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‘This is crap’ Consumers’ experience of de-influencing on TikTok

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Title

'This is crap' Consumers' experience of de-influencing on TikTok

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Abstract

In today's dynamic digital landscape, the emergence of de-influencing on social media platforms presents a significant research gap and an opportunity to enhance our understanding of consumer behavior. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how consumers experience de-influencing on TikTok. De-influencing refers to the practice of influencers discouraging the consumption of certain products or brands, often by expressing their dissatisfaction or disapproval towards them. The data was collected through a netnography of 300 comments on TikTok and two in-depth interviews. The analysis revealed a noteworthy finding, the emergence of a new phenomenon called re-influencing. Additionally, the study shed light on two motivations for anti-consumption, environmental- and financial motivations. Consumers also experienced authenticity, which manifested itself in both positive and negative dimensions. This research contributes to theory by bridging the knowledge gap regarding consumers' experience of de-influencing on TikTok. The findings emphasize the need for practitioners to understand the complexities of de-influencing and its varying interpretations among consumers. By comprehending the nuances of consumer perspectives, practitioners can develop more effective strategies to engage with their target audience and establish meaningful connections.

Keywords

De-influencing, TikTok, Consumer experience, Social media, Anti-consumption, Influencer marketing

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1. Introduction

This first chapter begins with a background that explains the phenomenon of de-influencing, the rise of influencers, and their impact on their followers, followed by the problematization, and purpose.

1.1 Background

Maria is scrolling through her social media feed and sees an advertisement for a new beauty product. Despite the product's claims and flashy packaging, Maria is not convinced and continues scrolling. A few days later, Maria comes across a de-influencing video where a content creator analyzes the same beauty product she saw in the advertisement. The influencer breaks down the product's ingredients and reviews its effectiveness, ultimately concluding that it is not worth the price. Maria feels that she agrees with the influencer since she was not convinced to buy the product the first time. She decides to post a comment on the video where she confirms what the influencer said, that she would never buy that product. This is an example of how consumers experience de-influencing content.

Before digital marketing, traditional marketing tactics such as TV commercials, print ads in newspapers, and magazines were the primary means of reaching consumers (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015; Tiago & Verissimo 2014). These methods involved high costs and were challenging to evaluate, because they relied on mass media to reach big audiences. Many researchers claim that traditional marketing is nowadays seen as an unstable way for a company to market itself (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015; Tiago & Verissimo 2014). Kirtiř and Karahan (2011) stated that the technical development in combination with 2008's financial crisis was the start of many companies' changed marketing strategies. The financial crisis forced companies to lower their costs, and digital marketing became much more important as a marketing strategy (Kirtiř & Karahan, 2011).

In this evolving landscape, the emergence of the social media platform TikTok has had a profound impact on online culture and social media dynamics (Hargreaves, 2020). TikTok has become a hub for short-form videos, with users who create and share content about anything

and everything (TikTok, n.d.). The app has created new pathways for individuals to become influencers. Even if creators have a modest audience, their interesting material will be rewarded by TikTok's algorithm, which has opened up new opportunities for people to build their personal brands (Green et al., 2022). TikTok's popularity has led to a rise in influencer marketing, and brands are now in partnership with TikTok influencers to reach younger audiences and promote their products (Green et al., 2022).

Influencer marketing is a relatively new phenomenon (Khamis et al., 2017). Influencer marketing is when brands collaborate with social media influencers, who have a large and engaged amount of followers, to promote their products or services (More & Lingam, 2017). Through partnerships with influencers, brands hope to tap into the influencer's credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity to reach their target audience (Khamis et al., 2017). Critics argue that influencer marketing creates an artificial desire for products and services that people may not need, driving overconsumption and contributing to environmental degradation (Belanche et al., 2021; Lidgren & Major, 2021). Despite criticism, it is also used for positive social change such as promoting sustainable and ethical consumption, and challenging harmful social norms (Lidgren & Major, 2021). For instance, the Swedish influencer Lindamariie (2022) has used her platforms to promote body positivity, inclusivity, and diversity, by challenging mainstream beauty standards and promoting more inclusive representations of beauty. As the marketing industry continues to evolve, influencer marketing will likely face further criticism and opportunities (Södergren & Vallström, 2022).

Recently, a new trend has emerged on social media known as 'de-influencing', which presents a challenge to traditional influencer marketing. De-influencing is a movement where content creators advise their followers not to buy certain products or brands due to concerns about their quality, ethics, or sustainability (Navlakha, 2023). The goal of de-influencing is to promote transparency and accountability in the marketing industry and to encourage consumers to make more informed and ethical purchase decisions (Reeler, 2023). The rise of de-influencing can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the increased awareness among consumers about the impact of their purchase decisions on the environment and society has led to a demand for more sustainable and ethical products (Mandarić et al., 2022). This has created an opportunity for influencers to leverage their platforms to promote such products and call out brands that do not meet these standards.

Secondly, de-influencing can be seen as a natural evolution of the anti-haul trend, which has been popular on YouTube and other social media platforms for several years (Navlakha, 2023). Anti-hauls are videos where content creators discuss products they do not plan to purchase and explain why (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). These videos often critique consumerism and the idea that buying more products will not make one happier or more fulfilled (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). The anti-haul trend has been praised for the promotion of mindful consumption and challenges the traditional consumerist mindset (Wood, 2021). Similarly, de-influencing seeks to raise awareness about the impact of consumers' choices and to promote ethical and sustainable purchase practices.

1.2 Gap Identification

As consumers, we are bombarded with a constant stream of information and opinion from various sources, including friends, family, advertisements, and social media, all of which will have a strong impact on our shopping habits. However, recent studies have shown that consumers are becoming more likely to refrain from shopping due to the influence of videos that tell them not to buy certain things (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). Understanding consumers' experience of de-influencing is essential to gain valuable insights into effective strategies to engage with them in today's saturated marketplace where de-influencing is prevalent. As social media continues to play an increasingly significant role in shaping consumers' behavior (Papp, 2022), it is essential to understand the impact of de-influencing on consumers' decision-making.

Previous research has found that consumers are consuming less frequently, compared to a couple of years ago (Lee, 2022). Today's consumers on TikTok are pumped with videos telling them not to shop, or to shop for different things (Reeler, 2023). Because TikTok's algorithm displays content based on user preferences rather than follower count (TikTok, n.d.), anyone can gain followers and have an impact on consumers' behavior. As a result, de-influencing on TikTok might affect consumers' behavior differently than it would on other social media platforms. Haenlein et al. (2020) addressed that market managers often struggle to make informed decisions in the rapidly evolving digital landscape, as they may have a limited understanding of newer platforms compared to more traditional media channels. This

knowledge gap can lead to neglected strategies and missed opportunities to reach and engage with consumers. This study can assist companies and marketers in better understanding how to target customers through influencer marketing by offering insightful information on how de-influencing videos affects consumers' behavior.

Researchers have utilized anti-hauls as a means to investigate consumers' behavior on youtube (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). Anti-hauls are usually more in-depth and comprehensive, as creators often elaborate on their decision-making process. De-influencing videos and anti-hauls share a similar purpose, which is to discourage consumers from purchasing certain products. However, despite their similarities, there are several differences between the two, thus creating a gap in the research on the phenomenon and how consumers experience it. This gap is especially prevalent on newer platforms like TikTok, where the emergence of the influencer culture presents a unique opportunity to examine the phenomenon of de-influencing. The hashtag #deinfluencer has garnered over 400 million views, which highlights the immense popularity of this trend on TikTok (Reeler, 2023). Thus, this thesis is limited to videos on TikTok where de-influencing content circulates. Navlakha (2023) notes that negative reviews of products may have a significant impact on how consumers perceive and interact with brands. It is possible that this type of content can shift consumers' preferences and ultimately lead to changes in their purchase behavior.

The lack of research on consumers' experiences of de-influencing content on TikTok can be seen as an example of 'gap-spotting', as described by Sandberg and Alvesson (2011). The existing research has primarily focused on anti-hauls on YouTube, which differ in several aspects from de-influencing videos. This has created a gap in knowledge, particularly on platforms like TikTok. As the influencer culture on TikTok continues to grow, it is crucial to understand the effects and nuances of de-influencing. This research gap provides an opportunity to delve into consumers' encounters with de-influencing on TikTok, address the limitations in understanding newer platforms, and contribute to the development of more effective marketing strategies. This study aims to address this gap in the literature which could help to develop more effective market strategies and make a potential impact on the marketplace.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine how consumers experience de-influencing content on TikTok. By investigating this phenomenon, the study aims to provide insights into how consumers respond to content that seeks to reduce the influence of consuming specific products. The study is conducted from a consumer perspective and focuses on content on TikTok.

1.4 Research Question

How do consumers experience de-influencing content on TikTok?

The research question was designed to be broad on purpose to better understand the new phenomenon of de-influencing on TikTok. By keeping the question open-ended, the study aimed to discover new and unexpected insights. This approach allowed us to explore new areas and uncover dimensions that had not been previously considered.

2. Literature Review

The second chapter begins by providing an introduction and overview of social media marketing, followed by an exploration of influencer marketing, anti-consumerism, and concludes with the presentation of a conceptual framework. The theories contribute to understanding the purpose of this thesis.

To explain how consumers experience de-influencing, literature plays a crucial role in providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Lind, 2019). The chosen literature offers valuable insights into what platforms and which factors consumers are influenced by. When this literature was brought together, we developed a more nuanced understanding of how consumers experience de-influencing. We were able to identify the different ways in which consumers may be influenced by social media and influencer marketing and how these influences may be resisted or rejected altogether. Anti-consumerism highlights how consumers may actively seek alternative lifestyles that reject the constant push to consume and the limitations that consumer culture can impose on individuals. All upcoming literature was chosen since it has helped to provide an understanding of how consumers experience de-influencing content on TikTok.

2.1 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is the process of gaining attention and web traffic through social media platforms (Evans & McKee, 2010). It involves creating content that users will share with their social network to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach (Evans & McKee, 2010). Social media marketing can be defined as the use of various online platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and other online platforms to communicate with consumers, share ideas about a product, service, or brand, and establish virtual communities (Gani et al., 2022; Li et al., 2020). Social media marketing builds relationships and interacts with customers in a way that is natural and authentic, rather than simply broadcasting a message (Evans & McKee, 2010). Social media marketing has revolutionized traditional marketing practices, such as advertising and promotion. It achieves this by offering dynamic

interaction on a personalized level, reaching out to a larger community, and complementing one-to-many marketing messages with collaborative communication media (Gani et al., 2022).

The emergence of social media has revolutionized the way firms and customers engage with each other, leading to a significant impact on consumer behavior (Evans & McKee, 2010; Gani et al., 2022; Li et al., 2020). Social interactions, whether active or passive, can shape the preferences and consumption patterns of individuals, highlighting the importance of social influence in marketing (Gani, 2022; Li et al., 2020). As emphasized by Evans and McKee (2010), effective listening to customer feedback and the provision of value-added content is key to establishing a company as a trusted authority within its industry. By leveraging social media, businesses can enhance their understanding of consumer behavior, including the influence of social connections and ties on purchasing decisions (Gani et al., 2022; Li et al., 2020).

