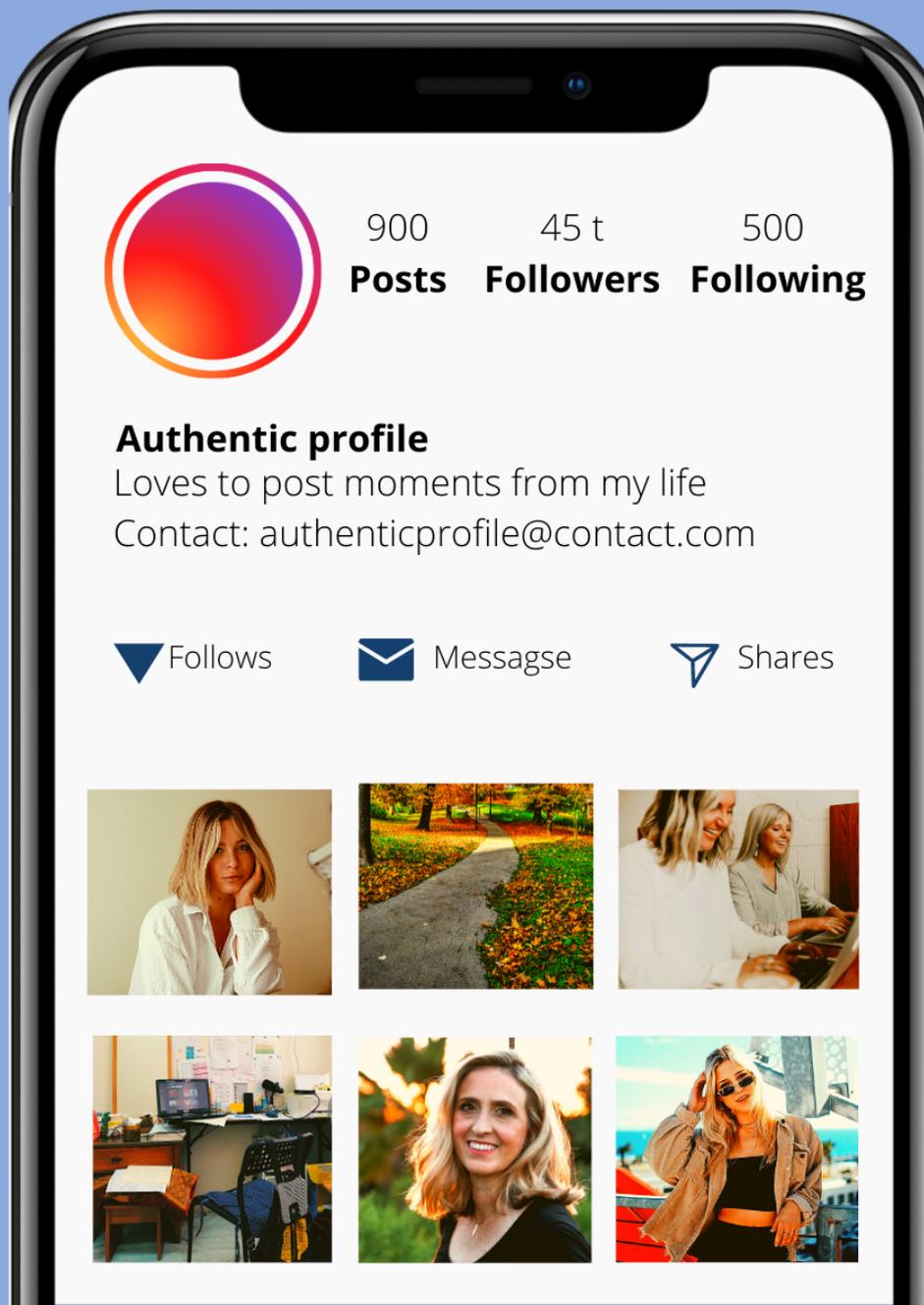


# #AUTHENTICITY

A case study on how influencers can appear authentic  
on *Instagram*



## ABSTRACT

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This master's thesis sets out to analyse how influencers can appear authentic on Instagram, based on three subordinate questions, because influencer marketing has become an emerging discipline with demands for authentic representation of influencers on Instagram. The questions are studied in the paradigm of interpretivism through the approaches of induction and deduction, and are thus answered on the basis of the theoretical framework and the empirical findings. The inductive approach is most fundamental for this master's thesis and is performed through emergent case studies in the form of interviews. On that note, the first subordinate question relates to the characteristics of authenticity on Instagram from which an analysis of the data and theories on brand authenticity are used to find that credibility, relatability, and spontaneity characterise authenticity on Instagram; meaning that those phenomena are qualities within authenticity itself. At the same time, the second subordinate question relates to the key drivers for authenticity on Instagram from which the same analysis of data and theories on key drivers for authenticity are used to find that credibility, relatability, and spontaneity are also emphasised as key drivers for authenticity on Instagram alongside consistency and vulnerability; meaning that those phenomena are qualities that can incite and thence drive authenticity on Instagram. Hence, credibility, relatability, and spontaneity are all qualities within authenticity itself and qualities that can incite it. However, when considering the third subordinate question that relates to the impact of said key drivers on Instagram, the phenomena that are both recognised as characteristics and key drivers are not necessarily found to be more impactful. That is as a thorough analysis of the data and the theories on key drivers for authenticity suggests that the impact of the key drivers, in a prioritised order, goes from credibility, consistency, spontaneity, relatability to vulnerability. Consistency is thus deemed one of the absolute most impactful key drivers even though it is not recognised as a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram. From those findings, it is concluded that influencers can appear authentic by tapping into the recognised key drivers of credibility, consistency, spontaneity, relatability, and vulnerability in that prioritised order. However, one of the managerial implications of this master's thesis is that influencers and businesses shall not tap into those drivers with their eyes closed, and a model for managerial use is therefore provided for them.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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With the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0, social media have become an integral and dominant part of modern life that impacts how consumers and businesses communicate and interact (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018, p. 5). That is as the interactive nature of social media enables higher consumer involvement and power by the facilitation of services that encourage user-generated content. This means that social media users can generate their own content on social media platforms, which other users can then applaud by using application functions such as liking and sharing (Van Looy, 2016, p. 1). Through the generation of such content, social media users can reach an unimaginable number of followers and thence influence them to such a degree that it is possible for them to start new trends.

In fact, social media users are possible trendsetters by the very definition. At least if you follow the definition by Saez-Trumper, Comarela, Almedia, Baeza-Yates, and Benevenuto (2012) who understands trendsetters as “(...) people that adopt and spread new ideas influencing other people before these ideas become popular” (p. 1014). Hence, social media users can start trends by generating original content that influences other users worldwide. Earlier trends initiated on and for social media are living proof of that. Just think of the numerous Instagram trends that have gone viral. On that account, social media users have also played a significant role in the changing lifestyle trends that have saturated not only social media but also society in general. In this respect, the trend of appearing perfect has been the most dominant trend on social media (Reade, 2021). The trend determined the usage of social media where users would post and praise content that promoted perfectness. Such content could for instance be the perfect body, the perfect house, or the perfect family. However, as it goes with trends, the trend of appearing perfect is no longer ravaging social media and in its place, the trend of appearing authentic has risen as a result of the increasing demand for authenticity.

On that account, authenticity has been demanded by consumers for centuries. Yet, Grayson and Martinec (2004) argue that the demand has intensified over time because of the technological revolution (p. 296) and it is, therefore, immensely relevant to consider at this point in time. That is especially because the introduction of web 2.0 facilitates the simulation of authenticity (Benjamin 1969; Halliday 2001; Orvell 1989 in: Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 296). Hence, it explains why authenticity has become a dominant trend on social media. Because the consumer demand for authenticity has intensified and is still rising, many scholars are studying the concept of authenticity and what it means for individuals and businesses within and outside social media. The stated scholars

are, amongst others; Grayson and Martinec (2004), Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn (2017), Beverland and Farrelly (2010), Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer and Heinrich (2012), and Gilmore and Pine (2007). Said scholars share somewhat similar understandings of authenticity, which can be summed up by the following definition of authenticity formulated by Robert Doniger and presented by Gilmore and Pine (2007):

*Authenticity will be the buzzword of the twenty-first century. And what is authentic? Anything that is not devised and structured to make a profit. Anything that is not controlled by corporations. Anything that exists for its own sake, that assumes its own shape (...)*

Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 9, l. 1-4

Authenticity is thereby something that is untouched, unprocessed, and uninfluenced. And that is what consumers demand. However, one must be aware that different lines of businesses are not subject to the same level of demand from consumers. For instance, the demand for authenticity is higher for businesses promoting influencers because consumers have general doubts about what influencers' intentions are (Moore, Yang & Kim, 2018). Authenticity is, therefore, very relevant to consider in relation to influencer marketing.

## 1.1. RESEARCH AREA & RESEARCH AIM

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Consumers demand authenticity in all aspects of life, and it has already been stated that influencer marketing is no exception to that. As a matter of fact, several scholars believe that authenticity is essential in influencer marketing for that same reason (Driel & Dumitrica, 2020; More et al., 2018). Yet, few have suggested how influencers might succeed in appearing authentic even though it implicates all people involved in influencer marketing who might profit from the benefits of authenticity. Said benefits are that authenticity impacts the quality of brand relationships and thereby also the behavioural intentions of the consumer (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 324, 339- 340). This master's thesis will, therefore, serve to find out how influencers can meet consumer demands for authenticity on Instagram. Instagram is in this respect emphasised because it is the primary platform for influencer marketing (Høck, 2020). To find out how influencers can meet those demands, this master's thesis will characterise authenticity and identify authenticity drivers from the theoretical framework and the empirical data, and those drivers will thence be unified in a bubble chart from which the authenticity

of influencers can be understood. Furthermore, the findings of this master's thesis will at the same time be assembled into a managerial model for improving influencers' authentic appearance on Instagram.

## 1.2. RESEARCH QUESTION

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Based on the research area and research aim, this master's thesis sets out to understand authenticity in influencer marketing on Instagram in terms of the following research question:

*How can influencers appear authentic on Instagram?*

To best answer the research question, I have formulated the following sub-questions:

1. What characterises authenticity on Instagram?
2. What are the key drivers for authenticity on Instagram?
3. How impactful are said key drivers on Instagram?

## 1.3. DELIMITATION

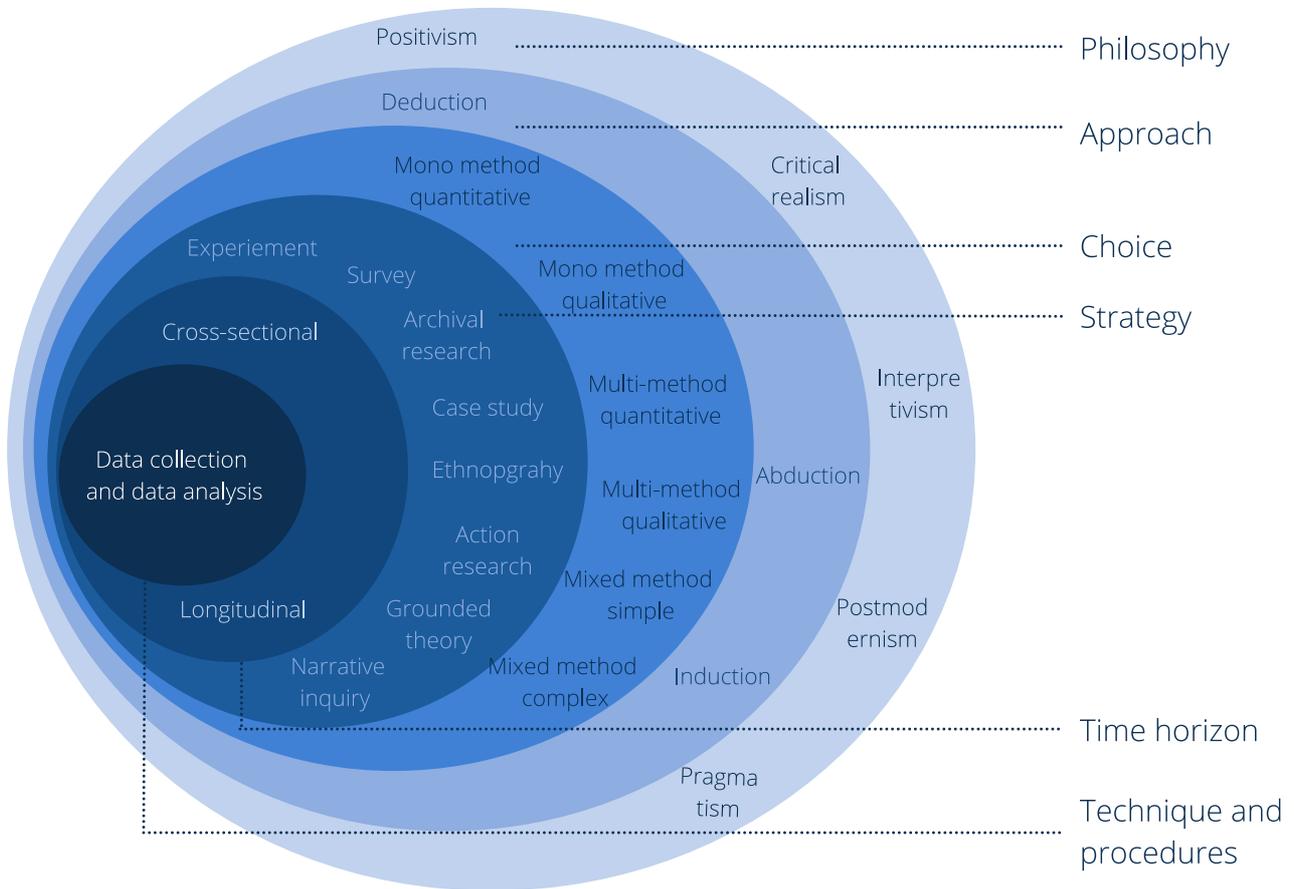
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This master's thesis is centred around the core concepts of authenticity, influencer marketing, and Instagram and those core concepts will therefore only be considered in relation to one another. The concepts will be studied through interviews with experts, influencers, and Instagram users that fit the following criteria. Experts must be concerned with branding, influencer marketing, or social media; influencers must be someone that spend much of their time showing behind the scenes and whose focus is primarily on authentic everyday life situations and artefacts; and Instagram users must be females between the age of 18 to 39 because that target group is the most responsive to influencers (Kaltoft, 2020). The target group is in this respect described more in-depth in the literature review.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

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This section outlines the methodical choices made for this master’s thesis. The choices will be presented with assistance from the research onion by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019, p. 130) which is a model that explains and visualises the different methodical stages of a research study. The stages are in this model termed layers because the model dictates how the stages must be passed from the outside and in. Like peeling layers of an onion. The layers of the model are philosophy, approach, choice, strategy, time horizon, and techniques and procedures, and they constitute the structure of the methodology section.



*Figure 1: Illustration of the research onion by Saunders et al. (2019).*

## 2.1. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY: INTERPRETIVISM

---

Research philosophy relates to the beliefs and assumptions one might have about the development of knowledge and they are relevant to consider since they shape how vital aspects of this master's thesis are understood (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130). These assumptions include ontological assumptions about the nature of being, epistemological assumptions about human knowledge, and axiological assumptions about how my values might influence the master's thesis (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130; Warwick, n.d.). Those assumptions will therefore be considered in relation to the research philosophy of this master's thesis after the reasoning behind the philosophical choice and the research philosophy in itself have been accounted for.

The chosen research philosophy for this master's thesis is founded in the interpretivist paradigm. It is so because my beliefs and assumptions as a researcher are tied to this paradigm and because the objective of this master's thesis is to find out how people understand, interpret, and assess the phenomenon of authenticity. Hence, the paradigm for this master's thesis must support diverse understandings of the phenomenon and thereby different versions of reality. One can argue that the interpretivist paradigm certainly does that. That is as interpretivism emphasises the concept of meaning which the paradigm believes is created by human beings (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 148). On that account, meaning is something that occurs through interpretation, and the meaning of a given concept can thereby differ among individuals. Thus, interpretivism adopts a subjectivistic perspective (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 148). Because of this perspective, interpretivists argue that "human beings and their social words cannot be studied the same way as a physical phenomenon" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 148, l. 31 – p. 149, l. 149) which is the way positivists study natural sciences. Interpretivism, therefore, stands in contrast to positivism and the quantitative methods positivists use to define universal laws (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149). Interpretivists instead suggest studying concepts by looking at the perspectives of different groups or individuals to "create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149, l. 8-9). Hence, they promote the use of qualitative methods. The interpretivist paradigm will therefore be applied in this master's thesis to understand how different groups of people or individuals understand the phenomenon of authenticity and what authenticity drivers they interpret as most important. The paradigm does however hold several strands that place slightly different emphasis on how to study and interpret social worlds and contexts (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149) and I, therefore, want to dive into what strands might benefit me in my study of authenticity. Said strands include phenomenology, hermeneutics, and symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology focus on how participants lived

experiences may affect their understanding of a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149; Jørgensen, 2020), hermeneutics focus on “cultural artefacts such as texts, symbols, stories, and images” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149, 25-26), and symbolic interactionism focus on how social interactions and language can create meaning (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149). From this, I find the perspective of hermeneutics to be the most impactful strand in my research because hermeneutics can help me to understand how artefacts on Instagram might shape participants’ understanding of authenticity and thence help me to answer my research question. On that account, the other strands might be beneficial for understanding other aspects of authenticity, but they are less beneficial for understanding how influencers can appear authentic on Instagram. Hence, interpretivism as a paradigm will be used in this master’s thesis with the utilisation of the hermeneutic strand.

