

Influencer Marketing Dominating Digital Media Strategies

A study on the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing in regard to its possibilities of brands utilizing the tool on the social media platform Instagram

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Abstract

Traditional media marketing are undergoing continuous challenge with the ever-evolving digital landscape, which is highly impacted with the tremendous attention social media platforms are getting today. By means of consumers continued increase of their social media usage, a phenomenon as Influencer Marketing has proven to be one of the most popular marketing communication strategies, which has in turn evolved rapidly.

With Influencer Marketing arising as part of the many possibilities the digital solutions have created for marketers and brands, many struggle to comprehend its complexities, and it can be experienced as in turn being questioned of who the tool is most relevant for in terms of businesses and brands gaining value by means of utilizing the tool, along with how this should be done most effectively.

This study therefore seek to investigate the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing in a context of comprehending it on the social media platform Instagram, with the intention of greater understanding for marketers and brands. Therefore, this research focus on understanding the concept from diverse perspectives, looking into experiences based on people involved with the concept from four different perspectives. These four perspectives are based on perceptions from an Influencer, a consumer, a brand that works with Influencer Marketing as part of their marketing strategy, as well as a an agency that works with Influencer Marketing by connecting brands and Influencers in strategic marketing initiatives. The research is conducted based on four qualitative interviews, as it looked into the experiences from these four perspectives. All four participants of the interviews were female in the age rage within the Millennials generation, by being from 25 to 30 years old. All participants used the social media platform Instagram on a daily basis, both privately and in relation to their respective work.

The research provides insights into some of the major characteristics of why and how traditional media marketing have been challenged based on newer technology solutions, as well as the consumers' change in behavior with their increased consumption of the social media platform Instagram. It further demonstrate insights to why a concept as Influencer Marketing is relevant on the basis of this, as it also has the possibility of impacting the consumers on all levels of the newer consumer decision journey. Furthermore, insights were also gathered towards how Influencer Marketing have different important aspects for companies to consider when wanting to utilize the

tool most effectively. Consumers have become more critical towards Influencer Marketing, so it is evident for companies to be very mindful of who they choose to collaborate with. They should be aware of creating the correct match, so that brand and Influencers are alignment on for instance their values. Consumers are looking for trustworthiness from Influencers, and untrustworthiness create poor ground for their communication to be persuasive. Therefore, should companies be very critical who they are collaborating with when utilizing Influencers as part of their marketing strategies. Consumers value very personal aspects of the Influencers, and consider personalized content communicated by them as creating more value towards them. In this sense, companies should further value this in their collaborations, along with enabling the Influencers to have great possibility of forming the communication, as consumers obtain brand communication with greater effect coming from endorsers, than from the brands itself. Also, the companies should be mindful of Influencers have a niche in their audience, and how they know their audience much better than companies, so they also know what resonates with them on a deeper level than what the brands might do.

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1. Introduction

The rise of the Internet and the digital media landscape have consequently made the traditional media marketing a subject of immense transformation, dramatically changing the marketplace and requiring marketers and corporations to rethink their marketing strategies (Belch & Belch, 2014). With the continued growth of the social media platforms, being one of the fastest evolving communication tools nowadays, marketers try and comprehend these newer ways in order to reach their target audiences in the most effective way as possible (Constantinides, 2014). This can be difficult, and companies struggle to keep track of all the new ways as technology keeps on advancing, and accordingly how to carry out those marketing strategies and decisions in the best manner (Bhat, 2019; Grin, 2020). One of the more recent marketing tools that has evolved quickly appearing to have considerable impact and popularity is Influencer Marketing, which in turn have become a new source in marketers strategic decisions. Many credit it as creating far-reaching benefits and opportunities for companies with its tremendous versatility (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Nevertheless, what seems to be less apparent, is who this tool is most relevant for, because is it in fact relevant for all companies and brands? Moreover, when wanting to utilize the tool, how is this done in the most successful way for companies to reach the possibilities it enables when reaching consumers?

With regard to the considerable impact Influencer Marketing have gotten in the marketplace on social media platforms, little academic literature have been carried out on the phenomenon (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). With interest deriving from the companies' point of view, marketers struggle to find thorough academic literature on who this tool is relevant for, along with how they should implement it in their marketing strategies with mindfulness to how this tool can create most value for them in the changing digital landscape (Grin, 2020). At this point, literature have to some extent covered what an Influencer is, with regard to considerations on how the phenomenon impacts purchase decisions, along with the roots of the phenomenon (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Nevertheless, it can be clarified as of being challenged in regard to the execution of creating valuable collaborations between the brand and the Influencer. Therefore, with the purpose of wanting to contribute to the academic literature on the subject, the intent is to understand Influencer Marketing as a phenomenon, in terms of the relevance and possibilities it can create for companies when wanting to use it strategically as part of their marketing initiatives. Moreover, along with what is important and essential for businesses to do when wanting to succeed utilizing this tool strategically, enabling the most value for them as a brand.

1.1 Research Questions & Objectives

The main purpose of this research is to explore the phenomenon Influencer Marketing, and understand for who it should be utilized by in terms of companies it is relevant for. Another aspect is to provide these companies with knowledge and direction on how to make use of the phenomenon as part of their marketing initiatives and strategies. Therefore, this research's intent is also to contribute to the limited academic literature and information regarding this field of study. In order to do so, this research investigate different aspects on Influencer Marketing by looking at perspectives from different actors who are using and impacted the tool in their lives. This is by means of comprehending perspectives from an Influencer, a consumer, a company that uses the tool as part of their marketing initiatives, along with an agency who works with connecting brands and Influencers in their marketing efforts. This leads to the proposition of my research questions, along with objectives that should guide answering these research questions. This is demonstrated in the following:

What is the role of Influencer Marketing in terms of its relevance for companies in the ever-changing digital landscape, and who benefits from utilizing the tool in their marketing efforts? Thus, what is characterized as effective Influencer Marketing when utilized as a marketing tool for companies?

The related objectives that serve as a help for investigating these research questions are focusing on the following:

- How have the impact of traditional media changed with the development of social media?
- What impact has the consumer's Instagram usage affected the social media as a marketing channel, thus giving rise to tools as Influencer Marketing to thrive?
- How has this impacted the consumer decision journey with regard to Influencer Marketing?

1.2 Delimitations

When conducting such research, it is important to comprehend the delimitations affecting this study. The following will therefore make an account of this.

This research thesis will look into Influencer Marketing from four perspectives identified as of importance in understanding the concept. The context of understanding it is based on the attributions on the social media platform of Instagram. The reason for it to be focused on the

Instagram platform is based on the immense popularity when looking at Influencer Marketing, as this is the platform in which the concept is mostly advanced and used. Another reason for being focused on Instagram is based on the increased popularity the platform has nowadays for consumers, consequently making it a focus for brands and marketers when wanting to reach their target audience. Considerations towards this are also explained in the section comprising the literature review. Furthermore, given the scope of this paper, the data collected on the four respective directions of perspectives regarding the phenomenon is only based on one representative of each. Each of the respective perspectives is all based on women born within in the millennial generation, which is specifically being between 25 and 40 years old as of the year 2021. Therefore, it should be considered how the scope and context of this thesis affect the expressions and consumption patterns that will be analyzed and discussed throughout. Nevertheless, having narrowed down the scope, it can be argued how it allows the thesis more focus and deep interpretations on the subject in place. Lastly, what further delimitates this study is the narrowed academic literature present on the phenomenon, evidently affecting the relations the findings will be placed in relation to, whereas secondary literature from other sources have been deployed in order to serve ground for interpretation. Also, this is one of the reasons the thesis focus on looking into more of the development of the media marketing landscape, serving as a ground for why this field of study calls for greater research in the future.

2. Literature Review

This section contains an outline and examination of the literature review carried out in relation to the scope of this thesis. It provides views on media marketing and its development into the expansion of digital marketing channels that are widely acknowledged and highly engaged in today by consumers. With a literature review examining digital marketing channels, it further expresses the focus of social media, and thus, developments within the landscape extendedly focusing on the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing on the social media platform Instagram. Therefore, in terms of this thesis, it was considered to be crucial to have a thorough literature review, considering that social media, its trends, and outlooks, can be perceived to still be a field of novelty with its ever-evolving process of change and transformation (Constantinides, 2014). As a field containing various definitions, concepts, and functionalities, several explicit clarifications are needed to follow along the path of this thesis, which is also stressing the relevance of being acquainted with the latest knowledge within the marketing disciplines of social media when wanting to apprehend phenomenon within the field,

accordingly, also when related to the aspects of Influencer Marketing. In turn, the fundamentals of this literature review is therefore to enlighten on the latest apprehensions, and to give a full understanding of the characteristics related to Influencer Marketing on social media, in particular on the Instagram platform. This literature review will furthermore be to serve as a background knowledge for the subsequent elements of this thesis, where certain parts of the theory and concepts are thus applied and drawn upon.

2.1 Traditional Media Marketing vs. New Media Marketing

In order to comprehend the development of the theoretical foundation supporting this research, this part of the literature review serves to develop an understanding of the expansion that traditional media marketing has gone through by facing a new era of the booming digital marketing channels and tools, also referred to as the New Media (Belch & Belch, 2014).

2.1.1 Traditional Media Marketing

Traditional media marketing have been known for decades within academics and marketing professionals, and thereby a well-known reference when it comes to advertising channels. To clarify, marketers have for example used broadcast (i.e. TV, radio), print (i.e. magazines, newspapers), and outdoor advertisements (i.e. billboards, brochures) when referring to traditional media channels (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). These channels are perceived as the ones that are proven and credible based on countless marketing initiatives, consequently relied upon by numerous organizations over the years, and can also be understood as extremely effective for many (Belch & Belch, 2014). Some of the characteristics of traditional media marketing can for one be applied to its way of semi-targeting, in terms of the audience receiving the advertisements. Thus acknowledged as often reaching a broad target audience and therefore generating a broad reach. As a result of this, traditional media marketing can usually also be recognized as a quite cost-effective solution. In turn, being another characteristic in terms of the application as a marketing effort, and for this reason usually requires a marketing budget of a considerable size for the companies utilizing them (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Moreover, as the field of traditional media marketing is undoubtedly a matter of extensive literature covered thoroughly, and without question a topic and development that has been followed closely, further comprehensive clarification on the features of traditional media marketing will not be accounted for in this literature review.

In turn, with the prevail of globalization, the continuous newer knowledge and enhancements within the media marketing area, traditional media can extendedly also be characterized as of having been at issue and continuously challenged with the rise of what can be distinguished as the New Media (Granados, 2016). Accordingly, Belch & Belch (2014) explicitly state, “The worldwide media environment is undergoing unprecedented change. The rapid growth of the Internet, social media and mobile media now offer marketers a variety of options that just a few decades ago did not exist.” This statement is clarifying what many marketers have experienced and been affected by through the last decade, as the digital presence and evolvement around it, has been under continuous development and improvement every day, and thus further has questioned the traditional media marketing options. The younger consumers in particular are a part of this media maturing, as they have become much more dependent on social media, whereas a huge part of this transition and reducing of the use of traditional media can be ascribed to them, consequently affecting the marketing efforts emphasized through these channels (Belch & Belch, 2014). Therefore, it is safe to say how marketers have been pressured to revise their media marketing initiatives and also reconsider the consumer decision journey, consequently obtaining a greater understanding of the media that impact these decisions today (Edelman, 2010). This aspect of understanding is vital for marketers when comprehending effective communication with “consumers in the new digital age” (Belch & Belch, 2014).

Therefore, the following section in this literature review seeks to further understand the digitalization of media marketing, the diverse aspects constituting the mentioned New Media, and thus specifically, in order to comprehend the ever-evolving aspects of the social media platforms with particular regard to that of Instagram.

2.1.2 New Media Marketing

Needless to say, when considering marketing over a course of the last twenty to thirty years it is a field that has been subject to considerable change. This can be perceived on a basis of academic disciplinary ground, as well as on management activity, and as briefly established in the aforementioned, therefore also with considerable perspective to traditional media marketing efforts (Constantinides, 2014). With market globalization, the emergence of newer information and technologies, whereas the Internet is without doubt one of the most noteworthy evolutions, the marketing agenda and its setting is under continuous progress. The development of the Web 2.0 era, along with the role of the Internet in general, have changed the marketing context for both marketers

and consumers to unlimited measures in the time to come, and will continue to do so, with particular respect to how technology keeps playing an increasingly larger role (Constantinides, 2014). These accounts comprise of what can be distinguished as the digital age, and in terms of media it can be applied to what can be characterized as the New Media, specifically in regard to this research (Granados, 2016). The term New Media has been widely argued in terms of what defines it. For instance do Simonson et al. (2013) express how it has not always been synonym with digital media, “Other media have perplexed us before and different new media perplex people differently; hence new media appear historiographically hazardous. In the long view, since each medium must be new before it becomes old, new media predate old media, and every age may be understood as an age of its own new media, “the age of print” no less than “the age of television” or “the internet age””. Nevertheless, with respect to diverse perspectives on what can be defined under the term New Media, including the Simonson et al. (2013) reference on the matter, this research’s perspective regarding the term New Media is based on the following clarification: New Media should be understood as any media that are delivered digitally (Cote, 2020). To further clarify, defining New Media as “a catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound” (Cote, 2020). This view on New Media therefore stands in contrast to previous descriptions of what constitutes traditional media, and is further exemplified by Cote (2020) stating how traditional media “defines as all forms of communication that came before digital technology, including radio and TV and printed materials such as books and magazines”. Moreover, having said this, New Media should not be comprehended as neglecting traditional media entirely. Some classifications of New Media are still to some extent also old media, in terms of a previously existing setup evolved into newer ways. For instance, traditional printed newspapers grew into the digital issues we today access through online means, which can be based on its origin coming from the print versions. On the contrary, other New Media are opposed and therefore entirely new, also in its origin, such as podcast, apps and social media platforms. As previously determined, what one should therefore contemplate on this matter is how technology advance endlessly, consequently continuously affecting definitions and certain structures as they will most likely also change and develop over time (Cote, 2020).

Going forward, having defined how New Media can be ascribed to media delivered digitally, one should be thinking of the media expansion as namely associated with online and social media. Further exemplified by Granados (2016) formulating how “The Internet enables publication of massive user-generated content, and social media enables one-to-one communication, as opposed

to the one-to-many communication structure of traditional media.” Therefore, one of the most prominent aspects New Media has led to can be understood in terms of the developments within communication between individuals and user-generated content (Hacioglu, 2019). In order to apprehend this development and importance in today’s society, with regard to this research and its research questions, the following will specifically consider the relevant aspects of social media and therefore focus on this particular development within New Media and the digital age.