Social media marketing has also facilitated more effective communication between brands and consumers, providing a platform for two-way engagement (Gani et al., 2022). This approach has influenced consumer behavior from the initial acquisition of information to post-purchase behavior, by shaping perceptions, attitudes, and end behavior while connecting like-minded individuals (Gani et al., 2022). Furthermore, the abundance of social media data has enabled companies to better manage customer relationships and make informed decisions in business (Li et al., 2020). Social media data is valuable for customer analysis, market research, and even the crowdsourcing of new ideas (Li et al., 2020). As such, social media has become an essential component of modern marketing strategy, revolutionizing the way businesses interact with customers and gain insights into consumer behavior.

2.1.1 Why we use Social Media

The popularity of social media has grown exponentially in recent years, and with it, how we use it. The different options that social media platforms give us to interact with people, see and share content, and express ourselves are many (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Whiting and Williams (2013) described how consumers not only seek information, but also use social media to share information. The Uses and Gratification Theory is one theoretical viewpoint that can provide insight into our motivations for the use of social media. According to the Uses and Gratification theory, individuals actively seek out media content that fulfills their needs and

desires (Katz et al., 1974). Katz et al. (1974) called the needs for gratifications, and these gratifications include amusement, self-expression, information search, and socialization (Eginli & Taş, 2018). The gratifications can be divided into three categories: cognitive gratifications, such as learning new information, affective gratifications, such as experiencing emotional responses, and personal integrative gratifications, such as enhancing self-esteem (Katz et al., 1974).

Social media has become a platform for individuals to connect with others, share their experiences, and express their opinions. It has also become a source of entertainment and a way to stay informed about current events (Manago et al., 2012). Consumers play an active role in shaping their media consumption and interpreting the meaning of media content (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Customers can therefore actively interact with the content they consume on social media, respond to it, and share it with their network. This emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend how users interact with social media information because it might affect their actions, attitudes, and beliefs (Manago et al., 2012).

2.2 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing focuses on using individuals who have a significant amount of online followers and social influence to promote a brand or product (Leung et al., 2022). These individuals, known as influencers, have established credibility and trust with their audience, and as a result, their endorsements can have a significant impact on consumer behavior (Leung et al., 2022). Influencer marketing can take many forms, such as sponsored posts on social media platforms, product reviews, endorsements, and can be used in conjunction with other marketing strategies to increase brand awareness and drive sales (Leung et al., 2022). Leung et al. (2022) highlighted the growing importance of influencer marketing in today's digital landscape and examined its effectiveness in consumer behavior.

Doshi et al. (2023), argued that influencer marketing campaigns have the potential to be highly effective due to the ability of influencers to reach large and targeted audiences, as well as their perceived authenticity and trustworthiness. However, there are also challenges to implementing successful influencer marketing campaigns, such as identifying the right influencers and ensuring that their content aligns with the brand's values and message (Doshi et al., 2023). The

effectiveness of using influencers to influence consumer behavior and attitudes is a topic that is being debated and is not entirely agreed upon. While some studies have found that influencer marketing can be highly effective in promoting products and influencing consumer behavior, others have highlighted concerns about the authenticity and credibility of influencer content (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ram, 2021). Skepticism toward influencer marketing is growing among consumers (Ki et al., 2022).

2.2.1 Influencer Authenticity

Authenticity refers to the quality of being genuine, truthful, and real (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is the state of being true to oneself, one's values, beliefs, and emotions, without pretense or facade. Authenticity is often associated with a sense of integrity and trustworthiness, as well as a willingness to be vulnerable and open to feedback and criticism (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In a world where social media and digital technologies often create an illusion of perfection or curated self-presentation, authenticity is increasingly valued as a desirable personal trait (Kapitan et al., 2022). Authenticity is a crucial component of influencer marketing since consumers are increasingly seeking genuine connections with brands and influencers (Chen et al., 2023; Zniva et al., 2022). Influencers cultivate a more friendship-like, close, parasocial relationship with their followers, which the brand itself often does not achieve (Kapitan et al., 2022). The emphasis on authenticity raises important questions about the role of influencers and their responsibility toward their followers (Kapitan et al., 2022). The ongoing debate surrounding this issue underscores the need for understanding the dynamics of influencer marketing and the ethical considerations involved in fostering these relationships.

Zniva et al. (2022) stated that the best strategies for maintaining authenticity include being consistent in messaging and behavior, being transparent about sponsored content, and avoiding over-commercialization. Chen et al.'s (2023) study provided the same strategies but adds the angle of personal stories as a good way for an influencer to manage authenticity. The strategies that focus on commercial messaging and product placement seem to have a negative impact on engagement, according to Chen et al.'s (2023) study. On the other hand, social media influencers are perceived as more genuine and create stronger connections with consumers when they genuinely believe in the product they endorse (Kapitan et al., 2022). This, in turn, increases the likelihood of consumers taking action on the products recommended by influencers.

2.3 Anti-Consumerism

Consumerism is a dominant feature of contemporary societies. However, the negative consequences of consumer culture on individuals, communities, and the planet have led to the emergence of a counter-movement known as anti-consumerism (Lee, 2022). Anti-consumerism is a social and political movement that aims to resist and critique the dominant consumerist culture and the social, economic, and environmental consequences associated with it (Lee, 2022; García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). Constant purchases of new and improved products are a problem in today's society, and it has become associated with individualism, status-seeking, and materialism (Wood, 2021). Consumerism is not just about the way you live your life, but it is also a way to protest against the current economic system (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). Anti-consumerists want to work towards new ways of production and consumption of goods, by challenging big companies, advertisers, and media groups that promote consumer culture (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). Anti-consumers may engage in practices such as minimalism, voluntary simplicity, or ethical consumption, and may also participate in collective action, such as boycotts, protests, or advocacy campaigns (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021).

Environmentalism, social justice, ethical consumption, simplicity, and minimalism are the foremost reasons for anti-consumerism (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Maseeh et al., 2022). It is not a new phenomenon, but today's overconsumption has made the topic relevant again (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). Anti-consumerism can take many forms in today's society, from choosing to buy used or refurbished products instead of new ones, to boycotting certain brands or products (Maseeh et al., 2022). To understand anti-consumerism, it is crucial to grasp the motivations and factors that drive this phenomenon. These factors may encompass environmental concerns, social norms, ethical values, and personal well-being (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Lee, 2022; Maseeh et al., 2022; Wood, 2021).

An aspect of anti-consumerism that has been discussed in previous research is the idea of 'cultural jamming'. Cultural jamming refers to the practice of subverting or transforming

dominant cultural messages and symbols through various means, such as art, music, or humor (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). This practice is often used to critique and challenge the power structures that underlie consumer culture and to promote alternative values and lifestyles (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). The rise of greenwashing, where companies misleadingly present their products as environmentally friendly (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020), can be a practice which triggers culture jamming (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). Recognizing the manipulative nature of greenwashing, culture jammers use their creative expressions to disrupt and expose these deceptive practices. Through subversive advertisements, parodies of popular media, and activist art installations, they shed light on the discrepancy between the eco-friendly claims made by companies and the actual impact of their products (Wood, 2021).

2.3.1 Anti-Hauls

Anti-hauls are a popular type of video content on YouTube where creators discuss and critique products they have bought or chosen not to buy (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). The videos include anything from makeup, fashion, tech gadgets, and home decor (Wood, 2021). In contrast to traditional ‘haul’ videos, where creators showcase their recent purchases and encourage viewers to buy them, anti-hauls are designed to encourage viewers to rethink their consumption habits and make more mindful choices (Wood, 2021). Anti-hauls are part of a broader anti-consumerist politics that seeks to critique and resist the dominant culture of consumption and its negative impacts on individuals, society, and the environment (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). Through anti-hauls, viewers are encouraged to think critically about their consumption practices and consider alternative ways of living and consuming that prioritize sustainability, social justice, and well-being (Wood, 2021).

Anti-hauls can also serve as a form of entertainment and community-building among viewers who share similar values and interests. Anti-hauls serve multiple purposes beyond solely improving the world; they also exist for entertainment purposes and to attract viewers to YouTube videos (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). When creators are critiquing products, viewers can engage in lively debates and conversations about topics such as ethical and sustainable production, the impact of advertisement on consumer behavior, and the role of consumption in our daily lives (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). Anti-hauls foster a

sense of community and solidarity among those who are committed to the reduction of their environmental footprint and can promote more conscious consumption practices (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). The authors argue that anti-hauls use a variety of engagement strategies, such as humor, storytelling, personalization, authenticity, and social activism, to promote anti-consumerist values and practices and create a sense of community among viewers who share these values (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021).

Wood (2021) argued that anti-hauls can be seen as a form of culture jamming, a practice that disrupts dominant cultural messages and promotes alternative ones. Wood (2021) suggested that anti-hauls are a form of ‘algorithmic culture jamming’ that subverts the algorithmic recommendations of YouTube and promotes alternative messages that challenge consumer culture. When creators refuse to participate in the dominant culture of consumption, their platform can be used to promote values such as sustainability, social justice, and well-being (Wood, 2021). Through their critiques of products, they encourage viewers to think critically about their consumption practices and consider alternative ways of living and consuming that prioritize these values (Wood, 2021). Wood (2021) argued that anti-hauls can be seen as a form of resistance to the dominant culture of consumption and an attempt to promote alternative cultural messages that challenge it.

