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1 Introduction

This chapter will first give the readers an insight into the background of current research and information on social media most specifically Instagram but also about influencers with regards to credibility. Thereafter followed by an introduction of the problem definition, research purpose, and research question. Lastly, the delimitations will be presented.

1.1 Background

In the past, companies have primarily used traditional media to reach out to their customers such as newspaper ads and television advertising. Messages produced from companies had a clear sender and then published in the media where it was hoped that it would target the right person. Through digitalization, it has now allowed people to be more linked through different social media platforms and has led to an increase in the use of these platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram (Broberg & Gianneschi 2016). The companies' ability to focus on their desired target group has become more effective in this way. The number of social media users increases where one-third of the world's population in 2017 used social media daily (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). A trend that fundamentally changed marketing, social media, is now a natural part of corporate market strategies. The process of adapting people to lucrative social media has been sped up by YouTube and Instagram although personal websites and blogs have been used for many years (Khamis et al., 2017).

The social media that is effective in marketing is Instagram where the app in September 2017 reached 800 million monthly active users (Wilberg, 2018). Compared to other social media, Instagram has the highest level of involvement through time spent on the app (ibid.). The clothing industry has got a real hold on Instagram where they are now more effectively reaching out to their customers and audiences through a more mainstream environmental setting, replacing previous methods such as catwalk shows and advertising campaigns. As a result, fashion marketers have gained a whole new world to exploit. Fashion brands on Instagram encourage people who wear their clothes, to

post pictures of themselves which acts as a marketing tactic. People thus get a bigger chance of seeing how the outfit looks like on multiple body types and can be seen as a form of user-generated content (ibid.).

According to Fastenau (2018), influencer marketing has increased with the numbers 325% in Google searches within the year 2017. This shows that the term is the fastest growing online acquisition method of the year (Fastenau, 2018). A digital strategy that is well established is the use of an influencer as part of marketing. Companies use influencer marketing as a tool where the firm is collaborating with influencers. This means the companies are working with people with a certain individual influence (Hargrove, 2019). For instance, Fashion Nova is a relatively new fashion brand in the clothing industry that has had a phenomenally rapid growth within the past few years on Instagram. The brand's marketing strategy is only based on influencer marketing where the company chooses to do collaborations with strategic influencers on Instagram. Individuals that follow these influencers on Instagram have some level of relationship with them, which later results in the followers becoming loyal to these influencers. Thus, followers become familiar with the brand that the influencer is collaborating with, which in turn can have an effect on the follower's view of the brand's credibility. The marketing software company, Influencer DB (2018), studies the most successful brands based on their influencer marketing campaigns on Instagram. According to the study, Fashion Nova has a social engagement of $125 billion earned media value (EMV) based on 611 million likes on posts mentioning the brand's name (Hargrove, 2019). Next year, approximately two-thirds of the marketing departments will increase their budget for influencer marketing, so the trend will probably continue in the future (Fastenau, 2018). Also, an average budget of $ 25,000 to $ 50,000 is expected to be invested by marketers in multi-tiered influencer campaigns (ibid.).

Celebrity Partnerships often have many followers that involve high exposure levels that help the brand. However, influencer marketing does not need to involve celebrity partnerships. Normally, the value of an influencer's Instagram profile is measured by the number of followers, yet, a non-influencer Instagram profile can create as much value to the brand towards their followers (Wilberg, 2018). In a way, one can resemble the influencer content as a recommendation from a friend. The result can create greater credibility with the brand and thus lead to a greater interest in buying the product from the brand in the future. This is important for branding accounts as they lead to a sense of community where a third party has the role of validating the products for consumers

(ibid.). The brand's target demographics should have a clear link to influencers' followers to achieve maximum benefit. It is difficult to measure success, even though the coherent expenditure is justified as influencing relationships can be expensive. On the other hand, demographics should not be seen as the ultimate factor for increasing exposure or sales, to build collaborations and relationships with influencers (ibid.). The problem of having clear measurements of the success of influencer marketing remains. The face of fashion has changed with social media in a way where mainstream users have a greater connection to brands than ever before on Instagram (ibid.).

1.2 Problem

Due to the increased use of influencer marketing followers might have different requests and demands on how an Instagram profile should appeal to them in order to increase the influencers' credibility. Marketers need to understand how influencers build credibility and how followers perceive the information portrayed on Instagram. This is examined by an in-depth research study to evaluate the importance of how credibility from the customer can increase towards influencers based on their Instagram profile.

The thesis is based on the field's gap where the subject has previously been studied in connection with influencer marketing. The first gap identified by the authors is the role of influencers and the perceived credibility of their Instagram profile. Celebrities have a greater effect than civilians, according to previous research (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). This thesis will not only consider celebrities but also, non-celebrities as influencers along with their Instagram profile.

The second gap identified by the authors is the position spokespersons have had in comparison to the position influencers have today. In the realm of public relations, PR spokespersons are designated to represent their organizations. Just as advertisers favour spokesperson who are thought to increase positive consumer attitudes toward the brand, organizations pick spokespersons to convey an organization's positive image and enhance its reputation (Hong & Len-Riós, 2015). The spokesperson's credibility is essential to maintain an organization's image (Hong & Len-Riós, 2015). Although the research has been conducted to suggest that spokesmen's credibility and image have an impact on consumer perceptions through traditional media. Therefore, social media marketing differs to a great extent from traditional marketing (Hajli, 2015). In conclusion, all research done on advertising and the effects on credibility cannot be applied to social

media more specifically Instagram. Moreover, there is little to no research been done about the relationship between influencers-followers and its effects on the perceived credibility towards the influencers Instagram profile. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how influencers Instagram profile affects their credibility.

Instagram is an important platform for influencers since the rapid growth of users has presented a change in how marketing is done on social media. The literature review conducted by the authors showed that a few articles are targeting Instagram marketing. Since there is little guidance for Instagram influencers when it comes to actionable strategies for this platform i.e. Instagram, it is therefore of interest to investigate how the credibility of an influencers' Instagram profile is affected by the influencer-follower relationship. Moreover, the central gap that this thesis aims to explore is the lack of understanding of the relationship between influencers-followers and its effects on the influencer's credibility with regards to their Instagram profile.

1.3 Research Purpose

The aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon and understand the relationship between influencers and followers, and how this relationship is influenced by the perceived credibility of the influencers' Instagram profile. The gaps identified is what the thesis will dig deeper into, try and explore this new phenomenon. Thereby providing relevant knowledge around this area as the existing research on the credibility of Instagram influencers is quite vague. The thesis will base the studies on Millennials as the target group. The reason why is that the audience in this group has a high involvement in the digital field.

According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), there are three ways of classifying research purposes, explanatory, descriptive and exploratory. For explanatory research purposes, here the emphasis is on studying a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationships between variables. Moving on to descriptive research purposes, here the objective is 'to portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations' (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In some cases, descriptive and explanatory research purposes are combined with what is known as descripto-explanatory studies. The final research purpose is exploratory purposes, which is a valuable means of finding out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomenon in a new light' (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). It is particularly useful if one wishes to clarify

their understanding of a problem. The exploratory research purpose is most applicable for this thesis as our topic aims to explore the phenomenon of credibility in a new light, in relation to influencers Instagram profiles. As previously mentioned, this study will investigate the gap found among spokesmen and influencers in the apparel industry. The reason to why the authors think exploratory research purpose is applicable for this thesis is because this approach does not require a deep understanding of the problem, but rather sets about to explore and understand the phenomenon

Furthermore, this study can be useful for marketers in the future, who want to read about Instagram profiles/influencers impact on followers. Also, about the importance of how to create well-perceived credibility as possible with their followers. Marketers can use this study to understand and decrease cost and time when planning marketing strategies but also collaborate with the right influencers to gain a higher level of credibility from the followers (potential target audience). Thus, a deeper understanding of the importance of creating effective advertising will help the marketing department of companies, when choosing an efficient marketing strategy.

Readers will gain an insight into the weight of how influencer credibility on Instagram has an effect on the followers' perceptions of them. The credibility of a source is also another strategy that seeks to see to what extent the consumer can accept the message of an organization. According to Zhou, Lu, and Wang (2016) website appearance, competence and reputation are factors of the platform that evaluates acceptance. In addition, followers might most likely see an influencer with a more proper looking virtual service-scape of their Instagram profile, and also the relevance of content to be more credible compared to a one with bad, irrelevant content (Zhou et al. 2016). Followers, together with user-generated content and brand content, increasingly turn to social influencers where they can identify products, services, and destinations that resonate with their unique lifestyles (Zhou et al., 2016).

1.4 Research Question

The following research question is proposed based on the previously defined problem:
How is the influencer-follower relationship affected by the influencer's credibility in relation to their Instagram profile from a millennial perspective?

1.5 Delimitations

The purpose of the study is to investigate whether Instagram profiles of influencer can affect the credibility of a follower's perspective. The study will focus on Instagram as the main source and exclude YouTube, Blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr as the thesis cannot cover all these platforms in depth at once. Further, this thesis will include any conclusions concerning the level of credibility, if the consumer's perception can be affected based on different influencer types.

Only information from millennials will be affected in this study as ages 18-29 correspond to 55% of the Instagram users according to the Pew Research Center (2015) study, thereby all other generations will be excluded. As Instagram has a huge number of users, to conduct a studying including all nationalities around the globe would be too lengthy, therefore, geographically, the information for the study is delimited to Swedish citizens. In addition, the study is limited to fashion influencers only, as the purpose of the thesis is to examine influencers Instagram profile.

1.6 Target Group

This thesis is written for marketing students and professionals within the marketing industry.

1.7 Definitions

Influencer: a person or group that has the ability to influence the behaviour or opinions of others ("Influencer | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary", 2019).

Millennials: a person who was born in the 1980s, 1990s, or early 2000s ("Millennials | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary", 2019)

Instagram: is a social media platform that is accessible on mobile devices, where users have the possibility to share photos and videos. Users also have the opportunity to like and comment on other people's posts (Miles, 2014).

Credibility: is the quality of being believed or trusted. If someone or something has credibility, people believe in them and trust them ("Credibility definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary", 2019).

2. Frame of reference

In this chapter, relevant literature and theories related to the purpose of this thesis are presented. Previous research regarding social media marketing, influencer marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, sponsorships, relationship building, and aesthetics are presented, in order to understand the effects, it has on influencers credibility, specifically on their Instagram profile. The section is followed by a deeper description of Ohanian's model of source credibility and Hovland's model of attribution of credibility, which will later be used to analyse the findings.

2.1 Social media marketing

Social media has more than 1.6 billion users all around the world (Statista, 2016). The use of this phenomenon is not the same throughout the world, however, social networking platforms, such as, Facebook, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Snapchat are the most popular content sharing platforms (Singh, Lehnert & Bostick, 2012). Social media marketing can be defined as the use of different social media content to market and promote the firm's products or service. According to Liu, S., Chou, C., Liau, H. (2015), social media marketing is otherwise known as consumer-generated marketing, because social media depends on the user's input regarding, posting content, expressing their opinions and engaging in discussion among each other. Without the social media user's contributions, social media marketing would be non-existent. A company's intention of using social media marketing is to reach out to a wider target market in a more engaging way to interact and build a relationship with the customers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The use of social media platforms is less expensive and more engaging in terms of communication with both parties compared to traditional marketing (Hajli, 2015). Also, the benefit with social media in contrast to the traditional media marketing is that the content shared in different platforms are open and accessible for everyone which is beneficial for companies in terms of electronic word-of-mouth where companies receive feedbacks and comments to satisfy consumer needs in the best way (ibid.). Electronic word-of-mouth can be referred to as the process of exchanging information or opinions from a sender to a receiver where the online context

that is shared has a great impact on the company (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004).

