

# #SPONSORED

*An explorative study on perceived influencer credibility in a commercialized context on Instagram*



15.05.18

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Number of characters: 253,163

Number of standard pages: 112

Total number of pages: 154

## Resumé

**Formål** – Denne afhandling fremfører en eksplorativ undersøgelse af forbrugeres opfattelse af influenceres troværdighed på Instagram.

Instagram er blevet et populært medie for markedsføring via influencer-kampagner, da det taler til forbrugeren på et ”peer-to-peer” niveau. Det skaber en udfordring for forbrugeren i forhold til at gennemskue oprigtigheden i posts med sponsoreret indhold, da der oftest er en økonomisk agenda, og der dermed kan sættes spørgsmålstegn ved troværdigheden af influencere med betalt indhold på deres instagramprofiler.

*Opgaven søger derfor at svare på, hvordan influencer-troværdighed opfattes af forbrugere på Instagram i en kommerciel kontekst.*

**Teori** – Den teoretiske ramme for opgaven er baseret på tre overordnede koncepter, der alle relaterer sig til troværdighed, og som deler den empiriske analyse op: Match, Source Credibility og Parasocial Interaction (PSI). Match-analysen bygger på teori om brands’ personlighedsdimensioner (Aaker, 1997), congruity (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955), reverse transfer effect (Yoo & Jin, 2015) samt character narrative (Kozinets et al., 2010). Source credibility-analysen er baseret på modeller af Hovland et al. (1953) og McGuire (1985). Slutteligt er PSI-analysen bygget på Horton og Wohl’s (1956) grundidé omkring parasocial interaction.

**Metode** – Afhandlingen bygger på et casestudie med tre forskellige danske influencere samt tre specifikke kommercielle samarbejder, der skal fungere som konkrete eksempler på de teoretiske problemstillinger. Vores forskningsspørgsmål er undersøgt på baggrund af 12 dybdegående interviews, der fungerer som den primære empiri i opgaven. Afhandlingen har et socialkonstruktivistisk syn på videnskabelse, og søger dermed ikke at komme med endegyldige konklusioner, men snarere at skabe en øget og nuanceret forståelse af problematikken omkring troværdighed på Instagram.

**Resultater** – Resultaterne relaterer sig til de tre analyseområder: Match, Source Credibility og PSI. Først kunne det ses, at match havde en stor betydning for opfattelsen af troværdighed i et sponsoreret samarbejde, da et godt match mellem influencer og brand indikerede oprigtighed fra influencerens side. Hertil sås det, at et godt match blev vurderet ud fra en overordnet opfattelse af samarbejdet, konteksten, samt hvorvidt samarbejdet passede til influencerens ”character narrative”. I relation til

Source Credibility viste det sig, at de forventninger, der var til influencerens produktviden, afhang af produktkategorien, samt at influencere var mere troværdige, når de forholdt sig kritisk til deres brand-samarbejder. Yderligere viste analysen, at det visuelle aspekt spillede en rolle for opfattelsen af en influencers troværdighed. Sidst kunne det ses, at de influencere, der delte mest ud af personlige detaljer, samt var relaterbare og interagerede med deres følgere, skabte det bedste grundlag for PSI. Hertil kom, at PSI var relateret til forbrugerens opfattelse af en influencers troværdighed, idet relationen kan skabe større accept af sponsoreret indhold.

**Konklusion** – Det konkluderes i opgaven, at forbrugerens opfattelse af influencers troværdighed er kompleks og i høj grad afhængig af den enkelte influencer og det enkelte samarbejde. Dog kan det konkluderes, at influencere opfattes som mest troværdige, når 1) de er opmærksomme på sammenhængen mellem dem selv og de virksomheder, de samarbejder med, 2) er opmærksomme på forbrugerens behov for viden, forholder sig kritisk og selektivt til sponsorater og skaber visuelt appellerende indhold, og 3) når de engagerer sig og interagerer med deres følgere samt deler ud af deres liv og dem selv.

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# Introduction



We are currently navigating in a society with constant development in technology and the different social media platforms. As a turning point for the web, the invention of Web 2.0 in 2004 led the way for interactive and social ways to use the internet (O'Reilly, 2005). The invention of Web 2.0 changed the boundaries of communication as social practices evolved. Social media sites have opened up for two-way communication and the creation and exchange of user-generated content. People have widely accepted this new way of engaging in social activity and today we see a constant need for connecting with others through different platforms (Dijk, 2015:4-5). With the move of social practices to the internet, companies began to realize the opportunities in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as a powerful marketing tool to promote products and services (Carr & Hayes, 2014). This has become an important way for marketers to attempt to influence consumers' attitude and behavior due to the more personal peer-to-peer interaction as well as the reach and influence of user-generated content (ibid.). As marketing through social media has gained importance, traditional media such as TV, print and radio are becoming less relevant. This can be seen as a result of consumers perceiving social media sites as more reliable sources for information as opposed to traditional media (Foux, 2006; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Johnson & Kaye, 2004).

The practice of business in social media sites is not completely new, but one social media application that has gained much importance in recent years is Instagram. Instagram is one of the social media sites that are gaining more and more attention from businesses, with 800 million monthly active users in September 2017 (Statista, 2017). As one of the most popular social networking sites, Instagram has become a popular medium for eWOM as users post images of products and services that they like and thus recommend them to their followers. Forbes has recently called Instagram "the place to be" for businesses wanting to do influencer marketing campaigns (Forbes, 2018). This can be seen as an indication of the growing popularity of the medium, which is why more and more businesses are

using significant parts of their marketing budgets on this platform (SMMIR, 2018). Marketers now use influencers on Instagram as marketing channels in order to reach consumers on a peer-to-peer level and thus appear more trustworthy.

Influencers' relationship with companies and brands have significant implications for how consumers perceive these influencers (Carr & Hayes, 2014). The fact that influencers on Instagram are increasingly being paid for distribution of specific messages provides a challenge for consumers to see through potential hidden financial agendas. Thus the commercialization of Instagram might result in consumers being sceptic towards the influencers.

## **1.2 Problem Delimitation**

The increased focus on Instagram from businesses have changed the way people use the social media network. Instead of focusing on personal and visual expressions through images, Instagram is now highly commercialized and the core purpose of social interaction has been disrupted by advertisement and financial motives. Today, much content on Instagram is posted with a financial gain for the influencer due to a third party sponsoring the message. The peer-to-peer communication that was previously based on one's own opinions, are now being paid for by businesses and therefore it is natural to question the motive and integrity of the influencer (Carr & Hayes, 2014). Previous studies on blogger credibility found that blogs are perceived as credible in the minds of the consumers due to the fact that this channel is independent from corporate interests (Chu & Kamal, 2008). However, commercial collaborations conflict with this perception of the bloggers as being unbiased (Carr & Hayes, 2014). Consequently, it is relevant to further investigate how credibility is perceived in a commercialized context where people are being paid to portray specific opinions regarding products and services. Influencers and bloggers are different in nature since they use different social platforms for exerting influence on others. But since they both can be seen as channels reflecting personality and the individual's opinions, it can be argued that the issue of credibility also applies Instagram influencers.

Studies have shown that in relation to celebrity endorsement, it is important that there is a match between the celebrity and the endorsed brand (Kozinets, Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010; Till & Busler, 1998; Törn, 2012). Congruity between celebrity and brand has been deemed significant in order to achieve credibility (Yoo & Jin, 2015; Kamins, 1990; Pradhan, Durairandian & Sethi, 2014). In the context of influencers on Instagram, it can thus be argued that a match between brand and



influencer in a sponsored collaboration is relevant to investigate in relation to the perceived credibility of the influencer.

Several researchers have looked into the characteristics that enhances the credibility of a communicator (Hovland, Jannis & Kelly, 1953; Ohanian, 1990; McGuire, 1985). The concept of source credibility explains that certain attributes relate to the credibility of the sender i.e. the source of a message (ibid.). A receiver's perception of whether a sender holds these attributes is positively related to the perceived credibility of that sender. In relation to the context for this paper, it is therefore relevant to apply source credibility theory to understand influencer credibility.

Furthermore, in relation to the influencer-consumer relationship, studies have found that an "imaginary" relationship that is perceived as real from the perspective of the consumer can enhance the effectiveness of eWOM communication (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011:314) This concept is called parasocial interaction (PSI) and it explains how receivers of a message can perceive the sender as more trustworthy due to a parasocial relationship. A such relationship is built on the condition that the receiver perceives the sender as unbiased (Horton & Wohl, 1956). It is thus found relevant to investigate the parasocial interaction between consumers and Instagram influencers in a commercialized context in order to further understand the perceived credibility.

As a preliminary research method for this paper, we conducted a focus group interview that functioned as a pilot study, where we could get more knowledge on Instagram use and perceptions of influencer credibility. A summary of key points was made (Appendix 1), and it became clear that commercial content on Instagram was a topic that our participants were highly attentive towards. The main incentive for following influencers on Instagram is inspiration as well as the feeling of getting to know them and being able to follow their lives. As influencers on Instagram are sharing more sponsored content, their motives are being questioned. It becomes difficult for consumers to know, whether an influencer is being true to his/her own opinions and beliefs or is selling out to businesses due to the money. Sponsored content is more likely to be positively received if it appears to be consistent with the overall style and personality of the influencer. This supports our preliminary thoughts on influencer credibility on Instagram.

There is no doubt as to whether the increased commercialization has changed Instagram and the monetary perspective of influencers when interacting with other users. However, little research has been conducted in relation to how consumers perceive influencer credibility in this new scenery. It is

highly relevant to understand that the increased commercialization poses challenges for influencer-brand collaborations. That is, in terms of how consumers accept these collaborations and receive their messages.

## **1.3 Research Question**

Based on the above problem delimitation, this thesis seeks to understand aspects of credibility in the context of commercialization on Instagram as seen from a consumer perspective. This has led to the following research question:

*How is influencer credibility perceived by consumers on Instagram in a commercialized context?*

### **1.3.1 Sub-questions**

In order to answer the above research question and create a comprehensive understanding of perceived credibility in relation to the commercialization of Instagram, this thesis will focus on three areas of investigation related to credibility: match, source credibility and parasocial interaction. These areas were deemed important in the delimitation of the problem. The following sub-questions have therefore been formulated to create structure for the research.

- How significant is the match between influencer and brand in a commercial collaboration?
- How do consumers perceive source credibility in relation to influencers?
- How does the parasocial interaction exist between consumer and influencer in a commercialized context?

## **1.4 Delimitation**

The scope of this thesis is affected by certain delimitations. Firstly, the thesis will exclusively focus on the media of Instagram. Influencers can operate on various channels such as Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter or blogs. However, we only seek to investigate their credibility in the context of Instagram. This choice is based on the rising popularity of Instagram and the increase in influencer marketing activity on the platform

Furthermore, the thesis is limited to concern women aged 18-34 as more than half of Instagram users have been found to fall within this age category (Statista, 2018).

Finally, we have delimited the geographical focus of the thesis to Denmark, as we wished to gain insight into the topic specifically in a Danish context. Therefore, we also chose three Danish influencers for our case study.

## **1.5 Clarification of concepts**

The following section will clarify specific terms and concepts in the thesis that might otherwise be misunderstood or unknown by the reader.

### **1.5.1 Influencer**

Influencers are the focal point of this paper. Influencers exist across various platforms of media, and are people who have some type of influence on their audience, typically within a certain topic or niche. This paper however, deals with influencers on Instagram. These are people with a large number of followers who communicate their lifestyle, interests and recommendations through images on their Instagram profiles. Due to their large reach and influential roles, many companies look to Instagram influencers for product promotion. They will either send products to the influencers for free and hope to be featured or engage in contractual partnerships for which the influencers receive a fee. These partnerships can be isolated or run across a longer period of time. Some of the most typical niches that Instagram influencers act within are fashion, beauty, food and interior design.

### **1.5.2 Instagram Post**

Posts on Instagram are uploaded by individual users and uploaded to his/her profile. Posts are generally permanent but can be edited or deleted. Posts can be either video or photos. Users have the opportunity to include a caption along with each post that can include some text about the photo or video. The caption, for instance, is where influencers typically state whether a product was gifted or sponsored. Furthermore, posts allow comments in which users can add any thoughts or questions they may have, as well as tag other users. Comments are visible to everyone.

### **1.5.3 Instagram Feed**

The term “feed” is used in two contexts in this thesis. 1) The news feed of a user’s profile. This feed displays various posts from the people that one follows on Instagram. The news feed functions as a “home page” and is what is first displayed when one opens the Instagram app. The feed is not chronological, but determined by an algorithm that calculates which posts each user will likely be most interested in. 2) The personal feed of a user. This feed is shown on a user’s individual profile and displays every post from that individual user in chronological order.

### **1.5.4 Instagram Story**

Instagram Stories are mentioned on several occasions throughout the thesis and often referred to as “stories” by the respondents in our in-depth interviews. Instagram Stories differ from the traditional posts, as they are only visible for 24 hours. Instagram users can see the stories of the people they follow by clicking on their profile image in the newsfeed or via the individual profiles. Stories can be both video or photos and text can be posted directly onto the image. Although it is possible to upload an old photo or video as an Instagram Story, they are more often posted instantaneously.

### **1.5.5 Direct Messaging**

Direct messaging is Instagram’s chat function, which enables users to contact each other privately. Direct messaging is possible between all users of Instagram and not just people who know each other. Thus, users have the possibility to message influencers with comments or questions that they do not necessarily want others to see.

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

The following will outline the structure of this thesis to provide an overview and purpose of each chapter.

Thesis Structure
<i>The first chapter</i> included the introduction to the thesis that preceded this paragraph. The purpose was to establish the boundaries of our problem as well as present our research question. Furthermore, the chapter established the delimitation of the paper and included a section with clarifications of concepts.
<i>The second chapter</i> will include a literary review of past research related to this thesis. Furthermore, it will elaborate on the three chosen theoretical perspectives that will later be applied in the analysis: match, source credibility and parasocial interaction.
<i>The third chapter</i> elaborates on the chosen theory of science and the methodology for the thesis. It will clarify the choice of cases for the analysis as well as establish the purpose of using in-depth interviews as our primary empirical data.
<i>The fourth chapter</i> commences the analysis starting with match. The purpose is to investigate the importance of match between influencer and brand in commercial collaborations on Instagram. The analysis will be based on theory on brand personality (Aaker, 1997), congruity (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955), reverse transfer effect (Yoo & Jin, 2015) and character narrative (Kozinets et al., 2010).
<i>The fifth chapter</i> has the purpose of examining how the source credibility of influencers is perceived by consumers. The analysis will be based on the models by Hovland et al. (1953) and McGuire (1985).
<i>The sixth chapter</i> concludes the analysis. The purpose is to examine how parasocial interaction exists between influencers and their followers on Instagram. The analysis will be based on the theory of parasocial interaction, which was originally developed by Horton & Wohl (1956).
<i>The seventh chapter</i> of the thesis will firstly include a discussion of key findings from the analysis. Secondly, it will provide suggestions for future research based on the limitations of the thesis.
<i>The final chapter</i> will include the overall conclusion to the paper.

*Figure 1: Thesis Structure*

The following will present the theoretical foundation for this thesis. First, the concepts of WOM as well as eWOM will be introduced. Then a review of past studies on amplified eWOM as well as past studies on Instagram will follow, addressing the research gap regarding sponsored collaborations on Instagram. The second part will present the theoretical concepts that constitutes the framework. The theoretical framework consists of three main aspects: (1) match theory, (2) theory on source credibility, and (3) the concept of parasocial interaction. These areas will all be thoroughly elaborated and explained to provide a meaningful understanding of the theories as well as how the theoretical parts relate to the research question of the paper. Finally, a framework of key theoretical concepts will provide an overview of the theory that will be used in this paper in the context of sponsored collaborations on Instagram. The purpose of this framework is to simplify and illustrate the key concepts that will constitute the foundation for the analysis and show how they relate to influencer credibility.

## **2.1 Word-of-Mouth and Electronic Word-of-Mouth**

Word-of-mouth is an important concept in explaining the basic practice of Instagram influencers in terms of why they have the power to influence their followers. Therefore, the following section will clarify the concept of word-of-mouth (WOM) and furthermore the evolution into the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and finally amplified eWOM. These concepts are relevant for this paper as they explain the foundation for a relation between influencer and follower and further why perceived credibility is important in the context of Instagram influencers.

WOM is defined as “*an informal mode of communication about the evaluation of goods and services between consumers who are independent of the marketer*” (Chong Lim & Chung, 2014:40). It is argued that WOM plays a significant part in forming consumer behavior as consumers seek out each

other for information in order to make more informed opinions. Traditionally, the social network that is used for the information search, consists of people within the individual's inner circle such as friends and family (ibid.:18). However, the evolution of the internet has expanded our opportunities to search for information and WOM is thus no longer limited to face-to-face interaction but has expanded into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004:39).

eWOM is defined as *“any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via Internet”* (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004:39). Most noticeable about eWOM is the plethora of information that is made available for consumer research online. Such large amounts of information have both its advantages and challenges in comparison to traditional WOM. Two of the main differences between WOM and eWOM are: 1) Lack of social influence may affect the effectiveness of eWOM as the relationships between sender and receiver are weaker and 2) Sender credibility issues (Andreassen & Streukens, 2009:252).

First, relationships between senders and receivers are weaker, since consumers do not actually know the people with whom they are exchanging information. This is challenging due to the fact that one of the main advantages of traditional WOM is the fact that consumers are believed to trust people within their network more than people outside (Chong Lim & Chung, 2011:18). Thus the lack of relationship may affect the effectiveness of eWOM, as consumers may spend much longer searching for information in order to validate the statements made by sources that they do not know. Second, eWOM is strongly related to sender credibility issues. This is in part due to the lack of relationship and prevalence of anonymity, which makes it difficult for the decision maker to determine whether a source is credible (Andreassen & Streukens, 2009:252).

In recent years, the final issue of sender credibility has been further intensified as companies have started interfering in the natural creation of eWOM. The following section will expand on this practice and how it relates to the issue of sender credibility.

### **2.1.1 Amplified eWOM and Credibility**

In its organic form, eWOM is not directly affected by firms or marketers (ibid.). This means that the topics and attitudes towards certain products and services are unbiased and dependent on the sender

of the information. However, along with the rise of the internet and due to the effectiveness of eWOM, marketers have seen great opportunity in using eWOM as a way to influence consumer communication. Marketers use eWOM as marketing by compensating influential people for reviews on their products and services (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009:721-722). This practice is now more commonly known as influencer marketing or sponsored collaborations and typically involves paying the influencer in free products or through financial compensation. The hope is that “advertisement” through online influencers will create bigger effectiveness due to the fact that eWOM is considered more reliable than traditional advertising.

Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen (2013:21) refer to the marketer influenced eWOM as being amplified, whereas naturally occurring eWOM is referred to as organic. Kulmala et al. have studied the similarities and differences between organic and amplified eWOM content on fashion blogs. In their findings, they conclude that both types of content appear very similar and that this suggests a need for consistency in the content displayed on these blogs. While this may be true, they do not examine the impact that amplified eWOM may have on readers’ attitude towards bloggers.

While amplified marketing may be the natural result of progression within the field of online marketing, it does bring with it some concerns. Once someone has been paid to offer their opinion, it is natural to question the genuineness and intentions of that person and thus their credibility might be impacted. The reason for this is that a person’s credibility is entirely dependent on the perceptions of others, as suggested by the following definitions: “*The quality of being trusted or believed in*” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018) or “*The quality or power of inspiring belief*” (Merriam-Webster 1, 2018) or “*The quality that somebody/something has that makes people believe or trust them*” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, 2018). Common for all three of these definitions is that emphasis is put on the receiver in relation to credibility. All three suggest that credibility is a quality perceived by others and not something that a person can instinctively possess. Whether or not influencers can be classified as credible therefore depends on the observer.

In relation to influencers and commercial collaborations on Instagram it makes sense to study credibility due to the similarities to personal blogs. While Instagram posts contain less text than typical blog posts, they often reflect aspects of a person’s life the same way that a blog would. Scholars have found personal blogs to be perceived as very credible by consumers and furthermore that personal blogs are considered more credible than online media sites as well as traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004:630). These findings make it relevant to study how consumers perceive



influencers' credibility in a commercial context on Instagram, as the lines between the personal and commercial have been blurred.

## **2.2 Past Studies on Amplified eWOM**

As the practice of amplified eWOM campaigns has evolved, so has researchers' interest in discovering how this may impact the influencers.

Kozinets et al. (2010) have studied eWOM marketing campaigns on blogs and how they work. For the purpose of the study, they created a seeding campaign in which 90 different influential bloggers received a free cell phone by a sponsor. The bloggers were not obligated to write about the phone, but the hope was that they would somehow mention or review it. 75 of the bloggers did so. Kozinets et al. found that how blog readers perceived the content regarding the free phone, was highly dependent on the "character narrative" of the blog (Kozinets et al., 2010:82). The character narrative refers to the overall style and personality of the blog and forms the foundation for the readers' expectations (ibid.). Character narratives could thus be related to whether a blogger is perceived as being especially savvy within topics such as technology, fashion, food or parenting. In their findings they conclude that there were some instances of negative reception of the eWOM campaign, as it did not match the general character narrative of the blog (i.e. a "mommy blog" advertising for a cell phone) (Kozinets et al., 2010:83). The comments made by readers in these situations suggested that the blogger did not come off as credible in relation to this post, as they did not have any knowledge on the topic. This suggests that for amplified eWOM to be effective and perceived as credible, correlation between the influencer and the product/brand must exist.

Another aspect of credibility within amplified eWOM that has been studied, is the nature of disclosure of a sponsored partnership and how this may affect influencer credibility. Although legislation may require influencers to clearly state whether they are being sponsored, not all influencers do so (Carr & Hayes, 2014:39). Carr and Hayes (2014) have studied the effects of perceived third party influence in social media. They have done so because of the emerging trend of amplified eWOM. In this context, Carr and Hayes have examined whether disclosure of a third party sponsorship affects the perceived credibility of a blogger. Their quantitative study is based on 527 participants who went through an online experimental study. Each participant was exposed to four different types of blog postings with four different degrees of disclosure. The four disclosure types were: no disclosure, impartial disclosure, implied disclosure and explicit disclosure. In their findings they discovered that

bloggers are seen as the most credible when explicitly disclosing a third party partnership or making no mention of a partnership. Less credible when explicitly stating the absence of partnerships and finally least credible when there is only implied disclosure of a partnership (Carr & Hayes, 2014:46).

The findings by Carr & Hayes are supported by a study by Liljander, Gummerus & Söderlund (2015). They have studied consumer responses to suspected covert and overt marketing. This study is related to Carr and Hayes, as it once again deals with the nature of disclosure. Liljander et al. similarly conducted a quantitative study among first and second year business students at a university. The students were exposed to two different food blog posts that both included the same recipe and each included brand specific dairy ingredients. However, whereas one post clearly stated that it had been sponsored by the dairy manufacturer, the other post included no mention of third party involvement. Students were then presented with a questionnaire, in which they had to react to each of the posts. Liljander et al. conclude that the overtly disclosed partnership result in greater perceived credibility than the one with no mentioning of a sponsorship. This result was based on the fact that respondents automatically assumed that the post was sponsored, even though no such thing had been stated (Liljander et al., 2015).

Finally, Colliander & Erlandsson (2015) have studied the effect on perceived credibility of a third party revelation of a sponsorship that was otherwise not mentioned. Colliander & Erlandsson equally conducted a quantitative study among 373 women primarily within the ages of 16-25. Participants were asked a set of questions regarding a blog post in which a fashion blogger endorses a specific brand without the mention of a sponsorship. Hereafter the participants were exposed to a gossip article that revealed that the blogger had been sponsored by the brand she was reviewing. The focus in this study is therefore on the revelation of a sponsorship by a third party such as gossip blogs. Colliander and Erlandsson discovered that blogger credibility is negatively affected upon the revelation of a partnership (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015:120). They further examined how the perceived relationship (parasocial interaction) between blogger and reader may mediate the effect of a revelation of a sponsorship. They concluded that blogger credibility decreases once a third party sponsorship is revealed, if readers perceive their relationship with the blogger to be similar to a real life friendship (ibid.). Their findings suggest that the perceived relationship between the blogger and reader would damage the blogger's credibility upon a negative revelation, as the readers would feel as if they had been betrayed by a friend.

Common for all four of the above mentioned studies is the focus on the blog media. This is most likely due to the fact that blogs have been the most common online media for amplified eWOM and furthermore the practice has existed long enough for the publishing of peer-reviewed research. However, the influencer marketing trend is developing with rapid speed and Instagram has become another preferred medium for eWOM campaigns. Although Instagram and more specifically Instagram marketing is growing, studies on the topic are very limited according to our knowledge of past literature.

### **2.2.1 Studies on Instagram**

Most of the past research on Instagram has been conducted with a more general perspective in relation to the medium itself and how people use it. Due to the dominant emphasis on the visual aspects of Instagram, some scholars have found it relevant to study the connection between the use of Instagram and the relation to narcissism. These studies have proven that people who rank higher in terms of narcissism tend to be more frequent users of Instagram and update their profile and images more than those who rank low on narcissism (Sheldon & Bryant, 2015; Moon, Lee, Lee, Choi & Sung, 2016). Furthermore, Sheldon and Bryant (2015) have found that the most common motive for using Instagram is for surveillance/knowledge about others, which they also refer to as information search (Sheldon & Bryant, 2015:93-94).

Other studies have focused on Instagram in relation to self-criticism and body satisfaction as a result of the visual representation of women that takes place on Instagram (Hendrickse, Arpan, Clayton & Ridgway, 2017; Jackson & Lucher, 2017; Ahadzadeh, Sharif & Ong., 2017). All three studies have found that women who engage in comparison of physical appearance on Instagram tend to have a greater sense of body dissatisfaction.

While the studies above have little to do with the topic of this paper, they present an interesting foundation for understanding some of the affordances of Instagram as a medium. Furthermore, it can be argued that Sheldon and Bryant's point about Instagram being a tool for information search, creates a solid base for using Instagram as a marketing tool. Finally, the studies related to body image proves that posts on Instagram are likely to be seen as content for comparison, or maybe even as aspirational points of reference. This suggest that placing your product in the hands of the right person, may create aspirations among other users to own that same product because they want to be like that person.

Consequently, these studies help us to understand why Instagram as a medium is so relevant for marketing.

The above studies do not focus on Instagram in relation to marketing. Influencer marketing on Instagram has received little attention in past research according to our knowledge. The limited available research is most likely due to the novelty of the practice, and thus the need for studies related to influencer marketing on Instagram is only just starting to present itself.

A study by De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) has examined the impact of number of followers on Instagram in relation to users' brand attitudes. Their hypothesis was that perceived brand uniqueness for a divergent product will diminish when promoted by an influencer with a high number of followers. The hypothesis was supported by the empirical results and thus emphasizing the importance of choosing the right influencer to promote a product or service. However, De Veirman et al. further conclude that number of followers should not be the only factor taken into consideration when deciding on an influencer. They emphasize the importance of evaluating "*the fit between the influencer and the brand, or the similarity or consistency between the brand and the influencer*" (De Veirman et al. 2017:814).

The limited insight into the growing field of influencer marketing on Instagram warrants the need for further research. This thesis seeks to further contribute to existing research by investigating consumers' perceived credibility of influencers in relation to sponsored collaborations on Instagram. In order to address this area of research, the following will elaborate on the chosen theoretical perspectives that will contribute to a deeper understanding of Instagram in a commercial context. The next section will present theory on match as the first theoretical perspective for the paper.

## **2.3 Match**

Brand match is an important factor in the practice of sponsorships. While the concept of social media influencer sponsorships may still be relatively new, celebrity endorsements have been studied on several occasions with specific focus on the match between celebrity and brand (Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 1998; Törn, 2012).

While this paper does not deal with traditional celebrities, the theoretical perspectives are deemed relevant in relation to influencers on Instagram, since influencers have the ability to persuade

consumers and form opinions the same way celebrities do. This section will therefore build on match theory in relation to celebrity endorsement, as the dynamics can be argued to be the same. Furthermore, the concept of match is deemed important in relation to studying perceived credibility, since studies have shown that a good match or fit is relevant in terms of evaluating consumer attitudes towards celebrity credibility (Kozinets et al., 2010; Yoo & Jin, 2015). The importance of investigating match in relation to influencer credibility was also shown in the pilot study, where we found that the match between influencer and brand was central to the participants' perception of the influencer (Appendix 1).

In order to understand some of the dynamics regarding match, two central concepts in relation to brand match, congruity and the match-up hypothesis, will be elaborated in the following section.

### **2.3.1 Congruity and the Match-up Hypothesis**

The definition of congruity is *“the quality or state of agreeing, coinciding or being congruent”* (Merriam-Webster 2, 2018). The concept of congruity was first related to celebrity endorsement in a 1955 article by Osgood and Tannenbaum. In this article, they explain the principle of congruity as the evaluation that occur when people link associations of objects in their minds (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955:43). Thus congruity can be said to relate to the general concept of “fit”. In the context of celebrity endorsement or sponsorship marketing, congruity is a commonly used term when evaluating the fit between brands and the celebrities they sponsor (Yoo & Jin, 2015; Kamins, 1990, Pradhan et al., 2014). Furthermore, the concept has been used to examine how that celebrities' images may affect businesses and vice versa.

Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955:43) explain that people have varying attitudes towards an infinite number of objects in their minds. This means that people experience either positive, negative or neutral feelings towards any object that is introduced into their consciousness. Congruity or incongruity thus occurs when two or more objects are linked through association. When two objects with positive attitudes are linked, congruity will occur. Congruity thus describes how people link objects based on the associations they have in their minds, and that congruity occur when there is a match between the associations. Furthermore, Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955:44) also explain that humans generally strive to achieve congruity within their minds because it provides us with comfort and satisfaction. This means that the attitude towards one of the objects might change to better match the other. Congruity theory dictates that the negative weighs more heavily within our minds and thus

have more power. This means that a positive attitude towards an object is most likely to decrease and become more negative when linked to an object that is regarded as negative (ibid.).

The match-up hypothesis has been formulated in order to further formalize the concept of needing congruence between brand and spokesperson. This hypothesis has been used to study brand-celebrity match in relation to consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994).

The match-up hypothesis was originally formulated by Kahle & Homer (1985) who studied physical attractiveness of celebrity endorsers on advertisement for disposable razors. They found that attitude and purchase intentions changed due to celebrity-source attractiveness. The hypothesis has thus been that marketing results would be more positive when using a physically attractive celebrity as opposed to an unattractive or less attractive celebrity.

Kamins (1990:5) explains that the match-up hypothesis “*suggest that the message conveyed by the image of the celebrity and the image of the product should converge in effective advertisement*”. This implies a need for congruence between product image and celebrity image. Based on Kahle and Homer's study and the match-up hypothesis, Kamins (1990) also investigated physical attractiveness, and found that the use of a physically attractive celebrity in advertisement for an attractiveness-related product significantly enhanced measures of spokesperson credibility and attitude towards the ad. Studies on match indicate that one of the key determinants of celebrity endorsement success is celebrity-product match, suggesting that a greater “fit” between the endorsed product and the endorser can make an advertisement more persuasive (Kamins, 1990; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Yoo & Jin, 2015).

The concept of congruity and the match-up hypothesis thus lay the foundation for understanding the importance of further examining the match between influencer and brand.