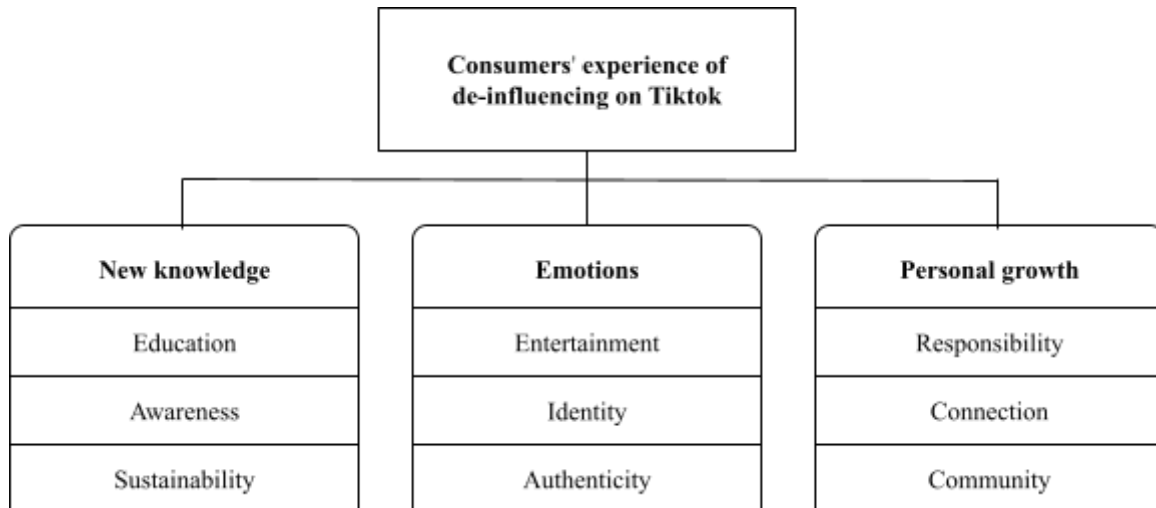
2.4 Conceptual Framework

To shed light on consumers' experiences of de-influencing content on TikTok, a conceptual framework was developed. The framework aimed to provide valuable insights into a phenomenon that had not been extensively explored in previous research. The conceptual framework, represented in Figure 1, was based on an examination of relevant literature. The framework partially drew on the Uses and Gratification Theory, which helped to understand how consumers used social media to satisfy their needs and desires (Katz et al., 1974). Several studies have employed the Uses and Gratifications Theory to explore consumer behavior on various social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (Athwal et al., 2019), and TikTok (Falgoust et al., 2022). Schellewald (2023) describes that users of TikTok are seeking a variety of gratifications, including entertainment, social connection, and self-expression. The theory was a source of inspiration for us, leading to the development of the

framework. As our research was centered around consumers' experiences, the framework was tailored accordingly.

Figure 1

Consumers' experience of de-influencing content on TikTok



Note. The figure illustrates essential experiences for consumers when exposed to de-influencing content on TikTok.

Consumers have the potential to encounter and engage with essential aspects such as new knowledge, emotions, and personal growth while experiencing de-influencing content. Aspects of new knowledge include education, awareness, and sustainability. When users consume de-influencing content on TikTok, they may experience becoming more knowledgeable and informed about important topics related to social justice and the environment. Sustainability has become a crucial aspect of social media, according to Johnstone and Lindh (2018), and de-influencing is closely intertwined with sustainable consumption. The same goes for anti-hauls, which also encompasses the principles of sustainability (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021), which share a similar purpose to de-influencing videos. Consumers may engage with de-influencing content to learn about and adopt more sustainable consumption practices, making sustainability a significant experience for them.

The second category, called *emotions*, included experiences related to consumers' feelings. Examples of emotions in the context of de-influencing content on TikTok include

entertainment, identity, and authenticity. Research on social media influence suggests that emotions play a significant role in shaping consumers' behaviors (Dwivedi et al., 2019). Consumers may experience de-influencing content as entertainment as it provides a refreshing break from the constant promotion and advertising messages they encounter (Dolan et al., 2016). Consumers' experience of de-influencing content on TikTok can also be linked to the development and expression of their identity. Research on social media and identity formation suggests that individuals actively construct and present their identities through online platforms (Merat et al., 2015). Consumers might discover content creators who produce de-influencing videos that align with their desired identity, drawing inspiration for their self-presentation. These content creators serve as role models, guiding consumers in their choices and influencing their personal brand which can contribute to a positive emotional experience. De-influencing content can also give people a platform to express their unique identities and find content that is consistent with their personal values and ideas, leading to a sense of authenticity and personal fulfillment (Hu et al., 2020).

Lastly, personal growth included experiences related to development such as responsibility, connection, and community. De-influencing content on social media could provide consumers with a sense of responsibility and empower them to make more informed decisions. According to Agyei et al. (2021), Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an essential driver of customer engagement and customer satisfaction. Based on the popularity of anti-hauls which encourages consumers to rethink their consumption habits (Wood, 2021), consumers might appreciate de-influencing videos as they, just like anti-hauls, advocate for responsible consumption and address social and environmental issues. According to Lehner (2015), consumers may seek out sustainable consumption behavior as a way to express their values and beliefs. Similarly, Kinzig et al. (2013) acknowledged that consumers who engage in sustainable behaviors frequently discover that their efforts are reinforced by social norms and interactions with others in their community. The engagement can be observed in studies on online communities, such as the research by Cao et al. (2013), where they highlight how these communities facilitate connections among like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of belonging.

3. Methodology

Chapter three of this thesis establishes and defends our epistemological and ontological alignment, but also provides a concise overview of our research philosophy, approach, and design. Additionally, we expound on how the data was evaluated using thematic analysis. Finally, we address the credibility of this study, any limitations it may possess, and ethical implications.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Ontology refers to the nature of reality and what exists in the world, and this can influence the choice of research approach and methodology (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The objectivistic view in ontology states that reality exists independently of human observation and interpretation (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this study, the ontological perspective was constructivist, as it recognized that reality was constructed through social and cultural processes (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lind, 2019). This perspective acknowledged that the phenomenon studied was not an objective reality, but rather a social construct that was shaped by individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations. Furthermore, the constructivist ontological perspective implied that the researcher's role was not to discover objective truths, but rather to understand the subjective realities of the individuals being studied (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In addition to ontological considerations, the epistemological aspect of the research question was also taken into account (Denscombe, 2018). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), epistemology is about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. Different epistemological perspectives can influence the research approach and conduction of research. There are three different epistemological philosophies: *positivism*, *interpretivism*, and *realism* (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lind, 2019). The positivistic philosophy claims that the existing knowledge is the real knowledge, and uses scientific methods to discover generalizable laws and principles that apply to all individuals and situations (Lind, 2019). Interpretivism emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals attach to their social world (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lind, 2019). The aim was to understand the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences, gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals, and understand how social phenomena

was shaped (Lind, 2019). Realism stands for the importance of understanding the social world as it actually exists, and investigates the things that affect people rather than the person itself (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Based on the thesis research question, the epistemological perspective of the study was interpretivism. The study aimed to investigate how consumers experience de-influencing content on TikTok, with a focus on the subjective experiences and meanings that consumers attach to this phenomenon. Interpretivism was well-suited to study subjective experiences and meanings, and is often used in consumer research to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavior and decision-making processes (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lind, 2019).

3.2 Research Approach

Research approaches show the ratio between theory and empirical material, and include *deduction, induction, and abduction* (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Denscombe, 2018). Bryman and Bell (2011) argued that the deductive approach is the most common way of explaining the ratio between theory and research. Deduction starts with a theory and then the theory will be tested with the empirical data that have been collected (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The second approach, induction, is the opposite of deduction. In this case, it starts with empirical data and then it will be used to develop theories or generalizations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), deduction is more common in quantitative research, while induction is more frequently used in qualitative research. The last approach is called abduction and is a combination of deduction and abduction (Lind, 2019). Abduction is based on a combination of existing theory and empirical data and can be useful where existing theories or explanations do not fully account for the observed data (Lind, 2019).

This thesis employed a blended approach that combined elements of both inductive and deductive reasoning. The current body of literature lacks comprehensive theoretical frameworks or empirical evidence to fully clarify its impact on consumer behavior. Consequently, due to this lack of existing research on de-influencing, we were compelled to draw upon theories and empirical data from related fields to formulate reasonable explanations for the observed phenomena. Through an abductive approach (Denscombe, 2018), we aimed to explore the potential factors that shaped consumers' experiences of de-influencing on TikTok. This blended approach allowed for a nuanced investigation into the phenomenon, which linked together the gap between theoretical understanding and empirical exploration.

3.3 Research Design

Qualitative research methods were used in this study as they provided a valuable approach to exploring the complexities of human behavior and experience (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The method was particularly relevant to the investigation of consumers' experience of de-influencing content. One of the main benefits of qualitative research is its ability to provide rich, detailed descriptions of participants' experiences and perspectives (Denscombe, 2018). This was important in the context of de-influencing content on TikTok, as it was a relatively new and complex phenomenon that required a nuanced understanding of users' experiences. Qualitative research methods allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of consumers' engagement with de-influencing content. Sreejesh et al. (2013), mentioned how qualitative research is flexible in adapting to the needs of the research question and the participants. This was particularly relevant in the case of de-influencing content on TikTok, which had limited existing research.

Even though qualitative research is an adequate method to get a deeper understanding of a phenomenon it has its weaknesses. Qualitative research is a very time-consuming and resource-intensive method (Denscombe, 2018) since it often involves collecting and analyzing a large amount of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It can also be criticized for a lack of reliability, as different researchers may interpret data differently or come up with different conclusions (Denscombe, 2018).

3.4 Data Collection

This part provides an overview of the methods employed in the data collection phase of the study. To ensure that findings were grounded in consumers' experiences, we primarily employed a netnography and used in-depth interviews as a compliment. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of consumers' experience of de-influencing content on TikTok, and ensured that the findings were true to how consumers experienced de-influencing on TikTok. In addition to describing these techniques, an explanation of the selection process was provided. The study was limited to TikTok to ensure a focused analysis and to avoid the complexities of examining multiple social media platforms.

3.4.1 Netnography

Netnography is a research method that has gained popularity in recent years for studying online communities and social media platforms (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). According to Kozinets (1998, p. 366), the method is defined as "the cultures and communities that emerge from online, computer-mediated, or Internet-based communications". Compared to other research techniques like surveys or interviews, it enables researchers to analyze online behavior and interactions in a less invasive manner. Netnography involves the use of a range of data collection techniques, including participant observation, content analysis, and interviews with online community members (Kozinets, 2022). This study involved participant observation to collect data by observing and analyzing associated comments to de-influencing videos on TikTok. This enabled a deeper understanding of consumers' experiences of de-influencing content on TikTok.

One of the advantages of netnography is that it allows for access to data that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to obtain (Kozinets, 2022). For instance, some users might be reluctant to take part in interviews about their social media use but might be more willing to share their opinions and experiences through comments on TikTok. Furthermore, netnography allows for a more naturalistic study of social media use, as users are not being asked to recall or report on their experiences after the fact (Kozinets, 2022). On the contrary, online participants can not be fully trusted which may limit the depth and quality of the data. Online communication can be impersonal and lack complexity, in contrast to face-to-face interviews (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018).

3.4.1.1 Video Selection

In our study of de-influencing content, we collected data from March 6 to April 17, 2023, using purposive sampling to select a set of appropriate videos for our research (Denscombe, 2018). To ensure the utmost relevance to our research question, we specifically concentrated on videos about makeup, beauty, and clothing. This deliberate focus aligns with the fact that de-influencing content predominantly centers around these particular categories (Greene, 2023). Our selection of videos reflected a deliberate effort to curate our research sample in a way that allowed us to explore the full range of de-influencing content and how it impacted

consumers. The focus of this thesis was centered on the comments section of the videos, as it provided valuable insights for the study. Table 1 presents the names of the creators behind the de-influencing videos, showcasing the levels of popularity and engagement observed in the analyzed content. This table serves as a visual representation of the findings from our research, highlighting the impact and reception of de-influencing content in terms of user interaction and participation.