2.2 Instagram

In October 2010, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger launched the now Facebook-owned social media platform Instagram (Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016). The application is available for smartphones and lets its users upload pictures or videos that they want to share with their followers and has established itself among young users. The images and videos are easily accessible as the user can tag them geographically or in the description text with hashtags which are both searchable (Harris, 2018). By adding a word in front of "#", the user marks a word or phrase that makes it easily searchable. Instagram organizes images in a smart way where it collects photos with the same hashtag in the same place in the app. A feature that simplifies the search for users who want to find people with the same interest (Ye, Hasmin, Baghirov & Murphy, 2018). Hashtags are also used by companies that want to market a particular product and thereby create brand awareness (Ye et al., 2018). The geographical tag fulfils the same function as the hashtag, though geographically since in the app one can tag its photo with a geographical location. Furthermore, users can edit their images by cropping or overlaying filters that enhance the images, the filters can change colour, sharpness, and resolution. After uploading, the user's followers can both like and comment on the photo or video (Lub, Trub & Rosenthal, 2015).

In the social media world, Instagram is the fastest growing of all of them where its consumers spend more time on this than other similar social media platforms (Djarfarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Instagram has thus become an effective brand management tool as consumers easily have access to their favourite brands by easily following them in the application (Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016). The app is a popular platform in social media where companies can market their products and services according to Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas (2016). Thus, more and more companies have begun to use Instagram as a way to create contact and maintain communication with their consumers which have improved sales (Chen, 2018). How well a campaign is established on Instagram can be evaluated by marketers using factors such as the number of approvals, comments, and insurances between the campaign, the content and the user (Muñoz & Towner, 2017).

Instagram recently introduced a new algorithm in its app where they changed their conical-based flow to a trendy flow. This means that the flow is now based on what the follower is believed to like the most and be most interested in instead of displaying posts in the time order with the latest first (Chen, 2018). However, the new algorithm can be problematic according to Chen (2018) for marketers as it determines what is suitable for the user to see in the flow and the user can thus miss marketing from brands.

2.2.1 Regulation

The Federal Trade Commission (2017) has been investigating the issue with paid advertising on Instagram, thus they created requirements on how influencers and celebrities should have ad labels on sponsored content to protect the followers. According to Instagram (2018), every account on Instagram can publish branded content. Branded content can be defined as content from either an author or publisher to show if it is influenced by a company. Facebook and Instagram accounts that have access to the specified branded content have to use a tool which tags the selected product from the third party or brands.

Instagram has a feature available for influencers where they can tag both Instagram posts and stories so that their followers can clearly see if it is a paid collaboration or sponsorship (O'Brien, 2017). All sponsored posts without ad labels violate the guidelines of the Federal Trade Commission on the risks of creating sponsored posts (ibid.). The paid partnership feature, Instagram tag, allows the influencers to clearly show their followers that there is a disclosure between them and a company, thus indicating that the post is sponsored content. Also, this helps businesses gain insights into how their sponsored content campaigns have performed. The reason is to bring a higher level of transparency and consistency regarding sponsored content on Instagram. Instagram made the feature available to all accounts with a higher level of engagement, such as influencers (Chacon, 2017). Thus, tagging a business with the feature may not completely meet the Federal Trade Commission requirements since it can still be misleading and unclear. Influencers and marketers have a responsibility to follow the requirements and get educated about the laws and standards to avoid any risk of violation. The followers must be aware of paid collaboration or sponsorship. If the followers have any issues to separate an influencer paid collaboration or sponsorship in contrast to a genuine opinion of a product, the influencer is violating the Federal Trade Commission's guidelines (Federal Trade Commission, 2017).

2.2.2 Cross-posting

Instagram has a tool where users can connect their accounts across other social media platforms i.e. Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter when posting content. Cross-posting enables posts and stories on Instagram from users and brands to also be posted on all the platforms mentioned above at once (Nield, 2017). Users have the option to turn this function on or off while posting a story and post. By using this strategy, both influencers and companies can increase engagement regarding the content (Pallien, 2019). According to Hutchinson (2019), the benefits with cross-posting are that it provides more exposure and has the potential to increase the performance from the followers. Also, if the one social media platform is lacking this strategy can help social media platforms boost each other's engagement with more content (Pallien, 2019). Thus, companies should have a specific strategy for each platform since the target audience can perceive the content in a different way depending on the source i.e. social media platforms (ibid.).

2.3 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing can be defined as 'a type of marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive a brand's message to the larger market' (Byrne, Kearney & MacEvill, 2017). An influencer is simply similar to an opinion leader according to Li and Du (2011), they also believe them to be anyone who is influential with a strong personal brand. However, none of these definitions are specifically focused on defining it with relation to influencer marketing in an online atmosphere, in particular on social media platforms.

Compared to paid advertising, it is more likely to see influencers as more credible because what they advertise better fits into their content, as can be seen by analyzing previous research (Abidin, 2016). This makes it easier to understand the great challenge that clothing brands face, which is to identify and choose the right influences (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). Furthermore, instagram users have the ability to follow these influences and thus be exposed to being influenced by the opinions and thoughts of these influences (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin & Chiang, 2013).

2.4 Influencer

According to Brown and Hayes (2008), an influencer is someone that is able to affect people within their environment and is a role model for others. Kirby and Mardsen (2006),

define an influencer as people such as journalists, reviewers, celebrities and bloggers who spread a message to many people at the same time. Companies have observed the increase use of influencers as a marketing tool in a company's marketing strategy and have realised a window of opportunity to increase company exposure through them. Given the increased importance paid collaboration has on a company's marketing strategy and the increased use of eWoM, this has in turn made the role of influencers crucial when aiming for efficient outcomes. Influencers play an important role for a company's marketing strategy as consumers (followers) are greatly influenced by the opinions of influencers more than the company itself. Therefore, companies have now started to value influencers more than before (Solomon, 2016). According to Mack, R., Blose, J., & Pan, B. (2008), it is critical that companies chose influencers whom are in line with what they do, to decrease confusion for the consumer (follower) as this can in turn decrease credibility on both sides. But also, that the influencer has the ability to inform and educate their followers about a topic, so that the message reaches the targeted audience the right way (ibid.). Moreover, Solomon, (2016), mentions how important it is to choose the right influencer to invest in, in form of paid collaboration, as not all influencers can portray the message to the target audience effectively. Uzunoglu and Misci Kips (2014), also discuss the importance of choosing the right influencer to spread the company's message. As different influencers are good at different things, so it is crucial to choose the right influencer that matches the company's values and goals. According to De Veirman et al. (2017), if an influencer has a large follower base, this can have positive effects towards their level of credibility as they seen as more popular.

2.4.1 Different categories of social influencers

With regards to social media more specifically, Instagram, there are five different categories that social influencers can be classed upon, as stated below. For this study, the authors will allocate a suitable influencer for each category mentioned and later investigate each individual category.

(1) Celebrity Influencers have been the original influencers for decades (Melissa, 2018). People have been looking up to celebrities since they have a big authority in status and fame. Celebrities have a huge amount of follower and therefore they are beneficial to the business since they provide a high level of driving traffic and sale (ibid.). However, it's hard to connect with them since they are such a big public figure and their fan base is so large that individuals may not feel a personal affinity with the celebrity.

(2) Authority Influencers are individuals that the followers trust based on the in-depth experience and expertise within a specific topic (ibid.). A benefit for companies to collaborate with authority influencers is the wide range of how their recommendation and opinion can reach the audience (ibid.).

(3) Social media "sensations" are individuals who have grown and received their followers through their platforms and are usually known in the niche market they work in (Melissa, 2018). Companies need to find influencers in this category that who are already talking about the company's product or who likes products similar to the company since it is important for the followers to perceive the on-brand and a natural partnership (ibid.). It should not be obvious that the collaboration and the recommendation of the company's products are very clear that it is sponsorship or that the influencer is getting paid for doing the post (ibid.).

(4) Micro-influencers have a ranging of follower amount from 1-100k and posts about their interests (ibid.). Hence, the small number of followers compared to other categories, the followers are usually very engaged and loyal to their content. Companies that chose to work with micro-influencers will get a great benefit from the collaboration since it is a relatively low cost and the trust they have with their followers (ibid.). Micro-influencers have a high engagement rate with their followers (ibid.).

(5) Bloggers have their own platform such as their blog where the influencers have complete control over what they show to their followers (ibid.). Bloggers usually use Instagram to further gain more followers to their blog in terms of links to their blog and blog posts. In contrast to an Instagram influencer where the individual profile competes with other since followers pass through a huge amount of different content and accounts (ibid.). Therefore, the benefit with a blog is that they have much more control over what they want to show, and the audience put more focus on only the content based on the blog.

2.5 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) can be defined as a digital marketing method to promote a product or service by quickly spreading its words to one or thousands of people through different kinds of possible social platforms (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2016). According to Mauri and Minazzi (2013) and Sotiriadis and Van Zyl (2013) there is a higher level of credibility through eWoM in comparison to traditional advertising, since followers consider the message to not be influenced by companies through paid sponsorships or collaborations because the influencer is sharing their opinions, in either

a positive and critical way. Kimmel and Kitchen (2014) mention that the level of credibility to which a message has can have an effect on consumers buying intent. They also choose to discuss how important the communication method is from both influencer and corporate perspectives in social media. Kozinets, D Valck, Wojnick, and Wilner, (2010) mentions how the relationship between influencers and their followers are affected by the fact that the influencer is receiving compensation from recommending companies' products or services. Fill (2013) does a deeper analysis than Kozinets et al. (2010) on how the companies benefit through sponsorship or payment of an influencer when the person handles the marketing for the company by displaying a product or service to their follower base on their Instagram profile. Unlike the others, Solomon (2016) chooses to discuss how much greater the negative impact eWoM has than positive since he believes that the criticism that is said about a product or service can spread much faster and even change the consumer's opinion.

2.6 Millennials

The thesis will base the studies on Millennials as the target group. The reason why is that the audience in this group has a high involvement in the digital field. More than 60% of social media users belong to the millennial's generation cohort (Statista, 2016). The researchers often categorized individuals between the age span 1980-2000 as millennials (Lu, Bocks & Joseph, 2013). This generational segment is significant for the studies since they grew up in an environment where social networking, is a part of their daily life and have been influenced by the digital environment (Parment, 2008; Valentine & Powers, 2013). Millennial are usually referred to as a highly educated generation where the individuals have a great understanding of technology and digitalization (Syrett & Lammiman, 2003). Researchers mention that millennials tend to be more critical in contrast to other groups on how different company market and promote their brands. They are known as the group where the emotional attachment is the factor where they create loyalty and where satisfaction for their need's matters (Veloutsou & McAlonan, 2012). Also, the audience is known as the category where individuals have a great need for uniqueness.

2.7 Relationship building

According to Waters, Burnett, Lamn, and Lukas (2009), "Relationships are the foundation for social networking sites". Instagram today has provided influencers with a powerful

platform and they can use this to their advantage when developing relationships with their followers (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). As according to Coombs and Holladay (2015), those who are attracted and satisfied, i.e. the followers, are most likely to remain in the relationship, and as a result, the influencers can also enjoy the benefit of retaining followers. However, a fundamental factor to sustaining a relationship between two parties is communication (Ledingham, 2003). Not only does Ledingham (2003) state that communication is important but also Valentini (2015), says that in order to build a mutual and beneficial relationship, it is important to foster two-way communication. Simply put, communication is most desirable when fostering relationships as it provides a more meaningful exchange of thoughts between both parties (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2007). Not only is communication a key factor in building a relationship between two parties, but relationships are also built upon trust and mutual understanding (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

2.8 Credibility

A message is perceived as more authentic and credible when it is communicated by a fellow consumer i.e. Influencer, compared to when it would have been put forward by an advertiser (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). The act to start following an influencer is an active choice, the consumer already sees the chosen influencer as credible (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin & Chiang, 2013).

Credibility is when an individual state if a claim is true, factual, or unbiased (Hass, 1981). Influencer marketing and trust go hand in hand regarding this study. When building personal relationships with customer it is critical for influencers to create trust in order to be in successful on social media (Jabr & Zheng, 2014; Weiss, 2014). Therefore, more personal relationships can be created between the follower and influencers as the follower is more likely to see the influencer's opinions as credible (Abidin, 2016). According to Lee and Koo (2012) consumers trust other consumers' opinions than the company and therefore there is a greater opportunity that consumers will take action from fellow consumers' recommendations. Consumers value opinions of others over advertisers and this is considered as one of the keys to influencer marketing (De Veirman et al., 2017).