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### 2.1.1. ONTOLOGY

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Ontology is the understanding a paradigm holds about the nature of reality (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 133). Thus, the most prominent ontological question to ask for the different paradigms is whether a paradigm believes there is an objective world or not (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 133). For interpretivists, there is none. That is as interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed and for that reason, it is only accessible through constructs such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings (PHILO-notes, 2020, 02:53). Hence, reality is defined and limited by the interpretation made by the interpreter (PHILO-notes, 2020). For this master’s thesis, said ontological standpoint implicates that all participants’ realities are acknowledged as real and that different understandings might emerge from those differing realities.

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### 2.1.2. EPISTEMOLOGY

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Epistemology is the understanding a paradigm holds about knowledge. This entails an understanding of what the paradigm considers legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge is communicated to others (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 133). In this regard, interpretivists believe that knowledge relies on interpretations of the meaning that humans attach to their actions (PHILO-notes, 2020, 00:37). Knowledge will therefore be considered something that is socially constructed and reliant on the participants’ interpretations of authenticity in this master’s thesis.

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### 2.1.3. AXIOLOGY

---

Axiology is the understanding of how the values and ethics of a researcher might implicate a research study, and this section, therefore, serves to understand how my personal values can be best managed to obtain the most valid research study. That is especially as an axiological implication of interpretivism is that interpretivists must recognise that “their interpretation of research materials and data, and thus their own values and beliefs, play an important role in the research process” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149, l. 35-36). Having recognised said implication, I plan to manage my own values and beliefs in this research process by adopting an empathic stance. Hence, I will move to enter the social worlds of the participants during the research to understand how they see their worlds (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149). This understanding of the participants’ social worlds will then allow me to understand the concept of authenticity from their different points of view. The validity of the research is therefore high as I plan to accentuate the participants’ values and beliefs rather than my own.

## 2.2. RESEARCH APPROACH: INDUCTION AND DEDUCTION

---

Research approach refers to the way research is concerned with theory testing and theory building (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 152). In this respect, the deductive approach is concerned with theory testing and the inductive approach is concerned with theory building (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 153). Since the main purpose of this master’s thesis is to build new theory on authenticity in influencer marketing, I am for the most part making use of the inductive approach that is founded in the collection and analysis of empirical data. However, I will also turn to relevant theories to compare and test empirical findings against theoretical findings, and I will therefore also make use of the deductive approach that is founded in the testing of empirical data.

If first accounting for the inductive approach, it has been established that induction is an approach suited for building theory based on empirical data. This means that inductive research must start with data collection upon a specific phenomenon so the data can be used to build new theory on the subject (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 153). Thus, the approach is used to generate generalisable untested conclusions that serve a theoretical purpose (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 153). The inductive approach, therefore, brings certain implications to the research of this master’s thesis. The most prominent

implication is that I must begin my research by collecting data that explores the phenomenon of authenticity in influencer marketing. Said data must then be analysed to eventually build theory.

If then accounting for the deductive approach, it will be used to test empirical findings in the process of building theory for this master's thesis. That is as deduction is an approach that goes through rigorous testing to draw logical and generalisable conclusions (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 153). The deductive approach will therefore contribute to the research being more valid with its true and generalisable conclusions that are considered true if the premises are true.

Because I am using induction and deduction cohesively, one can argue that I am using abduction. That is as abduction is an approach that combines induction and deduction and therefore moves back and forth between theory and data (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 155). As I plan to do. However, I need to stress that the emphasis on the abductive approach does not signify that the inductive and deductive approaches are equally important. Induction is still the primary approach for the research in this master's thesis.

### 2.3. RESEARCH CHOICE: MONO METHOD QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Having concluded that the research of this master's thesis must start with data collection, it is natural to consider the method for this data collection and thus the research choice. The research choice is inevitably influenced by the research philosophy and approach chosen for the development of theory in this master's thesis (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 173), whereas interpretivism and induction both emphasise qualitative research. The research philosophy of interpretivism has already been introduced for its subjectivistic perspective that involves creating new and deeper understandings of social worlds and contexts (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 149) and it is, therefore, clear that the paradigm emphasises qualitative research that supports the creation of such understandings. Along those same lines, researchers using the inductive approach also have a tradition of using qualitative research to obtain qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 155). For those reasons, the research of this master's thesis will be qualitative in its nature. The benefit of qualitative research is that it allows me to understand "subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 179, l. 4-5). The studied phenomenon is authenticity in this case. The research choice thereby supports my exploratory research of authenticity.

Qualitative research may make use of all methods that study meanings and interpretations by use of qualitative data such as words or images (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 179). However, the only method chosen for this study is the semi-structured interview and I am, therefore, using a single data collection technique. I have chosen a single data collection technique because I believe that the semi-structured interviews can provide me with plenty of new and rich understandings from which I can build new theory on authenticity in influencer marketing. Hence, the research choice for this master's thesis is to conduct a mono method qualitative study.

#### 2.4. RESEARCH STRATEGY: CASE STUDY

---

Research strategy is to be understood as the plan of action one might have to answer the research question in a study and it is, therefore, the link between the methodical layers presented in this methodology section (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 189). The most beneficial plan to study authenticity is thus one that fits the qualitative research design that has been outlined. Hence, the strategy chosen to answer the research question is a case study.

A case study is the preferred strategy for this master's thesis because it has the power to generate rich and in-depth data and thus build theory. It is, therefore, good for the research design of this master's thesis, which adopts an inductive approach. A case study generally permits that a phenomenon or topic is studied within its defined real-life setting or context by use of a single case or multiple cases (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 198). In this case, it will therefore be used to understand the phenomenon of authenticity within the context of influencer marketing by use of multiple cases. The cases are in this respect to be understood as the multiple interviews that will be conducted, analysed, and compared to shed light on the phenomenon of authenticity. Hence, the nature of the case study is that it is a multi-case study that studies the concept of authenticity holistically. Moreover, when considering implementing the case study, the strategy can be implemented in two different ways; either as an orthodox case study that proceeds in a structured and linear way or as an emergent case study that allows the focus to emerge and shift throughout the process (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 198). In this respect, the case study of authenticity in influencer marketing will be implemented as an emergent case study because I want the focus of the research to emerge through semi-structured interviews.

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## 2.5. TIME HORIZON: CROSS-SECTIONAL

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Having now considered the outer layers of the research onion and thereby the underlying methodical choices of the research, it is time to turn to the time horizon of said research. Time horizon refers to the period in which the research will be conducted, whereas research with a short and set time horizon is termed cross-sectional and research with a long and often indefinite time horizon is termed longitudinal (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 212). Since this research is expected to be completed by May 16, 2022 it, therefore, falls under the category of cross-sectional with its ‘snapshot’ time horizon. Cross-sectional studies are usually of “a particular phenomenon at a particular time” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 212) and that statement, therefore, further supports my notion of the research having a cross-sectional time horizon.

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## 2.6. TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES

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Techniques and procedures refer to the inner layer of the research onion, and it is concerned with how all the methodical choices made throughout the research onion impact the data collection and data analysis process. The techniques and procedures of the collection and analysis process are therefore to be introduced under their appurtenant headlines.

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### 2.6.1. DATA COLLECTION

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For this research, I have collected primary data from eight semi-structured interviews. The reason why I have collected data from semi-structured interviews is that such interviews allowed me to have a naturalistic and interactive research process where new focus points and questions could emerge throughout the interviews (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 179). In this respect, the interactive process is deemed critical for the research because of its exploratory and emergent nature. The semi-structured interviews have therefore been conducted with predefined open-ended questions that served to emphasise how participants perceived, detected, and valued authenticity and from which new focus points and questions could emerge continuously. The predefined questions have been composed by use of an interview guide, which ensured that the questions were based on the correct methodical and theoretical foundation; namely, the foundation that is emphasised in the methodical and theoretical sections. Moreover, I prepared no more than 16 predefined questions as I also wanted to introduce a short experiment, and as I feared a long interview might weaken the participants level of attention. In

this respect, the experts and Instagram users were arranged for the highest levels of questions with 15 predefined questions (16 for interview person 1; from now on IP, because of her involvement with influencers through her role as a social brand manager), while the influencers were purposively arranged for a more concise interview with 12 predefined questions, as I predicted that a more open dialogue might be beneficial. In particular, because I was unsure of the interviewed influencers' knowledge on the topic prior to the interviews. The experiment in questions has been introduced to all interview persons (from now on IPs) and it consisted of three social media posts the participants ranked on a scale from 0 to 10; where 0 is least authentic and 10 is most authentic, and it should ultimately be seen as a tool for starting conversation and recognising important drivers.

Regarding the participants, the interviews have been conducted with participants belonging to the three different groups of experts, influencers, and Instagram users. The expert group consists of four participants; IP1 to IP4, who are experts in different fields relevant for this study. IP1 is a social brand manager in a large Nordic corporation, who is considered an expert in influencer marketing; IP2 is an external lecturer at CBS, who is considered an expert in branding and social media; IP3 is a researcher and lecturer at SDU, who is considered an expert in branding; and IP4 is a teaching associate professor at CBS, who is considered an expert in social media. The four experts have thereby contributed to an understanding of authenticity in influencer marketing on Instagram from the fields of influencer marketing, branding, and social media. The influencer group consists of two influencers; IP5 and IP6, who are considered influencers that promote authenticity in their everyday lives. IP5 is an influencer with 23,1 t followers, who post everyday life events involving her cat, depression, and quirks of hers; and IP6 is an influencer with 10 t followers, who post everyday life events involving her kid, divorce, and challenges that emerge thereof. The consumer group consists of two participants; IP7 and IP8, who are female Instagram users between the age of 18 to 39. IP7 is a 27-year-old female, who uses Instagram to follow authentic profiles that specialise in DIY and baking; and P8 is a 25-year-old female, who uses Instagram to follow personal profiles. Hence, the distribution of the semi-structured interviews is as follows:

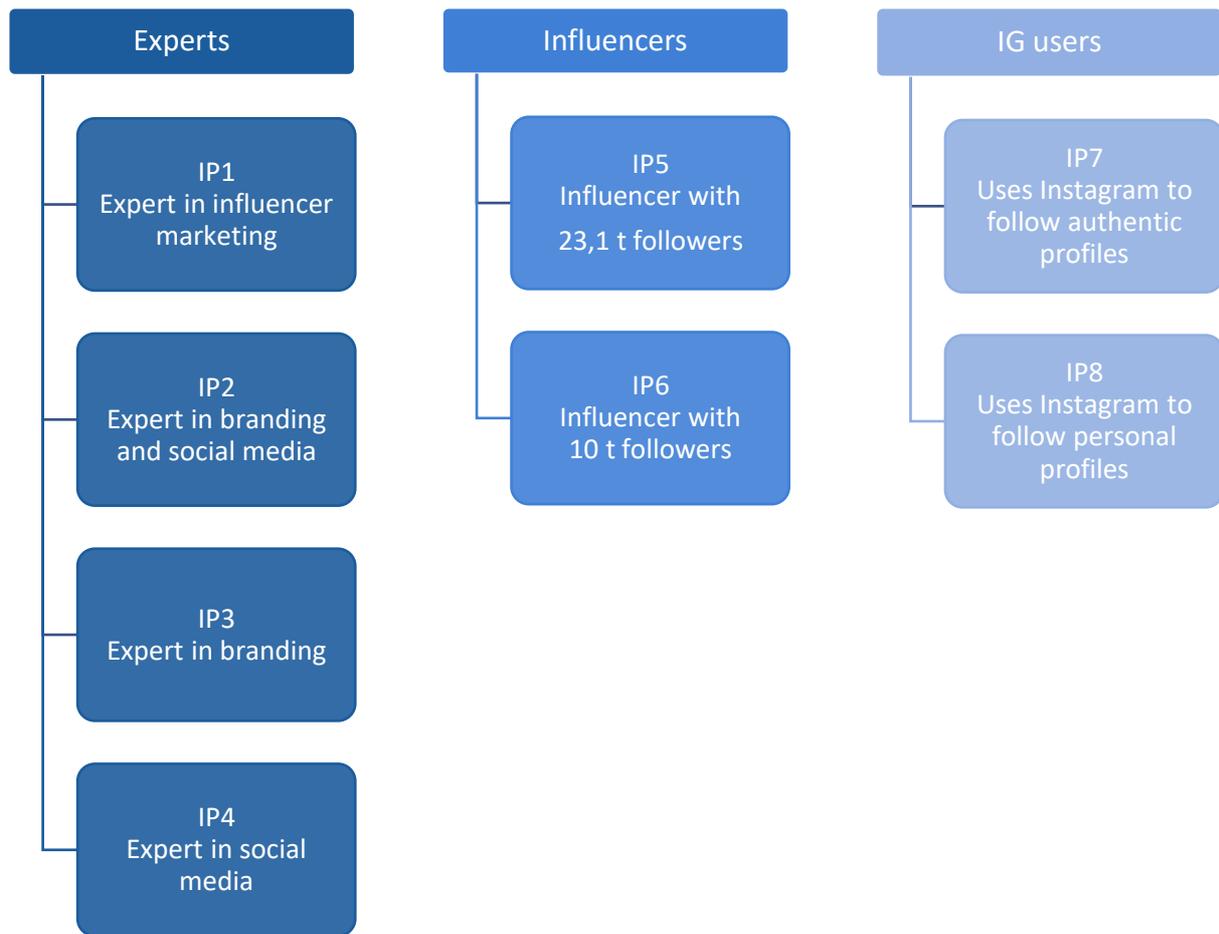


Figure 2: Illustration of the distribution of semi-structured interviews by me.

The reason why I chose to conduct the semi-structured interviews across the different groups is that I believe it has given me the most holistic understanding of authenticity in influencer marketing on Instagram and thereby provided me with the most beneficial data for answering my research question.

Regarding the setting of the eight semi-structured interviews, the interviews have been conducted in Danish as all participants are native Danes. I believed that conducting the interviews in their native language might remove any potential language barriers and allow for more open and honest interviews. Furthermore, for the sake of ensuring the absolute highest level of comfort for the participants, I conducted the interviews online using Teams or Zoom or in a physical setting of their choosing. To further ensure a positive participant experience, and to keep the participants' attention, the interviews lasted no more than 60 minutes.

To analyse the collected data, all interviews have been recorded on the Memo app after having received verbal permission to record and use the interviews in this master's thesis. The only exception to that is that the interview with IP3 is in writing due to technical difficulties.

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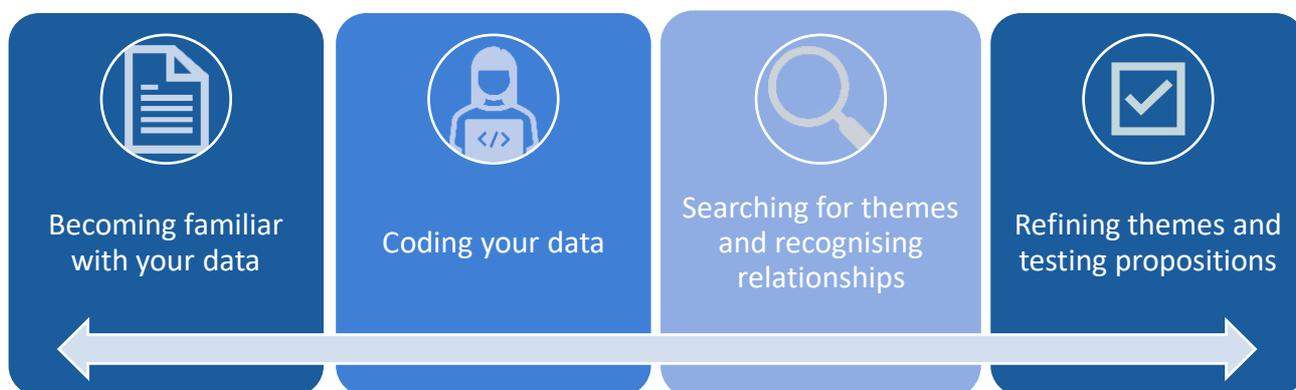
### 2.6.2. DATA ANALYSIS

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The collected data has in this master's thesis been analysed by use of a thematic analysis, as it has been proposed by Saunders et al. (2019). The thematic analysis is an approach for analysing qualitative data, such as the data that has been collected in this master's thesis from the eight semi-structured interviews. On that account, the approach revolves around the search for themes and patterns across different data sources, and it is thereby beneficial for understanding larger sets of qualitative data and for identifying themes and patterns for exploratory purposes (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 651). The approach is further described as a "foundational method for qualitative analysis" by Braun and Clarke (2006 in: Saunders et al., 2019) because of its flexible and accessible nature (p. 651). It is also this very nature that permits the method to be used in connection with different philosophical assumptions and methodical approaches (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 652). For this master's thesis, it implies that the thematic analysis has had its onset in the collected data from which the purpose has been to find different interpretations of the phenomenon authenticity with regard to the interpretivist stance of this master's thesis. Hence, the thematic analysis has been chosen for its ability to comprehend themes and patterns across the eight semi-structured interviews with experts, influencers, and Instagram users, as the approach has been used to identify different interpretations of the phenomenon authenticity and thus devise the themes of this thematic analysis.