Table 1

Examined de-influencing videos from TikTok

Content creator	Likes	Comments
valeriafride	162.7k	1189
michelleskidelsky	426.5k	5247
laura88lee	11.7k	73
kayli.boyle	168.1k	1154
mannytua773	154.2k	1367
livvvmarkley	124.5k	634
impactforgood_	58.9k	702
darcymcqueenyyy	148.9k	423
alyssastephanie	976.5k	8027
celinablanc	4893	33
alexeducatedmess	7347	330
eliseeatsplants	88.4k	1932
emmasrectangle	7807	52
makeupbymonicaa	13.6k	89
javonford16	103.3k	872
maj.beauty	12.1k	147
oldloserinbrooklyn	15.9k	234
overcoming_overspending	49.6k	986
bambidoesbeauty	29.5k	176
tatlafata	36.9k	258

Note. The table displays the de-influencing creators' names along with the corresponding number of likes and comments received by their videos, based on data captured on March 26, 2023.

Purposive sampling involves selecting research participants or data sources based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research question being asked (Denscombe, 2018). We focused on selecting videos that were most likely to provide insights into consumers' experiences of de-influencing content on TikTok. Specifically, only videos explicitly identified as de-influencing content, either through explicit labeling within the video or the presence of de-influencing hashtags were included in the study. This ensured that the analyzed content was related to the research topic, and reduced the potential for misinterpretation. By carefully selecting our videos in this way, we were able to conduct a thorough analysis of how consumers engaged with de-influencing content and provided valuable insights into the world of de-influencing and how consumers experienced this type of content.

3.4.2 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews involve conducting in-depth conversations with participants to gather rich and detailed data about their experiences, opinions, and perspectives on a particular topic (Patton, 2014). Denscombe (2018) asserted that in-depth interviews can be used to acquire information on a variety of issues, including sensitive and personal topics. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) mentioned how it can be particularly useful when exploring complex aspects or where quantitative research methods might miss the subtleties of participant experiences. In-depth interviews can also help to reveal unexpected or previously unknown aspects of the subject being researched (Patton, 2014). However, in-depth research can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, as they require a significant amount of time to plan, conduct, and analyze (Denscombe, 2018). Moreover, the quality of data obtained through in-depth interviews can be influenced by various factors, including the interviewer's competence and biases, the participant's willingness to share their experiences, and the specific context in which the interviews take place (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

This study utilized a modified form of in-depth interviews as a complementary method to the primary approach of netnography. The interviews were conducted in a condensed format compared to traditional in-depth interviews, which meant that the interviews were shorter but still contained depth. The depth came from the focused approach of analyzing a single video and engaging in in-depth discussions surrounding it. By concentrating on one specific video and thoroughly exploring the consumer's experience, this study was able to uncover detailed insights, despite the shorter duration. The purpose of incorporating these interviews was to

augment the findings obtained through the netnography and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. While the netnography focused on analyzing online comments, the in-depth interviews aimed to capture a broader perspective that comments alone may not fully convey. This approach was necessary as it allowed for exploring the underlying meanings behind participants' comments, which could not be directly addressed through the netnography itself.

The interviews were based on photo elicitation. Photo elicitation involves the use of photographs or other visual aids to prompt discussion and provide additional context for the participants to share their experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This method can be particularly useful when exploring sensitive or emotional topics, as the visual aids can help to create a safe and non-threatening space for participants to share their experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This thesis used a de-influencing video from TikTok as a form of photo elicitation. The same video was shown to both interviewees, and a link to this video is provided in the interview guide (Appendix A; Appendix B).

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured, in which a set of open-ended questions and prompts were used to guide the conversation (Denscombe, 2018). However, participants were given the freedom to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words (Appendix A; Appendix B). This interview approach allowed for flexibility, and ensured that the participants' voices and experiences were at the forefront of the collected data. The use of a semi-structured interview also allowed us to explore unexpected or previously unknown aspects of the phenomenon being researched (Denscombe, 2018).

3.4.2.1 Interview Guide

The interview guide, written in Swedish (Appendix A; Appendix B), was used to capture and explore consumers' experience of de-influencing on TikTok. The guide started with a brief introduction to the study and an explanation of the purpose of the interview. This was followed by the showing of a de-influencing video. After the video, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to encourage them to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the video and the concept of de-influencing in general.

The open-ended nature of the interview guide's questions allowed participants to freely express their thoughts and ideas without being constrained. As noted by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), such an approach is consistent with the principles of qualitative research, where the goal is to understand the participants' experiences and perspectives in their own words. Therefore, in this study, we asked follow-up questions that delved deeper into participants' feelings and thought processes. The interview guide had been carefully designed to encourage participants to share their thoughts and opinions in an open and non-judgmental environment.

3.4.2.2 Participant Selection

The participants in the study were selected through convenience sampling based on their activity on TikTok and exposure to de-influencing content. With the use of convenience sampling, participants were chosen based on their availability and desire to engage in the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We conducted interviews with two individuals, who were friends of the researchers and who met the selection criteria based on their activity on TikTok and exposure to de-influencing content. The age, exposure to de-influencing videos, date, and time of those interviewed are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Exposure to de-influencing videos	Date	Time
1	24	Medium exposure	2023-04-29	22 minutes
2	28	High exposure	2023-05-06	20 minutes

Note. The table shows the age, exposure to de-influencing videos, date, and time of those interviewed.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research method that involves the identification and analysis of patterns, themes, and meanings within data (Guest et al., 2012). In this study, a thematic analysis was applied to analyze a set of comments from de-influencing videos related to makeup, beauty, and clothing on TikTok as well as two in-depth interviews (Appendix C). The aim was to understand how consumers engage with de-influencing content in these areas.

Theoretical saturation was used to determine when data collection of comments could be concluded. Theoretical saturation occurs when additional data collection no longer results in the emergence of new themes or categories (Guest et al., 2012). 20 videos and 300 comments were collected before theoretical saturation was attained. The theoretical saturation was determined through regular discussions about the emerging themes and categories, and the identification of any gaps in the data. Once theoretical saturation was reached, data collection was concluded, and analysis could begin. This approach ensured that the analysis was based on a comprehensive and diverse data set and that the themes and categories identified were grounded in the data rather than preconceived notions or assumptions. Following the netnography, two interviewees participated in in-depth interviews. Both interviewees were recorded with written consent, and the data was later transcribed. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), transcription is a highly time-consuming process. To address this issue, the transcription process was made more efficient and convenient by utilizing the online tool oTranscribe2¹, which includes a feature for playing audio at a slower pace. The transcribed material from the two interviews comprised 12 pages and was held in Swedish. The presented quotes in chapter four were however translated into English.

The analysis of the netnography and the in-depth interviews were conducted through a process that involved both inductive, deductive, and abductive approaches. Both data collections were coded in two steps, which are visualized in Appendix C. To begin, a deductive approach was utilized as we familiarized ourselves with the data by closely reading the associated comments to the videos and examining the transcriptions (Denscombe, 2018). This deductive phase involved generating initial codes to capture key aspects of the data, such as the de-influencing techniques used and the tone of the comments and answers. The generation of these codes were not solely based on the data itself, but also influenced by prior knowledge and the conceptual framework guiding the study, which demonstrated an abductive nature (Denscombe, 2018).

Following the deductive phase, an inductive- and abductive approach was employed. The process of organizing the initial codes into four broader subheadings, as observed in the data, aligns with the recommended approach advocated by Bryman and Bell (2011). During the analysis, a constant comparison method was applied, which involved comparing the themes to each other and the data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This iterative process served to refine and

¹ <https://otranscribe.com/>

define each theme, ensuring that they accurately reflected the data while maintaining consistency (Denscombe, 2018). Finally, a narrative account of each theme was written, synthesizing the relevant data and drawing on relevant literature to support our interpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Denscombe (2018), an abductive approach enables a comprehensive comprehension, which in turn facilitated our ability to offer a broad understanding of consumers' interaction with de-influencing content about makeup, beauty, and clothing on TikTok. Overall, our approach was informed by both induction and deduction, as well as elements of abduction as we grappled with interpreting the data in light of our conceptual framework. This allowed us to generate a rich and nuanced understanding of how consumers engaged with de-influencing content on TikTok.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a key criterion for evaluating the quality of research (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lind, 2019) and it is required to conduct credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to be seen as trustworthy (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Denscombe, 2018).

Credibility is how believable the study is to others (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The research gets higher credibility by using carefully picked methods of data collection and analysis, such as collecting data from multiple sources (Denscombe, 2018). A combination of qualitative data collection methods, including comments from a netnography of TikTok videos and in-depth interviews were employed in this research. Further on, we conducted multiple rounds of coding and combined data from different sources to enhance the credibility of our findings (Denscombe, 2018).

Transferability is about generalization, and how the findings in the research can be transferred into different contexts (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), it can be hard to generalize in qualitative research since its major focus lies within the depth and not the breadth. Researchers can also provide a detailed description of their research context and participants, and be clear about the limitations of their research (Denscombe, 2018). However, this thesis prioritized in-depth investigation over generalization and therefore did not specifically focus on transferability.

Dependability pertains to the degree to which research findings are relevant and applicable across different contexts, implying that all aspects of the research procedure are documented and accessible (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The dependability of this research was ensured through clear documentation of the research process, including the methods used for data collection and analysis. The comments from the videos were collected and saved to the corresponding video, allowing for easy access and verification of the data. The interview guides, recordings, and transcripts were also saved on our devices in an organized and accessible manner to ensure dependability.

Confirmability can be enhanced by using clear and transparent methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As a qualitative thesis, it was acknowledged that the study's findings were subjective to some extent, given the nature of the research approach. However, the collaborative process of developing this thesis, along with guidance and input from our supervisor, has enabled us to incorporate diverse perspectives, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Additionally, to enhance conformability, we engaged in regular discussions and peer debriefing to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the data collected.

3.7 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, it is important to note that not all TikTok users who viewed the videos included in this study may have commented on them. Moreover, those who did comment may not necessarily be representative of the broader population, potentially limiting the scope of our findings. Individuals who experience de-influencing differently may have chosen not to post comments, thereby influencing the outcomes of our study. Secondly, it is important to highlight that the majority of the data was collected from users in the United States or Sweden. This is due to TikTok's algorithm (TikTok, 2020) and our geographic location which led to these countries being prioritized in our research. As a result, there is a potential for inaccuracies in our findings, as the cultural and societal contexts of these countries may not necessarily reflect those of other countries or regions.

Finally, although utilizing a method of data collection and analysis known as theoretical saturation, which involves collecting data until no new themes or patterns emerge, it is noteworthy that there may be other themes or patterns present in the data that were not identified or were not able to be fully explored. Future research could benefit from exploring a wider range of topics or collecting data from a more diverse range of social media to enhance the transferability of the findings.