2.9 Sponsorships

According to Meenaghan (1983), sponsorship can be regarded as the provision of assistance either financial or in-kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives. While in accordance with Sandler and Shani (1989), they regard it to be the provision of resources (e.g. money, people, equipment) by an organization directly to an event or activity in exchange for a direct association to the event or activity. The providing organization can then use this direct association to achieve either their corporate, marketing, or media objectives. However, International Events group, (1999) view sponsorship to be a cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property (typically sports, entertainment, non-profit event or organization) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property. While Meenaghan (1991), claim that sponsorship is an investment, in cash or in kind, in any activity, in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity. So far, there is no agreed upon definition of sponsorship (Walliser, 2003). Managers are finding that sponsorships are a more efficient means for communicating with prospective customers (Meenaghan, 1998; Lyberger & Mccarthy, 2001). However, Cunnigham, Cornwell, and Coote (2009) similarly state that sponsorships are now one of the fastest growing marketing communications tools in the world.

Furthermore, whether a sponsorship message will have a negative or positive effect depends on how well it is executed. However, it also relies on if the one being sponsored, in this case, the influencers, is receiving direct monetary compensation, as some may consider them to be less credible than those just giving recommendations in a non-advertising way (Petty & Andrews, 2008). On the contrary, Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit (2009), argue that if the sponsorship message is delivered as a recommendation in a non-advertising manner, it may be seen as misleading in the eyes of the receiver, in this case, the followers.

2.10 Aesthetics

Research has shown that visual aesthetics is one of the strongest determinants of perceived credibility, especially during the users first contact or visit (Lindgaard, Dudek, Sen, Sumegi & Noonan (2011); Robins & Holmes (2008)). Visual aesthetics is composed of two dimensions, classical aesthetics and expressive aesthetics (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004). Classic aesthetics refers to the traditional orderliness, symmetry, proportion,

clarity, harmony, etc. While expressive aesthetics refers to aspects of creativity, originality and sophistication. The main objective with expressive aesthetics is to increase arousal and user involvement (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004).

2.11 Ohanian's model of source credibility

Source credibility is a term where the level of the persuasiveness of a message can be affected based on the communicator's characteristics and credibility. Based on Ohanian (1991) studies, he found three factors (1) Trustworthiness, (2) Expertise and (3) Attractiveness, that adds a higher level of credibility of the source. Firstly, the level of trustworthiness is being discussed based on how valid the audience think the message is. The second factor is on which degree the spokesperson is perceived as. Expertise is the highest level in terms of credibility. Lastly, source attractiveness is based on how the message is being perceived.

Hovland, Jane, and Kelly (1951) developed the credibility model, a more established model compared to the attractiveness model. The model emphasizes that the ability and reliability of an endorser depend on the effectiveness of the message (Hovland et al., 1953). By internalizing a credible source, a consumer's beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and end behaviour can be affected (Ohanian, 1991; Solomon, 1996; Erdogan, 1999). Furthermore, according to Hunter (2010), consumer confidence and reactions towards the brand increase, but can also change negative prejudices and the like as a result of a credible source. Thus, a credible source is also more effective at the endorsement.

In order to obtain an effective endorsement as possible, Ohanian (1990) claims that several dimensions for both source methods have been developed that both models should be used. These source models measured the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers' communication through expertise, credibility, and attractiveness. However, according to Erdogan (1999), advertisers should also consider other factors, even though the credibility of the source is of great and direct importance to consumer behavioural intentions and attitudes. Which also McCracken (1989) agrees with because according to him, there are many more influential factors

2.12 Hovland's Model of Attribution of Credibility

Hovland's model focuses on the reliability of credibility with a perspective on how consumers assess the credibility of the ads, instead of focusing on the process where

consumers become persuaded. Different factors can be decisive for whether a message is perceived as credible or not. A hierarchy model with six levels of reference objects for credibility attributes was developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951) as an aid in evaluating the message's credibility (see below in Figure 2). Levels consist of the following factors and are described below according to the definition developed by Schweiger (2000):

Presenter: This refers to the first recipient whom the message is exposed to, such as someone who delivers a news article or something easier as an author of a comment.

Source/actor: as it reads in the name, it can be an author of a message or an actor. For example, a person in an interview who answers questions. For this study, it is the Influencer.

Editorial units: The term is assigned to the associated category type of the message. It may be the category to which the TV program belongs, or an online printed and published article. In this case, it is the influencers Instagram profile.

Media product: The particular TV network, newspaper, newspaper or web page to which the message is delivered. This level can also be related to product brands. Product brands can also be connected to this level. For this study, it is the content/feed aesthetics i.e. posts.

The subsystem of media type: what kind of media it is used with regard to private and public display, also what type of newspaper it is published in. For this study, it is social media platforms.

Media type: The overall credibility of its media type is assessed at the last level. It can be delivered via online services, television, radio or print. In this case, it is the Internet.
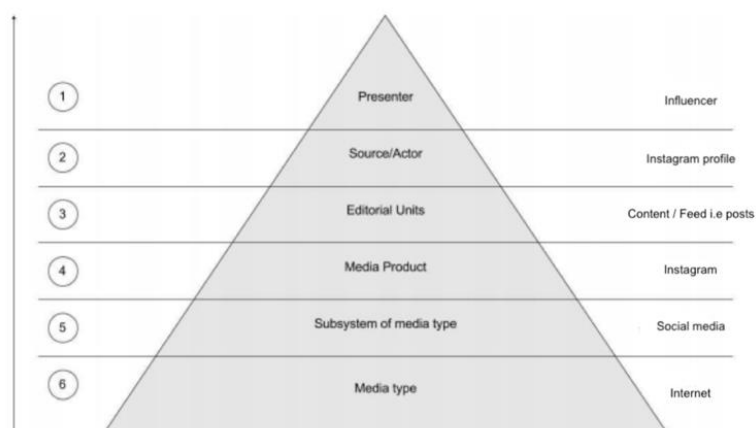

Figure 1: Hovland's Model of Attribution of Credibility (1951) adapted to the Instagram platform

The credibility can still be transferred even if the reference objects are divided into separate levels since the credibility according to Hovland (1951) and Schweiger (2000) is transferred both vertically and horizontally. For example, a media product can be perceived as credible if its presenter is perceived as credible, thus transferring credibility

to other levels. Furthermore, a newspaper or television program does not have to limit itself and can also transmit its credibility between the organization's various instances such as its website or online service, according to Schweiger (2000).

3. Methodology and Method

In this chapter, the research approach, as well as research philosophy and research method are discussed. Further, a detailed clarification of the data collection and sampling methods chosen are presented. The way the interviews were structured is explained. The chapter is concluded by discussions about transparency, reliability, validity and ethical concerns regarding the study.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy deals with the source, nature, and development of knowledge (Bajpai, 2011). In other words, research philosophy is about the ways in which data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed and used (Bajpai, 2011). According to Saunders et al. (2012), there are five main research: philosophies, positivism, interpretivism, critical realism, postmodernism, and pragmatism.

For this study, interpretivism approach was chosen as it fits well with the research design of the study. Interpretivism revolves around the belief that it is a necessity to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the influencer-follower relationship and how it is affected by the influencer's credibility based on their Instagram profile. For this reason, an interpretivist approach was seen appropriate as the authors wanted to generate some qualitative data which might further aid in their understanding of the phenomenon in which they are investigating.

3.2 Research approach

To begin with, this study set about with a deductive approach. The objective of the deductive approach is to investigate an existing theory's validity based on empirical

research (Crowther & Lancaster, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, according to Crowther & Lancaster (2009), deductive reasoning is most commonly used in quantitative research studies, however, the authors have decided to investigate the empirical findings of the Hovland's model of attribution of credibility and Ohanian's model of source credibility. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012), there are two additional approaches to research design, the inductive approach, and abductive approach. The aim of this approach is to build a theory from the data collected and analysed but is less applicable when there is a need to generalize, so, therefore, will not be used in this study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The abductive approach has some correlations of both deductive and inductive approaches, however, is not a mere combination of both approaches (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The objective of the abductive approach is identifying themes and explaining patterns for theory generation or modification, i.e. working back and forth between data and theories (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016) As there are some gaps in the existing research that will be investigated further by this study, this thesis went from a deductive approach to a more abductive approach. This thesis will focus on theories gathered from relevant literature that will be further built on through analysing the data that will be collected, moving back and forth between data and theories (ibid.).

3.3 Research strategy

A qualitative research strategy is when words rather than numerical data are analysed. The aim of this thesis is to explore and understand, rather than measure the effects influencer-follower relationship has on an influencer's credibility in relation to their Instagram profile, therefore supports the author's reasoning for choosing the research strategy stated. As qualitative research ties into interpretivism, exploring and understanding the actions, values, and opinions of individuals (Saunders et al., 2009), the authors feel that this is an appropriate strategy to use for this study. Given that this study will be of a qualitative nature, in-depth face-to-face interviews will be conducted as a means of collecting empirical data. The authors believe that collecting qualitative data for the study, will present more detailed findings in comparison to conducting a quantitative study. For instance, conducting face-to-face interviews will give the authors an opportunity to examine the participant's tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and other general behaviours, which cannot be done if a quantitative research method would have been chosen. The use of semi-structured, and in-depth interviews provide the authors with the chance to 'probe' answers when they feel that the participant

should elaborate or build on their response (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Probing can be useful when the authors need to seek an explanation to the participant's response where they do not quite understand the response given (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). For this study, it is important that the authors understand the reasons why the participants feel a certain way about the topic, but also about the questions being asked, as this will help the authors develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in which they are studying. For this reason, qualitative interviews were conducted.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Primary Data through Semi-Structured interviews

Interviews have many advantages in terms of collecting data and these advantages are discussed by Saunders et al. (2009). There are three different ways to do interviews, which are: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Semi-structured interviews are the best-suited approach for this thesis when it comes to understanding the influencer-follower relationship and its impact on the credibility of influencers' Instagram profile. The benefit with this approach is the possibility of discussions is created which can lead to new views since the discussion is not limited to a structured set of questions, which makes semi-structured interviews advantageous (Gray, 2004). There were a set of questions created by the authors that were used as a guide for the discussion but not all questions were necessarily used. Participants were asked a few follow-up questions, where the authors felt they needed to further elaborate on their response. In this way, further perspectives are obtained which broaden the understanding of the participants' responses (Saunders et al., 2009). The interview questions were crafted through an 'open questions' strategy, to create a more in-depth discussion between the interviewee and interviewer. The open questions strategy means that depending on the specific context, in connection with the research topic, can omit certain issues in relation to responses (Saunders et al., 2016). On the contrary, it also works when adding questions to collect more data. Thus, an opportunity for new aspects to focus on can be discovered (Gray, 2004). Furthermore, a slight risk that the interviewer might incur, is the fact that they can decide which issues to omit or add and formulate questions in a way that can affect the participant's responses (Kvale, 2007). Therefore, in order to avoid this from happening, the authors were informed to pay extra attention to the way they formulate the interview questions and also to keep them open. The authors decided to present the influencer Instagram profile within the different influencer categories, by letting the

participant search for the influencer on their phone and analyse the different Instagram profiles and feeds. The selection of the different influencers was based on the categories mentioned in the theoretical framework. The choice of influencers used as part of the

Participant	Age	Date of interview	Duration (min)	Type of interview
1	21	30th March	30 min	Facetime
2	22	31st March	50 min	Facetime
3	23	31st March	46 min	Skype
4	22	31st March	60 min	Skype
5	24	1st April	53 min	Face-to-face
6	20	1st April	60 min	Face-to-face
7	22	1st April	55 min	Skype
8	23	1st April	38 min	Facetime
9	23	2nd April	60 min	Face-to-face
10	23	31st March	30 min	Skype
11	23	31st March	40 min	Skype
12	24	31st March	45 min	Skype
13	25	1st April	32 min	Skype
14	20	1st April	25 min	Skype
15	26	1st April	35 min	Face-to-face
16	25	1st April	27 min	Face-to-face
17	23	1st April	16 min	Face-to-face

interview was made during a brainstorming session between the authors. The selection of influencers was based on how well they fit with the definition of the different social media influencer categories on Instagram. The details of each interviews are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Information from each Interview

3.4.2 Secondary Data

The authors have compiled data from other researchers which were later used to further understand the primary data collected through the interviews. Saunders et al. (2009) mentioned three main sub-groups of different type of secondary data, documentary data, survey-based data and data compiled from multiple sources. The authors chose to use Documentary data for this thesis, as they found it to be the most applicable to this study

as it consisted of books, journal articles, newspaper articles and organizations' websites (Saunders et al., 2009). The authors collected secondary data through the library database of Jönköping University, Primo, and Google Scholar as a compliment. Keywords that the authors used to compile interesting and relevant data were: "Social media", "Influencer Marketing", "Instagram", "Millennials", "Credibility", Influencer-follower relationship", "Sponsorships", ''Electronic Word of mouth", "Aesthetics".