### **2.3.2 Reverse Transfer Effect**

Previous studies on celebrity-brand match have primarily focused on celebrities' effect on audience perceived brand attitude and its relation to marketing effectiveness and purchase intention. However, some scholars have focused on what they call the reverse transfer effect from brand to celebrity, which is how a match may affect the celebrity's image (Yoo & Jin, 2015; Till, 2001). This perspective supports the relevance of match theory in relation to investigating influencer credibility.

In contrast to traditional research on celebrity endorsement, Yoo & Jin (2015) studied the effect of celebrity endorsement on the celebrity's perceived credibility in order to understand how the endorsement influenced consumers' perception of the celebrity. This study was based on the match-up hypothesis and examined varying degrees of celebrity-product congruence (Yoo & Jin, 2015:667).

Yoo & Jin predicted that a celebrity-brand fit would positively moderate the reverse transfer effect (2015:670). This suggests that a situation with great match will have a positive reverse transfer effect and thus enhance consumers' perception of the celebrities' credibility. And on the other hand, a poor match situation will result in negative reverse transfer effect, which means that consumers' perceptions of celebrity credibility will diminish (*ibid.*). They found that especially low fit situations had a reverse transfer effect on the consumers' perception of the celebrities' credibility (Yoo & Jin, 2015:676).

The reverse transfer effect correlates with the topic of this paper in terms of investigating the impact that a brand-influencer match might have on the influencer's perceived credibility.

### **2.3.3 Character Narrative**

Another perspective that is deemed relevant in relation to brand match is "character narrative" (Kozinets, 2010). When discussing sponsored collaborations in the focus group study, several participants argued for the importance of the influencer keeping a "common thread" (Appendix 1), which means that a sponsorship should match the influencer's overall style and profile. This further suggests that a brand match is related to how well consumers perceive a sponsorship to fit into their perception of the influencer. This is described by Kozinets et al. (2010) as fitting into the character narrative.

As mentioned in the literature review, Kozinets et al. (2010) completed a study on amplified eWOM on blogs and found that the perception of the blogger was related to how well the sponsorship matched the character narrative of that blogger. Character narrative refers to enduring personal stories and is related to the particular history and perspective of a person (Kozinets et al., 2010:82). It thus includes the overall style and personality of the sender and forms the foundation for having expectations towards that sender. Kozinets et al. found that negative reception of amplified eWOM on blogs was related to a poor match between the sponsorship and the character narrative of the blogger. Furthermore, they argued that a poor fit impacted the readers' perception of the blogger (*ibid.*). This

relates to the topic of this research, as it can be argued that influencers on Instagram also have specific narratives and thus their followers have formed expectations and perceptions of the influencer based on the narrative. This indicates that sponsorships that matches the influencers' overall style and personality are more likely to result in positive credibility.

All the above studies on match give an indication of the importance of investigating whether the match between influencer and brand is significant when analyzing influencer credibility in a commercial context, where influencers functions as endorsers. While previous studies deal with the importance of a match and not how a concrete match is measured, it is found necessary to identify a model that can be used for determining the “fit” of a brand-influencer match. Mishra, Roy & Bailey (2015) conducted a study on the significance of congruence between brand personality and celebrity endorser personality. In order to determine and allow for comparison of the personalities of the brands and celebrities in their study, they used Aaker's (1997) dimensions of brand personality. Their results showed that a celebrity whose personality was perceived to match the personality of the brand was seen as more suitable and more credible than one who was not perceived to match. The match up hypothesis was therefore supported when personality functioned as the criteria for pairing brands with celebrity endorsers. This indicates that this theory might be a suitable way of identifying the match between influencer and brand in the context of this paper. The following will therefore elaborate on Aaker's (1997) dimensions of brand personality.

### **2.3.4 Dimensions of Brand Personality**

Brand personality is defined as a “*set of human characteristics associated with a brand*” (Aaker, 1997). This definition makes it difficult to distinguish between whether brand personality is determined by the company behind the brand as with brand identity. Or whether brand personality is determined by the consumers of the brand as with brand image (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Making a complete distinction between the two is however impossible according to Hatch and Schultz (ibid.:51). They argue that brand identity is in constant communication and interaction with the perceived brand image and that marketers should focus on alignment between the two in order to achieve synergy. Thus brand personality may be seeded by the desired brand identity, but altered as a result of the perceived brand image in a constant process of reconstruction. This perspective is adopted in this paper due to the social constructivist approach where interpretation is created through



social interaction. This further means that determining one absolute brand personality for influencers or brands is not possible as it will depend on the perception of the observer.

Most studies on brand personality has either focused on the way consumers use brands to express self-identity or the way brand personality can be used to differentiate brands within a product category (Aaker, 1997:348). However, little attention has been paid to what brand personality really is, which has caused the lack of a common framework. Aaker (1997) has formalized five dimensions of brand personality in order to provide a generalizable framework to be used across product categories (ibid.:349).

Aaker has defined five main dimensions to explain brand personality. The idea is that any brand within any product category can be described by using at least one of these dimensions. However, Aaker further recognizes that brands are complex and therefore she has added facets to ease the process of determining brand personality. Finally, a set of personality traits have been added to each facet to add further depth and breadth to the five dimensions. By identifying various traits or facets within a brand, it is possible to determine a personality for that brand. It is important to mention though that a brand does not necessarily just fit within one dimension, just as humans most likely could not be described with one word.

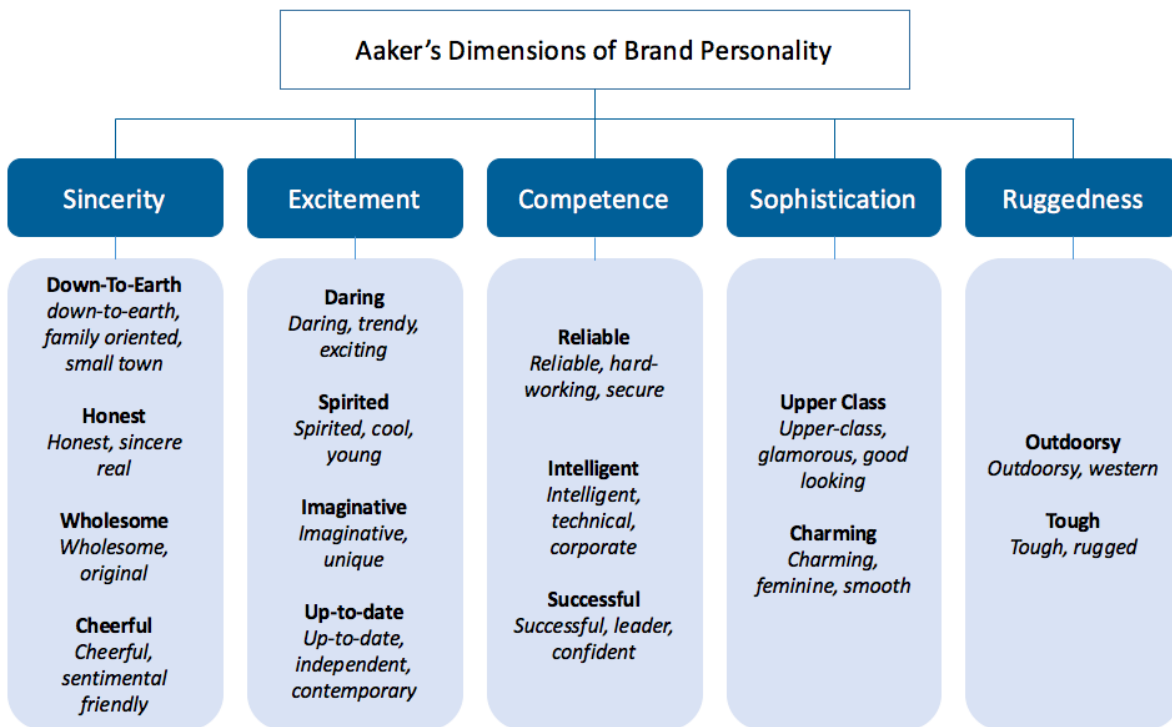


Figure 2: Aaker's (1997) Dimensions of Brand Personality

Scholars have criticized Aaker's Dimensions of Brand Personality for being overly vague and because of its "catch-all character" (Malik & Naeem, 2013; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) argue that the main problem with Aaker's definition of brand personality and thus the scale, is that it is too wide as it embraces concepts beyond those of brand personality and more related to human traits (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003:150). They reason that by loosely defining 'brand personality', any non-physical attribute can be associated with a brand, including different abilities, gender or social class, which makes it difficult to actually measure brand personality based on the scale (ibid.). In this paper, we acknowledge the critique of Aaker's Dimensions of Brand Personality. However, we still find it useful in order to understand the match between influencer and brand's personalities. Thus we adopt the view of Aaker (1997) and see not only influencers but also brands as having human traits as it makes sense in order to determine whether the personalities match.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Aaker's (1997) Dimensions of Brand Personality originally were based on quantitative methods and data, and thus it might be natural to analyze brand personality on quantitative measurements. However, as we seek to fully understand how our respondents perceive the personalities of influencer and brand, the dimensions will be used qualitatively and the respondents will be asked to freely describe the personalities. This stands in opposition to quantitative

research in which respondents would have been given the full scale, which might have prompted answers that the respondents otherwise would not have thought of. By allowing the respondents to answer with their own words, we get a better understanding of their perceptions of brand and influencer personalities.

After having introduced theory on match and brand personality, the next section will present source credibility theory, which is the second theoretical perspective that will be the foundation for the analysis.

## **2.4 Source Credibility**

This theoretical perspective has been included in the paper with the purpose of broadening the understanding of perceived credibility in a commercialized context. Source credibility theory is found relevant in order to further investigate how users of Instagram perceive influencers' credibility given the fact that the medium is highly commercialized.

Source credibility is a theory that relates to the communicator of a message and that person's positive characteristics in order to understand how these can affect the receiver's acceptance of a specific message (Ohanian, 1990:41) The theory argues that persuasiveness is related to the credibility of the source i.e. that people are more likely to accept a message when they find the communicator as a credible source (Hovland et al., 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1991; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Desarbo & Harshman, 1985).

A number of researchers have addressed the construct of source credibility in order to measure the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985; Applebaum & Anatol, 1972; McCroskey, 1966). Models of source credibility generally try to categorize the dimensions that constitute the concept as a way to evaluate source credibility (Ohanian, 1990; Chu & Kamal, 2008). Most source credibility research and reflections are built on the source-credibility model (Hovland et al., 1953) and the source-attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985), which are two general models that describe attributes of effective celebrity endorsers (Ohanian, 1990:41).

Hovland et al. (1953) developed the source-credibility model when studying factors that could relate to the effectiveness of communication depending on who delivered it. They came up with two components of source credibility; expertness and trustworthiness which they argued is related to

individuals' tendency to accept a conclusion advocated by a given communicator (Hovland et al., 1953:21). The attractiveness-model by McGuire (1985) states that the effectiveness of a message is linked to the overall attractiveness of the communicator.

The most commonly used dimensions of source credibility are *expertise* and *trustworthiness* (Hovland et al., 1953; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Ohanian, 1990; McCracken, 1989). Expertise is defined as “*the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions*” (Hovland et al., 1953:21). That is, the perceived ability of the communicator to provide valid and accurate information or discuss a particular subject (Chu & Kamal, 2008; McCracken, 1989). Trustworthiness refers to “*the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid*” (Hovland et al., 1953:21). Trustworthiness is thus how willing a source is perceived to be in providing valid information (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Ohanian, 1991). Chu and Kamal explain that using misleading practices to communicate information about products will lead to less perceived trustworthiness of the source and consequently effectiveness of the advertisement can be damaged (Chu & Kamal, 2008:5). The source-credibility model provides the argument that sources that are perceived to hold expertise and trustworthiness are credible and thus persuasive (McCracken, 1989:311). Past research has also found that these dimensions of source credibility are vital in order to persuade consumers and influence their attitudes (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Desarbo & Harshman, 1985; Ohanian, 1990).

*Attractiveness* has also been widely used in the literature as another component of source credibility, originating from McGuire's attractiveness-model. Ohanian argues for the use of attractiveness as an additional component for source credibility, since attractiveness is an important factor for an individual's initial judgment of another person (Ohanian, 1990:42). Attractiveness holds the concepts of familiarity, likability and/or similarity of the source (McGuire, 1985:264). Chu and Kamal explain that this component of source credibility refers to the communicator's perceived social value such as “*physical appearance, personality, social status, or similarity to the receiver*” (Chu & Kamal, 2008). People tend to have more positive feelings towards attractive communicators due to a higher level of identification either within one's fantasies or self-concept (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). As Chu and Kamal (2008) studied source credibility in relation to bloggers, they argue that attractiveness is not an applicable descriptor due to the lack of visual images on blogs. However, as this paper focuses on influencers on Instagram, we still find the visual aspect highly relevant. Thus the three-dimension model of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness provides a

good theoretical framework. Ohanian (1990) argues that this three component construct can be used as a valid and reliable model to measure the credibility of a communicator.

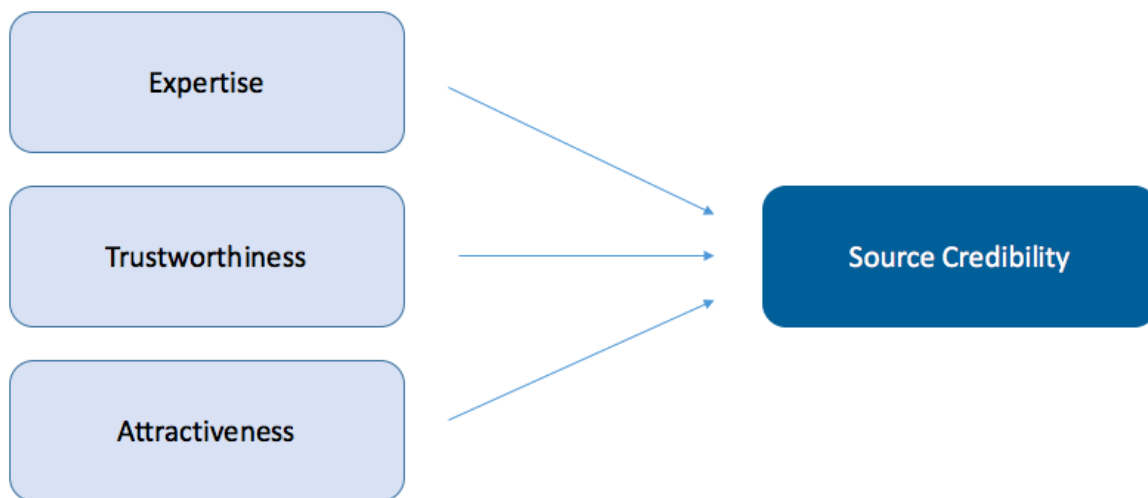


Figure 3: Illustration of the three-component construct of source credibility.

In this paper, focus is on how the consumers perceive influencer credibility in a commercialized context and thus the theory will be used in order to investigate influencer credibility on the parameters presented above.

McCracken criticizes source credibility theory in celebrity endorsement for being only one-sided. He argues that “*according to the model, the persuasiveness of the celebrity has everything to do with the celebrity and nothing to do with the product*” (McCracken, 1989:311). If persuasiveness only had to do with the credibility of the source, then *any* communicator, who had a satisfying level of credibility, could serve as an effective source for *any* advertising message. McCracken (1898) reasons that source credibility cannot be used as an isolated measurement of message effectiveness since one cannot ignore the endorsed product or service. In order for an endorsed message to be persuasive, an association between the meaning of the celebrity and the meaning of the endorsed product needs to be present (ibid.). In relation to our thesis, it can be argued that source credibility theory also ignores the sponsoring brand in a brand-influencer collaboration on Instagram. However, as mentioned in the previous section, the brand match will be analyzed with focus on brand-influencer fit, thus analyzing the association between consumers’ view on the influencer and the brand. Therefore, we find source credibility theory relevant in order to deepen the analysis by enlightening components that constitute

the communicator's credibility. This theory will thus add to the understanding of perceived credibility of influencers in the minds of the consumers.

The following section will introduce parasocial interaction as the third and final theoretical perspective. This will complete the theoretical foundation for the analysis.

## 2.5 Parasocial Interaction

This section will focus on the theory of parasocial interaction, which will later be applied to analyze the relationship between influencer and follower and what this means for the perceived credibility of the influencer.

Parasocial interaction (PSI) was first introduced to literature by Horton and Wohl in 1956 and was introduced to describe the artificial relationship that may arise between TV or radio personalities and their audiences (Horton & Wohl, 1956:215). They defined this relationship as "*intimacy at distance*" (ibid.).

Parasocial interactions are largely characterized by the contrast between the actual nature of the interactions and the way they are perceived by the observer. The reality of PSI is that it is one-sided, controlled by the performer and not disposed to mutual development (ibid.). However, viewers experience PSI as "*immediate, personal and reciprocal*" (Horton & Strauss, 1957:580). This emphasizes the point about PSI being artificial or illusionary relationships imagined by the observer. Horton and Wohl focus on what they call "personae" (Horton & Wohl, 1956:216). These are real people acting under their real name. People such as talk show hosts, quizmasters and announcers. Horton and Wohl puts emphasis on these personae's ability to create intimacy with large masses of strangers who happily engage in the parasocial interaction and believe that real intimacy exists. They argue that PSI is created in similar ways to real friendships: "*through direct observation and interpretation of his appearance, his gestures and voice, his conversation and conduct in a variety of situations.*" (ibid.) This has since been supported, as it has been argued that PSI includes aspects of real friendships (Auter, 1992). Another important aspect of PSI is the consistency that it offers. Horton and Wohl argue that the audience "lives with" the personae during the portions of his/her life that they are invited along for. They further argue that personae are predictable and unlikely to change over time. Thus they offer stability and comfort to a world that may otherwise seem chaotic. This

highlights the intensity of these perceived relationships that audience members may experience with a media persona.

There have been continuous attempts to conceptualize PSI since Horton and Wohl introduced the concept. Scales with a varying number of components have been created to formalize the characteristics of PSI. The most commonly known and tested scale is the one created by Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985), which is often referred to as the original PSI scale. This scale was created to examine the parasocial interaction between news viewers and their favorite newscasters (Rubin et al., 1985:167). The scale consisted of 20 items that had been derived from a questionnaire and adapted from past research. Each item is formulated as a sentence, which reflects certain aspects of the perceived relationship that the audience experiences with their favorite newscasters. Examples of items from the scale would be: *“The news program shows me what the newscasters are like”* or *“I see my favorite newscaster as a natural down-to-earth person”* (ibid.). The items are thus formulated to resemble aspects of real face-to-face social relationships. The original PSI scale has since been tested and reformulated numerous times to be used for studying PSI in relation to fictional TV characters (Cohen, 2004; Greenwood, 2009; Tian & Hoffner, 2010) or home shopping network hosts (Lim & Kim, 2011) Furthermore, it has been argued that PSI can also arise through online environments, in which the message is designed to bring the viewer closer to a mediated persona (Hoerner, 1990; Ballentine & Martin, 2005; Labreque, 2014; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011).

PSI is an interesting topic in relation to eWOM on Instagram due to the effect that it might have on the users’ perception of influencers’ credibility. Beninger (1987) found that designing communication that closely resembles real interpersonal interaction might contribute to an increased perception of the credibility and persuasiveness of that message (Beninger, 1987). This means that audiences who experience closeness or intimacy with a communicator may be more likely to be affected by that person’s communication. Instagram influencers are particularly interesting in this context as they typically show aspects of their life and invite their followers to be part of it in the same way that “real friends” on Instagram would.

Furthermore, Auter (1992) has argued that PSI increases with perceived interactivity. This means that an audience’s engagement in PSI increases when they feel that they are able to engage in interactive communication with the sender of a message. In his study, Auter showed viewers a TV show in which “the fourth wall” was broken, as the character addresses the audience directly. This action increased the audience’s perception of interactivity and thus the engagement in PSI (Auter, 1992:179). This is

interesting in relation to influencers on Instagram, as they too have the possibility to address their followers directly through text and video in posts and Instagram Stories.

While no previous study on PSI in relation to Instagram has been found, the studies made by Colliander and Dahlén (2011) are interesting in relation to this paper due to their focus on fashion blogging. In their study, they found blogging to be as effective as traditional peer-to-peer WOM due to the prevalence of PSI (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011:314). By this, it is meant that PSI mediates the gap between traditional peer-to-peer WOM and blogging, due to the inclusive nature of the blog post and the interactivity present on the blogs. They further emphasize that the parasocial relationship between bloggers and their readers is fragile, as bloggers must be seen as unbiased in order to maintain the relationship (*ibid.*). This correlates well with Horton and Wohl's (1956) perspective, as they conclude that viewers or audience members are free to withdraw from a parasocial relationship at any point in time without consequences. The parallels that can be drawn between fashion bloggers and Instagram influencers, form a foundation for wanting to examine the role of PSI in a commercialized context on Instagram.

It is important to note that there are differences in the way PSI is created and experienced on Instagram as opposed to the original subject of study which was TV. Firstly, Horton & Wohl as mentioned point out that PSI is "one sided and non-dialectical" (Horton & Wohl, 1956:215). They point out that there were ways for audience members of a TV show to get in touch with either program directors or technicians to express opinions or dissatisfactions, but that these were outside of the parasocial interaction itself. This, for instance, was also the case in Auter's 1992 study. However, it stands in contrast to Instagram in which influencers and followers are afforded the opportunity to engage in both private dialogue (through direct messaging) and public dialogue (through commenting). Secondly, Horton and Wohl study what they call *personae*, which could be news announcers, quizmasters and talk show hosts. While these *personae* act under their real name, they still assume a character or role while they appear on their shows and are most likely subjected to certain boundaries in terms of how they can behave and communicate. This offers a stability and dependability to the audience, as they count on consistency in the exposure of the persona. On the contrary, influencers on Instagram act entirely as themselves and on their own terms. This means that users of Instagram are not guaranteed the same type of consistency, which might affect the feeling of comfort that might otherwise exist.



While most studies on PSI have been conducted through quantitative studies, this thesis will analyze PSI through qualitative in-depth interviews. This method was chosen in order to achieve a thorough and all-encompassing understanding of our respondents' perception of the commercialization of Instagram. For the purpose of conducting a qualitative study on PSI, past literature has been thoroughly reviewed and three main concepts have been identified:

Concept	Meaning
Openness	The respondents' perceptions of how much an influencer shares and how well they know the influencer
Personal Relation	The respondents' ability to see themselves in or relate to the influencer
Interaction	The respondents' perception of the influencers desire to engage in contact or receive feedback

Figure 4: Overview of concepts for PSI analysis

Openness deals with the influencers' willingness to share personal information and thus the audience's feelings of knowing the influencer. Labrecque (2014) argues that "*openness should increase feelings of PSI, [as] the act of revealing information to a viewer should build intimacy and trust*" (Labrecque, 2014:136). Furthermore, she argues that viewers who engage in PSI express desire to gain knowledge of the media personality as well as insight into their lives (ibid.). Several of the participants in our focus group interview stated that they felt like some influencers are very good at sharing personal details about their lives. Furthermore, they stated that they felt like they knew some influencers' personalities and that they would like to know more (Appendix 1). Therefore, 'openness' was chosen as an element to our analysis.

Rubin et al. argue that a personal identification is important in relation to PSI. Part of their study focused on the viewers' ability to: "*see the media personalities as friends, imagining being part of a*

*favorite program's social world and desiring to meet the media performers*” (Rubin et al., 1985:156-157). This indicates that being able to identify with the media personality is central to PSI. The respondents in our focus group stated that they enjoyed following the influencers in their lives and felt like they were able to relate to them (Appendix 1). Therefore, ‘personal identification’ was also found to be a relevant concept of the PSI analysis in this paper.

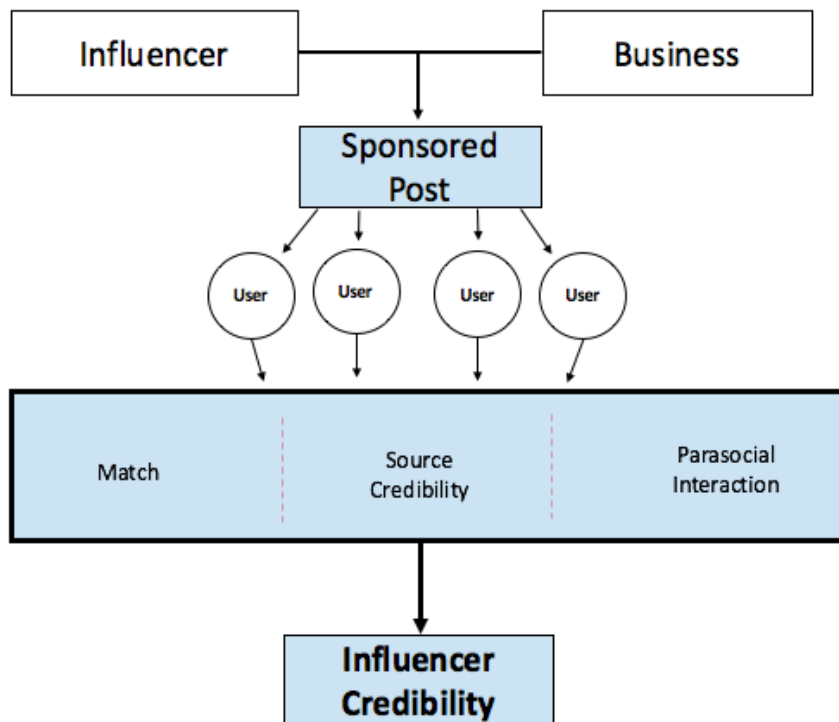
Furthermore, scholars argue that PSI increases along with perceived interaction, as this should increase people’s feelings of intimacy between themselves and the communicator (Altman & Taylor 1973, Auter, 1992; Labrecque 2014). Furthermore, Auter concluded that breaking the fourth wall increases interactivity. This is interesting as influencers often use Instagram Stories, where they speak into the camera, to address their followers directly which possibly increases PSI. Therefore, interaction was found to be relevant for this thesis, as Instagram is a media that does in fact allow interaction between influencers and followers.

Each concept has been thoroughly discussed in the in-depth interviews in order gain understanding of the respondents’ perception of each concept.

With PSI as the last theoretical area, the concepts of match, source credibility and parasocial interaction have now been introduced. These will form the theoretical foundation for our empirical analysis regarding influencer credibility in a commercialized context. In order to provide an overview of these key theoretical concepts, the following will give a visual presentation of the theoretical framework for this paper.

## **2.6 Framework of Key Theoretical Concepts**

In order to visualize the above elaborated theoretical areas, we have made a framework of key theoretical concepts that illustrates the key areas of research and how they relate to the context of this paper. The purpose of this framework is to simplify and illustrate the key concepts that will constitute the foundation for the empirical analysis and show how they relate to influencer credibility. As it only relates to the specific context in which our paper unfolds, it should not be seen as a future model for analyzing other contexts but rather as an overview of the specific theoretical frame for this thesis.



*Figure 5: Framework of key theoretical concepts*

The framework illustrates the influencer-business collaborations on Instagram via sponsored posts. These posts are seen by the users of Instagram who receive the information and form perceptions and opinions. The framework further illustrates that the paper will deal with influencer credibility through the three key theoretical perspectives: match, source credibility and parasocial interaction. Furthermore, it is made clear in the framework that this thesis seeks to understand the concept of credibility from the perspective of the consumers on Instagram. The key concepts of the framework will contribute to answering the research question of the paper, as they form the theoretical foundation for investigating influencer credibility.

As the framework of key theoretical concepts concludes the chapter on theory, the following chapter will present the methodology for this thesis.

This chapter will present the methodological reflections for this paper. The chapter will start by elaborating on the theory of science for the thesis, as it sets the boundaries for the research in terms of understanding how knowledge is constructed and our role as researchers. Then a section on induction and deduction will clarify how we have approached the data collection. Furthermore, our use of a case study will be explained. Finally, the qualitative methods including focus group study, in-depth interviews and survey research will be elaborated and reflections on the quality of the research will be presented.

## **3.1 Theory of Science**

In every research paper it is important to establish which theory of science is applied to answer the research question. The chosen theory of science determines the writers' perspective on knowledge and the truth, and furthermore it creates the frame for the methodological approach to the research (Larsen, 2005:135-136). Since this paper does not seek to uncover an absolute truth, but instead offers insight into a subjective and individual interpretation of the truth, the paradigm of social constructivism has been chosen.

Social constructivism stands in opposition to the positivistic paradigm in which an objective truth exists. Positivists believe that hypothesis needs continuous testing in pursuit of the absolute truth (Nygaard, 2005:26). This is not the case with social constructivism. Here an absolute truth does not exist, but is instead continuously constructed and reconstructed by people as a result of their interactions and constantly changing interpretation of the world that surrounds them (ibid:28). The focus on interactions and the social aspect is central when taking a social constructivist perspective, as it is believed that reality and knowledge is constructed of social interactions between individuals and individuals and objects (Esmark, Bagge & Andersen, 2005:17).

Social constructivism suits the research topic of this paper, as perceived credibility must be considered an individualistically constructed concept based on the interaction between the user and the object of their judgements.

Since knowledge is constructed based on social interaction and interpretation, it is important to acknowledge what this will mean for us as researchers. The knowledge produced in this paper will be affected by our interpretations as researchers. This means that it is highly important that we as researchers constantly remain critical and reflect upon our own role, to ensure that the constructed knowledge is not “*a reflection of our own social interests*” (Wenneberg, 2002:12). Our analysis and findings will furthermore be affected by our social interactions with the respondents in our in-depth interviews, which means that this paper will offer a subjective insight into a problem, based on the social relations that surround us, the researchers and them, the respondents.

### **3.2 Induction and Deduction**

The following section will clarify the interplay between induction and deduction in this paper in order to explain our approach to the collection of empirical data. The inductive method is based on generalizations as a result of observations (Erhardt, 2011:31). In relation to data collection, this means that a researcher collects a certain amount of data in order to make a general conclusion or create a theory. The deductive method is based on existing knowledge and the creation of hypothesis upon this knowledge (Erhardt, 2011:45). This means that assumptions on a specific topic are created based on what researchers presume to know. These assumptions are then investigated in order to make valid statements.

In the preliminary phases of this research the inductive method was used, as we collected literature within a general topic and hereafter organized our knowledge into systems. In addition to the collection of literature, we conducted a pilot study. This collection of knowledge gave us insight into the topic of perceived influencer credibility in a commercialized context on Instagram and allowed us to make general assumptions within the field of research. Consequently, we worked our way from the specific to the general.

After the preliminary research and the formulation of our research question we switched to the deductive method, as we looked to apply a general theory to our specific topic to see how it related. We did so by selecting three theories related to perceived credibility: match, source credibility and

parasocial interaction. We examined these theories against a collection of in-depth-interviews in relation to our chosen field of research.

By using inductive reasoning as our initial method we acquired substantial knowledge within the chosen field of research. Had we only worked with deductive reasoning we might have risked overlooking important aspects of our research, as we would have been entirely focused on answering our research question in relation to the chosen theory. Consequently, the mix of inductive and deductive reasoning allows for a more thorough understanding of the topic and a more comprehensive research.

### **3.3 Case Study**

For the purpose of investigating the commercialization of Instagram in relation to how consumers perceive influencer credibility, this paper will build on a case study in order to draw on specific situations.

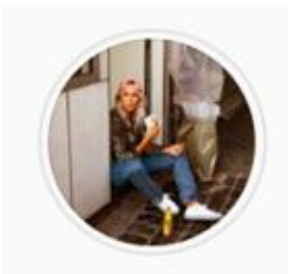
*“The qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context”* (Baxter & Jack, 2008:544). In this thesis, the case study method is thus a way of investigating influencer credibility in the context of commercialization on Instagram. Furthermore, Rendtorff (2012:243) argues, that a case study can be used to enlighten theoretical or practical issues by contributing with specific illustrations, documentation and thematization. This is found relevant in relation to this thesis in order to make the scope of the investigation more tangible.