3.8 Ethics

When conducting research that involves collecting data from social media platforms like TikTok, it is important to consider ethical implications (Denscombe, 2018). While the videos and comments are publicly available, researchers should obtain informed consent from the users before using their content for research purposes. Informed consent means that the users are fully aware of the purpose and potential risks and benefits of their content being used in research and have given their explicit permission to do so (APA, 2014). In some cases, it may be challenging or even impossible to obtain informed consent due to the nature of the data collection method. For example, if the data is collected through observation of public social media accounts, it may be difficult to track down and contact each user for consent (Bechmann & Vahlstrup, 2015). However, researchers should still strive to minimize any potential risks to the users and ensure that the data is being used responsibly and respectfully (Denscombe, 2018).

Some scholars have raised concerns about the ethics of using social media data for research purposes without obtaining informed consent. For example, Fossheim et al. (2015) argued that using social media data without consent can lead to exploitation and undermine users' trust in the platform. Similarly, Someh et al. (2016) discussed the need for ethical considerations in big data research and the potential for harm to individuals and communities if their data is used without their knowledge or consent. Since the videos and comments are public, it is generally considered acceptable to use them for research purposes (Zimmer, 2010). Additionally, as no individuals who commented on the videos have been named, there is no risk of breaching their privacy. However, ethical considerations should still be taken into account when using social media data for research.

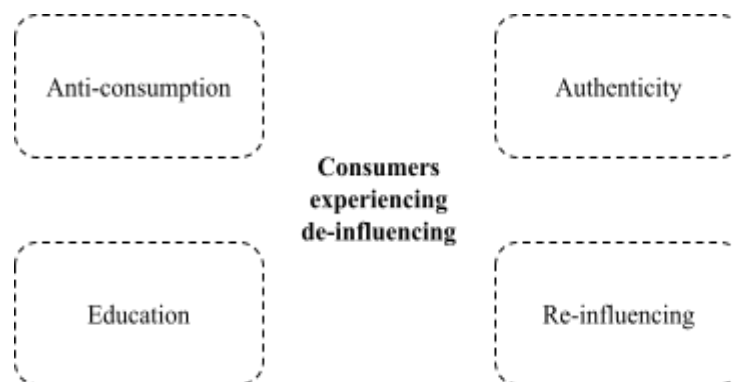
In-depth interviews are another method of data collection that also requires ethical considerations (Denscombe, 2018). When conducting in-depth interviews, we ensured that the participants were informed, which meant explaining the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, the risks and benefits, and any potential confidentiality issues (Denscombe, 2018). The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. In addition to obtaining informed consent, we also ensured that the participants maintained confidentiality and anonymity. This involved using pseudonyms and removing any identifying information from transcripts. Researchers should also be aware of the power dynamics that may be present during the interview process (Denscombe, 2018). Participants may feel pressure to give answers they believe the researcher wants to hear, or they may feel uncomfortable discussing certain topics (Denscombe, 2018). It was, therefore, important to actively listen to the participants' responses, and avoid leading questions or coercive tactics.

4. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents findings from the netnography and in-depth interviews. The research question will lay the foundation for the following analysis. The chapter comprises four themes that emerged during the data analysis, identified through the application of codes to the collected data, as seen in Appendix C. Each theme focuses on different aspects of the de-influencing phenomenon (Figure 2). The four themes are anti-consumption, authenticity, education, and re-influencing.

Figure 2

Themes developed from the analysis



Note. The figure provides an overview of the chapter's organization, highlighting the four themes that uncover different aspects of consumers' experience of de-influencing.

4.1 Anti-Consumption

Social media platforms have become a place where consumers often find themselves caught in an endless cycle of seeking validation through material possessions, as they strive to radiate picture-perfect lives. This constant pursuit of validation through consumption has given rise to the theory of anti-consumerism (Lee, 2022; García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). One of the primary themes that emerged from the data analysis was anti-consumption, reflecting consumers' critical perspectives and attitudes toward consumption practices. Within the theme, consumers expressed experiences encompassing both financial and environmental aspects which allowed for a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of

anti-consumption. The anti-consumption theme primarily pertains to the aspect of new knowledge within the conceptual framework, particularly emphasizing education and awareness. Consumers engaging with de-influencing content acquire knowledge about alternative consumption practices, financial literacy, and sustainable lifestyles.

4.1.1 Green Awakening

The comments indicated that consumers gained information and learned about important topics related to social justice, environmentalism, and other issues through watching de-influencing content. The comments revealed that there was a clear demand for more informative and nuanced content related to de-influencing and conscious consumption. The comments expressed gratitude for the educational aspect of the content and the inspiration it provided toward more mindful consumption. Commenters seemed to be looking for resources that could help them make more informed choices, rather than simply being told what products to buy or avoid. Additionally, there was a desire for a more nuanced approach to de-influencing. Consumers in the comment section wanted to understand the reasoning behind why certain products may not be worth purchasing, rather than just being told to avoid them without explanation. Furthermore, they made an interest in making de-influencing and conscious consumption a regular part of content creation. Commenters demanded more content that focused on conscious consumption that could educate consumers on how to declutter and consume more sustainably. Finally, commenters showed awareness of the environmental impact of overconsumption. They were interested in finding ways to declutter and consume more sustainably without contributing to environmental waste.

"I prefer when it's more nuanced and educational rather than "THIS PRODUCT IS SHIT DONT BUY IT!!!!"

- Netnography @oldloserinbrooklyn

"Love this! Sustainability is so important. Not only eco sustainability but personal sustainability. Conspicuous consumption feels tone deaf"

- Netnography @oldloserinbrooklyn

"THIS needs to be a whole series... this is by far the most informative thing i've seen online today... please continue"

- Netnography @valeriafride

"I so want to do this! But legit need to know how you were able to toss makeup? I want to declutter, but I hate the waste"

- Netnography @impactforgood_

4.1.2 Cost-Effective Decision Making

Another anti-consumption aspect was also found in the data, which was not linked to environmental issues but instead to financial motivations. Commenters and interviewees expressed that they liked the idea of reducing their consumption behavior, but primarily to save money. This aspect was also prevalent in one of the interviews. Commenters and the interviewee indicated that they preferred making more informed purchases to economize and avoid buying new products frequently. When unsure about whether to buy a particular item, hearing multiple voices questioning its quality or value influenced their decision, making them more reluctant to make the purchase. Thus, consumers experience de-influencing as a valuable resource for making more informed and cost-effective purchasing decisions.

"i'm in so much financial debt so i love deinfluencing SO MUCH"

- Netnography @michelleskidelsky

"The de influencing is saving me alot of money rn"

- Netnography @kayli.boyle

"[...] it is usually a lot of money, as I said before, that you spend on it. Eh, and if you're a bit unsure and hesitant about whether you should actually do it or not, then of course you're a bit influenced if it's one, or especially if there are several people who say that it's not as good as people have hyped up, you become a little reluctant to maybe not buy it instead."

- Interviewee 2

4.1.3 The Anti-Consumer Shift

Commenters expressed a desire to change their habits and behavior toward more responsible consumption. The commenters recognized that overconsumption was a problem and expressed a need to find a balance between having what they needed and having too much. They expressed a desire to become more mindful and conscious consumers and recognized the importance of considering the impact of their choices on the environment. Awareness was growing in the comment section, as well as a recognition of the importance of responsible consumption. Commenters were beginning to question their habits and behavior and were looking for ways to change their consumption patterns. As consumers become more aware of the impact of their consumption on the environment, they are more likely to take responsibility for their actions and make changes in their behavior (Maseeh et al., 2022). This shift towards responsible consumption has the potential to create a significant impact on the environment and the world around us.

"I think we just need to really dig deep & ask ourselves why we want all of this unnecessary stuff. Less is more. It really is"

- Netnography @eliseeatsplants

"This trend is so cringe !!!!!!! Just stop over consuming"

- Netnography @laura88lee

4.2 Authenticity

Authenticity was another theme that emerged from the data collection. Consumers are constantly seeking genuine connections with influencers (Chen et al., 2023; Zniva et al., 2022), and one way for influencers to get it is to be transparent about the content that they post (Zniva et al., 2022). Within the field of authenticity, two distinct subcategories surfaced: honesty and transparency. Consumers expressed a strong desire for genuine and transparent content while also expressing skepticism toward the authenticity of certain influencers and their messages. The authenticity theme is primarily linked to consumer emotions in the conceptual framework. Authenticity had a profound impact on consumers' emotional experiences. The emotional connection formed through authentic content on TikTok enhanced the overall entertainment value and enjoyment of the experience, just like how suspicion and doubt did the opposite.

4.2.1 Building Trust

Commenters expressed their appreciation for content creators who demonstrated honesty and truthfulness in their messaging. Genuine insights and personal experiences about the products they did not find worth buying evoked positive emotions such as trust, inspiration, and admiration. Consumers seemed to value authenticity and honesty in influencers who made de-influencing videos, and appreciated when they shared their true thoughts and experiences with their audience. Consumers were interested in hearing about the experiences of influencers with products, regardless of whether those experiences were positive or negative. The recognition of individual differences in preferences and needs demonstrated how commenters acknowledge that honest reviews provide valuable insights that allow viewers to make informed decisions based on their unique circumstances and preferences.

"This is so refreshing. I love the honesty. Giving honest reviews shows that what works for one person might not for another. Thank you ❤️"

- Netnography @darcymcqueenyyy

"I love how honest but respectful you are when talking about a product that didn't work for you or doesn't work like it says it will!"

- Netnography @laura88lee

4.2.2 Skeptical or Supportive?

The findings also suggested that there may have been differing opinions among some of the consumers regarding the authenticity of de-influencing content from paid influencers. Some consumers saw it as a positive move towards more transparency and honesty, while others viewed it with skepticism or distrust. It is possible that for some influencers, creating de-influencing content may have been a way to showcase their authenticity. However, some consumers saw this and still viewed the content as inherently biased due to the influencer's history of paid promotions. As a result, consumers experienced the video and the influencer as less authentic. There was varying opinion among consumers about the authenticity of

de-influencing content from paid influencers. While some consumers may have appreciated the effort to promote transparency and honesty, others still viewed paid influencers with suspicion.

"I think the deinfluencing should be left for people that have never been paid to influence/promote"

- Netnography @mannymua733

"What does she gain by making that video? Sure, it might be useful for her to bring it up because she seems likable. [...] It is in a way a bit strange for her to make such a video because if you ask yourself what is in it for her own gain? Because if she were to say, now I want to show products that I don't like, then she will lose collaboration contracts and money for it herself."

- Interviewee 1

4.3 Education

Education was the third theme that emerged from the data. Consumers experienced a desire to acquire new knowledge, broaden their awareness, and engage in meaningful discussions related to social justice, sustainability, and various important issues. This theme of education encompassed subcategories such as information, community, and awareness. The concept of de-influencing is closely tied to combating overconsumption. Consumers appreciated how de-influencing means to refrain consumers from unnecessary purchases, while others primarily valued the education it provided on product choices. Nonetheless, both perspectives contribute to raising awareness and empowering consumers to make informed decisions. De-influencing content contributes to and promotes a culture of continuous learning, connecting the theme of education to new knowledge in the conceptual framework. Consumers experienced de-influencing as a way to acquire information and seek advice, and recommendations from influencers and fellow consumers. Hence, the theme of education was also linked to personal growth in the conceptual framework, as consumers expanded their understanding of products, consumption practices, and their impact on personal well-being and the world around them.