2.2 The Social Media Landscape

In the transitional marketing context and the developments around the New Media, the role of social media has become a prominent component. Besides remarkable developments between individuals’ communication, social media has intensified the possibilities of what consumers are presented to every day. Along with this a development can therefore be indicated in terms of the consumer’s empowerment in their usage and utilization of medias, which consequently is seen as distinctively impacting the media and its marketing context (Constantinides, 2014). In terms of defining social media, numerous statements and interpretations are accessible, although most share the same understanding of the overall characteristics and thus intended meaning, some also cover the meaning in newer and diverse advanced directions as the context of it keeps changing for both academics and marketers (Constantinides, 2014; Lake, 2009). Therefore, to clarify does this research take the following definitions of social media into account, firstly being, “Social media is an umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio” (Lake, 2009). Secondly, focusing more on the time aspect of the media, “Social media is any digital tool that allows users to quickly create and share content with the public” (Hudson, 2020). Having exemplified the different definitions of social media, one should comprehend it as a media with reference to applications and websites that enable people to share content quickly, in real-time, along with being a communication tool that provides them with broad platforms for engaging and sharing with the public (Hudson, 2020). It covers multiple websites and applications, which consequently also make the integrated tools, possibilities, and services vary depending on the platforms or sites. A set of lines and certain structures of context and tools, along with their features, keeps being difficult to place upon the different social medias, as it evolves quickly and change fast. As greatly put by Granados (2016), “Trying to define media in the digital space is like shooting at a moving target because it is evolving so rapidly.” Therefore, when trying to apprehend it, with a sense of outlining and categorizing the current landscape as of today in the year

of 2021, one can understand the different social platforms to mainly involve discussion forums, social and media networks, consumer review networks, and blogging and publishing networks. Nevertheless, by being mindful of how it may be altered or different tomorrow (Constantinides, 2014; Hudson, 2020; Storm, 2020).

2.2.1 The Social Media Platform Instagram

As has been identified previously, the social media platform Instagram is of specific interest in this research, and therefore the following will look into specific attributions one should comprehend in order to understand the social media platform. Firstly, Instagram was created in 2010 and is characterized by being a free social media platform, in which users can share photos and videos (Instagram, 2021). Since the platform has launched, it has been a popular way of making its users connect and engage across interests and personal lives, as well as connecting with friends, and family, and even more so with celebrities, thought leaders, influencers, and brands (Antonelli, 2020). Instagram makes the user of the platform utilize many different features, such as posting content, posting stories, going live and streaming live, forming short-videos, and many more, in which many argue it to be a social media network “like no other” (Antonelli, 2020). What makes Instagram special, is how compared to many other social media platforms, Instagram is built around photo- and video sharing, in addition to opinions just shared verbally, it is done visually. It is a platform which enables the users great abilities of sharing content created by the user itself, and connection with others that do the same. With the rise of social media platforms, Instagram was one of the platforms that quickly took up a large part of this focus, and as 2020 came to a close it had over one billion registered accounts (Lee, 2020; Barnhart, 2021). Research indicates how it is platform which evidently has become a large part of people’s daily lives today, and additionally as explained by Antonelli (2020), “It seems like everyone is on Instagram nowadays, from small businesses to big ones, news organizations to cultural institutions, celebrities, photographers, and musicians, and not to mention the cottage industry of influencers that have come in its wake.” Looking at some of the most recent demographics of Instagram, it is pointing towards, “predominantly female (34.3%) user base that’s under the age of 34” (Barnhart, 2021). It is still evident though, that the user base on Instagram also consists of older users, and thus represents a very diverse age group, as it continues to increase in the consumer’s awareness and being consistent in its growth. Nevertheless, Barnhart (2021) state how, “Although there are still older users present, the platform is largely still dominated by Gen Z and Millennials”.

2.2.1.1 Generation Z & Millennials

Therefore, an important aspects to consider when understandings social media, and in particular the Instagram platform, is how these are very much driven based on two generations, popular referred to by the Generation Z and the Millennials (Barnhart, 2021). The Generation Z is based on people born between 1997 and 2012 (in 2020 ages 9 to 24), and the Millennial is based on people born between 1981 and 1996 (in 2020 ages 25 to 40) (Beresford Research, 2020). Understanding consumers within these generations are evident, when wanting to enable greater comprehension of the transformation that media marketing and the digital landscape has undergone. As a consequence of these generations increased reliance on digital medias, they as consumers have played a significant role in the change within media marketing, and thus the need for rethinking marketing initiatives and strategies (Belch & Belch, 2014). Gonzalez (2020) makes an account on some of the characteristics of these two generations by the following, “millennials and generation Z were born and live in a different socioeconomic environment to their parents and previous generations”, which can be continued by characterizing how they have strong attachments to their smartphones, in which they have become know as to also be referred to as “the Digital Natives” by some scholars (Judd, 2018). This research will look into how these two generations have impacted the traditional consumer decision journey, and in accordance, drawn on notions suggested by Edelman (2010) in terms of how this consumer decision journey should be changed, as argued in accordance by Belch & Belch (2014), “The consumer decision process is becoming an increasingly digital experience which requires marketers to rethink the consumer purchase journey.” Edelman (2010) has suggested a newer and extended framework, which can be referred to as ‘The Social Decision Journey’. In this sense, four basic stages have been identified in this model being; consider, evaluate, buy, and enjoy-advocate-bond (Edelman, 2010). Illustrations of both the old funnel and the new is therefore attached to this research, serving as a reference for understanding. Also, interpretations shared by the McKinsey group on the matter, is also perceived as reliable and relevant, as the model shared by them serves for even more interpretation (Court et al., 2018). The models deriving from the said can be found in the related appendix (Appendix A).

2.3 Influencers & Influencer Marketing

When looking at comprehending Influencers and Influencer Marketing, Campbell & Farrell (2020) have very recent considerations towards this. They describe how Influencer Marketing can be

described as, “the practice of compensating individuals for posting about a product or service on social media”. They further exemplifies how it can be classified as once being a relatively “small movement” but state how it is now, “estimated to become a \$101 billion industry in 2020, with 75% of advertisers reporting using influencers and 43% expecting to increase their spending on influencers in the next year” (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Moreover, Brown & Hayes (2008) further define Influencers as, “a third party who significantly shapes the customer’s purchasing decision”, much in accordance with previously regard to the consumer decision journey. In this sense, Influencer Marketing should further be understood as a marketing tool, in which companies are making use of Influencers as part of their marketing initiatives when trying to reach consumers and their target audience (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Therefore, Influencer Marketing is based on Influencers’ ability of delivering marketing messages on account of given brands or companies, by communicating messages, and creating content, to their followers and their given audience. Influencer Marketing is based on the intention of Influencers being able to influence, or impact, their audiences towards certain attributions, that being e.g. to create awareness, make a purchase, or in general just to communicate certain messages to them (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

Further comprehension of Influencers and Influencer Marketing is argued by Grin (2020), “Influencers are characterized by a large number of loyal and dedicated social media followers. They are perceived as experts in their niches and their recommendations are often highly regarded by their followers.” This interpretation show that some view Influencer Marketing as something very much based on their large number of followers on the social media platforms. Also, how they are seen to be credible as endorsers in terms of the recommendations that they share with their followers. With the phenomenon already having undergone rapid evolvement, certain different types of Influencers have become apparent. Accounts of the different types are not all the same, and it can be clarified how evident classifications are less apparent in academic research, and many determinations of this come from reports online made by companies who work within the marketing field. Therefore, this literature review looks on clarifications regarding this made by Campbell & Farrell (2020), which argue the different types as the following: Celebrity Influencers, Mega Influencers, Macro Influencers, Micro Influencer, and lastly, Nano Influencer. These are made up mostly based on their follower base, in accordance with the previous view on Influencers, and the parts making up each of these can be viewed as a model in the appendix (Appendix B).

3. Methodology

The following section serves to present and provide a clarification of the methodology of this thesis. Firstly, this includes an elaboration of the philosophy of science, including the ontological-, the epistemological-, and the axiological level. Secondly, the research design will be presented, in terms of using an inductive approach and a qualitative research method. Furthermore, is the section continued with an elaboration on the data collection method, including the primary and secondary sources. Thereafter, the section will be looking at the data collection process, which involves the use of interview, considerations towards the interview guide, along with the segmentation & participant process, as well as regard to given language barriers among others. After this, the research will account of the data analysis method that will be used in the findings section. Lastly, considerations towards the research quality will be taking place.

3.1 Philosophy of Science

In order to facilitate the right sense of a research project, it is of great significance to understand and comprehend the philosophical viewpoints the research is based upon. These viewpoints are vital to apprehend, hence they not only construct and support the researcher's development of knowledge, but also the nature of knowledge itself. What I as a researcher adopt as my philosophical viewpoint will impact the assumptions I make about the world, and thus, the practical considerations I take into account when researching (Saunders et al., 2019).

Therefore, inspired by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2019), Holm (2013), and Kuada (2012), this section serves to provide an understanding of the research philosophy acquired in this thesis. Moreover, according to Kuada (2012), an understanding of this further allows for apprehending the correlation and structure between the research philosophy and the choice of methods in this thesis. This is understood in terms of how each assumption is influencing the others, meaning that the philosophical viewpoint determines the epistemological and methodological choices (Kuada, 2012). Supporting this, this section is therefore closely followed by the justifications of the corresponding research design and data collection method and techniques chosen.

3.1.1 Ontology

In order to understand this particular study it is important to clarify, firstly, the ontological level of research philosophy. According to Saunders et al. (2019), ontology is referring to the assumptions made on the nature of being and reality, and thus, how such assumptions consequently "...shape the

way in which you see and study your research objects.” Considering this reference, this study is based on the thinking of considering more than one viewpoint. Contrary, to that of the objectivist approach, this should be understood in terms of how this study departure from how the social reality is based on perceptions and values made by consequent actions of social actors. Therefore, this study can be clarified as departing from that of the subjectivist’s approach (Saunders et al., 2019). From an ontological perspective, it is therefore considered how the structures of the phenomenon being studied is created by me as a researcher, together with other social actors, by means of their use of language, their perceptions, as well as their actions. Furthermore, in this study, the subjectivism is embracing social constructionism, emphasizing how reality is constructed intersubjectively, meaning that social interaction is constructing reality as the social actors create partially shared meanings and realities (Saunders et al., 2019).

When placing this approach in relation to the studied phenomenon of Influencer Marketing on Social Media, it is perceived how studying different social actors related, thus, their perceptions, as well as their correlation to each other, will contribute to comprehending the diverse dimensions of it. The related social actors considered, later referred to as participants, whose perceptions are of interest, are from an agency and a company utilizing the marketing tool, as well as someone working as an Influencer, together with an end consumer affected by means of the concept and marketing tool. The correlation of these, their intersubjectivity of constructing reality, are important to clarify in terms of how I as a researcher study this phenomenon, due to how it is recognized that they together construct this phenomenon based on their way of creating reality and value as a social construction. Clarifying this as the ontological level of research philosophy is important when connected to examining the research question of this study, by wanting to apprehend how and to whom this phenomenon is relevant for, in terms of the organizations choosing to make use of the concept and the related tools. The social constructionist view is the characterization of how Influencer Marketing is constructed through the social interactions of the mentioned social actors, and can be seen as a continual process being revised, as a result of the constant change such social phenomenon constructs (Saunders et al., 2019). In addition, by understanding how I as a researcher actively make use of these data, I acknowledge how I cannot detach myself from my own values related to the study. This is referred to as radical reflexivity, as I recognize the fact that I actively reflect on my own values, which will therefore be further elaborated upon in the section comprising the philosophical level of axiology (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.1.2 Epistemology

Another very important aspect of research philosophy to clarify is the epistemological level of this study. As described by Saunders et al. (2019), “epistemology refers to assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how we can communicate knowledge to others.” Epistemology can be divided into different perspectives, whereas the interpretivist approach is one developed from a subjectivist perspective, much in accordance with this research (Saunders et al., 2019). As a researcher taking this stand, one have to apprehend how the paradigm takes various realities into account. In this case, that includes the participants being studied, the context of the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing itself, and, as previously indicated, my own interpretations and validations as a researcher of the knowledge I acquire. The interpretivist approach is often used in compliance with a qualitative research methodology, due to how it emphasizes the study of human beings and their social worlds, and in that manner the meanings they therefore construct. As communicated by Saunders et al. (2019), “The purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts,” which in this research is done by means of comprehending perspectives from different groups of people, and consequently, exposing their perceptions on what seems to be most meaningful when interviewed about certain aspects of Influencer Marketing on the social media platform Instagram.

3.1.3 Axiology

When understanding the philosophy of axiology in compliance with Saunders et al. (2019), it is concerning the assumptions referred to the role of ethics and values confined in the research process. Throughout a research process a researcher face critical axiological choices, in terms of the extent to which “...you wish to view the impact of your own values and beliefs on your research as a positive thing” (Saunders et al., 2019). As a result of this, it is necessary to manage and take a stand on how you make use of both your own values and that of those whom you are researching. Previous clarifications has to some extent concerned the stand on this already, nonetheless, to clarify, I as a researcher explicitly recognize my own impact and values and continually reflect upon this when undertaking this study as previously referred to as radical reflexivity (Saunders et al., 2019). Given my research’s philosophical viewpoints referring to that of the subjectivist’s approach, with attention to its social constructionist and interpretivist viewpoint, I recognize how my own interpretation of the data researched is of significant value in the research process. This ascribed to how my own values and beliefs may construct and influence the research material and data as I actively make us of it.

Consequently in regard to this, I therefore acknowledge how I cannot detach myself from my own values and beliefs. This acknowledgement is also essential in terms of the chosen data collection technique of conducting interviews, since I as a researcher still have to be able to understand their point of view and therefore have to behave with empathy when trying to enter the participant's social world (Saunders et al., 2019).

Prior to studying the phenomenon in this thesis, it can furthermore be justified how an additional aspect should be considered, giving the former encounters with the phenomenon in work- and private related situations for me as a researcher. Because of this, the following section will make an account of the researcher's statement of value, since I as a researcher identify how this can help heighten the value of my thesis' results, acknowledging related personal values, beliefs, and experiences prior to-, as well as during, the research process (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.1.3.1 Researcher's Statement of Value

An account of the researcher's statement of value can be beneficial in the process of a thesis, in terms of acknowledging personal values related to the topic being studied (Saunders et al., 2019). As a millennial myself, born in 1996, naturally, the Internet is something I have been growing up with and always had on close hand, and thus, both on a personal and professional level (Beresford Research, 2020). The development and evolvement of social media as part of the Internet's expansion has therefore resulted in what can be determined as of being very familiar and ingrained into the lives of the people from this generation, which also represents my own case (Constantinides, 2014).

Thus, the interest for researching a specific area of media marketing and its development into certain digital tools and solutions evolved due to the many acquaintances with Influencer Marketing on Social Media. To which I am personally, as well as many others, exposed to on a daily basis when operating on different social media platforms, such as that of Instagram. Previous and current experience only accelerated this interest, both departing from a personal- and professional work point of view. In particular, from experiences and scenarios departing from own work experiences, in which many situations dealing with the phenomenon have been encountered and facilitated. Furthermore, by correspondingly being an academic student within the field of marketing and communication, thus having acquired knowledge of traditional and emerging theoretical concepts within marketing on an ongoing basis, researching this specific phenomenon seemed even more interesting to further try to comprehend. Therefore, my personal involvement and interest have grown into carrying out this particular study, in which I will therefore also be drawing

on practical application and viewpoints to the discussion when investigating this phenomenon of Influencer Marketing, when and if an account of this seems suitable in certain scenarios. That being said, by being a university student researcher I am aware of the credibility related to drawing on own practical knowledge in academic writing (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, these occurrences will not stand alone, and will be in context with other data and relevant instances when presented in this thesis. It will be used to co-create an understanding of given elements, enabling an extra layer for interpretation, in order to establish perspectives of coherence or that of questioning ground, in terms of the gathered data as well as the related theory, in much accordance with my stated research philosophy.