Knowledge produced via case studies have been rejected by researchers who have a positivistic perspective. It has been argued that case studies will not provide the possibility to draw general conclusions, as it only provides the researcher with context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 1991). This is due to the fact that case studies produce knowledge based on one or more specific cases out of many, which means that not all cases have been investigated. This means that from a positivistic viewpoint, case studies cannot be used to make general scientific statements (ibid.) However, as we look at knowledge production through the social constructivist paradigm, this thesis does not claim to uncover the absolute truth and make general statements on all cases. Instead, we wish to create a thorough understanding of the topic.

It has been argued that through case studies, it is possible to “*gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved*” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017:10), which supports the use of case study in this thesis.

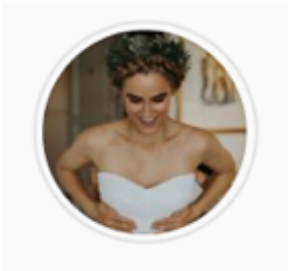
### 3.3.1 Selection of Case Influencers

In order to investigate how consumers on Instagram perceive influencer credibility in a commercial context, three Danish Instagram influencers have been chosen as a case study for this thesis: Emilie Lilja, Rock Paper Dresses and Emili Sindlev.



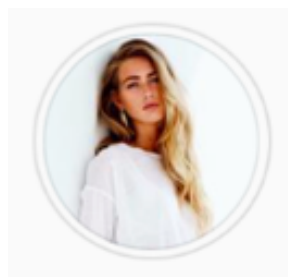
Emilie Lilja - @emielililja

Emilie Lilja is 30 years old and works as an influencer on her Instagram profile ‘Emilie Lilja’. She has 63,100 followers (Instagram, @emielililja).



Rock Paper Dresses - @rockpaperdresses

Behind the Instagram profile ‘Rock Paper Dresses’ is the 28 year old influencer Cathrine Widunok Wichmand. She has 46,300 followers (Instagram, @rockpaperdresses).



Emili Sindlev - @emilisindlev

The 22 year old Emili Sindlev is the influencer behind the Instagram profile ‘Emili Sindlev’. She has 167,000 followers (Instagram, @emilisindlev).

These case influencers have been chosen in order to bring value to the empirical analysis. As we wish to get a nuanced understanding of influencer credibility on Instagram, the three influencers are each within different categories. Emilie Lilja is mostly sport and health oriented, Rock Paper Dresses is a lifestyle influencer with focus on everyday life and Emili Sindlev has a strong focus on fashion. This was found important in order to broaden the scope of the analysis with different perspectives.

Furthermore, as we wish to understand credibility in a commercial context, it was important that all influencers showed elements of commercialization. In this regard, we found that the three influencers had each done a minimum of eight sponsored posts in a time period of two months, which implied that they were all commercial to some extent (Appendix 2).

Furthermore, for the empirical analysis on match, it makes sense to draw on specific commercial collaborations in order to further the understanding of match between influencer and brand. Therefore, three specific collaborations, one for each influencer, have been included in the case study with the purpose of providing concrete examples that can enlighten theoretical and practical issues in regards to match. The chosen collaborations are summed up in figure 6 and the specific posts are enclosed in an appendix (Appendix 2).

Emilie Lilja	Puma
Rock Paper Dresses	Adax
Emili Sindlev	Vero Moda

*Figure 6: Chosen collaborations for the case study*

The collaborations were chosen on the basis of three criteria. First, all collaborations should be commercial in a way where the influencer had been compensated in turn for posting the picture. Second, it was found important that the collaborations were of newer date and so we chose collaborations that had taken place in 2018. Third, all three brands in the collaborations should be well-known in order to make sure that our respondents were familiar with the brands and hence were able to describe them.

### **3.4 Qualitative Methods**

In order to explore and answer the research question, this thesis has its offset in the qualitative research methodology. Qualitative methods are often used in order to explore how people construct the world around them (Kvale, 2007), which in this paper is reflected in the objective to investigate the perceived credibility of influencers on Instagram in a commercialized context.



Qualitative methods are concerned with meaning and significance of data rather than the counting of data (Rasmussen et al., 2006:93). This fits with the purpose of the thesis since it seeks to explore consumer perceptions rather than quantitative measurements and thus meaning is essential. In this regard, Kvale also argues that qualitative research has the purpose of describing and explaining social phenomena “*from the inside*” (Kvale, 2007). As this paper looks at knowledge creation from a social constructivist perspective, the use of qualitative methods is therefore found appropriate.

By conducting qualitative research, respondents are allowed to express opinions through own words which allows the thesis to focus on “*the individual respondent’s perception and understanding*” (Rasmussen, Østergaard & Beckmann, 2006:93-94). This affects the paper in terms of the results and answers it provides, as it inevitably reflects the individual’s social understanding. Furthermore, it is important to be aware that all qualitative research is subject for some interpretation.

The qualitative research of this paper will consist of a focus group study, 12 in-depth interviews as well as a qualitative survey. As this thesis investigates consumers’ perception of influencer credibility on Instagram in a Danish context, it makes sense to complete the data collection in Danish. Therefore, the following will first elaborate on our reflections regarding translation of the data collection and then present the methodological considerations for the specific qualitative methods used in this thesis.

### **3.4.1 Translation**

As this paper is written in English while the data is collected in Danish, it has been necessary to translate all statements that are used in the empirical analysis. With all translation, it is important to consider what the source language can do in relation to what the target language can do, for the translation to serve the right purpose (Boase-Beier 2011:18).

Boase-Beier (2011:13) argues that “*translation is a process that preserves meaning, style and text-type*”, which implies that translation is much more than just translation of specific words. As languages encodes differences in ways of thinking, it is often not possible to directly translate a text without a potential mismatch in the source text and the translation. This can cause challenges when translating poems or other text-types that are very style-specific and where explanations are thus inappropriate, since the translation would risk losing form or ambiguity (Boase-Beier 2011:18). However, Boase-Beier further argues that meaning certainly can be expressed and comprehended in another language, if the translation functions as a transfer of content (ibid.).

The translation of meaning has been a great focus in this paper, as it has been essential to preserve the right expression and meaning in every statement used in the analysis. As a quality check, we tested our translation with two steps. Firstly, we translated two quotes from each in-depth interview and sent them to the respective respondents in order to receive their feedback. This gave us an indication of whether our translation had preserved the right meaning. Secondly, we each translated the same 15 quotes and compared our results. This enabled us to make sure that our translations were similar.

Being aware of potential pitfalls and staying highly focused on preserving the right meaning when translating the statements, ensures that our data is useful in the empirical analysis in order to create an understanding of perceived influencer credibility on Instagram. The data is deemed useful despite translation, as it is not the order of words as much as it is the core message that will be analyzed.

### **3.4.2 Focus Group Interview (pilot study)**

A focus group interview was conducted as a pilot study in order to collect data and gain knowledge as preliminary research. As already mentioned, our focus group interview was conducted inductively as the purpose was to gain deeper insight into the topics of Instagram, influencers and perceived influencer credibility in a commercialized context.

Focus group interviews are described as *“a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic or topics”* (Schmidt & Hollesen, 2006:63), which supports the purpose of conducting a focus group interview as a pilot study on the topic of this thesis. Furthermore, Demant (2006:133) explains that a focus group is useful if the researcher wants the data to help expand the perspective of the investigated phenomenon.

As this paper looks at knowledge through the social constructivist paradigm, we acknowledge that the understandings we produce via a focus group will be contextual and affected by the social situation. In a focus group, participants might give a specific answer based on what they believe is accepted in the group or they might try to convince the other participants to have a certain opinion (Halkier, 2010:127).

One of the main advantages of using focus group interviews is that it is similar to an everyday situation, which can create an obliging context that encourages participation. Flick (2002:114) argues that *“group discussions correspond to the way in which opinions are produced, expressed and*

*exchanged in everyday life*". However, this also means that as knowledge is produced based on the specific context, another focus group might not bring the same results (Demant, 2006:139). This means that we potentially miss out on other important perspectives and insights that would have appeared in another focus group.

Nevertheless, we argue that the focus group interview is useful as a pilot study for this thesis. This is due to the fact that it can help us test preliminary ideas and bring forward new perspectives regarding consumers' perception of influencer credibility. As the focus group will be conducted as a pilot study, the collected data will not be used as empirical findings for the analysis.

## **Participants**

As the focus group interview was meant to function as a pilot study, we invited our friends to participate and kept the interview informal. We initially invited six friends for the interview, but with two cancellations on the day, we ended up with four participants. They were all female within the age group of 18-34, which was the demographic scope of this paper: *Line* (24 years old), *Sarah* (25 years old), *Melanie* (25 years old) and *Line* (30 years old).

It was important that they were all active users of Instagram and that they had a certain knowledge of influencers. However, it was not a requirement that the participants were following our case influencers, as these were not the topic of the conversation.

When selecting our participants, we were attentive towards that the group of people we selected would affect the outcome of the interview, as data retrieved from a focus group is constructed and thus formed by the social context which the group represents (Demant, 2006; Halkier, 2010). Therefore, we wanted a group of people who were not completely homogeneous in order to bring as many perspectives forward as possible. Having a differentiated group ensures that the conversation can be nuanced and that the data collected will be comprehensive (Halkier, 2010; Flick, 2002). However, it was also important to create a group with some similarities, since this can create a relaxed atmosphere where the respondents feel safe and motivated to participate in the social interaction and sharing of opinions (Halkier, 2010; Flick, 2002).

## **Approach**

A semi-structured interview guide was made prior to the focus group interview (Appendix 3). This served the purpose of keeping the interview on the topic, while at the same time allowing the participants to bring other perspectives into the interview. According to Halkier (2010:126) there are three ways to structure a focus group interview: the loose or open model, the strict model and the mixed funnel model. The structure of a focus group should be consistent with the purpose of the interview and it determines the role of the moderator (ibid.). As our focus group was conducted as a pilot study, the primary purpose was to test our preliminary ideas and gain further insights into the participants' view on Instagram, influencers and perceived credibility in a commercial context. The focus group was structured as a mixed funnel model, which makes room for the participants' perspectives and interaction with each other, but at the same time ensures that the interests of the researcher is being met as it starts openly and ends more specifically (ibid.).

The focus group was led by one of us as a moderator, and the moderator's role was to facilitate the discussion and make sure that all participants were able to contribute. The interview was recorded on audio and a summary of key points has been made (Appendix 1).

### **3.4.3 In-depth Interviews**

As the primary empirical data for this paper, 12 qualitative in-depth interviews have been conducted with the purpose of gaining rich insights into how consumers on Instagram perceive influencer credibility in a commercial context.

The qualitative interview is a *“uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects' everyday world”* (Kvale, 2007:11). This indicates that it is a subjective presentation of a topic that is the focus of qualitative interviewing, and so this method fits with the social constructivist perspective of the paper. Kvale further argues that the qualitative research interview seeks to uncover information on both a “factual” and a “meaning” level, which entails a focus on both explicit expressions and what is said between the lines (ibid.).

According to Kristensen (2012:282) there are two types of qualitative interviews used by researchers when interviewing individuals. The exploratory interview has the purpose of exploring a wider topic and it can often generate information on topics where knowledge is sparse. The in-depth interview has the advantage of generating more detailed knowledge in relation to a specific topic (ibid.). In

order to answer the research question of this thesis, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with the purpose of establishing a detailed and thorough knowledge on the topic of perceived influencer credibility on Instagram in relation to match, source credibility and parasocial interaction. However, as we also wanted to get a general understanding of the respondents' view on the commercialization of Instagram, some exploratory elements were also included. Kristensen (2012) argues, that the two types of qualitative interviewing can supplement each other with advantages.

The semi-structured interview should be focused in a way where it is neither strictly structured with standard questions nor is it entirely open and "non-directive" (Kvale, 2007). This enables the interviewer to be open towards the perspectives and opinions of the respondents, while at the same time leading the interview towards certain themes. The semi-structured interview is carried out as an interaction between the researcher's questions and the respondent's answers (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2010:36) and is usually prepared with an interview guide that structures the course of the interview with predetermined themes and questions (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2010; Kvale, 2007). It is however important that the interview is a conversation where the researcher gives the respondent the opportunity to go into detail with some aspects that are found important. Also, the interview guide should be flexible in a way, where the interviewer can change and leave out questions if it makes sense (Kvale, 2007). Hence, the semi-structured interview can enhance the understanding of the respondent's experiences with, and understandings of, specific areas and themes in the respondent's lifeworld.

As with all qualitative methods, in-depth interviews are subject to some degree of interpretation as one statement can imply several meanings (Kvale, 2007). Sometimes an interviewer has to deal with ambiguity or contradictory statements, which demands an open and curious approach to interviewing in order to make the respondents clarify their statements. However, the statements will always be interpreted in some ways as one person's understanding of the meaning might be different than another person's despite clarification. We acknowledge this with our scientific perspective in the paper, as the in-depth interviews are understood as a way of creating knowledge by seeking to understand the meaning of central themes of the respondents' lifeworlds from their own perspective.

## Respondents

We found our respondents for the in-depth interviews through our acquaintances' network. We chose to find our respondents this way for two reasons. Firstly, it was important that the respondents were not people within our own network, since this could result in aspects being unsaid, as some details might be implicit between friends. Secondly, having a common friend can create a friend-like feeling, which fosters a situation where the respondent feels comfortable with sharing experiences, feelings and genuine opinions to someone who is otherwise a stranger. This should help create a professional yet comfortable interview situation, which provides the best foundation for obtaining useful empirical data (Kristensen, 2012:287).

It is argued that the ideal situation is to interview as many people as it takes to reach the “point of saturation” (Tanggaard & Bringmann, 2010; Kvale, 2007). The point of saturation is reached when further interviews bring little new knowledge on the topic of investigation (Tanggaard & Bringmann, 2010:32). In this regard, it could be argued that the point of saturation could be reached with less than 12 interviews, as it was clear that many of the respondents emphasized the same points. However, as parts of the interviews dealt with the specific influencers, it was found necessary to conduct four interviews on each case influencer. Therefore, four respondents for each influencer were selected, which resulted in the grouping seen in figure 7.

<b>Case influencer: Rock Paper Dresses</b>			
Respondent 1	Sine	26	Care Assistant
Respondent 2	Katharina	25	Kindergarten Teacher
Respondent 3	Stine	29	Site Manager
Respondent 4	Louise	23	Student
<b>Case influencer: Emili Sindlev</b>			
Respondent 5	Cecilie	26	Store Manager

Respondent 6	Anne	25	Restaurant Manager
Respondent 7	Stephanie	25	Pattern Designer
Respondent 8	Amanda	21	Student
<b>Case influencer: Emilie Lilja</b>			
Respondent 9	Line	24	Sales Assistant
Respondent 10	Sara	25	E-Commerce Store Manager
Respondent 11	Kia	28	Student
Respondent 12	Nanna	20	Student

*Figure 7: Respondents for in-depth interviews*

All respondents were females within the ages of 18-34 years old, as this was our predefined age group for the investigation. In order to achieve a nuanced understanding of the research topic, we wanted to select respondents who were different in relation to occupation and age. However, it should be noted that half of the respondents were 25 or 26 years old, and that it was not possible to recruit any respondents under 20 or over 29. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that all empirical data collected from in-depth interviews are dependent on the individuals being interviewed (Kvale, 2007). Consequently, having other respondents for the interviews might result in different perspectives and opinions.

It was a requirement that all respondents were active users of Instagram and furthermore, that they were following the specific case influencer that their interview regarded.

### **Approach**

All in-depth interviews were conducted on the basis of a semi-structured interview guide in order to ensure that the interviews would cover relevant questions relating to the research topic while allowing for flexibility and follow-up questions (Appendix 4). The interview guide was structured in blocks covering the central themes and it contained both research questions and interview questions, since

interview questions should be simpler and more adapted to everyday language (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2010; Kvale, 2007). Kvale (2007:57) explains that interviews can be structured with respect to thematic and dynamic dimensions, where thematic questions produce knowledge and dynamic questions promotes a positive interaction. In relation to this, we structured the interview questions to take both the thematic dimension and the dynamic dimension into account. Considering both the thematic and dynamic dimensions, enables the interviewer to approach the theoretical conceptions of the research topic, while also contributing dynamically to a natural conversational flow (Kvale, 2007:57-58).

Tanggaard and Brinkmann (2010:37) argue that no interview is neutral because it will always be determined by the agenda of the researcher, which is often theoretically reasoned. In order to be open to the respondents' opinions and new perspectives regarding perceived credibility, despite having a deep theoretical knowledge on the topic, we were attentive towards being presuppositionless, which Kvale (2007:12) describes as “qualified naïveté”. He further explains that rather than posing pre-formulated questions with respect to prepared categories, an interviewer should be sensitive to what is said and be critical of own presuppositions (ibid.). Having an open mind can allow the respondents to express their opinions and thoughts in their own words (Tanggaard & Brinkmann 2010). With this in mind, we approached the interviews with curiosity and attempted to put aside our own hypotheses and opinions during the interviews.

All in-depth interviews started with a short briefing about the purpose of the interview in order to make the respondents feel comfortable with the situation. They all agreed to the use of a tape recorder. The interviews were arranged with a set of opening questions to initiate the conversation and then it moved on to more complex questions. Within the theme of match, after having described the personality of the influencer and the brand, the respondents were shown the specific commercial collaboration with the influencer that their interview regarded (Appendix 2). This served the purpose of having a concrete example as a point of reference for the conversation, and to see how the respondents perceived the match when they were being presented with the context. All 12 in-depth interviews were recorded on audio and transcribed (Appendix 5-16). Transcribing verbal data into written form has been argued to be a “*key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology*” (Bird, 2005:227). This indicates the importance of transcribing, as it enables the researcher to become familiar with the data (Tanggaard & Brinkmann 2010). All interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.



In order to arrange the data from the in-depth interviews and provide a clear system of reference, all statements used for the empirical analysis have been highlighted in the transcribed versions. Furthermore, all highlighted statements have been given a number which is noted in the source reference in the analysis. This means that the last number in the interview references indicates the quote number instead of the page number. This ensures that all use of data from the in-depth interviews in the analysis can be traced back to the original statements in the transcriptions.

### **Thematic Analysis and Coding**

As a method for processing the collected data from the in-depth interviews, this thesis will use thematic analysis and coding. Braun and Clarke (2006:78) explain: *“Qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced, and thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis”*. Providing statements with specific codes (keywords) enables the researcher to deal with large amounts of data (Tinggaard & Brinkmann, 2010), which in this thesis is found useful in order to process our 193 pages of interview transcription.

*“Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”* (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). This indicates the use of thematic analysis when analyzing qualitative data. In line with this, Kristensen (2012) argues that a thematic analysis focuses on selected themes, and that it seeks an overall understanding of the theme by drawing together statements about the same theme from different interviews. Thematic analysis builds on a process where statements are coded individually. The act of coding is often put in relation to very systematic approaches with the purpose of creating quantitative descriptions within qualitative data (Kvale, 2007). However, Braun & Clarke argue that it is possible to use thematic analysis and coding as a flexible method for identifying or reporting patterns within different scientific beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2006:81). Thus this paper will use thematic analysis and coding in order to present different patterns, but due to our social constructivist perspective, we acknowledge that the patterns are socially produced and dependent on the individual’s lifeworld.

As previously mentioned, our analysis is conducted deductively, as we want to understand the respondents’ perspectives within an already set frame of theory. Consequently, we have a theme driven coding process, which looks for patterns within predefined themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We therefore coded our data with respect to our predefined themes, which was found in the key theoretical concepts: match, source credibility and parasocial interaction. The specific codes will be presented in each analysis. It should be noted, that coding our data deductively has the implication that our theoretical understanding might hinder our openness towards other themes that do not match the theory.

### **3.4.4 Qualitative Survey**

In order to collect supportive empirical data, we conducted a qualitative survey with open-ended questions. This served the purpose of collecting a larger amount of opinions on specifically chosen aspects of our research.

Survey research is characterized by a structured set of data, which means that information is collected about the same variables on one or more cases (De Vaus, 2002). A structured data set implies that all respondents answers the same questions with no flexibility in the order or wording of the questions. This stands in contrast to the in-depth interviews, where the semi-structured interview guide only served as the overall structure with flexibility for follow-up questions, change of order and adaption or discarding of existing questions. In relation to this, survey research is widely regarded as a quantitative method as it mostly produces countable data (Rasmussen et al. 2006). However, the survey in this thesis is used in order to generate qualitative data as we seek understanding.

As the purpose of the survey was to support empirical findings from the 12 in-depth interviews with more qualitative reflections, we designed the survey with open-ended questions. In this way, the respondents were allowed to formulate their own answers (De Vaus, 2002). The survey consisted of three initial screening questions, which ensured that we only received answers from females within the age of 18-34 that were active users of Instagram. Hereafter, the respondents were asked three open-ended questions relating to different areas of our research. The survey was sent out as an E-survey, which is a survey that is completed using electronic media, e.g. sent out online (Madsen & Grønbæk, 2012). After eliminating invalid answers, we had 42 responses (Appendix 17).

The use of an E-survey as a qualitative method can be criticised as it does not allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions if an answer appears unclear or ambiguous. As all qualitative data is subject for interpretation, it must be fair to assume that the lack of possibilities for clarification will have an

impact on the results. Consequently, the knowledge gained from a qualitative survey can be argued to largely depend on the respondents to provide clear and comprehensive answers to begin with.

### **3.4.5 Quality Assessment**

In any research project, it is important to reflect on the quality of the study. A study does not need to claim that the produced results are the definitive truth in order to hold quality, but rather it needs to *choose the right instruments to measure with* and to *measure correctly* (Rasmussen et al., 2006:136). Quality considerations in empirical research tend to be addressed using the concepts of “validity” and “reliability”. Validity refers to the researcher’s ability to actually investigate what he wants to investigate by making certain methodological considerations and choices (Larsen, 2005:138). Reliability refers to whether the study is reproducible, which means that two researchers independently can achieve identical results if they were studying the same phenomenon and with the same purpose (ibid.).

When evaluating the validity of a study, it is important to consider whether the used methods are able to bring an empirical data set that can provide a relevant and adequate answer to the research question (Riis, 2012). If the data set is not able to answer the research question, the study has relied on the wrong instruments to measure with. This thesis has its offset in the qualitative methodology, as it seeks to uncover how consumers on Instagram perceive influencer credibility in a commercialized context. Rasmussen et al. (2006) argue that when using qualitative methods, the researcher is able to understand subjects rather than measure them. Thus it can be argued that the use of in-depth interviews as the primary method for collecting empirical data is valid in order to further the understanding of the topic seen from the perspective of the respondents.

In relation to assessing the reliability of the study it becomes more complicated. As this concept relates to the data collection and the analysis of that data, the use of qualitative methods has some implications. Rasmussen et al. (2006) explain that it is fairly easy to evaluate the reliability in the quantitative methodology, as there are stricter rules. The difference of assessing reliability in qualitative studies as to quantitative studies lies primarily in the different roles of the researcher (Rasmussen et al., 2006:116). As the researcher plays an active role in the process of gathering and using qualitative data, it can be argued that such a study will never meet the requirement of reproducibility, as the study inevitably will be affected by the researcher’s own social understanding and therefore another researcher would never produce the exact same results. This is also supported

by Riis (2012:353), who explains that qualitative methods are characterized by the reflection that data is collected and interpreted by humans and consequently will be influenced by expectations, opinions and attitudes in opposition to pure technical measuring instruments. In this regard, we are aware of our role as researchers and that conducting in-depth interviews demands a high level of involvement from us. Thus we acknowledge that our results should be seen as an outcome of the social interaction between us and the respondents as well as our interpretation of the data, and consequently might not be reproducible.

However, several researchers have approached the evaluation of quality in the qualitative methodology based on other assessments (Riis, 2012; Kvale, 2007; Larsen, 2005). In order to ensure quality in qualitative research, it has been argued that transparency plays a vital role (Riis, 2012:348). In relation to this, the above chapter seeks to meet this requirement by clarifying methodological reflections and the implications on our results.

The reflections on the quality of the research concludes the chapter on methodology, and both the theoretical and the methodological framework for this thesis has now been established. The following will therefore begin the empirical analysis in order to investigate how consumers on Instagram perceive influencer credibility in a commercial context. The analysis is divided into three parts each focusing on a specific sub-question. Chapter 4 will investigate how significant the match is between influencer and brand in a commercial collaboration. Chapter 5 will then approach how consumers perceive source credibility in relation to influencers. And finally, Chapter 6 will end the analysis by examining the parasocial interaction between consumer and influencer in a commercialized context.

# Match Analysis

# 4

The following section will investigate the match between influencer and brand in sponsored collaborations. This analysis seeks to answer the sub-question: *How significant is the match between influencer and brand in a commercial collaboration?*

The analysis will consist of three parts that all serve the purpose of increasing the understanding of match as well as provide insights into the significance of a match. First, an analysis of the case influencers and brands will be presented in order to see whether a match can be found. This will be based on Aaker's (1997) Dimensions of Brand Personality. Second, based on Yoo & Jin's (2015) argument on the reverse transfer effect, an analysis will go deeper into how a match can be related to influencer credibility. Third, a thorough analysis of the importance of an influencer's narrative in relation to commercial collaborations will provide another valuable insight into significance of match. This part will be based on Kozinets et al. (2010), who argue that sponsorships should relate to the character narrative in order to enhance credibility of the sender.

The whole analysis on match will be based on our in-depth interviews in relation to the above mentioned theory. As the analysis is based on the interviews, we thus investigate the respondents' perceptions of the topic. This enables us to understand a potential match as well as the significance of this match from the perspective of the consumer.

## **4.1 Brand Personalities**

The following part will analyze the match between the case influencers and brands. This analysis will examine the personalities of the influencers and brands in order to further establish whether a match exists. The respondents were asked to describe how they perceived the personality of the influencer they were being interviewed about. Furthermore, they were asked to imagine that a brand could have

a personality and, with this in mind, describe the personality of the brand that the specific influencer had collaborated with. The respondents' statements were coded in relation to the facets of Aaker's (1997) Dimensions of Brand Personality (cf. figure 2) and the coding was based of the traits describing the facets. This enables us to categorize the statements into the five personality dimensions, which were the predefined themes for this analysis (Appendix 18).

The process of coding has been applied to the respondents' statements in relation to Emili Sindlev & Vero Moda, Rock Paper Dresses & Adax and Emilie Lilja & Puma in order to analyze the match between their personalities. The following will elaborate on the findings.

### 4.1.1 Emili Sindlev

The respondents' statements regarding Emili Sindlev's personality were coded in relation to the Dimensions of Brand Personality and the results are presented in figure 8.

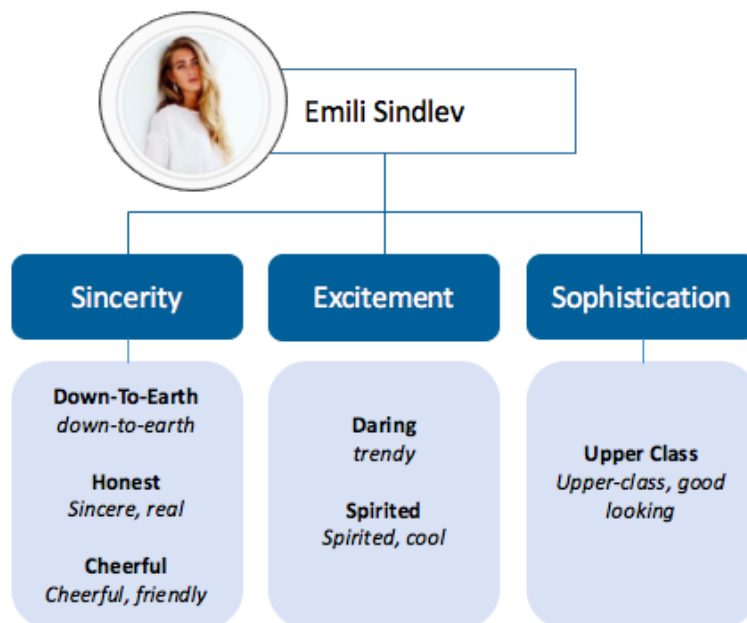


Figure 8: Personality of Emili Sindlev

Through coding of the respondents' statements, it was found that Emili Sindlev's personality was perceived to be within the personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement and Sophistication.

## Sincerity

The interviews uncovered that Emili Sindlev was described as a person with the characteristics of sincerity. One respondent states that she sees Emili Sindlev as very “*smiling*” and “*sweet*” (Appendix 10, respondent 6:1)<sup>1</sup>. This is coded as the facet ‘cheerful’, since it describes Emili Sindlev as appearing both cheerful and friendly. Another respondent explains that she perceives Emili Sindlev to be “*down-to-earth*” (Appendix 12, respondent 8:1), which is coded under the facet ‘down-to-earth’. Furthermore, she explains that she believes Emili Sindlev to be “*happy with whom she is as a person*” and “*true to herself*” (ibid.:2), which is related to the personality traits sincere and real and is thus coded under the facet ‘honest’. This is supported by one of the other respondents, who feel that Emili Sindlev is “*her own person*” and “*straightforward*” (Appendix 9, respondent 5:1), which is likewise coded as ‘honest’ since it also relates to being sincere and real.

## Excitement

The respondents also ascribe the personality dimension Excitement to Emili Sindlev’s personality. This is shown when one respondent describes her as “*colorful and full of energy*” (Appendix 9, respondent 5:2), which can be coded as ‘spirited’. One respondent states that Emili Sindlev is “*the kind of person, who can wear anything and any color and still look stylish*” (Appendix 12, respondent 8:3), which can be related to being trendy and is thus coded under ‘daring’.

## Sophistication

By talking about Emili Sindlev as “*very pretty*”, “*attractive*” (Appendix 11, respondent 7:1) and “*classy*” (Appendix 12, respondent 8:4), the respondents indicate that she is good looking, which is coded under ‘upper-class’. Also, one respondent describes Emili Sindlev as a “*Nordsjællandspige*” (Appendix 11, respondent 7:2), which is a Danish expression meaning upper-class. Directly coded under the facet ‘upper-class’, this statement also points to Sophistication as a personality dimension of Emili Sindlev.

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<sup>1</sup> As previously explained, this reference refers to appendix 10, respondent 6, quote number 1.

## 4.1.2 Vero Moda

Figure 9 illustrates the respondents' statements regarding the personality of Vero Moda after being coded according to the facets of Aaker's Dimensions of Brand Personality.

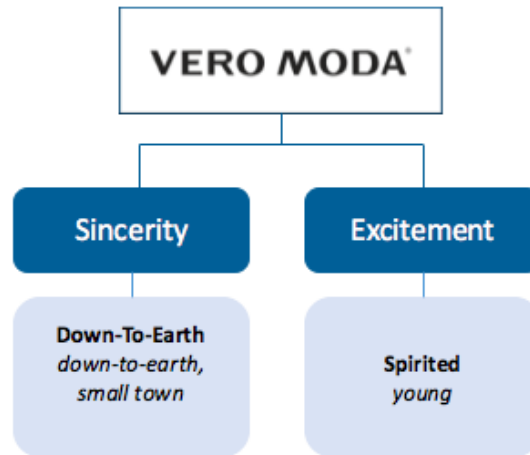


Figure 9: Personality of Vero Moda

The analysis of Vero Moda shows that the brand was categorized under the personality dimensions: Sincerity and Excitement.

