How competing brands are being communicated through Influencer Marketing

A qualitative study aimed to explore how consumers evaluate an influencer communicating competing brands
Abstract

Background: In today’s society, Influencer Marketing (IM) has become a rising phenomenon where brands collaborate with influencers in order to reach a wider range of consumers. Through the popularity of IM, influencers hold strong influential power since consumers feel a higher level of relatedness to them than traditional marketing efforts. The strong influential power enables influencers to communicate competing brands within a short period of time.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore how consumers are evaluating influencers who communicate competing brands, from the aspects of trust and relationship.

Method: This study applied an inductive, qualitative approach with an exploratory and interpretive view of the findings. The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 11 participants, on the aspect of how they evaluate a fashion influencer’s communication on the platform Instagram.

Conclusion: The findings of this research contributed to the development of a conceptual model, including the aspects of personality & relatedness, trust, as well as influencer-consumer relationship. These aspects are important for the influencer to understand, in order to perform the communication in the most effective way to increase consumer purchasing decisions.
Acknowledgements

The authors of this dissertation would like to express a large gratitude to the people that contributed to this research:

The greatest thank you goes to our supervisor Marcus Klasson for providing us with explicit guidance, knowledge and support. These contributions provided us with the confidence to pursue the research of this dissertation in the way it is finalized today.

An additional thank you to the seminar groups for providing us with helpful insights and advice on our research, in order to improve the quality of our work.

At last, we would like to thank all of the participants that took their time and were willing to provide us with useful knowledge in the conducted interviews. Our research would be nothing without you.

Jönköping, May 21st 2018

Josefin Dahlqvist

Samanta Preiksaite
# Table of Content

1. **INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................................. 4  
   1.1 **BACKGROUND** ............................................................................................................. 4  
   1.2 **PROBLEMATIZATION** .................................................................................................... 6  
   1.3 **PURPOSE** ...................................................................................................................... 9  
   1.4 **RESEARCH QUESTIONS,** .............................................................................................. 9  
   1.5 **PERSPECTIVE,** ............................................................................................................. 9  
   1.6 **DELIMITATIONS,** ......................................................................................................... 9  

2. **FRAME OF REFERENCE** ...................................................................................................... 11  
   2.1 **SOCIAL MEDIA** .......................................................................................................... 11  
   2.2 **WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING,** .............................................................................. 12  
   2.3 **INFLUENCER MARKETING** .......................................................................................... 14  
      2.3.1 **The Fashion Industry** ............................................................................................. 15  
      2.3.2 **Collaborations** ........................................................................................................ 15  
      2.3.3 **Influencer-Consumer Relationship** ....................................................................... 15  
   2.4 **PARASOCIAL INTERACTION THEORY,** ........................................................................ 17  
   2.5 **THE TWO-STEP FLOW THEORY,** ................................................................................ 18  
   2.6 **TRUST,** ....................................................................................................................... 20  
   2.7 **COMMITMENT & TRUST THEORY,** ............................................................................. 21  

3. **METHODOLOGY** .................................................................................................................. 23  
   3.1 **CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY** ...................................................................................... 23  
   3.2 **RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY** ............................................................................................. 24  
   3.3 **RESEARCH APPROACH** ................................................................................................ 25  
   3.4 **RESEARCH DESIGN,** .................................................................................................... 25  
   3.5 **DATA SOURCES,** .......................................................................................................... 26  
      3.5.1 **Secondary Data,** ...................................................................................................... 26  
      3.5.2 **Primary Data** ........................................................................................................... 26  
      3.5.3 **Qualitative Data,** .................................................................................................... 27  
   3.6 **INTERVIEW DESIGN,** ................................................................................................... 28  
   3.7 **SAMPLING,** .................................................................................................................. 29  
      3.7.1 **Variability,** .............................................................................................................. 29  
   3.8 **DATA ANALYSIS,** ......................................................................................................... 30  
   3.9 **RESEARCH QUALITY,** .................................................................................................. 31  

4. **EMPIRICAL DATA AND ANALYSIS** .................................................................................... 34  
   4.1 **PERSONALITY AND RELATEDNESS** .......................................................................... 34  
   4.2 **DIMENSIONS OF TRUST,** ............................................................................................ 37  
      4.2.1 **Paid & Unpaid Influencer Marketing** ...................................................................... 38  
      4.2.2 **Product Placement** .................................................................................................. 39  
      4.2.3 **Choice of Collaborations** ......................................................................................... 41  
      4.2.4 **Communication of too many collaborations** ............................................................ 44  
   4.3 **INFLUENCER-CONSUMER RELATIONSHIP** ................................................................. 46  
      4.3.1 **Consumer Purchasing Decisions** ............................................................................. 48  
      4.3.2 **Impulse Buying** ....................................................................................................... 52  

5. **CONCLUSION** ....................................................................................................................... 54  

6. **DISCUSSION** ......................................................................................................................... 56
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>CRITICAL REVIEW</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>FUTURE RESEARCH</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>REFERENCE LIST</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Every year brands spend large sums of money on different types of advertising, although the most effective tool for altering consumer purchasing decisions is actually free - namely the power of Word-of-Mouth (WOM) (Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik, 2010). In fact, 20-50% of consumers base their purchasing decisions primarily on expressed opinions of others, which is classified as a form of WOM-marketing (Bughin et al., 2010). These consumer expressions entail specific judgments regarding a brand, which is communicated between consumers (Bughin et al., 2010; Carr & Hayes, 2014). Throughout the years, the Internet has become a prominent source of information and a platform for people to communicate their opinions online. This has resulted in the modern concept of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009; Doh & Hwang, 2009). eWOM is particularly used on different social networks, where consumers have the ability to interact and share information freely with other consumers (Correa, Hinsley & de Zúñiga, 2010). These social networks are linked together to form the concept known as social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Weisfeld-Spolter, Sussan & Gould, 2014).

The number of users on social media is estimated to reach 3.02 billion by 2021, on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2018). In relation to individuals’ increasing presence, social media platforms have become a central medium for marketers to interact and engage with consumers (Hanna, Rohm, Crittenden, 2011). This rising trend of social media simplifies the socialization between users, whilst maximizing consumer interaction and connectivity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Social media has through recent years been established as one of the platforms where brands are able to perform lower cost marketing strategies through the interaction with consumers on a personal level, creating a brand and consumer relationship based on trust (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Saravanakumar, SugantaLakhsmi, 2012; Jaakonmäki, Müller & vom Brocke, 2017). In the process of building trust, brands have altered their marketing efforts by using the influence of a third party to build awareness and recognition towards their products (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001;
Platon, 2015). This new marketing effort is presently recognized as the popular phenomenon *influencer marketing* (IRM, 2017; Shirisha, 2018).

Influencer Marketing (IM) is a profound extension of the social media context and a concept of particular relevance to WOM (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). It has established itself as one of the fastest growing and central marketing methods - with investments recorded up to half a billion SEK in 2016 - for brands in their efforts to reach potential consumers (IRM, 2017). This form of marketing can be explained as a collaboration between a brand and an influencer to enact interactions between consumers about products, purchase experiences and personal opinions (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). The influencer operates on different social media platforms and has the ability to influence consumers’ attitudes and purchasing decisions, based on their individual judgments regarding a brand (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). This is achieved through the influencer’s lifestyle, where a product is displayed in a real-life context with the presumption that the consumer will relate to the content, resulting in the creation of a trustworthy relationship between the influencer and consumer (Woods, 2016). The influential power can, however, receive different outcomes in regard to how the influencer chooses to distinguish itself along with the content they produce (Woods, 2016). An influencer can categorize the published content between two subcategories of IM - *paid or unpaid* (Woods, 2016; Rantanen, 2017).

The power of influencers can have a strong influence on consumer purchasing decisions, despite it being known among consumers that the influencer is being paid (Woods, 2016). Paid IM occurs when a brand rewards an influencer to promote a product or service through their social media platforms (Rantanen, 2017). In comparison, unpaid IM takes place when the influencer uses a product or service for their own liking and promotes it unconsciously through a post on their social media channels (Rantanen, 2017). Both of these categories trigger and drive the purchasing decisions of the consumers through the influencer’s opinions (Rantanen, 2017). Paid IM is recognized daily on social media channels today, which is a result of brands understanding that influential power of consumers is of high importance when striving to alter a consumer’s purchasing decision (Rantanen, 2017).
With the evolving growth of users on social media, the contemporary use of IM has generated a new occupation path. To pursue this career path, a large amount of influencers incorporate brand promotions into their social media channels daily, corresponding to their full-time job (Alshawaf & Wen, 2015; Brand Publishing, 2016; Broman, 2017; Thurfjell, 2018). In order to account for this, influencers are required to promote several different brands competing in the same industry (Hobson, 2017). A search of influencers on their operating social media platforms - Instagram and Blog - provided us with insights that different competing brands are being promoted within a short interval of time. As influencers are collaborating with brands who are in the same industry, further research is of interest on how consumers evaluate influencers who are communicating competing brands on their social media platforms.

1.2 Problematization

The main reason for a brand to succeed on social media platforms is to preserve the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Booth & Matic, 2011). This is achieved by building brand trust through the influential forms of WOM-marketing in the manner of utilizing influencers (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). Seeing as social media has become such a central platform for consumers to socialize, it is not surprising that IM has established itself as one of the top leading marketing strategies, with influencers appearing daily on social networks such as Instagram (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). It is affirmed that influencers collaborate with several different brands simultaneously and in exchange receive rewards, in terms of payment (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). However, whilst the influencers are perceived as knowledgeable in their area of expertise, it is questionable whether their judgements are trustworthy concerning all the brands they promote (Woods, 2016).

Woods (2016) argues that there is a fine line between how unpaid and paid IM is perceived. In some cases, a paid post on social media can give a misleading impression and in many cases be regarded as deceptive (Woods, 2016). The credibility of the influencer is often questioned due to the fact that the influencer is receiving money for the expressed opinion, and thus it is uncertain if the positive comments regarding a
product are entirely genuine from the influencer’s point of view (Carr & Hayes, 2014; Woods, 2016). In addition, as the brands controls the content of the post more intensively through paid IM, both the influencer and the brand lose credibility (Rantanen, 2017).

Hobson (2017) suggests that the most trustworthy influencer is the one who is transparent and show expertise about the product or service being promoted. The trust towards the influencer is also affected from the way sponsored posts are acknowledged on its social channels, and if not done properly the influencer could lose trustworthiness towards its followers (Carr & Hayes, 2014; Woods, 2016). Conversely, regarding unpaid IM, there are questions as to why an influencer would review a product without gaining monetary value (Hasan, Subhani & Osman, 2012). Unpaid IM increases the risk for the brand, as negative reviews from an influencer might cause a decline in sales (Hasan et al., 2012). This is confirmed in extensive research explaining that the influencer has higher authority than the actual brand when it comes to the opinions expressed about a product (Kaplan and Haenlein’s, 2009; Hobson, 2017).

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is — it is what consumers tell each other it is” (Cook, cited in Gensler, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). For brands to incorporate this vision into their marketing efforts, they have begun to communicate with consumers on another level (Gensler, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). Brands have started to communicate with consumers through influencers, who are considered to be the most influential type of consumers on social media (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). More specifically, influencers have become the consumers who expose brands to other consumers through social media (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). Aligned with previous research in which brands develop a marketing strategy with influencers being their main focus, research also illustrates that a brand can establish a more trustworthy and reliable relationship with its consumers through the influencer (Hobson, 2017). Seeing how more brands are willing to incorporate IM into their marketing strategy, makes it more challenging for influencers to decide which brands to collaborate with (Hobson, 2017). This challenge often leads to the influencer promoting brands that are in competition with each other whilst expressing similar judgments regarding their products (Hobson, 2017).
Seeing as there is a lack of academic research on how influencers communicate competing brands, insight was gained by looking into two of Sweden’s major influencers’ Instagram and blog platforms. The two influencers, Kenza Zouiten and Janni Delér with 1.7 and 1.3 million followers respectively (Instagram, 2018), were the main sources for the data collection to understand how influencers are communicating competing brands on social media. It was observed that Delér collaborated with three different brands, NAKD, Nelly and Gina Tricot, on her blog platform in the time span of three and a half months (Delér, 2018). Collaborations with these competing brands were published on Delér’s blog and Instagram platform on the corresponding dates (Delér, 2018; Instagram, 2018). Likewise, Zouiten published collaborations with Nelly, IvyRevel, and Puma in the short time period of two months on her blog platform (Zouiten, 2018). Along with the published collaborations on her blog, an additional brand, namely Gina Tricot, was included in the promoted content on her Instagram platform (Instagram, 2018). All of the brands promoted - NAKD, Nelly, Gina Tricot, IvyRevel, and Puma - are all competing in the fashion industry, which indicates that influencers do work with competing brands (Delér, 2018; Zouiten, 2018; Instagram 2018).