3.5 Sampling

3.5.1 Participation selection and Sampling Technique

The requirements for the participants who would be interviewed were to have an Instagram account and that they would belong to millennials, the participants were then chosen based on the authors' assessment. A further requirement was that participants had to be within the age span set by the authors, millennials within the ages 18-29. Millennials have a recognized user experience for Instagram where they understand the platform and can analyse the influencer Instagram profile well (Becker, 2012) which makes them the most appropriate age group for this study. Prior to this study, purposive sampling was chosen as the sampling technique since the authors had specific requirements, mentioned above, in order to be able to participate in the study. The number of volunteers for the interviews was 17 individuals. The results will later be tested in a qualitative method to determine if the number of samples, can give a high level of credibility hence a large number of participants. It was important for the authors to keep in mind data saturation, when interviews may tend to provide repeated information (Saunders et al., 2016), as this would prevent collecting unnecessary data. The authors will interview as many as needed until the data reaches saturation and later validate the answers and the information that is based on the analysis. Finally, a variation in the test was ensured through a mixture of men, women, knowledge of marketing and difference in use and activeness on Instagram

3.5.2 Plan and execution of sampling

Volunteers were asked if they wanted to participate in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews, resulting in 25 willing participants. However, not everyone was interviewed, since the amount being interviewed depends on the information section, which means that the interviewer is attentive to repeated data indicating that there is no new

information to be gathered. The number of participants interview was 17 as the authors reached a data saturation point. Furthermore, the authors choose easily reachable people for a comfort test which, for this study, entails a purposeful sampling technique (Saunders et al., 2012). The fact that the participants are familiar with the authors before can be beneficial as the interview can feel more comfortable for the participant, thus making it easier to express their feelings and their own views on the subject. This can provide objective answers and avoids bias, which can be a result that the participants are not affected or controlled by the interviewers.

3.5.3 Formulation of Interview questions

The interview questions were formulated based on Hovland's Model of Attribution of Credibility and Ohanian's model of source credibility, in order to understand how influencer-follower relationship is affected by the influencer's credibility based on their Instagram profile. Questions regarding how active the participants are on Instagram, more specifically Instagram, the reasons behind why they follow certain influencers but also to what extent do they think they are affected by influencers content, were included. To illustrate an example of how these would be presented to the participants are as follows: "How active are you on Instagram?", "Why do you use Instagram?", "Do you follow any influencers?", "What's the reason?" and "To what extent do you think you are affected by influencers? (1-not at all, 2-Some extent 3-Large extent 4-great extent)". The answers to these questions will show that the participants have an interest in Instagram which in turn, will generate relevant data related to the research question. The questions were constructed in a way that it would clearly portray what potential factors affect the influencer-follower relationship through the influencer's credibility towards the follower. However, given the exploratory nature of this study, it was crucial to formulating questions that would give the authors a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 8.2.

3.5.4 Pilot testing

Malhotra and Birks (2007) defined pilot testing as the process of trying out the best potential method of gaining the most relevant information to further make sure that the questions and structure of the interviews are well constructed and will give beneficial information. Pilot testing is a strategy to be able to eliminate potential issues (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). A pilot test of the questions and the structure was made before doing the

semi-structured interviews to be able to get the best possible execution of the empirical study. The authors choose 2 participants from the 17 volunteers to do a try-out of the interview draft. The authors chose two respondents, belonging to the target population of the study, and simulated an interview. Pilot testing is beneficial in terms of getting a good understanding of how the participants would perceive the questions that are being asked. The outcome of conducting a pilot test might be that the authors need to do some changes in terms of the questions and structure of the interviews if there are any misunderstandings or errors between the authors and the participant. The 2 participants that were selected for the pilot testing were also included in the empirical study and analysis. By implementing the pilot testing, it proved that some questions and the structure of the interview needed changing to fulfil the purpose of the investigation. Additionally, some questions led to confusion amongst the participant and some participants tended to give similar answers. The moderators needed more open questions to create a more discussion and analytic response.

3.6 Data analysis

In this thesis, when structuring the data, a cross-sectional method will be put into practice while analysing the findings from the semi-structured interviews. By creating a system, based on this approach will favour the authors in a time-consuming perspective in terms of organizing the data and track repeating patterns of information from the interviews (Mason, 2010). The recorded audios from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and all the data will be written down in text format to further develop the collected data into different themes for the analytical framework. From the transcribed interviews, the author analysed the collected data and found patterns and themes that could be useful while examine and write a well-structured empirical analysis Therefore, a cross-functional method will be the most suitable method when it comes to analysing the data since it will give the author a clear overview of all the data from the findings. The themes identified were later analysed using the models stated in the frame of reference, Hovland's model of attribution of credibility and Ohanian's model of source credibility. To be able to draw sufficient conclusions from the collected data of the empirical investigation, the data needs to be properly analysed and to be able to identify relevant topics. (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The authors carefully analysed the data by not only transcribing the recorded interviews they also mapped out and colour coded relevant themes found within the empirical findings.

3.7 Ethics

According to Dymon & Holloway (2011), there are a number of basic ethical principles to take into consideration when conducting a research study; the right of free and informed choice, protection from harm to individuals, and principles of privacy, autonomy, and honesty. For this study, these principles were taken into account to ensure the research would be of a high standard. For this study to be of a high standard, it is crucial that ethical issues are taken into consideration. Especially as this study involves face to face interviews, the development of trust-based human relationships is a core aspect of ethical research (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). When it comes to recruiting participants, they should be well informed about the study in which they will be involved in and most importantly not be harmed in any way. Their participation should be voluntary, i.e. they should not feel as if they are being forced into it. For this study, purposeful sampling was used to gain access to potential participants. The participants were informed about their right to withdraw at any point. To ensure the interviews were conducted ethically, participants were requested to sign a letter of consent, stating that they are agreeing to participate willingly. To avoid leading questions, the authors conducted pilot interviews to ensure the questions being asked were easy to understand. Since the authors used a semi-structured interview design where the participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers, this ensured that the authors gained a more in-depth understanding of the participant's feelings and thoughts. Participants were given the opportunity to reflect over their answers and could add anything or change as they wish afterward. This ensured that the answers from the participants were clear to the authors but also that they were interpreted in the right way. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions throughout the interview process. In-depth interviews may carry emotional risks for the participants because they can be stressful, uncomfortable and at times problematic (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Therefore, the participants were assured that their answers would be kept anonymous and where also informed on how their answers were going to be used in the study to reduce the emotional risk that could arise. To guarantee the anonymity of participants, instead of using their names they are referred to as pseudonyms, i.e. P1, P2, P3, which stands for participant 1, etc. Furthermore, the confidentiality of the study is increased as no information is being explicitly disclosed about the participants.

3.7.1 Transparency

Transparency is the basis for alternative ways of determining quality, such as reliability and validity, and is the greatest task when creating quality in the qualitative method (Hiles, 2012; Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Transparency means presentation and dissemination of findings, which in turn means that methods and processes used should be clear (Hiles, 2012). Transparency includes the ability to reflect on one's own decisions and assumptions that can give rise to prejudice but also reflectivity. To counter prejudice, thorough and accurate explanations of the chosen research design and strategies, selection of participants, collection and interpretation of data have been made. Furthermore, transparency can be divided into three dimensions, which are the data transparency, analytical transparency and production transparency (Moravcsik, 2014). The former refers to the collected empirical data. The analytical transparency refers to analyses used in data and evidence to support requirements. The latter considers the transparency of production in the information presented through the research method used (Moravcsik, 2014). Thus, a clear presentation of used methods, data procedure and interpretation of results is obtained using these three dimensions (Hiles, 2012). Ethical principles are followed by completing transparency throughout the qualitative research study, elements such as the use and collection interviews, the interviewers' scripts and testimony of credibility (Roulston, 2016).

3.7.2 Reliability

In order to get a result with the same instrument, reliability with consistency and replicability is needed. In qualitative research, the idea behind reliability is not the same as in quantitative research as it is more personal in a subjective sense. The context is more difficult to replicate in qualitative research than it is in quantitative research with its questionnaire (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). However, some aspects are taken into account in order to ensure that there is reliability of data. Aspects such as awareness of actions that interviewers take to avoid getting a bias in the interview (Saunders et al., 2016). The interviewers were reminded of this and were careful not to become biased in the interviews. Responsibility for responsiveness is another factor one needs to consider which can occur when the participants are becoming insecure and can provide too much personal information (Saunders et al., 2016). This may be the case here when the study relates to attitudes of influencer marketing.

3.7.3 Validity

Validity is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). According to Daymon and Holloway (2011), validity is categorized into three aspects, internal validity, external validity, also known as generalizability, and relevance. To ensure the research study has a high level of validity, all three aspects were considered. Firstly, with regards to internal validity, member checking, i.e. presenting participants with a summary of their interview and observations made along with the author's interpretation of their comments made, ensured the authors avoided misinterpreting or misunderstanding what the participants meant (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Moreover, member checking can make clear, trigger or extend the authors ideas which can be fed back into the study (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Furthermore, external validity or sometimes also known as generalizability is when findings and conclusions may be equally applicable to other research settings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). However, generalizability is difficult to achieve in qualitative research because of the research's specificity and uniqueness (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Finally, relevance is an aspect that Daymon and Holloway (2011) mention, that means the research should be useful and most importantly meaningful for others who read it. With relation to this thesis, the topic of influencer-follower relationship and credibility is a growing phenomenon, where the findings could be useful to people interested in this area.

Another way of ensuring the quality of research is high is the use of triangulation. The quality of the research study is enhanced if similar results are found. According to Daymon & Holloway (2011), triangulation is when more than one perspective is combined to provide a more complete understanding of the topic. In this study, data triangulation and investigator triangulation were used. Data triangulation is the use of several sources, for instance, gathering data from various people at different times. The use of data triangulation is evident in the way data was collected, through the use of face-to-face interviews; several people were interviewed at different times. Furthermore, investigator triangulation is when more than one researcher is involved in the research study. Both authors of this thesis were present during the interviewing process and together analysed the data collected, where they later summarized the findings and came up with a conclusion.

3.8 Time Horizons

This thesis will be a cross-sectional study, a study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). A cross-sessional study approach was chosen as this thesis is seeking to examine how the influencer-follower relationship is affected by the influencer's credibility based on their Instagram profile. This study will be based on interviews conducted over a short period of time (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

4. Empirical findings and analysis

In this chapter, the empirical findings gathered during the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews will be presented. The research background will be discussed. Thereafter, a presentation of the findings, in connection to the frame of reference will be analysed. Furthermore, a discussion with the aim to discover what the results really implies is presented. This section aimed to assure a clear connection to the research question, in order to be able to fulfil the purpose set out for this thesis.

Information is presented in table 2 for simplification. Table 2

Participant	Age	Occupation	How active on IG
1	21	Student & Working	Active
2	22	Working	Active
3	23	Working	Active
4	22	Student	Active
5	24	Student & Working	Active
6	20	Student	Active
7	22	Student	Active
8	23	Working	Active
9	23	Student	Active
10	23	Working	Active
11	23	Student	Active
12	24	Student & Working	Active
13	25	Student & Working	Not active
14	20	Student	Active
15	26	Student	Not active
16	25	Student	Not active
17	23	Student & Working	Not active

Table 2: Information about participants occupation and how active they are on Instagram.

4.1 Research background

17 individuals were interviewed, between the ages of 20 and 26 who use Instagram on a daily basis and follow influencers on that platform. P2, P5, P8, P10, P11, and P12, stated that they are very active on Instagram, several hours a day. While P1, P3, P6, P7, P9, and P14, are active on Instagram 2-4 hours per day. However, P4, P13, P15, P16, and P17 mentioned that they are less active on Instagram as they spend 1-hour maximum a day.