4.3.1 Informed Choices

Consumers in the comment section appreciated the educational value of de-influencing content on TikTok. Commentators found it helpful to be informed of what products worked and what did not, which is in line with Whiting and William's (2013) study about how consumers seek information from social media to get educated. They experienced de-influencing as a way for them to educate themselves on various products, their features, and their potential impact on their health, environment, and society. These consumers were motivated by a desire to make informed purchasing decisions and to learn about new products that aligned with their values and needs. Other commenters experienced de-influencing as a way of promoting education about sustainable and ethical consumption practices. They believed that de-influencing could help them learn about the negative impact of overconsumption and inspire them to adopt more sustainable and ethical consumption habits. Similarly, one of the interviewees shared this perspective and added the importance of de-influencing videos being beneficial for consumers. They argued that consumers require information to make informed decisions rather than simply purchasing products without considering the consequences. According to this interviewee, de-influencing videos aim to promote a culture where promotions are not encouraged or emphasized.

"THIS needs to be a whole series... this is by far the most informative thing i've seen online today... please continue"

- Netnography @valeriafride

"Followed!!! Thank you for the information"

- Netnography @javonford16

"If it's a foundation, oh this is very hydrating and it's actually very drying, then you can appreciate that honesty from the influencer. Like this I don't think it's good, it's not worth the price and it doesn't live up to the way it's marketed, just saying, put it out there. Okay fine, that's great, then I've got that information."

- Interviewee 1

4.3.2 Conscious Consumerism

Furthermore, the data collection showed that consumers reported feeling a sense of awareness and were more informed about the impact of their choices and behaviors after watching de-influencing content. Some consumers viewed de-influencing as a means of promoting awareness about social and environmental issues. They believed that de-influencing could help them learn about the negative impact of overconsumption on society and the environment. These consumers were motivated by a desire to be more socially and environmentally responsible in their consumption habits. Some consumers also stated that de-influencing helped them understand that you do not need an excessive amount of products. It seemed like de-influencing made consumers understand that they were buying a lot of things they might not need because of the influence of influencers. Consumers experienced the knowledge of how much consumption has taken over their lives and were grateful for the de-influencing video helping them understand that. The anti-consumerist movement emphasizes the significance of cultivating awareness regarding the negative consequences of overconsumption (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021). For some consumers, it was an eye-opener, as they became more aware of the negative impact of overconsumption and started to rethink their consumption habits. Lehner (2015) emphasized that consumers have a constant desire to express their values and beliefs. The eye-opening experience might have served as a catalyst for consumers to effectively express themselves in alignment with the de-influencing content.

"I adore your content, your videos have definitely inspired me to be more mindful about my consuming and to take better care of what I already have 😊"

- Netnography @oldloserinbrooklyn

"I had a realization like this when I accumulated 5 eyeshadow palettes that all had the same colors but were from different brands. I decided this year not to buy any makeup until i've used up some of the stuff that i already have bc i have way to much of it and i probably won't get to use a good amount of it before it expires. after i get through some of it i'll try to get just sample sizes if possible"

- Netnography @oldloserinbrooklyn

4.3.3 United in De-Influencing

The concept of de-influencing has been found to not only inform consumers, but also create a sense of community among them. It seemed that the videos created a space for consumers to connect with others who shared their values and beliefs in influencer content. This sense of community could be a factor in the increasing popularity of de-influencing content. The emergence of de-influencing as a movement within the influencer industry indicated that consumers were becoming more discerning in their approach to influencer content. They were not just passively consuming content but actively seeking out information that could help them make informed decisions about their purchases. When consumers tag each other in the comment section, it serves as a way to spread the message and build a community around de-influencing content. The findings indicated that de-influencing content not only served an educational purpose but also fulfilled a social need among consumers.

"I found my people"

- Netnography @impactforgood_

"It's so rare to write anything on a video. But you tag a lot if you have talked a lot about something. Like oh this is what we were talking about. You want to pass the message on to someone. So if I'm talking purely personally in that way, I would have probably tagged someone and spread it further."

- Interviewee 1

Consumers expressed guilt about throwing away products and contributing to environmental damage and were actively seeking advice and guidance on the topic. They were engaged with the content and sought a connection with the influencer and other consumers. The data also implied that consumers were actively seeking and providing advice on various products. Some viewers asked for suggestions on alternative products to the ones that were de-influenced in the video, while others shared their own experiences and opinions with those same products. In response, other commenters would often provide helpful advice and recommendations, creating a sense of community among viewers.

"I hated the Tarte concealer too, and I think the NARS one is very similar. Tbh the NYX one does the job for me. Cant wait to try the hourglass!"

- Netnography @mannymua733

"What do you think of Mae love fade away serum!?"

- Netnography @alexeducatedmess

The interaction and engagement between the consumers suggested that de-influencing videos not only provided a platform for influencers to express their opinions but also created an opportunity for consumers to share their own experiences and knowledge with others. This community-building aspect could be seen as a positive outcome of de-influencing content, as it allowed for the exchange of information and fostered a sense of shared interest and concern. In addition to seeking and giving product recommendations, commenters in the de-influencing videos were also providing tips and advice on how to save money and consume less, creating long threads in the comment sections of some of the videos.

"This is the year I won't let tik tok influence me soendigg by my money. Made it one month so far. Love your content!"

"I go by the rule of three. I look at it three times. If by the third time I can't find a reason to buy it other than it's trending, I put it back"

"me too. I've also recently cleaned out my closet. everything I didn't wear in a year went to charity, except formal wear"

"it's a good way to shop in general. also asking yourself "is it cute or just cute in the display?" it may be me living on a budget but it helps!"

"Yeah I have definitely been more mindful lately"

- Netnography thread @makeupbymonicaa

De-influencing content has created a space where consumers can share their knowledge and experiences on more sustainable and responsible consumption practices. It also indicated that de-influencing content may have broader implications for consumer culture beyond simply influencing purchasing decisions. The creation of these small communities within the comments section created a sense of connection between consumers and encouraged them to think critically about their consumption habits. It also highlighted the potential for de-influencing content to spark larger conversations about sustainability and responsible consumption practices. As consumers continue to engage with one another in the comments section, these small communities may continue to grow and drive meaningful change in consumer behavior.

4.4 Re-Influencing

The theme of re-influencing emerged as a direct result of de-influencing, extending beyond the boundaries of the conceptual framework. While not explicitly included in the framework, re-influencing could be connected to multiple conceptual categories, highlighting its multidimensional nature and potential relevance to various aspects of the study. While de-influencing primarily focused on discouraging overconsumption and promoted responsible choices, re-influencing introduced a unique twist to this narrative. The study participants made it clear that when influencers incorporate recommendations into their de-influencing videos, it should be referred to as re-influencing rather than de-influencing.

4.4.1 Recommendations Clash with Responsible Consumption

The analysis of comments shed light on the consumers' experience of de-influencing and its potential connection to re-influencing. It was evident that de-influencing was intended to discourage overconsumption and encourage consumer responsibility. However, when influencers recommended alternative products, consumers perceived it as undermining the original goal and labeled it as re-influencing. This suggested that some commenters did not appreciate the discrepancy between claiming to de-influence while still exerting influence by showcasing *dupes*². The comments reflected a sentiment that de-influencing, even when attempting to discourage consumption, could be perceived as just another marketing strategy

² Dupes are inexpensive products positioned as direct replacements for prestige items (Rowser, 2019).

rather than a genuine movement towards conscious and responsible consumption. This raised questions about the authenticity of influencers producing de-influencing content. It became apparent that the mere act of de-influencing could still be viewed as a form of influence if the influencer did not adequately explain the purpose or concept of the video concerning the product. In contrast to the perspective observed in the netnography analysis, where influencing was primarily associated with recommending alternative products and re-influencing, the interview data provided a different viewpoint. The interviews revealed that influencers were seen as always having an influencing role, regardless of whether they were de-influencing or re-influencing. This highlighted the inherent influence influencers possess and suggested that the distinction between de-influencing and re-influencing might not be as clear-cut as initially perceived.

“Re-influencing”*

- Netnography @bambidoesbeauty

"You are deinfluencing, but at the same time influencing even more 🤔 that's not the point tho 🙄👉"

- Netnography @bambidoesbeauty

"She's still recommending products, so it's just another form of influencing but for cheaper brands lol"

- Netnography @alyssastephanie

"It's still PR. All PR is good PR. Even though she says don't buy this, she has shown the product and you also have to take that into account as a consumer."

- Interviewee 1

In the context of de-influencing, the practice of re-influencing could be seen as a form of greenwashing which refers to the practice of companies or individuals making false or exaggerated claims about the environmental benefits of their products or practices (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020). When an influencer recommends alternative products after de-influencing a

particular item it creates the impression that the influencer is concerned about the environment and is promoting sustainable consumption. However, this practice may be encouraging consumers to consume even more products, which may be undermining their original message and could have negative environmental consequences.

4.4.2 The Power of Dupes

Despite the negative experience that some consumers had with de-influencing videos in regard to overconsumption, the data also showed that consumers had positive reactions to influencers re-influencing alternative products or dupes. Commenters showed their gratitude when influencers promoted affordable and environmentally friendly alternatives. They expressed their interest in finding cheaper alternatives to high-end products, but still valued the honesty and responsibility promoted in de-influencing content. The commenters emphasized the purpose of featuring dupes in de-influencing videos, which was to challenge the assumption that a viral product is always superior. They believed that by promoting alternatives, these videos aimed to question the notion that popularity equates to quality and encouraged viewers to think beyond current trends. Other commenters recognized that consumers would inevitably continue purchasing unnecessary products, regardless of de-influencing efforts. However, their experience led them to desire more budget-friendly options. They acknowledged the reality of consumer behavior but expressed a preference for recommendations that align with their needs.

"I think alternatives are good. A viral product isn't always a good product and that's kinda the whole point 🙄"

- Netnography @emmasrectangle

"well everyone's gonna buy makeup regardless, so i feel like we should re influence the less expensive kinda instead of the expensive one"

- Netnography @tatlafata

In some cases, influencers may genuinely believe that the alternative product they are recommending is a better option for their audience, and may be motivated by a desire to provide helpful advice. Hence, based on how the videos were presented, consumers held divergent opinions on the appropriate approach to conducting de-influencing. Some viewed de-influencing as strictly abstaining from promoting products, while others saw it as an opportunity to recommend more responsible alternatives.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the empirical findings in relation to the conceptual framework and previously discovered research.