### Sincerity

The four respondents described Vero Moda quite similarly. The brand was labelled as “*basic*” (Appendix 11, respondent 7:3), “*mainstream*” (Appendix 10, respondent 6:2), “*boring*” (Appendix 9, respondent 5:3) and “*provincial*” (Appendix 12, respondent 8:5). These statements are coded under the facet ‘down-to-earth’, by describing Vero Moda as being small-town. One respondent further explains that “*it is the kind of brand that everybody can afford, very plain and simple and not all to fancy*” (Appendix 10, respondent 6:3). This supports the idea of Vero Moda as being ‘down-to-earth’, and thus within the dimension of Sincerity.

### Excitement

Two of the respondents expressed that they perceived Vero Moda to be “*very young*” (Appendix 10, respondent 6:4; Appendix 12, respondent 8:6). This is coded as ‘spirited’ indicating that the brand also holds an element of Excitement.



### **4.1.3 Match: Emili Sindlev and Vero Moda**

From the above analyses, it can be concluded that both personalities are categorized within the dimensions of Sincerity and Excitement. Emili Sindlev and Vero Moda are both described as down-to-earth, which indicates that there are similarities in the two personalities. However, Vero Moda is also defined as “small-town” which is rather different from Emili Sindlev. It is also seen that in relation to Sincerity, Vero Moda is placed under the facet ‘spirited’ by being described as young, where Emili Sindlev is described as spirited and cool. Furthermore, it shows from the analyses, that Emili Sindlev’s personality holds six facets, where Vero Moda is perceived to be within only two facets. Due to these considerations, it can be argued that there is only a weak match between Emili Sindlev and Vero Moda’s personalities according to the Dimensions of Brand Personality.

When asked directly about the match, several respondents expressed that when thinking of Vero Moda and Emili Sindlev, they saw no clear match. One respondent explains that *“on the face of it, I would not have supposed that Emili Sindlev shopped at Vero Moda”* (Appendix 10, respondent 6:5). This supports the findings from the above analyses. However, in relation to the specific collaboration between Emili Sindlev and Vero Moda (the sponsored post), one respondent states *“I actually think that the outfit looks really nice, and it does not look forced at all”* (Appendix 12, respondent 8:7). Another respondent says that Emili Sindlev is a person, who can fit into many different categories when it comes to style. And because of that, the respondent feels that there is a good match in the sponsored post (Appendix 11, respondent 7:4).

### **4.1.4 Rock Paper Dresses**

All statements regarding Rock Paper Dresses were coded through the same process as the sections above. The results are shown in figure 10.

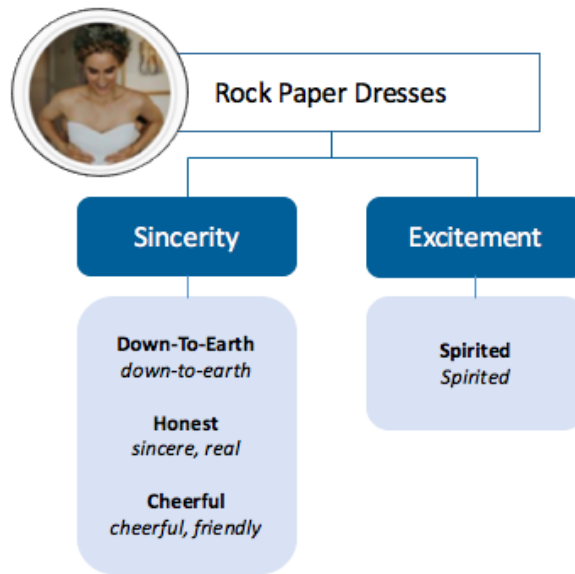


Figure 10: Personality of Rock Paper Dresses

By coding the respondents' statements, it was found that Rock Paper Dresses' personality largely fits with the personality dimensions: Sincerity and Excitement.

### Sincerity

One aspect that all the respondents mention, is that Rock Paper Dresses seems very positive. One respondent states that Rock Paper Dresses is *"always smiling"* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:1) while another respondent perceives Rock Paper Dresses as a person who *"has a positive view on life"* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:1). Common for all respondents is that they express a feeling of Rock Paper Dresses as being extremely happy, which is coded under the facet 'cheerful'. Another trait of the facet 'cheerful' is being friendly. In regards to this, one respondent says: *"She seems like such a sweet and kind person, who would be nice to her friends and good to her surroundings"* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:2). Rock Paper Dresses is further characterized by the personality dimension Sincerity, with statements that is coded under the facet 'honest'. For example, Rock Paper Dresses is described as *"natural looking"* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:2) and *"her own person"* (Appendix 6, respondent 2:1), which indicates that she is sincere and real. Finally, three of the respondents directly say that Rock Paper Dresses is *"down-to-earth"* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:3, Appendix 6, respondent 2:2, Appendix 7, respondent 3:3), which is another facet to Sincerity.

## Excitement

It was found that Rock Paper Dresses' personality can also be characterized within the personality dimension Excitement. One respondent states that Rock Paper Dresses seems “*enthusiastic and energetic*” (Appendix 6, respondent 2:3), which is coded under the facet ‘spirited’. Supportive of this, another respondent perceives Rock Paper Dresses' personality to be “*very colorful*” and she explains that it implies a lively and energetic lifestyle (Appendix 8, respondent 4:1).

### 4.1.5 Adax

The same analysis was also conducted on the personality of Adax, which can be seen in figure 11.

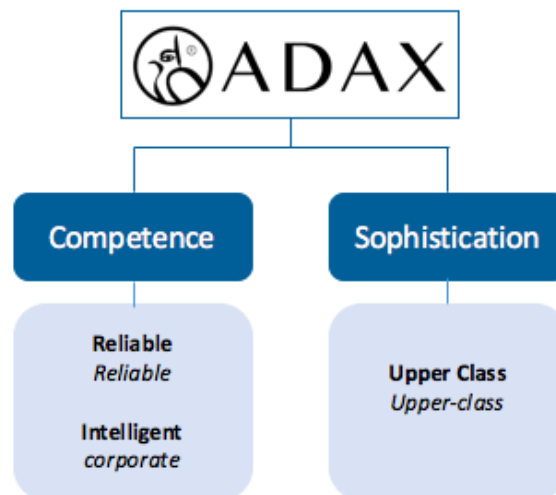


Figure 11: Personality of Adax

The respondents' statements were coded according to the Dimensions of Brand Personality and the analysis showed that the personality of Adax was perceived to be within the personality dimensions: Competence and Sophistication.

### Competence

Through analyzing Adax's personality, it was especially clear that the respondents saw Adax as equal to good quality. The respondents state that Adax is “*good quality*” (Appendix 8, respondent 4:2) and “*wear-resistant materials*” (Appendix 5, respondent 1:4), which indicates a focus on Adax as something you can count on. This is coded as the facet ‘reliable’, which relates to the personality

dimension Competence. Furthermore, the respondents also perceive Adax to be “*business like*” (ibid.:5) and “*professional*” (Appendix 6, respondent 2:4), and one respondent explain that Adax is more “*career oriented*” (ibid.:5), which is coded under the facet ‘intelligent’, since it can be argued to hold the meaning of being corporate.

### **Sophistication**

Some of the respondents’ statements were coded under the facet ‘upper-class’, which is themed under the personality dimension Sophistication. When talking about Adax’s personality, two respondents directly express that the brand is sophisticated. One of them states that Adax is sophisticated because it is “*classic*” and “*simple*” (Appendix 5, respondent 1:6), which is coded as ‘upper-class’.

#### **4.1.6 Match: Rock Paper Dresses and Adax**

Based on the results according to the Dimensions of Brand Personality, it can be argued that the personalities of Rock Paper Dresses and Adax do not match. This is evident since they are categorized under different facets and thus personality dimensions. Where Rock Paper Dresses’ personality is described with traits related to ‘down-to-earth’, ‘honest’, ‘cheerful’ and ‘spirited’, Adax’s personality is portrayed as ‘reliable’, ‘intelligent’ and ‘upper-class’.

In this case, the interviews revealed that all respondents actually believed Rock Paper Dresses and Adax to be a good match when they saw the specific context and product. This is seen when one respondent says: “*But I think that this bag is very much her style*” (Appendix 8, respondent 4:3), and it is supported by another respondent: “*Well, in this particular picture, I actually believe that there is a good match because I can see, that this bag, uhm, fits her style*” (Appendix 6, respondent 2:6).

The respondents did, however, express that at first they did not see the connection between the two personalities. One respondent explains “*I believe that she is more youthful and bubbly than what I imagine Adax to be*” (Appendix 7, respondent 3:4).

### 4.1.7 Emilie Lilja

The respondents' statements regarding the personality of Emilie Lilja were coded in relation to the Dimensions of Brand Personality and the results are presented in figure 12.

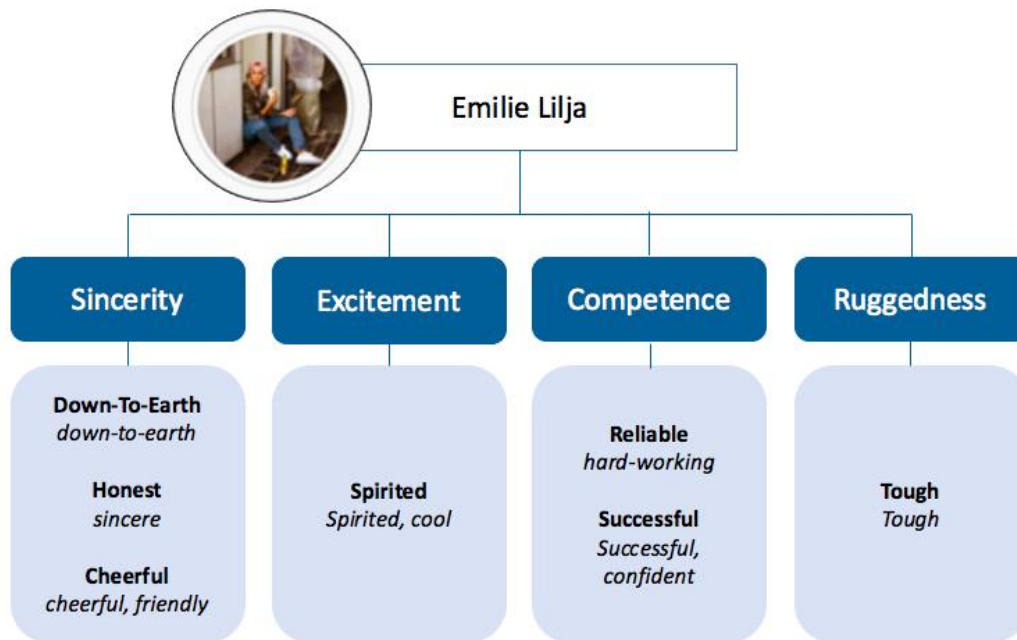


Figure 12: Personality of Emilie Lilja

The analysis of Emilie Lilja indicated a personality with many facets. This was made clear as the respondents' statements suggested that Emilie Lilja can be categorized under four of the personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence and Ruggedness.

#### Sincerity

The interviews uncovered that Emilie Lilja's personality was characterized by three facets under Sincerity. One respondent expresses that Emilie Lilja is very "down-to-earth" and that "she does not take herself too serious" (Appendix 16, respondent 12:1+2). This is coded under the facet 'down-to-earth'. Additionally, another respondent describes Emilie Lilja as "genuine" because she shows many sides to her personality (Appendix 13, respondent 9:1). Since it can be argued to hold the meaning of being sincere, this is coded under the facet 'honest'. Finally, several statements are coded under the facet 'cheerful', which also relates to the personality dimension Sincerity. For example, one respondent states that Emilie Lilja is "loving" and "caring" (Appendix 15, respondent 11:1), which

could indicate the meaning of being friendly. Also, Emilie Lilja is described as “*happy*” (Appendix 16, respondent 12:3), which suggests that she is cheerful, and these statements are thus coded hereunder.

### **Excitement**

In relation to the personality dimension Excitement, Emilie Lilja is described as being “*energetic*”, “*bubbly*” (Appendix 13, respondent 9:2), “*positive*” (Appendix 15, respondent 11:2), and “*lively*” (Appendix 14, respondent 10:1), which indicates a spirited personality. Moreover, one respondent states that Emilie Lilja is “*very cool*” (Appendix 15, respondent 11:3). These statements are therefore coded under the facet ‘spirited’.

### **Competence**

One respondent expresses that Emilie Lilja is a person who can “*juggle many things at once*” in relation to her career (ibid.:4) This suggest that she is hard-working, which is a trait to the facet ‘reliable’. Also, Emilie Lilja is described as being “*successful*” (Appendix 15, respondent 11:5) and “*sure of herself*” (Appendix 14, respondent 10:2), which is related to the traits successful and confidence and therefore coded under ‘successful’.

### **Ruggedness**

Emilie Lilja can also be characterized within the personality dimension Ruggedness. Describing Emilie Lilja as “*sporty*” and “*fit*” (Appendix 16, respondent 12:4), points to the consideration that she is tough and can thus be coded under the facet ‘tough’.

## **4.1.8 Puma**

The same coding process as all the above analyses was conducted in relation to Puma. The results are shown in figure 13.

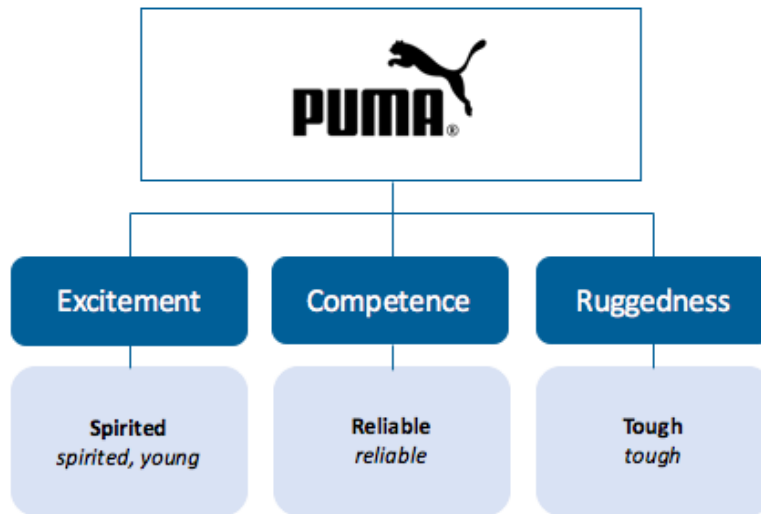


Figure 13: Personality of Puma

Analyzing the respondents' statement regarding Puma suggested that Puma's personality could be categorized within the personality dimensions: Excitement, Competence and Ruggedness.

### Excitement

The respondents state that Puma is “energetic” (Appendix 13, respondent 9:3), “active” and “young” (Appendix 16, respondent 12:5), which points to the traits of being young and spirited. These statements are thus coded under the facet ‘spirited’.

### Competence

In relation to the personality dimension Competence, Puma is described as “good quality” (Appendix 14, respondent 10:3), which is coded under the facet ‘reliable’, since it implies that Puma's products are long-lasting.

### Ruggedness

All the respondents express that they perceive Puma as being sporty, and one respondent further explains that Puma is “rough” and “like a wild animal” (Appendix 15, respondent 11:6). This all indicates that Puma's personality is related to the dimension Ruggedness, since these statements can be coded under the facet ‘tough’.

#### 4.1.9 Match: Emilie Lilja and Puma

The analysis of Emilie Lilja showed that the respondents saw her personality as many-sided. She was placed in several facets within four out of five personality dimensions, which indicates that her personality holds many different aspects. Puma was described within three personality dimensions, which all match the personality of Emilie Lilja. This suggests the similarities of the two brands, and from the Dimensions of Brand Personality it can thus be argued, that there is a match to a certain extend.

When asked about the connection between Emilie Lilja and Puma, all respondents express that they see a good match. *“I think that it fits well”* (Appendix 13, respondent 9:4) one respondent says, and another respondent states *“I think that it makes very good sense. Because even though she is a DJ and a model and not a sports personality as such, she is still very fit and active in her everyday life”* (Appendix 16, respondent 12:6). One respondent expresses that she believes that there is a good match because of the sporty expression in both personalities, but at the same time, she does not feel that Emilie Lilja would choose Puma as a brand if it was not sponsored, which makes the match less convincing in her mind (Appendix 14, respondent 10:4).

All the above sections analyze match based on Aaker’s Dimensions of Brand Personality. It was found that according to these dimensions no absolute match was found between the case influencers and brands. The analysis showed that, based on pure associations, Emilie Lilja and Puma were perceived to be the best match. Emili Sindlev and Vero Moda were a partial match and there was no match between Rock Paper Dresses and Adax. However, the in-depth interviews revealed that even though the respondents did not naturally link the personalities in their minds, they still felt that a match occurred when they saw the specific collaboration. This indicates that it is not possible to measure influencer-brand matches based purely on associations of personalities, since it is clear that the context also plays an important role when consumers make evaluations of the match in a sponsored collaboration.

In order to broaden the analysis of match, the following will analyze the influencer-brand match in relation to influencer credibility.



## 4.2 Influencer-Brand Match and Credibility

This part will further analyze the significance of a match between influencers and sponsoring brands. This analysis will deal with the influencer-brand match and how this impacts the perceived credibility. In our in-depth interviews, the respondents were asked about the importance of a match between influencers and brands in sponsored collaborations. The respondents' statements have been classified under the following two codes: "*match is important*" and "*match determines credibility*" (Appendix 18).

This analysis is further built on the argument that consumers' associations of the endorser and the endorsee determines the effects of the advertisement (Kamins, 1990). Also, it was found that the "celebrity-brand fit" was related to the perception of the endorsee's credibility (Yoo & Jin, 2015). This suggest that an influencer-brand match is likewise related to the perceived credibility of the influencer.

In relation to the match between influencers and the brands that sponsor them, most of the respondents express that it is important that the brand fits with their overall idea of the influencer. One respondent states: "*Definitely! It is definitely that thing about that it has to fit, and you have to be able to believe that it is something they would have wanted to buy or test, even if they were not being paid*" (Appendix 11, respondent 7:5). Another respondent says: "*Yes, I think that it should be related, because otherwise they [the influencers] just become even more fake*" (Appendix 7, respondent 3:5). This indicates that the consumers are aware of whether a collaboration between an influencer and a brand matches, and furthermore that it relates to how they perceive the influencer. The importance of a good match is also supported by a third respondent, when expressing that she believes that the fit between the influencer and the brand brings purpose to the collaboration: "*... I just think that there are some collaborations that don't make sense, if the company does not... like... match the influencer*" (Appendix 14, respondent 10:5).

Furthermore, it became evident that most of the respondents feel that the match is closely related to the influencer's credibility. One respondent expresses that it creates a feeling of trust if the values of the brand match the influencer as a person:

*"I am generally not a big fan of sponsored posts, but if I can feel that this is a brand that really matches the influencer, and that the overall values fit her [the influencer] as a person,*

*I am more likely to trust that she is actually sincere rather than if it was some product that was far from what she normally likes”.* (Appendix 12, respondent 8:8).

Another respondent states:

*“... it has to fit into the overall idea I have about the influencer I am following. I definitely think that if they [the influencers] collaborate with a brand that I believe makes a lot of sense and that I am generally positive towards, then I think they seem more credible. But if they collaborate with some kind of brand, where I first of all believe that the company or the brand is kind of... I don't know... sketchy or so, and that I don't really understand why they collaborate with this company [...] then I feel it is a bit unreliable and like just for the money”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:7).

This statement shows that the respondent also believes that a good fit between the influencer and the sponsoring brand is important, and that the match is built on the respondent's positive or negative feelings towards the brand as well as a general perception of whether the collaboration “makes sense”. It indicates that in order for the influencer to appear credible when doing sponsored collaborations, it is important that the consumer feels that there is more to the collaboration than just money. This is furthermore supported by a respondent who expresses that she sees influencers as more credible if they chose to collaborate with brands that fit their personalities. She says: *“...that I can feel that the brand actually matches the influencer in a way so if there had been no money involved, the influencer would still be interested in the product”* (Appendix 13, respondent 9:5). Several of the respondents mention that a good match between an influencer and a brand makes them believe that the influencer is sincere and honest when promoting something, which can otherwise be difficult to tell, since there is money involved. Only one respondent did not feel that the influencer-brand match impacted the perceived credibility of the influencer. She explains: *“there are some sponsored things, that fit better with who they [the influencers] are or who you feel they are [...] but I don't know if it makes them less credible. I just think I expect that even though they receive sponsored products they give their honest opinion about the product”* (Appendix 8, respondent 4:4).

The above reflections on the importance of a match were also supported in the online survey. When asked what the match between an influencer and a brand in a sponsored collaboration means for the respondents' perceptions of the influencer, most of the respondents express that the fit is very important. Also, many respondents also directly state that it impacts how they perceive the

influencer's credibility. This can be seen when one respondent comments: *"Yes, I believe that a match between the two parts are important in relation to my perception of the individual influencer. If there is no natural connection, the influencer will appear unreliable and fake."* (Appendix 17). Another comment from the survey shows that a poor match can result in lack of respect for the influencer, and that the respondent expects an explanation in order for the influencer to maintain credibility: *"If there is no clear or obvious connection, I lose respect for the influencer. If it [the collaboration] is not clear, I expect a thorough explanation for credibility"* (Appendix 17).

The influencer-brand match has become relevant due to the high commercialization on Instagram. Over the last couple of years, Instagram has become a medium with many collaborations between influencers and brands, which the consumers now have to determine their attitude towards.

The above analysis shows that the match between an influencer and the sponsoring brand in a commercial collaboration is very important. The empirical findings imply that a good match mediates the boundaries between being sincere when recommending certain products/services and simply presenting a specific opinion because there is money involved. Thus a genuine match can be seen as a means to justify the sponsored collaboration from the influencer's side where a poor match is likely to negatively impact the influencer's credibility because the collaboration then appears insincere and as if it was only executed for financial gain. This supports the findings of Yoo & Yin (2015), who found that especially the absence of a match impacted the endorsee's credibility.

The above statements regarding the influencer-brand match indicates that perceived influencer credibility is highly related to how the sponsorship fits into the respondents' overall perceptions of the influencer. This suggests that influencers should only collaborate with brands that fit them. It was seen that the respondents perceived a match to exist when a sponsorship felt natural and as something the influencer would purchase and use without being sponsored. Hence, in order to enhance influencer credibility, a sponsorship should seem as a natural choice for the influencer, which points to the consideration that it should match the overall style of the influencer.

In the previous analysis, it became clear that the specific match between the case influencer and the sponsoring brands were not perceived as obvious for the respondents. It showed that a match could not be assessed based purely on dimensions of personality without considering the context of a sponsored post. This implies that there is a difference between pure brand associations and how a match can be perceived when put in a specific context. This point about how the context is important

in terms of determining a match relates to the above findings because the context helps illustrate how and if a sponsorship fits the consumers' perceptions of an influencer. Kozinets et al. (2010) explains how the overall perception of a communicator can be described as his/her character narrative. In order to further investigate the significance of the match, the following will analyze how a perceived match is related to the influencer's character narrative and whether this impacts the influencer's credibility.

### 4.3 Character Narrative

This section will look further into the character narrative of the influencer in order to create a deeper understanding of the significance of the match in relation to how influencer credibility is perceived. The character narrative is a term used by Kozinets et al. (2010) when describing the "story" of a communicator. The narrative includes aspects such as values, norms, habits and attitude which all constitutes how others perceive a person and it thus determines the expectations others have towards this person's behavior. Kozinets et al. (2010) argue that word of mouth marketing is more likely to be positively received if it follows the narrative of the character. In this regard, the respondents from the in-depth interviews were asked what made an influencer on Instagram credible in their opinion. Also, they were asked more questions in relation to how they perceived a good match and how/if a good/poor match impacts their perception of an influencer. In this analysis, the statements were placed under the overall theme "character narrative" and coded under "*overall style*", "*consistency in sponsorships*", "*theme/category*", "*relation to own life*" and "*use in non-sponsored context*" (Appendix 18).

The in-depth interviews revealed that the respondents were very focused on whether a sponsored collaboration matches with the influencers everyday life and routines. It was found important that an influencer expressed a clear and consistent "story" with the sponsorships in order to appear credible. In relation to this, the respondents express that an influencer should keep a common thread throughout their feed. One respondent explains: "*They [the influencers] are not credible when something stands out. I mean, when something does not fit into the things that are already there*" (Appendix 6, respondent 2:7). This indicates that the respondent feels that a sponsored post should match the influencers' existing content thus the overall style of the influencer. This is further supported by another respondent who talks about how sponsored posts have to fit into the "normality" of the influencer in order to give credibility to the influencer: "*... Something that is far from what they normally post. Then you'll think that they only post it because they are being paid*" (Appendix 11,

respondent 7:6). This suggest that if a sponsored collaboration stands out as something that would not normally be featured in the influencer's feed, then it can appear to be done for financial purposes only and thus it can be questioned whether the influencer is sincere. It was mentioned by one respondent that a sponsored collaboration had to make sense in relation to the visual style of the influencer (Appendix 10, respondent 6:6). This also points to the consideration that an influencer should keep a common thread throughout their feed, so that sponsorships match with the overall style of the influencer.

It showed in the interviews regarding Rock Paper Dresses that even though the respondents at first did not naturally link Adax with Rock Paper Dresses, all four respondents expressed that there was a good match when they saw the specific post. One respondent states *"It's pink and she loves pink"* (Appendix 8, respondent 4:5) while another respondent talks about how it matches Rock Paper Dresses' style because she is more down-to-earth instead of very high-end when it comes to fashion (Appendix 5, respondent 1:8). This suggest that the sponsored collaboration with Adax fits into the story and lifestyle of Rock Paper Dresses. In this regard, one respondent mentions how an influencer, who normally buys very expensive handbags would be untrustworthy if she accepted a sponsorship from a more affordable brand: *"Lets say, if it was Sandra Willer, who always buys Louis Vuitton and Miu Miu and Prada and whatever, and she then got an Adax bag, then I would be like 'you have only accepted that because you are probably being paid', like 'it's not you, it's ridiculous'."* (Appendix 8, respondent 4:6). This suggests that because Sandra Willer has created a universe around her with only designer bags, then it would appear less credible if she was sponsored by a lower-priced brand such as Adax.

In relation to the common thread, some respondents argue that it is important in order for an influencer to appear credible that their sponsored collaborations fit within one overall theme or category. One respondent express that if an influencer has sponsored content that points in several directions or is within many different categories, then she would question whether the influencer was actually being sincere: *"I sometimes feel that if their [the influencers] sponsorships are a bit all over the place, then I lose... well... then they lose some credibility, I think. Because I don't know if they then really mean it or if it is just because they receive money for it"* (Appendix 13, respondent 9:6). The same respondent also argues that it would appear more credible if an influencer has a specific theme and the sponsored posts are kept within this theme. She gives an example regarding sneaker interested influencers who enter into sponsored collaborations with the shoe-care brand Jason Markk. Here, the

respondent argues that this would appear credible to her because it would feel natural and she would think that this is a product that the influencers would use anyway (ibid.:7). This is supported by another respondent who states: “... *but I think... like... there has to be some kind of niche [...]. You can't be someone who reviews smartphones and TVs and then say 'you should wear this when you go clubbing tomorrow night'*” (Appendix 10, respondent 6:7). This perspective is supported by Kozinets et al (2010), who give the example of a “mommy” blogger, who receives a free cell phone that she promotes on her blog. This created negative feedback from her readers, which Kozinets et al. argue is due to the impression that the campaign did not relate to the blogger’s character narrative. The blogger’s narrative was about being a stay-at-home mother and building a bond with her readers through very personal content where she was showing her family and sharing parenting struggles. Therefore, the cellphone campaign caused negative responses, since it did not match the blogger’s character narrative (Kozinets et al 2010:79).

The same dynamics was seen when investigating credibility on Instagram in our case, which points to the consideration that it is important for an influencer to keep a common thread. It suggests that influencers are more credible in relation to sponsored posts when the sponsorship matches the consumers’ expectations to the influencer based on previous behavior and values, and that it appears more credible when an influencer is consistent in what she expresses on her Instagram profile. This is furthermore supported by the results from the online survey, where one respondent argues: “*It has to fit together. Otherwise it seems fake. A sports geek should not suddenly have sponsored posts with candy or alcohol – it has to have some kind of consistency*” (Appendix 17). Another respondent also explains that she perceives an influencer to be more credible if the sponsorship is related to the influencer’s profession: “*An influencer appears definitely more credible if the product/brand they are being sponsored by seems relevant in relation to who they are/their profession. (For example if a cake-blogger is being sponsored by a brand producing kitchen machines)*” (Appendix 17, survey).

In relation to this, it could be assumed that as long as a “beauty” influencer only did sponsored collaborations with beauty brands, the influencer would maintain credibility with the consumers. However, one respondent states that a “fashion” influencer cannot just promote any clothing brand and still appear credible. The respondent explains: “*I don't think you can just promote any brand within your area, it still has to fit to the... like... profile of the influencer*” (Appendix 5, respondent 1:9). Two other respondents stress the importance of being loyal towards specific products, since it can seem untrustworthy to be sponsored by two competing products.

*“I think it is important that I feel that they [the influencers] don’t just change their opinions in regards to who there are being sponsored by. [...] For example, if you have received money to state that this face cream from Nivea is the best, and you say that you use it every day before you go to bed. And then after a couple of weeks, you receive a sponsored cream from Vichy and now suddenly this cream is the best. Do you see what I mean? It seems very untrustworthy if the influencer changes loyalty like that”* (Appendix 16, respondent 12:7).

As opposed to the above statements, one respondent expresses that it is possible for an influencer to promote competing skin care products and still be credible, because the respondent believes that it is natural to like different products. She gives an example of an influencer, Snegl Cille, who received negative feedback from followers because she previously had promoted one skin care brand and now she had a sponsorship from another skin care brand. Here, the respondent states: *“You can’t really say that because you have previously used Clinique, then you suddenly can’t like a new product. Because everybody does that at some point.”* (Appendix 8, respondent 4:7). This indicates that a shift in loyalty can make the influencer appear unreliable unless the consumer accepts it as a natural change of opinion.

All respondents point to the consideration that influencer credibility is related to the overall perception of how well a sponsorship “matches” the specific influencer. From the in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that there is no complete measurement on what a good match is. The respondents’ statements indicate that it is based on an overall assessment of many parameters in relation to the sponsored collaboration.

Several respondents express that it enhances influencer credibility when the influencers display the sponsored products as an integrated part of their lives. In this regard, one respondent explains that when focus is less on the sponsored product and more on the relation between the product and the influencer’s life, then it becomes more convincing and credible. The respondent states: *“Even though this is sponsored, she [the influencer] actually talks more about what she... that she hasn’t done anything today. So that this [the sponsored product] is a proof that she has actually had other clothes on besides her nighties or something”* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:6). The respondent says that because the influencer manages to put the sponsored collaboration into a personal context, it seems more real and she becomes more positive towards the sponsored post (ibid.:7). Another respondent argues that it is credible when influencers manage to promote a product in their own way and in a way where they incorporate it into their life. The respondent explains: *“It should, in a way, show that*

*they are using it themselves or how they use it*” (Appendix 5, respondent 1:10). One respondent, who also feel that it is important that the influencer shows the sponsored product in everyday life situations, talks about an influencer who has received a sponsored beauty roller. The respondent explains that the way the influencer promotes the product makes her believe that it is a natural element of the influencers life (Appendix 15, respondent 11:7). This all indicates that if an influencer incorporates a sponsored post into everyday routines and daily life, the sponsorship is more likely to appear consistent with the overall narrative of the influencer.