"I'm very active on Instagram. I'm on it several hours a day, to be honest." - P11

''I had it in the beginning and thought it was a fun thing. Now the app has lost its charm and now I just have it to have it. I scroll through Instagram about once a week'' - P15

The individuals who were interviewed were both students in different stages of their studies and employees in different fields of work; who spent time on Instagram and followed influencers but also who were able to express their opinions about influencers. All those who were interviewed had been exposed to some kind of influencer marketing via sponsorship posts on Instagram from the influencers they follow. The grounded theory was used for the purpose of the analysis. The grounded theory consists of a 12-step process, as presented by Bryman and Bell (2012). However, the authors have been focusing on coding, constant comparison and saturate categories, when analysing the data; as when the three steps are implemented, common themes start to arise and relationships between categories are explored in such a way that hypotheses about connections between categories emerge (Bryman & Bell, 2012). The outcomes of using the grounded theory to analysis data are shown below in the following sections.

4.2 Influencer definition

After interviewing all participants, the authors recognised that not everyone had the same opinion when it came to defining an influencer and what they do. Not only did the participants have difficulty in explaining who an influencer is and what they do, but there were some conflicting opinions about the definition.

P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P16, and P17 define an influencer as someone who has a lot of followers that look up to them, have power to inspire and

influence others, who use their media platform, Instagram as a means of doing this. The discussion continues where P1 and P4 define an influencer as a person who is passionate about what they do and inspires others positively through their confidence.

"Someone who is secure in themselves and has a positive impact on others. Not only that, but they also inspire their followers with aid from their confidence." - P4

However, P14 regards an influencer to be someone who works with social media. Whereas P15 disagrees with P14 and would regard an influencer to be anyone who can influence its followers' opinions for a good cause, where they at times use social media as a channel to get their word forward; not necessary work primarily with social media.

''A person who works primarily with social media, as a way to make income'' - P14

"Someone who has an influence on people. And can also influence people's opinions on not only good but bad things." - P15

The authors of this thesis had a clear and straightforward definition of what an influencer is and what they do. They believe that an influencer is an individual who has a large follower base, to which they have an impact on the opinions and views of their followers. There were many conflicting views when it came to explaining who an influencer is and what they do. It is therefore evident that the phenomenon the authors chose to investigate is new, as it is apparent that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding when it comes to formal definitions and a general overview of the influencer phenomenon.

4.3 Credibility

As mentioned earlier in this study, a message is perceived as more authentic and credible when it is communicated by a fellow consumer i.e. Influencer in this case, compared to when it would have been put forward by an advertiser (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). The 17 participants had individual opinions regarding what makes a influencers Instagram profile credible. According to P5, P7 and P8, an important factor that distinguishes an influencers Instagram profile to be credible or not, is when their posts are in line with both the influencer's personality and within their field of expertise, which P6, P9, P13, and P15 agree. Their opinions are in line with the Ohanian

model of source credibility, as Ohanian (1991), state that expertise is the highest level of credibility. This shows that followers value the influencers competence and that it has an effect on how the follower see them as credible.

''Yes, it does. Authority influencer has more respect for me because of their experience and expertise. There is a reason why they have come so far. And therefore, they are most the credible - P11

Otherwise, the remaining participants named above do not feel that the profile would be seen as credible. P9 strengthens this statement, as according to them the content on the influencers Instagram profile should be value adding towards their followers, which in turn creates credibility. It is therefore important for influencers to post content that matches their personality and true values.

"I find an influencers Instagram profile to be credible when their personality and interests match their content, i.e. posts. However, it is important that what they say in the form of an Instagram post, is in line with their values." - P5

According to Hovland's model (1951) (See *Figure.4.1)*, credibility holds a hierarchical structure, therefore, a media product (Instagram profile), to be seen as credible, the presenter (influencer) needs to be deemed as credible by their source (followers) from the very beginning. In this manner, credibility is developed through all the different levels mentioned in the theory. To sum up, for an influencers Instagram profile to be seen as credible, the influencers need to understand how important it is to present themselves positively towards their followers as this will have an effect on how their followers see them. This model is supported by the empirical data collected by the authors, as P15 states that:

''If the sponsored posts are in line with what you do, then it can be credible. For example, if a Fashion Influencer would suddenly advertise a screw. Then you notice that they only did it for the money. It must be products that you can stand behind. What you are advertising must, as I said, fit in with what you are trying to convey with your Instagram. '' - P15
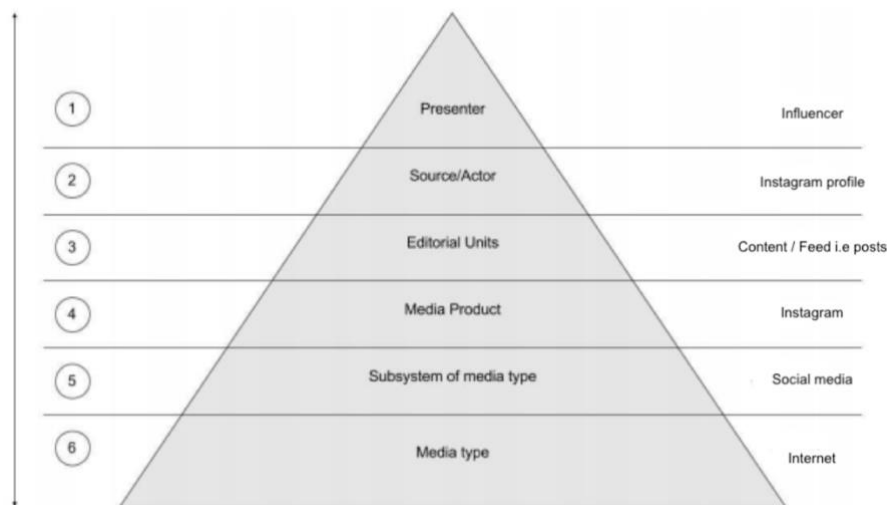
Figure 4.1: Hovland's model of attribution of credibility (1951)

Furthermore, another important factor worth mentioning is the fact that a few participants identified a link between an influencer, the companies they choose to collaborate with and its effect on their perceived credibility. P3 and P4 claim that if an influencer has collaborations with big well-known brands and post about them on their Instagram profile, credibility increases in their eyes. P12 continues to develop and argues that it depends on what type of companies the influencers collaborate with as some brands are taken more seriously than others.

"For example, if someone would do a collaboration with a large company such as Nike, I would have respected them more since I feel that they really have succeeded." - P12

On the contrary, P2 argues that if an influencer's post on Instagram is presented in the form of a recommendation rather than part of a collaboration, it increases the credibility of the influencer.

"I see an influencer as credible when the posts are not advertised and is just a recommendation." - P2

The discussion continues as P1 and P14 state that for them, an influencer is more credible if they are active on their Instagram profile and post relatable content. P17 and P10 agree as well, as they point out that in order for them to perceive an influencer as

credible, they need to be themselves and post relatable content. Therefore, influencers should keep in mind how they can increase engagement and post relatable content to fit the interest of their followers, as this will in turn increase the credibility of their Instagram profile.

"Influencers need to be themselves on their Instagram profile in order for me to perceive them as credible. If they try to be someone else or act in a way that's fake, they lose credibility in my eyes." - P17

4.3.1 Losing credibility of an Influencer

The participants were asked about what would make an influencer's Instagram profile less credible, in their opinion. P1, P2, and P6 claim that for them, an influencer's Instagram profile would be seen as less credible if the influencer's content is not in line with the morals and values they display. This claim is supported by P11 response, as they said that when an influencer's Instagram profile seems to be contradicting, they automatically lose credibility in their eyes. It is therefore important that influencers keep to what they believe and keep their Instagram profile consistent throughout. On the other hand, P10 and P16 stated that if the influencers Instagram profile is not in line with their own morals, the influencer is most likely to lose credibility. P15 supports the claim as they say that if an influencers Instagram profile does not fit the values and moral, they hold, the credibility of the influencer greatly decreases. In this case, it depends primarily on the follower's morals and values, as It dictates whether they see the influencer's Instagram profile as credible or not.

"An influencer loses credibility when their Instagram content is not in line with the values they display." - P1

"If an influencer seems quite contradicting and does not stick with their values or morals, their Instagram profile automatically loses credibility." - P11

Two participants appeared to have similar opinions on what would make an influencer's Instagram profile less credible. P5 and P8 argue that if an influencers' pictures on their profile are heavily photoshopped or filtered and seem as if they were taken unrealistically, they undoubtedly lose credibility. Influencers should, therefore, be cautious when editing their photos for Instagram as they may lose credibility towards

their followers. Ohanian (1991), states that attractiveness adds to the credibility of the message, i.e. Instagram post, this is in line with the empirical data collected, therefore it is important for an influencer to be aware that if their posts are too filtered and unrealistic, it can have an effect on their credibility.

"Photos that are overly edited and heavily filtered, say a lot about the influencer and in my opinion seems to be less credible." - P8

Furthermore, P3, P4, P7, P9, and P12 all mention that for them to lose credibility in an influencer, it comes down to whether the content presented on the Instagram profile seems to be exaggerated to some extent or when an influencer contradicts themselves. The participants also brought up the fact that, if an influencer goes mainstream or changes their style or behaviour negatively, credibility is lost. P13, P14 and P17 support this statement as they believe that if an influencer is quite clumsy in the way they display themselves on their Instagram profile, their view of them as credibility is automatically lost. This is an important point for influencers to note when it comes to their image and how they carry themselves on their Instagram profile, as if they are not careful, they might risk losing their follower base. It is also important that the influencer ensures that followers are satisfied with the content they post on their Instagram profile. However, they should keep in mind the reason behind why their followers follow them, therefore, they should keep to who they truly are when posting sponsored content.

"It is when I feel that it is being enforced and they are changing in their style of how they are. For example, I followed a guy who is big in Fortnite. In the beginning, he was fun and posted clips when he was gaming with his friends, etc. And then all of a sudden from nowhere he started making lots of sponsored posts all the time. You immediately notice that he did it for his own gain. A sell-out. It felt like forced advertising." - P12

A common reason why the participants unfollow an influencer is due to that the influencer posts too much-paid content. Once again, collaborations where the followers do not see the connection and get a feeling that the influencer is just doing it for financial purposes (what they call a "sell-out"). That could result in negative attitudes and be the reason why people unfollow.

''If their posts get boring and if they put up too much-sponsored content every day they lose credibility in my eyes. There is a limit when it gets too much and that you are willing to see their toxic content '' – P17

4.3.2 Number of followers affects influencer credibility?

The data collected showed that 17 participants had individual opinions on whether the number of followers an influencer had, would increase or decrease credibility. From the results collected, almost half of the participants agreed that the number of followers an influencer had, would increase credibility while the other half disagreed. P4, P5, and P6 say that the larger the following number, the better and that the number increases credibility, in their opinion. While P9, P11, P12, and P14 agree as well, that the number has an effect as they feel that because a lot of people are following means that they are known by many.

"Yes, it does matter to me, but it depends on whether you are self-made or if you are known before. A person who has worked his way up from day 1 in Instagram, I have more respect for their follower number than someone who is known since before." - P12

P2 and P3 state that the number of followers an influencer has does not have a direct impact on their view of the influencer as credible. The more well-known the influencer, they automatically have a lot of followers, in that case, the number does not have an effect on their thoughts per se. P7 and P10 continue the argument, as for them number yet again does not have an effect on their view because it comes down to the content they produce on their Instagram profile. P16, on the other hand, said that micro-influencer accounts have a greater impact on their view of credibility than those who have several million followers. As the influencers who have a larger following base tend to be more careful in what they post because they risk on losing way more followers than micro-influencers. For that reason, P16 believes that the lower the number, the more credibility the influencer holds towards their Instagram profile as they seem to post more genuine content. While P13 and P17 state that it does not matter to them whether an influencer has a larger number of followers or not, the content is what matters most.

"I don't feel that the number of followers an influencer has, has an effect on my view of them being credible in what they say or post. The content is the only thing that matters when it comes to their Instagram profile." - P13

The minority of participants (P1, P8, and P15) said that the number of followers an influencer has does not have any effect on their perception of credibility towards the influencers Instagram profile. They only follow influencers on Instagram for inspiration and to keep up with current trends.