As influencers posts’ incorporate brands that are major competitors, within a few weeks of each other (Hobson, 2017; Delér, 2018; Zouiten, 2018), further research is of interest on how consumers perceive this type of communication. Existing literature argues that consumer to consumer interactions are a much more influential type of marketing tool in relation to the more traditional marketing methods, leading up to consumers being more willing to purchase a product through a WOM- recommendation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Hasan et al., 2015). Considering how consumers are being more affected in their purchasing decisions by influencers rather than the brand itself (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009), it is fundamental to analyze how the consumer’s perception of the influencer affects their purchasing behavior. To gain a deeper understanding of the consumers’ evaluation of the influencer’s communication, the elements of trust and relationship will be examined based on how the influencer communicates competing brands.
1.3 **Purpose**

This dissertation aims to create an understanding of how an influencer communicating competing brands is evaluated by the consumer. This examination will interpret how consumers perceive influencers in terms of trustworthiness and provide a deeper understanding of how a relationship between the influencer and consumer influence consumer purchasing decisions. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate how influencers are communicating competing brands.

1.4 **Research Questions**

*How do consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands?*

As the authors argue in the problematization, the underlying dimension of trust in relation to consumer purchasing decisions is central to understand how consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands. Therefore, two sub-questions have been constructed to support the initial research question, evaluating the elements of trust, relationship, and purchasing decisions.

- *How is trust towards the influencer perceived by the consumer when the influencer communicates competing brands?*
- *How does a relationship with the influencer, influence the consumers purchasing decisions?*

1.5 **Perspective**

This dissertation will be performed from a consumer’s perspective, by gaining insight into how consumers perceive influencers who promote competing brands within a short interval of time.

1.6 **Delimitations**

The main delimitation performed in this research is the consumer-base and geographic area, which is limited to female students from Jönköping University. Therefore, this research cannot be applied to all consumers and influencers as the male population will not be taken into consideration. The results are also irrelevant to consumers who do not follow influencers and are not active on social media, as the platform studied will be
Instagram. A large consumer-base of IM on Instagram consists of young adults; thus, this dissertation is limited to participants from the ages 20-25, which were the most accessible for the authors of this dissertation. Therefore, the results cannot be applied to younger or older consumers of this age interval as consumer perceptions of the influencers communication may vary. Furthermore, as the authors hold the greatest amount of knowledge regarding influencers operating in the fashion industry, other industries will not be studied.
2. Frame of Reference

In the following chapter, the authors approach how consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands more in-depth, by applying different relatable concepts and theories. The concepts comprise of social media, word-of-mouth, influencer marketing, and trust. Within these concepts, there exist underlying connections to the elements of influencer-consumer relationships and consumer purchasing decisions. The concepts influencer marketing and trust are further developed through the approach of the parasocial interaction theory, the two-step flow theory as well as the trust and commitment theory. These theories will contribute to the understanding of how consumers evaluate the influencer communicating competing brands and which dimensions that lie behind such behavior.

2.1 Social Media

Social media is built on the concept of online communication between different users on popular social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2018). The rising of these platforms have incorporated the ability for users to express opinions and share information online both efficiently and easily, as well as to allow brands to use social media platforms as a promotional tool (Correa, Hinsley & de Zúñiga, 2010; Nawas, Salman & Ashiq, 2015). In short, social media has opened up a new dimension of marketing and provided brands with the opportunity to create awareness regarding their products on a different platform (Nawas et al., 2015). In this manner of networking between brands and consumers, social media has enhanced the relationship of trust between users and the shared content on social media, which has led to consumer communication imposing more control over brands than the actual brand managers (Neti, 2011; Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). As a result, brands have increased their traditional marketing efforts into social media marketing, which involves the usage of online communities for the promotion of their products (Neti, 2011). This has, in turn, strengthened the consumer and brand relationship, through the
communication between consumers and their engagement towards the brand on different social media platforms (Bolton et al., 2013).

The fact that brands have shifted their marketing efforts towards social media marketing comprises to the advantages of efficiency, reduced costs and increased revenue (Baird & Parasnis, 2013). One industry in particular that quite naturally passed towards social media marketing is the fashion industry, which has referred their marketing efforts to social networking websites and social platforms to create a deeper relationship with their consumer’s (Nawas et al., 2015). The fashion industry complies to the concept of social media due to the fast changing environments in both courses where fashion bloggers are considered to be the most influential people in the industry (Nawas et al., 2015). The fashion bloggers are perceived as opinion leaders and act as a link between the brands and the consumers, in which they have attained great reliance for, where consumers trust the blogger’s judgments about the products that brands offer (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Nawas et al., 2015). The diversity of opinions that is provided through fashion bloggers have also led to a rising popularity towards Word-of-Mouth (WOM) forums, where the focus has been to share specific knowledge regarding a brand between consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Nawas et al., 2015).

2.2 Word-of-Mouth Marketing

WOM is classified as an influential source in marketing, entailing personal recommendations to consumers from a trusted source, and has become one of the most influential ways of communicating a product towards consumers (Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik, 2010; Wiedmann, Hennigs & Langner, 2010; Carr and Hayes, 2014). The attractiveness of WOM has been determined by low cost combined with personal communication that can be achieved between brands and consumers (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009; Doh & Hwang, 2009). To understand how WOM-communication works, businesses need to adapt their communication to consumer’s individual and social capital, which includes, personality, behavior and knowledge, skills, abilities, resources, and values (Wiedmann et al., 2010). The consumer’s individual and social capital determine the effectiveness and results from a WOM-marketing communication as well as the influence on the social relationship between the brand and the consumer.
(Wiedmann et al., 2010). These personal traits may also profoundly affect the consumer’s purchasing decisions and motivation to engage with the brand (Wiedmann et al., 2010).

Along with the advancement of the Internet and social media, the consumers purchasing decisions have come to be more affected by the concept electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009; Doh & Hwang, 2009). The definition of eWOM, can be regarded as an expressed opinion – positive or negative – by a consumer of a brand through the internet and are regarded as most effective within the first time purchase of a product (Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik, 2010; Lin, Lu & Wu, 2012; Weisfeld-Spolter, Sussan & Gould, 2014). As previous research state, consumer-generated reviews have become an important approach in the purchasing decision process, where consumer perceptions of reviews tend to be aligned with their personal distinctions of how they interpret the product (Chen & Xie, 2008; O’Reilly, MacMillan, Mumuni, Lancendorfer, 2016). Additionally, research shows that consumers have three elements that initiate the use of eWOM which consist of: reducing risk, limiting search time, and finding social connection and assurance (O’Reilly et al., 2008). This can be accomplished through the development of a consumer-generated eWOM with personal interaction as the main focus, with the reason being that the trustworthiness of consumer-generated information is linked to how trustworthy the source is (Chen & Xie, 2008; O’Reilly, et al., 2016).

The level of trustworthiness regarding a source can be enhanced through eWOM and several other social media platforms namely Instagram and blogs, which are becoming more influential towards consumers by gaining higher credibility than traditional marketing methods (Lin, Lu & Wu, 2012; Carr & Hayes, 2014). It is the influence from opinion leaders also called influencers – individuals who transmit product information to their social networks – on social media platforms that have the ability to affect trust and the relationship between brands and consumers (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955; Wiedmann et al., 2010). The elements that make consumers trust influencer’s judgments are mainly due to their ability to show expertise and knowledge regarding a product, as well as how they choose to display and involve the product in their WOM-messages (Wiedmann et al., 2010). Consumers have a tendency to compare attitudes and competencies with others and are more likely to interact with those who have
similar opinions to themselves, including other social traits such as race, sex, age and education (Wiedmann et al., 2010). Thus they often choose to follow an influencer accordingly to their own opinions and their level of relatedness (Wiedmann et al., 2010).

The fashion industry plays a substantial role in terms of persuading consumer opinions and purchasing decisions (Wiedmann et al., 2010). This industry is often recognized as one of the industries which have the most powerful influence on WOM-communication and the fashion trends on social media (Wiedmann et al., 2010). This is also due to the increase of women publicizing content on their social channels leading to a mass communication of fashion trends and fashion brands online (Wiedmann et al., 2010). The enhancement can also be achieved by brands utilizing influencers in their marketing strategies (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017).

2.3 Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing (IM) has been developed as an extension from the WOM-marketing approach, where brands engage with consumers through influencers who have a strong base of followers on social media platforms (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). In today’s evolving media-environment, brands perceive the concept of IM an important feature to their sales process, which is driven by consumer purchasing decisions (Brown & Hayes, 2008). One of the main reason to why IM has gained so much popularity is mainly due to the fact that it is profoundly more cost-efficient and has the capacity to reach a large scale of consumers, in a much cheaper way than traditional marketing techniques (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Woods, 2016; Hobson, 2017; Shirisha, 2018). In fact, IM takes up approximately 20% of a brand’s existing budget that is used for traditional marketing (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Another comparison between traditional marketing and IM is the extensive increase in return on investment (ROI) due to the increase of sales, which is achieved through influencers (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Woods, 2016). Seeing as marketing on social media is rather inexpensive, it enables brands of all sizes to make use of it, increasing competition among brands on the social media market (Shirisha, 2018). Shirisha (2018) further explains that as consumers’ utilization of social media platforms increase, there are more platforms the brand has to take into consideration when promoting a product or service through
influencers. As influencers hold a strong influence on their followers, it increases their ability to reach millions of prospects and consumers through collaborations with brands (Khamis et al., 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). In this way, IM increases the feasibility for brands to select more narrowed target markets when collaborating with influencers (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

2.3.1 The Fashion Industry
A specific target market where IM has established itself is the consumers of the fashion industry where fashion blogs have become the ultimate medium for sharing experiences, opinions, and recommendations (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Fashion blogs allow consumers to constantly be up-to-date with the new fashion trends and to become influenced by a variety of brands in the fashion industry (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). In the sense that the fashion industry is most represented in IM, the marketing content and work produced within IM and posted on social media is mainly represented by female influencers (Duffy & Hund, 2015). This is foremost due to the fact that women obtain numerous working positions within the entire fashion industry (Marwick, 2013). As fashion blogs became one of the first mediums to represent the trends in the fashion industry, the social media platform Instagram has likewise gained a great amount of attention in terms of how fashion influencers promote brands in a social context (Alshawaf & Wen, 2015). One of the reasons is due to its fast-evolving social culture which can easily be adapted to the rapidly changing trends within the fashion industry (Alshawaf & Wen, 2015). Another reason is that Instagram allows its users to connect to an international audience on a global marketplace, differentiating itself from fashion blogs where the audience and location can be limited (Alshawaf & Wen, 2015). However, influencers working on both Instagram and blog platforms are considered a valuable and powerful tool in terms of connecting consumers to brands while simultaneously providing publicity to brands at a lower price than the average marketing budget (Cassidy & Fitch, 2012; Duffy & Hund, 2015).