To use the thematic analysis, one must follow the procedure of the approach which is concurrent in its nature (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 652). The procedure is centred on the four stages of becoming familiar with your data, coding your data, searching for themes and recognising relationships, and refining themes and testing propositions (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 652), and those stages are therefore

to be introduced in relation to the specific analytical actions that have been performed through the analysis.



*Figure 3: Illustration of the procedure of the thematic analysis by Saunders et al. (2019).*

The stage of becoming familiar with your data is described by Saunders et al. (2019) as the process of going through the data by summarising, reviewing, and transcribing it (p. 652). As the interviews in this master's thesis have not been transcribed per se, familiarity with the data have first been achieved through summaries and reviews for own use before relevant statements have been transcribed and assembled in an excel sheet. The summaries, reviews, and statements have been conducted as preparation for the coming stage of coding the data and for that reason, the various summaries, reviews, and statements have been compared to the theoretical framework for the purpose of recognising initial and potential codes for the coming stage.

The stage of coding your own data is to be understood as the process of labelling and thereby fragmenting units of data according to defined codes (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 653). The codes symbolise a particular meaning, and coding is thereby a way to gather the different meanings in a series of data. In this respect, I have labelled the various transcribed statements in the excel sheet according to numerous codes identified from the theoretical framework and empirical data because it follows the inductive and deductive approach chosen for this master's thesis. Thus, the codes have been identified from different sources; *in vivo* (terms used by participants), *a priori* (terms used by theorists), and data labels by choice (labels developed from the data), because utilisation of all sources provides me with the most exhaustive and exploratory starting point. All codes have, however, been guided by the research questions, so they remain relevant for the search for themes and recognising relationships.

The stage of searching for themes and recognising relationships is where the different codes and meanings must be analysed and gathered in the search for themes and patterns across series of data (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 656). Following the thoughts of Saunders et al. (2019), I have identified relationships between some of the codes in the excel sheet of the transcribed statements and then assembled them under numerous identified themes. The process hereto has been interrelated and concurrent because the identification of themes incited me to transcribe and code even more statements that answer to the themes and then; the transcription incited me to make more codes and themes et cetera. The stage of searching for themes and recognising relationships has, therefore, been the most fundamental stage for this master's thesis because it incited me to analyse the empirical data in a profound manner over numerous sessions, and it has thus been good preparation for the final stage of refining themes and testing propositions.

The stage of refining themes and testing propositions is the stage in which the themes are analysed for their cohesiveness because the themes in the analysis must be coherent out of structural reasons (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 658). It was thereby at this stage I analysed all my themes for their cohesiveness and decided on five themes for my thematic analysis. This implies that all remaining themes have been discarded from the excel sheet and ultimately the analysis. The excel sheet has thus been used throughout the entire data analysis process to transcribe, code, and thematise relevant statements from the interviews and it now only consists of five refined themes and their statements (app. 1). Besides refining the themes of this master's thesis, I have also tested certain propositions throughout the interviews. I have done so by engaging myself in all stages of the procedure from the beginning, so I was able to develop testable propositions out of the first interviews to test in later interviews. Yet, further testing of propositions has not been conducted this time around, but it could perhaps be grounds for future studies and tests.

By following the procedure of the thematic analysis, I have decided on five themes for my thematic analysis from which a considerable number of statements (i.e., 113 statements) relate to. On that account, it should be mentioned that some of the statements are replicated and enters into more themes. The number of statements contest to the relevance of the identified themes and the statements will also be used later on to determine what impact the different themes have on authenticity in influencer marketing on Instagram. But first, the themes will be used to analyse and discuss characteristics and drivers in this master's thesis. On that note, the themes in question are:

| Themes               | Number of statements | Division of statements                                                                                 |
|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Credibility</b>   | 31 statements total  | 11 statements for characteristics<br>15 statements for drivers<br>5 statements for the level of impact |
| <b>Relatability</b>  | 20 statements total  | 8 statements for characteristics<br>12 statements for drivers<br>0 statements for the level of impact  |
| <b>Spontaneity</b>   | 29 statements total  | 11 statements for characteristics<br>15 statements for drivers<br>3 statements for the level of impact |
| <b>Vulnerability</b> | 14 statements total  | 12 statements for drivers<br>2 statements for the level of impact                                      |
| <b>Consistency</b>   | 19 statements total  | 14 statements for drivers<br>5 statements for the level of impact                                      |

Figure 4: Illustration of the statements for the thematic analysis by me.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

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The literature review aims to introduce underlying theories necessary for understanding the issue at hand as well as theories necessary for conducting the analysis and discussion because theories on both levels are crucial in terms of answering the research question. The chosen theories will all shed light on authenticity in influencer marketing on Instagram somehow, and they will therefore constitute my theoretical framework. Hence, the theoretical framework will be constituted of theories from the three theoretical constructs of brand authenticity, influencer marketing and Instagram, and the respective theories will therefore be accounted for in relation to their appurtenant theoretical construct in the coming sections.

### 3.1. BRAND AUTHENTICITY

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Since there are limited studies on authenticity in influencer marketing and authenticity on Instagram, I will instead make use of theories on brand authenticity because said theories can be applied to all brands; hence, also personal brands such as influencers, and in all contexts; hence, on Instagram. The theories of brand authenticity will therefore be accounted for in this section for the purpose of applying them to my analysis later. Thus, this part of the literature review will be concerned with the definition of brand authenticity, an account of the demand for brand authenticity, and an account of the key drivers for brand authenticity.

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#### 3.1.1. DEFINITION OF BRAND AUTHENTICITY

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Brand authenticity has been defined in numerous terms by various scholars and this section, therefore, set out to identify those different definitions and ultimately determine which definition of brand authenticity to follow in this master's thesis. To accomplish that, I will first introduce and make use of several dictionaries' definitions of authenticity to gain a general understanding of the concept before I turn to the definitions of authenticity provided to me by various scholars. Said definitions will both be of authenticity in general and more specifically of brand authenticity because both concepts have uniform values. Hence, they can both be used to understand authenticity in this master's thesis.

When looking at different dictionaries' definitions of authenticity, Cambridge dictionary and Oxfords Learners dictionary both relate authenticity to the quality of being true (Cambridge A, n.d.; Oxford Learners Dictionary, n.d.). Yet, they still differ in their further understanding of authenticity because Cambridge dictionary also relates authenticity to the quality of being real while Oxford Learners Dictionary also relates authenticity to the quality of being genuine (Cambridge A, n.d.; Oxford Learners Dictionary, n.d.). This difference emphasises two different and still interrelated ways of understanding the concept of authenticity; as something real or/and as something genuine. In this respect, Cambridge dictionary is the only dictionary that solely understands authenticity as something real because both Oxfords Learners dictionary, Saurus dictionary, and Collins dictionary all understand authenticity as something that is also related to genuineness (Cambridge A, n.d.; Oxfords Learners dictionary, n.d.; The Saurus dictionary, n.d. & Collins dictionary A, n.d.). I argue that authenticity is a nuanced concept, and the most accurate understanding of authenticity must therefore

be found in the union of the different dictionaries' definitions. Hence, as something that is both real, true, and genuine.

However, looking up the word authenticity in the dictionary does not make for a satisfactory definition of the term. Especially considering the simplicity in which authenticity is described in those dictionaries. I will therefore now consider how various scholars define authenticity in general and in relation to brands to come up with a more exhaustive definition to apply to this master's thesis. When I consider various scholars' definitions of authenticity, I will identify and introduce the differences and similarities between them to map authenticity in its entirety before finally settling on one definition suitable for this master's thesis. In this respect, Grayson and Martinec (2004) account for two different definitions of authenticity, and their efforts will therefore be used in this master's thesis to define brand authenticity. Grayson and Martinec put forward indexical authenticity and iconic authenticity as two different yet interrelated definitions of authenticity. Indexical authenticity is defined as something that is linked to "the real thing" rather than the imitation and it can, therefore, be understood as something that is authentic through its quality of having a factual and spatio-temporal link to something (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 298). Contradictory, iconicity is something that is perceived to be similar to something else (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 298). Hence, iconic authenticity is to be understood as something that is sensory experienced as similar to the actual concept or object (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 298). Indexical authenticity is thereby something that is real, while iconic authenticity is something that appears to be real. Along those same lines, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) also define authenticity as something that can be iconic and indexical. However, they also introduce how researchers often explain authenticity as something symbolic, existential, legitimate, sincere (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010, p. 838) and I could go on. To burn at the stake, Fritz et al. (2017) and Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer, and Heinrich (2012) also introduce authenticity as something related to continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness (Bruhn et al., 2012, p. 567; Fritz et al., 2017) and Fritz et al. (2017) even add sincerity, genuineness, and symbolism (p. 327) as other concepts related to authenticity (p. 327). Authenticity is thereby a concept with many facets.

In this master's thesis, I will make use of a definition that makes room for the authenticity facets enumerated above and that definition is one already previously presented. Namely, the one formulated by Robert Doniger and presented by Gilmore and Pine (2007):

### *Definition of brand authenticity*

Anything that is not devised and structured to make a profit. Anything that is not controlled by corporations. Anything that exists for its own sake, that assumes its own shape (...)

Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 9, l. 1-4

This definition is unrestricted so it makes room for indexical and iconic understandings of authenticity while it can also include all the facets authenticity withholds. Including the facets of trueness, naturalness, sincerity, and genuineness, which seem to be some of the more important ones as they are agreed upon by numerous scholars. The definition has therefore been chosen as the applied definition for this master's thesis on that ground.

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### 3.1.2. DEMAND FOR BRAND AUTHENTICITY

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Because it has been established in the introduction that consumers demand authenticity, I will now set out to understand how this demand manifests itself. This part of the literature review will therefore account for underlying theories necessary for understanding the issue at hand and for understanding the relevance of said issue. The theories will be concerned with the development of the demand and the nature of the demand because those theories are considered the most relevant ones for the research in this master's thesis.

When contemplating how the demand for authenticity has occurred, I will turn to the thoughts of Grayson and Martinec (2004), Fritz et al. (2017), and Gilmore and Pine (2007) as they have considered the development of the demand quite immensely. Grayson and Martinec (2004) state that the demand for authenticity has been an eminent part of our society for centuries but that the demand has shifted from being a demand set for some limited consumption areas to being a demand that saturates all consumption areas in our society (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 296). Hence, it saturates tourism, restaurants, food markets, art markets, and conventional consumer goods and services, such as haircuts and clothing (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 296). They continue to argue that this increasing demand for authenticity is a result of the introduction of web 2.0. (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 296). In this respect, web 2.0. is to be understood as an era in which consumers are active

co-participants who use the internet in an interactive manner by producing user-generated content (Taylor & Pentina, 2017, p. 241). The introduction of web 2.0 brought with it a more transparent communication tradition, which I believe is the reason why authenticity is steadily rising with the advancement of technology.

Fritz et al. (2017) agree that authenticity has been an increasing demand for centuries and that the demand for authenticity is a result of the introduction of web 2.0. However, they argue that the reason for this increasing demand is a result of numerous variables and not just one. To make such an argument, Fritz et al. (2017) have relied on their own thoughts as well as the thoughts of other scholars and all their arguments will therefore be introduced in this section. Out of the numerous variables that might affect the demand for authenticity, one variable is that human beings desire authenticity in times of trouble because it gives them a sense of continuity (Turner & Manning, 1998 in: Fritz et al., 2017, p. 325). The increasing demand for authenticity can thereby be seen as a result of the multiple serious crises we have endured over the past years (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 325). Fritz et al. (2017) continue to reflect that another variable might be that the demand for authenticity is a result of the increasing homogenization of the marketplace, where authenticity behaves as a differentiation factor for consumers (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010 in: Fritz et al., 2017 p. 325). The thoughts of Grayson and Martinec (2004) and Fritz et al. (2017) thereby contemplate some of the reasons for the increasing demand for authenticity.

To present more concrete drivers for the demand for authenticity, I will lastly include the thoughts of Gilmore and Pine (2007), as they present five chronological interrelated key drivers behind the demand for authenticity (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, p. 9). The first key driver behind the demand for authenticity relates to today's experience economy where consumption is connected to experiences (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, p. 10-12). That is as the dominating experience economy with its staged experiences leaves people to question "what is a real experience and what is not? What is really necessary and what is not?" (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 12, l. 18). Thus, these questions lead consumers to desire and demand less-contrived encounters – in other words, authentic encounters by this master's thesis definition of authenticity (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 12). The second key driver relates to the technological advancement and the frustrations it bears with it. The advancement of technology has led to numerous technological solutions that draw resemblance to the real thing but are still far from the real thing. Gilmore and Pine (2007) serve computer automated customer service as an example of such (p. 14). This advancement has led consumers to desire and demand "the real thing" which is to be understood as the downright opposite of automatic and technological advances. Moving on, the third key driver behind the demand for authenticity is constituted in the postmodern

thought of losing the objective reality as a result of the unreality that dominates consumers' daily lives (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 18). This thought dominates consumers' minds until it culminates in a demand for a real reality and thus an authentic reality. The fourth key driver relates to the psychological aging of baby boomers and their employment of brands in the process of becoming their authentic selves (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 20). In this respect, baby boomers' brand use plays a significant role in the market, as they "now rule the marketplace – in numbers, in spending, and in determining the rules for successful marketplace engagement" (David Wolfe in: Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 20, l. 23-24). Their desire for authentic brands they can use in self-presentation is thereby controlling the entire marketplace and thus the demands within it. Lastly, the fifth and final key driver behind the demand for authenticity relates to the new consumer sensibility, meaning that the eroding reputation of some of the major social institutions have made consumers more sensitive to corporate scandals that make said corporations appear unauthentic (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 23).

To gather the thoughts of Grayson and Martinec (2004), Fritz et al. (2017), and Gilmore and Pine (2007), one can conclude that the demand for authenticity is grounded in the technological advancement, the crises we have endured, the homogenization of the marketplace, the emerging experience economy, the postmodern thought, the role of baby boomers and the deceit of corporations' reputation.

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### 3.1.3. DRIVERS FOR BRAND AUTHENTICITY

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In theory developed by some of the various scholars, numerous drivers for brand authenticity have already been identified. I will therefore uncover said drivers in this section to gain the most comprehensive understanding of what drives brand authenticity in influencer marketing. In this regard, Fritz et al. (2017) will be the primary reference. The key drivers for brand authenticity can be divided into different thematic groupings, namely key drivers related to brand past, brand virtuousness, brand continuity, brand originality, and self-identification with brands, and the key drivers will therefore be presented in relation to their appurtenant grouping.

The first grouping relates to brand past and is constituted by the key drivers that are identified as brand heritage, brand nostalgia, and brand country of origin by Fritz et al. (2017) and Karakoç (2016.) Brand heritage has in this respect been proven to correlate positively with brand authenticity because a strong heritage signals durability, consistency, and uniqueness for consumers (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 331). On the other hand, Karakoç (2016) finds that brand heritage correlates negatively with

authenticity and he, therefore, discourages any promotion of former values. Hence, there is some incongruence between the scholars' studies and brand heritage should therefore be empirically tested in future research to determine its effectiveness. Brand nostalgia is identified as a key driver by Fritz et al. (2017) that has been proven to correlate positively with authenticity and it is to be understood as the perseverance of former values that might make a brand appear "original, reliable, continuous, and natural, as the nostalgic staging connotes stability, nativeness, and uniqueness" (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 332, l. 8-9). Moving on, Karakoç (2016) identifies brand country of origin as a key driver and finds that brand country of origin correlates positively with authenticity.

The second grouping relates to brand virtuousness, and it is constituted by the key drivers of brand virtuousness itself, brand clarity, brand genuineness, and the social commitment of brands, and said key drivers describe whether a brand stays true to itself by maintaining its integrity (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 328). Fritz et al. (2017) and Beverland and Farrelly (2010) first identify brand clarity as a key driver because it correlates positively with authenticity and it can be understood as the comprehensibility of communication related to the brand (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 331;336). At the same time, genuineness is identified by Driel and Dumitrica (2020) as a key driver and it is considered especially important for this study because they tie genuineness to the personalities of human beings, which is at the very essence of influencer marketing. Furthermore, brand's social commitment is identified by Fritz et al. (2017) as a key driver and it can be understood as the social activities a brand is involved in. It also correlates positively with authenticity because "social engagement ascribes high moral values to the brands" (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 332, l. 46 – p. 333, l. 1). Lastly, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) identify brand virtuousness as an authenticity driver in itself and it can thereby be argued that he supports the key drivers related to virtuousness that have been identified by other scholars.