3.2 Research Design

The following section serves to look at the thoughts and considerations of using an inductive approach for this research, along with how a qualitative research method is used in accordance with this, in terms of how this can be clarified as part of shaping this study's research design.

3.2.1 Inductive Approach

With the use of an inductive approach the data will be collected and a theory will be developed as a result of the data analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). By working inductively I justify based on my experience, and therefore start off with no persistent truth, but ideally ends with being more confident in one. A significant advantage with working inductively is the fact that I actually create new knowledge, which in turn can also be a major disadvantage, as the new-found knowledge not necessarily can be classified as certain knowledge, but more so as a probable knowledge. By the use of an inductive approach, this thesis will therefore be data driven, hence allowing meanings to emerge from the data collected, enabling the possibility of identifying relationships, themes and patterns taking place (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2.2 Qualitative Research Method

The qualitative research method is very relevant when associated with the social constructionist approach. This thesis project is therefore carried out by using the qualitative research method, in order to achieve the best level of understanding of the phenomenon being studied. With a study of participants' meanings and the relationship between them, this research approach contribute to identifying the relevant aspects and patterns when deriving meaning from the data collected. By

enabling the use of a qualitative research method a variety of analytical procedures and data collection techniques will be used, which as a result can establish a theoretical contribution and conceptual framework to this thesis project (Saunders et al., 2019).

Further, by the use of this research method the meanings and results in this particular study will derive and be expressed through spoken words. It can be clarified how those who agree to take part in this research are therefore not only perceived as respondents, but as participants or informants of the data collected. Another key reason for making use of the qualitative research method is based on the importance of using a method that can “talk” with the theory. Therefore, this thesis will be making use of qualitative interviews, which can contribute to producing in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon, but nevertheless, this as solely understood on a basis of this research’s participants’ perspectives, enabling me to interpret the significances of Influencer Marketing on the social media Instagram. By conducting qualitative interviews, it is empirically possible to access the chosen participants’ experiences and opinions on Influencer Marketing on Instagram, on the account of these experiences being formulated linguistically, which is in line with the constructionist views about language being a central aspect in the creation of each individual’s reality (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2010).

Considering the above, there are still different ways to carry out qualitative interviews, which therefore present the need for further clarification. In the following section, I will therefore describe my choice and considerations of my data collection method, including the interview method used for obtaining the primary data of this thesis.

3.3 Data Collection Method

The purpose of this section is to clarify the methods used when obtaining the data collection for this research. In order to comprehend the different areas and aspects constituting this research, both primary- and secondary data was collected. The secondary data was collected mostly prior to the primary data, and can be accounted for as a starting point for this research’s aim and objectives, in terms of relevant theories and literature (Saunders et al., 2019). The two data collection methods, primary and secondary, will be further elaborated upon in the following.

3.3.1 Primary Data

It is established how this research is developed through a collection of primary data. When referring to primary data, one should understand the data as collected by a researcher from first-hand sources.

When placed in relation to this research, the first-hand sources was obtained by means of a research interview, where the researcher seeks to constitute a level of interaction and relation between the participant and the researcher, in order to develop purposeful conversation with outmost potential of gaining insight into the participants perspectives on the topics in question (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, the following will further clarify the different aspects related to carrying out research interviews for this research.

3.3.1.1 Qualitative Interviews

The foremost intention of collecting data for this thesis departure in gathering primary sources connected to Influencer Marketing on social media, with the primary focus on the media Instagram. This was established through the qualitative interviews that were carried out, which is enclosed in the appendix (Appendix D). These interviews was based on a semi-structured technique and was non-standardized (Daymon & Holloway, 2011: 220; Saunders et al., 2019). The reason for choosing this type of data collection technique when obtaining information to answering my research questions was for one ascribed to the flexibility, understood both in terms of the participants during the interview sessions, as well as myself as a researcher. Therefore, to facilitate the outmost potential for producing such communication and interaction supporting this reasoning, the interviews was held on a one-to-one basis. This allowed me as a researcher and the participants to act in a kind of social interaction, where both parties were able to produce meaningful, situated accounts of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Thus, meaning that this method assisted in collaboratively exploring and developing an understanding of feelings, values, ideas, and meanings held by the participants. Further, this contributed to providing transparency in the conversation during the interview, which can act as a tool for obtaining knowledge and access to the participants' world (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2010). Given the one-to-one format, there was also applied a certain degree of control by the participant itself, due to how they could influence the interviews direction and pace. Essentially, giving the participants a choice of answering spontaneously, as well as the potential of providing more detailed answers to the questions that applied for this, according to their own perception of the subjects in question. This can be argued as both an advantage, as well as a disadvantage, in terms of how it could influence the results and the outcomes of the interviews. Having the researcher-participant relationship in mind, it enabled a large degree of personal involvement for the researcher, which can arguably also have an effect and a risk of the answers being modified by me, the researcher and interviewing person, intentional as well as unintentional.

Therefore, the researcher and interviewer's communicative competencies should be considered, in terms of how it could affect the questions that were asked to the participants, this either positively or negatively. These aspects are important to consider and have in mind when collecting data by means of this research technique. Nevertheless, as a result of considering the different aspects that appear when utilizing this technique, I distinguished how the researcher-participant relationship was highly applicable related to this research, because of the more direct, transparent, and confidential approach it allowed (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2010: 36).

These qualitative interviews was guided by questions with a focus on the themes and topic areas to be covered, which will be further outlined in an interview guide. Depending on the participants and the responses from them, the sequencing of the questions was not necessarily the same for each participant during the interviews, since this depended on the process of each interview session and the given participant. Thus, allowing me to understand the different perspectives of the participants' and their distinct accounts of Influencer Marketing on Social Media. Nonetheless, the interview guide ensured that the type of data collected from each was similar from all of the participants. By the use of a semi-structured interview method and a corresponding interview guide, the questions was developed prior to the sessions. This allowed me as a researcher subsequently to the interview sessions to comprehend them and their results, enabling me to consider the most significant outcomes to follow and further develop my enquiry and its path depending on the given results (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). That being said, a further elaboration on the actual questions is necessary, thus, such will be clarified in a later section.

Considering the above, nevertheless, depending on which of the interviews and the interviewees the format of conducting it varied. Due to our current pandemic crisis of covid-19 the interview sessions was affected by the crisis' restrictions, and did therefore not take place face-to-face, and much to the contrary only through online resources. This was despite the desire of wanting to conduct all of the interviews on a face-to-face basis under normal circumstances. The interviews' format thereby also depended much on the individual participants, due to their own preferred formats and capabilities related to carrying out the interview merely through online resources. For this reason, the online interviews were carried out by the use of computers or phones, either in terms of a live video-chat using software such as Microsoft Teams or Google Hangout, or by a normal audio-call without video through a phone. Every participant was requested for a video-chat call if possible, nonetheless, did they have the final saying in what was possible for them to carry out. Therefore, if the participant did

not have the possibility to carry out a video-call, an audio-call was decided as the next best solution. All of the interviews were still allowed to occur synchronously because of this, i.e. in real time (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). By happening in real time, being online- or audio-call interviews, the interviews were able to be filmed and recorded by the use of a phone or by systems in the computer recording the screen synchronously. The audio-call interviews were only voice recorded, since filming was not necessary as the participant's face, and thus facial expressions and gestures, could not be observed. The video-chat interviews were filmed both with audio and video, which enabled the best results for me as a researcher, as I could examine all the expressions held by the participant, both verbal and non-verbal. By being able to watch them during the interview, and not only listen to them talk, as was the case with the audio-calls, it allowed better understanding for both me and them during the interview session. Fewer misunderstandings were experienced, and as a researcher I was able to act on expressions and gestures when guiding the participant through the interview (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). In addition to mainly getting data as synchronous interviews from the participants, smaller data was also collected asynchronous in terms of a text-based format. All participants were asked to send their data on their screen-time spent on Instagram during a normal day and week, as well as to reply with further clarification on given statements they made during the interview, if such was needed after the interviews had taken place (Appendix E). This therefore facilitated some of the data to be gathered in non-real time when necessary, by either communicating through the use of e-mailing, texting, or Instagram Chat (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

3.3.2 Secondary Data

When carrying out a research, working towards answering a research question(s) and its objectives, one can be expected to manage certain aspects of secondary data. Secondary data can be characterized as of data collected by someone other than the researcher itself, which may have originally been collected for other research purposes. In terms of this study, the same can be accounted for, as the collected secondary data was obtained to provide additional knowledge and interpretations on the subject in place, but may initially have been collected for other purposes (Saunders et al., 2019). The following will therefore make an account of the secondary data collected and its methods.

It is expressed by Saunders et al. (2019), how "...secondary data include both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (non-numeric) data...". This research makes use of both types of secondary data, and it was originally obtained by someone else than the researcher of this paper. The secondary data was

mostly collected prior to collecting the primary data, in compliance with starting off the research process when searching for relevant theories, literature, and knowledge as a basis of carrying out this research. By researching through secondary data prior to carrying out the primary data, the direction of this research's topics and delimitations was further established. The following intention of developing knowledge through the gathering of secondary data then evolved around researching the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing and other associated areas and topics applicable to media marketing and its development. Obtaining secondary data was done by means of a variety of different types of sources, which included that of online articles, company surveys and reports, along with academic articles and academic books, accordingly making the data collection comprised by both structured (numeric)- and unstructured (non-numeric) secondary data (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, the secondary data was collected by means of online resources utilizing the Internet and search engines like Google, through the libraries at CBS both on campus and online, as well as by means of the researcher's own collection of academic books and articles obtained through the enrolled years as a communications and marketing academic at Copenhagen Business School, Aarhus University and Sogang University.

3.4 Data Collection Process

The previous section clarifying the data collection method established how this research makes use of qualitative interviews. In addition to that, this section then seeks to further clarify aspects related to the interviews, which includes the corresponding interview guide, along with sampling, segmentation and the participants involved in the interviews. Moreover, this section also makes an account of considerations regarding language barriers.

3.4.1 Interview Guide

When referring to the interviews in this research, one must consider how those are realized through decisions and considerations made on the actual questions that are comprised in the interviews. As a researcher making use of qualitative interviews as a method for data collection, the aspect of creating and structuring an interview guide is crucial for the research. As the data collected is going to impact the entire outcome of the study, it is of great importance that the researcher manages to produce an interview guide that sufficiently covers the themes and topics relevant to the research, when trying to answer the research question as sufficient as possible. Therefore, in accordance with this, the questions comprised in this research's interview guide was produced on a basis of relevant theories

and techniques from Daymon & Holloway (2011), along with the theory concerning the themes of this study covered in the literature review. The question type technique is therefore based both on Patton (2002) and Schatzman and Strauss (1973). Patton's (2002) technique is related to a series of questions about background and demographics; experiences and behavior; opinions and values; feelings; knowledge; and senses. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) offer a technique on asking questions that covers idealization and contrast questions (Daymon & Holloway 2011:). The following will therefore make an account of the composed questions, firstly, when placed in relation to Patton's (2002) technique, and secondly, in relation to Schatzman and Strauss' (1973) technique. The full interview guide and its composition can be found in the appendix (Appendix C).

3.4.1.1 Background and Demographic Questions

At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were asked open questions to state their name, age, and occupation. This part of the interview served as a foundation of gaining knowledge on the individual participants in terms of basic background information, and is perceived as a good opening and beginning of an interview.

3.4.1.2 Experience and Behavior Questions

The questions related to this part of the interview concerning experience and behavior questions served as a good way for getting the participants to start talking, which firstly covered their own personal usage of the social media Instagram. The following questions then guided the participants to open up about other situations where they made use of the platform, such as, "Are you only using it [Instagram] for personal matters, or also in work related matters?". Thus, further asking them questions considering their behavior on the platform, how much time they spend on using it, in what situations they make use of it and various other related scenarios that would give insight on their behavior and experiences with the media. The questions related to this area in the interview gave a good view on their own personal involvement on the social media Instagram, which further opened up for a good dialogue about the media in relation to many of the later questions asked in the interview. Therefore, this section also helped establish an outline of the media's relevance according to their own personal involvement, initiating some of the reasons and situations where given users of Instagram take action on the platform, along with the general usage of it.

3.4.1.3 Opinions and Values Questions

The interview further consisted of questions formulated with a very direct approach, in relation to some of the participant's opinions, such as, "What are your thoughts and opinions on 'traditional' marketing and advertising tools?". This question exemplifies how it is asked with a very straightforward approach, which also influenced many of the other questions in the interview. Another question highlighting this type of question in the interview guide is, "What is your opinion on influencer marketing as a marketing tool/initiative?", followed by a series of further reflective opinion affected questions, when placed in related to their own knowledge and perspectives on the phenomenon used as a marketing tool. Questions reflecting values from the participants in the interview guide is further something that is represented, by asking them to express what they perceived to be the value one should be wanting to achieve, if companies were to utilize Influencer Marketing as part of their marketing initiatives. To clarify, the participants were asked to express what they recognize as the value the tool can give when utilized in the most sufficient way, by the question formulated as the following, "What is the essence of the value the use of Influencer Marketing creates for companies?".

3.4.1.4 Feelings Questions

A few questions were also resolving around feelings questions, although not necessarily asked in a direct manner, but structured indirectly so the participants were able to reflect on certain scenarios making feelings appear towards it in a natural way. A section in the interview guide structuring this can be placed in relation to the questions about interaction on the Instagram platform, situated around how Influencers engage and communicate with their followers and possible consumers. The questions were framed so that the participants could indicate the emotions and feelings they believe impact the way Influencer Marketing may foster a personal level when used as a marketing tool. They were asked to the participants in relation to their own personal usage and experiences on the media, along with other perspectives that also reflected upon it, in terms of their opinions and experiences when related to working in the industry for those of the participants applicable to this. The intend for this, was to further enable a dialogue on what feelings and emotions the participants perceived to occur when consumers operate on the platform, especially when related to Influencers and what their communication may evoke when producing content and performing on the platform.

3.4.1.5 Knowledge Questions

The interview guide focuses on various knowledge related questions throughout the entire interview guide. In the beginning of the interview the participants were asked to how they would define and describe Influencers themselves, and whether they knew of various terms associated when wanting to define who they are and what they do. Each participant were later in the interview asked to their knowledge on Influencer Marketing, in order to clarify their level of understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the interview guide also focuses on the knowledge towards the development of Influencer Marketing as a marketing tool, asking the participants to reflect on this aspect in the years they have had encounters with it. As the interviews were semi-structured, these questions led on to evolve the interviews differently depending on the participant. The participants working with the phenomenon professionally had a lot of data and knowledge within the subject, and in turn also highly reflected their responses and desire to elaborate upon this in regard to all the knowledge related questions. The participants were also asked to their knowledge of when an Influencer Marketing initiative were interpreted as of being successful. Accordingly, the participants working with different traditional and digital medias professionally also had several elaborations related to knowledge and experience on this, and as the semi-structured approach allowed they consequently also conversed on this aspect as they saw adequate. Besides the mentioned aspects that resolve around knowledge related questions, additional questions throughout the interview guide are further reflecting this question type. The reason for this is due to how the knowledge aspect were seen as very relevant for the participants to discuss during their individual interviews when related to different matters, since this research actively wants to address the perspectives experienced and viewed from the individual participants in relation to various aspects of Influencer Marketing.