4.4 Gender differences among participants activeness on Instagram

Data collected from the interviews, showed a distinct difference between males and females when it comes to how active a person is on Instagram in correlation with how they perceive them as credible on their Instagram profile. From the study, the authors noticed that the male participants spent fewer hours of the day on Instagram in comparison with the female participants. Roughly, the males spent on average less than 1 hour a day on Instagram while the female participants spent over 4 hours a day on Instagram on average.

"I'm not so active on Instagram, I would spend at most 45 minutes to 1 hour on Instagram a day." - P13

"I scroll through Instagram for on average 46 minutes a day according to the screen time calculator feature on my iPhone." - P7

"I'm on Instagram every day for maybe around 4 hours a day." - P4

"Instagram is almost always the first application on my phone that I open when I not doing anything. If I am honest, I spend over 3 hrs a day, sometimes more on Instagram." - P11

Findings from the interviews conducted showed the people who spent less time on Instagram paid less attention to whether an influencers Instagram profile is credible or not. While those people who spend more time on Instagram had stronger opinions about the influencer's Instagram profile.

4.5 Relationship with influencers

As seen in this study, relationships are the foundation for social media sites (Waters, Burnett, Lamn & Lukas, 2009), where Instagram has provided influencers with a powerful platform to use to their advantage when developing these relationships with followers (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Therefore, it is important for influencers to not only attract but try to maintain a relationship with them, as those who are attracted and satisfied, i.e. the followers, are most likely to remain in the relationship which is great for the influencer (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). P9, P11, and P15 ranked their relationship towards influencers with a 3, good relationship, in contrast to the majority of the group which gave either 1 (no relationship) or 2 (weak relationship) in the ranking.

''I don't know that person (the influencers). I follow them because I am still interested in what they do. However, they do not affect me at all. '' – P12

With relation to Ohanian model (1991), its states that attractiveness of the message adds to credibility, however, the empirical data shows that attractiveness not only has an effect on credibility but also on the relationship between the influencer and follower. Therefore, influencers should value the relationship built with their followers as the stronger the relationship, the higher the Instagram profile will be seen as credible. Previous research has also showed that the credibility of messages communicated from influencers increase when a person has a strong relationship with their followers (Abidin & Ots 2015; Liu et al.; Freberg et al.; Sarathy &Patro 2013; Solomon 2016; Mossberg 2015: 152; Chu & Kamal 2008).

''The influencers that I follow are politically driven, which means that I see their content to be highly credible. If it was a Fashion Nova babe, then it would have been a 1 immediately. I must be able to relate to them and what they have to say. If I can't connect with them then I don't value what they have to say. '' – P 15

The majority who gave either 1 or 2 said that they did not have much interaction with the information from the influencers and that in turn, were not affected by the content at all. Not only does Ledingham (2003) state that communication is important but also Valentini (2015), says that in order to build a mutual and beneficial relationship, it is important to have a efficient communication strategy amongst one another. Simply put, communication is most desirable when building relationships, a more meaningful

exchange of thoughts between both parties is established (Hallahan et al., 2007). As seen in the empirical data P2, P3, P3, P4, and P7, mention that two-way communication is important for them, if they were to have any kind of relationship with the followers. They discuss that if there is a level of interaction with the influencers and their followers, they would be more likely to build a relationship with them. For this reason, it is important for influencers to not only post relatable content but to interact with their target audience ie. their followers.

''If I message them, they could reply or if they left a question on their Instagram story that they answer the questions or answer me in a more personalized manner. More personal interaction with me.'' - P 2

''They should Interact more with their followers and not just show them the happy moments in life, it can be interesting but that's why followers feel that they don't have a relationship with them. Influencers should make their followers heard or that they at least exist through interaction'' - P3

Researchers mention that millennials tend to be more critical in contrast to other generational cohorts on how different company market and promote their brands. They are known as the generational cohorts, where an emotional attachment is a factor where they create loyalty and where satisfaction for their need's matters (Veloutsou & McAlonan, 2012). Millennials tent to be more loyal to brands given there is an emotional attachment involved (ibid.). For example, when an influencers' content is more personal and relevant to the user. On the contrary, millennials tend to be disloyal towards a brand if the information provided to them does not satisfy their expectations or needs (ibid.). For instance, when an influencer does not stick to their original values and opinions or if they start posting irrelevant sponsored content.

''How much they affect me and how my connection is with them. If I have no connection with them then I will unfollow immediately. For instance, Kenza. I've been there since day 1 since she started to get big through her blog. Then on Instagram, I thought that her lifestyle did not fit mine anymore. For example, she changed her style completely, before she had everyday clothes and could write about everyday problems. And now I cannot relate to her lifestyle. Our connection is not there anymore, which made me tired and I unfollowed her.'' - P11

4.6 Sponsorships

Cunningham, Cornwell, and Coote (2009) similarly state that sponsorships are now one of the fastest growing marketing communications tools in the world. Social media is a large part of people's everyday routine, where most hours of the day are spent on social media platforms. Therefore, this explains the reason behind how the presence of sponsorships on social media has become more popular among social media influencers, more specifically on Instagram. Thus, companies are strategically utilising the new phenomenon of influencers to their economic advantage but also to reach a greater range of prospective target audience which makes it less credible to the followers since companies do it too much and often. P1, P2, P2, P4, P4, P6, P8, P9, P,10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, and P17 mentioned that their involvement in influencers' social channels has decreased and it's mainly because paid collaboration takes over these channels, which means, what's communicated is no longer seen as personal and credible. Influencers should regulate the amount of collaboration they accept as in the eyes of some followers, this move can be portrayed negatively, thus they risk losing their follower base. Influencers should be aware that companies are, as mentioned above, strategically utilising the new phenomenon of influencer marketing, only to their economic advantage. Therefore, they should only accept collaboration they feel is relevant to their field and would be of interest to their target audience i.e. followers.

''Yes, it gets too much, it feels unworthy. That they are doing this only to make money. '' - P10

P4 and P11 discussed how the influencers' chose to work with paid collaboration that is not entirely in line with the values and at times their expertise, can have a negative effect on the follower's perception of the influencer as credible. The outcome of posting collaborative content with companies who are high competitors with each can be seen as a negative as they contradict themselves from the follower's point of view. This may be the reason why credibility is reduced, as it becomes more difficult for the follower to understand the influencers standpoint.

'' An influencer I can think of who contradicts themselves is Alice Stenlöf. One day she is posting collaborations with Maybelline and next day, Nivea. This to me makes me second guess her values.'' - P4

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''When it does not feel genuine. And that it is sponsorships after sponsorships. One moment they can have Ideal of Sweden collaboration and then next time they can work with Richmond and Finch. And these two brands compete with each other but still, some influencers choose to promote both brands. Then it feels like they are doing collaborations just to get money. They contradict themselves.'' - P 11

4.7 Feed aesthetics

The majority of participants agreed that feed aesthetics and content is the feature that stands out from an Instagram profile. When the participants were discussing feed aesthetics, it referred to the quality of the pictures and how the colour works together while looking at the overall feed. Research has shown that visual aesthetics is one of the strongest determinants of perceived credibility, especially during the users first contact or visit (Lindgaard, Dudek, Sen, Sumegi & Noonan (2011); Robins & Holmes (2008)). In comparison with Ohanian (1991), where it stated that attractiveness adds a higher level of credibility of the source. The influencer should put effort and make their content as attractive as possible towards the followers.

''I mainly check on their content and if it appeals to me and fit my style.'' - P 10

P11 mentioned the importance of having a pleasing appearance in terms of feed aesthetics and would increase the interest of following a person in comparison to the number of followers.

"The first thing I check on is the entire look of the profile and if the layout is coherent. I make a quick overview of the profile and if it appeals to me, I will follow". - P11

The empirical findings from the interviews show the importance of, what feed aesthetics and posts influencers choose to show for their followers, has on the influencer's credibility. How a follower looks at an influencers Instagram profile and perceives its credibility, can be greatly influenced by the sponsored content. It is critical that an influencers feed aesthetics is appealing, and the flow is coherent, as this is the first impression that potential followers get from the profile. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the influencer to ensure that what they post is not only appealing but will attract, new potential followers and to maintain the current follower base.

4.8 Attitude towards influencers

De Veirman et al. (2017) highlight the challenge brands are facing when identifying and choosing the right influencers to fit the company's value. The fact that Instagram users can choose which influencers to follow, they allow which influencers to influence them (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin & Chiang, 2013). P 13 and P15 is politically active and only followed influencers within that category and therefore hold positive attitudes towards influencer marketing. Another reason for the positive attitude can be because of the Instagram users have the opportunity to choose which influencers to follow. Participants feel that companies should be more careful when using influencers in their marketing tools, to ensure it continues to be an efficient marketing strategy. As the choice of influencer must match the company's values but most importantly the message being put forward through the influencers Instagram profile. If this fails, not only will the influencer and company suffer from backlash but also the followers' attitudes towards them will change.

'' For business purposes, I think it is positive because you do not need the world's most advanced marketing strategy, but you can push the products out and it wants to convey quickly and efficiently. '' – P15

P 2, P 3, P 5, P 6, P 7, P 8, P 9, P 10, P 11, P 13, P 14, and P16 mention both the advantages and disadvantages of Influencer marketing. They discussed from a marketing perspective where you look at how the company benefits from utilizing this phenomenon. However, from a follower's perspective, it can be seen a negative since the majority believes that the followers are exposed by such a large amount of sponsorship and collaboration especially towards young people who can be easily influenced by what they see.

''Both. For marketing purposes, companies find it positive. The negative part is that many young people are affected by both good and evil. Such as body ideal and the like. They believe that everything that happens on Instagram is genuine. Many do not understand that they manipulate images to convey the perfect life that one lives.'' – P14

''It depends on what perspective. From a marketing perspective, it's really good. It's cheap and more effective way than a traditional aspect. For people, I feel like it's very negative because I think the younger generation does not understand the difference

between the real and fake world of Instagram and it can create an ideal that can affect people in a very bad way.'' - P17

The participants of this study had issues when expressing their attitudes towards influencer marketing. People's attitudes might change over time; however this topic will still be a controversial issue to discuss. With regards to the new regulation on Instagram participants claimed that they have become critical towards paid collaboration and sponsorship as they now are aware and have difficulty considering influencers' opinions as credible.

'' I do not take anyone on Instagram seriously because I think it is an outlandish world because I know that you can do false marketing and that you do everything to get money. A superficial world.'' - P16

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the answer to the research question is presented along with conclusions of the empirical data collected by the authors. A clear yet concise picture of the key findings will be presented.

In today's world, social media is a large part of our everyday routine, where most hours of the day are spent on social media platforms. Therefore, this explains the reason behind how the presence of sponsorships on social media has become more and more popular among social media influencers, more specifically on Instagram. Thus, companies are strategically utilising the new phenomenon of influencers to their economic advantage but also to reach a greater range of prospective customers.

Empirical findings have demonstrated that people have a hard time when deciding whether influencer marketing is positive or negative. The authors of this study describe influencer marketing as when any influential person with a loyal follower base and strong personal brand is exploited and used as a marketing tool to drive a company's message to a larger market and gain product/brand awareness. The participants had conflicting opinions on whether influencer marketing is positive or negative. The majority of participants viewed influencer marketing as positive however, they also stated that it depended on which perspective it was portrayed in, from a company's or followers' perspective. On the other hand, the minority of participants strongly viewed influencer marketing as negative. However, to sum up, the empirical findings, it is evident that Influencer marketing can be seen in both a positive and negative light.

The authors found out that the number of followers did not have a direct impact on the level of credibility towards an influencers' Instagram profile. However, De Veirman et al. (2017) state that the higher number of followers will indicate that the influencer can be seen as credible. An influencers status and background is seen as a more important indicator for credibility. Given this statement, a high number of followers could aid in the influencers' image of being credible, if the influencer is still being genuine and realistic with their views and opinions.

Empirical findings have shown that if the relationship is weak, the followers are less likely to stay. Influencers need to ensure their communication develop a connection with their followers to avoid the risk of losing their follower base. Not only is communication a key factor in building a relationship between two parties, but relationships are also built upon trust and mutual understanding (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). For this reason, it can be said that it is crucial for influencers to first, build trust and establish a mutual understanding with their followers but also that good communication is kept persistent between both parties.