The third grouping relates to brand continuity, and it is constituted by the key drivers of brand continuity itself, brand consistency, and brand reliability. Bruhn et al. (2012) identify continuity as a key driver for authenticity because maintaining traditions and values enhance brands' perceived authenticity. At the same time, Karakoç, (2016) argues that brand consistency is a key driver for authenticity because consumers perceive brands to be more authentic if they know what to expect from them (p. 7). Bruhn et al. (2012) also identify brand reliability as a key driver because they argue that consumers deem brands more authentic if they can rely on a uniform brand perception (p. 573).

The fourth grouping relates to brand originality, and it is constituted by the key drivers of brand originality itself and brand naturalness. Brand originality is identified by Bruhn et al. (2012) as

something that refers to individuality and innovativeness (p. 570). At the same time, Bruhn et al. (2012) identify naturalness as another key driver and it ought to be understood as something genuine and real (Bruhn et al., 2012, p. 570).

The fifth and final grouping relates to consumer-brand identification, and it is constituted by the key drivers of consumer-brand identification itself, ideal self-congruence, and actual self-congruence. Fritz et al. (2017) put forward that authenticity can be determined by the level of consumer-brand identification because “the perceived fit between an individual’s self and the brand for instance via cultural legitimacy or self-image congruence can be assumed to enhance the evaluation of a brand’s authenticity” (p. 329, l. 17-19). Related to that, Fritz et al. (2017) introduce ideal and actual self-congruence as two different yet interrelated concepts that refer to consumer self-conception corresponding to a communicated brand image (p. 331). Hence, the authors state that the two concepts relate to the fit between a communicated brand image and the image of a consumers’ ideal and actual self where there must be some sort of congruence (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 331).

From this theoretical account, I can conclude that the various scholars introduced in this section have identified the following key drivers for authenticity.

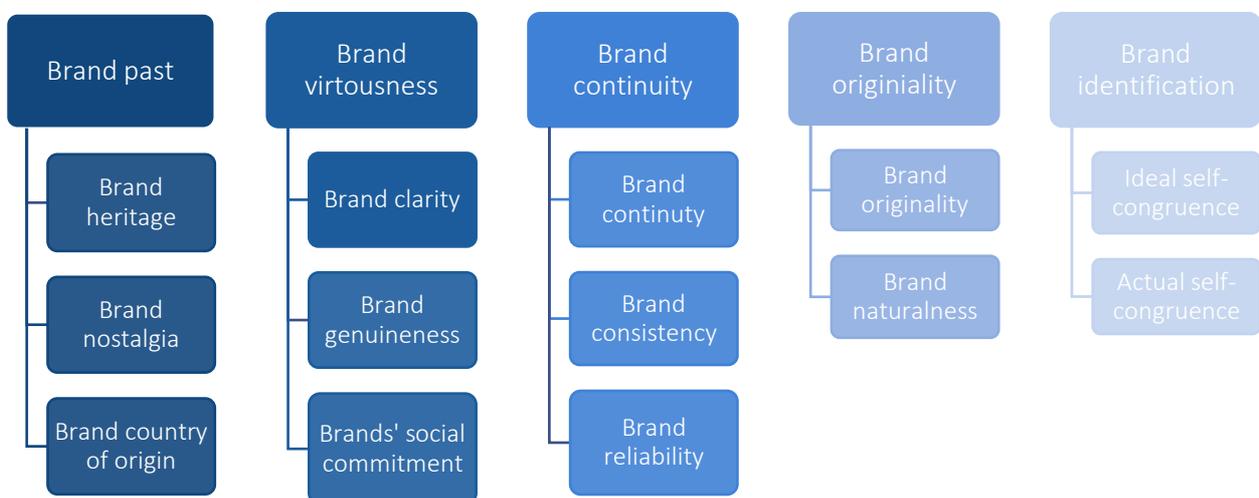


Figure 5: Illustration of the identified key drivers for authenticity in the theoretical framework by me.

These key drivers serve as the theoretical foundation for answering the second sub-question. This implies that the key drivers will be tested in relation to the analysis of the empirical data from which some key drivers will be added to the recognised key drivers in the analysis in that same process.

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## 3.2. INFLUENCER MARKETING

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Because this master's thesis serves to understand authenticity in influencer marketing, I will also make use of relevant theories on influencer marketing to understand the context in which I understand the phenomenon of authenticity. In this respect, I will define influencer marketing while also contemplating the role of influencer marketing, the target group of influencer marketing, and the endorsement of products in influencer marketing in this section.

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### 3.2.1. DEFINITION OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

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Influencer marketing is defined in numerous terms by various scholars and those definitions will therefore be introduced now to understand influencer marketing as a concept and to determine what definition of influencer marketing to apply to this master's thesis. In this regard, I will first turn to the definitions of influencer marketing in the dictionaries before I will include definitions provided to me by recognised scholars within the field.

First, influencer marketing is not acknowledged as an interconnected word in any dictionaries, and I will therefore make use of the definitions of the two words individually to extract a common definition. In this regard, I will first scrutinise the word 'influencer' which is defined Cambridge as "Someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave" (Cambridge D, n.d.) and by Collins as:

*Someone who is able to persuade a lot of other people, for example their followers on social media, to do, buy or use the same things that they do. They are often paid or given free products in exchange for doing this*  
Collins B (n.d.)

From these definitions, an influencer can thereby be understood as someone who purposely influences the behaviours of others. The question now is whether the definition of 'marketing' impacts this obtained understanding. To investigate this, I will make use of Cambridge's definition of the word marketing, where marketing is defined as "a job that involves encouraging people to buy a product or service" (Cambridge E, n.d.). Marketing can thereby be understood as the effort of making people buy a product or a service. Together the various definitions of the two words can thereby be understood as the effort of promoting products or services to a group of people by use of an influential

persona. Yet, the understanding of influencer marketing as a concept will not solely rely on the definitions provided to me by the dictionaries and I will therefore now turn to the definitions provided to me by various scholars within the field.

To start, I will introduce Leung, Gu, and Palmatier's (2020) definition of influencer marketing, as they have made a comprehensible study on online influencer marketing which validates their definition of the concept. In this regard, I want to stress that there is no difference between Leung et al.'s (2020) term: 'online influencer marketing' and my use of the term: 'influencer marketing', as influencer marketing is widely understood and accepted as an online presence, whereof the online aspect of it should not necessarily be emphasised. According to Leung et al. (2020), influencer marketing is defined as:

*a strategy in which a firm selects and incentivizes online influencers to engage their followers on social media in an attempt to leverage these influencers' unique resources to promote the firm's offerings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing firm performance.*

Leung et al., 2020, p. 226, l. 15-21

This definition emphasises the firm's role to a great extent and given that influencer marketing is an influencer-controlled strategy, I will therefore rather emphasise a definition that embraces the role of the influencer. Such definition is provided to me by Høck (2020) who defines influencer marketing as a discipline that depends on the influencer instead of the business and said definition will therefore constitute this master's thesis definition of influencer marketing:

#### *Definition of influencer marketing*

Influencers can, when we are talking about influencer marketing, be seen as a media with their own creative platform. Here influencers develop and publish their own content by means of their own media and the business is by and large without control (my translation)

Høck, 2020, chapter 1

The definition includes the prominent role of the influencer and the nature of influencer marketing and thus, provides for a much more nuanced and exhaustive definition of influencer marketing. The definition has, therefore, been chosen as the applied definition for this master's thesis on that ground.

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### 3.2.2. ROLE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

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After having defined influencer marketing by use of numerous dictionaries and scholars, I will now determine what role influencer marketing has today. More specifically, I will uncover why and how the role of influencer marketing manifests itself today. In this respect, I will primarily rely on the thoughts of Leung et al. (2020) and Høck (2020) as they have all studied influencer marketing profoundly.

Influencer marketing “has emerged as a global phenomenon and integral component of brands’ marketing strategies” (Leung et al., 2020, p. 226, l. 25-26) within this decade and it, therefore, goes without saying that influencer marketing plays a massive role in our global society today. This is also evident from the Benchmark Report 2021 conducted by Influencer Marketing Hub where the report predicted that spending related to influencer marketing would reach US \$13.8 billion in 2021 (InfluencerMarketingHub, 2021). It is thereby literally a billion-dollar marketing industry at this point in time. At the same time, Høck (2020) states that influencer marketing is only getting started and she even compares influencer marketing today to what social media was in the beginning of the 2000s. If Høck (2020) is right in her presumption that influencer marketing follows the same evolutionary path as social media, influencer marketing will dominate the industry within decades. This does perhaps seem a bit extreme, but several arguments serve to support the presumption. For one, influencer marketing has already evolved immensely from being a blog centred discipline to becoming a discipline that is exercised on all media platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook (Høck, 2020). That shows that the discipline is not at all static. Moreover, Høck (2020) introduces that the emergence of social media permits anybody to establish themselves as an influencer on their preferred platform and this accessibility ought to have huge implications for the future evolution of influencer marketing. Furthermore, all evidence points to the fact that businesses continue to increase their influencer marketing investments and budgets. To support such a claim, I will emphasise two studies of influencer marketing that shed light on the future of influencer marketing. The first study was conducted in 2020 in connection with the making of Høck’s (2020) book and it shows that 34 % of the survey respondents (i.e. businesses) planned on increasing their investments in influencer marketing. The second study was also conducted in 2020 but by Influencer

Marketing Hub (2020), and it showed that 66 % of the survey respondents (i.e. businesses) planned on increasing their influencer marketing budget within that year. Hence, influencer marketing seems to play an increasingly important role today. But why is that?

Scholars point to different reasons for the evolution of influencer marketing, and one can therefore argue that there is no single answer to the question. I will therefore introduce the thoughts of Leung et al. (2020) and Høck (2020) to gain a better understanding of why influencer marketing plays such a vital role today. Leung et al. (2020) identify several reasons why influencer marketing continues to evolve as a discipline, some of which will be presented in connection with the thoughts of Høck (2020). But first, Leung et al. (2020) argue that businesses can use influencers' personal positioning to change or improve their own position in the marketplace (p. 365). Thus, influencer marketing can be used strategically for positional purposes. From this follows that businesses can also be associated with certain attributes of the collaborating influencers and they can thereby shape their corporate image by making use of the right influencers (Leung et al., 2020, p. 235). This is, of course, yet another way to change one's position in the marketplace. At the same time, Leung et al. (2020) also argue that influencers can be more creative in their communication which in fact makes it even more effective (p. 337). Hence, businesses can experience higher levels of effectiveness by utilising the creative benefits of influencer marketing. From this one can conclude that Leung et al. (2020) primarily point to positioning benefits as reasons why influencer marketing continues to evolve. However, they also identify other more commonly acknowledged reasons why and said reasons will therefore be presented now in relation to Høcks' exposition.

Høck (2020) has conducted an exhaustive study on influencer marketing from which I will continue my identification of reasons why influencer marketing is an increasing discipline. In this respect, Høck (2020) argues that influencer marketing allows businesses to expose themselves to a specific target group using an appropriate influencer (Høck, 2020). This reason is also acknowledged by Leung et al. (2020) who identify the naturally occurring target group within an influencer network as something that increases segment homogeneity and dynamism (p. 233). In other words, the target group in an influencer network will naturally have high levels of similarity to one another, and it will also reflect the actual and changing needs of said target group (Leung et al., 2020, p. 233-334). Høck (2020) also argues that influencers do not simply have a homogenous and dynamic target group but that they also have the ability to affect that target group like no business can. Businesses are, therefore, to a greater extent, using influencers because of their ability to affect and elicit high market acceptance (Høck 2020; Leung et al., 2020, p. 235). To support that, Høck (2020) introduces that influencers typically have the same powers to affect their followers as other opinion leaders have (Høck, 2020).

Høck (2020) continues to argue that influencer marketing can also be used to create hype and awareness about an issue because influencers have the right channels and momentum like it can also be used for general branding of products or services. What is special for influencer marketing is that influencers can interact and engage with their followers, and businesses thereby have a unique opportunity to engage with followers using a spokesperson (Høck, 2020). In this respect, consumers are most likely more willing to engage with such content because influencers usually generate personal and credible content that generates high levels of trust (Høck, 2020; Leung et al., 2020, p. 238; Moore et al., 2018). In fact, it seems as if the trust factor is the most accentuated reason amongst scholars and it might stand to reason why influencer marketing leads to measurable and provable sales (Høck, 2020).

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### 3.2.3. TARGET OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

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Influencers are of course available for all interested individuals and influencer marketing can thereby, in principle, be seen as a universal marketing strategy. However, studies show that not all individuals indulge in or respond well to influencer marketing, and I will therefore determine who the target group for influencer marketing is and what characterises said target group in this section. The determination of the target group is important because Høck's (2020) account of the target group impacts which Instagram users I interview in this master's thesis. Hence, to determine the target group of influencer marketing and its characteristics, I will make use of Høck's (2020) analysis of the Danish influencer market in 2020.

In the analysis of the Danish influencer marketing in 2020, Høck (2020) introduces that 34 % of Danes follow influencers, whereof 39 % of them are men and 61 % of them are women. There is thereby a majority of women who follow influencers on various platforms. Mostly on Instagram (71 %) Youtube (45 %), and Facebook (37 %) (Høck, 2020). On these platforms, 42 % of the individuals follow lifestyle influencers, 33 % follow beauty influencers, 31 % follow health and diet influencers and 31 % follow fashion influencers (Høck, 2020). Furthermore, the analysis also shows that it is mostly younger individuals who follow influencers, since 75 % of them are under 40 years old (Høck, 2020). Thus, the target group for influencer marketing is primarily women under the age of 40 who use Instagram to follow lifestyle influencers.

The analysis by Høck (2020) also contemplates what stances followers might have on influencers and how followers are affected by influencers. Those reflections will therefore also be introduced in this

literature review to understand the dynamics that exist in the relationship between influencer and followers, i.e. the target group. In this respect, Høck (2020) states that the target group follows influencers because of their entertainment value but that many at the same time believe that influencers are frivolous. This is particularly the case for men who are in the age gap of 30 to 39 (Høck, 2020). Moreover, 66 % of the target group believe that influencers can make sponsored content as long as it is to a reasonable extent. (Høck, 2020). If influencers succeed in finding the right balance for sponsored collaborations, they can collect the purchasing benefits, as many within the target group consider purchasing (37 %) or purchase (20 %) products or services based on sponsored collaborations (Høck, 2020). For men, these purchases are primarily within the categories of fitness, gaming, travel, and food, while they for women are primarily within the categories of makeup and clothes (Høck, 2020). Moreover, if influencers live up to the target group's expectations, they can be rewarded with high levels of interaction. That is as 33 % of the target group sends a post to friends on a weekly basis, 20 % sends direct messages to influencers on a weekly basis, and 31 % participate in contests on a weekly basis. The target group is thereby interacting with influencers to a high degree – especially men. As a final note, Høck (2020) also introduces that 70 % believe that influencers have a social responsibility and that 29 % believe that influencers do not live up to that responsibility (Høck, 2020). From this, one can argue that the target group has high expectations to influencers' level of entertainment, sponsored collaborations, and social responsibility and that influencers must live up to those expectations to collect the benefits.

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#### 3.2.4. THE MATCH-UP HYPOTHESIS

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Because some of the analysis will be concerned with the match between influencers and the products they endorse, I will make use of the match-up hypothesis by Heidi Hansen (2016), and the theory will therefore be introduced and accounted for in this section.

The match-up hypothesis is a theory that has originally been intended for celebrity branding, but I argue that the differences between celebrities and influencers are minor because both are personal brands and have a troop of fans and followers. This implies that the match-up hypothesis is applicable to influencer marketing. Said notion is further supported by IP3 who contemplate that there needs to be a natural match between an influencer and a product the same way there needs to be a natural match between a celebrity and a product. This contemplation manifests itself in the following statement:

*Subsequently, authenticity on Instagram is for me that there needs to be a natural match the same way as the theory about celebrity branding will argue for it (my translation)*

IP3: Q3, 1. 6-8 (app. 4)

After having argued for the applicability of the match-up hypothesis for influencer marketing, I will now account for it. The match-up hypothesis is concerned with the natural match between a celebrity and the product that is being endorsed (Hansen, 2016, p. 210). In this respect, Heidi Hansen (2016) argues that branding is more effective if there is a natural match between the product that is being endorsed and the person that endorses it (p. 210). For instance, it will be more effective if a swimmer endorses swimsuits and swimming caps than if a musician does it. In the context of influencer marketing, it means that an influencer who endorses products relevant to them and their followers will appear more credible and authentic. In turn, this might convince more consumers to buy the endorsed products, which is both beneficial for the influencer and the brand.