Three respondents also mention that when an influencer continuously uses the sponsored products, it seems sincerer because it appears as if the influencer uses the product because she likes it and not because she is being paid. One respondent explains:

*“If I can see that the influencer actually uses the product in situations where she does not get paid to use it. I mean, if an influencer has been paid to promote a shirt, then it would seem much more credible if she continues to use this shirt even though the sponsored collaboration had ended”* (Appendix 12, respondent 8:9).

While talking about Rock Paper Dresses and the Adax collaboration, another respondent says that she has noticed that Rock Paper Dresses has also used the bag in other non-sponsored posts, which gives the respondent the impression that Rock Paper Dresses truly likes the bag and it thus makes it fit better into the perception she has of Rock Paper Dresses (Appendix 6, respondent 2:8). The third respondent argues: *“I think it is really credible if they [the influencers] have done a sponsored post for some kind of clothing or product or a cooking pot or a blender or whatever, and I then see that they are actually using it still”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:11). These statement shows that when an influencer shows a sponsored product in non-sponsored situations it seems more genuine and thus it relates better to the overall perception of that influencer.

This analysis supports the previous findings by suggesting that a perceived match is highly linked to the credibility of an influencer. More specifically, this analysis indicates that the perception of a match relates to how well a sponsorship fits with the character narrative of an influencer, which supports the claim of Kozinets et al. (2010). This was clear since the respondents expressed that a sponsorship should be in line with the overall style of the influencer. Furthermore, the sponsorships should not be consistent and not too much “all over the place”. In relation to this, it was found to be credible when the influencer keeps sponsored content within one overall theme or category. Especially two aspects



were pointed out as something that enhanced the perception of a match. Showing sponsored products in relation to everyday situations gives the impression that it is a natural part of the influencer's routines and life. Also, it was found to appear more credible when the influencer used sponsored products in other non-sponsored contexts and in non-sponsored posts. This all points to the consideration that the narrative of an influencer consists of previous behavior, lifestyle and the overall tone of the influencer. And furthermore, that this creates certain expectations from consumers who then decides if a sponsorship feels as an authentic parts of the influencer's narrative.

#### **4.4 Conclusion on Match**

Examining the significance of the match brought out many interesting perspectives. The first part of the analysis dealt with the specific case influencers and brands, and it became evident that when using Aaker's Dimensions of Brand Personality, no absolute match was found. However, the analysis also showed that when the respondents saw the specific post and context of the sponsorship, all of them expressed that it made sense in relation to their perception of the influencer. Furthermore, the second part established that a match was highly related to the respondents' perception of the influencers' credibility. With only one respondent expressing that the match did not impact her perception of influencer credibility, all other respondents argued that a match was important in order for the influencer to maintain credibility in a sponsored collaboration. Finally, the last part further investigated the significance of the match by analyzing the importance of a consistent character narrative. Here, it was found that the respondents believed that a sponsored collaboration should be in line with the overall narrative of the influencer as it enhances influencer credibility.

The analysis on match points to the conclusion that a match cannot be completely assessed on pure association of personalities, as there are more aspects to how consumers perceive a match between influencers and brands. A match is highly important in relation to the influencers credibility, and the most significant aspect to the match is, that it is perceived to be in line with the overall narrative of the influencer. It can thus be concluded that the match between an influencer and a brand in a commercial collaboration is determined by the individual's judgement, and furthermore that the match is highly related to the perception of influencer credibility.

# Source Credibility Analysis

# 5

The following analysis will address the second sub-question: “*How do consumers perceive source credibility in relation to influencers?*” The analysis will be based on the theoretical concept of source credibility from Hovland et al. (1953), McGuire (1985) and Ohanian (1990). Hovland et. al has formulated two components of source credibility: expertise and trustworthiness. However, Ohanian argues that the component of attractiveness should be added based on McGuire’s attractiveness-model. The following analysis will therefore focus on the roles of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness in relation to source credibility and influencers.

The analysis will be based on our in-depth interviews in relation to the chosen theory. As explained in the chapter on methodology, our interviews have been processed based on predefined themes within each analysis. The statements made by the respondents has thus been coded under the predefined themes of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. The following analysis is split into three sections, according to the three themes.

## 5.1 Expertise

The first part of the analysis will focus on the theme of expertise. The respondents were asked questions relating to their perceptions of influencers’ expertise on the topics that are displayed in their posts. Both sponsored and non-sponsored. The questions regarded the respondents’ general feelings as well as feelings about the specific influencer that their interview regarded. Their statements have been classified under the following four codes: “*character specific expertise*”, “*technical fashion expertise*”, “*little/no expertise*”, “*function based expertise*” (Appendix 19).

When asked whether the respondents found it important for influencers to have expertise on the products that they promote on their profiles, most respondents said that it was important, but several

indicated that it depended on the influencer and the type of the product. Nearly all respondents stated that they either expected or believed influencers to have some degree of expertise within their specific “areas”. These comments were coded under character specific expertise. One respondent says: “*I think they should know about the things that their profile is about. Like food or fashion or whatever it may be*” (Appendix 12, respondent 8:10). This statement points back to the importance of character narrative, as it is clear that the respondents have specific expectations to the character of an influencer.

Most respondents mentioned that they did not have a need or expectation for technical knowledge about fashion items, in terms of how it was made or from what fabric. These statements were coded under “technical fashion expertise”. One respondent explains: “*With some of the fashion influencers that I follow, I don’t expect that they have a lot of knowledge of this shirt or how it’s made. You know, with those types of things. But I still expect them to be some kind of expert on the area [fashion], that they know something about it. Otherwise why would I follow them?*” (Appendix 16, respondent 12:8). This statement is supported by other respondents who also do not have a need for technical information but still want fashion influencers to be good at styling and showing off their outfits. However, they do not seem to equate this type of knowledge with real expertise. The influencer who is primarily mentioned in this context is Emili Sindlev, as several respondents mention that they primarily follow her for fashion inspiration. They further indicate that they do not believe Emili Sindlev to be an expert on fashion in terms of production, but that they believe her to be a good stylist. When asked whether the lack of technical fashion expertise generally affects their perception of the influencers’ credibility, most of the respondents answer no, as they do not judge the influencers based on their ability to provide this information.

Another general finding shows that most of the respondents do expect influencers to have additional knowledge when it comes to products that have a specific function such as a face moisturizer, kitchen appliances or cooking recipes. In this case, the respondents would like influencers to have expertise related to the results of those products as exemplified here: “*If it’s about food or lotions then I might have...where it’s actually going into the body or on the body...then I have higher demands and think that they should know about it or describe it. Whereas with clothes it’s more about the styling.*” (Appendix 11, respondent 7:7). This suggests that expertise functions as prerequisite for credibility when the promoted product supplies the user with a deeper function than items like clothing or accessories. When putting on a dress or carrying a specific bag, the payoff might be instant in the form of increased confidence or compliments by others. However, the payoff from using skincare

lines, kitchen appliances or recipes is more often unknown, as the consumers will most likely have to invest more time in order to determine product quality. The uncertainty related to the results of using these products may be what causes a higher demand for expertise in order for an influencer to be perceived as credible when promoting these items.

Furthermore, some respondents indicate that repeated exposure of a sponsored product also increases the perception of the influencer's expertise. This is explained by one respondent who is referring to Rock Paper Dresses: *"I guess, I think she has more knowledge because...uhm...I think it seems like she doesn't just have these one day customers. She has longer sequences, which I think is fine because then it seems more serious [...] Then when something [sponsored items] comes back you see it as a whole"* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:8). This perspective implies that influencers can increase their followers' perceptions of expertise by being selective and doing longer sponsorships.

While the respondents generally agreed that expertise is often needed in some form, they also agreed that they do not always believe that influencers have that expertise. One respondent mentions an incident with Rock Paper Dresses in which she felt that Rock Paper Dresses had no expertise in regards to a sponsored post for a "yellow" labor union<sup>2</sup> called Krifa (Appendix 20:1). The respondent mentions that the post backlashed and Rock Paper Dresses received many negative comments regarding her support for the union and that she did not seem to have any knowledge of the company behind (Appendix 5, respondent 1:12). However, she further clarified that this particular post did not affect the overall perception of Rock Paper Dresses' credibility because of her kind and likable personality (ibid:13). This suggests that a lack of expertise can be mediated by other qualities that an influencer might possess. This will be further elaborated in the analysis on PSI.

The respondents who were interviewed about Emilie Lilja also express generally low perceived expertise. Only one respondent states that she believes Emilie Lilja to have good knowledge of the products that she promotes, while the other three make no indications that she seems to know more than others. One respondent mentions that she just is not inspired by Emilie Lilja, while another mentions that she does not really believe that Emilie Lilja truly knows about the products she

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<sup>2</sup> Yellow labor unions differ from traditional labor unions, as they are not part of union/employer negotiations, they do not take court cases, they are not connected to a specific trade and they do not participate in strikes

promotes because she does not show enough interest. She compares Emilie Lilja with another fitness focused influencer:

*“Uhm...so for instance, her friend. What’s her name? Healthy Skinny Bitch, like she seems to know way more about it, the way I see it, because it’s like that’s what she lives and breathes. For Emilie Lilja it’s more music and being a model I think. So no I don’t think she knows more than others”* (Appendix 13, respondent 9:8).

In this case, the respondent is expressing a gap between what she believes Emilie Lilja to be an expert on and the topics that Emilie Lilja herself is portraying on Instagram. Fitness seems to be the primary reference for all four respondents, but only one indicates that Emilie Lilja is somewhat of an expert on the topic. When asked whether it affects their perception of her credibility, two respondents mention that fitness content was not the reason why they started following Emilie Lilja and that they do not get inspired by her as much anymore. These comments suggest that by switching areas of expertise, influencers might alienate followers who do not see the link between the influencer and the new area of interest, which in turn will diminish credibility.

The interviews showed that expertise is relevant for influencer credibility depending on the product category. In relation to fashion, the respondents only need influencers to be knowledgeable about styling, whereas function-based products in sponsored posts require more information in order to convince consumers. Furthermore, we found that influencer credibility seemingly is not entirely dependent on expertise, as other factors such as an appealing personality might mediate the lack of knowledge. This further suggests that an influencer’s overall credibility can overcome negative incidents such as a lack of expertise and therefore might be more enduring than the effect of each specific sponsorship. Finally, it was evident that the respondents’ perception of an influencer’s expertise might change if the influencer switches their narrative to focus on new interests, which may affect the overall perception of the influencer’s credibility.

## **5.2 Trustworthiness**

The second part of the analysis will focus on the theme of trustworthiness. We defined trustworthiness in the chapter on theory as: *“the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid”* (Hovland et al 1953:21). The analysis will thus focus on the respondents’ perceptions of the influencers’ willingness to provide valid and accurate information on

specific topics. The respondents were asked questions relating to their perceptions of influencers as being trustworthy in relation to sponsored posts on the influencers' Instagram profiles. The questions regarded the respondents' general feelings as well as feelings about the specific influencer that their interview surrounded. Their statements have been classified under the following four codes: *“money”*, *“professional restraints”*, *“benefit of the doubt”* and *“sponsorship selection”* (Appendix 19).

The statements coded under *“money”* and *“professional restraints”* all relate to incidents in which the respondents do not trust the influencers. Several respondents mentioned that they find it hard to trust influencers because they are getting paid to share their opinion. When asked whether she believes influencers to be truthful, one respondent answers: *“No! They're getting paid to do it. I mean, if I got 30.000 for an Instagram post, then I'd definitely say that this frying pan is amazing.”* (Appendix 14, respondent 10:6). Another respondent mentions that she believes that newer influencers are more likely to be untruthful on Instagram because they are just starting out:

*“...I think it depends on how established you are, because once you reach a certain amount of followers and have made a name for yourself, then I think that you would have more freedom to say no to things [...] But if you're new, and just want to get in to the whole influencer game, then you can't really afford to say no to things in the same way”* (Appendix 6, respondent 2:9).

Aside from expressing that money plays a role when it comes to being truthful on Instagram, the respondents are also aware that influencers might be subjects to contractual restraints when they do sponsorships. When asked whether they believed that an influencer would tell the truth about a product, even if it didn't benefit the company behind, all respondents said no. They believed that the influencers would be prohibited from doing so by their contracts, or that it didn't make sense professionally in terms of securing sponsorships in the future. One respondent explains her answer with the following statement: *“No, I don't think she's allowed to. Like, then I don't think she would do the sponsorship at all”* (Appendix 10, respondent 6:8). These assumptions regarding the influencers' reluctance to share “bad” information are supported by comments in the online survey. When asked what makes an influencer appear trustworthy, two respondents mention that the inclusion of negative reviews makes influencers seem more honest: *“When they for instance write something negative about a product, which happens very rarely”* (Appendix 17). This shows that the primarily positive nature of Instagram might be diminishing influencer's trustworthiness, as it does not depict

an accurate image of life where negative opinions clearly exist. Furthermore, it stands in opposition to the theory, which states that trustworthiness is dependent of the influencers' willingness to share valid information.

Although some respondents expressed concerns regarding the financial aspects of influencer marketing, others expressed partial feelings of trust. Some respondents agree that they believe influencers to be truthful if they promote a product that falls within their interests. This is exemplified with one respondent who states: *"I definitely think it could be that they're telling the truth if it's something that sort of matches their profile"* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:14). This statement fits with the arguments presented in the analysis on match, as it shows that the respondents are more likely to see influencers as truthful when a product matches them. Another respondent expresses that she believes influencers to speak the truth because she sees it as their role:

*"...even though it's bought advertisement, then... then I just choose to have an idea that I can trust what they're saying because they're really just privileged normal people, and for me, the influencer has to be the one who brings it down to eye level [...] that's my foundation for trusting what they're saying, because otherwise they're just neglecting their role"* (Appendix 8, respondent 4:8).

The statements above are both coded under *"benefit of the doubt"* which is a general pattern in relation to trust. None of the respondents who expressed general feelings of trust, seem to have any specific reasons for trusting the influencers. This points to a strength in relation to trustworthiness, as it suggests that feelings of trust can be achieved within a commercial context on Instagram. However, it provides very little insight into how and why those feelings might occur.

In relation to the three specific cases, there are however signs of a pattern concerning the respondents' perception of trustworthiness. In the case of Rock Paper Dresses, all four respondents believed that she is truthful in her sponsored posts. When asked whether she thinks that Rock Paper Dresses tells the truth, one respondent answers: *"Yes, I have a feeling that she does. Precisely because she seems critical and doesn't just say yes to anything"* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:9). In the case of this respondent, the matter of being critical and selective functions as a way to build trust, which is also supported by several respondents in the online survey. When asked when an influencer seems trustworthy, they point out that being critical and limiting the number of sponsorships increases trustworthiness: *"When the person doesn't just post sponsored posts, and when they remain critical"*

and “*When the person doesn’t have too many sponsored posts*” (Appendix 17). The respondent who previously mentioned the unfortunate incident with Krifa, did not believe that Rock Paper Dresses was being dishonest and greedy, but rather that she simply made a mistake:

*“Yes, I generally believe that she’s being truthful. And I think she thinks even more about it after the thing with Krifa. Because I don’t think...but that’s also because I think she seems so sweet and sincere, but I don’t think it was a greed-move. I really believe that she was just unenlightened”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:13).

These statements suggest that Rock Paper Dresses is perceived as being trustworthy by the respondents and when asked whether that affects their perception of her credibility everyone except for one agrees that it makes her more credible.

These findings differ to some extent in the case of Emili Sindlev, in which the respondents only have partial feelings of trust. When asked whether she believed that Emili Sindlev really liked the clothes from a brand she had advertised for, one respondent said: “*Uhm, I don’t think that she would ever choose an outfit and show it on Instagram, if she didn’t think it was cool. Because I have this idea that she has too much respect for fashion to do that.*” (Appendix 10, respondent 6:9). This was supported by another respondent who also didn’t believe that Emili Sindlev would just wear anything. The two remaining respondents do not believe that Emili Sindlev is being truthful because she is getting paid, as exemplified here: “*I mean, she’s getting paid and it’s her job. And it doesn’t make any difference to her as long as the clothes match the rest of her photos. Then she can say whatever she wants.*” (Appendix 9, respondent 5:4). These statements point to a division in terms of the perceived trustworthiness of Emili Sindlev. While two respondents believe that she is truthful on her profile, two others disagree because of the financial aspect. This conflict might be a result of the strong focus on fashion, since it is a more abstract topic where the information provided in the posts is often more vague and light, as seen in the analysis on expertise. When asked whether the perceived trustworthiness affected their overall perception of Emili Sindlev’s credibility, three respondents said no. One respondent explains “*I would lie if I didn’t say that I would hope that she only advertised for things that she can vouch for. But then again, I use her for inspiration, so I don’t know if I even think about her credibility*” (Appendix 10, respondent 6:10). This statement suggests that the focus on fashion once again plays a role, as the respondents do not need her to be truthful because they are capable of deciding whether the clothes look good or not.



Finally, the interviews about Emilie Lilja also show low trustworthiness. Three respondents mention that they do not find her truthful because she makes so many different sponsored posts. One explains: *“I think it’s because she does so many different things that she doesn’t... ‘I’m a model. I did this, look how nice it is’ or ‘I’m just a personal trainer, this is my life’ or ‘I am ONLY’ ...It’s this thing where sometimes it just feels a little half everything she does”*. (Appendix 14, respondent 10:7). This stands in contrast to Rock Paper Dresses who is perceived as trustworthy because she is selective in her sponsorships. In the case of Emilie Lilja, she is criticized for having too many sponsorships within too many different topics, which makes her seem less trustworthy. This can be related to comments made by several respondents in the online survey. They indicate that choosing a “direction” for your profile and furthermore your sponsorships is important in order to maintain trustworthiness. This is exemplified here: *“When they have a theme and they stick to it. For instance, sport, beauty, fashion, food...”* (Appendix 17). These statements support the findings in the match analysis, which indicated that too many sponsorships without a common thread does not seem credible. The final respondent in the in-depth interview has a feeling that Emilie Lilja is only telling what is mentioned in the product brochure and the respondent therefore needs to see the product more than once in order to believe in the information (Appendix 15, respondent 11:8). The interviews point to a generally low perception of Emilie Lilja’s trustworthiness, which also seems to affect the overall perceived credibility. One respondent mentions that because of the low sense of trustworthiness she does not consider Emilie Lilja to be the one she would go to for information on specific topics, as she finds other sources more credible (Appendix 13, respondent 9:9).

The interviews have shown that trustworthiness is complex in relation to influencers on Instagram. While the respondents are aware that influencers are getting paid to post sponsored content and that it is a matter of a business transaction, some also have certain expectations for the influencers’ behavior. They expect influencers to be critical in their choices and only promote products that they want to tell the truth about. This also means that most influencers have a somewhat narrow field of topics that they can promote while seeming trustworthy to their followers, which is why Emilie Lilja is not seen as generally trustworthy. Furthermore, there is a consensus that being truthful about fashion is less necessary, as the respondents form their own opinion and in this case only use the images for visual inspiration. So, while the respondents view Emili Sindlev as a reliable source for information about style and fashion they may not put as much emphasis on whether she is being sincere. This might provide influencers like Emili Sindlev with more opportunities for doing fashion-

related sponsorships without coming off as untrustworthy, but it also limits their options to promote products outside of the fashion category.

### 5.3 Attractiveness

The third and final part of the source credibility analysis deals with attractiveness. In the theory chapter, attractiveness was determined to be relevant as Ohanian argued that attractiveness is an important part in people's initial judgement of others (Ohanian 1990:42). Furthermore, studies have found that attractive people are consistently more liked and have a larger impact on the products that they are associated with (ibid.). This component of source credibility deals with the influencers' physical attractiveness, personality and similarity to the consumer as perceived by the respondents. In regards to attractiveness, the respondents were only asked questions related to the specific influencers, as it was deemed difficult to discuss physical and personal attractiveness at a general level. Their statements have been coded under the following codes: "*physical attractiveness*", "*photo attractiveness*", "*personality*" "*aspiration*" and "*similarity*" (Appendix 19).

All the respondents whose interviews surrounded Rock Paper Dresses considered her to be attractive in some way. Two respondents explicitly mention that she is beautiful, while all four respondents mention her smile as a factor of attractiveness, as exemplified here: "*She's an insanely pretty girl and she has an insanely pretty face... she has this huge smile and it takes up all of her face and her eyes become like teeny tiny when she smiles, and I just think that it's very charming to look at*" (Appendix 5, respondent 1:15). Aside from mentioning her smile in the context of physical beauty, three respondents mention her smile and general happy attitude when asked what they find appealing about her personality. One respondent states: "*Her joy of life. And just that she seems to have a general appetite for life...and then that she has uhm...how do you say it...she has like drive, and approaches things with her head held high*". (Appendix 6, respondent 2:10). Another respondent mentions that she finds it very appealing that Rock Paper Dresses maintains a personal angle in all of her posts and that her personality is visible in everything she does: "*I think it's nice in this sponsored society that...that it all...that she actually manages to maintain the personal link to all of her followers and that she includes some of herself and tells about everyday life and her ups and downs*" (Appendix 7, respondent 3:10). These statements indicate that the general perception of Rock Paper Dresses' physical and personal attractiveness is good, which might affect the overall perception of her as a credible source. The fact that the respondents consider her to be pretty and kind indicates that they

like her, which according to Ohanian (1990) means that she has more impact on those around her. When asked whether the respondents feel similarities with Rock Paper Dresses, they only partially agree and instead express feelings of aspiration towards her, which can be seen here:

*“I’d probably like to be able to follow her example more, but I’m not nearly as cheerful and fun-loving as she is. I can see myself in some of the things she posts and she likes to travel... I like to travel. In that way. I mean, I think I’m a somewhat happy and positive person too. I’m trying to wear more color for instance. But I’m not in her scale at all yet”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:16).

The fact that more of the respondents have aspirational feelings towards Rock Paper Dresses further points to a strong perceived attractiveness of her as an influencer.

While Rock Paper Dresses’ attractiveness seemed to be based on both her looks and personality, Emili Sindlev’s seems to be one-dimensional with most focus on the appearance of her and her photos. Three respondents mention that she is a pretty girl and that it affects their general perception of Emili Sindlev. One respondent says:

*“Well she’s a pretty girl and she smiles and those types of things and that’s wonderful to look at. So in that way yes. If it was someone who stood there and looked angry and posed in those standard poses that’s thrown in your face, then I probably wouldn’t find her that interesting.”* (Appendix 9, respondent 5:5).

When asked about her personality, the respondents are more on the fence, as they do not feel like they know her personality that well. Their comments are mostly related to her ability to style outfits and take nice photos. While the respondents may not feel attracted to her personality, one also mentions that it does not really affect her perception of Emili Sindlev in a negative way because she does not have a need to know her, as she might have with other influencers (Appendix 12, respondent 8:11). Finally, when asking the respondents as to whether they feel similarities with Emili Sindlev, the overall answer is no. The respondents express that they either do not look or dress like her or that they don’t have the same type of lifestyle. However once again, they express aspirations, as some have a desire to look more like her in terms of her fashion sense:

*“So, I am aware when I look at her that I probably cannot see myself in her. But maybe I can take some of it. For instance, some colors that she puts together, which looks cool. Or a skirt*

*or like I said a sweater. So I can't see myself in her, but I can still get inspired by her.”*  
(Appendix 11, respondent 7:8).

This shows that the respondents are aware that they have few things in common with Emili Sindlev, but somehow still aspire to adopt aspects of her life that they find attractive. The fact that Emili Sindlev is seen as physically attractive and that the respondents seem to put emphasis on her great sense of style and beautiful pictures, might make up for the lack of trustworthiness and expertise, as her followers might value attractiveness more in her case.

Finally, in the case of Emilie Lilja, the respondents agree that she is a physically attractive girl, but when it comes to her photos and general profile, three respondents express that they find her profile to be a little messy and incoherent:

*“Well, I think she's quite pretty and then I think that her photos are nice and sharp. Well actually, her feed isn't really like...a lot of the profiles I follow are more like fashion-profiles, where their feed is maybe a bit more cohesive. Hers is a little different.”* (Appendix 16, respondent 12:9).

When asked whether the incoherent profile affects her perception of Emilie Lilja's attractiveness, the respondent answers no and explains that she feels like Emilie Lilja has other things to offer instead. This statement is backed by other respondents and supports the argument that attractiveness cannot be entirely measured on physical appeal (Ohanian, 1990:42).

In relation to what they find attractive about Emilie Lilja's personality, two respondents had generally positive feelings about her and used words such as *“kind”*, *“positive”*, *“happy”*, and *“fresh”* (Appendix 15, respondent 11:9; Appendix 16, respondent 12:10). One respondent mentions her *“tomboy-ish”* style (Appendix 13, respondent 9:10), while the final respondent also found her to be *“fresh”* and *“outgoing”* but also *“annoying”*, which she argues could be a feeling of annoyance with influencers in general (Appendix 14, respondent 10:8). The same respondent also states that she only follows Emilie Lilja because she has been doing it for a long time and probably would not choose to follow her now, which indicates that she generally does not find Emilie Lilja to be an attractive influencer. Two of the respondents who does find her personality appealing also suggest that they probably would not start following her today, because of the amount of sponsored posts on her profile.

This suggests that being pretty and having a positive attitude might not be enough to keep followers interested.

Finally, when asked whether they can see themselves in Emilie Lilja, three respondents indicated some degree of similarity. One respondent focused on her tomboy-ish style while the two other focused on her confidence and positive and energetic attitude as mentioned here: “*Well again, it’s all this about that she seems very happy and secure with herself and that sort of stuff...and...that’s the type of stuff that I want to see in myself...*” (Appendix 15, respondent 11:9). In this case, the respondent’s feelings of similarity are mixed with feelings of aspiration, which indicates perceived attractiveness according to the theory. The respondents’ overall perceived attractiveness of Emilie Lilja is the most inconclusive of all three cases, as the respondents seem to have mixed feelings about her. While they generally like her appearance, they all agree that her Instagram feed and photos are somewhat incoherent. Furthermore, there are split opinions relating to her personality as well as how relatable she is.

The component of attractiveness can be concluded to be highly dependent on personal opinion as there were very few distinctive patterns. Rock Paper Dresses’ perceived attractiveness is based on a combination of her physical attractiveness, her kind and positive personality and the respondents’ desire to be more like her. Emili Sindlev’s attractiveness is primarily based on her physical appearance and her abilities as a stylist, while respondents have very limited opinions regarding her personality. And finally, the respondents talking about Emilie Lilja provide the most ambiguous answers, due to the difference in the responses. However, nearly all respondents mentioned that they found the influencers to be physically attractive, and indicates that it is important in order to be inspired by the influencers. One respondent says: “*But of course, to get inspired by something, it has to be visually appealing to look at, otherwise...well...it’s like...you’re always inspired by something beautiful and lovely*” (Appendix 8, respondent 4:9). This statement supports the notion that attractive people have larger impact on the products they are associated with, as the respondent is more easily inspired by what is attractive. Furthermore, there seems to be a general agreement that a happy and positive personality is seen as attractive, as this is mentioned in relation to all three influencers at some point. The emphasis on physical and personal attractiveness indicates that these two are the most important in relation to Instagram, as the media primarily seems to function as a source for inspiration and entertainment for our respondents. The feelings of similarity towards the influencers seem to be less important and are primarily related to the respondents’ own aspirations or recognition

of everyday moments such as having dinner with one's friends. This is supported by respondents in the online survey who points out that influencers are more credible when they post relatable content. This can be seen in the following examples: “[Influencers are credible] when they are relatable” and “Credibility is about the way that they present their lives with honesty and humor. When it's just one big production of the perfect life I have no interest in following them” (Appendix 17).

## **5.4 Conclusion on Source Credibility**

In the analyses above we sought to investigate how the source credibility of influencers is perceived by Instagram users in a commercial context. The part regarding expertise in sponsored posts showed that some degree of expertise was important in order to maintain credibility. It was found that products related to fashion or other items in which usage results are immediate, required less product specific knowledge, as the respondents are able to form their own opinions of the product. However, when products had a function, where payoff is not instant and requires more usage in order to determine the effectiveness and quality, the respondents had higher expectations of influencer's expertise. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that influencer credibility is not entirely dependent on product expertise, as the respondents expressed that a good personality and overall good perception of the influencer could make up for a lack of knowledge. The second part regarding trustworthiness showed that the respondents most likely experience some internal conflict when reflecting over the trustworthiness of influencers. While they are aware that influencers get paid to promote products and therefore approach this type of content with some skepticism, they also expect influencers to remain critical and only promote products that they actually like. Additionally, it was found that critical selection and limiting the number of sponsorships contributed to increased perceived trustworthiness, which also had positive effect on the overall perception of influencers' credibility. Finally, the analysis regarding attractiveness showed that all three case influencers was found to be physically attractive by the respondents and it was argued that it was easier to be inspired by something that looked good. Moreover, all respondents indicated that a smiling and positive attitude improved their perception of the influencer.

In conclusion it can be said that source credibility is a complex topic in relation to sponsored posts on Instagram and furthermore that it is highly dependent on the product that is promoted as well as the influencers themselves. While the respondents are aware that sponsorships function as a business transaction between influencer and brand, they also indicate that there are several aspects that may

increase the overall credibility of the influencers. This means that the respondents have the best perception of influencers' source credibility when:

- they pay attention to the type of product that is being promoted and the information that is expected by the followers
- they remain critical in their choice of collaborations and limit the amounts of sponsorships
- they post visually appealing content and maintain a positive attitude throughout.

# PSI Analysis



The last part of the analysis on credibility will seek to answer the third sub-question to the research question: “*How does the parasocial interaction exist between consumer and influencer in a commercialized context?*” The analysis will be based on the concept of parasocial interaction which was introduced by Horton & Wohl (1956) and has since been reworked and studied in various contexts of media personalities. The aim of the analysis is to examine the state of the relationship that may exist between influencers and followers and how it exists in a commercial context.

As described in the chapter on theory, we have defined three main concepts within PSI that will function as the framework for our analysis: openness, personal identification and interaction. These three concepts also function as predefined themes in the deductive coding of our empirical data. Statements made by the respondents have therefore been coded under these themes in order to maintain structure throughout the analysis. This part of the analysis will focus on our three case influencers. However, the analysis will start with a general introduction regarding the respondents’ statements on PSI and influencers.

## **6.1 Influencers and PSI**

Prior to asking the respondents about their thoughts concerning the specific influencers, they were asked more general questions pertaining to influencers on Instagram and PSI. This was done in order to determine whether PSI generally can or does exist between influencers and their followers. The statements have been coded under: “*Instagram Stories*”, “*Personal details*” and “*Everyday life*” (Appendix 21).



Nearly all of the respondents feel as if they know some influencers on a personal level. Some respondents mention that they feel like they get to know influencers when they are open about their lives and share personal details. One respondent explains:

*“Uhm, I think so in terms of the things that they share about their lives. For instance, with Pernille Teisbæk. Even though it’s so much fashion and so focused, there are still lots of photos of her husband and her son. So I think that in that case I have insight into her personality and her life...”* (Appendix 10, respondent 6:11).

This respondent indicates that although the influencer Pernille Teisbæk primarily deals with fashion on her Instagram profile, she still values personal information about her life and family as it helps her to get to know the influencer better. The desire to know more about the influencer’s personality and the feeling that they do know them indicates that they engage in PSI, as the respondents’ feelings are imaginative and based on a controlled information released by the influencer.