Apart from having a strong relationship between influencers and followers, having a credible Instagram profile is key in order to be successful in the social media world, more specifically on Instagram. Empirical findings have shown that those claiming to have a weak to no relationship with influencers, is because the influencers Instagram profile lacks credibility in their opinion.

Furthermore, the study shows that relationship aside, everyone appreciated when influencers keep true to who they are all the time. When they do not manage to do this, their Instagram profiles turn into an advertising profile and this is when they lose credibility directly. Empirical findings have shown that not only should influencers stay true to who they are but also continue to inspire and create entertaining content that draws followers and attracts their attention for a long period of time. This will, in turn, lead to stronger relationship bonds between influencers and followers, which will give positive results. When an Instagram user decides to start following an influencer, the assumption here is that they already view the influencer as credible (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin & Chiang, 2013).

Moreover, the authors found out through the conducted interviews that, too many paid sponsorships on an influencers Instagram profile can usually have a negative effect in the way that it can decrease an influencer's level of credibility. The discussion is further strengthened by Petty & Andrews (2008) because according to them, influencers who are receiving monetary compensation for making a post on their Instagram profile, are seen to be less credible than those just giving recommendations in a non-advertising way. Therefore, it is important for influencers to keep this in mind when agreeing upon paid sponsorships with companies as it could have a negative effect on them.

In this study, feed aesthetics was a key factor when determining whether an Instagram profile is deemed credible or not. The majority of participants pointed out that it was very important that the feed aesthetics flowed well with the theme. It is therefore important for influencers to put effort into creating an appealing Instagram profile.

To answer the research question stated above, the influencer-follower relationship has a greater impact on an influencer's credibility, than what research had portrayed in the existing literature. From the empirical analysis, participants highlighted that the way in which an influencer presented a sponsorship, had the greatest effect regarding the influencer's credibility. Followers are becoming more critical in the way they evaluate an influencers Instagram profile, as they value more personal and genuine content. The influencer's sense of authenticity, that they portray on their Instagram profile plays an important role for followers to see them as credible. The strength of the influencer-follower relationship has an impact on whether an influencers Instagram profile is seen as credible or not. Therefore, influencers should strive to develop a strong and relatable connection with their followers, as it has an effect on how their follower base sees them as credible.

6. Discussion

In this chapter, the managerial implications of this study are presented, followed by limitations. Moreover, the authors have presented contributions and areas of future research.

6.1 Managerial Implications

Trying to understand and analyse an influencer is important in order to get an idea of their credibility so that companies can use this in their marketing, especially with Instagram. For those stakeholders who seek knowledge about how followers' attitude and perception are affected by influencing marketing, the result in this thesis will be useful, primarily within sponsorship on Instagram.

In addition, the results can serve as advice for marketers regarding the followers' perceived credibility towards influencers and their sponsored posts on Instagram. The study also shows fixed factors that clearly show their impact on the consumer's attitude and relationship. For example, if sponsorship is to be posted, the influencing factors are the number of followers, what the follower influencer has and what the followers have for the opinion of the influencer. In contrast, the followers care more about the content and the feed of the account than the number of followers.

Furthermore, the result in the study also provides insight into millennials' attitude towards influencer marketing. Thus, the study can act as a guide for companies when marketing new products, campaigns or collaborations and understand what works and what does not, as they get a better understanding of the millennials' attitude to influencer market. A common collaboration failure is that an influencer's image cannot be linked to the company's brand, they differ too much as the followers cannot connect to the brand, something that can destroy an influencers image of being seen as credible. Credibility is fundamental to attracting millennial consumers, therefore companies and influencers should work harder to maintain a high level of confidence since influencer credibility has decreased as a result of the new marketing/sponsored content regulation on Instagram. Hence, the importance of being innovative and creative with the solutions that attract and

keep consumers happy. If credibility is not found, the content is perceived as less authentic.

6.2 Limitations

In the process, there were some sources of error and other shortcomings. One such thing was the narrow sample of millennials born between 1993-1998 which is a relatively small part of the target millennials. This may affect the general conclusion about the attitudes about influencer marketing. Furthermore, the result is based on subjective perceptions from the participants' responses, where the individuals had different opinions, that can have an impact on the way their answers could be interpreted, for example, when defining what an influencer is and what they do. In addition to this, it is important to know that the sample used, Swedish millennial citizens, cannot be generalized to the whole Swedish population.

6.3 Contributions

Through the research questions answered, the study provides a deeper insight and understanding of how sponsorship affects the credibility of influencers Instagram-profiles and how their followers perceive this credibility. Marketing and sponsoring through influencers on Instagram have, in a short time, become a well-established discourse topic, although it being a relatively new tactic. Discussions often arise regarding the lack of potential consequences due to the marketing approach new advancement lacking laws and regulations that are directly linked to what influencers can say about the marketing or the way they do it. However, there have been various regulations over time, one such is that in the description one must mention that it is a collaboration to notify its followers and thereby protect these and potential customers. For this reason, more research within this important subject was made to gain more knowledge. Thus, more followers can be protected from negative marketing, because before you could not know where the information came from, it was not in the text on sponsored posts that it was a collaboration.

The study will also help companies that seek knowledge of underlying factors that are important to take into account when introducing influencer marketing. Because the study gives a good understanding of how the followers perceive an influencer based on their Instagram profile and what effects a sponsorship can have on their perception of the

influencer. In addition, the study will contribute as an insightful reference to future academics who want to explore the topic from other perspectives.

6.4 Future Research

For future research, the authors believe that this study could be improved to enrich the body of knowledge. For example, this thesis investigated a small sample, which in turn limited the possibility for the authors to draw general conclusions. To further examine the influencer-follower relationship and how it's affected by influencer credibility based on their Instagram profile, a larger demographic sample with a wider age range, could be included to increase the possibility to draw generalized conclusions. Since Instagram is used around the world, a further study could compare two different countries or more and analyse the cultural differences around Instagram and what the influencer-follower relationship is like between the countries shown. It could be interesting to look into the importance of creative and innovative content more specifically on Instagram, in order for influencers to keep followers interested. Especially since Instagram will become more saturated with influencers than what it currently is. Furthermore, researchers could further investigate gender differences between males and females when it comes to evaluating Influencer credibility on Instagram.

There were many conflicting views when it came to defining who an influencer is and what they do? It is therefore evident that the phenomenon the authors chose to investigate, is apparent that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding when it comes to formal definitions and a general overview. During the thesis process, there was a lack of academic articles discussing, how credibility is influenced by sponsorship and how much impact it has. Therefore, future research could explore and emphasis this phenomenon.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Interview questions

Interview with Name:

Age:

Sex:

Introduction
- Do you have Instagram?
- How active are you on Instagram?
- Why do you use Instagram?
- Do you follow any influencers?
    - What's the reason? (Discounts, Inspiration, Entertainment, Updated to trends, other..)

Influencers
- How would you define an influencer?

Influencers social Instagram profile
- Looking at an influencers Instagram profile, what aspects of the Instagram profile stands out most to you (number of followers, bio, feed aesthetics, common friends following)
- Do you follow these influencers only through Instagram or have you discovered them on an other media platform?

Credibility
- What are the factors that makes an influencer's content credible to you? And why?
- Does the amount of sponsorship posts/collabs have an affect on their credibility towards you? Why?
- What are the factors that makes an influencer's content non-credible to you? And why?
- Do you ever reflect over the influencers personal brand?
- When would an influencer lose credibility in your opinion? Reasons why?

- Do you believe the number of follower's matter if so, do you think it increases the influencers credibility?

Instagram profile sources. (Explain types of influencers):

1. **Celebrity Influencers** are the original influencers for decades (Melissa, 2018). People have been looking up to celebrities since they have a big authority in status and fame. Celebrities have a huge amount of follower and therefore they are beneficial to business since they provide a high level of driving traffic and sale (Melissa, 2018). However, it's hard to connect with them since they are such a big public figure and their fan base is so large that individuals may not feel a personal affinity with the celebrity. **Kylie Jenner (**https://www.instagram.com/kyliejenner/)

2. **Authority Influencers** are individuals that the followers trust based on the in-depth experience and expertise within a specific topic (Melissa, 2018). A benefit for companies to collaborate with authority influencers is the wide range of how their recommendation and opinion can reach the audience (Melissa, 2018). For instance, if clothing apparel gets credit from a famous fashion designer. Since the influencers have such authority within the field, the view from this individual is being considered in a larger degree. **Virgil Abloh (**https://www.instagram.com/virgilabloh/ **)**

3. **Social media "sensations"** are individuals who have grown and received their followers through their platforms and are usually known in the niche market they work in (Melissa, 2018). Companies need to find influencers in this category that who are already talking about the company's product or who likes products similar to the company since it is important for the followers to perceive the on-brand and a natural partnership (Melissa, 2018). It should not be obvious that the collaboration and the recommendation of the company's products are very clear that it is sponsorship or that the influencer is getting paid for doing the post (Melissa, 2018). **Song of style (https://www.instagram.com/songofstyle/**)

4. **Micro-influencers** have a ranging of follower amount from 1-100k and posts about their interests (Melissa, 2018). Hence, the small number of followers compared to other categories, the followers are usually very engaged and loyal to their content. Companies that chose to work with micro-influencers will get a great benefit from the collaboration since it is a relatively low cost and the trust they have with their followers (Melissa, 2018). Micro-influencers have a high

engagement rate with their followers (Melissa, 2018). **Pierre Laurent (**https://www.instagram.com/pierre.laurent/)

5. **Bloggers** have their own platform such as their blog where the influencers have complete control over what they show to their followers (Melissa, 2018). Bloggers usually use Instagram to further gain more followers to their blog in terms of links to their blog and blog posts. In contrast to an Instagram influencer where the individual media profile competes with other since followers pass through a huge amount of different content and accounts (Melissa, 2018). Therefore, the benefit with a blog is that they have much more control over what they want to show and the audience put more focus on only the content based on the blog. **Hannalicious (https://www.instagram.com/hannalicious/**)

- Ask the participant if the profile if it looks credible to you?.. what makes them think its a credible influencer...
- All together - What stands out?
- Which is the most credible one and why?
- Does following different types of influencers have an effect on your view of them as credible ie do you feel that bloggers or micro-influencers are more credible than celebrity influencers or social media sensations for example….