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### 3.3. INSTAGRAM

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The study will be conducted on Instagram, and I therefore must include theory on the matter. Theories on Instagram will thereby contribute to an understanding of the platform in general and an understanding of how authenticity in influencer marketing manifests itself on Instagram in particular. More specifically, the literature review of Instagram will encompass a definition of Instagram, an account for the role of Instagram, an account for Instagram trends, and an account for the communication triangle.

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#### 3.3.1. DEFINITION OF INSTAGRAM

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Instagram is an advancing and dominant social media platform that has been defined in varying terms since its occurrence in 2010. This section of the theoretical review will therefore serve to identify the different definitions of Instagram for the purpose of determining which definition to follow in this master's thesis. In this respect, I will introduce definitions provided to me by different dictionaries and various scholars.

First, Instagram is by Cambridge dictionary defined as “(...) a social media service for taking, changing, and sharing photographs and videos” (Cambridge F, n.d.), while it is defined as “a photo-sharing application for computers and mobile phones” by Collins’ dictionary (Collins C, n.d.). From this, it can be derived that Instagram is a social media service that outplays on an application made for photo and video management. This understanding of social media appears to be universally agreed upon and the scholars who concern themselves with Instagram thereby seem to take it as gospel truth. This insight comes from flipping through numerous articles and books on the matter where almost no scholars put forward an alternate definition. However, few scholars introduce definitions of Instagram, and even though they resemble the definitions provided to me by Cambridge dictionary and Collins dictionary, those definitions also stand to be introduced in this section. If not only to support the dictionaries definitions.

In this respect, Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen, and Carter (2014) put forward that Instagram, in their opinion, is to be understood as a “mobile social networking platform for sharing photographs and videos” (p. 256). At the same time, Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2017) emphasise that Instagram has an inherently visual nature (p. 511), and they thereby support the notion of Instagram being a photo and video sharing platform. Hence, the scholars’ understanding of Instagram is following the definitions provided to me by the dictionaries, and Cambridge dictionary’s definition will therefore constitute this master’s thesis definition of Instagram. Mostly because said definition entails all facets of Instagram.

#### *Definition of Instagram*

A social media service for taking, changing, and sharing photographs and videos.  
Cambridge F, n.d.

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### 3.3.2. ROLE OF INSTAGRAM

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Having defined Instagram by use of numerous definitions, I will now attempt to understand and outline what role Instagram plays today. The role of Instagram is ultimately important for me to inspect because Instagram, as a platform, impacts authenticity in influencer marketing. To best outline the role of Instagram, I will turn to studies of Instagram from various scholars whom all contemplate

the role of Instagram, and in this respect, the most prominent scholars are Smith and Anderson (2015) and Casaló et al. (2017). Other scholars will however also be included for supportive purposes.

Smith and Anderson (2015) state that Instagram plays an immense role in today's social media world when they introduce that Instagram is believed to be one of the "fastest growing social media platforms" (Lunden, 2014 in: Smith & Anderson, 2015, p. 343). The scholars argue that Instagram plays such an immense role due to its ability to self-represent through different themes (Smith & Anderson, 2015, p. 343). This is further supported by Casaló et al. (2017), Towner and Muñoz (2018), and Yu and Sun (2019) whom all introduce various ways in which Instagram plays an impactful role. In this respect, Casaló et al. (2017) introduce that Instagram is the most used platform for influencers and that "consumers are increasingly using social media to gather information on which to base their decisions" (p. 510, l. 1-2). They continue to introduce that Instagram has high rates of engagement (p. 510) and Instagram thereby facilitates influencer and user communications. Hence, Casaló et al. (2017) support the notion that Instagram plays a massive role today. Especially for influencers who might benefit from Instagram's facilitation of engagement and consumers' increasing social media use in their decision-making process. Similarly, Towner and Muñoz (2018) and Yu and Sun (2019) introduce that Instagram also plays a massive role in politics, such as presidential elections, and digital tourism, such as gastronomy, literature, music, and film (Towner & Muñoz, 2018, p. 484; Yu & Sun, 2019, p. 257). Yu and Sun (2019) argue that the magnitude of Instagram's role today is a result of the success of the platform in terms of advertising, promotion, and marketing (Doolin, Burgees & Cooper, 2002 in: Yu & Sun, 2019, p. 257). Thus, the various scholars all argue that Instagram plays a massive role. Partly due to the possibilities of the platform for influencers who want to advertise, promote, and market on their Instagram profile.

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### 3.3.3. INSTAGRAM TRENDS

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As already briefly presented in the introduction, social media trends are ever-changing and for that reason, it is crucial to consider the historical trends on Instagram to understand former and present demands for the platform. The historical trends will focus on the shift from being perfect to being authentic as it fits the scope of this master's thesis. In this respect, I will account for the shift between the two trends by including theories from various scholars and articles from various sites and papers. The scholars and authors in question are Reade (2021), Chen (2021), Hummel (2020), and Lorenz (2019), and their thoughts will therefore constitute the theoretical backbone of this section.

For a start, I will make use of Reade's (2021) study on fitness inspiration because the findings in the study can be seen as evidence of a universal shift in trends on Instagram. That is as Reade (2021) introduces that "the nature of fitness inspiration content is changing" (p. 436, l. 3). Referring to the change from the trend of appearing perfect to the trend of appearing authentic. In this respect, Reade (2021) forwards that influencers should rather post natural and unedited pictures than perfect content to fit into the dominant trend of appearing authentic (Reade, 2021, p. 536). I argue that her findings are universal because the demand for authenticity is not limited to fitness inspiration and because she speaks of the demand in general terms, while the thoughts of Grayson and Martinec (2004), Fritz and Schoenmueller (2016), and Gilmore and Pine (2007) have also earlier been used to establish that authenticity is a worldwide demand. Her study can thus be used to establish that there has in fact been a change in trends in recent times and that influencers can follow the dominant trend of appearing authentic by posting natural and unedited pictures.

To support the notion that it is trending to appear authentic, I have looked over various articles and how-to guides on how to navigate Instagram. I am aware that anybody can put forward an article or a guide and that those sources are therefore not dependable per se. Yet, they still give me a sense of the tendencies on Instagram, and I will, therefore, use them for support purposes. In this respect, Chen (2021), Hummel (2020), and Lorenz (2019) all argue that authenticity is a dominant Instagram trend today. For Chen (2021), the trend of authenticity manifests itself in the value of casualness when he forwards that Instagram content should be casual and thereby imperfect. At the same time, Hummel (2020) and Lorenz (2019) use more general terms to describe how authenticity is a dominating trend on Instagram. Hence, "The Instagram Aesthetic Is Over" by Lorenz (2019) and "Authenticity Wins on Instagram" by Hummel (2021). Hummel (2021) even contemplates different ways to keep up with the trend of being authentic, whereof the most prominent ways are to only edit in a naturalistic way and to make lengthy and honest captions (Hummel, 2021). From the arguments made by the various scholars and authors, one can derive that authenticity is a dominant trend on Instagram today and that it is to be understood as a reaction to the former trend of perfectness. This is evident from Lorenz (2019) and Hummel (2021) who voice that there is a direct connection between the occurrence of authenticity and the demise of perfectness in Instagram feeds. Not least through this statement by Lorenz (2019) about young influencers who "all reject the notion of a curated feed in favour of a messier and more unfiltered vibe".

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### 3.3.4. THE COMMUNICATION TRIANGLE

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Because Instagram is a communication media, I will also make use of communication theory that is concerned with credible communication in public settings. The theory in question is one by Heidi Hansen (2014) that is manifested in the communication triangle. The model will therefore be introduced and accounted for in this section.

The communication triangle is a model whose purpose is to understand credibility in organisational contexts, and it, therefore, builds upon various scholars' understanding of organisational identity (Hansen, 2014, p. 48). However, the very structure of the triangle is a reference to Peirce's semiotic tripartition for which the model has its onset. It can, therefore, be used to understand the representamen, the object and the interpretant of any sign and thereby in any given situation. In this regard, representamen is something that stands for its object, the object is what is being represented, and the interpretant is the mental interpretation of the representamen (Teaterleksion, n.d.). It should here be noted a sign can assume one of three forms: a symbolic one, an indexical one, and an iconic one. A symbolic sign is something that is arbitrary but is widely agreed upon, an indexical sign is something that is linked directly and physically to its object, and an iconic sign is something that has qualities in common with the object (Huening, n.d.). From the account of Peirce's fundamental concepts the communication triangle is built upon, it can be argued that the semiotic tripartition is applicable for all signs and that is thereby also the case for the communication triangle and its three semiotic terms. Namely, desired image (i.e. representamen), identity (i.e. object), and ethos (i.e. interpretant). The communication triangle will therefore be used to understand credible communication on Instagram.

The communication triangle is concerned with credibility and consists of desired image, identity, and ethos. In this respect, desired image is the desired representation of the sender, identity is the actual personality and lifestyle of the sender, and ethos is the surroundings' perception of the sender (Hansen, 2014, p. 48). Heidi Hansen (2014) argues that desired image, identity, and ethos must be in accordance with one another for credibility to arise and remain (Hansen, 2014, p. 28). Meaning that no matter what you ask about the desired image, identity, or ethos of something or somebody, the answer should always be the same (Hansen, 2014, p. 48). Hence, a person is credible if what they want to be is in accordance with what they are and what the world sees them at. This will likely be the case for many things or people because the three corners of the triangle affect one another and thereby negotiate and adopt a common understanding (Hansen, 2014, p. 48). This is represented in the model as "me" and "I" which is a direct reference to George Herbert Meads theory on the I and

the Me. That is as George Herbert Meads consider the self to consist of the me; the observing and evaluating part of the self, and the I; the immediate and impulsive part of the self (Hansen, 2014, p. 44). The self is thereby constructed in the interaction between the me and the I, where the me captures what the surroundings perceive one to be, and the I choose whether to modify the self according to the surroundings' perception (Hansen, 2014, p. 44-45).

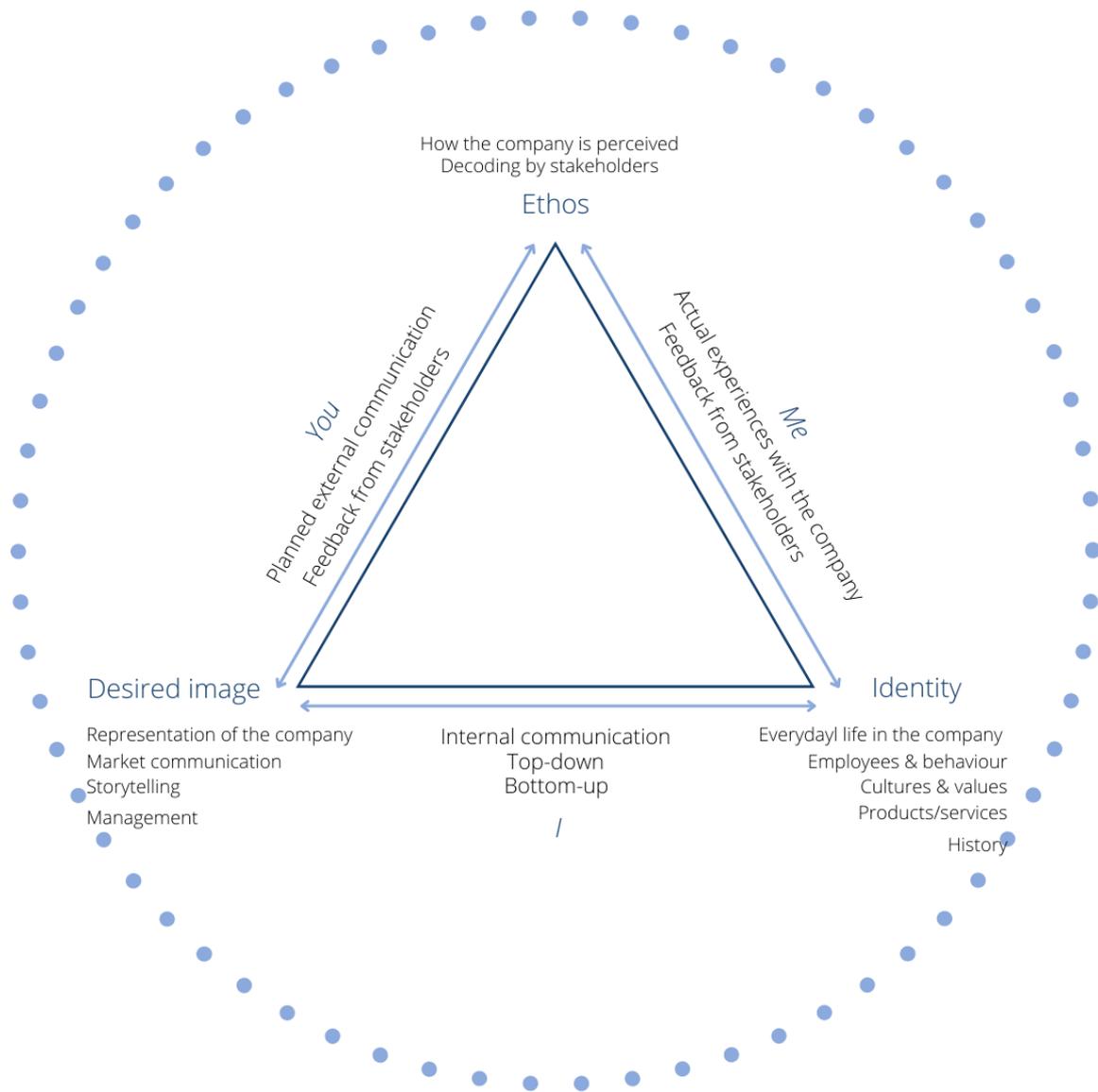


Figure 6: Illustration of the communication triangle by Hansen (2014).

## 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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Before initiating the analysis and discussion, which will eventually lead me to answer my research question of: “How can influencers appear authentic on Instagram?”, I will first make my case for its relevance once again. This time with empirical support. In this respect, the theoretical framework of this master’s thesis reveals that there is a general demand for authenticity and that this demand is a result of a number of factors. This statement is further supported in the data, where most of the IPs believe that there are high demands for influencers’ authenticity on Instagram (IP1, IP2, IP4, IP6, IP7, and IP8). At least for some of the influencers. That is as some IPs argue that the demand for authenticity in influencer marketing varies among the different influencers (IP3 and IP4) and one IP even states that:

*I think the expectations vary from influencer to influencer. By that, I mean that consumers have some expectations for certain influencers’ authenticity, while they have no expectations for other influencers’ authenticity, if they, for example, are following them for entertainment only (my translation)*

IP3: Q10 (app. 4)

As a matter of fact, Høck (2020) introduces that the target group of influencer marketing follows influencers for entertainment, and this supports the notion of IP3. However, Høck (2020) also introduces that 70 % believe that influencers have a social responsibility, and the empirical data also suggests that the target group still has expectations for some influencers. Thus, one can argue that since the demand for some influencers is both recognised in the theoretical framework and in the empirical data, it is most relevant for influencers to consider and accommodate. Especially because the consequences of being unauthentic on Instagram can be immense and the advantages of being authentic are worthwhile. In this respect, the different advantages of appearing authentic are recognised by the IPs in the sense that IP7 and IP8 state that they have made purchases based on influencers’ promotion of it, IP3 and IP4 state that trust is a direct advantage of being authentic, and IP1, IP5, and IP6 state that authentic influencers receive higher levels of engagement and better partnership deals. At the same time, the consequences of appearing unauthentic will arguably be the opposite. Hence, loss of purchases, trust, engagement, and good partnership deals. For those reasons, it is most relevant to find out how influencers can appear authentic on Instagram and thereby answer the research question.

To find this out, the phenomenon of authenticity will be analysed and discussed according to three sub-questions: 1) What characterises authenticity on Instagram, 2) What are the key drivers for authenticity on Instagram, and 3) How impactful are said key drivers on Instagram. The analysis and discussion will thereby be taxonomically built as it reflects the academic structure of the sub-questions. Each sub-question will be analysed and discussed based on a number of themes that have been devised from the thematic analysis process preceding the analysis and discussion. The themes will be introduced as findings that both draw resemblance and discrepancy between them and naturally, some of the findings (i.e. themes) are to overlap. That is as the questions are truly interrelated in their nature and the implication thereof is that some themes are to be analysed and discussed on all three taxonomic levels. Hence, in relation to the three sub-questions. This is evidently because what characterises authenticity on Instagram will in many cases also be what drives it to varying degrees. However, the themes will still be analysed and discussed differently according to their taxonomic level. Moreover, the findings have been chosen in a selection process where the findings have mainly been assessed for their theoretical and empirical recognition because high levels of recognition signify importance. This assessment thereby indicates that the chosen findings are indeed the most significant and relevant ones. However, the assessment and selection of the identified findings have also focused on whether or not certain findings have only been recognised theoretically or empirically because it signifies incongruences between former research (i.e. theories) and the research of this master's thesis (i.e. data). On that account, certain incongruencies have been identified and they will therefore also be studied.