Other respondents mention that seeing pieces of an influencer’s everyday lives is what makes it easier to get to know them: *“I actually think that just seeing glimpses of their everyday lives gives me insights into their life...and of course less about their personalities, but still...because I guess that what you do says something about you too”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:17). This respondent suggests that deeper personal details are less important as long as you get insights into the daily routines of the influencer. However, there is some disagreement as to whether this is true. One of the respondents exemplifies the difference between providing followers with life details and glimpses of their everyday lives by describing two of our case influencers: *“I don’t think I know Emilie Lilja that well for instance, but that’s also because, if you look through her feed then it’s glimpses of everyday life, but it’s not super personal. Whereas with Rock Paper Dresses it is super personal. Both in her Instagram photos but also all this stuff about the fertility treatment.”* (Appendix 14, respondent 10:9). This point will be supported later on in the analysis of each influencer, which will show higher degrees of PSI for Rock Paper Dresses than for Emilie Lilja.

Finally, most respondents agree that Instagram Stories is one of the best ways to get to know an influencer. Stories are mentioned as a way to portray instantaneous ‘here and now’ images or videos to followers. As well as a way to communicate more directly with followers, as influencers have the opportunity to talk directly into the camera and address the audience. One respondent mentions:

*“Uhm, but it’s also where they actually have the opportunity to talk to their followers because it’s a video, like a live...they actually can send live if they want. Uhm so I think that you definitely sense more of their personalities by hearing them talk”* (Appendix 6, respondent 2:11).

This comment supports Auter’s (1992) theory on breaking the fourth wall. PSI thus increases when the influencer addresses her followers directly because it imitates the feeling of an intimate one-on-one conversation between influencer and follower.

Based on the above, it must be assumed that PSI can exist between the respondents and the influencers. The following sections will analyze the influencers based on the in-depth interviews in relation to the three separate aspects of PSI that were mentioned earlier.

## **6.2 Openness**

The first part of the analysis will relate to the theme of openness. This relates to the respondents’ perception of the influencers’ willingness to share personal information. As mentioned in the theory, PSI should increase along with perceived openness (Labrecque, 2014:136). Furthermore, it relates to whether the respondents feel like they are able to identify the influencers’ personalities. The point is not to determine how well the respondents actually know the influencers, but whether they feel like they do. Past research has focused on this aspect of PSI as it relates to an audience’s imagined perception of the media personality. The respondents’ statements have been coded under the following codes: *“Knowledge of personality”*, *“No Knowledge of personality”*, *“Sponsorships increase knowledge”* and *“Sponsorships do not increase knowledge”* (Appendix 21).

### **6.2.1 Rock Paper Dresses**

Three respondents expressed that they know Rock Paper Dresses’ personality, while the last respondent had not been following her for that long and therefore did not feel like she knew her. One respondent says: *“She’s just very open about her life and who she is. And then she uses stories a lot”* (Appendix 6, respondent 2:12). This respondent has a feeling that she knows Rock Paper Dresses’ personality, which suggests that she engages in PSI with Rock Paper Dresses. She further mentions Instagram Stories as a contributing factor to her knowledge of Rock Paper Dresses, which supports the previous point about Instagram Stories being the most efficient way of engaging and bonding with followers. Another respondent who also feels like she knows Rock Paper Dresses, states that

she would not have the same knowledge about her personality if Instagram Stories did not exist: *“Definitely not. Not because she doesn’t include her dog and boyfriend and so on in photos, but it’s much more alive in stories. And more ‘here and now’ than in pictures”*. (Appendix 5, respondent 1:18). This comment supports the point that Instagram Stories are highly contributing to PSI between influencers and their followers.

When the respondents were asked whether commercial content affected their ability to get to know Rock Paper Dresses’ personality, three agree that execution is key. One respondent explains:

*“I think it depends on the execution. She had this Nespresso sponsorship where she used Nespresso to tell something about herself...something with decaf...that she drinks decaf because she’s trying to get pregnant. So in that way the sponsorship gave me some insight into her personality. But with Adax I didn’t learn anything new about her personality. But I mean, it’s not negative, it’s just like ‘eeeh’”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:19).

This answer indicates that PSI can increase as a result of sponsored content, once a convincing personal angle exists. When asked whether she found Rock Paper Dresses to be credible in the Nespresso sponsorship, the respondent also answered yes, as she really felt like the sponsorship fit Rock Paper Dresses’ personality (ibid.:20). This answer further suggests that PSI may increase the credibility of an influencer, when Instagram users feel like they can see the influencer in organic as well as sponsored posts.

### **6.2.2 Emili Sindlev**

The respondents whose interviews concerned Emili Sindlev do not express the same degree of deeper knowledge of her personality. Although the respondents had previously been asked to describe Emili Sindlev’s personality in relation to the match analysis, they seem to find it harder to answer whether they feel like they actually know her. One respondent explains that she finds it hard to get to know Emili Sindlev’s personality due to the lack of personal information and Instagram Stories: *“I think it’s difficult with her specifically because...she posts stories but she doesn’t post as many and when she does I often think it’s work related. So with her I actually think it’s difficult”* (Appendix 10, respondent 6:12). This answer suggests low PSI as a natural consequence of the lack of personal information. Another respondent also mentions that she does not feel like she knows Emili Sindlev’s personality and also mentions a lack of videos or Instagram Stories: *“She’s not the type of person who sits down and talks into the camera for instance... like a kind of...I mean where she talks about how*

*her day is going. And that's one of the ways where you might get to know them*". (Appendix 12, respondent 8:12). The respondent indicates that she would have a better understanding of who Emili Sindlev is, if she spoke directly to her followers, which is in alignment with Auter's point about how PSI increases when the audience is addressed directly.

The respondents also express that sponsored posts on Emili Sindlev's profile do not contribute to getting to know more about her personality: *"Actually, you would hope that you really learned a lot by looking at the sponsorships, because that would be brands that she really loves. Unfortunately, I just don't think reality looks like that."* (Appendix 11, respondent 7:9). This respondent implies that Emili Sindlev does not choose sponsorships based on what really reflects her personality. Other respondents explain that they do not learn more about Emili Sindlev's personality through sponsorships, due to the nature of the products. One respondent describes her sponsorships as being *"surfacy"* (Appendix 12, respondent 8:13). In this case, the respondents' statements imply that the nature of Emili Sindlev's profile makes her seem less open about her life and her personality, which hinders respondents from getting to know her better. Both through sponsored and non-sponsored posts. This suggests very low or no engagement in PSI. However, the respondents also agree that the lack of personal knowledge does not affect their perception of her credibility negatively: *"Maybe I would find her more credible if I knew her better. But otherwise I don't think it matters."* (Appendix 10, respondent 6:13). This perception most likely only applies to Emili Sindlev and other influencers with the same emphasis on fashion. Since respondents do not really need to know about her personality in order to determine whether they like her outfits, it also does not affect their perception of her credibility. However, if Emili Sindlev promoted products outside the fashion category, respondents may have felt that they needed knowledge of her personality in order to determine whether she was credible.

### **6.2.3 Emilie Lilja**

Most of the respondents have a generally good feeling about who Emilie Lilja is. One respondent states: *"I feel like I have a pretty good grip of what's happening in her life, what she's up to and what interests her"* (Appendix 16, respondent 12:11). Another respondent explains that she has been following Emilie Lilja for a long time and that she uses Instagram Stories a lot: *"Well, I've followed her for a long time. And she does this thing where she talks to the camera through stories. So in that sense, I believe that I have a good idea about who she is. That I'm not that into her anymore, that's a different story"* (Appendix 14, respondent 10:10). This respondent is showing some signs of

personal conflict in relation to Emilie Lilja. She expresses on several occasions that she does not find Emilie Lilja too interesting anymore, however she does not have the intention of unfollowing her and even states that it would be weird to do so after having followed her for so long. While it may not seem like this respondent experiences strong PSI towards Emilie Lilja, the fact that she is choosing to keep following her might indicate otherwise. The respondent is essentially free to withdraw from the “relationship” at any point, but chooses to maintain the connection, although she does not seem to gain anything from it anymore. It is easy to imagine that someone would behave this way with an old friend that they may have lost contact with. This suggests that PSI exists, as it imitates real relationships.

Three respondents state that they have gotten to know Emilie Lilja better through sponsored posts on occasion: *“Hmmm...for instance in a sponsorship with Spotify, where she had made a workout plan and a playlist. In that case, I really felt she cared. And cared about whether people liked it and wrote to her about it”* (Appendix 15, respondent 11:10). They all agree that some sponsored posts show larger commitment than others and these are especially contributing to getting to know her better. This was also seen with Rock Paper Dresses, where respondents also agreed that with the right personal angle, you can get to know an influencer better via sponsored posts. The respondents further stated that the posts that portray Emilie Lilja’s personality are more credible than others: *“It’s definitely more credible than the ones where you don’t see as much personality, I think. And it’s not that she’s not excited about that Puma outfit. You just don’t feel it the same way. So to me it seems more credible”* (Appendix 16, respondent 12:12).

The above shows that openness is important in establishing PSI. In the cases of both Rock Paper Dresses and Emilie Lilja, some degrees of PSI were seen, as respondents felt like they knew the influencers on a personal level. Furthermore, it is seen that personal knowledge of an influencer and thus PSI can increase as a result of commercial content under the right circumstances. Through the analysis of Emili Sindlev it was also found that this aspect of PSI is not a prerequisite for credibility in all cases, but definitely an advantage.

### **6.3 Personal Identification**

The second part of the analysis will relate to the theme of personal identification. This relates to the respondents’ feelings of identification with the influencers as well as their ability to see them as a friend. The respondents were asked questions relating to how the influencers made them feel, whether

they could relate and whether they felt as if they were watching a friend. Their statements have been classified under the following three codes: *“Personal identification”*, *“No personal identification”* and *“Comfort”* (Appendix 21).

### **6.3.1 Rock Paper Dresses**

Three respondents agree that they feel comfortable when watching Rock Paper Dresses. One respondent explains: *“She definitely makes me feel comfortable because she seems so happy and seems so open and approachable”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:21). Another respondent explains that Rock Paper Dresses makes her feel comfortable because she appears to be down to earth: *“...because she is down to earth and she makes both fashion and everyday life seem a little more down to earth, so you don’t have to strive to be this unachievable fashion icon or something...it seems achievable”* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:11). Both of these statements suggest that respondents find Rock Paper Dresses to be relatable due to her attitude and general self-portrayal on Instagram. One of the respondents further mentions that the fact that she feels comfortable when watching Rock Paper Dresses also makes her more credible (Appendix 5, respondent 1:22).

When asked whether they view Rock Paper Dresses as a girlfriend, two respondents answer no, but also mention that they would like to be able to think of her as a friend: *“Uhm I don’t know if I feel like she’s part of my social circle, but maybe more that I feel like I’d like to be looking at someone who’s in my social circle”* (Appendix 6, respondent 2:13). This answer suggests engagement in PSI, as it relates to other PSI studies, in which scholars have asked respondents whether they feel like they are watching a friend or whether they would like to be friends with the media persona in question (Rubin et al., 1985:167). One respondent does recognize some feelings of friendship and explains:

*“Hmmm...in a way, kind of. I know that she’s having a hard time getting pregnant and stuff and I really feel for her...like I really hope it will happen for her. And that’s sort of a weird thing to think about someone that you don’t know. So yes, maybe it is a little girlfriend-ish”* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:12).

This statement definitely points towards PSI, as the respondent expresses genuine empathy for Rock Paper Dresses. Through observations of Rock Paper Dresses’ Instagram profile, we have also concluded that many other followers share this respondent’s feelings. On April 8th 2018, Rock Paper Dresses announced her pregnancy on her Instagram page and the photo has received more than 21,000 likes (Appendix 20, 2). In comparison, the three photos before have only received between 1000 and

3000 likes. While most comments on the post just include a “congratulations”, there are also several longer comments that exhibit clear signs of PSI:

*“As someone who’s been through many years of fertility treatments and ended up with an egg donation due to a lack of eggs, I am really moved by your post [yellow heart emoji] I don’t know you, but I shed a tear on your behalf. Wow it’s so big [kissy face emoji]”* (Appendix 20, 3).

Another example is:

*“Just amazing! A huge congratulation!! My husband, little sis, my friends and I have followed your struggles with pregnancy, talked about you and crossed our fingers. It’s just amazing that it’s happened! A huge congratulation!!! [3 x red heart emoji]”* (Appendix 20, 4).

These comments display genuine PSI, as these followers experience true empathy and takes part in Rock Paper Dresses’ pain and happiness the same way as they would with a real friend.

Past studies have suggested that PSI might function as a mediating factor if an influencer is caught in a bad situation. This was also the case with Rock Paper Dresses, as a respondent who expresses a personal relation to Rock Paper Dresses easily forgave Rock Paper Dresses for a failed sponsorship with the labor union Krifa, where followers criticized her for her choice and lack of knowledge (cf. analysis on source credibility p. 77). Two respondents also state that the fact that they feel a personal relation to Rock Paper Dresses makes her more credible: *“Maybe she couldn’t be in my social circle, but I still feel like I maybe know her a little personally, and that makes me see her as more credible”* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:22).

### **6.3.2 Emili Sindlev**

None of the four respondents express strong feelings of a personal relation to Emili Sindlev. Two respondents state that she is slightly relatable because she is smiling in her photos, while the two others see no relation. One explains: *“She’s this “Nordsjællandspige” [danish expression for upper class girls] ... I think her parents have this huge house up in uhm...and I’m much more...I’m just a normal girl from Amager”* (Appendix 11, respondent 7:10). This respondent highlights the economic differences between herself and Emili Sindlev. She is under the impression that Emili Sindlev comes from a wealthy household, which makes her unrelatable compared to the respondent’s own life.

Another respondent explains that she cannot relate to Emili Sindlev because she does not pay attention to what her personality might be like: *“I just don’t think I look at her. It’s more her clothes and her things”* (Appendix 9, respondent 5:6). This supports the points in the previous analysis on source credibility in which it was made evident that respondents primarily follow Emili Sindlev for fashion inspiration. Finally, as exhibited in the previous analysis, the respondents find it difficult to relate to Emili Sindlev, since they do not have a clear picture of her personality.

The respondents’ answers indicate low to non-existing PSI. However, when asked whether their perception of her credibility is affected negatively by the lack of personal relation to Emili Sindlev, most answer no. One respondent explains: *“No I don’t think so actually. But then again, it’s about what I use her for. Fashion inspiration you know? But maybe she would be more credible if I felt like I could relate to her more.”* (Appendix 10, respondent 6:14). In this case, the lack of personal relations does not seem to have a negative effect on the perceived credibility of Emili Sindlev. However, it is indicated that Emili Sindlev might be more credible if she was more relatable, which indicates that perceived credibility may increase along with PSI. This applies to Emili Sindlev due to her “superficial” focus on fashion, as mentioned in the analysis above. Respondents might have a bigger need for a personal relation if she promoted other products as seen with Rock Paper Dresses.

### **6.3.3 Emilie Lilja**

With Emilie Lilja, the four respondents answer with more variation than in the other two cases. One respondent has no feeling of personal relation and explains that her and Emilie Lilja lead very different lifestyles (Appendix 14, respondent 10:11). Another respondent expresses some degree of personal relation to Emilie Lilja: *“Uhm... I don’t know. I feel like she’s starting to become annoying. But I still see myself in her in terms of being a tomboy. So in that way I feel comfortable when I see her in hoodies because I like that too”* (Appendix 13, respondent 9:11). When asked why she finds Emilie Lilja annoying the respondent answers: *“I think it’s because she makes so many of these sponsored posts. It becomes an annoyance”* (ibid.:12). This comment suggests that sponsored posts interferes with the respondent’s perception of Emilie Lilja as well as her ability to relate to her, which suggests that PSI might decrease along with increasing commercialization on Instagram. The respondent further states that the fact that she is finding it harder to relate to Emilie Lilja makes her less credible.



Two respondents indicate that they feel comfortable when watching Emilie Lilja due to her open and positive attitude. When asked why this attitude is so important, one respondent answers: *“It’s something I strive for myself. I like to be happy of course, but also to seem happy to others. And I like it when I seem like I have extra energy and that type of stuff”* (Appendix 15, respondent 11:11). In this case, the respondent indicates that she uses Emilie Lilja as motivation and inspiration for maintaining a positive attitude. This further indicates PSI as it suggests a personal relation in terms of comparing oneself to the media personality.

When asked whether they think of Emilie Lilja as a friend, three respondents indicate that they can compare her to their friends or that they would like to have her as a friend. One respondent explains that Emilie Lilja’s Instagram Stories plays a part in this context, as they remind her of the stories that her own friends make (Appendix 15, respondent 11:12). This supports the previous point, which implied that Instagram Stories can increase PSI in certain instances.

From the above, it can be concluded that PSI in terms of personal relations is highly dependent on the style and character of the influencers. In alignment with the previous sections, the respondents who follow Rock Paper Dresses seem to experience the strongest personal relation. This may be a result of Rock Paper Dresses’ openness, as this makes her easier to relate to. The respondents agree that feeling a personal relation to Rock Paper Dresses makes her more credible. In the case of Emilie Lilja, respondents are more conflicted as two respondents seem to think that Emilie Lilja has changed on Instagram, which is why they find her to be less relatable now. One respondent further mentions that she finds Emilie Lilja to be annoying due to the high concentration of commercial content on her channel. Finally, no signs of a personal relation were seen between the respondents and Emili Sindlev, which was mainly caused by a lack of interest from the respondents’ side as well as a lack of knowledge about Emili Sindlev’s personality. Interestingly, the respondents’ lack of personal relation did not affect their perception of Emili Sindlev’s credibility negatively, which was also the case in the previous section.

## **6.4 Interaction**

The final part of the analysis deals with the theme of interaction and relates to the theory in terms of interactivity or perceived interactivity. This deals with the respondents’ desire to contact the influencers as well as their perception of the influencers’ interest in their comments and feedback. If the respondents feel as if they are engaging in two-way communication, PSI can be concluded to

exist. The respondents' statements have been coded under: "no interaction" "interest in interaction", "no interest in interactions" and "interaction equals credibility".

### 6.4.1 Rock Paper Dresses

None of the respondents have ever attempted to contact Rock Paper Dresses through comments or direct messaging. However, all four respondents indicate that Rock Paper Dresses would be interested in their comments and feedback, as exemplified here: *"I have an idea that she generally replies to the comments that she gets. I think that...or I notice that she's normally very accommodating to people who have questions for her or write to her"* (Appendix 5, respondent 1:23). This perception of Rock Paper Dresses suggests some level of PSI as the respondent believes that Rock Paper Dresses would most likely answer if she asked a question. Another respondent mentions that Rock Paper Dresses sometimes asks for advice from her followers and therefore must be interested in their comments and feedback (Appendix 8, respondent 4:10). This comment also exhibits a degree of PSI as the respondent believes that Rock Paper Dresses is interested in her followers' comments and feedback.

Observations on Rock Paper Dresses' Instagram profile confirm the respondents' perceptions, as she answers most comments that include questions (Instagram, @rockpaperdresses). One example shows a follower who asks where Rock Paper Dresses' bike is from (Appendix 20, 5), to which she answers: *"@ranrosanna it's a Batavus that I bought 5-6 years ago and it's still going! I really investigated the market back then - everyone mentioned it [raising hands emoji]"* (Appendix 20, 6). In another post, Rock Paper Dresses is eating ice cream and asks how many of her followers had their first ice cream of the year as well (Appendix 20, 7). One respondent indicates via emojis that she had ice cream too, to which Rock Paper Dresses replied: *"@yogibine Yeeees! I feel like saying CONGRATULATIONS [grinning face emoji] isn't that what the kids say in kindergarten, when they have the same lunch? Or am I remembering it wrong? [grinning face emoji] [raised hands emoji]"* (Appendix 20, 8). This reply mimics conversation between two people who know each other, as it is very casual and friendly. However, since Rock Paper Dresses does not follow the user @yogibine on Instagram, it is fair to assume that the two have no real relationship. Both of these examples support the respondents' perceptions and thus it can be concluded that there is a strong foundation for PSI, as it should increase along with the level of interactivity.

All four respondents further agree that it increases Rock Paper Dresses' credibility when she answers her followers. When asked whether she finds Rock Paper Dresses more credible because she takes

time to answer her followers, one respondent replies: *“Yes I think that...I just think it’s so thoughtful that she takes the time to answer...if she didn’t get around to write where her socks were from and someone asks...that you bother to answer...”* (Appendix 7, respondent 3:13). This answer not only suggests that perceived credibility increases when influencers spend time answering their followers, but maybe also that the general perception of the influencer as a sympathetic person increases.

#### **6.4.2 Emili Sindlev**

With Emili Sindlev, one respondent mentions that she has considered writing to Emili Sindlev on a few occasions. The rest have never written to her or considered it. However, in opposition to Rock Paper Dresses, the respondents do not believe that Emili Sindlev would spend time answering her followers. The one respondent who considered writing to her withheld from doing so because other followers had already asked the same question. When asked whether Emili Sindlev had replied to those comments she answers: *“Never. And I know she has a lot of followers buuuuut... I still think she should answer. I mean, she’s not Kim Kardashian. She just doesn’t seem very engaged”* (Appendix 12, respondent 8:14). This comment indicates that Emili Sindlev might be diminishing chances of PSI among herself and her followers and thus possibly diminishing their perception of her credibility. However, as previously mentioned, it is worth noting that Emili Sindlev has 100,000 followers more than Rock Paper Dresses and Emilie Lilja. Through observations of Emili Sindlev’s profile, it is evident that she most often does not reply to questions regarding the outfits that she is wearing, however she does “like” almost every comment to her photos, which indicates some level of interaction (Instagram, @emilisindlev).

Two respondents mention that in the case of sponsorships they believe that Emili Sindlev owes it to the sponsoring brand to answer questions about the product, as it would be part of her job: *“...when it’s her job and she gets paid to post an outfit, then I also think that part of it is to answer where it was bought or when it will be available...”* (Appendix 11, respondent 7:11). The respondents also all agree that Emili Sindlev would be more credible if she replied to questions, which is in line with the statements regarding Rock Paper Dresses. It must therefore be assumed that the foundation for PSI in relation to interaction is much less significant for Emili Sindlev than it is for Rock Paper Dresses.

#### **6.4.3 Emilie Lilja**

Finally, in the case of Emilie Lilja, none of the respondents had ever attempted contact. Opinions were split in terms of whether Emilie Lilja would be interested in comments and reply to messages.

One respondent believes that Emilie Lilja gets too many comments, and is therefore not able to reply, while another respondent believes that she is just generally uninterested in her followers' opinions: *"With Emilie Lilja, her profile is like, it's her life and it's not meant to include...not meant to include us. In that way"* (Appendix 14, respondent 10:12). This comment indicates no PSI as the respondent does not feel included in Emilie Lilja's life at all. However, another respondent mentions: *"...yes she's done these 'ask me questions' uhm...where she's filmed in her story that she's answered some questions and that type of stuff. And that says, like that shows that she'd like to interact with those who follow her you know?"* (Appendix 13, respondent 9:13). These two replies stand in clear opposition to one another, but emphasizes previous points about Emilie Lilja as being "difficult to figure out". It further indicates that PSI is more likely to exist among followers who believe that she is interested in contact and interaction.

All four respondents agree that credibility increases when Emilie Lilja replies to comments and questions. When asked whether Emilie Lilja loses credibility by not answering questions one respondent states: *"Yes, it just seems more like a billboard or like an agency or something. It seems a little mechanical or robot-like, so yes"* (Appendix 15, respondent 11:13). This implies that PSI affects credibility in the sense that influencers are perceived more commercial when they opt out of interacting with followers and vice versa.

The above shows that PSI in the form of interaction can be highly influential on Instagram users' perceived credibility of influencers. The respondents who follow Rock Paper Dresses indicate the strongest signs of engaging in PSI as they believe that Rock Paper Dresses is interested in interaction with her followers and answers all of their questions. This perception increases their overall opinion of her likability and makes her seem more credible. The respondents further mention that both Rock Paper Dresses and Emilie Lilja make use of Instagram Stories to speak directly to their followers, which increases PSI according to Auter's theory on breaking the fourth wall. Opinions regarding Emilie Lilja are, however, more split as some respondents do not see her as inclusive. Finally, the respondents who follow Emili Sindlev indicate no signs of PSI, as they do not believe that Emili Sindlev is interested in interacting with her followers. They state that Emili Sindlev would be more credible if she took the time to answer her followers when they have questions about clothes that she is wearing and further if she made more use of Instagram Stories.

## **6.5 Conclusion on Parasocial Interaction**

In the analysis above we sought to investigate how PSI exists between influencers and their followers in a commercial context on Instagram. It was found that the possibility of PSI exists, due to the inclusive and interactive nature of some influencers' behavior. Furthermore, it was found that PSI largely depends on whether influencers share personal details and glimpses of their everyday lives, as well as whether they use Instagram Stories to mimic interaction with real friends. In relation to the three separate elements of PSI, the following can be concluded.

Firstly, it was found that the respondents who follow Rock Paper Dresses and Emilie Lilja had the greatest perception of the influencers' openness and consequently the greatest perception of their personalities. This was caused by their inclusive characters, as they share personal details and include followers in their everyday life. The respondents' comments further indicated that PSI may increase as a result of commercial content, if a thorough and meaningful personal angle is applied.

Secondly, the analysis showed that having a personal relation to the influencers or viewing them as a friend would increase the respondent's perception of credibility in the cases of Rock Paper Dresses and Emilie Lilja. However, due to Emili Sindlev's strong focus on fashion, respondents did not require to feel a personal relation in order to view her as credible.

Finally, it was found that the respondents showed little PSI engagement in terms of actual interaction with the influencers. However, all of the respondents who follow Rock Paper Dresses and half of the respondents who follow Emilie Lilja believed that the influencers were interested in interacting with their followers. Nearly all respondents agreed that they perceive influencers to be more credible if they interact with their followers, which proves that this element of PSI is highly important in terms of building and maintaining credibility in a commercial context.

Conclusively, it can be said that consumers engage in various degrees of PSI with different influencers depending on their perception of and relationship with the influencer. Furthermore, PSI is relevant as it may improve consumers' perception of the influencers' credibility in spite of commercial content.

# Discussion and Future Research



The following chapter will include a discussion of key findings from the preceding analyses. The point is to reflect on the results in relation to our chosen theory and methodology. Furthermore, we wish to bring forward a more nuanced understanding of our results and the factors that may have impacted them.

## **7.1 Match**

An interesting finding in relation to our analysis on match, is the initial lack of a perception of “fit”, when the respondents were first told about the specific case collaborations for Rock Paper Dresses and Emili Sindlev. The personality descriptions made by the respondents did not seem to indicate a good match in either case and neither did the respondents see a truly good match after having described the influencers and the brands. Their arguments were rooted in their perceptions of the influencers and the brands, and they did not find it natural to imagine Rock Paper Dresses with an Adax bag or Emili Sindlev wearing clothes by Vero Moda. However, when the respondents were shown the visual representation of the collaborations they all changed their opinions and indicated a good match for both influencers. They justified the change in opinion by admitting that both Rock Paper Dresses and Emili Sindlev looked natural in the images and that they probably would not have identified the posts as advertisements if they had not seen the accompanying text. Our results therefore suggest that a match, according to our respondents, is highly dependent on the context of the collaboration.

While this adds an interesting level of nuance to our research, it is worth discussing why we might have achieved these results.

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, congruity exists when objects of similarly ascribed attitudes are associated within peoples' minds (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955:43). Our respondents first indicated that a match did not exist for Rock Paper Dresses and Adax and likewise for Emili Sindlev and Vero Moda. Congruity theory therefore suggests that the respondents were not able to positively link the objects within their minds. However, when we presented them with the images that had been posted to each influencers' Instagram profile, the respondents changed their minds and stated that it made good sense and that they did see a match. This suggests that the image functioned as an extra object of association, which allowed the respondents to achieve congruity. Furthermore, the theory on congruity states that people generally strive to achieve congruity between objects that are linked in their minds, as this provides them with satisfaction and comfort. This may explain the respondents' willingness to accept the images as a solution for the lack of congruity that they experienced without the visual object of association. It is therefore evident that creating the right context between an influencer in a sponsored post is increasingly more important, as this is how consumers may come to terms with any conscious or subconscious feelings of congruity. If Rock Paper Dresses had chosen to feature the Adax bag in a photo that did not include her holding it, the respondents might not have achieved congruity between her and Adax. Consequently, they might not have perceived a match to exist, which might have affected the perceived credibility of Rock Paper Dresses.

While the above proves that context and visual understanding is highly influential on the respondents' perception of match, it also suggests a difference between our study and the reality on Instagram. On Instagram, users are exposed to brand-influencer collaborations through visual content first. Therefore, they are not offered the opportunity to reflect upon the "fit" of a collaboration before being confronted with the context. Had we chosen to show our respondents the post at the same time as presenting the collaboration, it is reasonable to assume that we would have concluded that all three collaborations were instantly perceived as a good match. While this might have been sufficient for the study, as it more accurately resembles the reality on Instagram, it would not have provided us with the insight into the importance of the context.

## **7.2 Source Credibility**

An interesting finding in the analysis on source credibility surrounded the difference in results pertaining to the perceived expertise in relation to each case influencer. In our chapter on methodology, we stated that the three case influencers had been chosen in order to gain a nuanced

perspective on influencer credibility (cf. Selection of Case Influencers p.39). We were aware that the chosen influencers had different personalities and acted within different niches and hoped that this would provide us with insight into the complexity that we believed influencer marketing to possess. Through the analysis, we can see that this proves to be the case, as there are significant differences in the results between the three influencers in relation to expertise. The following discussion will therefore look into the effect of our choice of influencers on our results and whether they would have been different with a more homogenous selection.

In our analysis we saw three primary patterns in terms of the respondents' needs and expectations for influencers' expertise. Firstly, respondents felt that influencers should have some expertise within the areas of their specific niche or interests. Secondly, they expected influencers to have additional knowledge of a product if it had a function. Examples such as skincare, cooking recipes and kitchen appliances were given. Finally, they did not expect influencers to be experts on the more technical aspects of fashion such as production or material. Although the respondents did indicate that influencers who promote fashion should have some knowledge of styling, none of them indicated that they perceived Emili Sindlev as having expertise on the topic of fashion, since they all indicated that she probably did not know about production or materials. This finding was particularly interesting as the respondents further indicated that the lack of expertise did not affect their perception of Emili Sindlev's credibility, as they had no need for additional information about the production or quality of the clothes. This suggests that the respondents' interpretation of the word expertise in relation to product promotion on Instagram is related to a deeper and more technical type of knowledge. Keeping in mind that expertise in this thesis is defined as "*the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions*" (Hovland et al., 1953:21), it is fair to assume that Emili Sindlev does in fact possess expertise. This assumption is based on the interpretation that a source's expertise is determined by the audience's need for information, as is indicated by the word "perceived" in the definition. Since Emili Sindlev's followers' need for information seems to be exclusively related to her abilities as a stylist, we can therefore assume that the respondents would in fact see her as an expert, if they had interpreted the word differently.

While the above may indicate that respondents may require very little from Emili Sindlev in terms of expertise, it may also limit her opportunities as an influencer. In contrast, respondents expected Emilie Lilja to be an expert in relation to more functional products such as loudspeakers and headphones on account of her job as a DJ or fitness products on account of her enthusiasm for working



out. The requirements for Emilie Lilja in terms of remaining credible in sponsorships may therefore seem much higher, as she is expected to be extraordinarily knowledgeable about a product, whereas Emili Sindlev is essentially just expected to determine whether something looks good or not. This may be the case; however, it also limits Emili Sindlev's opportunity for expanding the range of her sponsorships as she is not perceived to be knowledgeable other topics than fashion.