While there is a lot of research on social media marketing, influencer marketing, and anti-hauls on YouTube, this study found that there was no such research done on consumers' experience of de-influencing, let alone on TikTok. The findings provided an insight into which experiences consumers had when exposed to de-influencing on TikTok. The phenomenon of de-influencing was experienced by consumers in a multitude of ways. While some consumers posited that de-influencing still exerted an influence, others embraced the prospect of receiving information regarding which products to purchase instead of others. Anti-consumption, alongside the authenticity of the influencer, featured as a significant factor that consumers experienced. Consumers also found that education was an experience that they appreciated. Overall, consumers had both positive and negative experiences linked with all four themes that emerged from the data analysis. The themes could all be linked to the three aspects of the conceptual framework.

5.1 Skepticism Towards Influencer Marketing

Previous research by Ki et al. (2022) showed consumers growing skepticism towards influencer marketing, which was also prevalent in the findings of this study. As García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ram (2021) highlighted concerns about the authenticity and credibility of influencer content, some consumers in this study reported feeling detached and skeptical towards de-influencer content on TikTok. The skepticism expressed by consumers towards de-influencing content was due to various factors, one of which was the perception of paid influencers as being biased due to their history of sponsored promotions. These findings align with Zniva et al.'s (2022) recommendations to maintain authenticity by being consistent in messaging and transparent about sponsored content. Abruptly transitioning from creating mostly sponsored content to producing de-influencing videos can be seen as inconsistent, which may cause consumers to perceive the influencer as less authentic. As a result, consumers felt a

sense of disconnection or loss of trust when watching de-influencing content from these influencers. The reason behind this could be that some consumers perceived de-influencing as a passing trend rather than a long-term commitment. They saw through the influencer's intention and recognized that de-influencing was only a tactic to remain relevant, rather than a genuine effort to try and connect with their audience in a more meaningful way. However, it is important to note that not all consumers shared this perspective. Some experienced de-influencing as a positive trend that encouraged influencers to be more authentic and transparent with their audience.

5.2 De-Influencing or Not

Re-influencing occurs when an influencer claims to be de-influencing, but continues to exert influence by recommending alternative products. The phenomenon of re-influencing can be closely connected to influencer authenticity. Authenticity is a key factor in influencer marketing (Chen et al., 2023; Zniva et al., 2022). Influencers perceived as authentic are more likely to be trusted by their followers and have greater influence over their purchasing decisions (Chen et al., 2023). However, consumers experienced influencers' engagement in re-influencing as risky, compromising their authenticity by giving the impression that they were not being entirely truthful with their followers. This suggests a potential connection between re-influencing and the category of emotions within the conceptual framework. When influencers claimed to be de-influencing, but still influenced by showing dupes, many consumers got skeptical of the influencer, and some said they felt more influenced by the de-influencing video than a regular influencer video.

Other consumers suggested that they perceived de-influencing videos to still have a de-influencing effect even when the video promoted dupes. Consumers maintained the belief that the video aimed to address overconsumption by presenting more affordable alternatives to expensive products. This observation implied that the issue may have stemmed from how the influencer framed the video, thereby creating misleading expectations for viewers. However, the interviews revealed that both de-influencing and re-influencing tactics ultimately constituted a form of influencing. The interviewees maintained that, regardless of the specific content presented in a de-influencing video, the fundamental goal of influencers remained unchanged: to persuade consumers to act in a certain manner. Leung et al. (2022) also argued

that influencers' intentions primarily revolve around exerting influence rather than abstaining from it.

The notion that de-influencing and re-influencing both constitute a form of influence is rooted in the underlying principles of marketing. The primary objective of marketing and advertising is to influence consumer behavior by creating an awareness of products or services and motivating individuals to make a purchase (Leung et al., 2022). Influencers, as a type of marketer, utilize various tactics to achieve this goal, such as promoting products, providing reviews, or even discouraging the purchase of a product through de-influencing videos (Leung et al., 2022). However, regardless of the specific tactic used, the ultimate aim of influencing remains the same - to persuade consumers to act in a particular way (Doshi et al., 2023; Leung et al., 2022). Therefore, even though a de-influencing video may appear to discourage a purchase, consumers saw the underlying intent is to influence. Similarly, re-influencing, where an influencer recommends an alternative product, was also seen as a form of influencing as it aimed to persuade consumers to buy a specific product. As revealed in the findings, consumers observed instances where influencers seemed to exert even greater influence when attempting to de-influence through their videos.

5.2.1 Re-Influencing, a form of Culture Jamming

Previous research about culture jamming states that anti-hauls could be seen as an 'algorithmic culture jamming' that turns algorithmic recommendations into alternative messages (Wood, 2021). In a similar vein, the phenomenon of re-influencing can be understood as another form of 'algorithmic culture jamming'. Influencers who engage in re-influencing aim to make a socio-political statement by emphasizing the value of more affordable products that are equally effective as their higher-priced counterparts, thus aligning themselves with the ethos of culture jamming. By challenging traditional consumerist narratives and disrupting algorithmic-driven recommendations, re-influencers contribute to the broader discourse of alternative consumption practices (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Wood, 2021).

5.2.2 Consumer-Driven Re-Influencing

The interactive nature of the comment section in de-influencing videos on TikTok could be understood as a form of "consumer-driven re-influencing," where viewers actively seek advice,

share experiences, and influence each other's consumer choices. This phenomenon aligns with the observations made by Gani et al. (2022) regarding social media platforms serving as spaces for individuals to connect and share their experiences. These conversations often evolved into extensive discussions, fostering a sense of community and connection among consumers. Notably, García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón (2021) highlighted how anti-hauls brought people together based on environmental concerns, and similarly, the comment section of de-influencing videos on TikTok also fosters community building.

Community building contributed to consumers' personal growth aligning with the conceptual framework. In addition to environmental considerations, the communities formed in the comment section of de-influencing videos on TikTok encompassed a wide range of topics and discussions, which were not mentioned in previous research on anti-hauls. For instance, viewers engaged in conversations about product recommendations, sharing their experiences with different brands, discussing the effectiveness of certain products, or exchanging tips on finding budget-friendly options. The comment section becomes a space where individuals with similar interests and preferences connect, exchange valuable information, and support each other in making informed consumer choices. This dynamic highlights the multifaceted nature of consumer-driven re-influencing and the diverse interests and motivations that drive these interactions within the online community.

5.3 Financial Motivations for Anti-Consumption

The present study revealed an interesting aspect of anti-consumption, namely, the financial motivations for reducing consumption. In particular, de-influencing videos that aimed to discourage consumption without recommending alternative products appeared to resonate with consumers, leading them to feel motivated to save money. Prior research on anti-consumption has primarily emphasized environmental concerns (Lee, 2021; Wood, 2022), and this study's findings suggested that financial motivations may have played an equally important role in driving anti-consumption behavior. The findings indicated that many consumers who expressed a desire to reduce consumption did so because they were tired of feeling pressured to continually purchase new products, and recognized that by decreasing consumption, they could alleviate financial stress and save money. While sustainability remained an important consideration for some consumers, the study's results suggest that financial motivations were a stronger driver of anti-consumption behavior.

6. Conclusion

The final chapter summarizes and concludes the thesis of how consumers experience de-influencing on TikTok. Following this, the chapter will outline both the theoretical and practical contributions of the study. Finally, the limitations of the research will be discussed, along with suggestions for future studies.

6.1 Summary of Thesis

Maria's experience of de-influencing on TikTok reflects the findings of this study. As a consumer, she learned something new about the beauty product and its ingredients, which ultimately led her to decide not to purchase it. By engaging with the influencer and leaving a comment, Maria also felt a sense of connection and responsibility toward making more sustainable choices. Her experience aligns with outcomes reported by other consumers who watch de-influencing content on TikTok.

This study examined how consumers experience de-influencing on TikTok and delved into the experiential nature of de-influencing on TikTok, aiming to uncover novel and unexpected insights. We employed a mix of an inductive- and deductive approach, and a conceptual framework was developed to capture the diverse ways in which consumers experienced de-influencing videos on TikTok. These experiences encompassed not only the gain of new knowledge but also the evocation of emotions and personal growth. A significant finding of this study was the emergence of a new phenomenon, 're-influencing', which needs further investigation to expand knowledge about it.

To gain a deeper understanding of consumers' experiences, this research adopted a qualitative research strategy, combining netnography on TikTok with two in-depth interviews. By analyzing the data using thematic analysis, the study identified topics that shed light on how consumers perceive and engage with de-influencing content on the platform. The study's focus on uncovering previously unknown aspects of consumers de-influencing experiences on TikTok makes it a valuable contribution to the field.

According to the findings connected to the conceptual framework, it appears that the urge to learn something was a common experience for consumers when watching de-influencing content on TikTok. Consumers reported feeling that they learned something from these videos, both in terms of product efficacy and sustainability. Personal growth was also a reported experience, with consumers feeling a sense of connection and community with others as well as a sense of responsibility toward making more sustainable choices. De-influencing videos also evoked feelings of authenticity among consumers, highlighting the emotional connection experienced by individuals. These findings offer valuable insights into how consumers engage with and respond to de-influencing content on TikTok.

Throughout the data collection process, two noteworthy findings emerged that were not originally incorporated within the initial conceptual framework. Firstly, the data highlighted re-influencing as a newly found phenomenon. The idea of re-influencing is to recommend alternative products after de-influencing a particular item, and this could potentially encourage overconsumption and be considered a form of greenwashing. However, there is potential for a more sustainable and responsible form of de-influencing, with influencers promoting affordable and environmentally friendly alternatives. Secondly, our study identified two distinct facets of anti-consumption: environmental motivations and financial motivations. While some participants reported reducing consumption due to environmental concerns, others were motivated by financial motivations. The emergence of these findings highlights the growing importance of responsible consumption in the influencer industry.

6.2 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to understand how consumers experience de-influencing on TikTok. The thesis was written from a consumer perspective and focuses on de-influencing videos on TikTok. We conclude that consumers have varying experiences of de-influencing. Our study indicates that consumers experience de-influencing on TikTok both positively and negatively, and through that, this study has resulted in three main conclusions.

Firstly, consumers experience de-influencing content on TikTok as a means to regain control of their consumption behavior and resist the pressure of constant consumption. This is driven by a

variety of reasons, including environmental, as well as financial motivations. In a world where advertising messages are constantly bombarding consumers from all angles (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021), de-influencing offers a way to push back against this pressure and make more deliberate, conscious choices about what to consume and when. Consumers are experiencing new knowledge from the videos by getting informed, educated, and reminded of how everything that we see on social media might not fill a purpose in our lives. It is not only the influencer making the video that is spreading this message, consumers are asking each other for advice as well as giving recommendations on how to take control of the overconsumption that is happening. This exchange of knowledge is a positive experience for consumers.