3.4.1.6 Sensory Questions

The interview guide is demonstrating a few questions related to the participants senses. The questions related to sensory questions can be expressed as mostly being to what is ‘seen’, as they are reflecting questions towards what the participants has viewed in terms of different advertising and media communication. In regard to Influencer Marketing being carried out on a media that utilizes one of the senses, being to view or experience something using the eyes, this aspects is both used directly in the questions, as well as indirectly, when asked. Exemplifying this aspect, sensory type questions in the interview guide can for instance be related to the questions where the participants were asked different questions in relation what they have experienced on the Instagram platform. The respondents are perceived to explain what they then have viewed by means of their eyes when using the platform.

Accordingly, another section of questions that also reflects on the senses is related to the traditional media marketing questions, where the participants were asked about their opinions towards the media channels along with advertisements carried out by means of it. These questions enabled space for elaboration on their experiences with it, which intentionally gives them the possibility to describe what they have seen when reflecting on the different communications experienced through these media channels, in the same way as with the experiences on Instagram questions. To demonstrate an indirect question where the senses might appear as part of the participants responses, they were asked of their preference when receiving advertisements, “Do you personally have a preference, when it comes to both using and/or receiving advertisements, in terms of which channel it is done through?”, which automatically makes them describe their experiences of receiving commercial advertisement, to which most have explained and recalled a situation where they watched it by using their eyes.

3.4.1.7 Idealization Questions

A small amount of questions can be characterized to the question type technique referred to as idealization, or as distinguished by Schatzman and Strauss (1973) as ‘posing the ideal’. It is used with the intend of asking the participants about “an ideal state of affairs or an ideal product or situation” (Daymon & Holloway 2011). The interview guide in this research makes use of this when the participants were asked a series of questions in one of the sections related to ‘ideal’, in this case phrased as ‘successful’, Influencer Marketing initiatives. The participants were asked to reflect on when Influencer Marketing campaigns and initiatives could be distinguished as successful, in terms of matters related to the Influencers, the brands/companies, and the consumers, along with when associated to the perspectives from an agency working with the phenomenon. This section of questions enabled the participants to further get into a dialogue on experiences or knowledge on certain scenarios that reflected different outcomes when placed in relation to ‘the ideal’. In this sense, the participants were further asked to compare the different contexts, consequently facilitating a large degree of reflection on the subject. Demonstrating another idealization question, the participants were subsequently asked, “What is the ideal value the use of Influencer Marketing can create for companies?”, and was in this case asked as part of the last questions, in order to sum up the main aspects considering this, in which the participant had gone through in more detail in previous sections.

3.4.1.8 Contrast Questions

In terms of contrast related questions, some have partly been covered in previously described question types. As Daymon & Holloway explains (2011), “Contrast questions aim to reveal differences in

attitudes and perceptions by comparing one thing with another”. In terms of this interview guide such questions are emphasized in the section where the participants were asked about traditional media channels. As with some of the other question types, some were in a straight-forward manner, and some were asked indirectly, as the participants naturally were encouraged to compare the different media channels and thus related marketing campaigns. Contrast questions along with related responses appeared naturally when discussing Influencer Marketing throughout each of the interviews, as it has been known for a shorter period of time than many other medias, especially when emphasized in relation to traditional media channels.

3.4.2 Sampling Technique

Considering sampling and sampling techniques, this thesis have taken the following into consideration, and thus should be apprehended in terms of the overall composition as well as findings related to the study. In order to answer my research questions and enabling me to meet my objectives, a non-probability sampling technique was determined as of being most suitable to this research. Further, should the sampling technique be characterized as of using a purposive sampling technique, as my judgement as a researcher was used to select specific cases I believed to be the most relevant when investigating the aspects comprising this study (Saunders et al., 2019). The sampling size can be identified as of being small by having interviewed 4 participants, which in this context can also be referred to as my ‘population’(Saunders et al., 2019). The sample size was accordingly suitable to the mentioned sampling technique, as the participants were selected for this research on the notion of being particular informative on the diverse matters related to Influencer Marketing (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Having said this, one should nevertheless be mindful and very conscious about how such research can never be statistically representative of the selected target population (Saunders et al., 2019). This aspect will be further elaborated upon in a later section.

When further exploring the considerations behind the selected sample, the target population should be determined as of representing a heterogenous sampling (Saunders et al., 2019). Saunders et al. (2019) refers to this as a technique where the researcher uses their judgement “to choose participants with sufficiently diverse characteristics to provide the maximum variation possible in the data collected.” The participants were selected on the basis of understanding Influencer Marketing from diverse perspectives, although all can be related to the concept, they had different levels of interaction, as well as levels of profession. Therefore, each participant represented a different perspective on the subject, which is clarified in the following: One was illustrating perspectives by

being a consumer that uses and engage on the Instagram platform; another was working as an Influencer, whereas their main income source and profession derived from this; the third represented a brand that makes use of Influencer Marketing as part of their marketing initiatives as a company; and finally, the fourth represented and worked at a media agency, in which the agency's sole purpose is working with Influencer Marketing, by means of connecting and administering Influencers and brands, and thus enabling utilization of it as a marketing- and strategic tool for businesses. Further attributions on the decisions for selecting such sample, was based on an account of wanting to enable descriptions and explanations on key themes coming from very different perspective and roles when related to the subject (Saunders et al., 2019). Emerging themes and patterns can on this basis therefore be emphasized of great value and interest, as they become evident in a context of participants' having diverse backgrounds, purpose, and directions. It can therefore be determined on a basis of what Daymon & Holloway (2011) describes by, "a search for variations in settings and for individuals with widely differing experiences of a particular phenomenon". This was perceived as specifically suitable when related to the aim of this research, as the findings are not intended to generalize on either the population, nor the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing. The findings are therefore rather intended as to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon in a certain setting and what is perceived as a relevant context, through the experiences of this specific group that were chosen as the applicable sample for this (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Having clarified this, further details of the involved participants should also be accounted for, which the following section will therefore examine.

3.4.3 Participants & Segmentation

The previous sampling section involved certain evaluations and remarks on the chosen sampling, and thereby to some extent the participants involved in the research. This section serves to provide additional details on the individual participants, enabling the reader to consider the participants' individual backgrounds and their point of departure in terms of their perspective on the studied phenomenon.

3.4.3.1 Karoline Dall – the Influencer

In relation to this study Karoline Dall is represented as the Influencer. She is working as an Influencer full-time, and therefore her primary income. In the research she will be referred to as 'Karoline D', as two Karolines take place in this study.

3.4.3.2 Emma Kapetanovic – the Consumer

In relation to this study Emma Kapetanovic serves as representing perspectives departing from a consumer. Therefore, her occupation has no specific relevance to this study, as she is merely a consumer of Instagram and Influencer Marketing, and not working with it like the others. She will be referred to as ‘Emma’ throughout the research.

3.4.3.3 Karoline Sørensen – Company working with Influencer Marketing

Karoline Sørensen serves as this paper’s perspective on a company working with Influencer Marketing. In this sense, someone who makes use of Influencers as part of their marketing strategies and initiatives. She will be referred to as ‘Karoline S’ throughout the paper.

3.4.3.1 Natasja Hviid – Agency Working with Influencer Marketing

Natasja Hviid is working as Head of Influencer Marketing at one of the largest agency’s working with connecting brands and Influencers in Denmark. Therefore, she serves as this research’s perspective from someone who works with Influencer Marketing when derived from the agency point of view. Throughout the research she will be referred to as ‘Nastaja’.

3.4.4 Language Barriers

In terms of language barriers related to this research, certain aspects should be considered and thus accounted for. The interview guide was initially carried out in English, but when considering the scope of the research in terms of the previously clarified delimitations, the participants interviewed was limited to solely being Danish people living in Denmark. Therefore, in order to comprehend their perspectives and behaviors with greatest possible potential, it was decided to carry out all of the interviews in Danish. Moreover, was the interview guide extendedly translated and adapted to Danish, as to fit the interviews and the participants in the most sufficient manner. In this way, more certainty was placed in terms of the participants understanding of the questions, as well as allowed easier reflection and confidence on the topics covered, with Danish being all of the participants’ native language (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Having said this, as a researcher I am fully aware of the possible risks related to translating the interview guide into another language. Therefore, it was greatly considered the importance of both guides being sufficiently reflecting one another, and primarily how the Danish version should be aligned with the initial English version. Continuous correction and comparison was therefore made in both versions, making the final interview guide

continually modified in order to resemble the correct meaning and intended purpose before applied in the interviews sessions (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.5 Data Analysis Method

This section's purpose is to clarify the data analysis method, as a data analysis method serves to support the researcher in analyzing the findings from a data collection set. As the nature of this research's data collection derive from an inductive approach, together with being conducted on the basis of a qualitative method, a thematic analysis have been identified as an applicable approach in relation to this specific study (Saunders et al., 2019). A thematic analysis method is a common approach related to analyzing qualitative data, and can be characterized by how, "The essential purpose of this approach is to search for themes, or patterns, that occur across a data set" (Saunders et al., 2019). It is in great compliance with having carried out a series of interviews, thus being a significantly appropriate method for this study. It enables a logical and orderly way of analyzing the data collection by means of coding and categorizing, thus facilitating greater comprehension of the participants' explanations and perspectives as it indicates key elements covered throughout all of the interview sessions (Saunders et al., 2019). The thematic analysis approach have been supported by theory from Saunders et al. (2019), together with deriving from the framework of Braun & Clarke (2006).

3.6 Research Quality

As briefly mentioned previously in the sampling section of this research, one should contemplate on the matter regarding the quality of the research. This aspect can be of significant value to the research's results, and in certain cases, such as a quantitative research, such can be clarified and assessed by means of its validity and reliability. In turn, by this research being of a qualitative matter, Daymon & Holloway (2011) argue how the same quantitative standards would be inappropriate when placed in direct relation to a qualitative study, along with further addressing how diverse perspectives and disagreements appear when addressing the notion of research quality and indicates its lack of consensus. Therefore, this research's approach to research quality embrace the suggestions of Daymon & Holloway (2011), contrasting the traditional criteria of reliability and validity, as they give credence to alternative criteria presented as trustworthiness and authenticity "for demonstrating and judging quality in qualitative research" (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

3.6.1 Authenticity

According to Daymon & Holloway (2011), a study can be viewed as authentic when the researcher have used strategies that are seen as appropriate in relation to communicating the participants' ideas as true to what they have expressed. Another aspect of authenticity is perceived as of the study being fair, along with "when it helps participants and similar groups to understand their world and improve it" (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). In regard to these attributions when related to this research, I as a researcher have emphasized great time and energy in examining strategies and approaches in order to establish as competent a setting as possible for understanding the participants' perspectives and experiences as accurately to their 'truth' as possible (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). By having emphasized this and by continually being conscious of this particular aspect throughout my research, I consider my replica of their expressions, and thus their truth, as of being as accurate and persistent as was possible to me. This exertion of effort also corresponds with the endeavor of wanting to understand the participants' worlds as thorough as possible. The section composing the literature review emphasize this, by deriving from the intention of wanting to be able to reason with the participants, the gathered secondary data addresses important aspects of the participants' worlds. Moreover, this secondary data came from academic journal articles and books, based on well-known scholars and academic institutes, along with further obtaining secondary data from companies and their reports who are perceived as experts and specializes within the field. In addition, all of the theories and concepts deriving from this comprised in the literature review was carefully explained and addressed purposefully. It contributed to showing knowledge and empathy towards the participants, and therefore served to facilitate ground for optimal understanding of their perspectives and worlds (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

Furthermore, I have taken steps to place great emphasis on documenting as much of my process throughout the research as was applicable. Some will be present as included in this paper, others have been kept for reference and stored if it should be requested for later on in the future. Reflection on the said throughout the research have led to careful consideration, note-taking on the line of thought and thus specific processes, in order to enable the most suitable setting for decision-making related to the different aspects of the research. Therefore, each section of this research also consider such reflections, in order to document the notions behind many of the decisions taken in relation to the research.

3.6.2 Trustworthiness

According to Daymon & Holloway (2011), “the criteria for evaluating trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability”. Looking firstly, at the criteria of credibility, it can be understood as what Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to as “if readers recognize in the findings the meaning that the research has for them in their own social context” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). When aiming for reaching this level of credibility, this research clearly clarify the various methods that are used throughout the study, as well as demonstrate how each of these complement one another as suitable as was perceived possible. These aspect have been crucial to clarify, as choosing the most suitable methods for this particular research enables a greater level of credibility, by having utilized techniques that actually relate and measure the matters comprising this study in what have been identified as the most sufficient manner. Furthermore, this also helps the readers of this study to interpret it, if it were to be place in relation to other matters of investigation of related issues or contexts. Along with the intention of thereby adding to the existing academic literature, having the potential of improving the level of knowledge within Influencer Marketing in the researched context of Instagram, and thus mindful for companies’ perceiving the marketing tool as of being applicable to their business objectives, when the methods in place seem credible for such researches. This can also be referred to as attributions on the second criteria of trustworthiness, being the notion of transferability (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). As transferability in qualitative researches focus on the particular knowledge obtained from one’s research findings and its level of transferability to “other settings and situations with which they are familiar, or to make connections between the two” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

4. Findings

Previous sections regarding this research’s methodology has clarified how four qualitative interviews have been carried out in relation to this study, thus this section serves to interpret theses interviews and its related findings. This section will make use of the analytical aspects previously described, drawing on principles from a thematic analysis theory approach with reference to Braun & Clarke (2006) and Saunders et al. (2019), when analyzing the gathered data collection. Therefore, this section is structured by the key themes deriving from the interviews. The interest of the specific key themes derived from the interviews all departure from the intention of trying to answer the research questions and its objectives. Therefore, the analysis serves to provide greater comprehension of the

phenomenon of Influencer Marketing as a marketing tool, when placed in the context of the social media platform Instagram. This is done so by means of exploring the tool in terms of who the use of it might be relevant for, or lack thereof, in regard to businesses deciding on whether or not to employ it. Furthermore, the analysis will on that account further look into how this can be done so successfully, by means of interpreting the different perspectives coming from the participants, whom individually represents different roles in the occurrences of Influencer Marketing, but nevertheless appear to be having underlying conjunctions in order for it to actually take place. During the analysis elements of discussions and interpretations will be taking place continually, along with specific considerations towards related theories and aspects. After the account of this, the research will then look into key themes derived from the interviews, in terms of aspects that impact companies successful integration of Influencer Marketing when being a part of their marketing strategies. Therefore, suggestions occur towards what companies should consider when wanting to create as much value as possible, when strategically making use of Influencer Marketing.

4.1 Influencer Marketing's Relevance as a Marketing Tool

Analysis of the gathered interviews uncover specific themes throughout all four interviews related to the technological developments and improvements that has impacted the media landscape, with specific attention to the presence and effect of the social media platforms. Themes related to this appear with specific attention to how the consumers may have impacted such setting, in terms of both their digital usage and Instagram consumption, along with the impact this has had on the consumer decision journey. All of this will be viewed in the following section, with specific considerations towards the overall formulated research questions, with primary focus on that part asking on the relevance of whether or not companies should consider implementing Influencer Marketing as a marketing strategy. When trying to answer this, the following section will therefore; firstly, look into the research objective of, how the impact of traditional media have changed with the development of social media; secondly, look at the objective of, what impact the consumer's Instagram usage say about the media as a marketing channel, thus giving rise to tools as Influencer Marketing to thrive; and thirdly, investigate the objective of, how this has impacted the consumer decision journey with regard to Influencer Marketing.