Our results provide us with a very nuanced picture in relation to the concept of expertise and the differences between product categories are evident. We intentionally selected influencers with different profiles for this exact purpose, which resulted in quite varied answers. Had we instead chosen three influencers with very similar profiles, it is fair to assume that our respondents' answers would have been more unanimous. This is a reasonable assumption, since the interviews showed that expertise is far more related to product category than it is to the individual influencer. Had we for instance chosen three influencers similar to Emili Sindlev, our answers might have looked different because all 12 of the respondents would have answered the questions in the context of fashion. This would have resulted in a more conclusive result, but it would not have provided us with the same understanding of the respondents' varying needs in relation to product categories.

### **7.3 PSI**

The analysis on PSI shows that Rock Paper Dresses' followers seem to be engaged in more PSI than the followers of both Emili Sindlev and Emilie Lilja. While some PSI is evident with Emilie Lilja, there are almost no signs of PSI with Emili Sindlev. In the analysis we conclude that the respondents believed Rock Paper Dresses to share much more personal information, be more down-to-earth and interact more with her followers all of which resulted in PSI. Upon reviewing the results of the analysis, we find it relevant to discuss whether other factors may have contributed to the higher engagement in PSI in relation to Rock Paper Dresses and furthermore whether results would be different if three more similar influencers had been chosen.

As mentioned in the introduction, some influencers act across various channels. This is also the case with Rock Paper Dresses who runs a blog with the same name as her Instagram profile. While the respondents were asked to focus only on Instagram, there is a chance that their answers might have been affected by knowledge and impressions that they have acquired from her blog. Therefore, it makes sense to discuss whether Rock Paper Dresses' followers' would have the same experiences of

PSI if she had not had the blog and conversely whether Emili Sindlev and Emilie Lilja's followers would have different experiences if these influencers had blogs too.

Colliander and Dahlén (2011:314) argue that PSI should be prevalent on blogs for two reasons. First, blogs are updated frequently (ibid.). According to Auter (1992:174) this should reinforce PSI as the parasocial feelings should grow along with each encounter. This however, would also be true for Instagram and maybe even more true, as Instagram posts should require much less time and preparation than a blog post. This is also true for Rock Paper Dresses who typically uploads several posts a day to Instagram, while the blog is typically only updated once every two or even three days. Second, Colliander and Dahlén argue that PSI is applicable to blogs, as "*readers are exposed to details from the blogger's personal life and watch him or her interact with other online visitors through comment functions*" (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011:314). This is the point where Rock Paper Dresses' blog may "win" over her Instagram. While she shares personal information via both channels, there is no denying that the information shared via her blog is more expansive and goes further into detail. This means that readers are exposed to a greater portion of her thoughts and opinions and therefore they might find her more relatable. This could explain the difference in the results between Rock Paper Dresses and the two others. Emilie Lilja does not have a blog and while Emili Sindlev does, the posts only contain photos and it was last updated two months ago (Emilisindlev.com, 2018). Consequently, there is abundantly more information available about Rock Paper Dresses than the two other, which could result in stronger PSI engagement from her followers, given that they read the blog.

While this might provide an explanation as to why Rock Paper Dresses' followers seem to engage more in PSI, it does not necessarily mean that results would be the same for Emili Sindlev and Emilie Lilja. As indicated by Emili Sindlev's current blog, it appears that it would be as fashion focused as her Instagram, if she were to post more frequently in the future than she does now. And while the respondents all agreed that they follow her for fashion inspiration, most of them also agreed that they did not really have a need to gain further perspective into her personality. In this case, it is reasonable to assume that Instagram as a communication channel is sufficient for Emili Sindlev, as it serves the purpose of communicating fashion in the form of images without much additional information. As for Emilie Lilja, it is more difficult to predict what her style of blogging would be or whether it would make a difference. The two respondents who did not indicate any signs of engaging in PSI with Emilie Lilja, had either lost interest in her due to a confusing line of posts or because they found her many

sponsorships irritating. This suggests that PSI is hindered by a lack of a clearer and more focused character narrative and expanding with a blog might therefore not be a way to engage her followers more.

While we can argue that our results may not have been different if all three influencers had had a blog, it is also worth discussing whether our results would have been more unanimous if our influencers had been more similar in style and personality.

It is easy to assume that three influencers with a similar profile to Rock Paper Dresses, would have followers who engage in PSI in similar ways. However, as it was evident in our analysis, PSI seemed to be very dependent on the individual influencer as well as the respondents' need for interaction. The respondents who follow Rock Paper Dresses indicated several examples of why they seemed to like her so much. These included her dog, boyfriend, physical appearance and the fact that she was so open about her struggles with pregnancy. These are all very personal examples that cannot be replicated by other influencers, which means that the respondents' foundation for engaging in PSI with Rock Paper Dresses is largely based on elements that are very specific to her personality and life. Consequently, there is no guarantee that three influencers whose interests and profiles were similar to Rock Paper Dresses would come up with the same results in terms of PSI.

The point above would likely apply to Emili Sindlev as well, as there is no way of knowing whether three influencers similar to her would have come up with the same results for PSI. It is fair to assume that an influencer could have the same focus on fashion as Emili Sindlev, while sharing more of her personality and interacting more with her followers. Our results indicate that this influencer would likely rank higher in terms of PSI than Emili Sindlev, which would mean that such an analysis' results on PSI might be as differentiating as the ones in this thesis. We therefore assess that it is possible that the results in our PSI analysis would not have been more unanimous if a more homogenous group of case influencers had been chosen.

## **7.4 Future Research**

The following section will elaborate on topics for future research. These are topics related to the present thesis that would increase and further nuance the understanding of influencer marketing on Instagram.

As mentioned in the introduction, the literature on the topic of this thesis is quite limited. To our knowledge, no one has attempted to study how consumers perceive influencers' credibility in a commercial context on Instagram. This thesis therefore provides valuable insights into what we perceive to be undiscovered territory in academic literature. While past researchers have primarily focused on influencer credibility in relation to blogs, we found it relevant to investigate the topic in the context of one of the world's busiest social media platforms. Through our qualitative analysis we have attempted to contribute to a greater understanding of consumers' perception of credibility as well as the factors that drive this perception. Furthermore, the thesis contributes with an understanding of the nuance and complexity that is related to the concept of credibility on Instagram. We found that consumers appear to pay great attention to credibility on Instagram and that several factors within match, source credibility and PSI matter in terms of how they perceive an influencer along with the messages that they communicate. However, we are aware that there are facets to the topic that our research does not address.

As mentioned in the discussion above, we saw noticeable differences between our influencers. It was especially evident in relation to source credibility and the element of expertise. While we were able to clarify some of the nuances and possible causes, we do not provide a complete comparison of our case influencers, as this was not the purpose of the thesis. It would be interesting however, to conduct a comparative study to gain further insight into consumers' expectations of various influencers. One possible angle would be to further contrast and compare the differences between influencers within different categories. An example could be food and fashion. Another possible angle could be to compare newer and less established influencers with more established and well-known ones. This would be interesting as some respondents indicated, that established influencers with a large number of followers were more credible with newer ones, as they did not perceive them to be as critical and selective in their sponsorships. Such studies would contribute with a more thorough understanding of the differences than the one presented in this thesis.

Another interesting perspective for future research relates to the delimitation of this thesis. As we focused entirely on female influencers and respondents, we are not able to make any assumptions as to whether our results might apply to men as well. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct a study with male influencers and respondents in order to determine whether men use Instagram for the same reasons as women and whether credibility is as important to them.

While our study shows that credibility is important for consumers in relation to influencer marketing on Instagram, it does not make any assumptions as to what it means for the effectiveness of a marketing campaign. While theories on credibility indicate that credible sources are more persuasive than those around them, we are not able to make any valid statements as to whether this is the case in relation to our research. We therefore find it relevant to suggest that future research looks into the effect of consumers' perception of influencer credibility in relation to the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Instagram. Such a research might clarify whether influencers on Instagram can actually create purchase intentions among consumers. In our in-depth interviews, some respondents mentioned that they would likely search for further reviews and recommendations for products with a function that they were not able to try out prior to a purchase. They explained that they would not base their purchase decision off of the opinion of a single influencer. This observation makes it interesting to expand the study and investigate the possible differences in effectiveness in relation to various product categories.

The suggested studies above would naturally all contribute to existing literature within the limited field of influencer marketing on Instagram. However, they would also contribute to practitioners' understanding of the concept and assist them in making the right evaluations and decisions when moving forward with influencer marketing.

# Conclusion



This chapter will complete the thesis by concluding on the findings and thus provide an answer to the research questions: *how is influencer credibility perceived by consumers on Instagram in a commercialized context?*

The purpose of the thesis was to investigate aspects of influencer credibility in the context of commercialization on Instagram as seen from a consumer perspective. This was found relevant, as influencer marketing on Instagram blurs the line between what consumers consider to be genuine opinions and paid advertisement. Therefore, it made sense to study consumers' perceived credibility of influencers as this can be questioned when influencers engage in commercial collaborations.

As this paper has a social constructivist perspective on knowledge creation, the findings are a result of the socially constructed reality between us, the researchers, and the empirical data. Therefore, the results should not be seen as a definitive truth. Furthermore, the qualitative approach to the research makes it impossible to make generalizations about consumers' perception of influencers' credibility. Instead, the findings should be seen as indications of possible perceptions of the topic.

The first part of the empirical analysis regarded the match between influencer and brand in a sponsored collaboration. Here, it was found that a match cannot be assessed based purely on associations but is highly dependent on the context in each individual post. This was found, as respondents paid great attention as to whether the product seemed to fit naturally into the life of the influencer. Furthermore, it was indicated that a match is highly related to perceptions of influencers' credibility. Finally, it was seen that the perception of a good match is based on how well a sponsorship fits with the overall narrative of the influencer.

The second part dealt with source credibility which was broken down into the elements of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. It was found that the expectations of influencers' product knowledge is dependent on the category, as products with a function require more information. Furthermore, influencers should remain critical when selecting brand collaborations as this may enhance their trustworthiness. Finally, it was seen that attractiveness is important, specifically in terms of appealing photos and maintaining a positive attitude. Thus, high source credibility was found to enhance influencers' credibility, however, with some nuances depending on the style of the influencer.

The third and final part examined the perceived parasocial interaction between influencers and their followers. It was discovered that sharing personal information, being relatable and interacting with followers can enhance PSI, which in turn might affect the perception of influencers' credibility in a positive way. Furthermore, it was found that PSI mediates the issues between influencers and commercial content, as the parasocial relationship might cause consumers to be more accepting of sponsored messages.

After the analyses a discussion was presented, which addressed possible causes of findings in the analysis. In regards to match, it was found that the qualitative methodology results in a more thorough understanding of consumers' perception of match and the relation to congruity. In the discussion of source credibility, the interpretation of the word expertise was discussed. It was found that consumers may ascribe a deeper and more function-based meaning to the word, which may cause fashion focused influencers to be perceived as having less expertise. Finally, in relation to PSI it was discussed whether a more homogenous group of influencers would have resulted in more unanimous findings. However, the correlation between the influencer's personality and followers' engagement in PSI, makes it reasonable to assume that a more unanimous result cannot be predicted by choosing similar influencers.

In conclusion, it can be said that perceptions of credibility are a complex matter in relation to influencers on Instagram. It is clear that the increased commercialization challenges consumers' perceptions of influencers' credibility. It can be argued that the perception of credibility in a commercial context is largely dependent on each individual influencer and each individual collaboration. In this regard it is found that consumers are more likely to perceive influencers as credible when:

- They are conscious about the fit between themselves and the brands that they collaborate with
- They consider consumers' need for expertise, remain critical and selective in regards to sponsorships and create visually appealing content, which reflects a positive mindset
- They engage and interact with followers and appear open towards sharing aspects of themselves and their lives.



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## **Appendix 1: Focus Group (pilot study), Key Points**

Focus group interview, 1 hour and 19 minutes

Four participants: Line (24), Sarah (25), Melanie (25) and Line (30)

### **Summary of key points**

The participants talk about how they experience content on Instagram. They say that they are constantly being exposed to commercials and sponsored content, which is foundation for a lot of irritation. This was both in relation to Instagram's algorithm, which places sponsored brand-content in people's feeds. But also in relation to sponsored influencer-content, which the participants are being exposed to because they follow different influencers on Instagram.

The participants feel that sponsored content is "taking over" and that focus has changed immensely since they first started using Instagram. They talk about how Instagram was previously a place, where you primarily posted pictures to share with your friends. Today it is a completely different social media site, where you still follow your friends but now it is also normal to follow people and profiles that you do not know personally. The participants see both advantages and disadvantages with the changes of Instagram. They express that it is an advantage that you can follow a lot of different profiles that inspire you. This is primarily related to fashion, but also food and home decor are areas where the participants use Instagram as a source for inspiration. On the other hand, they feel that these influencers, whom they follow for inspiration, are beginning to post a lot of commercial content. This is one of the main disadvantages of the development of Instagram that the participants see.

The participants explain that an influencer in their opinion is someone who holds some type of skill. Someone who has a platform and has the power to influence other people. The participants also express that it is necessary to have many followers in order to be an influencer, and you need to be known by many people as well. It is possible to be an influencer on many different platforms, but the participants agree that Instagram is platform where they are most active in terms of following influencers. They express that a couple of years ago, it was more widespread to follow influencers on their blogs, but now it has moved to Instagram. They explain that this is a social media site where it is easy to reach a large number of people, and that for the followers it does not take as much involvement as it does reading blog posts.

All the participants are following several influencers on Instagram. As mentioned, the main reason for doing this, is to be inspired by their style and “better looking” universe. The participants are following many different influencers, and these include both Danish influencers and international and large influencers such as Kim Kardashian.

The participants talk about how following an influencer lets them become a part of the influencer's life. It allows them to be a fly on the wall and get insight into the lifestyle of the influencer. The participants experience that influencers on Instagram normally post a new picture every day or every second day. Furthermore, the influencers often post many stories almost everyday. The participants say that this makes them feel like they truly know what the influencers are doing and how they live their lives. The participants talk about how this makes them feel like they actually know many of the influencers they follow - especially those influencers that share many personal details about themselves. The participants talk about how it can create a friend-like feeling when they get to know different aspects of an influencer's life.

The participants explain that this feeling of a personal relation depends highly of the influencers' willingness to share personal information. They say that Instagram Stories are one of the best ways to learn about an influencer's life as it is more “here and now” images. There are some influencers, where the participants feel like they know them and would be able to say “this is typical her”, but there are also other influencers, where they do not feel like they know much about their personalities.

In relation to the commercial content, which the participants express is increasing on Instagram, they all say that it can create a distance between them and the influencer. The participants say that when influencers are doing commercial posts they are often doubting whether it is sincere. Because of that, it can be difficult to know, whether it is a true and honest opinion or whether the influencer is just saying nice words about a brand/product because they are being paid. In relation to the personal connection the participants feel to some influencers, questioning their sincerity makes them feel less personally connected because it can feel like the influencer is trying to tell a lie.

The participants say that the increasing commercial focus on Instagram makes them question whether they can trust the influencers that they follow. They say that every time an Instagram post is marked as sponsored content, it is difficult to know whether it is sincere. They explain that because there is money involved, it becomes unclear what the motives behind the posts are. The participants especially highlight that when they feel that the sponsored post does not fit into the overall impression that they have of the influencer, they question whether it is sincere. They talk about how it seems more trustworthy when the sponsored content feels as a natural element alongside the influencer's other content. It is important that there is a common thread in order for an influencer to appear credible.

When talking about the issue of influencer credibility, the participants say that it depends on the individual influencer. They see some influencers as credible, where others are perceived as highly untrustworthy. It really depends on how the sponsored posts are carried out. It increases credibility if the influencer uses the sponsored product several times, and the participants talk about how being an “ambassador” for a specific brand makes the influencer appear more credible. Furthermore, the participants say that larger influencers often appear more credible because it seems as if they can be more critical towards which companies they want to work with. Consequently, the participants expect smaller or new influencers to be more willing to say yes to any sponsorship as long as they get free products or money. This is due to the expectation that large influencers receive more offers.

Despite talking very negatively about sponsored content and how it affects their perception of the influencers, the participants also talk about how sponsored content can be a good thing. This is especially because you can become aware of products that you might not have heard of otherwise. They also talk about how commercial content is more appealing when it comes from the influencer than if it came directly from the company.

The participants agree that there is a lot of “noise” on Instagram because of the increasing commercialization. They are constantly being exposed to commercials and it is difficult to know, whether the influencers that they started following because of good taste and fascinating lifestyles, are keeping true to themselves or selling out to businesses because of monetary purposes. The participants talk about how it can be easy to unfollow someone, if the sponsored content becomes too much or seems to be insincere.

## Appendix 2: Case Study

Emilie Lilja	Dato	Rockpaperdresses	Dato	Emili Sindlev	Dato
Zalando	01/12/2017	Flying Tiger	03/12/2017	Reserved	04/12/2017
Zalando	04/12/2017	Posy	05/12/2017	Gucci	10/12/2017
Zalando	05/12/2017	Adax	06/12/2017	Tori Burch	12/12/2017
Hifi Klubben	08/12/2017	Jukserei	08/12/2017	H&M	15/12/2017
SAS	19/12/2017	Naked Fashion	10/12/2017	Vero Moda	11/01/2018
SAS	20/12/2017	HP (printer)	13/12/2017	Minimum Fashion	17/01/2018
SAS	21/12/2017	Selected Official	17/12/2017	Nina Ricci	24/01/2018
Spotify	16/01/2018	Adax	02/01/2018	Mykke Hofmann	31/01/2018
Aussie Hair	16/01/2018	H&M	11/01/2018		
SAS + 66 North	23/01/2018	Eau Thermale Avène	25/01/2018		
Aussie Hair	25/01/2018	Nespresso	28/01/2018		
		Yogi Tea Europe	30/01/2018		

## Emilie Lilja & Puma

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BftmGQMh4j-/?taken-by=emilielilja>



**emilielilja** • Følger  
Powerhouse Frederiksberg

emilielilja | Sponsoreret |  
Den nye @pumaperformance kollektion  
er fucking 🔥🔥🔥  
@intersport.dk  
#DoYou  
#Sporttothepeople  
aspionee 🤫🚀🔥  
carolinecorinth Du er 🔥



1.035 Synes godt om

FOR 4 DAGE SIDEN

Tilføj en kommentar ...



## Rock Paper Dresses & Adax

[https://www.instagram.com/p/BesIP\\_YhJZW/?taken-by=rockpaperdresses](https://www.instagram.com/p/BesIP_YhJZW/?taken-by=rockpaperdresses)



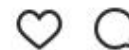
rockpaperdresses • Følger

rockpaperdresses sponsored @adaxbags | Just a small proof that I did wear something else today than my pajamas 😂 At least for a few hours!

stormpmuseet Fantastisk med alle de smukke damer samlet på et billede - både dig og de to skønne madammer på vores udstillingsplakater i baggrunden! 🥰💕 We love it @rockpaperdresses

rockpaperdresses @stormpmuseet Og sådanne to herlige plakater må jeg indskyde 🙏🙏

stormpmuseet @rockpaperdresses 🙌👉  
goldenghetto Fineste 🎀



610 Synes godt om

2. FEBRUAR

Tilføj en kommentar ...



## Emili Sindlev & Vero Moda

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BdzkqkTIYzF/?taken-by=emilisindlev>



emilisindlev • Følger

emilisindlev advertisement | Happy face 😊  
Shooting with @veromoda #veromoda

Vis alle 38 kommentarer

mhortense 😍

innu.outfits\_official Cute

efilavda 😊👍🇺🇦🌹

yaelusch Obsessed

josimariaxx Oh wow - girl, you are so inspiring and wonderful💕 xoxo

mariafarrofootwear Cute tee

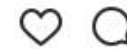
lilywrist 💙💙💙

Isromantic This is amazing!!!!!!

kathikaefflein @veromoda when will the pieces of the shooting be in stores? 😍

esenia.naoumova Yesss to this outfit!

lauren\_worden So cute



5.468 Synes godt om

11. JANUAR

Tilføj en kommentar ...



### Appendix 3: Focus Group (pilot study), Interview guide

Forskningsspørgsmål	Interviewspørgsmål
Hvordan bruger deltagerne Instagram? <i>How do the participants use Instagram?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvor meget bruger i Instagram?</li> <li>• <i>How much do you use Instagram?</i></li> <li>• Til hvad og hvorfor?</li> <li>• <i>For what and why?</i></li> </ul>
Hvad er den generelle opfattelse af en influencer <i>What is the general perceptions of an influencer?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvad skal der til for at man er influencer?</li> <li>• <i>What does it mean to be an influencer?</i></li> <li>• Hvad synes I om hele influencer fænomenet?</li> <li>• <i>How do you feel about the influencer phenomenon?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Altså det at nogle personer fx kan være med til at påvirke dagsordenen på forskellige områder?</li> <li>• <i>That some people for instance have the capability of affecting agendas in some areas?</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Hvordan opleves den generelle holdning til influencers på Instagram? <i>How is the general attitude towards influencers on Instagram?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvad synes I om influencers på Instagram?</li> <li>• <i>How do you feel about influencers on Instagram?</i></li> <li>• Fylder det meget?</li> <li>• <i>Do you notice it a lot</i></li> <li>• Hvorfor følger I influencers på Instagram?</li> <li>• <i>Why do you follow influencers on Instagram?</i></li> <li>• Hvorfor er det spændende?</li> <li>• <i>Why is it exciting?</i></li> <li>• Hvad får I ud af det?</li> <li>• <i>What do you gain from it?</i></li> <li>• Er det nogle udfordringer ved influencers på Instagram?</li> <li>• <i>Are there any challenges related to influencers on Instagram?</i></li> </ul>
Troværdighed <i>Credibility</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvor gør, at I ser en influencer som troværdig?</li> <li>• <i>When is an influencer credible in your opinion?</i></li> <li>• Hvornår er en influencer ikke troværdig?</li> <li>• <i>When is an influencer not credible in your opinion?</i></li> <li>• Hvad betyder sammenhængen mellem en influencer og et brand i et sponsoreret samarbejde for jer?</li> <li>• <i>What does the match between influencer and brand mean to you?</i></li> <li>• Synes I at influencers virker professionelle i forhold til de ting de promoverer?</li> <li>• <i>Do influencers seem professional to you in terms of the products they promote?</i></li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Har I nogensinde prøvet at kontakte en influencer?</li> <li>• <b>Have you ever tried to contact an influencer?</b></li> <li>• Hvor meget betyder det visuelle ift deres troværdighed?</li> <li>• <b>How much does the visual mean in terms of their credibility?</b></li> </ul>
<p>Fremtiden <b>The future</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ser I nogle udfordringer ved at influencers i højere grad bliver betalt for deres indhold nu end tidligere?</li> <li>• <b>Do you see any challenges now that influencer more often than before are being paid for their content?</b></li> <li>• Hvad tænker I om fremtiden ift influencer sponsorater på Instagram?</li> <li>• <b>What do you think about the future in relation to influencer campaigns on Instagram?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kan det fortsætte som det er nu?</li> <li>• <b>Do you think it will continue as it is now?</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Kunne I forestille jer nogen alternativer til den her form for reklame?</li> <li>• <b>Could you imagine any alternatives to this form of advertising</b></li> </ul>
<p>Diverse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Er der noget som I brænder inde med eller som I ikke føler, at I er blevet spurgt?</li> <li>• <b>Do you feel like there is anything that you haven't gotten the chance to say?</b></li> </ul>

## Appendix 4: In-depth Interviews, Interview Guide

Forskningsspørgsmål	Interview spørgsmål
<p>Hvad er informantens forhold til Instagram ?</p> <p>What is the respondents' relation to Instagram?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvor længe har du været på Instagram?</li> <li>• How long have you been on Instagram?</li> <li>• Hvorfor er du på Instagram?</li> <li>• Why are you on Instagram?</li> <li>• Hvad bruger du Instagram til?</li> <li>• What do you use Instagram for?</li> <li>• Lægger du selv ting op på Instagram?</li> <li>• Do you post things to Instagram ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvilke ting?</li> <li>• What things?</li> <li>• Hvorfor?</li> <li>• Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Hvilke typer mennesker/profiler følger du på Instagram?</li> <li>• Which people/profiles følger du på Instagram?</li> <li>• Hvor tit tjekker du Instagram?</li> <li>• How often do you check your Instagram?</li> </ul>
<p>Hvad er informantens generelle holdning til influencers?</p> <p>What is the respondent's general attitude towards influencers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvad synes du om influencer fænomenet generelt?</li> <li>• How do you feel about the influencer phenomenon in general?</li> <li>• Hvad synes du om influencers på Instagram?</li> <li>• How do you feel about influencers on Instagram?</li> <li>• Hvorfor følger du influencers på Instagram?</li> <li>• Why do you follow influencers on Instagram?</li> </ul>
<p>Hvordan opfatter informanten influencers troværdighed?</p> <p>How does the respondent perceive the credibility of influencers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvad skal der til for at du oplever en influencer som troværdig/utroværdig?</li> <li>• What does it take for you to perceive an influencer as credible/incredible?</li> <li>• Hvordan er din generelle opfattelse af troværdighed på Instagram?</li> <li>• What is your general perception of influencers' credibility?</li> </ul>
<p><b>MATCH:</b> How significant is the match between influencer and brand in a commercial collaboration?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Betyder det noget for dig at der er sammenhæng mellem influencer og brand i sponsorerede indlæg?</li> <li>• What does the match between influencer and brand in sponsored collaborations mean to you?</li> <li>• Påvirker det din opfattelse af en influencer negativt, hvis de promoverer et produkt/brand, som du ikke bryder dig om?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it affect your perception of an influencer negatively if they promote a brand product/brand that you don't like?</li> </ul>
<p>Hvordan opfatter informanten det specifikke case samarbejde?</p> <p>How does the respondent feel about the specific case collaboration?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvordan vil du beskrive Xs (influencer) personlighed?</li> <li>• How would you describe X's (the influencer's) personality?</li> <li>• Hvordan vil du beskrive Y (brand) hvis man skulle forestille sig at det havde en personlighed.</li> <li>• How would you describe the personality of Y (the brand) if you imagined that it had a personality?</li> <li>• Hvad tænker du om sammenhængen mellem X og Y i dette partnerskab?</li> <li>• What do you think about the match between X and Y?</li> <li>• (vis post) Når du ser postet, hvordan tænker du så om matchet?</li> <li>• (show post) When you see the post, how do you then feel about the match?</li> <li>• Hvorfor passer dette match godt? Eller skidt?</li> <li>• Why is it a good/bad match?</li> </ul>
<p>SOURCE CREDIBILITY: How do consumers perceive source credibility in relation to influencers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvor vigtigt er det for dig, at en influencer har stor viden/virker som om de har stor viden i forhold til de produkter og services de reklamere for?</li> <li>• How important is it to you that an influencer is knowledgeable/seems knowledgeable about the products and services they promote? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tænker du, at det er tilfældet med influencers på Instagram generelt?</li> <li>• Do you think it's generally the case with influencers on Instagram that they know a lot?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Føler du at influencers på Instagram taler sandt når de laver sponsorerede posts?</li> <li>• Do you feel like influencers are generally being truthful in sponsored posts?</li> </ul>
<p>Hvordan opfatter informanten den specifikke case influencer ift source credibility?</p> <p>How does the respondent perceive source credibility in the case of the specific influencer?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Føler du at X har større kendskab og viden til de ting, hun reklamerer for på sin profil?</li> <li>• Do you feel like X is knowledgeable about the products she promotes on her profil?</li> <li>• Og er det vigtigt for dig?</li> <li>• Is it important to you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hvad gør det, ved den måde, du tænker omkring hende som troværdig?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does it affect the way that you think about her in terms of credibility?</li> <li>• Føler du, at du kan stole på, at X taler sandt om de ting hun reklamerer for?</li> <li>• Do you feel is you can trust that X is being truthful in her sponsored posts?</li> <li>• Tror du hun ville tale sandt om et sponsorat, selvom det måske ikke var til fordel for virksomheden bag?</li> <li>• Do you believe that she would be honest about a sponsorship, even if it didn't benefit the company behind?</li> <li>• Hvad finder du tiltalende ved X i forhold til hendes visuelle fremtoning?</li> <li>• What do you find appealing about X in terms of her visual appearance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• både i forhold til hendes eget udseende og hendes visuelle udtryk på profilen?</li> <li>• Both in terms of her physical appearance as well as the visual style of her profile?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Hvad finder du tiltalende ved hendes personlighed?</li> <li>• What do you find appealing about her personality?</li> <li>• Synes du, at du kan se elementer af dig selv i hende? Hvilke?</li> <li>• Are you able to see elements of yourself in her? Which? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• betyder hendes visuelle fremtoning noget for om du finder hende troværdig?</li> <li>• Does her visual appearance mean anything to you in terms of perceiving her as credible?</li> <li>• Betyder det noget for dig, i forhold til at lytte til X, hvis det visuelle er pænt/eller grimt?</li> <li>• What does the visual aspect mean in relation to the influencers?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>PSI: How does the parasocial interaction exist between consumer and influencer in a commercialized context?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Føler du at du kender de influencers du følger på Instagram?</li> <li>• Do you feel like you know the influencers that you follow on Instagram?</li> <li>• Hvad kan være med til at skabe større kendskab til en influencers personlighed?</li> <li>• Which aspects can enhance how well you feel know an influencers personality? If any?</li> </ul>

<p>Hvordan eksisterer PSI mellem informanten og den specifikke case influencer?</p> <p>How does PSI exist between the respondent and the specific case influencer?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Føler du at du kender X?</li> <li>• Do you feel like you know X?</li> <li>• Kan du lære X bedre at kende gennem sponsorerede posts?</li> <li>• Is it possible to get to know X better through sponsored posts?</li> <li>• Føler du dig tilpas når du kigger på X? Er det som at kigge på en veninde?</li> <li>• Do you feel comfortable when you look at X? Is it like looking at a friend?</li> <li>• Synes du at I deler interesser? Poster hun ting, som du gerne vil vide mere om?</li> <li>• Do you think that you share interests? Is she posting stuff that you are interested in knowing more about?</li> <li>• Føler du at X er interesseret i dine kommentarer?</li> <li>• Do you feel like X is interested in your comments and feedback?</li> <li>• Hvad gør det ved din troværdighedsopfattelse?</li> <li>• How does this impact your perception of influencer credibility?</li> </ul>
<p>PURCHASE INTENTION: How do consumers experience purchase intention in relation to brand sponsored content?</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oplever du, at du får lyst til at købe produkter som du bliver opmærksom på gennem sponsorerede posts?</li> <li>• Do you experience that you want to buy products which you become aware of through sponsored posts?</li> <li>• Oplever du en større købelyst hvis der er et godt argument i et sponsoreret post?</li> <li>• Does a good argument in a sponsored post increase your intent to purchase?</li> <li>• hvordan er din generelle holdning over for de produkter du ser i sponsorerede post?</li> <li>• What is your attitude towards products that you see in sponsored posts?</li> <li>• hvad betyder mest for dig i forhold til at skulle få lyst til at købe et produkt fra et sponsoreret post?</li> <li>• What is most important to you in relation to wanting to purchase a product seen in a sponsored post?</li> <li>• Kan du komme i tanke om nogle sponsorerede posts, som fik dig til at ville købe noget? Eller nogle som virkede modsat på dig?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you remember any sponsored posts that made you want to buy the product displayed? Or some that had the opposite effect on you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hvad var det, der gjorde det?</li> <li>• Why did you feel this way?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Kunne du forestille dig nogle sponsorerede posts som ville give dig mere eller mindre lyst til at købe et givent produkt?</li> <li>• Can you imagine any sponsored posts that would make you be more or less interested in buying a product?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvad tænker du, når du ser dette post?</li> <li>• What do you think when you see this post?</li> <li>• Lægger du tydeligt mærke til, at der er tale om reklame?</li> <li>• Are you clearly aware that this is a commercial?</li> <li>• Hvad tænker du om dette?</li> <li>• What do you think about this?</li> <li>• Giver denne reklame dig mere eller mindre lyst til at købe produktet?</li> <li>• Does this commercial make you want to buy the product more or less? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hvorfor?</li> <li>• Why?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Afslutning Wrap up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Er det noget du sidder og brænder inde med?</li> <li>• Do you have any final comments?</li> <li>• Noget du føler, at vi ikke er kommet ind på?</li> <li>• Anything you feel that we have not touched upon?</li> <li>• Har du nogle yderligere tanker omkring det her med influencers på Instagram?</li> <li>• Do you have any additional thoughts on all this about influencers on Instagram?</li> </ul>

**Appendix 5-16: Transcribed Interviews (Enclosed separately)**

## Appendix 17: Survey

Respondent	Hvad betyder sammenhængen mellem influencer og brand i sponsorerede samarbejder for din opfattelse af den influencer? <b>How does the match between influencer and brand in sponsored collaborations affect your perception of the influencer?</b>	Hvornår opfatter du en influencer som troværdig? (uddyb gerne) <b>When do you perceive an influencer as trustworthy? (please elaborate)</b>	Oplever du, at du får lyst til at købe produkter, som du bliver opmærksom på gennem sponsorerede opslag? <b>Do you ever experience a desire to purchase products that you notice through sponsored posts on Instagram?</b>
1	Jeg synes influencerene klart kun skal tage imod gaver og lignende, hvis de rent faktisk vil stå inde for brandet. Hvis de bare tager imod alt hvad de kan, og der konstant kommer reklamer op fra alle mulige mærker (specielt hvis det er konkurrerende brands) så mister influenceren lidt troværdigheden.	Kom jeg vist til at svare på i sidste spørgsmål. Men jeg siger det igen. Når en influencer ikke tager imod hvad som helst, og rent faktisk virker som om de står inde for brandet med en brændende energi	Til tider. Dog sjældent når det gælder de nyeste sundhedstricks og slankekure.
2	Jeg synes der er en sammenhæng på den måde at influencer lidt skal selve brandet, og måske smøre lidt ekstra på. Opfattelsen af den enkelte influencer oftest bliver påvirket af for det første hvilket brand de bliver sponsoreret af, hvordan de gør det og om det virker reelt.	Når de giver et realistisk billede af de viser. Er det f.eks. en creme, at de viser billeder som ikke er redigeret og sådan. Man skal kunne relaterer til det og bliver overbevist på en realistisk måde. Og ikke af en som overredigerer og bruger mange filtre. Så synes jeg troværdigheden ryger.	Til tider ja, hvis det personen har vist det på en kreativ måde og det er ting som jeg selv bruger, måske bare ikke lige det mærke
3	Nej	Når de fx skriver negativt om et brand - det sker sjældent	Både og. Jeg kan godt finde ting på Instagram, som jeg gerne vil købe, men det kan både være et sponsoreret opslag eller et der ikke er sponsoreret. Så på den måde handler det egentlig i højere grad om, at blive opmærksom på et produkt gennem Instagram - og ikke om det er sponsoreret eller ej.