Open discussion/Comments

- Would you like to add anything more that you feel would contribute to this thesis?
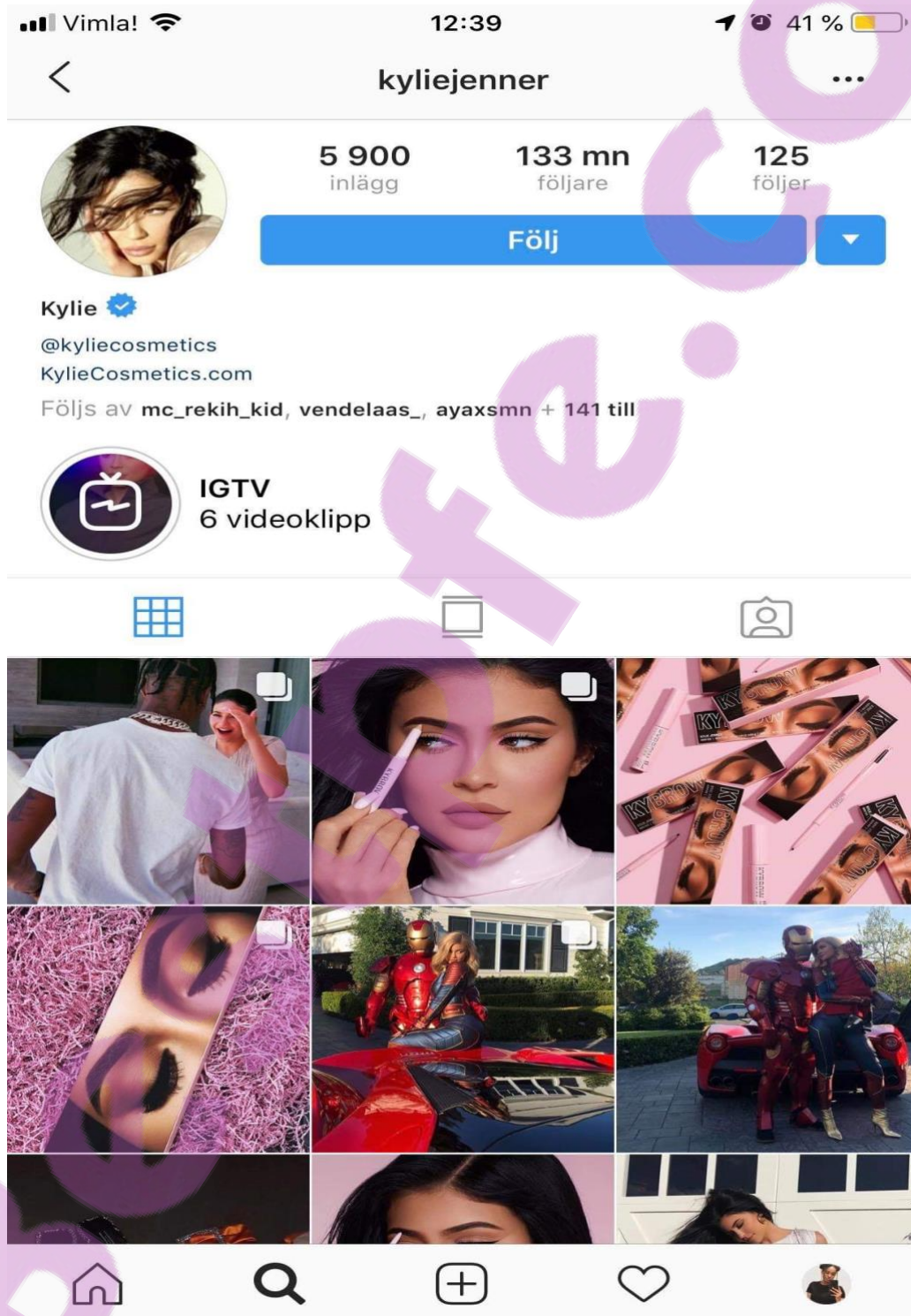- How do you believe future would look like regarding influencer marketing?
- Is influencer marketing positive or negative, according to you? Why?

Appendix 2 - Interview questions reviewed

Interview with Name:

Age:

Sex:

Introduction

- Do you have Instagram?
- How active are you on Instagram?
- Why do you use Instagram?
- Do you follow any influencers?
- What's the reason? (Discounts, Inspiration, Entertainment, Updated to trends, other..)
- To what extent do you think you are affected by influencers?
  (1-not at all, 2-Some extent 3-Large extent 4-great extent)

Influencers

- How would you define an influencer?

Influencers Instagram profile

- Looking at an influencers Instagram profile, what aspects of the profile stands out most to you (number of followers, bio, feed aesthetics, common friends following)
- Do you follow these influencers only through Instagram or have you discovered them on an other media platform?

Credibility

- What are the factors that makes an influencer's content credible to you? And why?
- Does the amount of sponsorship posts/collabs have an affect on their credibility towards you? Why?
- When would an influencer lose credibility in your opinion? Reasons why?
- Do you believe the number of followers matter if so, do you think it increases the influencers credibility?

Relationship

- What would you rate your relationship with influencers on Instagram? (1-4) 1: no relationship 2: weak relationship 3: good relationship 4: a strong relationship
- If(between 3 or 4), so what qualities of the influencer makes you feel this way?
- (Between 2 and 3) why is this important to you?
- If (between 1 and 2)not, what was was wrong with the relationship and what made you stop following them?
- (Between 1 and 2)what can the influencer do to regain a relationship with you?

Instagram profile sources. (Explain types of influencers):

1. **Celebrity Influencers** are the original influencers for decades (Melissa, 2018). People have been looking up to celebrities since they have a big authority in status and fame. Celebrities have a huge amount of follower and therefore they are beneficial to business since they provide a high level of driving traffic and sale (Melissa, 2018). However, it's hard to connect with them since they are such a big public figure and their fan base is so large that individuals may not feel a personal affinity with the celebrity. **Kylie Jenner (**https://www.instagram.com/kyliejenner/)

2. **Authority Influencers** are individuals that the followers trust based on the in-depth experience and expertise within a specific topic (Melissa, 2018). A benefit for companies to collaborate with authority influencers is the wide range of how their recommendation and opinion can reach the audience (Melissa, 2018). For instance, if clothing apparel gets credit from a famous fashion designer. Since the influencers have such authority within the field, the view from this individual is being considered in a larger degree. **Virgil Abloh (**https://www.instagram.com/virgilabloh/)

3. **Social media "sensations"** are individuals who have grown and received their followers through their platforms and are usually known in the niche market they work in (Melissa, 2018). Companies need to find influencers in this category that who are already talking about the company's product or who likes products similar to the company since it is important for the followers to perceive the on-brand and a natural partnership (Melissa, 2018). It should not be obvious that the collaboration and the recommendation of the company's products are very clear that it is sponsorship or that the influencer is getting paid for doing the post (Melissa, 2018). **Song of style (Aimee Song** (https://www.instagram.com/songofstyle/)

4. **Micro-influencers** have a ranging of follower amount from 1-100k and posts about their interests (Melissa, 2018). Hence, the small number of followers compared to other categories, the followers are usually very engaged and loyal to their content. Companies that chose to work with micro-influencers will get a great benefit from the collaboration since it is a relatively low cost and the trust they have with their followers (Melissa, 2018). Micro-influencers have a high engagement rate with their followers (Melissa, 2018). **Pierre Laurent (**https://www.instagram.com/pierre.laurent/)

5. **Bloggers** have their own platform such as their blog where the influencers have complete control over what they show to their followers (Melissa, 2018). Bloggers usually use Instagram to further gain more followers to their blog in terms of links to their blog and blog posts. In contrast to an Instagram influencer where the individual Instagram profile competes with other since followers pass through a huge amount of different content and accounts (Melissa, 2018). Therefore, the benefit with a blog is that they have much more control over what they want to show and the audience put more focus on only the content based on the blog. **Hannalicious** (https://www.instagram.com/hannalicious/)

- Ask the participant if the profile if it looks credible to you?
  What makes them think it's a credible influencer.
- All together - What stands out?
- Which is the most credible one and why?
- Does following different types of influencers have an effect on your view of them as credible ie do you feel that bloggers or micro-influencers are more credible than celebrity influencers or social media sensations for example

Following questions:
- Does the number of followers this influencer have affect your perception of them as being credible? Or is it the status?
- What kind of attitude/feelings do you get from this Instagram profile? Would you say that this is a credible profile? Explain!

Open discussion/Comments

- How do you believe future would look like regarding influencer marketing?
- Is influencer marketing positive or negative, according to you? Why?

- Would you like to add anything more that you feel would contribute to this thesis?

Appendix 3 - Influencers used in interviews including pictures

Kylie Jenner is a reality star and entrepreneur from California, USA. She is known from the show ''Keeping up with the Kardashians'' and got her own makeup brand ''Kylie Cosmetics''. She has over 130 mn followers.

Virgil Abloh has over 3,5 mn followers. He is known as a fashion designer and entrepreneur from USA.

Aimee Song (Song of style) is an social media sensation, specifically on Instagram, with a content focusing on lifestyle, fashion and travelling has over 5 mn followers and
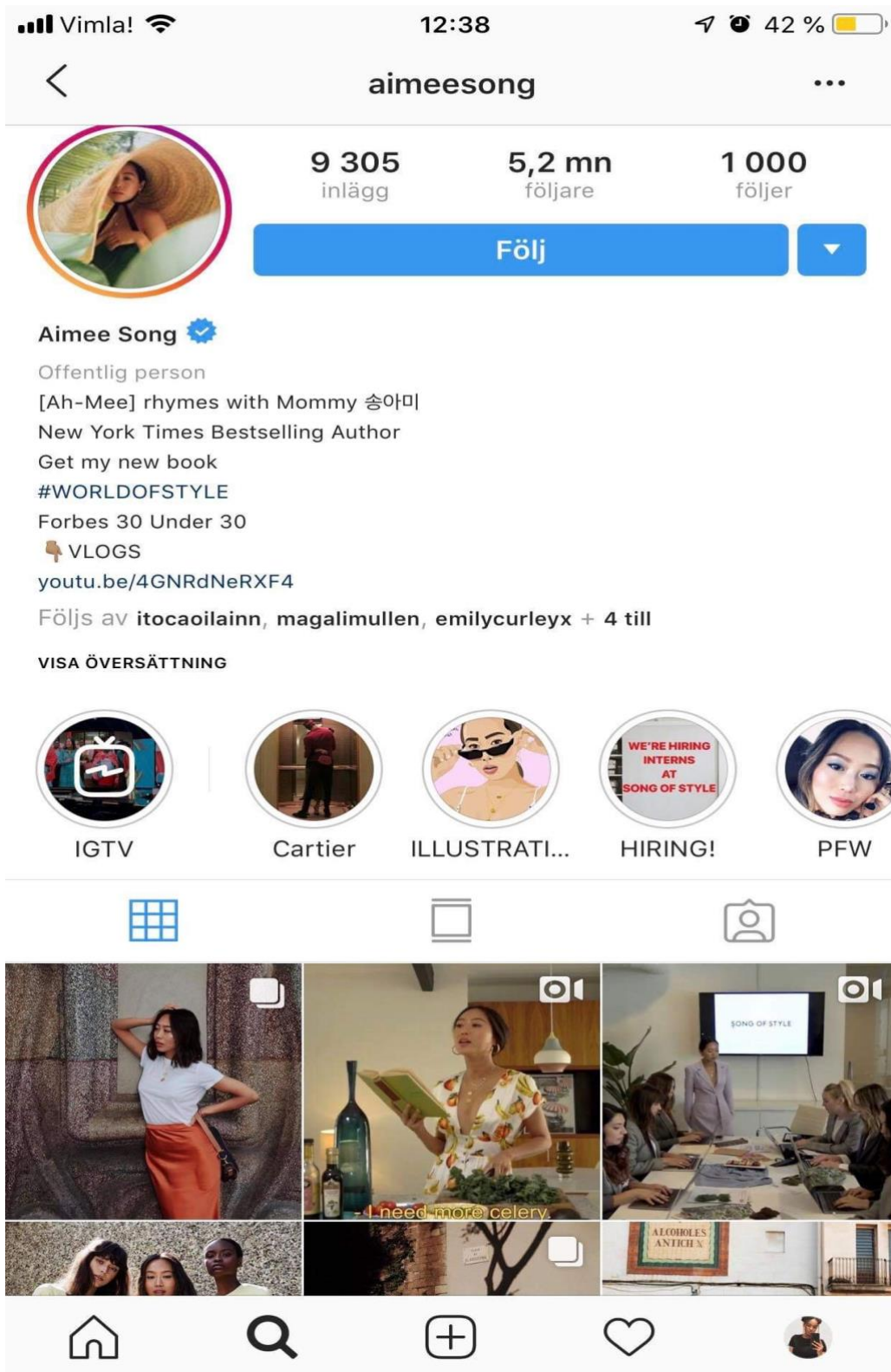
Pierre Laurent has over 60k followers and his Instagram focuses on fashion and streetstyle for men.

Hanna Friberg (Hannalicious) has over 170k followers. She is known as a lifestyle blogger and fashion designer based in Stockholm, Sweden.
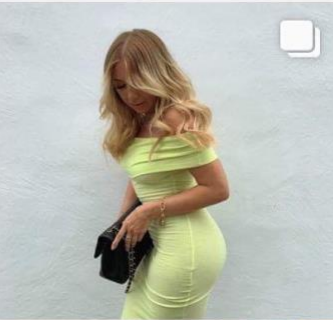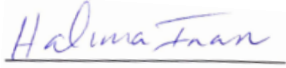
Appendix 4 - Testimony of credibility

I Amanda Anongdeth _____ can confirm in a formal statement that the data collected from the interviews to further be used in the empirical analysis during the timeframe 300319 to 020419 is truthfully presented.

I Halima Iman Barre _____ can confirm in a formal statement that the data collected from the interviews to further be used in the empirical analysis during the timeframe 300319 to 020419 is truthfully presented.