Having introduced how the findings have been selected, it is evident to state that the findings might be evidence of tendencies and contemporary trends on Instagram. This is apparent from Reade (2021) who recognises that there has been a tendency shift on Instagram where authenticity is now the dominant trend in favour of the previous trend of appearing perfect. At the same time, IP8 state that there is a tendency for trends on Instagram and that those tendencies move fast between the various influential profiles (10:24-11:00). For those reasons, the findings introduced in the coming sections may be evidence of current times and they are, therefore, not necessarily verifiable in future research.

#### 4.1. CHARACTERISATION OF AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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This section serves to characterise authenticity using theory and data, and thereby answer the first sub-question of: “What characterises authenticity on Instagram?”. To best answer the question, data that contemplate authenticity in general as well as specifically for Instagram will be applied, while theory on brand authenticity will also be applied for the purpose of supporting and challenging findings in said data. General as well as specific data on authenticity will be applied to this analysis and discussion because the IPs are fonder of characterising authenticity in its entirety than they are of characterising authenticity on Instagram, and also because it has been empirically realised that characteristics of authenticity in general and characteristics of authenticity on Instagram are very closely related. That is as IP2 and IP6 both state that the characteristics of authenticity in general are also the characteristics of authenticity on Instagram and as the remaining IPs repeat themselves when they attempt to characterise authenticity on Instagram after having already characterised it in more general terms. This could however have something to do with the fact that all IPs have been introduced to the scope of this master’s thesis prior to the interviews and thereby naturally think of authenticity in terms of influencer marketing on Instagram. Nonetheless, saying that the general characteristics of authenticity are also the characteristics of authenticity on Instagram is not the same as saying that Instagram does not bears with it some specific characteristics. Because it does. It should rather be seen as evidence of the general characteristics not being contrary to the specific characteristics on Instagram and for that reason, both general characteristics of authenticity and specific characteristics of authenticity on Instagram will be included when characterising authenticity on Instagram in this analytical part of the master’s thesis. Simultaneously, theory on brand authenticity will be included to support and challenge findings in the data because it makes for a more valid study. Said brand authenticity theories have already been accounted for in the literature review where they have been emphasised for their applicability to all types of brands and contexts.

To characterise authenticity on Instagram, I will focus on three main characteristics that will be introduced as finding A, B, and C. The findings will be analysed and discussed for their individual meaning and characteristics of authenticity on Instagram at this point in time.

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#### 4.1.1. FINDING A: CREDIBILITY CHARACTERISES AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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The first finding I have chosen to emphasise is that credibility characterises authenticity on Instagram. Credibility is a term I have chosen as a superior term for all terms with uniform meanings for the sake of unifying all theories and data that emphasise credibility as a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram. This decision has been proven necessary because many of the included theorists and IPs emphasise the ability to believe in and trust someone as a key characteristic of authenticity by the use of different terms. Considering the different terms, the theorists Fritz et al. (2017) identify sincerity as a characteristic of brand authenticity, while IP2, IP3, IP4, IP5, IP7, and IP8 identify credibility, trustworthiness, validity, and ethos as characteristics of brand authenticity. All these terms share a uniform meaning that can be summarised by the definition of credibility that has been provided to me by Collins dictionary: “If someone or something has credibility, people believe in them and trust them” (Collins D, n.d.). To support that claim, I have gathered the terms’ meanings side by side in the table below.

| Credibility                                                                    | Sincerity                                                                     | Trustworthiness                                                              | Validity                                                                                                      | Ethos                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| If someone or something has credibility, people believe in them and trust them | The quality or state of being sincere; honesty, genuineness, good faith, etc. | A trustworthy person is reliable, responsible and can be trusted completely. | The validity of something such as a result or a piece of information is whether it can be trusted or believed | Ethos appeals to the writer’s character. Ethos can also be thought of as the role of the writer in the argument and how credible his/her argument is |
| Collins D, n.d.                                                                | Collins E, n.d.                                                               | Collins G, n.d.                                                              | Collins H, n.d.                                                                                               | Lutzke & Henggeler, 2009                                                                                                                             |

This account clarifies that credibility is a superior term that withholds many subordinate terms with uniform meanings and that credibility is a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram that is recognised by many. Including Fritz et al. (2017) and IP2, IP3, IP4, IP5, IP7, and IP8. What comes to mind when viewing the terms’ various definitions is also that many of the terms are concerned with trust in one way or another. Including the definition of credibility. This is also empirically

realised because IP4 and IP8 characterise authenticity on Instagram as something that has to do with trust. Just look at the following statement on what it means to be an authentic person from IP8:

*I think you have something. That you are valid somehow. That, when you say something, then people trust what you are saying because you have built up some kind of authenticity (my translation)*

IP8: 00:28-00:45 (app. 9)

Credibility is thereby a term that is concerned with trust and it seems to be one of the main reasons why so many theorists and IPs argue that credibility is characteristic of authenticity on Instagram.

Now, it has been suggested that credibility characterises authenticity on Instagram. In particular, because theorists and IPs view authenticity as something that has to do with trust. However, it has not yet been exemplified and for that reason, I will turn to IP5 and IP7 who characterises authenticity on Instagram in the following ways:

*For me, authenticity is linked up to credibility (my translation)*

IP5: 01:40-01:43 (app. 6)

*I am mostly thinking about something that is real and very true to life.*

*Something that is credible (my translation)*

IP8: 00:07-00:22 (app. 9)

The statements thus establish that credibility is recognised as a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram from the empirical data and for that reason, it has both been recognised as a characteristic from the theoretical framework and the empirical data.

Having established that credibility characterises authenticity on Instagram, I will now introduce the communication triangle by Heidi Hansen (2014) because an IP with expertise in branding and social media refers to it when characterising authenticity on Instagram. Hence, she puts forward that authenticity arises when people are credible through a balanced image, identity, and ethos (IP2). Said notion is supported by the following statement where IP2 argues that credibility and authenticity arise "when one succeeds in calibrating image, identity, and ethos" (00:30). The communication triangle has been meticulously accounted for in the literature review, and it will therefore not be further elaborated on. However, the main takeaway from the model is that there must be a balance between

desired image, identity, and ethos before a person is seen as credible (Hansen, 2014, p. 48). This notion is also partially recognised empirically because several IPs state that who you are (i.e. identity) needs to be in accordance with who pretend to be (i.e. ethos). The IPs in question are IP4, IP6, and IP7, and the following statement summaries their sentiments:

*To be authentic is to be who you pretend to be (my translation)*

IP4: 00:22-00:30 (app. 5)

The IPs are therefore recognising that identity and ethos must be in accordance. However, they are not concerned with desired image, and this could be because desired image is something that is theoretically rather than practically recognised and IPs who do not concern themselves with professional communication might therefore not realise that there is a desired image to consider. Moving on, the statement from IP4 and the underlying need for factual and spatio-temporal linkage draws resemblance to Grayson and Martinec's theory on indexical and iconic authenticity, where they introduce indexical authenticity as something that is linked to the real thing and iconic authenticity as something that has similar qualities to the real thing (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 298). It is therefore arguable that credibility can be seen as a type of indexical authenticity that demands an actual and factual link between one's perception and one's actual self. Hence, a link between ethos and identity in the communication triangle. This can also be considered in relation to Peirce, from which the communication triangle has its onset because he argues that a sign can either be a symbol, an index, or an icon. In this regard, an indexical sign is one that is "directly and physically influenced by its objects" (Huening, n.d.) and it is thereby similar to Grayson and Martinec's definition of indexical authenticity. From this, it can be inferred that credibility is in all probability a sign or a type of authenticity that benefit from having indexical qualities.

The conclusion to finding A is that it has been theoretically as well as empirically realised that credibility is a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram that has its onset in trust and that credibility is an indexical sign or type of authenticity that arises when there is balance and factual linkage between a person's desired image, identity, and ethos.

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#### 4.1.2. FINDING B: RELATABILITY CHARACTERISES AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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The second finding I have chosen to emphasise is that relatability characterises authenticity on Instagram. Relatability is a characteristic that has solely been recognised empirically and it can thereby be seen as evidence of relatability being a new characteristic of authenticity on Instagram. That is as the studies included in this master’s thesis have been performed in former times (2004-2017) and it thereby indicates that relatability is a characteristic that has merged recently. As it was the case for credibility, relatability is a term I have chosen as a superior term for all terms with uniform meanings. Relatability is in this respect defined in the following way: “If someone or something is relatable, you feel an emotional connection with them” (Collins I, n.d) and it is thereby concerned with connections that may manifest itself in different ways or by use of different terms. In this respect, IP2, IP4, and IP6 identify relatability, identification, and recognisability as characteristics of brand authenticity. Since identification and recognisability both share the same meaning as relatability, they will enter into the superior term which is relatability. To establish that the terms do in fact share a uniform meaning, I have gathered the meanings of the terms in the following table where it becomes evident that they are all concerned with connections between something or someone:

| Relatability                                                                     | Identification                                                                              | Recognisability                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| If someone or something is relatable, you feel an emotional connection with them | The identification of something is the recognition that it exists, is important, or is true | If you recognise someone or something, you know who that person is or what the thing is |
| Collins I, n.d.                                                                  | Collins J, n.d.                                                                             | Collins K, n.d.                                                                         |

From these uniform meanings, it has been demonstrated that relatability is a superior term that encompasses the subordinate terms of identification and recognisability. In this respect, it should be mentioned that the terms of identification and recognisability are solely subordinate in the way that they are not emphasised as much as relatability. Having identified the terms that are connected to relatability, I will now include statements from IP4 and IP6 to establish that relatability does in fact characterise authenticity on Instagram. On that account, IP6 introduces the perspective of an influencer when stating that:

*I think that is what you create by being authentic on Instagram. You attract people who can recognise some of the things you are experiencing and are occupied with (my translation)*

IP6: 04:30-04:42 (app. 7)

IP6 thereby establishes that relatability is a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram, when she introduces that her authenticity has attracted followers that can relate to her life. At the same time, IP4 state that influencers appear more authentic if they are similar to you and this supports the finding. IP4 continues to introduce that these similar-minded influencers are typically micro-influencers when she states that micro-influencers are:

*Easier identifiable, relatable, for the ones who look at what they are doing than if you have a huge influencer who has many followers and where everything the person does is something that you could never ever be close to be doing (my translation)*

IP4: 05:42-05:58 (app. 5)

This is also empirically supported by IP1 and IP5 who both identify micro-influencers as more relatable types of influencers that seem more authentic. However, reflections on why that is will not be introduced in this analytical part of the master's thesis because relatability is to a greater extent identified as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and the why and how of it will therefore be answered in a later analysis.

The conclusion to finding B is that relatability and its subordinate terms of identification and recognition characterises authenticity on Instagram in the way that people automatically view influencers as more authentic if they can relate to them. Micro-influencers are, therefore, particularly authentic because they are the most relatable influencers on Instagram.

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#### 4.1.3. FINDING C: SPONTANEITY CHARACTERISES AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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The third finding I have chosen to emphasise is that spontaneity characterises authenticity on Instagram. Spontaneity has been emphasised as a characteristic because it has been empirically and theoretically recognised as so. Or it has in fact not been theoretically recognised as spontaneity per se. Instead, it has been recognised in form of other terms with similar meanings. Spontaneity will therefore function as a superior term for all terms with uniform meanings, as it has also been the case for the other characteristics of credibility and relatability. Spontaneity is defined as “the quality of being natural rather than planned in advance” (Cambridge G, n.d.) and it thus stands for anything that is unmanipulated, natural, and immediate. On that account, Fritz et al. (2017) and Bruhn et al. (2012) identify naturalness as a characteristic of authenticity, while IP4, IP5, and IP6 identify true to life, spontaneity, realness, and immediateness as characteristics of authenticity. Thus, all the empirically and theoretically identified characteristics fit the description of spontaneity because they encompass the quality of being unmanipulated, natural, or immediate somehow. Spontaneity will in this analysis, therefore, be a superior term for the subordinate terms of naturalness, true to life, realness, and immediateness for which their individual definitions are introduced in connection with one another below to emphasise their similarities.

| Spontaneity                                                 | True to life                                                          | Naturalness                                                                                  | Realness                                                                                        | Immediateness                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The quality of being natural rather than planned in advance | Corresponding to what happens or exists in real life; true to reality | If someone’s behaviour is natural, they appear to be relaxed and not trying to hide anything | A material or object that is real is natural or functioning, and not artificial or an imitation | An immediate result, action, or reaction happens or is done without any delay |
| Cambridge G, n.d.                                           | Collins L, n.d.                                                       | Collins M, n.d.                                                                              | Collins N, n.d.                                                                                 | Collins O, n.d.                                                               |

From the dictionaries’ definitions of the subordinate terms to spontaneity, it becomes evident that all the terms together correspond to spontaneity because the terms are concerned with the natural and immediate nature of spontaneity and for that reason, they will be used inseparably in this analysis.

Having now accounted for the meaning and objective of spontaneity and its subordinate terms, I will now include statements from various theorists and IPs to demonstrate that spontaneity is in fact a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram that has been recognised empirically and theoretically. In

this respect, Fritz et al. (2017) and Bruhn et al. (2012) argue that spontaneity is a characteristic of authenticity and that is demonstrated in the following statement from Fritz et al. (2017) where they introduce a definition of authenticity from another theorist:

*Bruhn and colleagues define brand authenticity as the perceived genuineness of a brand that is manifested in terms of its stability and consistency (i.e. continuity), uniqueness (i.e. originality), ability to keep its promises (i.e. reliability) and unaffectedness (i.e. naturalness)*

Bruhn et al. (2012) in: Fritz et al. (2017), p. 327, l. 17-20

The statement demonstrates that naturalness (i.e. spontaneity) is a characteristic of authenticity because it enters into a definition of authenticity that is supported by Fritz et al. (2017) and Bruhn et al. (2012). At the same time, IP6 establishes that spontaneity is an empirically recognised characteristic of authenticity on Instagram when she states that authenticity is:

*That you are spontaneous and that you are transparent and that you show the person you would usually be if you were not on the screen on social media (my translation)*

IP6: 00:20-00:30 (app. 7)

She continues to argue that she is authentic by being spontaneous and that comes to show in the following statement from her:

*There is not that much consideration and strategy behind it and I actually also thinks that it characterises being authentic that it is actually just... That I am just posting it. You know, it is because I get a thought and I take out my phone and bum bum and then out (my translation)*

IP6: 22:30-22:55 (app. 7)

IP6 thereby uses her own experiences on Instagram to establish that spontaneity is in fact a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram because it allows Instagram users to see influencers for who they are behind the screen. Namely in an unmanipulated and natural manner that is considered true to life.

The conclusion to finding C is that it has been theoretically and empirically realised that spontaneity and its subordinate terms is a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram that has its onset in naturalness, realness, immediateness, and things that are true to life. This is particularly relevant for Instagram content because it is influencers' portal to their followers and thus their way of showing what goes on behind the screen.

#### 4.1. KEY DRIVERS FOR AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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This section serves to analyse and discuss identified key drivers for authenticity on Instagram, and thereby answer the second sub-question of: “What are the key drivers for authenticity on Instagram?”. As it was also the case for the characteristics of authenticity on Instagram, general as well as specific data on the different key drivers will be included in the analyses to answer the sub-question because the IPs have both contemplated on key drivers for authenticity in general as well as specifically for Instagram from which the data are quite similar. The similarity of the data can be demonstrated by the introduction of IP4 who uses the same terms to describe a key driver in general and specific terms. In this respect, the first statement is general, and the second statement is specific for Instagram.

*It is important that you can trust what the person is saying (my translation)*

IP4: 01:28-01:31 (app. 5)

*You need to be able to trust that what they do and what they say is actually something they mean. That they are not solely saying something just to say something because they have been paid by a product/company to say so and so (my translation)*

IP4: 20:05-20:20 (app. 5)

Therefore, it can be argued that the general and specific data draw such apparent similarities that there is no point in distinguishing between the two. Especially because it can be argued that general data on the different key drivers are just as valuable, and can be applied to all relevant studies. Including this one.

When analysing and discussing the identified key drivers for authenticity on Instagram, I will focus on five identified key drivers that have been derived from the thematic analysis and that will be introduced as finding D, E, F, G, and H. Said key drivers will be analysed for their different abilities to drive authenticity on Instagram at this point in time. This involves an establishment of the justification of the different key drivers and a reason as to why and how the different key drivers drive authenticity on Instagram.

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#### 4.1.1. FINDING D: CREDIBILITY IS A KEY DRIVER FOR AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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Because it has already been recognised that credibility characterises authenticity on Instagram, it is no surprise that credibility is also a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. Credibility will therefore be analysed for its ability to drive authenticity on Instagram. So, while credibility was earlier recognised and analysed as for what it characterises, it will now mostly be analysed as for why and how it drives it. This analysis and discussion of credibility will therefore start off by establishing that credibility is in fact a key driver for authenticity before it will answer the why and how of it.