4	Ja det gør det bestemt. Matchet mellem influent og brand skal stemme overens og er afgørende for hvilke værdier man tillægger både influent og brand.	Når der er anlagt en personlig vinkel på deres indlæg	Ja. Man "køber ind" ind i personligheder, så hvis jeg er facineret af en bestemt influents livsstil og de advokerer for særlige brands, påvirkes jeg helt klar (sikkert ubevidst) af dette.
5	En influencer fremstår klart mere troværdigt, hvis det produkt/brand de er sponsoreret af, virker relevant ift. hvem de er/deres erhverv. (fx hvis en kage-blogger er sponsoreret af et brand til køkkenmaskiner)	Når det oprigtigt virker som om, de selv ville bruge produktet, også hvis de ikke var sponsoreret.	Helt klart. Det kan fx give større købelyst, fordi influenceren viser produktet i brug frem for et billede af produktet i sin indpakning.
6	Det har ikke altid betydet så meget for mig, men jeg syntes det er ved at tage overhånd, jeg er f.eks. Virkelig træt af at høre om SimpleFeast (de der mad bokse) da ALLE influencere har fået dem i gave nu, så der begynder jeg at blive irriteret	Når de også skriver om andre ting end betalte samarbejder eller hvis de bare er gode til at have deres egen mening med	Ja
7	Jeg forstår ikke helt spørgsmålet? Altså om brandet skal være inden for det som bloggeren arbejder med? Jeg synes i hvert fald det kan virke mærkeligt hvad en modeblogger så skal reklamere for andet en mode. Så virker det mere som om det er gjort for pengene at personen rent faktisk synes det er et godt produkt, ydelse mm.	Når det ikke er en "reklame" for et brand. Når der er penge involveret og det står "sponsoreret" på insta, så tænker jeg altid at folk kun anbefaler det fordi de bliver betalt og undre mig over om de rent faktisk mener det, de siger om produktet, servicen mm	Nej ikke på sponsoreret opslag. Jeg føler det er en fake anbefaling. Jeg har først været inresseret i produkter jeg har set, men så har det været bloggerens egen køb, hvilket virker mere troværdigt
8	Det har en stor betydning for min opfattelse af influenceren, da virksomhedens omdømme påvirker influenceren	Når det ikke er sponsoreret, men derimod lægger et opslag op, der går i spænd med influencerens 'brand'/personlighed	Nogle gange - selvom jeg helst ikke vil indrømme det. Hvis det bliver præsenteret på en ordentlig måde med en forklarende tekst om, at de har fået det sponsoreret, men faktisk er blevet meget positiv over produktet (med begrundelse), så kunne jeg have lyst til at købe produktet
9	Meget	Hvis produkterne passer til influenceren	Meget

10	Det er vigtigt at influenten er identificerede med brandet. Kampagner hvor samarbejdet udelukket er lavet pga. pengene er ofte meget gennemskuelige. Derfor er sammenhængen mellem de to vigtige for at opnå et troværdigt samarbejde.	En influent er troværdig holdningerne er personlige og ikke købte. Selvfølgelig får en influent et brief der skal overholdes, men når kampagnen tillægges personlighed skaber det troværdighed.	Ja, når de er troværdige. Sponsorerede opslag, der er lavet uden personlighed og karakter er ligegyldige og bliver bare til støj i mediebilledet.
11	Det betyder meget, at influencerne er sponsorerer for noget, de alligevel ville have købt eller i hvert fald prøvet og været stolte af at prøve. Det går ikke, hvis det virker for falsk eller som FOR meget reklame.	Når de er 100% sig selv og når deres personlighed skinner igennem alt, hvad de gør.	Ja, det er rart at se produkter (fx tøj, smykker, tasker) på en person. Hvis det er sat pænt sammen inspirerer det mig og så får jeg større lyst til at købe.
12	Ja det skal give mening	Hvis jeg kan stole på det de siger	Nogle gange
13	Det afspejler troværdighed	Når sponsoreret content falder inden for influencerens naturlige content	Indimellem, ja
14	Samarbejde er fint, så længe det passer til bloggerens profil. Nogle gange er meget tydeligt at en blogger har fået at vide, hvad de skal gøre med billeder og tekst, så bliver det lidt påtaget. Nogle er dårlige til at overholde markedsføringsloven ved fx bare at lave et lille #ad det synes jeg er dårlig stil. Når man har mange følgere på IG og indgår samarbejder må det være influencerens job at sætte sig ind i loven	Et eksempel er Lise fra nybyggerne. Hun fortæller ærligt om sit liv. Troværdighed handler om den måde de fremstiller deres liv på er ærlig og med humor. Hvis det bare er en stor iscenesættelse af deres perfekte liv, orker jeg ikke at følge dem	Ja, men det vil aldrig kun være på baggrund af det. Jeg vil nærmere sige at betalte samarbejder (man må ikke længere kalde det sponsorerede opslag jf. markedsføringsloven) breder mit kendskab til produkter og services
15	Jeg tager ikke deres ord for gode vare, når de omtaler et sponsoreret produkt. Omvendt er de desværre mange tilfælde, hvor de "glemmer" at informere om den bagvedliggende aftale.	Når de både kan give positive og negative evalueringer af produkter og har andet at byde på end blot promovring af diverse produkter. Altså hvis de har andet indhold end (positive) reviews.	Det sker fra tid til anden. Men jeg er oftest meget kritisk overfor den anmeldelse, der gives af diverse influencers. Jeg ville have langt mere tillid til en række anmeldelser fra "almindelige" mennesker, der ikke har noget i klemme hos annoncøren/producenten.

16	Et "match" har i mine øjne stor betydning for troværdigheden	Når det er mit indtryk, at de kan stå inde for alt, de promoverer	Ja
17	Det, der bliver reklameret med, skal have en eller anden form for politisk stand eller agenda for jeg mener, der kan influeres ret meget	Når produktet passer til den der reklamerer for det, og man ved, at det stemmer overens med deres egne værdier. Men grundlæggende tror jeg aldrig på en ærlig bedømmelse af et opslag, som starter med ordet "sponsoreret"	Nej
18	Jeg tænker efterhånden sjældent over det, med mindre der er et påfaldende mis-match. Generelt er jeg dog generet af sponsorerede indlæg, og jeg giver ikke meget for dem. Mange influencers laver for mange sponsorerede indlæg, og for mig virker det simpelthen utroværdigt, lige meget hvor godt influencer og brand matcher.	Når de anbefaler produkter, der ikke er sponsorerede. Og ellers når de ikke anbefaler produkter.	Til tider. Men det er mere et spørgsmål om, at jeg opdager produkterne. Dem kunne jeg lige så godt have set i et sponsoreret opslag direkte fra brandet. Det tilføjer ingen værdi for mig, at det er en influencer, der poster det.
19	Betyder meget. Vigtigt at influenceren og brand "matcher" for at skabe fortrolighed hos tilskueren/mig.	Når man kan genkende influencer i brandet. Fx en instagrammer, med fokus på fitness og sundhed, ville fremstå fortrolig, ved at brande sportstøj, proteindrikke etc.	Ja. Fx make-up med tilhørende tutorials
20	De fleste gange er der ikke det store match som sådan, men der bliver udviklet en historie så det passer produktet/brand	Der bør stå når det er betalt partnerskab. Jeg tror det er mere en lang proces som influenceren skal være igennem for at opbygge troværdig for derefter at reklamere for brands. Tænker jo mere nedtonet og ærlig personen er jo større troværdighed følger med.	Ja men ikke altid. Det kommer an på om det er noget jeg søger i forvejen så ja. Ellers ikke rigtigt

21	Sammenhængen betyder meget, idet det siger noget om brandet og om influenceren. Hvis et brand indgår samarbejde med en influencer man ikke finder megen troværdighed ved, tror man højst sandsynligt heller ikke på brandet.	Når personen ikke udelukkende laver sponsorerede indlæg, og når personen forholder sig kritisk.	Ja
22	Der skal være en sammenhæng i hvert fald. Hvis en der normalt lægger billeder ud af tøj pludselig laver et sponsoreret post om en skruetrækker virker det utroværdigt.	Hvis personen udtrykker sig ens på sponsorerede og ikke sponsorerede posts og hvis hver eneste post ikke er sponsoreret. Hvis jeg rent faktisk tror på at personen bruger produktet.	Hvis det for eksempel er noget tøj eller makeup jeg synes er pænt får jeg lyst til at købe det. Jeg ville aldrig købe 'fit tea' eller lignende.
23	Selvfølger betyder det noget. Hvis der ikke er et match mellem influencer og brand, så er partnerskabet ikke troværdigt. Min opfattelse af influenceren bliver, at de siger ja til partnerskabet pga. pengene i stedet for, at tænke på deres eget brand.	At de kun laver partnerskaber, når det passer ind i deres brand	Ja. De anbefaler mig noget og deres holdning er troværdig.
24	Ja - troværdigheden af produktet	At produktet passer ind i influencerens liv og ikke anmass reklame ned over ens hoved.	Ja
25	Den betyder meget.	Når personen ikke har særlig mange sponsorerede opslag	Ja. Det er gode anbefalinger
26	Ja, det er vigtigt at en influencer vælger et produkt de selv bruger eller kan stå inde for.	Når de viser sig selv	Ikke nødvendigvis. Men hvis influencer er meget åben omkring produktet, og taler af erfaring med det, gør det mig mere tilbøjelig til at købe det selv.
27	Jeg følger få influencers, og der er der sjældent match i forhold til hvad de sponsorerer. Men de målrettede reklamer der er, de rammer virkelig tit plet.	Når der ligger en oprigtighed i deres promotion af ting.	Desværre ja, jeg syntes det er præsenteret lækkert og ofte er ting jeg godt kunne bruge.. især til hjemmet eller oplevelser etc
28	Det betyder meget.	Når personen poster gode ting.	Ja

29	Jeg mener ikke, at det har en indflydelse på den enkelte influencer som sådan. Jeg tænker, at de fleste godt ved, at grunden til at en influencer viser et billede af et produkt på sin Instagram er fordi personen bliver betalt af virksomheden, så på den måde ser jeg det mere som et arbejde for influencers at sælge virksomhedernes produkter. Det er nok det vigtigste aspekt i forhold til influencers for mig altid at huske på at det er deres arbejde, og det ikke nødvendigvis betyder, at de rent faktisk har prøvet produktet og kan stå inde for det.	Jeg opfatter sjældent en influencer som troværdig, og jeg følger kun meget få på Instagram. Jeg ser det på samme linje som reklamer i fjernsynet - folk der er betalt for at sige noget om et produkt.	Nej det er meget sjældent. Måske hvis det er et produkt, jeg i forvejen har fået og overvejet og så falder over nogle som taler positivt om det.
30	Troværdighed	Når man kan se en sammenhæng mellem brugeren og brandet.	Ja
31	Ja det har en betydning - både ift. brand og influencer. Det kan både være positivt og negativt.	Når samarbejdet passer ind i det øvrige indhold.	ja
32	Jeg danner min opfattelse af en influencer ud fra de opslag personen laver på sin instagram. Dvs. de brands som en influencer samarbejder med og reklamerer for bliver en del af dennes brand og identitet. Jeg tager en influencer mere seriøst, hvis de er omhyggelige med deres samarbejder og tager dem der støtter op om deres identitet, fremfor at tage alt der kommer deres vej. Samtidig er de jo bare mennesker, der har luret hvordan man tjener penge på at få gratis ting. Jeg anerkender bestemt de arbejder for det og det er hårdt ligesom alt andet, men	Se tidligere svar.	Nogle gange. Jeg bliver opmærksom på behov jeg ikke vidste jeg havde, fx når jeg får guides til webshops der sælger lige det møbel jeg ikke vidste jeg manglede.

	en fashion-influencer, kan vel også have brug for nyt køkkengrej i ny og næ - dette giver ikke mening ift. dennes identitet på SoMe.		
33	intet	aldrig	nej
34	Bloggerens livsstil, popularitet kan betyde meget i forhold til relevansen til brandet, så jeg ved om jeg også kan relatere til brandet. Influencerens popularitet kan fortælle mig noget om det er en som tager imod alle tilbud, eller som kun vælger kvalitet frem for kvantitativ (større influencers)	Når han/hun har en større popularitet, klar indblik over sin livsstil.	Få gange
35	ja hvis der ikke er nogen tydelig og obvious sammenhæng, mister jeg respekt for influenceren. Hvis det ikke er en selvfølgelig, så forventer jeg en uddybet forklaring for troværdighed.	Virker oprigtig. God til at kommunikere deres drømme og intentioner med deres content.	Meget sjældent, der skal mere til en en kedelig reklamepost.
36	Det skal passe sammen, ellers virker det falsk/påtaget. En sportsnørd skal ikke pludselig have sponsorerede opslag med slik eller alkohol - det skal have en hvis konsistens	Når de ligesom har et tema og holder sig til det. Fx sport, beauty, fashion, food... og så skal de ikke lave tusinde opslag eller stories med det samme sponsorerede indhold, for så virker det desperat og alt for påtaget.	Helt sikkert. Men der er langt fra tanke til handling - og det er vel det der er spændende.
37	Det drager en parallel, men man har jo også lidt skepsis, så bare fordi det er der, ved man jo godt de ikke nødvendigvis støtter det	De er relaterbare	sjældent

38	Ja, jeg synes at en sammenhæng mellem de to parter er vigtig for min opfattelse af den enkelte influencer. Hvis der ikke er en naturlig sammenhæng, vil influenceren fremstå utroværdig og falsk.	Jeg synes, at en influencer opfattes troværdig, når han/hun har gennemarbejdet sit post. Man kan ret hurtigt fornemme, om personen rent faktisk kan lide produktet eller om det er endnu et produkt, som de bare skal lave et post om for at overholde deres aftale.	Få gange, hvis man kan mærke at influenceren oprigtigt er glad for produktet, kan jeg godt finde på at købe et produkt. Men det er klart usponsoreret opslag om produkter jeg bliver mest bidt af.
39	Hvis der ikke et match mellem brand og influencer gør det influencer utroværdig , hvilket også påvirker fremtidige sponsorerede samarbejder	Hvis brand/produkt der reklameres for er i tråd med det influenceren står for/interesser	Ja
40	Ja det betyder meget! Det giver en troværdighed	Når de ved noget om emnet og har en klar interesse for det	Nej ikke rigtigt. Synes sponsorerede opslag er irriterende
41	De skal passe sammen	Hvis stilen passer til hendes personlige.	Ja

## Appendix 18: Coding for Match Analysis

	Theme	Code	No of occurrences	Example of quotation
Brand Personality Match	Sincerity	Down-To-Earth	N/A*	<i>"I think she seems sweet, because she is so smiling and happy and down to earth"</i>
		Honest	N/A*	<i>"And very much like... her self... yes... and straight forward..."</i>
		Cheerful	N/A*	<i>"Uhm... sweet... smiling"</i>
	Excitement	Daring	N/A*	<i>"The kind of person, who can wear anything and any color and still look stylish"</i>
		Spirited	N/A*	<i>"She is very colorful, both in the way she dress but also her personality. I feel that she is like very lively and energetic"</i>
	Competence	Reliable	N/A*	<i>"I would say that it is always like real leather bags, so in that way I think that it is good quality"</i>
		Intelligent	N/A*	<i>"And then I think that it is professional."</i>
		Successful	N/A*	<i>"Sort of like 'it's on a role here, it is going good and I am nice'"</i>
	Sophistication	Upper Class	N/A*	<i>"Nordsjællandspige, I would think that she is."</i>
	Ruggedness	Tough	N/A*	<i>"Where you kan, like, feel the the pulse and it is like... rough... or something [...] I feel like it is really like the finger on the pulse and sweat and like that uhm... I think of it like a cheetah or something you know."</i>



<b>Influencer-brand Match</b>	Match is important	17	<i>I just think that there are some collaborations that don't make sense, if the company does not... like... match the influencer"</i>
	Match determines credibility	11	<i>"I am generally not a big fan of sponsored posts, but if I can feel that this is a brand that really matches the influencer, and that the overall values fit her [the influencer] as a person, I am more likely to trust that she is actually sincere rather than if it was some product that was far from what she normally likes"</i>
<b>Character Narrative</b>	Overall style	14	<i>"... Something that is far from what they normally post. Then you will think that they only post it because they are being paid"</i>
	Consistency in sponsorships	5	<i>"I don't think you can just promote any brand within your area, it still has to fit to the... like... profile of the influencer"</i>
	Theme/category	12	<i>"... but I think... like... there has to be some kind of niche [...]. You can't be someone who reviews smartphones and TVs and then say 'you should wear this when you go clubbing tomorrow night'."</i>
	Relation to own life	9	<i>"Even though this is sponsored, she [the influencer] actually talks more about what she... that she hasn't done anything today. So that this [the sponsored product] is a proof that she has actually had other clothes on besides her nighties or something"</i>
	Use in non-sponsored context	4	<i>"I think it is really credible if they [the influencers] have done a sponsored post for some kind of clothing or product or a cooking pot or a blender or whatever, and I then see that they are actually using it still"</i>

\*As these codes relates to only one of the three influencer or one of the three brands, it provides no value to count the statements.

## Appendix 19: Coding for Source Credibility Analysis

Theme	Code	No of occurrences	Example of quote
<b>Expertise</b>	Character specific expertise	34	<i>“I think they should know about the things that their profile is about. Like food or fashion or whatever it may be”</i>
	Technical fashion expertise	17	<i>“With some of the fashion influencers that I follow, I have no expectation that they have a lot of knowledge of this shirt or how it’s made. You know, with those types of things. But I still expect them to be some kind of expert on the area [fashion], That they know something about it. Otherwise why would I follow them?”</i>
	Little/no expertise	20	<i>“Uhm...so for instance her friend. What’s her name? Healthy Skinny Bitch, like she seems to know way more about it, the way I see it, because it’s like that’s what she lives and breathes. For Emilie Lilja it’s more music and being a model I think. So no I don’t think she knows more than others”</i>
	Function based expertise	14	<i>“If it’s about food or lotions then I might have...where it’s actually going into the body or on the body...then I have higher demands and think that they should know about it or describe it. Whereas with clothes it’s more about the styling.”</i>
<b>Trustworthiness</b>	Money	17	<i>“No! They’re getting paid to do it. I mean, if I got 30.000 for an Instagram post, then I’d definitely say that this frying pan is amazing.”</i>
	Professional restraints	16	<i>“No I don’t think she’s allowed to. Like, then I don’t think she would do the sponsorship at all. “</i>
	Benefit of the doubt	21	<i>“...even though it’s bought advertisement, then... then I just choose to have an idea that I can trust what they’re saying because they’re really just privileged normal people, and for me, the influencer has to be the one who brings it down to eye level ... that’s my foundation for trusting what they’re saying, because otherwise they’re just neglecting their role”</i>

	Sponsorship selection	9	<i>“Yes I have a feeling that she does. Precisely because she seems critical and doesn’t just say yes to anything”</i>
<b>Attractiveness</b>	Physical attractiveness	17	<i>“She’s an insanely pretty girl and she has an insanely pretty face... she has this huge smile and it takes up all of her face and her eyes become like teeny tiny when she smiles, and I just think that that is very charming to look at”</i>
	Photo attractiveness	14	<i>“Well I think she’s quite pretty and then I think that her photos are nice and sharp. Well actually, her feed isn’t really like...a lot of the profiles I follow are more like fashion-profiles, where their feed is maybe a bit more cohesive. Hers is a little different.”</i>
	Personality	15	<i>“Her joy of life. And just that she seems to have a general appetite for life...and then that she has uhm...how do you say it...she has like drive, and approaches things with her head held high”</i>
	Aspiration	14	<i>Well again it’s all this about, she seems very happy and secure with herself and that sort of stuff...and...that’s the type of stuff that I want to see in myself...”</i>
	Similarity	11	<i>"I can see myself in some of the things she posts and she likes to travel... I like to travel. In that way. I mean, I think I’m a somewhat happy and positive person too."</i>

## Appendix 20: Observational Examples from Instagram

### 1. Rock Paper Dresses' Krifa post

The following post sparked somewhat of a crisis for Rock Paper Dresses as she was widely criticized for endorsing a “yellow” union. These types of labor unions are not related to a specific trade, often cheaper and do not participate in trade agreement negotiations, why they are often accused of freeloading off of traditional unions.



 **rockpaperdresses** • Følger  
RIST

rockpaperdresses sponsored @krifadk | In 1,5 months I celebrate my first year as self-employed! 🥂 A decision I made after listening to myself complain (or 'broke' as we Danes call it) too much about my previous position and the terms it came with! Working on a post about it all for you later in the week 🤔 🇩🇰 🇩🇰 ♀ ♀ Do share your 'broke' at work stories at #brokpåjobbet @krifadk 📸 @juliebjarnhoff

Vis alle 38 kommentarer

mortilmarcipan @rockpaperdresses for mig at se er problemet, at du skriver, du støtter kampagnen, men tilsyneladende ikke Krifa? Det virker utroværdigt på mig, hvis det er tilfældet. Især når du - sådan som jeg havde forstået det - vælger dine betalte indlæg ud fra noget, du rent faktisk kan stå inde for.

rockpaperdresses @mortilmarcipan Læs

📍 🗨

1.333 Synes godt om

FOR 3 DAGE SIDEN

Tilføj en kommentar ...

Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BfYjMydhKcg/?taken-by=rockpaperdresses>

## 2. Rock Paper Dresses' Pregnancy Announcement



Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BhTSTp5h63I/?taken-by=rockpaperdresses>

## 3. Comment to Rock Paper Dresses' pregnancy announcement

**louisiesophiehesselberg** Når man har været igennem mange års fertilitetsbehandling og endt med ægdonation pga manglende æg, så bliver jeg SÅ rørt over dit opslag 🧡 jeg kender dig ikke, men fældede en lille tåre på jeres vegne. Wauw hvor er det stort 😭

## 4. Comment to Rock Paper Dresses' pregnancy announcement

**amalielicious** Helt igennem fantastisk! Stort tillykke!! Min mand, lillesøs, mine veninder og jeg har fulgt jeres udfordringer for at blive gravide, snakket om jer og krydset fingere. Det er simpelthen helt fantastisk, at det er lykket! Stort tillykke!!! ❤️❤️❤️

## 5. Rock Paper Dresses' bike post



 **rockpaperdresses** • Følger  
Carlsberg Byen

rockpaperdresses A basket full of spring  
★★★★

stylebyjosephine Ej jeg kunne altså godt bruge den taske i mit liv 🌸

ranrosanna 😍 WaaUuu Cathrine - Hvilken vidunderlig cykel du ejer 🔔🚲👉 Hvor er den fra (firma) ? @rockpaperdresses

rockpaperdresses @ranrosanna Det er en batavus jeg købte for 5-6 år siden, og den holder bare! Undersøgte virkelig markedet dengang - alle nævnte den 🙌

rockpaperdresses @stylebyjosephine den er også evigt smart i min bog 😊

stylebyjosephine @rockpaperdresses nu er jeg jo overordentlig glad for storesøster, så en lille pink søster kunne være på si plads 🧑🏻♀️🌸👉

sonoma\_seven Så dejligt at foråret er her!

🤍 💬 📌

1.773 Synes godt om

7. APRIL

Tilføj en kommentar ...

Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BhRnf6vhlh/?taken-by=rockpaperdresses>

## 6. Comment to Rock Paper Dresses' bike post

ranrosanna 😍 WaaUuu Cathrine - Hvilken vidunderlig cykel du ejer 🔔🚲👉 Hvor er den fra (firma) ? @rockpaperdresses

rockpaperdresses @ranrosanna Det er en batavus jeg købte for 5-6 år siden, og den holder bare! Undersøgte virkelig markedet dengang - alle nævnte den 🙌

## 7. Rock Paper Dresses' ice cream post



rockpaperdresses • Følger  
Dragør, Denmark

rockpaperdresses How many of you got your first icecream of the year today? 🍦👩 Mine was pretty much gone before I got to snap a picture 😂

yogibine 🍦👩💕

alonavibe Ej vi kommer lige derfra 😍 men kunne ikke helt overskue iskøen 😂

rockpaperdresses @alonavibe Den var også laaang 😂 Stædighed længe leve!

rockpaperdresses @yogibine Jaaaa! Har lyst til at sige TIL LYKKE 😊 er det ikke det ungerne siger i børneren, når man har samme madpakke med? Eller husker jeg forkert? 😂🙄

heidimariausbeck Altså lige med kjolen - er den i H&M nu?? 😍😍

rockpaperdresses @heidimariausbeck Den er fra #hmstudio2018, så den har lige været.



1.929 Synes godt om

2. APRIL

Tilføj en kommentar ...



Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BhEv-ILBwZA/?taken-by=rockpaperdresses>

## 8. Comment to Rock Paper Dresses' ice cream post

rockpaperdresses @yogibine Jaaaa! Har lyst til at sige TIL LYKKE 😊 er det ikke det ungerne siger i børneren, når man har samme madpakke med? Eller husker jeg forkert? 😂🙄

## Appendix 21: Coding for PSI Analysis

Theme	Code	No of occurrences	Example of quotation
<b>Influencers &amp; PSI</b>	Personal details	17	<i>“Uhm I think so in terms of the things that they share about their lives. For instance with Pernille Teisbæk. Even though it’s so much fashion and so focused, there are still lots of photos of her husband and her son. So I think that in that case I have insight into her personality and her life... “</i>
	Everyday life	12	<i>“I actually think that just seeing glimpses of their everyday lives gives me an insight into their life...and of course less about their personalities, but still...because I guess that what you do says something about you too”</i>
	Instagram stories	11	<i>“Uhm, but it’s also where they actually have the opportunity to talk to their followers because it’s a video, like a live...they actually can send live if they want. Uhm so I think that you definitely sense more of their personalities by hearing them talk”</i>
<b>Openness</b>	Knowledge of personality	8	<i>“I feel like I have a pretty good grip of what’s happening in her life, what she’s up to and what interests her”</i>
	No knowledge of personality	7	<i>“I think it’s difficult with her specifically because...she posts stories but she doesn’t post as many and when she does I often think it’s work related. So with her I actually think it’s difficult”</i>
	Sponsorships increase knowledge	9	<i>“Hmmm...for instance in a sponsorship with Spotify where she had made a workout plan and a playlist. In that case I really felt she cared. And cared about whether people liked it and wrote to her about it”</i>



	Sponsorships do not increase knowledge	6	<i>“Actually, you would hope that you really learned a lot by looking at the sponsorships, because that would be brands that she really loves. Unfortunately I just don’t think reality looks like that.”</i>
<b>Personal identification</b>	Comfort	8	<i>“She definitely makes me feel comfortable because she seems so happy and seems so open and approachable”</i>
	Personal identification	13	<i>“Hmmm...in a way, kind of. I know that she’s having a hard time getting pregnant and stuff and I really feel for her...like I really hope it will happen for her. And that’s sort of a weird thing to think about someone that you don’t know. So yes, maybe it is a little girlfriend-ish”</i>
	No personal identification	7	<i>“She’s this “Nordsjællandspige” [danish expression for upper class girls]... I think her parents have this huge house up in uhm...and I’m much more...I’m just a normal girl from Amager”</i>
<b>Interaction</b>	No interaction	7	<i>"I don't know actually. I've never written a comment and I rarely "like" ...Actually I rarely "like" bloggers or people that I don't know"</i>
	Intereste in interaction	11	<i>“I have an idea that she generally replies to the comments that she gets. I think that...or I notice that she’s normally very accomodating to people who have questions for her or write to her”</i>
	No interest in interaction	9	<i>“Never. And I know she has a lot of followers buuuuut....I still think she should answer. I mean, she’s not Kim Kardashian. She just doesn’t seem very engaged”</i>

	Interaction equals credibility	10	<i>"Yes I think that...I just think it's so thoughtful that she takes the time to answer...if she didn't get around to write where her socks were from and someone asks...that you bother to answer..."</i>
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