4.1.1 Traditional Media Marketing Loosing Ground

When wanting to comprehend how the traditional media have been impacted with the development of the social media platforms, the interviewed participants all had individual interpretations on this. Nevertheless, it stands without question how they all agreed on the fact that the rise of the Internet, also referred to as part of the Web 2.0 (Constantinides, 2014), has changed the perceptions of using the traditional media significantly (All Interviews). More and newer options for brands and marketers have become evident since the development of globalization and our more digitalized world, and the options are without doubt more nuanced when company and brands want to communicate to their target audience, since they can now also do so by means of the social media platforms (Constantinides, 2014). In terms of communicating through more traditional media marketing one of the perceptions communicated by the interviewed participant Emma, which represents the consumer perspective in this research, describes its way of targeting by the following, “I do not think that traditional [media] marketing is particularly segmented” (Emma interview, recoding 1, 7:16), closely continued by describing how online advertising is more specific in its targeting toward her as a consumer, “I have never minded how the advertisement that I get online are tailored to me. It actually suits me very well, as it is based on some data [about me] that are correct” (Emma Interview, recording 1, 7:22). These perspectives clearly, and quite specifically, show how Emma interprets traditional media marketing and online media marketing as in complete contrast to each other, in terms of its targeting to her, and therefore further her perception towards traditional media and its targeting to consumers in general. She continues this elaboration on traditional media marketing by stating how she says, “to me, traditional [media marketing] is a bit nostalgic” (Emma Interview, recording 1, 7:38), and exemplifies this with stating show she rarely turns on the TV, thus rarely watch an advertisement through this medium. In this explanation she puts ‘TV’ and the wording ‘nostalgic’ in the same sentence, exemplifying how she aligns them in complete absolute with one another, stating how TV for her is outdated and not a medium in which commercials and brands reach her, as they do not target as specifically by being a channel of mass media (Emma Interview).

According to academic literature, this aspect of questioning the effect of traditional media with the ever increasing focus on utilizing the New Media, i.e. the digital and social media platforms (Granados, 2016), has been widely discussed. The social media platform’s existence and continued focus is without question recognized, nevertheless do Belch & Belch (2014) argue how a total neglect of the traditional media would be wrong as they account of it still having huge importance. Moreover, they are stating how social media should be proceeded with caution, and that

companies should highly consider to which extent it should make up for their marketing budgets, until the effectiveness of using it can be considered more reliable and showing greater valid results. This research is from the year of 2014, and in the same year another scholar, Constantinides (2014), argue the exact opposite, hence greatly exemplifying how the digital media transformation offers ground for considerable discussion in terms of the social media's relevance, and thus to which extent it should take up companies' marketing budgets, and extendedly whether or not to substitute the traditional ones. Constantinides (2014) argue how traditional media marketing "seem[s] to loose ground", highly declaring how marketers need to disregard their insecurities and doubt of the newer technologies, as the change is here to stay and keeps on evolving. He further argues that a necessary condition for marketers to regain control is to face the challenges, and doing so by comprehending the new market realities and consequently adopt new attitudes, "instead of looking to their customers as a massive and passive audience they must treat them as sophisticated and creative individuals or even as potential partners" (Constantinides, 2014). Moreover, also Crittenden & Crittenden (2015) express alike considerations towards this, concerning the need for staying up to date on the times and related tools, as the tools "are also expanding rapidly".

Emma portrays what many consumers experience and perceive about traditional media marketing and its effectiveness, as especially younger consumers have become much more reliant on social media, and generally speaking, the extent to which all of the digital media's offer (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2015). The interviewed participant Natasja, working as Head of Influencer Marketing at one of the biggest Danish agencies within media marketing, Bloggers Delight, builds on the comprehensive aspect of traditional media marketing's impact on reaching consumers in today's media setting. She has worked in the media marketing industry for many years, exemplifying how she has very specific insights into the different values the different media setting's contribute to now, based on experiences derived from the extensive clients that have hired the agency to help their marketing initiatives over the years. Based on these experiences, she explains how traditional media marketing is perceived as strong platforms when wanting to target a broad audience and wide exposure, which contributes to the previous indications of how these marketing tools are reaching the mass media. Having said that, nevertheless, she further quickly explains how traditional media marketing for her represent 'noise' and further explains how it can be perceived as disturbing for the consumers, for instance when watching TV, listening to the radio, and so forth, with having an advertising interfering, in this case, during watching or listening to something (Natasja Interview).

She explains how she definitely experiences the traditional media being challenged, further drawing on practical experience from clients of the agency exemplified by the following, “we also experience this [from clients], not many brands choose to only use the traditional [media channels], since it now has been acknowledged that what they can accomplish from the digital [channels] enables a totally different access to their consumers. It can create interactions and engagements with them, which you cannot achieve from the traditional channels” (Natasja Interview, 15:40). She continues the notion of how she experiences that the traditional media is challenged, with stating, “in this sense, they [the clients] are challenged in what they can awaken in the consumers” (Natasja Interview, 16:12). This is an interesting aspect, in terms of considering what the digital marketing solutions and tools can ‘awaken’ and make possible for brands when pursuing communication with their consumers and target audience. Karoline D explains how Influencer Marketing is much more personal, than what she experiences traditional media marketing to be (karo int).

This is an aspect which theory and scholars also seek to investigate, when trying to comprehend the impact the social media platform solutions create for marketers, especially when compared to the traditional media marketing channels and what they initially offer in a now socially mediated world (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2015). It is very much argued how the social media platforms offer brands and marketers greater direct possibilities of getting into dialogue with the consumers, in contrast to what the traditional media’s are offering. Further, this aspect have played a huge part in the debate concerning the need for new market orientation, and, to some, the consensus of the need for re-defining marketing approaches (Constantinides, 2014). The suggestions for re-defining approaches, is therefore on a basis of the New Media’s emergence, in the sense that it has changed the way marketers can awaken their consumers as it has enabled the more direct possibility of communication and engagement, along with many more aspects. Suggestions have therefore been made towards relationship-focused marketing approaches, along with more customer-focused paradigms, which should be based on “openness, engagement, cooperation, co- creation and propensity”, with the argumentation of wanting “to help customers rather than control them” (Constantinides, 2014). Many scholars and marketers have in the recent years adopted approaches that resonates with this, when undertaking marketing initiatives and deciding on their future strategy of getting the consumers attention, and more specifically in getting the consumers to value you, by being more empowered than ever before (Hudson, 2020). Moreover in this line of thought, Constantinides (2014), shares many interesting aspects regarding all of this, consequently with a sense of certainty by stating how, “For marketing strategists, the message is simple: surviving in the

age of the empowered customer requires less dependence on traditional mass-marketing tactics; understanding the role of technology in shaping the marketplace and more importantly engaging the Social Media as part of the marketing toolbox becomes a strategic imperative.”

This brief notion of the consumers’ increased empowerment in relation to the New Media, specifically in regard to the social media platforms, calls for further investigation when understanding its relevance of the argued increased possibilities and focus it has for marketers in their marketing strategies. This will be looked at more profoundly in a later section, since the need for further clarification of the development within a specific social media platform is considered relevant beforehand. This is regarding the social media platform of Instagram, which this study has a specific interest towards given the research of the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing. Therefore, the following section will argue for this consideration, and further try to comprehend the aspects of Instagram, before looking into the increased empowerment of the consumers in the digitalized world.

4.1.2 Instagram’s Continued Growth

In the extension of having looked at the New Media and the importance of social media platforms in today’s context of trying to understand consumers, and thus companies’ marketing focus, in a more broad perspective, this research see the relevance of investigating the specific social media platform Instagram, when placing these considerations in direct relation to this research. This is based on numerous reasons, which is exemplified in the literature review of this research, as well as argued for in other sections of this research paper for instance regarding the scope and delimitations. It is important to clarify, due to the limitations of this research, and since this research intend to investigate the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing, the context that seemed suitable, as well as attainable, was identified as of being on the Danish market. It can be accounted for, how Influencer Marketing in Denmark is carried out in most cases on the social media platform Instagram. Moreover, all of the participants of this research shared this perception, in which Instagram is the most used platform for them both professionally and personally (All Interviews). Therefore, when trying to answer the research question, the platform of Instagram has been identified as of being the most relevant to understand, given the mentioned context. The literature review covers broad aspects regarding Instagram in terms of comprehending the social media platform, in which one exemplified is how Instagram is created with the notion of being a free platform for sharing photos and videos (Lee, 2020). Even though, many of the clarified relations and information regarding Instagram presented

is based coming from an international perspective, it can be argued how it still seems relevant when placed in relation to this research's context, as it serves as ground for interpretation and perceptions on developments that also suits the Danish context. The globalization and diminishing of lines between countries and market trends, emphasizes these perspectives in our rapidly changing digital world, in relation to the impact and development of Instagram (Belch & Belch, 2014; Barnhart, 2021). Compared to other social media platforms very much focused on words and writing, i.e. Facebook (Facebook, 2021), Instagram is build more around people, or brands, also sharing images and videos. With the rise of social media platforms, Instagram quickly took up a large part of this focus, and thus the people around the world, having over one billion registered accounts as 2020 came to a close (Lee, 2020; Barnhart, 2021). For most people in this digitalized world, it has become a part of their daily lives. This can also be exemplified as the case for all of the participants in this research's data collection. All four participants use the social media platform every single day, and according to their retrieved telephone- and computer data, they are active on the platform between 2-5 hours each and every day of the week. With no exception (Appendix E). This is both for Emma, representing a consumer using the platform, as well as for Karoline Dall, Karoline Sørensen, and Natasja, who is using it in relation to their respective professional work. Nevertheless, the participants who work with Influencer Marketing, do not only use Instagram as part of their job, they, as Emma, also spend time on the platform as consumers, besides in work related matters. Therefore, all three of them, Karoline Dall, Karoline Sørensen, and Natasja, argues how time spent in private- or work related matters are actually a harmonized conjunction, and they do not really identify it as separate actions (Karoline D, Karoline S, Natasja Interview). This clearly exemplifies how Instagram is part of their daily lives, and they all four also describe it accordingly. They further state how they see Influencers, and Influencer Marketing every single day when using the platform. They all four share similar actions and behaviors in relation to the platform, in terms of when they are making use of it. It is part of their daily lives in the sense that they utilize it as part of their lives in all sorts of settings; when they want to specifically search for something, when they do not want to, but simply want to be inspired, when they want time to go by, in some cases to fill up situations of boredom, or simply when they do not know what to do – they spend their time on the platform. Many resonate with this notion, with Instagram today simply being a part of people's daily lives (Lee, 2020). Furthermore, statistics based on data from the platform suggests the same, as the people using it can be identified as of being a rabid base. This is an important aspects to understand, when trying to comprehend the ground for whether having relevance or not for businesses utilizing the platform and the possibilities deemed

within it, such as a marketing concept as Influencer Marketing. Emma for instance describes her behavior related to the platform as instead of not doing something, she simply opens up the Instagram platform, and therefore even before she is bored, she automatically makes up time by looking on the platform (Emma Interview). All of the participants describe Instagram as part of their routine, for instance as part of their morning/evening ritual, like getting coffee, and all openly acknowledge using the social media platform out of habit (Natasja Interview). These attributions contribute to common related significances concerning social media, by demonstrating and proving how, “social networking is one of the most popular ways for online users to spend their time, enabling them to stay in contact with friends and families as well as catching up with news and other content” (Statista, 2021a). Numerous accounts of similar notions can be identified accordingly, and very recent reports highly exaggerates Instagram as a social media platform of importance. It is argued as of being both steady and consistent in terms of its growth as a social media platform, but besides its growth, it is also the social media platform with the most dedicated users in terms of the frequency they log into the platform and continued engagement towards it (Barnhart, 2021).

Having said that, deeper understanding of the demographics that make up the Instagram platform suggests that females are the predominant user base, and in spite of reflecting diverse age groups, most of the users are predominantly comprising the Gen Z and Millennials generations (Barnhart, 2021; Statista, 2021c). In terms of this research, all of the participants interviewed are also considered to be within this age and generation specifications, as well as all being females. Therefore, it can be argued how the chosen participants are not deviating from this perception on the users of Instagram. Looking more at the Instagram usage on the Danish population, Statista (2021b) amounts the user number for 2021 to be approximately 2.2 million user, and projections towards development firmly illustrates an increase to 2.8 million users in 2025 (Statista, 2021b). The projection towards further increase of users being present and a regard of Instagram to have a high degree of importance in the social media platform agenda, further suggests ground for the exemplified accounts and scholars that encourages brands to emphasize accordingly when wanting to target consumers in the digitalized world (Constantinides, 2014). By 20220 many companies have adopted this notion of utilizing Instagram and its possibilities, in order to adapt to the consumers’ need and demands, accordingly also making Instagram a popular platform for following brands, and is argued as being a “key component of any social marketing funnel” (Barnhart, 2021; Casaló et al., 2017). According to Tankovska (2021), “69 percent of marketers stated that they were planning on increasing their use of Instagram for marketing purposes in 2019 while only 51 percent of respondents stated the same about

Facebook”. Facebook have for long been the most dominant social media channel for both consumers and brands to focus upon, and is still “the most popular social media platform used by marketers worldwide” (Tankovska, 2021), nevertheless, accounts on the increased focus placed on Instagram stress the importance of Instagram as a point of relevance in businesses continued focus regarding social media platforms. Therefore, growing adoption among brands and companies of Instagram, as a result of the increased presence among consumers, suggests comprehension towards placing value in the relevance of Instagram. Another crucial reason for this, is how brands have utilized the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing, which is present and utilized on many social media platforms, but most popular on Instagram according to the most recent updates, and especially in the context of the Danish market (Tankovska, 2021). Before comprehending the aspects of Influencer Marketing as part of utilizing Instagram for businesses, one should understand consumer behaviour and decisions, as this have been largely affected and undergone change by what this research have accounted for so far. Having looked into the change the social media, and more specifically Instagram, has had on the traditional media marketing’s impact, previous statements refer to understanding this in alignment with comprehending the consumer’s behavior and decisions accordingly within this context. The following section will therefore focus on this aspect.

4.1.3 New Possibilities in the Consumer Decision Process

When looking into the data collection from the interviewed participants different themes derived that should be highly related to consumer decision processes, as well as purchasing behaviors (All Interviews). The expressions concerning these were related to some of the previous covered elaborations, concerning how social media have impacted this, along with how much time they each spend on the social media platform Instagram, together with how they utilize the media in almost all aspects and parts of their everyday life. This is evidently affecting their behaviors towards their decisions and purchasing choices, in which Influencer Marketing is clearly stated by all four to have affected and driven such on a daily basis, which can be derived from multiple elaborations on related themes regarding this. When listening to the participants they describe how Influencer Marketing utilizes Instagram’s different tools in reaching and communicating to consumers on a variety of different levels, which can be interpreted as how the different situations they describe are touching them at each stage of the consumer decision journey (Belch & Belch, 2014). They compared these experiences to how the traditional media do not attain this, and how these channels do not succeed sufficiently when trying to influence them in these decision stages. This can be accounted for in terms

of how the participants did not resonate with these initiatives, which they exemplified through related examples of such initiatives, and even more so, as they explained they did not have much presence on these channels.