2.3.2 Collaborations
IM has resulted in brands collaborating with influencers that have a relatively large amount of followers on social media, whom share more than just their private life on social media platforms (Duffy & Hund 2015; Veissi, 2017). The collaboration acts in the way that a brand pays an influencer to promote the brands products on their social
channels, which creates a tendency to impact the consumers purchasing decisions (Veissi, 2017). Often the collaborative posts on an influencers social media channels involve a product description, the staging of the product as a person might utilize it in real life, and a discount code, either only on the product or on the entire range of the brand (Déler 2018; Zouiten 2018). In turn, it is made possible for influencers to make a living out of collaborations with brands, by talking and sharing their own experiences about the products (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Thus, the ability to make a living out of IM confirms the amount of value and capital that lies behind and is created through this phenomenon (Duffy & Hund, 2015). The amount of value that is created through IM, contributes to the relationship that is acquired between the influencer and consumer.

For both parties, IM is a relationship building tool (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). For the brand collaborating with influencers, IM helps to acquire new and loyal customers while the influencer gains trust and authenticity among its followers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Vessi, 2018). Influencers are often perceived as experts in their fields, similarly to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) definition of an opinion leader, which are also very influential within their social networks. Thus, to build a trustworthy relationship with the followers it is important that the influencer is knowledgeable about both the brand and the product that is being promoted (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Shirisha, 2018). A good and beneficial relationship between the influencer and follower mirrors how a product would be recommended between two friends (Woods, 2016).

2.3.3 Influencer-Consumer Relationship

As previous studies illustrate the rise of IM, it is fundamental for brands to understand that an influencer and consumer relationship enhances their marketing efforts (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Influencers have a strong influence on consumer purchasing decisions, and therefore brands have to adapt and take advantage by enacting IM in order to maximize potential consumers (Platon, 2015; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Sudha & Sheena (2017) further stress the fact that influencers maintain strong influential power through building a trustworthy relationship with the consumer. Additionally, Woods (2016) explains that a trustworthy relationship between the influencer and consumer can lead to the resemblance of how a product would be recommended by a friend. An influencer providing reviews of a brands products, can create a strong influencer-consumer relationship which is seen as an advantage to the brand considering the fact that
consumer purchasing decisions are being affected (Booth, 2011). As the purpose of this dissertation is to explore how influencers communicate competing brands, it is important to understand how the consumers purchasing decisions are being affected through the consumer’s relationship to the influencer, which acts as a base in the analysis of this question. Through this, the reasoning on how the relationship between the influencer and consumer is established, can further be analyzed through the parasocial interaction theory.

2.4 Parasocial Interaction Theory

The parasocial interaction theory is based on a one-way interactive relationship that is developed between an individual and a media persona - defined as a well known person by many others who operates on several different media channels (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The theory indicates that the role of the persona can create a deep relationship with an extensive amount of strangers, through a performance that in many cases is only fiction and the character that the persona portrays is only pretend (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Seeing as our research will be conducted in regards to analyzing the influencer-consumer relationship, our analysis will be strengthened through the understanding of this theory. Similarities can be drawn on how a one-way interactive relationship is built with the influencer from the consumer's perspective, where the influencer acts as the media persona in this research. This theory builds upon that the audience can carry the same bond with the persona as they do with friends, contemplating that the audience has been an active part of the persona’s life through different situations, and experiences of different emotions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The bond the individual develops only gets stronger when the persona extends an ongoing relationship, by being visible to the individual for a specific period of time (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Horton & Wohl (1956) further argue that through the time period an individual follows the persona, associations to the persona are created, which evolves to the sharing of mutual values and enhances the feeling of closeness in the relationship between the persona and the individual. As this relationship becomes more intense, the individual will become more attached and gain a sense of commitment, and for that reason increase the time spent following that specific persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Ballantine (2015), combines Horton & Wohl’s (1956) theory with today’s society where
a large amount of media personas exists on the online community of social media. The online community has become too broad for a consumer interaction to exist among all users, thus parasocial interaction has become a common term where users gain a relationship through the uploaded information by other users (Ballantine, 2015). This corresponds to the current application of social media in this study, where the operation of influencers occurs in the online community.

Armstrong & Hagel (1996) were the first to amount to the findings that online communities were the optimum way to establish more new and even deeper relationships between brands and consumers. The two fundamental reasons to why online communities are much more relevant for this theory is that consumers are acquiring more influential power than brands, as well as the opportunity for brands to assess consumer’s preferences on an additional platform (Ballantine, 2015). Ballantine (2015) therefore implies that it is necessary to apply the parasocial interaction theory, to further understand how non-active users on the online community are influenced by the more participative users who generate reviews regarding brands and products - the more participative users in this research being influencers. This formation of reviews can likewise affect the relationship through the way information is transmitted to other users. The two-step flow theory looks deeper into this and analyzes the relationship between a more influential user and an ordinary user. Therefore, it is aligned with our purpose which looks at influencers communicating competing brands.

2.5 The Two-Step Flow Theory

The expression opinion leader was briefly mentioned earlier in this dissertation and mirrored to the contemporary term influencer, which will provide deeper knowledge on how consumer purchasing decisions are affected from the influencer’s communication of competing brands on their social media platforms. The expression originates from the two-step flow theory which is based on the primary research by Katz and Lazarfeld (1955) and predicts how mass media messages is interpreted through an opinion leader. Within the two-step flow model, there are four different principles – *exposure, medium, content, and predispositions* – also called interpersonal relations which can have an influence on mass media communication, either by hindering or by easing the way information reaches the public (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955). The four principles of
interpersonal relations will act as a guide when analyzing how consumers evaluate the influencer’s communication regarding how a promoted product is displayed in a social media context. The influence of interpersonal relations is connected to the opinion leader, an individual who observes and interprets the information from mass media and thereafter communicates the interpreted messages from mass media to the public (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955). Often the opinion leader is someone who is appraised by their opinions and is highly trusted by their followers (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955). This group of followers consists of people with similar opinions where opinions are changed depending on the social norms (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955). Katz & Lazarfeld (1955) further indicates that individuals are more obliged to accept changing opinions when they see their peers accepting the norms too.

By acknowledging the two-step flow theory, greater understanding is developed regarding people’s decisions based on the influences by mass media and deeper knowledge is gained on how media campaigns can change people’s attitudes and behavior (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955). Additionally, Carr and Hayes (2014) contribute that the two-step flow theory is applicable to the concept of eWOM and connects the relationship between the brand and its consumer through the opinion leader. Through this connection, Carr & Hayes (2014) deepens the understanding of the influencer and consumer relationship in the manner of how consumers evaluate influencer’s communication. Therefore, in the contemporary sense, the two-step flow theory will act as a base in the understanding of how IM operates.

Additionally, Carr and Hayes (2014) imply that a brand can create positive opinions around its brand and nurture consumer relationships through the influence of opinion leaders, who present information and write reviews about the brand. However, seeing how positive opinions are established in the sense of promoted products, questions can arise regarding the influencers true judgements, especially when compensation is involved (Carr & Hayes, 2014). The element of trust has for that reason been chosen to explore the relationship between the influencer and consumer and its influence on consumer purchasing decisions.
2.6 Trust

A leading element on which a strong relationship between a consumer and brand is based on is trust – which can be defined as a feeling of assurance that the performed behavior will be of good intention from the other party (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). One of the most effective ways of maximizing trust is through WOM-marketing, where the consumer gains knowledge regarding a product from a trusted source (Hasan et al., 2012). The maximization of trust has also been established through IM, which has a major effect on consumer purchasing decisions – resulting in impulse buying (Baird & Parasnis, 2013; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). The increase in impulse buying can be explained by the study performed by Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán (2001) where high involvement in the consumer-brand relationship is shown to have a positive influence on consumer commitment and trust, which is a source to increasing consumer purchasing decisions.

As Doh & Hwang (2009) and Jaakonmäki et al. (2017) highlight the importance of WOM in building trust, implies that social media is also a key tool, which is the leading source on which WOM-marketing is performed on. The level of trust increases on social media due to the high interactivity of users, where recognition and awareness are built (Platon, 2015). As a result of greater trust in social media, brands have lost control of what is being said about their products, since more influential users have acquired influential power (Baird & Parasnis, 2013). Therefore, it is of high importance to analyze how consumers evaluate these influential users, in order to understand how the level of trust is being affected by social media. Losing control to influential users have increasingly led to brands losing additional control over the relationship building with consumers, and conversely, consumers are instead being influenced by other marketing attempts (Baird & Parasnis, 2013).

These attempts can further be established when influencers are used by brands, seeing as consumers obtain information regarding the brand in a more understandable and relatable way (Platon, 2015). However, Hobson (2015) states that influencers main focus is generating profit by promoting competing brands simultaneously, thus, the trustworthiness towards influencers should be criticized. This is an important dimension
in our research in order to understand how consumers evaluate influencers through their communication of competing brands, seeing as trust is a key factor in the relationship building between the two. To obtain a deeper understanding of the influence of trust in the influencer and consumer relationship, the trust and commitment theory will be taken into account.

2.7 Commitment & Trust Theory

The commitment and trust of relationship marketing theory is based on the research that the most fundamental feature of a business is to form a bond with the consumer (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As previously stated, trust is when one partner has the belief that the other partner will act in the best of interest of the other partner and the assurance that the partner always will be reliable (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Morgan & Hunt (1994) argue that trust is the determinant of a successful partnership, and the trustworthiness will later be followed on by commitment, considering that the partners value trust so greatly that they will be willing to commit to the relationship. In this manner, the concept of commitment is important in the sense that it drives to build and preserve the relationship between one partner in terms of the other (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Corresponding to this study’s purpose, of understanding how the relationship between a consumer and influencer is affected through the element of trust, the commitment and trust theory will act as an aid when striving towards answering the research question. Ndubisi (2007), further acknowledges the fact that strong consumer relationships are a benefit to both the influencer and consumer, where mutual rewards are acquired in the way of influencers getting paid and consumers receiving a discount code. If trust is maintained between the influencer and consumer, brands can gain an additional source of marketing in terms positive reviews from the influencer (Ndubisi, 2017).

The results of the theory suggest how a brand can develop trust and commitment in a relationship, and the four solutions are to (1) provide resources, opportunities, and rewards to the other partner, (2) align with partners who share the same values, as well as (3) beneficial knowledge, and market intelligence with one another along with (4) the restraint of taking advantage of the other party (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When
analyzing how the consumers evaluate the influencer’s communication, these solutions will be taken into consideration and later applied to how the influencer should perform their communication in order to create maximization of commitment and trust.
3. Methodology

There are different levels and strategies on how the selection of the right research method is accomplished. All research questions require an appropriate research method in order to gain the most trustworthy results. Therefore, this chapter presents the consideration of the chosen methods, and the developed knowledge behind the decision which provided the authors with the most appropriate research method.

3.1 Choice of Methodology

Influencer Marketing (IM) and consumer relationships are both concepts that have been popular research topics (Ndubisi, 2007; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). However, the majority of the research regarding these topics is conducted through quantitative data and only a minority is qualitative, where several research papers have tested the effects influencers have on the relationship to the consumers through hypothesis testing (Ndubisi, 2007; Hasan et al., 2012; Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Veissi, 2017). Seeing how the majority of research regarding IM is conducted through quantitative approaches, this dissertation applied a qualitative approach through analyzing how the consumer evaluate an influencer communicating competing brands in a more profound manner. In order to gain deeper insights and explore this phenomenon deeper, this research contributed to a stream in need of more research, and gained the ability to develop a model through the conducted analysis.

Seeing how the ability was gained to develop a model from the empirical data, an inductive approach was applied. Aligned with this approach, in order to analyze consumer behavior on a deeper level, smaller sample sizes were accumulated through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews provided the authors with the opportunity to elaborate on the questions asked, which resulted in the authors receiving all possible information without the participants being influenced by other individuals’ answers. This enhanced the ability to find deeper patterns on how consumers evaluate an influencer’s communication, along with the reasoning behind their perceptions. The frame of reference contributed to the understanding of IM in the
fashion industry from the consumers perspective, thus the criterion was that the individuals participating in the interviews were required to be acquainted with these aspects.