Secondly, consumers experience de-influencing content to possess different levels of authenticity. Some consumers perceive de-influencing content as honest and view the influencers as authentic because they are now sharing their genuine opinions about products, even those that they may have had brand deals with that company in the past. Other consumers are a bit more hesitant toward de-influencing. They find it difficult to fully trust the influencer's transition from solely creating regular influencing videos, where they promote and sell products, to now sharing their opinions on what they deem unworthy of purchase. This abrupt shift in content can create a sense of mistrust among these consumers, as they question the influencer's sincerity and true intentions behind the de-influencing approach. These consumers perceive the content as less authentic, questioning whether the influencer's motivations align with genuine efforts to advocate for conscious consumption or if it is merely a strategic move to maintain credibility. This perception of inauthenticity leads to the recognition of the final insight.

The final insight from this study is that de-influencing content on TikTok can lead to re-influencing. While de-influencing primarily focuses on pushing back against the constant pressure to consume and promotes more conscious consumption, it can also lead consumers to discover new products and services that align with their values. Through the process of de-influencing, consumers are becoming more critical of the products they see on social media meaning that when an influencer promotes dupes for products that they are de-influencing, it can lead to a positive influence or re-influence. As this thesis has shown, consumers can experience a sense of authenticity towards the influencer when they are transparent about their experiences with a product. Consumers express gratitude when influencers promote affordable

and environmentally friendly alternatives, demonstrating their interest in finding budget-friendly options while still valuing the honesty and responsibility promoted in de-influencing content. This thesis did however also show a more negative experience towards re-influencing, as some consumers experienced the recommendation of dupes as disingenuous or inauthentic. This may be because the concept of de-influencing is to resist the urge to constantly consume, yet recommending cheaper alternatives may still encourage consumption. Consumers see this as a counteraction to the original intention of de-influencing.

6.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on social media and influencer marketing by examining the phenomenon of de-influencing on TikTok, which has not yet been explored in previous research. The findings highlight the experiences of consumers who engage with de-influencing content, including the impact on their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to consumption. Previous research defines influence as the ability to persuade others to act or think in a certain way (Leung et al., 2022).

A major finding of the study was the concept of re-influencing, where influencers who claim to be de-influencing continue to exert influence by recommending alternative products. This phenomenon raises questions about influencer authenticity, as some consumers perceive this behavior as disingenuous and a compromise of the influencer's credibility. According to Chen et al. (2023), credibility decreases when authenticity is lacking. The study contributes to the ongoing debate on the role of influencers and their responsibility to their followers (Kapitan et al., 2022). The study also provides insights into the underlying principles of marketing and the nature of influence, suggesting that de-influencing and re-influencing are both forms of influencing. Leung et al. (2022) strengthened the view that influencers aim to persuade consumers to act in a particular way. The study raises questions about the definition of de-influencing and its effectiveness in reducing unnecessary consumption, as some consumers perceive re-influencing and anti-hauls as having the same goal.

In addition to the factors related to authenticity and education, the study also revealed that financial considerations play a significant role in the phenomenon of de-influencing. Many consumers cited financial motivations for engaging in anti-consumption behaviors (Lee, 2022),

such as the desire to save money and reduce waste. In particular, some consumers noted that they were frustrated with the constant pressure to buy new products and keep up with the latest trends. They felt that the culture of constant consumption perpetuated by social media and influencer marketing was unsustainable and financially irresponsible (Lee, 2022; Leung et al., 2022).

6.4 Practical Contributions

The study's findings have significant implications for marketers, influencers, and consumers, pointing to the importance of enhanced transparency and authenticity in influencer marketing practices. Marketers can leverage these findings to develop more effective strategies that align with consumer preferences for genuine connections with influencers. By fostering greater transparency, such as disclosing sponsored content or partnerships, marketers can build trust and credibility with consumers, leading to stronger brand-consumer relationships. For influencers, the study emphasizes the significance of maintaining authenticity in their interactions with followers. By prioritizing transparency and avoiding misleading or deceptive practices, influencers can enhance their credibility and strengthen the trust they have established with their audience. This, in turn, can lead to increased engagement, loyalty, and a more positive perception of their personal brand.

As the social media landscape is constantly evolving so does the changing attitudes and behaviors of consumers. As more and more people turn to social media for information it is important for practitioners to stay up-to-date with these trends and to adapt their strategies accordingly. Staying up-to-date with trends will also enable them to identify potential issues and pivot their strategies accordingly. By paying attention to the feedback of their target audience, practitioners can adjust their campaigns to better meet the needs and desires of consumers on TikTok. Moreover, staying attuned to trends and consumer feedback not only enables practitioners to adapt their strategies, but also empowers them to seize new opportunities. By identifying emerging trends or shifts in consumer behavior, practitioners can proactively shape their campaigns to capitalize on these trends. This proactive approach helps practitioners remain competitive and ensures that their influencer marketing efforts align with the evolving landscape of TikTok.

This study also provides elucidation that the concept of de-influencing can be subject to interpretation and engender challenges due to its divergent understanding among individuals. Consequently, as practitioners of de-influencing videos, it becomes crucial to exercise caution when assigning labels to such content. Consumer perceptions of de-influencing videos vary, with some perceiving them as a means to reduce unnecessary consumption, while others view them as informative sources highlighting inferior products and recommending alternatives. If practitioners can acknowledge and understand the diverse perspectives surrounding de-influencing, practitioners can tailor their content to cater to different consumer needs and expectations. Striving for clarity and transparency in messaging, while considering the multifaceted nature of de-influencing, can foster a more effective and meaningful connection with the audience.

6.5 Limitations and Further Research

This thesis focuses on consumers' experience of de-influencing on TikTok. However, there are opportunities for further research to explore the concept of re-influencing and its potential impact on consumer behavior and attitudes. This future study could investigate whether exposure to re-influencing content leads to increased purchasing of recommended products, and whether this undermines the goal of de-influencing. A quantitative orientation could be adopted to emphasize the focus of the study. Additionally, the study could examine whether re-influencing is a form of greenwashing, the extent to which influencers are transparent about their motives and the products they promote, and how this impacts user trust and authenticity.

While this study was limited to users in Sweden and the United States, future research could aim to explore the de-influencing experiences of users from other countries or regions. This could help identify potential cultural or contextual factors that may impact the experience of de-influencing, as well as any cultural differences in how consumers experience de-influencing. As de-influencing also exists on Instagram, a potential idea for further research could be to explore consumers' experiences of de-influencing on this platform.

It is worth noting that this study was limited to data collection through netnography and interviews. While netnography is a valuable method for understanding online consumer

behavior, it may be criticized for its lack of depth and quality compared to other data collection methods (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). To address this limitation, future research could consider utilizing additional methods such as focus groups to explore whether there are any differences in consumers' experiences when discussing their de-influencing experiences more deeply with others. This could provide further insights into the nuances and complexities of consumer attitudes and behaviors in relation to de-influencing.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide (Swedish)

1. Introduktion och uppvärmningsfrågor
 - Presentation av forskarna och en förklaring av syftet med studien.
 - Uppvärmningsfrågor, såsom deras namn, ålder och yrke.
2. Videopresentation
 - <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGJuJ1DVo/>
3. Frågor

Ny information

- Var snäll och beskriv videon.
- Vad tyckte du om videon? Vilka känslor väcker den hos dig?
- Fanns det några särskilda element i videon som stack ut för dig?

Känslor

- Hur kände du när du tittade på videon?
- Hur tycker du att videon relaterar till din personliga identitet?
- Har videon påverkat hur du ser på liknande produkter eller influencer-kampanjer?
- Vad tror du är syftet med videon? Varför tror du att personen skapade den?

Personlig utveckling

- Vad hade du kommenterat om du hade kommenterat på videon?
- Hur relaterade videon till dina personliga erfarenheter och känslor?
- Hur påverkade videon dina uppfattningar om smink, skönhet eller kläder?
- Hur tror du att de-influencing innehåll skiljer sig från traditionell reklam eller influencer-innehåll?

Appendix B - Interview Guide (English)

1. Introduction and warmup questions
 - Presentation of the researchers and an explanation of the purpose of the study.
 - Warm-up questions, such as their names, ages, and occupations.
2. Video presentation
 - <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGJuJ1DVo/>
3. Questions

New information

- Please describe the video.
- What did you think of the video? What emotions did it evoke in you?
- Were there any specific elements in the video that stood out to you?

Emotions

- How did you feel while watching the video?
- How do you think the video relates to your personal identity?
- Has the video affected how you view similar products or influencer campaigns?
- What do you think is the purpose of the video? Why do you think the person created it?

Personal growth

- What would you have commented if you had commented on the video?
- How did the video relate to your personal experiences and emotions?
- How did the video affect your perceptions of makeup, beauty, or clothing?
- How do you think de-influencing content differs from traditional advertising or influencer content?

Appendix C - Excerpts of Thematic Analysis

Quote	Code	Theme
<i>So ready for this shift. Anti-capitalist overconsumption girlies stand up!!!</i>	Environment	Anti-consumption
<i>It be saving the planet too! 🌱🌍</i>	Environment	Anti-consumption
<i>They create needs where there really is no need. So for the individual, it creates little, so it becomes a financial issue in the end.</i>	Financial	Anti-consumption
<i>Thank you for these videos!! You are making a positive impact in my life and bank account.</i>	Financial	Anti-consumption
<i>And as I said, using it and using de-influencing on their channels, on their platforms, can make them seem more likeable. [...] That they seem credible and they seem friendly towards the consumer [...]</i>	Transparency	Authenticity
<i>This is so refreshing. I love the honesty. Giving honest reviews shows that what works for one person might not for another. Thank you ❤️</i>	Honesty	Authenticity
<i>Do more of these!!! I love this and we need more of these honest reviews</i>	Honesty	Authenticity
<i>You're the only influencer I trust ❤️😭</i>	Trust	Authenticity
<i>Can everyone do this please</i>	Transparency	Authenticity
<i>What do you reccomend instead of the bronzing drops?</i>	Asking for advice	Education
<i>Love that you included education! We need more informed, conscious consumers</i>	Information	Education
<i>THIS needs to be a whole series... this is by far the most informative thing i've seen online today... please continue</i>	Information	Education
<i>TIP for the Charlotte tilbury product you mention first: use as a liquid highlighter!! So nice for a natural make-up 🧡</i>	Community	Education
<i>Yeah, I'm going to start wearing it like that instead!! 🧡🧡</i>	Community	Education
<i>This hit me so hard recently. Why am I buying a new product when I have 100 half full bottles still in my cabinet</i>	Awareness	Education
<i>Re-influencing*</i>	Negative towards dupes	Re-influencing
<i>I wish de-influencers would just stop pushing OTHER products.</i>	Negative towards dupes	Re-influencing
<i>Based on what I have seen, it is not de-influencing by definition. Then it's still influencing.</i>	Negative towards dupes	Re-influencing
<i>Girl I don't think the point of deinfluencing videos is to promote more products in them 😭</i>	Negative towards dupes	Re-influencing
<i>well everyone's gonna buy makeup regardless, so i feel like we should re influence the less expensive kinda instead of the expensive one</i>	Positive towards dupes	Re-influencing
<i>I am HERE for your deinfluencing recommendations.</i>	Positive towards dupes	Re-influencing