In accordance with the expressions held by the participants, along with the identified impact and presence on the social media platforms, scholars have also seen the need for developing suggestions that extend the traditional consumer decisions process (Belch & Belch, 2014). Edelman (2010) has extended the traditional known model by proposing 'The Social Decision Journey', which is exemplifying how it has been identified to re-think the consumer decision process based on the social media impact. The ground for making the newer social decision journey applicable is also highlighted and supported by the McKinsey group who describes how, "social media is a unique component of the consumer decision journey: it's the only form of marketing that can touch consumers at each and every stage" (Court et al., 2018). So instead of deciding where to allocate marketing initiatives through diverse options and medias, Court et al. (2018) argue how marketers now have an option of doing so by means of the social media platforms, as the decision-making process of consumers today is now more of a circular journey, compared to the previous adopted linear process in which much of the mass media channels communicate by means of.

Having looked at this, determining how some scholars now look at social media as a unique opportunity in the consumer decision-making journey, one should look at the following identified components of this, when placed in accordance with Influencer Marketing. With Edelman's (2010) proposed framework of the 'The Social Decision Journey', together with aligned assumptions from the McKinsey Group (Court et al., 2018), four basic stages have been identified by them as of being; consider, evaluate, buy, and enjoy-advocate-bond. All of which indicate how the process should now be perceived as of, as mentioned, a circular journey, instead of a linear process. As already established previously, social media is the only form of marketing that can touch consumers at every stage. Nevertheless, is it important to understand how many marketers perceive utilizing it, as previously determined, as of being very difficult and complex, due to how the tools within the platforms is sometimes viewed as uncertain, given the short track record, as well the ever-changing technological environment it is functioning within. Therefore, numerous tools and concepts can be identified to guide businesses in this process, although arguably not many touches all of them. Whereas one phenomenon can be argued for as evidently touching all of these four stages by utilizing and understanding just one phenomenon; that being Influencer Marketing. When looking at all of these

four stages, one can argue how Influencer Marketing can be related to all four of these consumer decision-making processes, and if incorporated and utilized in an appropriate manner arguably create significant value for companies. This perception was shared by all four participants in the conducted interviews, and they demonstrated the relation of Influencer Marketing impacting these stages through numerous expressions and perceptions. This will be exemplified in relation to all four stages in the following.

4.1.3.1 Brand Consideration

In relation to the mentioned four stages, when firstly looking, at the consideration stage, Karoline Dall, the Influencer, describes the following for related interpretation, “I experience and view advertisements every day that are presented to me through an Influencer on Instagram”, followed by, “it is every day, and multiple times a day” (Karoline D Interview, 19:02). She describes how she becomes aware of particular brands and services by means of Influencers every single day, evidently consciously, or unconsciously, making her consider and become aware of certain brands, companies, or services. The participants demonstrate knowledge towards how Influencers are very commonly used at this stage of awareness for companies when hiring them, enabling brand awareness, whether this is directed from companies that are newly established or already well-established, as well as regarding product or services, whether they are already known in the representative market, or in relation to for instance a new launch. Karoline Sørensen, who works at a company that make use of Influencer Marketing as a huge part of their marketing strategy, also expresses how everything she has recently bought, the way she became aware of it from, was through her own presence on social media, along with being presented to it by an Influencer who communicated about a brand (Karoline S Interview). She further elaborates on this by talking about a clothing piece she recently bought from a specific brand, which was something she kept becoming aware of through Influencers on Instagram. Evidently she ended up buying that piece of clothing, partially, based on the numerous encounters she had with the brand, through Influencers, and their own social media presence and communication.

4.1.3.2 Active Evaluation & Researching

This further highlight some aspects of the next stage regarding evaluation, whereas Karoline Sørensen was evaluating which piece of clothing she was then going to buy. In which she kept being reminded of a certain brand, she evidently chose that over another in this situation. The brands own presence during this active-evaluation process, helped guide Karoline Sørensen in this decision, along with how she describes looking at people she follows on Instagram for inspiration, in which she highlights

Influencers as an active asset for her when actively looking for this. Again, she experienced how an Influencer endorsed this brand, which in this decision journey consequently helped Karoline Sørensen in evaluating the brand. Numerous findings support this exemplification of how reviews and recommendations impact the active-evaluation phase, which the McKinsey group specifically regard high value towards by emphasizing how consumer-driven marketing, “is increasingly important as customers seize control of the process and actively “pull” information helpful to them” (Court et al., 2018). Influencers is thereby a huge part of validating a product or a brand to consumers.

4.1.3.3 Buying the Brand

Going further exemplifying the different stages of the ‘The Social Decision Journey’ in relation to Influencer Marketing, the next important stage is evidently the buying stage. With the previous exemplification made by Karoline S, she also describes how Influencers can be related to the stage of buying, as she evidently ended up buying it based on the awareness created by numerous Influencers. Nevertheless, this stage related to Influencer Marketing have been up for much discussion since the phenomenon have become an influential factor on Instagram. Previously, Influencers direct link to consumer’s act of buying have been, according to some, very difficult to measure. Many have given the phenomenon huge credit in terms of the more upper funnel related aspects of the marketing funnel, although many were uncertain to the ‘Return on Investment’ (ROI) (kilde). As Influencer Marketing have kept on developing along with Instagram, Instagram have over more recent times tried to accommodate this for brands and marketers. Thereby, the phenomenon have kept on experiencing developments with the increased potential it has been credited to have, accordingly impacting this stage of the consumer’s decision process to a much higher degree than in its beginning. This should be related to how Influencers now have the ability to direct consumers directly to brand’s different landing pages, for instance by ‘swiping up’ on their Instagram ‘stories’, directing consumers for instance to a company’s website. Another way this have been developed is how many Influencers are now given a personal URL, which can trace all the consumers directed through the Influencer’s own link. This have relatedly also been used as a new way of paying the Influencers, if companies chose to value them, and pay them, based directly in accordance with the ROI they have created for the company.

Expressions that led to this evaluation, were based on explanations from both Emma and Karoline S. The two participants have no relation to each other, thus have no aligned group of friends or people in their lives, live in separate parts of the country Denmark, nevertheless, do both

of them explain a similar situation related to the Influencer Cecilie Fjord. They both follow her, and value her profile and its themes, consequently the ‘universe’ in which they pitch in on by following her. Cecilie Fjord has over a longer period of time had a collaboration with the cosmetics company Gosch, which both of the participants, have made direct buys from in one of the times she has had a paid campaign going on with the brand, which she solely communicated and carried out through her Instagram platform. A collaboration in which Cecilie Fjord and Gosch utilizes the ‘swipe up’ function Instagram make possible for ‘business profiles’, enabling consumers to make a direct buy from the advertisement. Karoline S describes how she used this direct ‘swipe up’ link from one of Cecilie Fjord’s stories from the campaign, and purchased the product she promoted in the same sequence as she was viewing the campaign (Karoline S Interview). Emma also describes the easy access the platform now has created throughout the interview, for instance by the following, “It is so easy now. It is right in front of you. It is only one click away” (Emma Interview, recording 2, 9:23). This is clearly exemplifying how Emma describes the situation on Instagram now, where Instagram is trying to remove the part of Influencer Marketing that have been through much debate since its arrival, by enabling the direct purchase function, making marketers access measurable results and value towards this stage of the consumer decision process also in relation to Influencer Marketing, whereas it has previously been more clear in relation to all the other stages.

4.1.3.4 Post purchase & Enjoy-Advocate-Bond

The next and final stage of the redefined consumer decision process by Edelman (2010) is the enjoy-advocate-bond stage, also referred to as the post-purchase experience by the McKinsey group (Court et al., 2018). When looking into this stage in relation to its presence within Influencer Marketing, it can be argued how this is also a stage in which the phenomenon can have an impact towards the consumers. Natasja explains some of the developments within Influencer Marketing as a marketing tool, which has evolved quickly in spite of its relative short time frame of existence (Natasja Interview). She describes how one of the developments they experience, is how the Influencers now evaluate on given products and communicate this to the consumers, being their respective followers. This was not necessarily very common in the beginning of using Influencer Marketing, although she describes how this is now one of the very credited and efficient ways of utilizing Influencer Marketing today. To clarify in more specific detail, this should be understood in terms of collaborations where Influencers in some scenarios ‘test’ products or services, even though it is a paid collaboration from a brand, and in the end they clearly communicate to their followers what they experienced and can

conclude on product or service. In this sense, these kind of collaborations between brands and Influencers, the Influencers themselves go through the entire consumers decision process, like any 'normal' consumer, and evaluate the 'post purchase' sentiments they regard to the given product or service. This being in spite of such collaboration being with brands paying for a campaign, consequently not necessarily being certain on the outcome of the Influencer's recommendation, or lack thereof. This process of the Influencers communicating should be placed in relation to the evaluation stage of the consumers, as such collaborations highly impact consumer's evaluation of brands and their products, as illustrated in the stage concerning evaluation above. Karoline D explains how she experiences consumers using these aspects as part of their own active-evaluation, based on her recommendations as an Influencer, giving rise to how the Influencer serves as part of the consumers' validation towards a buy in their consumer decision process (Karoline D Interview). All of the participants explain similar situations concerning Influencers' communicated experiences with brands or products, that served as a validation, or the contrary, towards their own purchase of something, or someone they know, being clients or friends. What this should be emphasized in relation to, is the well-known characteristics of word-of-mouth communication, and how this can have fundamental impacts on consumers' decision process (Belch & Belch, 2014; Court et al., 2018).

When looking at all different stages of the consumer decision process, whether that is in terms of the Influencers' own part in this journey, or it is their impact on the consumers' journey, word-of-mouth is at the root of understanding the effectiveness that Influencer Marketing can have if carried out efficiently, as it evidently appears at all of the stages. Consequently, since Influencer Marketing is much based on Influencers communicating something to the consumers, their followers, they function and exist based on people listening to their word-of-mouth communication. This communication is directed by means of the focus of that collaboration, whether that is to impact awareness, evaluation, purchase, or post purchase, it is based on word-of-mouth. Campbell & Farrell (2020: 475) suggest comprehension in accordance with these findings, and further call attention to how, "Influencers often present themselves as fellow consumers", by additionally stating how "This makes them more persuasive, as consumers view word-of-mouth product reviews from fellow consumers as more trustworthy than other reviews ". Having said that, together with accounts of the phenomenon being continuously undergoing change, the need for further elaboration on how Influencer Marketing should be carried out effectively in order to create value for businesses utilizing it as a marketing tool is evident. The following section will therefore investigate this aspect.

4.2 Influencer Marketing Creating Value

The previous section instigated the findings in relation to creating ground for Influencer Marketing's relevance for businesses to utilize it as a tool in their marketing initiatives. This section serves to comprehend what is important for businesses to focus upon, and be mindful of, when carrying out such initiative in order for it to generate value. These aspects will be analyzed upon based on the findings from the interviews that were carried out in relation to this study, as well as in regard to the mentioned thematic analysis approach. Therefore, relevant themes derived structuring the following. Moreover, theory and concepts from scholars and secondary data will be placed in relation to these findings throughout this section when suitable. A very recent study by Campbell & Farrell (2020), which previous sections have already drawn upon, suggests comprehensions on the identified themes, therefore it has been identified as appropriate to incorporate when relevant for greater interpretations of the findings.

Based on the participants' expressions and perceptions of Influencer Marketing, what is important to comprehend is how the phenomenon have already undergone significant changes and developments in its relatively short period of existence as a strategic marketing tool used on Instagram. The immense escalation within the phenomenon, which has happened over a short period of time, as well as how it functions on a technological platform that keeps on advancing and changing, might have been a part of affecting the academic literature covering it, since this can be identified as of relatively small and inadequate. Campbell & Farrell (2020) correspondingly argue how despite the extensive growth, "relatively little strategic or academic insight exists that is specific to influencers", which I as a researcher of this study can only consent on when trying to apprehend its diverse dimensions. In turn, comprehensive research have been made on the phenomenon as a marketing tool by numerous businesses that operate within the digital landscape, where countless reports can be found on the subject based on the most recent findings and experiences. Having said that, the following takes these changes into consideration, as the findings are based on the most recent experiences from someone who meet the phenomenon every day, and accordingly, also have seen it undergone changes and alterations since its beginning.

4.2.1 Sense of Community

Rooting on some of the fundamental aspects of what Instagram, and other social media platforms, offer, Influencer Marketing should be credited towards the ability of Influencers' creating and engaging communities (Campbell & Farrell (2020). When the participants were asked to consider what successful Influencer Marketing campaigns or initiatives looked like, they all emphasized the extent to which the Influencers were successful in engaging their followers enabling them to be a part of a community when entering their respective 'universe', as referred to by Karoline D, which in this context should be understood as when followers go to the Influencers Instagram profile (Karoline D Interview). In this sense, the participants explain different levels of how Influencers enable consumers to follow their way of living, what they communicate about their life through the medium Instagram, and how this in turn makes followers who see this portray of life as relevant to them. So they describe how consumers follow the community, the Influencers, they resonate with. This perception has also been argued by Bearden & Etzel (1982), who suggest that consumers are more likely to support people they either like or feel attachments towards. The participant Emma for instance, describes how she either follows someone who she believes to fit well with her, in terms of someone who might have some of the same worldviews as her, the same interests, and so forth, or that she follows someone, who might not live like her, but who then inspires her through their way of living (Emma Interview). She further exemplifies the aspect of following an Influencer as being a part of a community, because it is possible to get more out of following them, than just following along with them. It is possible to communicate with them, engage with them and their content, as well as being able to get into dialogue with likeminded people. Furthermore, she evidently express great value to the part of actually writing with them directly by means of the Instagram inbox (Emma Interview).

Emma clearly indicates how Influencers enable people to connect with them and the community they created on multiple levels if you want to, and how this creates immense value compared to other marketing tools, since Influencer Marketing is not only one-way communication, in turn, it is possible to keep the communication on-going, no matter the time frame or who initiates it. Therefore, based on how the Influencers interact with their followers even after posts or stories have been shared by them, the sense of community enables immense value for their audience. Campbell & Farrell (2020) comment on this aspect, and exemplifies how this not only create and encourages greater engagement, but consequently also enables a support function. This is resonating with the aspects Emma described when being able to reach out to the Influencers getting into dialogue, in which also Karoline D highly supports, and furthermore stresses as a significant aspects of how

she creates greater value to her audience when being in the role of an Influencer, as she is always communicating with them, and not only to them (Karoline D Interview). When looking at this aspect of community, another important characteristic derived from the interviews with the participants. Closely linked to the sense of community Influencers enable, what can be further emphasized is different levels of personality, in terms of how intimate the Influencers get with their audience, as well as how personalized their content, thus their communication, is with them. The following section will look more deeply into this aspects.