The fashion industry was chosen as the main focus due to the fact that it is a primary enforcer of IM, in which collaborations with influencers through several different platforms such as Instagram is performed (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). This led to the choice of the social media platform Instagram, as IM is increasing its presence on this specific platform (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). Instagram has reached 400 million users equivalent to 36% of the total social media market in 2015 (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017), which strengthens the likelihood that consumers who are acquainted with IM, are also active users on Instagram. This was further acknowledged by the participants of this research, which led to the most justifiable evaluation of an influencer’s communication from the consumer’s perspective. Further reasoning behind the methodological choices made in this study will be elaborated on in the current chapter.

### 3.2 Research Philosophy

The four main research philosophies are considered to be *positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism* – and these are important to the understanding in which way the environment is perceived and will act as a guidance in how to proceed with the method and strategy (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2008). Interpretivism is a philosophy where humans acquire social roles in the society, and it is fundamental to understand how individuals act in different ways according to their own social meanings (Saunders et al., 2008). This philosophy also implies that the interpretation of the actions of whom one socializes with will have an influence on the development of one’s behavior (Saunders et al., 2008). Saunders et al., (2008) further state that interpretivism is a subjective philosophy where the details and the reasons behind certain statements and behavior are of high importance. Considering the research aim of wanting to discover how consumers evaluate an influencer communicating competing brands, the analysis of the consumers purchasing decisions was performed through the most suitable philosophy of interpretivism. Through interpretivism, a profound understanding was developed on certain patterns among the respondents, along with gaining knowledge on
how the respondents were affected by IM. The philosophy of interpretivism acted as a base in analyzing the behavior of the respondents, where certain words and expressions were taken into consideration behind the answers received. When respondents emphasized certain words, the interpretivism approach was applied in the way that it gave deeper meaning to how the respondents evaluated influencer’s communication in certain ways.

3.3 Research Approach

There are two different types of approaches towards a research – *deductive* and *inductive* – and these are important to decide on how one will undergo the research (Saunders et al., 2008). The inductive approach links to the interpretive philosophy and consists of first developing data and as a result constructing a theory (Saunders et al., 2008). The approach usually consists of a small sample which can be analyzed deeper and is further based on the understanding of why a certain behavior takes place instead of researching what is happening (Saunders et al., 2008). Regarding this knowledge, and the fact that this research will be conducted on consumer evaluations of the influencer’s communication, the process of interpreting a small sample size seemed more appropriate, which led to the inductive approach. This approach created the ability to collect smaller samples, therefore, it was possible to deeper analyze and understand the behavior of consumers evaluating influencers who communicate competing brands. Through analyzing the consumer’s evaluation, the inductive approach enabled the development of a model comprising of the elements that are important to the aspect of the influencer’s communication.

3.4 Research Design

According to Saunders et al., (2008), the three research designs consist of *explanatory*, *descriptive* and *exploratory*. The most convenient design for this dissertations aim was the exploratory design, as this study focuses on exploring and understanding the behavior of consumers evaluating an influencer communicating competing brands. When striving to understand the problem, it is fundamental to study insights into the chosen matter (Saunders et al., 2008). This can be accomplished through a variety of different principles, and the authors chose to interview user experts in the subject which consisted of regular consumers who are exposed to marketing efforts in IM on the
platform Instagram. The user experts in the interviews provided the authors with different findings than what was originally anticipated, which led to a shift in focus in the research question. A shift in focus in the research question was pliable seeing as the exploratory design was applied (Saunders et al., 2008). Even though the exploratory design allows this type of shift, does not make the research less credible, since the purpose of the exploratory design is to reach a more narrowed focus than initially predicted (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1991).

3.5 Data Sources

3.5.1 Secondary Data
To gain a sense of understanding of the research problem, secondary data had to be gathered, and studies from different journals had to be evaluated in order to enhance the expertise regarding the research of the primary data (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). The form of secondary data that was examined was documentary data, which consists of both written and non-written material that is located on sources such as journals (Saunders et al., 2008). Secondary data benefitted the authors in the way that resources were limited, thus, the collection of secondary data from the library as well as Google Scholar enhanced the reliability of the gathered information (Saunders et al., 2008; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). All the existing secondary data in the Google Scholar database is considered as compiled data which implies that selection and summarizing has been performed to secure the credibility of the publications (Saunders et al., 2008). Therefore, documentary data was collected through these sources in order to develop a base in the author’s scientific research and better explain the research problem when conducting the primary research (Saunders et al., 2008; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010).

3.5.2 Primary Data
As secondary data was limited to the new rising phenomenon IM, it was fundamental to continue our research with the incorporation of primary data (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). The primary data was performed in the way of interviews, where respondents were questioned about their relationship towards IM in order to gain insight into their evaluations of influencers. The main advantage of primary data is the consistency one preserves in line with the purpose and research question, seeing as the data collected can include more specific details into consumers’ behavior and their background (Ghauri &
Grønhaug, 2010). Despite the contrary, primary data may have high expenditure requirements seeing as the authors in some cases are required to travel longer distances (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). Therefore, the authors were limited to the same geographical area as Jönköping University, along with their utilization of networks to enact the investigation on students. Seeing how this dissertation is applied to the consumer’s evaluation of influencers communicating competing brands, interviews were conducted in order to obtain valid and reliable data (Saunders et al., 2008).

3.5.3 Qualitative Data

Subsequently, qualitative data was applied to the performed data collection technique of interviews (Saunders et al., 2008). Qualitative data can be defined as data which is interpreted through words and does not require the results to be categorized numerically in addition to the analysis consisting of the writer’s perception (Saunders et al., 2008). These characteristics were ideal to the research question of this dissertation which focuses on the influencer’s communication through the consumer’s evaluation. Nonetheless, qualitative data has in many scientific contexts been considered as unscientific along with having low status which is illustrated in the lack of qualitative research papers (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2005). Yet many benefits are generated from using qualitative data as it allows the authors to gain a deeper cross-cultural understanding and provides a more exploratory result to the research problem (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2005). Qualitative data contributed to the gathering of deeper findings seeing as the analysis was able to be developed through a more personal perspective, seeing as the respondents’ behavior was being observed whilst they were expressing their judgements. The exploratory result required the authors to pursue the skills of abstract thinking, analyzing, bias avoidance, along with the ability of obtaining reliable information together with having a theoretical background (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010).

The reason for choosing qualitative data for this study was linked to the past experience of IM, which arose the desire to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers are affected by influencers more extensively. Moreover, qualitative data is aligned with the inductive approach as well as the exploratory research (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010).
Therefore, this data selection was the most suitable for this research, which led to the development of a model and the explanations behind it.

3.6 Interview Design

The chosen form of research consisted of interviews, mainly due to the opportunity of developing deeper results in the attempt of providing more honesty and reliability to the research (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2005). Ghauri & Grønhaug (2010) reinforce the fact that interviews are the most optimal choice for data collection, where substantial communication between the researcher and the respondent is required. Three general types of interviews exist and these are as follows: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured/in-depth (Saunders et al., 2008). The authors combined Ghauri & Grønhaug’s (2010) recommendation, in the way of planning topics, sample-sizes and people to be interviewed in advance in order to reveal further personal consumer information to enhance the results. The semi-structured interview can include a differentiating order of questions, along with altering some questions to fit the certain context of the respondent (Saunders et al., 2008). Additional questions may also be included in order to explore the research question when required, which can be seen as a disadvantage of this typology considering that the exact interview cannot be replicated by another researcher (Saunders et al., 2008; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). The interviews that were conducted for this research was divided into four main parts including questions regarding the general information about the respondent, the respondent’s relationship towards influencers, the respondent’s opinions regarding promoted posts and its influence towards their purchasing decisions along with how trust towards the influencer is affected.

The questions of the interview were further aligned with the analysis section, where an interview question like “Do influencers affect you in some way, such as you feel the need to have the same products as the influencer?” was resembled in the theme of personality and relatedness in the analysis. Likewise, the question of “Do you feel as if you can trust the influencers judgement about the brands they promote?” was resembled in the analysis of trust, which corresponds to how the influencers communication of competing brands can be evaluated either as trustworthy or untrustworthy from the consumers perspective.
Seeing as this dissertation focuses on the consumer’s perspective, semi-structured interviews were enacted in order to achieve a more open and flourishing conversation where the respondents had the ability to express their judgements in a deeper manner. Semi-structured interviews are categorized as non-standardized, which is aligned with qualitative data and exploratory research, and these were conducted on a one-to-one basis (Saunders et al., 2008). The semi-structured interviews consisted of approximately twenty questions that were all consistent with the research question of looking at how consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands. As the approach of interpretivism was applied, respondents were encouraged to build on their responses, thus semi-structured interviews directed the authors to a clearer understanding of the consumer’s behavior. An overview of the interview guide is presented in Appendix 1.

3.7 Sampling

To establish a deeper understanding of the research topic, the interviews have to be performed in the right way, particularly the selection of respondents (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2005). An aspect that influenced this selection was the geographic location, which according to Marschan-Piekkari & Welch (2005) is a major determinant of the choice of individuals that are interviewed. Seeing as the authors of this dissertation are located in Jönköping, all the respondents were chosen to be students from Jönköping University as they were most accessible. This was performed with the reasoning that a major part of the consumer-base of IM amounts to young adults likewise to the authors, thus the selection of individuals in the same networks seemed as the most optimal solution.

3.7.1 Variability

For any study to be of high quality, it requires variability (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). Variability was achieved by selecting participants from the different faculties at Jönköping University, to attain a broader variety of results where certain features such as education could be of influence. Respondents consisted of students from the different departments of Business, Technical Studies, Health & Welfare as well as Learning & Communication. However, the variability was limited to female students seeing as the fashion industry, along with IM is mainly based on female consumers. Along with
female students, the chosen number of participants was set to 11 which provided us with a broad selection of responses in order to gain greater variability. The interviews lasted approximately 25-30 minutes, thus the number of participants were adapted to this time frame.

3.8 Data Analysis

The prominence of analyzing qualitative data is on creating explanations on the insights gained from the empirical material (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). The analysis was carried out simultaneously as the data was being collected, where the authors interpreted the respondent’s answers and followed-up with more questions, aligned with Ghauri & Grønhaug’s (2010) suggestion. The follow-up of questions was carried out in the way that the participants were asked to elaborate further on the initial question for the authors to gain more insights into the matter. For instance, when one of the respondents expressed that no negative reviews had been seen regarding a promoted product, yet had been seen when a product was not promoted, the authors further asked about the respondent’s thoughts in terms of the initial answer. These type of examples recurred repeatedly during the interviews, however, they were not included in the interview guide, seeing as the follow-up questions were not the same for every respondent.

As previous studies state that qualitative data can become complex due to a large amount of collected data, the analysis was divided into three parts of data reduction, data display as well as conclusion drawing and verification (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010; Saunders et al., 2008). The first step, data reduction, was performed by only extracting and transcribing the relevant information from the audio-recording of the interviews, as suggested by Saunders et al. (2008) and Ghauri & Grønhaug (2010). Simultaneously as transcribing the data, the authors compiled the information into categories that were aligned with the interview guide, in order to establish a more structured overview of the data collected. The categories consisted of questions regarding the respondent, questions regarding the respondent’s relationships with the influencer, questions regarding promoted posts and purchasing decisions and questions regarding promoted post and trust.
Categorizing the findings was a fundamental part in the data display, in order to detect and summarize different patterns from the participant’s answers (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2005; Saunders et al., 2008). For the documentation of the findings to deliver clearer insights, Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, (2005) acknowledge that the findings should be documented in a clear way in order to separate the different responses between the participants, which was performed in a word document by the authors of this dissertation. Through the documentation, the data was interpreted in a qualitative manner, in where the author’s sought to adjust the respondent’s answers by applying a certain experience or idea of their own to understand the participant’s responses better as Ghauri & Grønhaug (2010) propose. The interpretation of the participant’s responses resulted in the authors establishing several themes and a relationship between how the different themes were connected. The relationship between the different themes is documented in the analysis along with other elements that may have affected the respondent’s answers’ in some way. The patterns and relationships were further linked together upon how consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands and guided the authors to the final step of conclusion drawing and verification, which lead to the creation of a model (Saunders et al., 2008; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010).