Before establishing that credibility is a key driver, it is essential to state that credibility is also considered a superior term with the identified subordinate terms of: sincerity, trustworthiness, validity, and ethos attached to it in this analysis. Having said that, Fritz et al. (2017), Bruhn et al. (2012), and Driel and Dumitrica (2020) put forward that the concept of virtuousness and its appertaining concept of genuineness is a key driver for brand authenticity and because virtuousness and genuineness share the same meaning as credibility and its subordinate terms, the two terms will enter into the shared understanding of credibility. Hence, credibility encompasses the following terms with uniform meanings from now on: sincerity, trustworthiness, validity, ethos, virtuousness, and genuineness. From this, there are two main takeaways. Namely that credibility shares the same meaning as virtuousness and genuineness and are uniformed on that ground, and that Fritz et al. (2017), Bruhn et al. (2012), and Driel and Dumitrica (2020) all find credibility to be a key driver for brand authenticity. Because everything can be considered a brand, I argue that their findings are applicable for all studies and thereby also for my study of authenticity in influencer marketing on Instagram. Credibility is, therefore, theoretically recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. When establishing that this is also the case empirically, I turn to IP2, IP3, IP4, IP5, and IP8 who all state that credibility drives authenticity in general as well as specifically on Instagram. This is exemplified by IP3 who specifies what drives authenticity on Instagram in the following statement:

*Because Instagram is closely connected to personal brand, I believe that authenticity to some degree is also about the sender's credibility and expertise (my translation)*

IP3: Q3 (app. 4).

It can thereby be established that credibility is both recognised from the theoretical framework and the empirical data as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and for that reason, it is essential to discover why and how it drives it on Instagram.

If first considering why credibility is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram, IP4 and IP8 argue that credibility is important because you need to be able to trust what someone is saying and showing. In this respect, IP4 is more concerned with what influencers are saying, while IP8 is more concerned with what they are showing. Not the least in advertisement situations, where the IPs want to be sure that they can trust what influencers are saying and showing is true. This comes to show in the following statement by IP4 and IP8:

*You need to be able to trust that what they do and what they say is actually something they mean. That they are not solely saying something just to say something because they have been paid by a product/company to say so and so (my translation)*

IP4: 20:05-20:20 (app. 5)

*Well, for me it is credible to show... To show a genuine picture of how something is or looks. Even so because you know that the thing about manipulating pictures or using filters is very abused (my translation)*

IP8: 11:40-12:13 (app. 9)

Hence, a direct reason why credibility is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram is that people need to be able to trust what they see on Instagram. Especially in advertisement situations where they might experience buying unfavourable products based on false advertisement if the person advertising for it is not credible. While the IPs are very much concerned with practical and direct reasons why credibility is a key driver for authenticity, the theorists included in this master's thesis are more concerned with the indirect reasons as to why that is. In this respect, Driel and Dumitrica (2020) state that it is important to come across as credible because it forms a positive connection between influencer and follower (p. 75). When applied to this study, it implicates that a positive connection

between influencer and follower might lead to higher engagement rates and even purchases. At least, that has been the case for IP7 and IP8 who have engaged with and purchased products from influencers that they feel connected to, and it is thereby a clear reason as to why credibility is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. At the same time, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) argue that people want to represent their authentic selves by making authentic choices because the benefit thereof is a feeling of virtuousness (i.e. credibility) that comes from being true to oneself (p. 846). When applied to this study, it can therefore be inferred that Instagram users might arouse a sense of credibility in themselves when they demand and act on credibility in relation to influencers on Instagram. Credibility is thereby a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because it arouses trust, positive connections, and feelings of credibility for Instagram users.

Having contemplated why credibility is a key driver of authenticity on Instagram, I will now find out how credibility drives it. On that account, I will begin by revisiting a theory that has been introduced in connection with the characterisation of authenticity on Instagram. Namely, the communication triangle by Heidi Hansen (2014) because it can be used to understand how credibility arises and manifests itself on Instagram. As it has already been introduced, the communication triangle put forward that balancing one's desired image, identity and ethos will incite credibility (Heidi Hansen, 2014, p. 48). Hence, it implies that something or someone cannot have incongruences between different parts of its or their self and still be considered credible. This is empirically realised by the interviewed influencers in this study who pride themselves on only saying and doing things that are in accordance with their identity. Especially in advertisement situations, because it has been found that the IPs identify trust as a necessity when influencers advertise for products or services. The interviewed influencers: IP5 and IP6, are thereby purposefully reflecting their identity in advertisements situations to appear authentic. How this manifests itself on Instagram has been exemplified in the following statements:

*Very often if someone, if I have to make a collaboration or if someone comes to me and says, "we want to make a collaboration" and I do not know their products, then we say I think it sounds very interesting. I will need at least two months to test it and then we can decide if we want to do a collaboration or not (my translation)*

IP5: 12:32-12:50 (app. 6)

*About collaborations where you can only say nice things, I do not take those collaborations. Ehm, if it is a contract where it directly states that... Where it is written that you cannot talk negatively about the company, then I say no thank you, or I tell them that they need to delete it because I want to be permitted to do that (my translation)*

IP6: 05:05-05:20 (app. 7)

The interviewed influencers thereby maintain their authenticity by staying credible in terms of advertisement. This manifests itself when they only agree to do collaborations where they can speak freely or when they only enter into collaborations with companies or products they can vouch for. If referring to Heidi Hansen (2014) and her communication triangle, the influencers balance their desired image, identity, and ethos to incite credibility and thereby maintain their authenticity.

As a side note, numerous IPs state that the use of too many hashtags makes influencers appear untrustworthy and unauthentic because it seems manipulative. This has been recognised by IP1, IP3, IP4, and IP8 and manifests itself in the following statement by IP1:

*I cannot trust the company if they are in need of so many hashtags (my translation)*

IP1: 24:26-24:29 (app. 2)

Actually, she continues to argue that influencers should use no more than three hashtags because it impacts the engagement rates otherwise. A minimum of hashtags is, therefore, another way to appear more credible and thus authentic.

The conclusion to finding D is that credibility is theoretically and empirically realised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because it incites trust and personal connections necessary for maintaining influencers' authentic appearance. In this respect, influencers' authentic appearance can be maintained or improved by only agreeing to do credible collaborations while using a minimum of hashtags.

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#### 4.1.2. FINDING E: RELATABILITY IS A KEY DRIVER FOR AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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Relatability has already been recognised as a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram; however, it has in fact been recognised even more so as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because more theorists and IPs recognise relatability as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram than they recognise it as a characteristic. Therefore, it will be analysed and discussed more profoundly in this analytical part of the master's thesis. Mostly as for why and how it drives authenticity on Instagram.

However, before relatability can be analysed and discussed as to why and how it drives it, it needs to be established as a key driver. In this respect, relatability will continue to stand as a superior term that encompasses the subordinate terms of identification and recognition, and it will continue to be considered as such with a few additions. That is as consumer-brand identification and the related concepts of ideal and actual self-congruence have been theoretically identified as key drivers for authenticity and as the meaning of those terms relates to relatability itself. To support the claim, Fritz et al. (2017) describe consumer-brand identification as “the degree to which a consumer views a similarity and connection between him- or herself and the brand” (Rion et al., 2004 in: Fritz et al., 2017, p. 329, l. 6-7), while they also state that:

*Congruence between a brand's values and norms and those of its consumers  
(i.e. cultural fit) is identified as an important driver of brand authenticity*  
Fritz et al., 2017, p. 329, l. 8-9

From this, it can be established that consumer-brand identification is a key driver for authenticity and that it is closely connected to the meaning of relatability because both concepts are concerned with connections between something or someone. For those reasons, consumer-brand identification and ideal and actual self-congruence will be considered subordinate terms to the superior term of relatability, and they will therefore be used inseparably in this analysis. In this respect, ideal and actual self-congruence are to be understood as the fit between a brand's image and a consumer's ideal and actual self-image (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 331) and the concepts are, therefore, relevant for understanding consumers' level of relatability to brands on multiple levels. Hence, in relation to their ideal and actual self-image.

This account of relatability and its subordinate terms testifies to the fact that relatability is theoretically recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram by Fritz et al. (2017). It is in

fact directly stated in the previously included statement from them. However, relatability is also empirically recognised as a key driver because IP1, IP2, IP4, IP5, IP6, and IP8 all refer to relatability when contemplating what drives authenticity on Instagram. This is demonstrated in the following statement by IP4:

*If you can easily identify with the topic, then it will for me seem more authentic than if they are talking about something that has nothing to do with me (my translation)*

IP4: 21:15-21:26 (app. 6)

Hence, relatability has been theoretically and empirically recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and I will therefore now focus on answering why and how it drives it.

If first considering why relatability drives authenticity on Instagram, I will have to include the thoughts of Fritz et al. (2017) who contemplate that the reason why consumer-brand identification (i.e. relatability) is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram is because the fit between brand image and self-image can enhance brand's authenticity (p. 329). Moving on, another reason why relatability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram is that consumers want to feel seen and represented in their everyday lives on Instagram. Said reason is being put forward because IP5 recognises it as such in the following statement:

*Every time you can talk into something relatable, then people are happy because then they feel like seen in some sort of way. So, I like to talk about everyday goofiness. That is a big thing. Just the little fuckups you make continuously throughout the week, when you say something stupid or when you have morning hair and all those things (my translation)*

IP5: 27:48-28:17 (app. 6)

From this statement it is evident that the IP wants to see relatable content on Instagram consisting of everyday events because it makes her feel seen and arguably also represented on the platform. Said statement is thereby evidence of consumers wanting to feel seen and represented in their everyday lives on Instagram being one reason why relatability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. Another reason why relatability is a key driver is that consumers want to gather inspiration from people they can relate to. This reason has been identified in the interviews with IP5 where she states she gets inspired by likeminded people on Instagram (i.e. influencers) in the following statements:

*If I follow someone who has anxiety and I have anxiety, and they have done something on a day where they had really bad anxiety and they have been able to do something, I am like "fuck you are cool" and maybe I can do that next time (my translation)*

IP5: 47:44-47:55 (app. 6)

In this statement, IP5 expresses how influencers she can relate to inspire her to tackle similar challenges in her own life; she does so by including past experiences and this statement demonstrate that relatability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because consumers want to gather inspiration from people they relate to. Moving on to the last identified reason why relatability is a key driver, IP2 suggests that relatability is a key driver because consumers primarily want to buy products from influencers they relate to. This comes to show in the following statement from IP2:

*If you buy something and is happy about it and use it, then I will also buy it and be happy with it and buy it (my translation)*

IP2: 21:25-21:22 (app. 3)

Thus, from the statements included in this argumentative analysis, it can be inferred that relatability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because consumers want to feel seen, represented, and inspired on Instagram, while they also feel more inclined to buy products from relatable influencers.

Having contemplated why relatability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram, I will now find out how relatability drives it. Hence, this section of the analysis can be used to understand how influencers come to be seen as relatable and thereby authentic characters on Instagram. To understand this, I will include the perspective of IP5 because she has succeeded in appearing relatable and authentic on Instagram through her function as an influencer. Through that function, she has realised that influencers are experienced as relatable and thereby authentic when they show both sides of their lives. Hence, the pretty and the not so pretty side. This realisation is empirically supported by the following statement made by IP5:

*I make an effort to show both the pretty and the not so pretty sides. Because that is what I like. It is also such people I follow on Instagram. That is what I find interesting. That is what gives me something. It gives me someone I can see myself in (my translation)*

IP5: 47:25-47:42 (app. 6)

In said statement, IP 5 uses her own experience as an influencer while she also dives into her own preferences as a follower and her arguments can thereby be seen as diversified in the sense that she both assumes the role of an influencer and a follower. Said statement from IP5 supports the realisation that influencers need to show both sides of their lives because it makes them more relatable.

The conclusion to finding E is that relatability is theoretically and empirically realised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because consumers want to feel seen, represented, and inspired on Instagram and that said feelings can be achieved if influencers post content that shows both sides to life.

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#### 4.1.3. FINDING F: SPONTANEITY IS A KEY DRIVER FOR AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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As it was the case for credibility and relatability, spontaneity has both been recognised as a characteristic of authenticity and as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and for that reason, spontaneity will now be analysed for its ability to drive authenticity on Instagram. Hence, this analysis and discussion will focus on why and how spontaneity drives authenticity on Instagram after it has been theoretically and empirically established as a key driver.

In this respect, spontaneity will continue to stand as a superior term with the subordinate terms of: true to life, naturalness, realness, and immediateness attached to it. However, in the theoretical and empirical search for key drivers, several other terms with uniform meanings have occurred and they will therefore also enter into the superior and shared understanding of spontaneity. If first considering the theoretically identified key drivers for authenticity on Instagram that relate to spontaneity, Bruhn et al. (2012) have identified brand originality and brand naturalness as key drivers for authenticity on Instagram, whereof brand originality refers to individuality and innovativeness, and brand naturalness refers to something that is genuine and real (Bruhn et al., 2012, p. 570). I argue that brand originality

and brand naturalness share similar meanings to spontaneity because the terms are concerned with individuality, spontaneity, and realness which correspond to the meaning of spontaneity that is derived as anything that is unmanipulated, natural, and immediate. It should here be argued that Bruhn et al.'s (2012) theory on brand authenticity and the related terms of brand originality and brand naturalness is most applicable because branding theories are universal per se. Moving on to the empirical identification of key drivers, IP1 identifies being in the moment as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and it will therefore constitute another subordinate term to spontaneity due to its similar meanings. Furthermore, IP2 and IP7 identify that realness drives authenticity on Instagram, while IP2 and IP4 state that anything that is calculated and set up is the opposite of authentic. The IPs thereby support the original account of spontaneity and its subordinate terms. For those reasons, spontaneity will be considered a superior term with the subordinate terms of: true to life, naturalness, realness, immediateness, originality, and being in the moment attached to it from now on.

This account of spontaneity and its subordinate terms will be used to make a case for spontaneity being a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because all the theoretical and empirical identifications included in said account stand as arguments for that. That is as Bruhn et al. (2012) as well as IP1, IP2, IP4, IP5, IP6, and IP7 all recognise spontaneity as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram from one of its subordinate terms. To support the notion, I will include statements from relevant IPs. Statements from theorists have already been introduced to support arguments made for any subordinate terms and it is, therefore, sufficient to merely state that those statements demonstrate that spontaneity is theoretically recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. When moving on to the statements from relevant IPs, the following statements support any arguments made for spontaneity and its subordinate terms and they should, therefore, be seen as evidence of spontaneity being empirically recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram:

*I believe that you are authentic when you are in the moment (my translation)*

IP1: 01:20-01:23 (app. 2)

*I think it is the dichotomy here. Authentic – Calculated (my translation)*

IP2: 14:30-14:39 (app. 3)

These statements recognise the qualities of being in the moment and uncalculated (i.e. unmanipulated) as key drivers for authenticity on Instagram and it thereby demonstrates that spontaneity is recognised empirically as a key driver for authenticity from its subordinate terms.

Having now accounted for spontaneity and its subordinate terms and then used said account to establish that spontaneity is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram, I will now focus on why and how it drives it.

If first considering why spontaneity drives authenticity on Instagram, IP5 argues that spontaneity drives authenticity because spontaneous (i.e. natural and immediate) content makes a person appear to be a complete human being. At the same time, IP4 supports the notion by arguing that the opposite, namely that everything is set up and planned, appears to be too good to be true. Said arguments will therefore be introduced in this analysis for supportive purposes:

*I think I feel like the more of yourself you show, the more you will appear as a complete human being, and I think there is something authentic in that (my translation)*

IP5: 22:13-22:22 (app. 6)

*If it is to set up, I think to myself that it simply cannot be true. There is something wrong (my translation)*

IP4: 13:02-13:06 (app. 5)

From the arguments made and the appertaining supporting statements, it can be established that spontaneity is empirically recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because influencers seem more authentic when they appear to be complete and realistic human beings. The theorists of Bruhn et al. (2012) have merely stated that spontaneity (i.e. brand originality and brand naturalness) is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram, as they do not contemplate why that is. Hence, the analysis of why spontaneity is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram has therefore solely been empirically realised.