4.2.2 Personality - Personalized

In extension to creating the sense of community, it was exemplified how the direct contact with Influencers was highly valued by consumers, but also for the Influencers themselves. This can also be viewed as a part of Influencers getting into very personal communication with their followers. Emma describes in the interview as something she really likes. She explains how she feels ‘special’ when an Influencer takes the time to reply to her messages or comments, as she is well aware of the fact that many others are also communicating to and with them (Emma Interview). This creates a sense of bonding for Emma with the Influencer, and she clearly explains how she is much more prone to buy something that they recommend, when the Influencers’ level of interaction are more personalized. She further explains how, “following Influencers feels like following one of my girlfriends” (Emma Interview, recording 1, 15:10). When interpreting this notion by Emma, one should be mindful of the bond she is insinuating that the Influencers enable, in which Campbell & Farrell (2020) further clarifies by stating how, “Influencers who form more intimate bonds with consumers tend to carry more persuasive power.” Therefore, when business look at choosing Influencers for their collaboration on campaigns, they should be mindful of how well they communicate with and respond to their followers, along with the extent of which they choose to share personal information, or create personalized content to fit with their audience. As part of the personal aspect, Natasja share similar evaluations, as she explains how the agency’s previous campaigns with brands and Influencers have history of being more successful when the Influencers’ audience experience the content to be created with mindfulness of their followers (Natasja Interview). So this is also in terms of the created content the Influencers do for campaigns, in which the more personalized content resonate better with their respective audience. Karoline S shares alignment with Natasja’s experiences, drawing on her own experiences working with Influencer Marketing at Camille Brinch Jewellery, the company she works at. She also explains how they experience greater

engagement from consumers, when campaigns are done in collaboration with Influencers who share more personal aspects of themselves as part of a campaign, or when the content are more personalized and focused on being in alignment with the respective Influencers' audiences. When understanding the aspect of more personalized content, Emma explains how she values content where she can tell that the Influencer have spent a lot of time on the content or on a given campaign. Along with when she can tell that there is a story behind it, where a collaboration seems as a natural fit between the Influencer and the product or the brand (Emma Interview).

4.2.3 Trustworthiness

The next theme that were covered immensely by all of the participants, should be accounted for as the aspect of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness can be underlying in some of the previous aspects covered, and should be related to in correspondence with them. Trustworthiness of Influencers and Influencer Marketing is something highly valued and considered by all four of the participants, and they exemplify this on different levels, along with why it is so important today (All Interviews). As previously accounted for, Influencer Marketing have already in its short period of existence undergone many changes due to its rapid evolvement in the digital and social media landscape. Natasja's agency has worked with the phenomenon as a marketing tool from its very beginning when it started taking off especially on the Instagram platform. She accounts for how the first and young years when it started to evolve, companies focused primarily on collaborations with the Influencers who had a large follower base or those who were famous from 'outside' of Instagram, that now also had an account on Instagram. She further exemplifies this by explaining how the initial match between the brands and the Influencers were not something that were considered much, but was consequently more based on the Influencer presumably reaching out to a large audience. Karoline D explains related thoughts on this aspects in terms of the development within Influencer Marketing, as she clarifies how the increase in present Influencers have escalated quickly, consequently making brands collaborate with many different Influencers with less regard to who they were, and what they stood for, with explaining, "as long as they had many followers, it was interesting for brands to get into dialogue with the Influencers, and letting them communicate about their brand" (Karoline D Interview, 32:16). What should be understood by these perceptions is how all of the participants further elaborate upon how Influencer Marketing have today because of this started to experience some untrustworthiness. As the consumers have become more familiar with meeting advertisement communicated by Influencers every day when interacting on the platform, they have also started to

questioned it more. Emma exemplifies this by explaining that it is at this point well-known that influencers can earn a lot of money if they accept a partnership with a brand, and therefore have the possibility of speaking positively about as many brands as they would like and recommending them to their followers, and then, in turn, earn a lot of money with this strategy if they want (Emma Interview). Karoline S also exemplifies this aspect and explains how, “I’m actually very critical towards it [Influencer Marketing] myself” (karo s int, 13:58), followed by explaining, “I am very aware of the fact, that today it can easily be perceived as something that is somewhat superficial” (Karoline S Interview, 14:12). Furthermore, several statements from all of the participants also exemplifies how some experience Influencers to have created a sense of untrustworthiness when they communicate about a brand in regard to some consumers, as the consumers know the Influencers have been paid for communicating about it. A recent development within Influencer Marketing have also made it easier for consumers to determine when Influencers’ are communicating paid content, as they now have to state when a product they are talking about or showing on their platform is gifted or paid for by a brand. In the beginning of Influencer Marketing this was not the case on Instagram, now it is permitted by law, as Influencers are a channel for advertising as any other media, who are permitted to indicate the same. Emma, perceiving this aspect from merely a consumer point of view, further comments on how untrustworthiness is not unfamiliar now when talking about Influencers. She exemplifies it by commenting on a very famous Danish blogger and Influencer Fie Laursen, as someone who is easily interpreted as untrustworthy today (Emma Interview). Fie Laursen has been running a business of being an Influencer, collaborating with almost any brands, at least it appeared so, if they were willing to pay her the price. Fie Laursen have been a much argued case regarding Influencer and their trustworthiness, and serves as a great example of when it goes in a less successful direction for both herself as an Influencer, and for the brands that have collaborated with her (Welch & Nygaard, 2020). Kapitan & Silvera (2016) support these findings, by describing how endorsers communicating a product they are trying to sell is less effective when consumers have concerns about whether the endorser uses it themselves.

Therefore, based on the participants perceptions of untrustworthiness in relation to using Influencer Marketing, they in turn expressed great value towards trustworthiness as a crucial aspect of successful within Influencer Marketing. This was therefore also described with much consideration, in terms of when and how they experienced Influencers to be trustworthy, and in turn, when collaborations between Influencers and brands could then be perceived as trustworthy and creating value to the phenomenon as a marketing tool. As clarified in the beginning of this section

regarding trustworthiness, many of the aspects of the Influencers being more personal, and personalized in their content, are something the participants explain as heightening the Influencers' trustworthiness in the eyes of both the consumer, but also in terms of the companies. Influencers themselves are starting to focus on this aspect of trustworthiness by articulating to their followers who they have upcoming collaborations with, why they have with the given brands, and consequently also the thoughts that lie behind why they choose to collaborate with them (Appendix F). In this extent, as part of the previous aspects regarding how Influencers can be connected to all levels of the consumer decision journey, in extension of trying to create more trustworthiness towards their audience, they have therefore also been seen to make accounts of the products they promote not only on the positive attributes, but also in terms of negative attributes or opinions towards it. Similarly, researchers have found how opinions on several sides and aspects on a given product review, creates a more persuasive communication when trying to reach an audience (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). When looking at this, another aspect derived from the interviews that were carried out, in terms of the Influencers' perception of their own brand. This will therefore be investigated more closely in the following section.

4.2.4 Match Between Influencers and Brands

When having looked into the details of what makes Influencers more successful in their persuasiveness and communication to and with their audience, there is another aspect evidently impacting all of the above. According to the interviewed participants a very crucial factor for creating value and success as a marketing tool, should be placed in relation to how the Influencer and the brand 'match' (Emma Interview). Today, these two components need to match in order to be successful. When looking into the expressions from the participants on this aspect, it should be considered as coming from both sides (All Interviews). Therefore, the brand should be collaborating and choosing Influencers who match them. This could for instance be in terms of sharing the same values, e.g. sustainability, luxury fashion, or being mindful of finances and so forth, or it could be in terms of the visuals and aesthetics an Influencer might have, which suits the style the brand represents, for instance by being a furniture brand with a certain style, among others. In the same sense, when Influencers chose to collaborate with brands, they should be mindful and considerate of the brands and products they work with, and should therefore also fit who they are and resonate with the given brands. Emma expresses opinions on this by stating, "Influencer Marketing makes a lot of sense, but [the] product and the Influencer must fit together. It [the collaboration] should not just be a quick

choice. Especially on the Influencers' part" (emma int, clip 1, 12:25). By this exemplification Emma addresses how it is important for both parties, the Influencer and the company, but most importantly for the Influencer. This should be placed in relation to previous statements regarding their trustworthiness, which in turn may have huge impact on this if the fit is not adequate, as has been argued previously. Emma further explains that when she perceives an Influencer in a collaboration that seems as a wrong match, she would not buy the product they are referring to (Emma Interview). When looking at some of the most recent research within the field of Influencer Marketing, Campbell & Farrell (2020) have as previously shown shared some interesting attributions. In terms of this aspect, they agree on these findings, but they merely state how their findings point to the relevance for advertiser's "need to ensure a good fit between Influencer and brand". Based on the findings derived in this research's data collection, this aspect should be emphasized to a much greater extent, as it seems as one of the most crucial aspects for brands to succeed utilizing the tool today, given the history the phenomenon has already gone through in terms of the level of untrustworthiness some consumers experience when facing Influencers' advertisement and communication.

Karoline S shares very specific thoughts on this in terms of how they at Camille Brinch Jewellery selects Influencers to collaborate with, as she explains that the match is the most important part of utilizing an Influencer for them. When they look at who can be a match for them, they firstly look at the Influencers style, and look at whether they as a brand can stand behind them and would endorse them, like the Influencers endorse them as a brand. In this sense, the same goes for them as a company when choosing the right Influencers to advocate for them. As their brand is very much based on the founder, along with the name being too, their own communication is also always communicated in Camille Brinch's own words, which therefore also impacts their Influencer choosing, as Karoline S explains "it has to be someone Camille could see herself being friends with" (Karoline S Interview, 18:24). Thereby, based on the company's own style of communication and way of branding, which is based on the person Camille Brinch, they choose Influencers that she can see as part of her friends, as she is their branding, and their trustworthiness is in the same way based on this. She describes that it is after all of this they then go and look at the more fundamental metrics and data, that look into engagement rates, followers and so forth. Again, when looking at the research conducted by Campbell & Farrell (2020), they focus much more on the data and especially the Influencers specifications in terms of their follower base. Karoline D exemplifies more contrary thoughts on this, but in alignment with Karoline S, explaining how the number of followers and the focus around this aspects are changing dramatically (Karoline D Interview). Much in line with what

has previously been covered, the Influencer Marketing aspects have already undergone a lot of change, in which these thoughts seem to be more and more outdated, as Influencers and brands need to focus their attention onto several dimensions when looking for successful Influencers and thus successful Influencer campaigns.

5. Conclusion

When looking at the entity of this study, it was trying to look at how a concept as Influencer Marketing has created relevance and possibility of being present in today's changing digital landscape. This was done so by means of investigating the phenomenon from very different perspectives, as it looked at it from the perspective of an Influencer, a consumer, a company who worked with the concept, and also an agency who works with the marketing tool by connecting Influencers and brands. Therefore, this study looked at the interplay between these different perspectives, in order to try and create greater comprehension of who this evolving marketing tool is relevant for, in terms of companies utilizing it. Moreover, this study further served to try and comprehend, what is essential to consider for companies when wanting to carry out Influencer Marketing, with considerations towards what marketers should evaluate and be mindful about, when wanting to create value using the tool. Research and considerations towards relevant theories together with carrying out qualitative interviews, were the components that combined this research.

When looking at the first research question, this study wanted to investigate the relevance of the emerging concept, in terms of why it might be important for companies to utilize as part of their marketing initiatives, as well as who might be relevant for. Based on the analyzed findings and this research data collection, it can be argued how Influencer Marketing has shown immense relevance in for companies to make use of. Looking at the ever-changing digital landscape, a concept such as Influencer Marketing can help companies to communicate with their consumers by means of endorsers, instead of the communication merely coming from them as a brand. Which has shown to create much more effectiveness, as the Influencers act as a spokesperson for the brand. When looking at the consumers, their presence on Instagram is much greater than almost any other social media, and the way that they incorporate it in their daily lives, it can be perceived as a channel of marketing communication companies loose too many consumers on, if they are not present. And as Influencer Marketing is everywhere on the platform, and the participants express how they are met with it every

day, this creates many opportunities for companies if done right. Moreover, Influencer Marketing is a tool in which marketers are able to reach the consumers on every level of the consumer decisions journey, which is very difficult to succeed with in any other marketing tools. Having said that, companies and marketers should always be very mindful of their target audience. They should be present where their consumers are present. Based on the analyzed findings, most of the consumers present are from the generation Z and the millennials. Therefore, should this be considered when deciding on utilizing the tool as part of one's marketing initiatives. Moreover, the findings suggest a change in the type of companies that make use of the tool, as the participants suggest that any company or brand could make use of it, and not mostly fashion, beauty, or lifestyle brands, as has previously been suggested much as the case. The findings in this research, highly express that any brand could make use of this tool with great success, as long as their target audience is present, as the tool have now been developed so much, that the possible outcomes of using it clearly adjust to many types of businesses. So regardless of industry or type of business and brand, this research's findings suggests that the effectiveness rely on how successful one's ability of utilizing the tool affects its potential of creating value to a company.

Looking more into the very specifics of what makes Influencer Marketing more successful and creating value for companies, several contributing findings were discovered. The findings suggest companies to very mindful of the Influencers they chose to collaborate with. Very significant results on this lie on the basis of companies choosing Influencers who match them as a brand. The match between brand and Influencer is very important as the communicated message to consumers are affected greatly by this, and in turn highly affects the consumers want of purchase, as well as ultimately their recognition of the brand. If a match is interpreted by consumers to be in bad alignment, they initially may affect the consumer on all levels of the consumer decision journey. Therefore, brands should be very mindful of the trustworthiness of the Influencers, as that affects the match collaboration with a brand. Further, the Influencer's ability of engaging their community also affects the communicated message by the Influencer, and thus the value a given brand gets by utilizing such Influencer. As Influencers are becoming their own brand, they are also valuing the match between a brand and themselves very highly, as they know how serves a basis of trustworthiness towards their audience, and if done wrong can be harmful to them. Along with how the Influencers are getting more aware of their own brand, they have also learned that a more personal approach towards their consumers with more personalized content is greatly valued by them. This is again

rooting in the aspect of trustworthiness. Therefore, companies should be very mindful when choosing to collaborate with Influencers, how well the Influencers are in personalizing their account and universe towards their audience, as this serves a much greater persuasion skills when communicating about a brand or a product. In this sense, companies may reach greater results with Influencer Marketing if they let the Influencers take a huge part in the collaboration, compared to setting to strict guidelines and restraints. Consumers obtain brand communication with greater effect coming from endorsers, than from the brands itself, which therefore may affect them better than when brands promote themselves. Companies should in this sense be very mindful of how Influencers have a niche in their audience, and how they know their audience much better than companies. Therefore, they also know what resonates with them on a deeper level than what the brands might do.

5.1 Limitations & Future Research

When concluding on this research, the findings should be considered as a basis of greater interpretation of why and how to utilize the Influencer Marketing as a marketing tool. It is a field in which marketers and brands needs to constantly be updated on trends and solutions, if wanting to create value by means of it and be relevant in the eyes of the consumer. It is therefore also evident how Influencer Marketing can easily be perceived as a complex challenge for marketers to get involved in. Nevertheless, it is suggesting great possibilities and many opportunities for companies to utilize, as it is one of the most popular marketing strategies today. Based on the scope of this research, it is in no way representative, and should therefore not be considered as solid conclusions on the mentioned aspects. This research show indications based on the involved participants, which is important to stress for the overall interpretation of the findings. Therefore, it can not be used for generalization matters, but serve to shed light on the given context within Instagram and the said respective perspectives carried by the participants, and as previously mentioned, adding to the scarce academic literature on the matter.