3.9 Research Quality

When conducting qualitative data there are several aspects in which the quality of the research can be criticized from (Suter, 2012). These aspects are – transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility – all of which measure the level of how trustworthy the research conducted is (Suter, 2012).

Transferability is associated with the ability to apply the results from the qualitative research to another study within a different course and focus (Suter, 2012). However, Bryman & Bell (2015) argue that a high level of transferability is challenging to reach when performing a qualitative research, seeing as the findings are interpreted in a subjective manner. It is rather more attainable for the authors to strive to find concepts and patterns that are transferable to a future study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study has approached the matter of transferability by finding several main elements which
were drawn from the concepts and evaluations of IM, the fashion industry, cons and Instagram. As semi-structured interviews enabled authors to apply follow-up questions to the respondents, it led to a broader base of data collected which increased the likelihood of transferability. Thus the authors argue that the results of this study can be transferred to other research papers within similar industries and social media platforms.

*Dependability* is required for a study to be able to be conducted by other researchers, and yield similar results (Suter, 2012). When a research paper includes a clear overview of the entire procedure of the research process, it acquires a high level of dependability (Suter, 2012). The authors of this dissertation aimed to develop a clear overview of the methodological process, where future researchers can find guidance on how the research should be performed in an identical way. Further dependability was enhanced through the transcription of every interview conducted, as well as through the criteria where respondents were required to be acquainted with IM in the fashion industry on the platform Instagram.

*Confirmability* addresses the subject of personal values and implications which should be avoided in order to achieve the most optimal and unbiased results (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This is a challenging task within the research philosophy of interpretivism, seeing how the analysis is based on the author’s interpretations of the respondents’ answers (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, it is of high importance to apply an objective and neutral view when analyzing the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This has been the aim of this dissertation where the authors strived to be as unbiased as possible.

*Credibility* focuses on the way the research is conducted in order to obtain the most reliable results (Suter, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). The credibility aspect is enhanced through the authors striving towards making the participants feel as comfortable as possible by letting them interpret each question in their own way. Through this, a neutral and open communication was reached, minimizing the amount of bias in the interviews. The open communication was further developed through the author’s choice of an appropriate location, which was made up of a quiet group room at Jönköping University. To obtain high reliability, all interviews were recorded twice on two
different devices as a backup, so the material would not be lost, seeing as the responses are of great importance to the research (Saunders et al., 2008).
4. Empirical Data and Analysis

In the upcoming chapter, the empirical data and analysis will be presented and combined together. The chapter is divided into themes from the empirical material and the analysis based on theoretical tools from the frame of reference. Quotes from the conducted interviews will be presented, which will act as support for the interpretations of the results, in order for the reader to perceive clearer insight. As to generate more structure, a short background of the respondents will be presented here below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Civilekonom</td>
<td>Friends, Football, Food, Shopping, Boyfriend</td>
<td>28,35 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>International Management</td>
<td>Travelling, Outdoor Activities, Music</td>
<td>25,36 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Dental Hygienist</td>
<td>Meeting Friends</td>
<td>27,12 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Computer Engineering Built- In Systems</td>
<td>Training, Meeting Friends, Golf</td>
<td>26,55 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Civilekonom</td>
<td>Gymnastics, Décor, Clothes, Friends</td>
<td>27,06 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>International Work – Global Studies</td>
<td>Working, Meeting Friends, Training, Travelling</td>
<td>26,47 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Media &amp; Communication</td>
<td>Training, Meeting Friends</td>
<td>25,58 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Civilekonom</td>
<td>Training, Meeting Friends, Cooking</td>
<td>30,01 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Civilekonom</td>
<td>Meeting Friends, Shopping, Traveling</td>
<td>29,14 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>International Management</td>
<td>Animals – especially dogs, Décor, Training</td>
<td>28,22 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1 Personality and Relatedness

In today’s society where lives are circulating around social media, people have the ability to decide whose lives they want to be a part of (Correa, Hinsley & de Zúñiga, 2010). One can easily follow and unfollow people, namely influencers, on social media depending on who and what they want to see on their feed. A general criterion for
conducting the interviews was that the respondents were required to follow at least one influencer on social media – the focus being Instagram. Seeing how Khamis et al., (2017) express that influencers have strong power on consumers, it is vital to understand the reason to why a consumer decides to follow an influencer. This is the first step to understand how consumers evaluate an influencer’s communication. The dependent elements behind following an influencer that has been recognized throughout this research are the influencer’s personality and the level of relatedness a consumer feels towards them. These elements are a determinant in the selection of the influencer a consumer chooses to follow, and will further be elaborated on in the sections of trust and influencer-consumer relationships seeing as it was found to be a foundation of trust and relationship building.

The fundamental question of why the respondents of this research started following an influencer opened up to some interesting perspectives. The majority of the respondents mentioned that perspectives such as an inspiring feed and pictures developed the desire to follow an influencer’s life. Respondent 8 implied that her interests mirror the people she follows on Instagram in the way of finding inspiration for her own personal desires. The participant continued by saying “I find the fashion industry very interesting. I follow a lot of fashion people because I think they are very cool”. Many respondents reinforced this state of mind, by stating that the influencers they follow engage in the area of their interests. Respondent 4 mentioned “I follow some graphical design studios and photography freelancers on social media”, which corresponds to the participant’s interests. In a similar context, Respondent 11 formulated that her interest of décor defines the Instagram profiles that she follows, where a big focus lies on the influencers having nice pictures for inspiration.

As the respondents found interest to be an important criterion upon following an influencer, reinforces the state of mind that relatedness is a driving component to why consumers begin to follow an influencer on social media. This complements Platon’s (2015) reasoning in how consumers evaluate a brand from the influencer’s communication in a more understandable and relatable way, compared to how the brand would be perceived through traditional marketing efforts. During the interviews, it was evident that the respondents found interest to coincide with the level of relatedness they
feel towards the influencer. Respondent 11 expressed that the most relatable post by influencers are the ones where the influencers are personal and the posts are inspiring as to the respondents own interest. Respondent 10, highlighted that the relatedness varies to the influencer depending on what the influencer post on social media “/.../ sometimes you can only relate to someone’s post but not the rest of their stuff”. According to the two-step flow theory, opinion leaders contemporarily expressed as influencers, tend to affect others based on similarities in demographics, interest, and personality (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Carr & Hayes, 2014). Respondent 8 addressed these subjects by saying how she becomes inspired by personality and lifestyle taking into consideration the fact that she recognizes her own personal similarities with the influencer. Likewise, this is apparent in Respondents 9 case, where she stated that she is more intrigued by an influencer’s communication to the extent of how relatable the influencer is to her own personality.

There is a personal interaction that is obtained by Respondent 6 to the influencer as she expressed that “/.../ it feels as if I know them in a way since I have followed them for so long, therefore, I want to know what is happening in their lives” which can counterpart the findings by the remaining participants on the question of why they started following an influencer. Respondent 11 implied “I do it since I feel a sort of relation to the person, like a feeling of connection. I find it interesting to know what they do and just more about their lives”. This is comparable to Respondents 7 statement “I would not follow the influencers if I did not feel I could relate to them”. A feeling of relation can generally occur from the influencer posting more personal content besides inspiring pictures. This further addresses the answer to Respondent 1 in which she follows an influencer because she finds them both inspiring and personal. The personality traits that appear on an influencer’s social media channel adds to the reasons to why people start to follow the profile. An influencer’s personality can sometimes even be the foremost reason to why a consumer decides to follow them. In the case of Respondent 4, she expressed herself by saying that she follows people on social media who provokes and tries to stand out through their personality. Remaining respondents claimed that personality was important to them, but in order for them to relate to an influencer on a personal level, the promoted product has to be presented in a specific way in order to generate trust.
4.2 Dimensions of Trust

The majority of the respondents claimed that the most popular type of influencers that they followed was within fashion and lifestyle. This result is aligned with the previous research conducted by Sudha & Sheena (2017), in which the fashion industry adopts influencer marketing as their largest marketing effort. Through the usage of Influencer Marketing (IM) in fashion industries, consumers gain a sense of inspiration for the different products that are recommended by influencers. The theme of product recommendation can be identified as eWOM marketing, which in the case of influencers is consumer-generated in conjunction with personal impact (Chen and Xie, 2008; O’Reilly, et al., 2016). The personal impact from the influencer can enhance the trustworthiness of the product recommendation. The respondents’ answers on product recommendations varied since this aspect was interpreted in different ways. Respondent 9 explicitly presented an example of how she bought a training belt an influencer had promoted, all because of the trustworthiness she had to the influencers judgment. Similarly, Respondent 11 claimed that she in most cases believe the influencers judgment to be true. Yet, product recommendations from influencers do not appeal as substantially to all consumers, seeing as Respondent 2 expressed that she trusts traditional marketing much more than IM:

“I think I am much more traditional. I have everything that works for me, so I do not need to test as many new things.” (Respondent 2)

During the interview Respondent 2 emphasized the fact that influencers were not a big part of her life, and that the reason why she chose not to follow their social channels every day was due to the big influence that the media personas already have on the society. Such a mindset of doing the opposite as everyone else creates an outcome consisting of having no sort of recognition or trust to influencers on social media. This result of Respondent 2 corresponds to the study of Hobson (2015), which entails how influencers do not generate more credibility as their aim is mainly profit, and this is aligned to several other respondents’ perspectives.
4.2.1 Paid & Unpaid Influencer Marketing

A general theme that occurred between the participants was the awareness that the influencer was paid, which developed a level of mistrust in the perception of the promoted posts. According to Respondent 4, the post that is being promoted as paid becomes uninteresting due to the perception of the influencer only posting something for the monetary reward. Paid collaborations in many cases can decrease the level of trust a follower has to the influencer (Hobson, 2015). This form of marketing has become more visible on social media platforms as a new law states that all influencers are obliged to declare when it is a collaborative post. The law has enhanced consumers knowledge regarding which collaborations are paid and Respondent 10 is positive towards this change by expressing “I think it is good now when they actually have to state that it is a commercial. Before it was probably a lot of posts that were paid that we did not know about”.

Throughout the research, the general answer to the question of which type of marketing – paid or unpaid – was the most appealing to them in the way of being trustworthy was rather similar. The majority of the respondents expressed themselves in similar ways, where unpaid IM seemed to be the most influential.

“Unpaid – Absolutely! Especially when they actually state they are not sponsored, yet say that they like the product.” (Respondent 3)

“I am more affected by it if it is not paid, because if they say that it is not an AD, yet really like the product, then I know that it is 100% real.” (Respondent 2)

The reason behind the philosophy of unpaid IM being more compelling is due to the principle of the promoted content being perceived as more real. However, an evident matter was that the respondents understood that being an influencer is a job, thus paid IM was essential to make a living out of it. This is aligned with the reasoning of Respondent 7 who indicated that paid IM is more trustworthy according to her, seeing as a large brand stands behind the influencer that promotes their products. Even though paid IM often occurs with an influencer, trust can still be maintained if the influencer performs the marketing in a correct way according to the respondents.
4.2.2 Product Placement

During the interviews, the aspects that contributed to the level of trust a follower feels to the influencer’s communication of products was largely dependent on how the product was placed in the promoted context. A large element that is dependent, as previously stated in the problematization of this dissertation, is the knowledge that influencers promote competing brands in a short period of time and state the same opinion (Hobson, 2015). A need for predisposition is required to make the communication run smoothly according to Katz & Lazarfeld (1955), where influencers should present context they believe would yield most receptivity. A common topic in the interviews was that influencers tend to be repetitive regarding their statements on the different brands and products they promote, and this contributes to trust decreasing from the respondents’ point of view. When influencers use the same expression on various promoted posts, the respondents find it to be simulated. Respondent 4 perceives these types of expressions from the influencer to be seen as taglines and emphasized the fact that the influencers are not using their own words. Similarly, the answer from Respondent 10 follows:

“They become less trustworthy if they write the same thing all the time regarding the product and brand. It becomes very clear that they have been told to say these things.”

(Respondent 10)

Additionally, Respondents 9 feeling of influencers being told what to say about a product can be connected to the experience of all respondents never seeing an influencer say anything negative about a product on Instagram. This could be linked to the principle of influencers using the same expressions on different brands. Respondent 3 even uses the term “I have never even heard of it”, which highlights the assumption on how rare it is that an influencer expresses itself by saying negative opinions in a paid collaboration. This awareness generated a sense of mistrust, seeing as respondents grasped during the interviews how influencers are solely presenting positive views, which can be connected to the paid aspect of a collaboration.
Despite the collaboration being paid, there are several aspects that the respondents brought up that contributed to the trustworthiness of the posts. The majority of the respondents emphasized the benefit of influencers promoting products in their lifestyle by posting everyday pictures when they use the products themselves. Respondent 9 prefers when “/.../ the product does not just hang on a hanger; it is rather styled it in some way”, along with Respondents 7 reasoning of how it becomes more personal when the product is used in the influencers daily life. Furthermore, Respondent 1 elaborated and stated that she is influenced in how the influencer expresses their lifestyle and personal style through different posts “If the influencers are positive and encouraging it is easier to take part in the posts they make”. Similarly, Respondent 8 believed that the sponsored post becomes even more personal if the influencer communicates it with a humorous approach. An additional evaluation is Respondents 11 answer which explained that the influencer should underline the factum of how the post is sponsored, yet still authentic. This resembles Respondents 2 viewpoint of how the best impact is achieved through honesty, showcasing “/.../ the more perfect a product is, the less trustworthy the influencer is to me”, which can be linked to Respondents 4 statement saying the influencer becomes more trustworthy by saying negative things about a product. Regardless of positive or negative reviews of a product, Respondent 5 links trust to the influencers who provide the most input regarding a product. The way of how the promoted post is presented corresponds to the principle of content in Katz & Lazarfeld (1955) two-step flow theory, which is perceived as an interpersonal relation between the influencer and consumer. If the influencer produces content accordingly to the consumers’ values, it will enhance the responsiveness of the content (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955).

From the respondents’ statements, the most general aspect of how trust is built between the influencer and follower links to the level of personal content that is presented on the influencers social media channel. Several respondents have expressed themselves in a similar way as Respondent 6 whom implied “The more personal they are, the more I trust them”, which goes to show how the theory of trust and commitment coincides with this by emphasizing the importance of building a strong relationship in order to build trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Once the influencer incorporates these aspects in their collaborations, trust will be developed by the follower which will be accompanied by
commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Subsequently, mutual rewards will develop which in many cases consist of some sort of discount code (Morgan & Hunt 1994; Déler 2018; Zouiten 2018). An additional perspective is that the influencer should incorporate the sponsored products into their daily lives, especially when they are not promoting them in a paid collaborative post. Respondent 10 expressed this by saying how it becomes more real and genuine when they use products outside of the collaborations because then it feels as if they truly do like the product. This interrelates to Katz & Lazarfeld’s (1955) principle of exposure, where the exposure of the promoted product that is presented in the influencers everyday life is of high importance, in order for the respondents to interpret the influencers communication in a more positive manner.

4.2.3 Choice of Collaborations

A fundamental aspect of this dissertation is how the respondents evaluate an influencer promoting several brands within the same industry from a consumer’s perspective. As stated previously in the problematization of this dissertation being an influencer is a full-time job and in order to make a living out of it, influencers need to acquire several brands to promote on their social media channels (Hobson, 2017; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). Therefore, seeing how influencers promote several competing brands, it is important to analyze how trust towards the influencer is affected from the consumer’s perspective. During the interviews, the opinions regarding influencers promoting brands within the same industry were rather stable and equal between the respondents. The overviewing responses were positive towards the fact that influencers promote competing brands on their social media channels. The reason the respondents were positive towards the promotion of several brands were mainly due to the fact that the influencers were realistic in the way they choose to promote different brands as seen in Respondents 1 answer:

“When the brands are similar to each other I think it has a positive effect since the brands go hand in hand” (Respondent 1)

Respondent 10 also stated that “Influencers are of course allowed to promote different brands, if I look at myself, I’m not only buying clothes from one place”, equally to how Respondent 6 said “I also shop from different places”, whereas to Respondent 2
answered “/.../ it would be strange and if they didn’t since it’s impossible to have clothes from only one brand” and Respondent 11 explained “I have no problems with it, since I also buy clothes from different brands”. The majority of the respondents were acceptant to the fact that influencers promote brands within the same industry. However, while most of the respondent’s answers were positive, some of the respondents had not even noticed it. Respondent 4 said “I haven’t thought of that at all” whereas Respondent 3 answered, “I’ve never thought of it, but it makes sense that they would do something like that”. The reason this might have bypassed some of the respondents may have to do with the fact that the brands are so compatible with each other, and the fact that the content was not being perceived as misplaced in the context.

Despite the many elements that the influencer should incorporate into collaborations, a feature that is crucial according to the consumers, for the influencer to develop trust is the choice of the brand they cooperate with. This was a fundamental viewpoint in order to answer the research sub-question of how trust towards the influencer is perceived when the influencer communicates competing brands. How a consumer perceives a brand on social media is highly affected by what and how an influencer displays the brand in their promoted posts on their social media channels. Since trust is based on the belief that one person will only act in the best interest of the other person (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), one could theorize that the respondents would trust that the influencer is honest in their review of the brand. If trust later is accomplished through the influencer, the brands can increase commitment in the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). According to Respondent 10, trust is developed through the influencer if it is a new brand that is being promoted. Moreover, there occurs an addition of trust if the consumer has a developed relationship with the brand before the influencer starts collaborating with it. Respondent 11, expressed herself equally by saying “If an influencer promotes a brand that I like beforehand, the influencer would probably strengthen the connection and trust towards that brand”. In tandem, several of the respondents claim that they trust the influencer’s judgement about a promoted product most of the time, considering their formerly trustworthy image of the brand. Conversely, to trusting an influencer the authors also asked the respondents how the image towards the brand would be affected if they would not trust the influencer promoting that brand. Respondent 11 claimed that in most of the cases
she trusts the influencer’s judgment about a brand’s product. However if the purchase of the product generated a negative experience, it would foremost lead to decreased trust towards the influencer and not the brand according to the respondents.

Additionally, in the answers from the various respondents’ previous relationship towards the brands as well as the brand’s size mattered greatly if there is a lack of trust towards the influencer. Respondent 5 said, “If I haven’t had any previous connections with a brand I wouldn’t get a positive outlook on that brand”. Regarding the size of the brand, a bigger and more well-known brand is less affected by the influencer’s reviews, seeing as respondents already have a personal opinion and trustful connection with that brand:

“If it is a large brand that I already know and have a personal opinion of the trust towards the influencer would not affect my opinion towards the brand as much.”

(Respondent 5)

Correspondingly Respondent 9 stated that generally she has more trust to bigger brands indirectly of how much she trust an influencer and believes that “If an influencer I don’t have much trust towards promotes a smaller brand I haven’t heard of before, then I don’t think that I would trust that brand as much either”. Contrariwise, Respondent 11 brought up that trustworthiness is enhanced when an influencer promotes a more unique and smaller brand.

“It feels as a lot of influencers promote NAKD and Nelly because they are such big brands, which can feel shallow in some cases. So I feel as if those who promote smaller brands which are more unique feel more trustworthy.” (Respondent 11)

As previously discussed, promoting several brands are a part of an influencers job, however, which brand the influencer promotes determines how trustful the influencer is perceived by its followers and consumers online. Often the influencer promotes brands within a specific category such as fashion or beauty, but how is trust towards the influencer affected when an influencer promotes a brand outside of that category? During the interview, we asked the respondents how they would react towards a fashion
influencer promoting an online casino, in which we received equal answers from all of the respondents. At large, promoting an online casino if the influencer normally promotes fashion brands has a negative influence on trust between the consumer and the influencer. Respondent 6 said, “It would be strange, and it wouldn’t fit in with the person’s original values”. The majority of the respondents further elaborated and said that they would have perceived the collaboration being only for the sake of the money:

“I would probably feel that they are doing it for the sake of the money and that they’re not really interested in the brand itself.” (Respondent 4)

This is also similar to Respondent 2’s opinion towards the influencer:

“I would be so clear that it was just a paid partnership and that the influencer not really stand behind the brand.” (Respondent 2)

In one of the cases, Respondent 8 stated that all trust would be lost and that she would unfollow that influencer directly. The majority of the respondents believed that it would affect the trust with future collaborations as well, which in turn could have an influence on other brands the influencer promotes.

4.2.4 Communication of too many collaborations

The fundamental mistake that influencers make is that influencers communicate too much sponsored content in a short period of time as this dissertation’s problematization emphasizes. Even if an influencer pursues ideal product placement, trust will still not be achieved if the influencer does not hold an even amount of collaborative posts on their social media channels. Since collaborative posts are perceived to be a way of gaining new and loyal consumers, it is vital that an influencer is knowledgeable in the way it presents such posts as well as acquire information regarding the product (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Vessi, 2018; Shirisha, 2018). The frequency of collaborative posts in an influencers feed builds up a base in how personal they are, seeing as influencers who post sponsored posts the majority of the time counterparts to generating less capacity for their personal life. Though promoting different brands within the same industry is welcomed by the respondents, the authors noticed that there is a fine line between how
many and how often the collaborations should be done. The respondents were more negatively set towards the influencer if they promoted too many brands within a short time interval. Respondent 2 expressed that the influencers personality would not shine through if the influencer promoted too many brands in the collaborative communication, and further explained that the connection between them would be lost since she would receive no value by following the influencer anymore. When the influencer’s personality did not shine through due to too many collaborative posts caused Respondent 4 to perceive the influencers personal Instagram as a marketing channel, which led to the respondent unfollowing them. The term marketing channel resembled Respondents 9 interpretation:

“There is a fine line when it comes to promoted content and how many collaborative posts there should be in a week, they need to make money but it should not become a collaboration portal” (Respondent 9)

The expressions, marketing channel and collaboration portal, go hand in hand when it comes to the consumer’s perception of too much sponsored content. This result is parallel to Hobson’s (2015) study, seeing as when influencers promote collaborative posts too frequently, it generates a negative tone in the consumer’s perception by implying that profit is the main purpose. A common result of influencers promoting collaborative posts too frequently is seen to be that many of the respondents choose to unfollow these types of influencers. An influencer that was mentioned several times with regards to the question of if any of the respondents ever had unfollowed an influencer was Bianca Ingrosso, which was based on the experience that her channel had become as some respondents expressed a “marketing channel”. In addition to this, Respondent 9 emphasized how the promotion of products which present distort pictures of reality leads to her cutting all ties to that influencer. This sort of response can be supported by Horton & Wohl’s (1956) reasoning in how the feeling of closeness decreases when the sharing of mutual values decreases. Respondents 9 values with the influencer clashed at that point when the influencer tried to promote a product that the respondent was against, which led to the diminishment of trust between the influencer and consumer in regards to the communication. Likewise to Morgan & Hunt’s (1994) theory of trust and commitment, which explains how partners should share the same
values – in this case, the influencer and consumer – to reach the maximum amount of trust and commitment in the relationship.

Nonetheless, the interview results show that the leading dynamic to the perceived trustworthiness of the influencer regarding promotions is linked to the relationship. Respondent 1 and Respondent 3 highlighted that they often feel as if they can trust the influencer’s judgements, yet the key aspect to how trustworthy the influencer is depends on the developed relationship. Additionally, Respondent 6 complied by expressing how she trusts influencers judgements more when they are personal since this creates a stronger bond.

4.3 Influencer-Consumer Relationship

The element of the personal interaction that a follower can feel to an influencer, can simultaneously build up a sort of relationship. The level of personality that is present in an influencers posts is the leading dynamic on how deep the relationship between the follower and influencer is:

“I can feel a sort of “friendly” relationship to some influencers but not all, for example, Margaux whom I follow, is very personal in her posts. It feels as if I know her.”