In terms of future research, many studies can and should be carried out on Influencer Marketing. This thesis suggests minimal aspects, and deeper knowledge on specific aspects would be highly encouraged. However, what is evident based on this research, is how the consumers and the digital transformations may very much dictate and indicate the directions of Influencer Marketing in the future. As this research have accounted for, transformations within the field have already happened many times, and suggestions towards that this will keep happening is hard to overlook. Therefore, companies should continue being updated on the latest trends, and adapt their marketing

strategies towards the changes as much as they can. In these times, as technological and changes happens so quickly, one should try and get insights from their consumers and follow their target audience digital footprint, in order to know how they should adjust their digital marketing strategies, and especially that of their Influencer Marketing strategy.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix A – The Funnel Metaphor & The Consumer Decision Journey

Then: The Funnel Metaphor

For years, marketers assumed that consumers started with a large number of potential brands in mind and methodically winnowed their choices until they'd decided which one to buy. After purchase, their relationship with the brand typically focused on the use of the product or service itself.



Now: The Consumer Decision Journey

New research shows that rather than systematically narrowing their choices, consumers add and subtract brands from a group under consideration during an extended evaluation phase. After purchase, they often enter into an open-ended relationship with the brand, sharing their experience with it online.

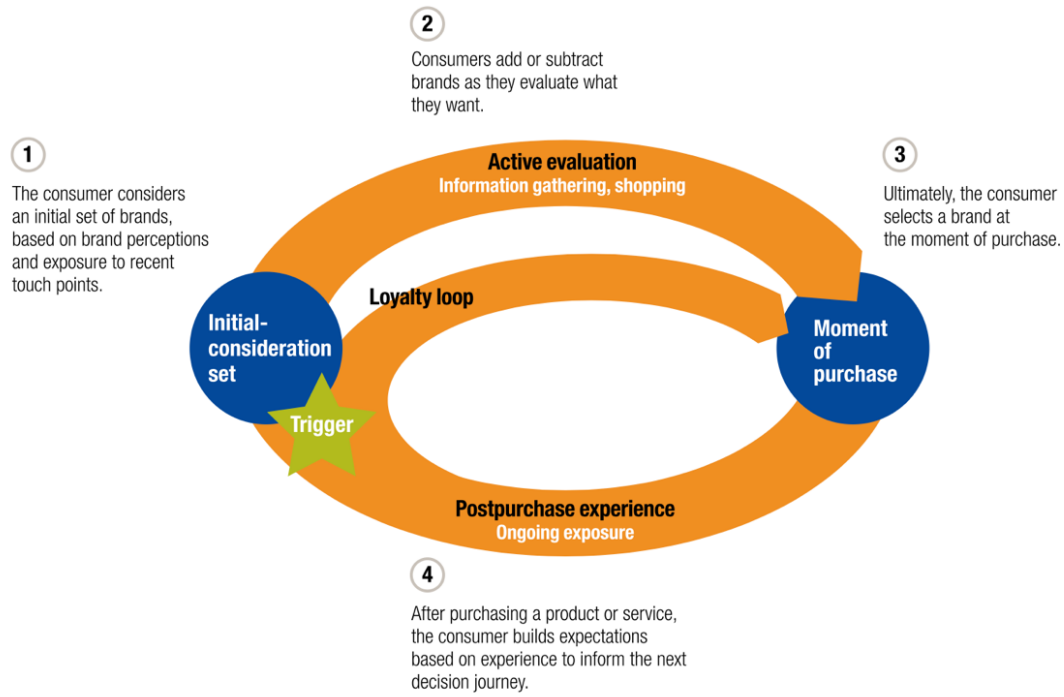


Consider & Buy Marketers often overemphasize the “consider” and “buy” stages of the journey, allocating more resources than they should to building awareness through advertising and encouraging purchase with retail promotions.

Evaluate & Advocate New media make the “evaluate” and “advocate” stages increasingly relevant. Marketing investments that help consumers navigate the evaluation process and then spread positive word of mouth about the brands they choose can be as important as building awareness and driving purchase.

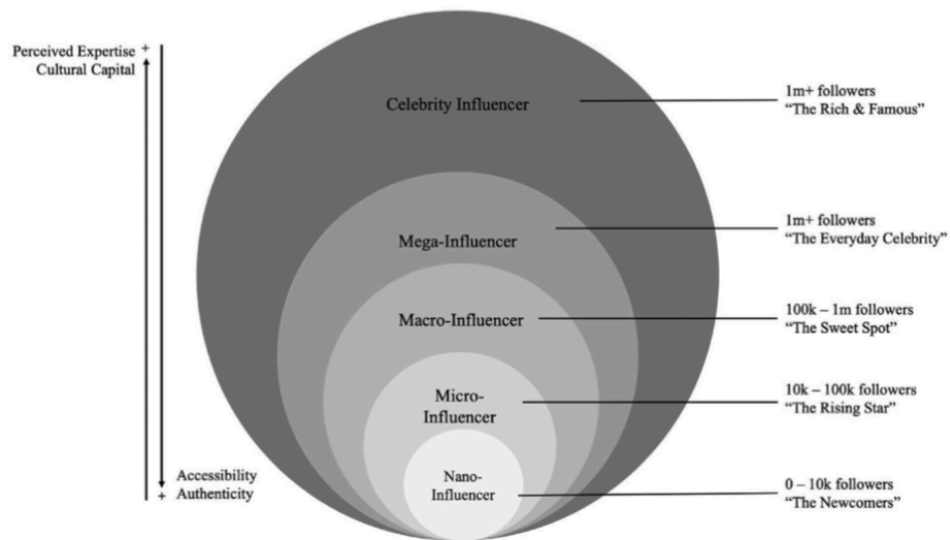
Bond If consumers’ bond with a brand is strong enough, they repurchase it without cycling through the earlier decision-journey stages.

(Source: Edelman, 2010).



(Source: Court et al., 2018).

7.2 Appendix B – Types of Influencers



(Source: Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

7.3 Appendix C – Interview Guide

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Michelle Borup-Larsen and I am a master's student at Copenhagen Business School in International Business Communication in Intercultural Marketing. My thesis is focused around the developments within media marketing and how this has evolved into social media platforms and newer marketing tools and concepts, with specific attention towards the concept of Influencer Marketing which is difficult to overlook. This thesis is therefore looking into this concept, Influencer Marketing, on the social media platform Instagram.

Moreover, the purpose of this thesis is to find out more about the relationship between brands, influencers, and consumers when making use of Influencer Marketing, in terms of why it might be relevant for companies to make use of it, and consequently who it is relevant for as a marketing tool. With regard to this, this thesis therefore further try and comprehend how Influencer Marketing should be carried out, in order to be used successfully for companies. Therefore, I have carried out a list of questions related to the different aspects of this, in order to guide this talk, nonetheless – please feel free to view this as an open talk and elaborate as much as you would like in your responses, or add additional thoughts and details as you see fit. With your consent, I will also be recording this interview, for later reference and analysis in my paper. Also, if further clarification or refencing on specific responses from you is needed after having carried out this interview, I will also be grateful if I am allowed to reach out to you again.

Demographic & Introduction:

Question to Participant:	Theoretical Reference:
Start off by stating the perspective/role the given participant has in this interview: e.g. the consumer, an Influencer, representative from a company that uses Influencer Marketing, or the agency working with Influencer Marketing.	
To begin with, some basic background questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is your name?- What is your age?- What is your occupation, what do you do for a living?	Daymon, C. & Holloway, I. (2011). <i>Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications</i> . 2nd edition. New York: Routhledge. Saunders P. M. N. K., Thornhill A., & Lewis D. P. (2019).

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<p>Are you a user of the social media Instagram?</p> <p>If so:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you only using it for personal matters, or also in work related matters? - How often do you use it? - Do you know approximately how many hours averagely a day/week? - Would it be possible to get your phones data on this after the interview? - What do you use Instagram for the most? - In which situations do you open the app? 	
<p>Do you know what an Influencer is?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your own words, how would you describe an Influencer? - Which words or sentences do you associate with the term Influencer? - Can you use other words/terms when referring to an Influencer? And would you do it yourself? And if so, why/elaborate? 	<p>Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. <i>Business Horizons</i>, 63(4), 469–479.</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003</p>
<p>Have you heard about the concept of Influencer Marketing before this interview?</p> <p>If so,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have your level of encounters with the concept developed the last couple of years? Increased, decreased, the same? - In which circumstances/relations has it developed? - If e.g. increased, how/where/why are these situations? (is it work related/personal etc.) 	

Media Marketing Development:

Question to Participant:	Theoretical Reference:
<p>What are you thoughts and opinions on ‘traditional’ marketing and advertising tools? To clarify, this can be stated as marketing done through e.g. print, TV, and radio.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you see the change to digital solutions influence the traditional ones? 	<p>Crittenden, V., & Crittenden, W. (2015). Digital and Social Media Marketing in Business Education: Implications for the Marketing Curriculum. <i>Journal of Marketing Education</i>, 37(2), 71–75.</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475315588111</p>

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<p>Do you personally have a preference, when it comes to both using and/or receiving advertisements, in terms of which channel it is done through?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When considering this, if you reflect on recent things/services you have bought, where did you become aware of it from? - Was there a media channel, that presented it to you, and if so, which one? 	
<p>Have you ever yourself made a purchase based on an Influencer's recommendation or suggestion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have your interest in a product/service increased after being familiarized with it from an Influencer? 	

Influencer Marketing as a Strategy:

Question to Participant:	Theoretical Reference:
<p>What is your personal relationship with influencer marketing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you come across it on a private level? - Related to your work? - Please elaborate on when you encounter it in your daily living. 	
<p>What is your opinion on influencer marketing as a marketing tool/initiative? To start with, by answering shortly, what would you say?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you 'like' it? - Do you see it as relevant? 	
<p>Influencer Marketing is a marketing tool that is very present today, why do you think that is?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think makes it so special? Interesting? - Are Influencer's content creation more accommodating for consumers than traditional advertising? (e.g. real time view, customized, creative, close look on lives etc.) - Is it more personal? In terms of followers appreciating the Influencer's lifestyle/'universe'/what they represent? 	<p>Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. <i>Business Horizons</i>, 63(4), 469–479.</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has the possibility of direct contact, comments, guidance etc. an effect? 	
<p>Who do you mean Influencer Marketing is reaching when used as a marketing tool?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who is the audience/customers? - Does the audience who is reached by it differ? - Do you believe/know if Influencer Marketing has more success/greater effect with a certain group than others? - If so, or if not so, why? Is it the same for different audiences? - Please elaborate on this aspect. 	
<p>When it comes to companies and the choice of using Influencer Marketing as part of their marketing efforts, do you perceive it to be equally relevant and suitable for all companies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Such as, differ in the type of industries, type of business and so forth? - Differ due to size of the company, new and small businesses compared to larger etc.? 	
<p>When and how is an Influencer Marketing initiative(s) successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which factors play a key role for making it a success? - Are any factors in this related to the relationship between the company and the Influencer? - Does payment or another possible outcome for the Influencers have an effect on it? - What are the best possible prerequisites of creating value for a company by using the tool? And thus, value for the Influencer? - Please elaborate on this. 	<p>Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. <i>Business Horizons</i>, 63(4), 469–479. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003</p>

Influencer Characteristics:

Question to Participant:	Theoretical Reference:
<p>Clarification of who is determined as an Influencer is more evident today, than when Influencer Marketing started. This research takes the following clarifications into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Celebrity Influencer "The Rich & Famous" (1m+ followers) - Mega-Influencers "The Everyday/Influencer Celebrity" (1m+ followers) - Macro-Influencer "The Sweet Spot" (100k – 1m followers) - Micro-Influencer "The Rising Star" (10k – 100k followers) 	<p>Crittenden, V., & Crittenden, W. (2015). Digital and Social Media Marketing in Business Education: Implications for the Marketing Curriculum. <i>Journal of Marketing Education</i>, 37(2), 71–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475315588111</p> <p>Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nano-Influencer “The Newcomers” (0 – 10k followers) - What are your thoughts on this? Do you agree/disagree? - When assigning value to an Influencer, is the amount of followers most important? - What other factors may be valued? - Please elaborate if needed. 	<p>The functional components underlying influencer marketing. <i>Business Horizons</i>, 63(4), 469–479. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003</p>
<p>Having this in mind, how can collaborations and marketing efforts vary between company’s and Influencers, based on their size?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does this have to say in terms of using different Influencers in marketing efforts? - What are your thoughts on the different possibilities this can constitute for collaborations, and the choice of using it as a marketing tool? 	<p>Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. <i>Business Horizons</i>, 63(4), 469–479. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003</p>
<p>As stated, Influencer Marketing has already been on a considerable growth curve, continuously evolving Influencers as a tool in marketing efforts. More recently, Influencers themselves has thus become a brand of their own.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How might this have changed (if it has) the Influencer’s role in relation to companies when/if hiring them? - When it comes to the constellation of a collaboration and decisions, has this changed between the companies and the Influencers? - Who sets the guidelines and agenda for a collaboration? - How has the Influencer’s own branding affected Influencer Marketing? - Please elaborate. 	<p>Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. <i>Business Horizons</i>, 63(4), 469–479. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.03.003</p>

Ideal Value of Utilizing it as a Tool:

Question to Participant:	Theoretical Reference:
<p>Can Influencer Marketing do something other marketing tools cannot?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To sum up, what is the ideal value the use of Influencer Marketing can create for companies? 	<p>Daymon, C. & Holloway, I. (2011). <i>Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications</i>. 2nd edition. New York: Routhledge.</p>
<p>When do you believe it is relevant for a company to choose this tool in their marketing efforts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further, what should they want to achieve, so that it makes sense using this tool? - Please elaborate on these aspects. 	

Concluding Notes:

Question to Participant:	Theoretical Reference:
<p>Thank you very much for your time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Do you have any concluding remarks you would like to add?- Any perspectives that you would like to further elaborate upon?- Or any other/new perspectives you think should be added in relation to this talk?	<p>Daymon, C. & Holloway, I. (2011). <i>Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications</i>. 2nd edition. New York: Routhledge.</p>

7.4 Appendix D – Audio Recordings of Interviews

The data collection that were carried out consist by means of four qualitative interviews. The four interviews were all audio recorded. The following website link enables the reader to download all four interviews through a shared link to a Dropbox website. The audio recordings can also be accessed and listened to online.

Shared Dropbox website link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/i6kv5ahlesdwv1/AACyZtT4ezr7RgsCDDGpAV8Ua?dl=0>

7.5 Appendix E – Participants' Instagram Data

7.5.1 Karoline Dall Data



7.5.2 Emma Kapetanovic Data



7.5.3 Karoline Sørensen Data



7.5.4 Natasja Hviid Data



7.6 Appendix F – Emily Salomon Instagram Post



Liked by **silleaarslev** and **1.370 others**

emilysalomon annonce Hvad kan I bedst lide? 🤍 eller ❤️ undertøj? Jeg har altid været på team sort (eller nude, fordi praktisk), men er ved at blive forfalden til hvidt også, her på mine gamle dage 🤞

Men uanset om du bedst kan lide det ene eller andet, så skal du kende [@woronstore](#) der er dansk og laver det lækreste, mest komfortable, bæredygtige undertøj. Har købt og ønsket mig deres trusser de seneste tre år (og ejer således næsten ikke andre) og ELSKER dem. Der er altså tale om et rent kærlighedssamarbejde. Altså det er der jo altid, gider ikke andet, men det her er mit hjerte ekstra nært. Bogstaveligt talt 🥰

Men nok om mig, I skal også prøve, hvis I lyster og derfor byder vi på 20% rabat med koden EMILY20 på [www.woronstore.com](#) 🤞

(Source: Salomon, 2021)