(Respondent 6)

Several participants implied that an influencer can sometimes feel as a persona which acts as a physical friend in their lives which mirrors the theory of parasocial interaction by Horton & Wohl (1956). This dimension builds upon how long the consumer has been an active follower of the influencer, as in Respondents 9 case where she implied that she has followed some influencers since middle school. This results in a feeling of knowing the influencer as a personal friend, which is a reaction from the influencer being active in the respondent’s life for such a long time. The features of personality along with the time of following the influencer contributes to how deep the relationship is between an influencer and consumer. Along with this, consumers have typically a more profound relationship to the persona’s who are considered to be more relatable to them in the manner of similar opinions, age, attitudes and other competencies (Wiedmann et al., 2010). This relatedness adds up to the inspirational aspect, which can
imply that products can be more inspiring as they are used by influencers who are more similar to oneself. A personal level relationship that the respondents feel with the influencer generates trust and can even be perceived as if a product would be recommended by a friend (Woods, 2016).

Ballantine (2015) interrelates the parasocial interaction theory to today’s society of social media and incorporates the online community in the establishment of the user’s relationship towards a specific media persona online. This can further be interpreted in Respondents 9 perception of influencers in which she stressed that influencer affects her a lot, from the morning she scrolls through her phone to the moment when she goes to bed in the evening.

“I see that they have a huge impact on me; I think this thing with influencers is really fun and I love following them, they have become a big part of my daily life in a way”  
(Respondent 9)

The matter of how influencers are a part of consumer’s everyday lives is a consequence to the fact that the influencers are perceived as the respondent’s physical friends in most cases, thus the influencer is able to create a deep relationship to their followers. It has become a one-way interaction, where followers receive daily updates on how the influencers day has went, which can be compared to a real-life conversation the respondents can have with a friend about the same topic. Morgan & Hunt (1956) address that the more experiences the media persona share the more intense the relationship becomes. Thus, this creates deeper commitment as seen in the case of Respondent 9 who has perceived the relationship towards some influencers as a friendship for several years. Likewise, this occurred in Respondents 6 situation as she disclosed the closeness she feels to certain influencers, similarly as she does to her friends. Yet not all participants agree that a relationship to the influencer is reached on the platform Instagram. Respondent 11 expressed that the relationship with the influencer is built depending on the channel the influencer posts content on. She further explained that platforms such as blogs or Instagram where the follower only read about the influencers life do not present a picture of who the influencer actually is, whereas if the follower watches the influencer on YouTube and listens to them through a podcast,
the personality of the influencer shines through to a greater extent. Getting to know the influencer through a video and sound creates a much better relationship according to the respondent. The reasoning behind this aligns with Katz & Lazarsfeld’s (1955) interpersonal relations, where the choice of medium has a great influence on how the communication from the influencer is interpreted.

A non-existent relationship can also occur, where the follower does not feel any personal contact with the influencer. Respondent 7 claimed that for her influencers are only influencers and nothing more. Correspondingly, Respondent 2 does not perceive to have any sort of relationship to an influencer because she feels that a relationship with a sense of friendliness is built outside the social media walls. This further contradicts Ballantine’s (2015) extended theory of parasocial interaction. The level of relationship a consumer feels to the influencer can determine the influence on consumer purchasing decisions, where a non-existent relationship leads to no reaction to this behavior. This understanding was established due to the research sub-questions which focuses on how a relationship with the influencer, influence the consumers purchasing decisions.

4.3.1 Consumer Purchasing Decisions
IM has become remarkably influential that consumers in many cases fully trust the influencer’s endorsements enough to perform a purchase. This behavior has resulted in influencers marketing becoming more effective than traditional marketing in the majority of the cases (Lin, Lu & Wu, 2012; Carr & Hayes, 2014). According to Woods (2016), influencers can have a strong power on consumer purchasing behavior. After questioning our respondents about how their purchasing behavior is affected through the influencer, a variety of different perceptions were encountered. The majority of the perceptions entailed that it was due to the fact that the respondents perceived the influencer as inspirational, which as previously brought up is a feature that both relatedness and relationship are dependent upon. A fundamental part to understand how the consumers purchasing decisions are affected by the influencer is largely dependent on how many of the respondents that have actually bought a product an influencer has promoted. Approximately 50% of the respondents stated that they have bought a product an influencer has promoted on a social media platform at least once. This result corresponds to Bughin et al.’s (2010) reasoning of how eWOM increases the possibility
that a consumer pursues a purchase when they are exposed to the product for the first time. Moreover, the time period between consumer purchases varied equally between “very often” to “once a month”. Respondent 10 claimed that she has purchased makeup and beauty products that influencers have promoted because of their product placement. Along with this, the element of seeing similar products being promoted by different influencers also contributes to the performed purchases according to the respondent. However, she implies that if only one influencer would promote the product, the chances of a purchase is lower seeing as it becomes less intriguing. Similar answers were received from the remaining respondents where Respondent 3 said “One of the reasons I bought a product, was mainly because the product gained popularity among a large group of influencers”. She also gave an example of Daniel Wellington, as she had seen several influencers promoting that brand. Respondent 1 also stated that she has seen similarities between influencers and popularity with different fashion brands.

In regards to a promoted product on Instagram, the majority of influencers often incorporate a discount code for all of their followers to use, either for only the product or the entire brand’s assortment. When we asked the respondents if they ever used a discount code given to them by an influencer, approximately 70% answered that they have used a discount code at least once. Additionally, the respondents who have never bought a product were more intrigued to purchase something from the brand providing a discount code. In many of the respondents’ answers, it is stated that the discount code often encourages an interest to look at the brand’s assortment, but never leads to a purchase. Respondents 1 reason is that the discount codes promoted by influencers do not feel as exclusive anymore since different influencers offer a discount code on the same brand several times a week – in this answer she brought up NAKD as an example. Thus, Respondent 1 felt “It is more exclusive to buy a product occasionally rather than to use a discount code each week”. Respondent 9 stated that she is more intrigued to purchase a promoted product she finds interesting rather than utilizing a discount code solitary for a deduction on the price:

“Often the discount codes are promoted when I haven’t planned or want to purchase anything, and then I don’t get as excited to go in and look for something else either. In that case, I’m more attracted to promoted products.” (Respondent 9)
Conversely, Respondent 4 whom has not bought a product nor utilized a discount code claimed that the discount code stimulated a greater interest in the brand rather than the promoted product, and encouraged her to go onto the brand’s website and look at their assortment. Likewise, Respondent 10 explained that “Discount codes are a good way to attract consumers, it doesn’t mean one will purchase anything, but it might open up one’s eyes for the brand”. One of Morgan & Hunt’s (1994) solutions to increase trust and commitment in a relationship is through rewarding the other partner. This contributes to the findings of how consumers are more willing to commit to the influencer and the brand when they are rewarded with a discount code from the influencer’s promotions. The majority of the respondents are positive towards the promotion of discount codes, but Respondent 10 further clarifies that “Since discount codes are extremely easy to access on social media it is more common to search for a discount code when you actually want or need to buy something, rather than to buy something just for the sake of buying”, which Respondent 5 and Respondent 3 justify as well.

Analyzing the results above along with the two-step flow theory in which an influencer can persuade a large group of followers (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), connects to the fact that when several influencers promote the same brand in a short time span, the influence on consumers purchasing decisions will be even greater. However, the results stress that the influencer will only affect the purchasing decisions among those consumers who feel that they can relate to or have a relationship with the influencer. Answering our research sub-question on how consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by the relationship with the influencer. Among the respondents who did not relate to or have a relationship with the influencer, it was most likely that they had never bought a product promoted on the influencers social media channels. One reason being that they have not been affected strongly enough, in which Respondent 2 mentioned that it corresponds to a monetary issue.

“I have products that work, so I don’t need to try so many new things. If I were to think everything was nice and I would spend so much money.” (Respondent 2)
The monetary issue was a recurrent answer among the respondents who never bought a product, which can be connected to their life as students with a monthly income below average. The results show that the respondents who have not bought a promoted product by an influencer, value other aspects higher in comparison to the respondents who have bought a promoted product. In another matter, Respondent 11 reflected that while she has not recalled a purchase of a promoted product, the action could have occurred unconsciously. She further elaborated that specific trends seen on Instagram might have influenced her to purchase a clothing item at some point in time.

Many of the respondents explain that the decision to buy from a brand being promoted on social media is done unconsciously because they have seen the brand prior to the purchase. Respondent 4 explained that she believes that the majority of what is seen on social media is always present in the back of people’s minds and is the underlying cause of their purchasing behavior. Similarly, Respondent 10 utters that she unconsciously thinks of a specific brand when she feels a desire to perform a purchase because of previously seeing that specific brand on social media. Respondent 7 clarified, that the majority of times her behavior proceeds unconsciously because she has earlier been exposed to the brand from an influencer on social media. However, while all of the respondents agree that their purchasing decision has been affected unconsciously by what they have seen on social media, the influence varies depending on their perception of the brand. The perception of the brand NAKD which Respondent 7 is exposed to repeatedly on social media, counterparts to the fact that she is less intrigued to purchase a product from the brand, seeing as her style is not in line with what they offer. Respondent 7 further explained that the impression varies depending on what kind of product category the brand being promoted belongs to, in which she said, “I’m more affected if I see a makeup brand rather than a fashion brand”. It was further found from the respondents’ results, that their purchasing decisions can be influenced in other ways.

The influencers influence on consumer purchasing decisions could yield a response outside the social media walls. This is a matter all of the respondents agreed upon. According to the respondents, the majority believed that the influencers can affect their purchasing decision several days later than when the actual promoted post had been published and seen. The reason behind this perceptive is because the respondents have
been exposed to the brand on their social media channels days prior to the actual purchase. Respondent 3 stated that as she is constantly fed with promoted content on social media, she believes that she is more likely to perform a purchase from the brands she constantly sees on social media without the persuasion of a promoted post. Correspondingly, Respondent 11 expressed herself by saying that if she sees a brand on her Instagram platform, it lingers to the back of her mind until she receives the desire to purchase clothes. An additional finding to constant promoted content on social media performed by influencers led to the cause of impulse buying.

4.3.2 Impulse Buying

The relationship aspect between the consumer and the influencer is connected to the increase in the consumers purchasing decisions which leads to a pattern of impulse buying. Participants who felt a personal relationship to the influencers felt how their impulse buying became more affected by the influencer’s promotions. Respondent 6 has previously expressed that she feels as if she knows the influencer as a friend, and further discussed how impulse buying has affected her in the way of purchasing promoted products that she did not know she needed. This sort of behavior can be connected to previous research regarding how high involvement with the consumer influence consumer purchasing decisions (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Baird & Parasnis, 2013; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017).

Along with high involvement, trends can also be a reason to why a consumer’s impulse buying increases. Respondent 10 answered that an influencer can alter her decisions regarding how certain styles are perceived and continue by explaining that an outfit or trend she perceived as ugly before could become pretty depending on how several influencers style the items. This highlights Katz & Lazarfeld’s (1955) indication of how consumers are more accepting towards change when they see their environment proclaiming this change too, which in this research is connected to influencers. This can be mirrored through how consumer purchasing decision in terms of trends is changing depending on how often they see other influencers promoting a contemporary item. Seeing how influencers in the fashion industry were researched, can be the reason as to why the influencers greatest influential power depends on trends, and their readiness on how they adapt to the fast-changing environment on social media (Nawas et al., 2015).
A contradicting aspect to influencers affect on consumers purchasing decisions, is the reason of the delimitations of only including students into the interviews. Both Respondent 4 and 5 acknowledge the matter of how being a student limits their purchasing decisions to the level of not buying anything at all from the influencer’s promotions. Respondent 4 even indicated that “Seeing as I am a stingy student, it takes a lot for me to actually buy something” where Respondent 5 puts it in the way as “If I had more money, then maybe my impulse buying would increase”.

An additional aspect that entails a leading force in the impulse buying has to do with age. Insight was received from several participants regarding that the younger they were, the more influence influencers had on them due to little knowledge of that the opinions from influencers were in many cases paid. Respondents 9 and 10 both expressed the philosophy of that “The older you get, the less affected you are by things”, along with Respondents 9 statement of how in the present day she is more aware that the influencers opinions may be generated by several aspects, and that it may not always be what the influencer says it is. A supplementary feature related to impulse buying is the level of education that the respondents obtain. Respondent 4 claims that her previous knowledge regarding how promoted content is formed augments her awareness of the influence of influencers on purchasing decisions. Thus, making her less willing to be affected by their promotions, and not perceiving the influencers promoted products in the same way as the influencer. Education can therefore be associated with the respondent’s age which implies that product promotion is not perceived in the same pliable way the older and more knowledgeable a person is.
5. Conclusion

This upcoming chapter will provide an answer to the research questions, which draws upon the themes presented in the analysis and connects them to the purpose and research question of this dissertation.

The research question in this dissertation aimed to examine how consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands. The findings from the analysis conveyed three themes consisting of personality & relatedness, dimensions of trust along with influencer – consumer relationships. These themes contribute to the consumer’s perspective of the influencer communicating competing brands, and delivers a model of how these three themes is connected to the aspect of the influencer’s communication. The conceptual model is presented here below.

![Figure 1: The Conceptual Model](image)

The element of personality & relatedness is the foremost reason to why a consumer chooses to follow an influencer, which is fundamental to understand how the communication of the influencer is evaluated. The personality of the influencer generates a level of relatedness from the consumer’s perspective, which can lead to the development of trust. Trust is established through the influencer’s communication
depending on how paid and unpaid Influencer Marketing (IM) is performed through the product placement on social media. Moreover, trust is also affected by the influencer’s choice of collaborations with competing brands as well as how often collaborations are produced. Too many collaborations lead to a negative reaction from the consumer’s evaluation of the influencer, resulting in the influencer being perceived as less trustworthy. The influencer’s promotions of competing brands tend to not be evaluated as negative from the consumers perspective, however, the number of collaborations performed in a short period of time is the leading cause to a negative perception of the influencer’s trustworthiness. Thus, answering the sub-research question of how trust towards the influencer is perceived by the consumer when the influencer communicates competing brands.

The level of trust that is existent between the influencer and consumer, can influence the relationship that is developed. A stronger relationship is developed when the consumer has followed the influencer for a longer time and has a personal connection to the influencer. The stronger the relationship is, the stronger influence the influencer has on the consumers purchasing decisions. As consumer purchasing decisions increase, the pattern of impulse buying subsequently increases from the influencers promotions. Leading up to the answer to how a relationship with the influencer, influences the consumers purchasing decisions. Through these components of personality & relatedness, dimensions of trust and influencer-consumer relationship, it can be concluded that consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands in different ways. All of the three elements are dependent on how the consumer perceives the influencer, seeing as different communication techniques produce differing outcomes. The influencer’s communication technique of competing brands has to be performed in the right way, taking all of these elements into consideration, in order to achieve a positive evaluation from the consumer’s perspective. If a positive evaluation of the influencer is achieved from the consumer’s perspective, it can lead to the increase in the consumer’s purchasing decisions.
6. Discussion

The upcoming chapter will include several different viewpoints on the conducted study, where a critical review will be performed on the aspects that could have had an influence on the findings. Along with this, the research has resulted in findings that contribute to the academic literature within qualitative data that has a focus on Influencer Marketing (IM). The practical implication section will be included, where it will be stated in which ways this research is beneficial, as well as how this research can be conducted in the future from different perspectives.

6.1 Critical Review

Applying a critical point of view to this study incorporates the ability to take into consideration the time limitation that was provided to conduct this research. The contemplation that the authors were executing a first-time dissertation contributes to the findings that have been generated in the fixed time. Interview skills are an advantage when striving to yield the optimal results, and achieve a set of data that is full with detail and important meanings (Saunders et al., 2008). These sort of skills are limited when the research is performed for the first-time, thus a more advanced set of interview skills may have provided a deeper meaning in the achieved findings, along with a prolonged period of time.

The aspect of including entirely female respondents in the research prohibits the results from being unbiased, thus conceiving a more subjective and similar perspective on the phenomenon of IM. This result can also be based on the fact that the respondents were in the comparable age group of 22-24 years old, which corresponds to the reasoning behind several results inclusive of relatedness.

As stated in the delimitation section of this study, the philosophy behind the incorporation of students in the geographic area Jönköping is due to the convenience of not being required to travel. Seeing as the results are solely formed from female students at Jönköping University, can be perceived as bias and not entirely fulfilling.
Yet a contradicting reasoning persists in the awareness that the majority of consumers follow comparable influencers who acquire the highest popularity among the Swedish younger generation. Therefore, it cannot be said that the findings would differ if the geographic area would be set to a different location. Nonetheless, the factum that the respondents were students at a higher academic level, pursues the perceptive that education is a factor that could have an influence on the findings.

As mentioned in the empirical data and analysis section, several respondents were very aware of the influence of social media and how social media content is produced in order to influence consumers into purchasing promoted products. Seeing as our conclusion entails that communication is key, it is an important attribute to take into consideration that communication can differ depending on the consumer. Students may require a different level of communication that is performed in a more personal way perhaps than other consumers. The basis for students on how an influencer should communicate promoted content is personality, yet a variety of different answers were acknowledged on the remaining aspects that have an influence on their evaluation.

6.2 **Theoretical Contribution**

A diversity in the results received made it challenging to identify a pattern in the analysis of the empirical findings. A pattern is crucial when striving to present a result of the research question (Saunder et al., 2008), and since differing answers to the question “how do consumers evaluate influencers communicating competing brands” were received resulted in the authors of this dissertation linking the answers to create an understanding of the key element, communication.

As mentioned previously, this research was carried out due to a lack of qualitative research in the area of interest. IM is a relatively new phenomenon on the market, where brands need to understand the main implications in order to apply it in the right way. Therefore, the authors endeavored to explore this phenomenon in a qualitative way, which provided profound knowledge into the more abstract way of consumer thinking. This allowed the authors to incorporate more detailed interviews, where personal interaction with the respondents generated a deeper analysis.
Previous research and theories did not adopt the desired connection to IM, due to the novelty of it. This resulted into the combination of several previous theories that obtained relevance to the anticipated research, which acted as a base in the interconnection to the findings. Yet there was no existing theory that corresponded to the exact findings that were attained, thus the reason as to why the authors developed the conceptual model. The model contributes to existing research in the way, as to linking communication – which in our study was the key element – to the supplementary two aspects consisting of relationship and trust. The findings provided a contribution to how communication of promoted content should be performed in the correct way in order to generate a solid relationship which is enhanced by trust.

6.3 Practical Implications

As IM is a rather new concept which has grown to be one of the most dominated marketing strategies among brands, it is important for them to understand how the phenomenon is perceived on social media. This study contributes to the fact that brands can develop a better understanding of consumer purchasing decisions and perceptions on social media – mainly the platform Instagram – which can increase the brand’s profits immensely. By comprehending the concept, brands can easily choose which influencers to collaborate with, in order to attain the best communication with their consumer group on social media. Thus, increasing the elements trust, relationship and commitment among consumers towards the brand are important to become prosperous on social media.

Likewise, this study contributes to the influencers operations as well. From this dissertation, the influencer can attain useful information on how to develop trust and relationships with its followers on social media. Along with, how the content should be adapted to the platform and the consumer in the most optimal manner. Additionally, this research contributes to the understanding of what consumer’s value most in the posts on social media, and how the influencer best can create a relationship and enhance trust with the consumers. Accordingly, influencers will be able to gain insight into how content should be displayed in order to develop a trustworthy relationship with consumers comprising of female students in the younger generation.
6.4 Future Research

This dissertation opened up new possibilities in which future research can be conducted. One example of future research is the examination of a younger age group than the one being studied. A majority of the respondents said that they probably would have been influenced differently by an influencer if they were younger and had not been studying at a university since they are knowledgeable in the area of source criticism and the internal perspective of marketing. This brings up a further viewpoint on which IM could be studied on. As this study is based on students at Jönköping University where income is limited to loans and grants, further research on people who have a full-time employment could be explored. The purchase behavior of a person with a steady income might be influenced differently than a student with limited income.

Since the fashion industry, as well as IM, is dominated by women on social media, this study only brought up the female perspective of the concept. Thus, an additional implication for future research could investigate how male consumers perceive influencers on social media and how influencers affect their purchasing decisions. Moreover, a different industry could be researched in which IM exists in, as well as a different platform such as YouTube or Snapchat where IM is substantially powerful.

Furthermore, the respondents mentioned how they have never seen an influencer state negative comments regarding a product being promoted. The reason for this kind of communication might be connected to the influencers actually selecting their collaborations wisely to make sure that they truly support the particular brand before the promotion is posted on social media. Future studies on self-branding from an IM-perspective would, therefore, be an interesting topic to explore further.
7. Reference List


Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Introduction
*Explain to the respondent what the research is about along with the purpose of it. Define the main concepts used in this study such as Influencer Marketing.*

Questions regarding the respondent:
- Where are you from?
- How old are you?
- What do you study?
- What are your interests?
- Do your interest mirror who you follow on social media?

Questions regarding the relationship with influencers:
- What kind of influencers do you see in your daily life on your social media channels?
  - Do you follow any fashion influencers in particular?
- Why did you start following these influencers?
- Have you developed some kind of relationship with the influencer?
  - Can you relate to them in some way?
  - Do you feel that you can trust them like you trust a friend?
- Do influencers affect you in some way, such as you feel the need to have the same products as the influencer?
  - How does influencers affect your purchase decision and your impulse buying?

Questions regarding promoted post and purchase behavior:
- Are you affected in the things influencers promote, or do you ignore those types of posts?
  - In what way do these post affect you?
- Have you ever bought a product an influencer has promoted?
  - If you have, why did you buy the product?
  - If you haven’t, why didn’t you buy the product?
  - How often do you buy a product promoted by an influencer?
- Have you ever used a discount code an influencer has offered?
  - If you have, why did you use the discount code, and did you use it on the product promoted or another product within the brand’s product range?
  - If you haven’t, why didn’t you buy the product?
  - How often do you use a discount code offered by an influencer?
- How are you affected when an influencer promote two different brands in the same industry in a short time span?
  - Example given: An influencer promoting Nelly one week and NAKD the other week?
  - Is this something you have noticed and thought about?
  - How often do you notice these kind of posts?
- Have you ever bought products from different brands that has been promoted by an influencer?
Example given: Would you buy a product that for example Janni Delér posts about from Nelly, and says how gorgeous the clothing item is, and praises the brand and the quality? If she would say the same thing a week later about Gina Tricot, and NAKD

How would you react upon it?

Even though you might not use the offers the influencer promotes right away do you still turn to the brands they promote when YOU want to buy something with no influence from a discount code?

Example given: Considering you might see the brand Nelly on your social media fees, do you automatically turn to Nelly when you need to buy something in particular?

Questions regarding promoted post and trust:

- How do you perceive the product an influencer promote?
  - Do you gain a certain impression of the product depending on what the influencer says about it, or can you disagree with the influencer and interpret it in your own way?
  - Have you ever seen an influencer saying something bad about the brand/product being promoted?
- Do you feel as if you can trust the influencer judgement about the brands they promote?
  - Does the trust vary depending on which brands they promote?
  - How should an influencer display a promoted post to gain your trust?
- Does the influencer lose your trust when it promotes several fashion brands and states similar opinions regarding them?
- Is your opinion about the promoted product affected in any way considering that the influencer is being paid to say these certain things about the brand?
  - Do you question the influencer’s genuinity as you do not know if they are saying the truth or if they are just doing this for the job?
- Does the amount of followers matter in terms of how much you trust an influencer or promoted post on Instagram?
- Have you ever unfollowed an influencer due to lack of trust?
  - Or any other reason?