Having analysed and discussed why spontaneity is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram, I will now find out how spontaneity drives it. In this respect, I will introduce empirically realised ways in which spontaneity drives authenticity on Instagram and those empirical ways will not be accompanied by ways identified by Bruhn et al. (2012) because they have not contemplated how spontaneity drives authenticity on Instagram either. Instead, I will include the thoughts of Chen (2021) and Hummel (2020) who in their description of the authentic trend argue that Instagram content should be casual and thereby imperfect, while it should only be edited in a naturalistic way (Chen, 2021; Hummel, 2020). Generating imperfect and casual content is, therefore, a theoretically recognised way of driving

authenticity on Instagram. Moving on, it has been empirically realised by IP4, IP5, and IP6 that influencers can drive spontaneity and thereby authenticity by doing two things: post spontaneous and natural content and do not use filters. That is as IP4 and IP6 argue that influencers can appear authentic through spontaneous and natural posting of content that encompasses features such as morning hair. The significance being that such spontaneous and natural content should be posted in real-time with no manipulation of it. Said argument is made by IP4 who expresses her expert opinion and IP6 who uses her own experiences as an authentic influencer to answer how spontaneity drives authenticity on Instagram. The arguments are made in the following statements, and they stand to support the preliminary analysis of how spontaneity drives authenticity on Instagram:

*Sometimes you could take a picture, post a picture where everything is not set up. You know just completely like "I am just tired and have morning hair today"- kind of picture (my translation)*

IP4: 15:48-16:00 (app. 5)

*I do not delete what I record. It just gets put out there (my translation)*

IP6: 09:10-09:12 (app. 7)

*There is not that much consideration and strategy behind it, and I actually also think that it characterises being authentic that it is actually just... That I am just posting it. You know, it is because I get a thought and I take out my phone and bum bum and then out (my translation)*

IP6: 22:30- 22:55 (app. 8)

These statements demonstrate that spontaneity drives authenticity on Instagram in the way that influencers can appear more authentic by posting spontaneous and natural content in real-time. Related to that, IP6 argues that the choice to not use filters is a good way to appear spontaneous and authentic. She makes such arguments in the following two statements where she promotes naturalness and has feelings of contempt towards people who also promote naturalness and spontaneity while using filters:

*I do not use filters. I have a principle about that I do not do that. Never (my translation)*

IP6: 07:40-07:50 (app. 7)

*I am so challenged by those people that wake up in the morning and thinks...  
They write "I can also look like sh\*t" and then there is a filter on it (my  
translation)*

IP6: 08:05-08:16 (app. 7)

The statements demonstrate that the choice to not use filters and thereby appearing more natural (i.e. spontaneous) is also a way to drive authenticity on Instagram.

The conclusion to finding F is that spontaneity is theoretically and empirically realised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because spontaneity makes people seem like complete and realistic human beings. Furthermore, it has been established that spontaneity can drive authenticity through posts with spontaneous and natural content with no use of filters.

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#### 4.1.4. FINDING G: VULNERABILITY IS A KEY DRIVER FOR AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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Unlike the former key drivers for authenticity, vulnerability has not been identified as a characteristic. Hence, it will only be analysed and discussed as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. It can be questioned why vulnerability has not been identified as a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram as the former key drivers, and while it has not been theoretically or empirically answered per se, I still want to contemplate the reason why.

In this respect, I want to include definitions of the terms for comparative purposes. ‘Characteristic’ is defined as “a typical or noticeable quality of someone or something” (Cambridge H, n.d), and ‘driver’ is defined as “something that makes other things progress, develop or grow stronger” (Cambridge I, n.d). Characteristics thereby relate to qualities that are already within something, while drivers relate to qualities that can incite a change. Drivers can thus be seen as qualities that are imposed on something rather than qualities of something. Said claim is supported by the following definition where the related phenomenon of ‘drive’ is defined as “to force someone or something to go somewhere or do something” (Cambridge J, n.d.). Since vulnerability is recognised as a key driver and not a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram, it seems as if vulnerability is a quality that is being imposed to incite authenticity on Instagram rather than a quality within authenticity itself.

However, this does not minimise the importance of vulnerability because it has in fact been recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram from the empirical data. Still, it has only been recognised as a key driver empirically and vulnerability might therefore be a new key driver for authenticity on Instagram. That is as vulnerability has not been recognised as a key driver in the included theories on key drivers that have been published in the time span of 2009 to 2020 and it thereby seems as if vulnerability is a key driver that has emerged more recently. Perhaps in connection with the onset of a new trend. Related to that, it should be mentioned that Chen (2021) and Hummel's (2020) proposed ways to appear more authentic do not constitute a good enough theoretical foundation to establish it as a theoretically recognised key driver because Chen (2021) and Hummel (2020) have not studied key drivers for authenticity and because they are not credible sources per se. After having contemplated why vulnerability is only recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and why it is only empirically recognised as so, I will now account for the meaning of vulnerability and thereby establish it as a key driver of authenticity on Instagram before I will analyse and discuss why and how it drives it.

The meaning of vulnerability will be accounted for in this section of the master's thesis because it has not already been introduced in connection with the previous analysis of characteristics. Like the former key drivers. In this respect, vulnerability is defined as "willingness to show emotion or to allow one's weaknesses to be seen or known; willingness to risk being emotionally hurt" (Dictionary.com, n.d.), and all statements that correspond to that definition will therefore fall under the superior term of vulnerability. In an ideal world, I would list the meanings of the different terms by which the IPs recognise vulnerability as because it has not already been done relative to the analysis of characteristics of authenticity on Instagram. However, the IPs have been fond of using metaphors and figures of speeches for this key driver and it ultimately complicates matters because such sayings are not clearly defined or outlined. Vulnerability will therefore be considered a superior term that encompasses metaphors and figures of speeches with uniform meanings. For instance, the metaphors: "that something is not a bed of roses" and "to break the picture perfectness". But the different metaphors or figures of speeches will not be listed and defined because it does not provide the intended clarity.

Instead, I will start by establishing that vulnerability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram by including relevant statements from the empirical data. In this respect, IP7 recognises vulnerability as a key driver when arguing that it is important to open up and talk about hard things and that it is wrong to only talk about the positive things in the following statements:

*I think it is wrong that you only talk about what you think is positive. That you never talk about what is negative. I do not think that is authentic. So, I think you owe it to the ones who are watching to maintain this transparency, so people actually know what is going on. So, you do not just become a monotonous advertising pillar (my translation)*

IP6: 01:22-01:43 (app. 7)

Said statements thereby demonstrate that vulnerability is in fact recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and the statements are further supported by IP5 and IP8 who too recognise vulnerability as a key driver.

Moving on to why vulnerability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram, it is most significant to state that there appears to be an empirical overlap between the reason why relatability and vulnerability are considered key drivers. That has become evident from the IPs statements where showing both sides to your life has been identified as a reason why relatability as well as vulnerability drives authenticity on Instagram. To demonstrate the overlap, I will include similar statements that have been made about relatability and vulnerability. In this respect, the first statement by IP5 refers to relatability while the proximate statement by IP7 refers to vulnerability:

*I make an effort to show both the pretty and the not so pretty sides. Because that is what I like. It is also such people I follow on Instagram. That is what I find interesting. That is what gives me something. It gives me someone I can see myself in (my translation)*

IP5: 47:25-47:42 (app. 6)

*That you talk about things, and you do not only show the part that is perfect and good but also the part that is the hard one (my translation)*

IP7: 04:40-04:52 (app. 8)

These statements clearly demonstrate that there is an overlap between the reasons why relatability and vulnerability drive authenticity on Instagram and for that reason, necessary iterations might occur.

When considering why vulnerability drives authenticity on Instagram, it has obviously already been established that vulnerability drives authenticity because it is important to show the hard side of life. This is agreed upon by IP6, IP7, and IP8 and manifests itself when IP6 states it is important:

*That it does not just become a bed of roses all the time. Because none of us lives like that (my translation)*

IP6: 02:30-02:39 (app. 7)

From the statements by IP6 and IP7, it can thereby be established that the reason why vulnerability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram is that it is necessary to be vulnerable and thus show the hard side of life.

After having considered why vulnerability drives authenticity on Instagram, it is now time to consider how it drives it. And if you believe the empirical data in this master's thesis, it is rather simple. Vulnerability drives authenticity on Instagram through vulnerable content that shows the other side to life. Hence, the harder side of life. Influencers can thereby appear vulnerable and authentic by posting vulnerable content. This has been empirically realised by IP6 who uses her own experiences as an influencer to suggest authentic topics to talk about in the following statement:

*Vulnerable things. Completely ordinary everyday life ugh-things. What you think can be hard in your relations. What you think is difficult about becoming a grown up and getting your economy together and talking about things you do not know anything about. But you know, I am also just a fan of... Not getting completely under their skin but that... That what I see on other (profiles) on social media is something I myself can recognise (...) (my translation)*

IP6: 02:54- 03:30 (app. 7)

The statement thereby supports the notion that influencers can appear vulnerable and authentic if they talk about vulnerable things.

The conclusion to finding G is that vulnerability is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because it is necessary for influencers to show the hard side of life by posting vulnerable content.

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#### 4.1.5. FINDING H: CONSISTENCY IS A KEY DRIVER FOR AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM

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As it was also the case for vulnerability, consistency has not been identified as a characteristic of authenticity on Instagram and it will therefore only be analysed and discussed for its role as a key driver. From arguments made about the differences between a characteristic and a driver in the previous analysis, one can contemplate that consistency has only been recognised as a key driver because it seems to be a quality that is imposed to incite authenticity on Instagram rather than a quality within authenticity itself. Hence, consistency is not a characteristic of authenticity, but it is something that can drive and incite it.

Having argued that, I will now account for the meaning of consistency and thereby establish it as a key driver by including relevant theories and empirical data before demonstrating why and how consistency drives authenticity on Instagram. The meaning of consistency has not been accounted for prior to this analysis because it has not been identified nor analysed as a characteristic of authenticity like the first three key drivers. A profound account of said meaning will therefore be included in the analysis much similar to the ones introduced in the analyses of characteristics of authenticity on Instagram. Consistency is in this respect defined as “the quality of always behaving or performing in a similar way, or of always happening in a similar way” (Cambridge K, n.d.) and it is, therefore, to be understood as anything that performs in the same way over time. The definition is added to by Karakoç, (2016) who studies brand consistency in relation to brand authenticity and understands brand consistency as “the extent to which consumers are counting on a brand” (p. 7, l. 38). Consistency is in this context something that performs in the same way to such a degree that consumers can count on it. Any terms or phrases that answer to said description will therefore enter into the shared understanding of consistency as a subordinate term. In this respect, Bruhn et al. (2012), Karakoç, (2016) and Fritz et al. (2017) identify brand consistency itself, brand continuity, and brand reliability as key drivers for authenticity on Instagram, and they will therefore be used inseparably in the analysis because of their similar meanings that will be presented in a table later. The IPs are on the other hand mostly using metaphors and figures of speeches to establish consistency as a key driver

of authenticity and because they are numerous and not as clearly defined and outlined, they will not enter into that same table. Those metaphors and figures of speeches will therefore ultimately enter into the shared understanding of consistency without being defined and outlined in the table. Examples of said metaphors and figures of speeches are: “not selling out”, “staying your ground” and “having a common thread”. Consistency is thereby a superior term that encompasses the terms and constructs of: brand consistency itself, brand continuity, and reliability as well as numerous undefined metaphors and figures of speeches with uniform meanings. The defined and described terms and constructs figure in the table below where their uniform meanings and links manifest themselves:

| Consistency                                                                                                                            | Continuity                                                                                                                               | Reliability                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The quality of always behaving or performing in a similar way, or of always happening in a similar way</p> <p>Cambridge K, n.d.</p> | <p>Continuity is the fact that something continues to happen or exist, with no great changes or interruptions</p> <p>Collins P, n.d.</p> | <p>People or things that are reliable can be trusted to work well or to behave in the way that you want them to</p> <p>Collins F, n.d.</p> |

Having now accounted for the meaning of consistency from relevant dictionaries and theories, I will use said account to establish that consistency is in fact a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. In this respect, Bruhn et al. (2012), Karakoç, (2016) and Hansen (2016) has recognised consistency as a key driver, and the included statements testify to that. Consistency has therefore already been theoretically established as a key driver. At the same time, it has been introduced that the IPs also recognise consistency as a key driver but there have been no statements to support it. Relevant statements will therefore now be introduced to support the claim and establish consistency as a key driver from the empirical data as well. In this respect, IP1, IP3, IP5, IP6, and IP8 recognise consistency as a key driver and this comes to show in the following statements and anecdotes where IP1 and IP3 emphasise the value of staying your ground, keeping a common thread, and thence remaining consistent:

*You are authentic when you stand your ground, no matter the budget (my translation)*

IP1: 11:26-11:30 (app. 2)

*According to brand theories, it is said that brand legacy, brand clarity and the common thread drives authenticity (my translation)*

IP3: Q3 (app. 4).

*We had a case with a very famous pair of twins on Instagram, Danish girls I perhaps you may know of, there were contacted by Cucci to make commercial for them on Instagram but where it was a part of the campaign that you should take a selfie. And they refused to do that. Because it did not match their profile. They had never posted a selfie. They do not think that is cool in the way that they see coolness, so they chose to say no to possible one of the biggest customers and I think that is very very authentic. I think it is so cool and I think it is so original and i think it is very impressive. It is one of the coolest things I have seen on Instagram for a long time (my translation)*

IP1: 09:30-10:09 (app. 2)

The statements demonstrate that consistency is a key driver that has been empirically recognised and it can therefore now be established as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram. Thus, I will now find out why and how consistency drives authenticity on Instagram.

If first considering why consistency is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram, I will turn to IP5 who contemplates that consistency is necessary for her line of work because her followers count on her to post certain content and to enter into certain collaborations and this comes to show in the following statements:

*They have some expectations for what they ought to see with me (my translation)*

IP5: 28:44-28:48 (app. 6)

*For me, it means a lot that I do not agree to do collaborations that I cannot vouch for, that I do not rave about products that I do not think are great, that I do not agree to do collaborations that do not fit in, because I want to hold on to the universe I have created (my translation)*

IP5: 06:58-07:25 (app. 6)

From these statements, she introduces that a natural fit between her and the products she endorses is necessary because her followers have certain expectations for her and because she wants to be true to her universe and thereby remain consistent. At the same time, one of the interviewed Instagram users supports the notion when arguing that it does not make sense to deviate from your universe in general or in collaborations in the following statement:

*It does not make a lot of sense for someone who has never talked about sustainability to sit and advertise for plant-based beverages. Then you are like "why?" (my translation)*

IP8: 19:10-19: 27 (app. 9)

The realisations of the IPs are further supported in the theoretical framework because Heidi Hansen (2016) uses the match-up hypothesis to argue that a natural fit between a celebrity and the product that is being endorsed makes for more credible and effective branding and it has in the literature review been argued that the same goes for influencer marketing. Thus, it can be inferred from the match-up hypothesis that it is in fact important to enter into natural collaborations and it is, therefore, a supporting argument for the interviewed influencers and Instagram users who emphasise it. From the theoretical and empirical arguments made, it can thus be inferred that influencers should enter into natural collaborations because it makes for more credible and effective branding while it also allows them to maintain their universe. On a more general note, Karakoç, (2016) states that “consistent brands are perceived more authentic because authentic brands continuously fulfil their brand promise” (p. 8, l. 1-2). Hence, he argues that consistency incites trust and authenticity through that. The key drivers of consistency and credibility can therefore be linked to one another for their similar stimulus of trust. From this, consistency is a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because a natural fit between influencers and the endorsed products is a way to meet consumers’ expectations to consistent content and sensible collaborations, which in turn incites trust and makes for more effective branding.

Having established consistency as a key driver and contemplated why it drives it, I will now consider how consistency drives it on Instagram, and thus how influencers can obtain a consistent brand. In this respect, I will take my point of departure in the match-up hypothesis because the hypothesis suggests how you can remain consistent and thence authentic, and that is ultimately to enter into natural collaborations. Said notion is supported by the empirical data where an authentic influencer unfolds one of the secrets to her authentic appearance. Namely, that she does not enter into unnatural

collaborations and that comes to show in the following statements, where one of the statements have also been introduced in relation to answering why influencers must remain consistent:

*For me, it means a lot that I do not agree to do collaborations that I cannot vouch for, that I do not rave about products that I do not think is great, that I do not agree to do collaborations that do not fit in, because i want to hold on to the universe I have created (my translation)*

IP5: 06:58-07:25 (app. 6)

*For me, it is very much something that goes on behind the curtain if I say no to a collaboration because I do not think it is a good match (my translation)*

IP5: 09:58-10:05 (app. 6)

Along those same lines, IP6 argues that another way to maintain your consistency is to not follow trends heedlessly, and in connection to collaborations this entails that you should not base your collaborations on trends but rather on your own core values. Said notion ultimately comes to show in the following statement:

*(...) Instead of just following everything that is trending right now and you know, doing things all the time to gain followers (my translation)*

IP6: 19:14-19:26 (app. 7)

Having introduced that influencers can obtain a consistent brand through natural collaborations that correspond to influencers' own values, I will turn to Bruhn et al. (2012) who argue that you can obtain a consistent brand by determining and implementing key facts about the brand and upholding traditions and values, and that comes to show in the following statement by them:

*In order to positively influence a brand's continuity and thus its authenticity, it seems necessary to determine key facts (historically as well as over time) about the brand, such as its foundation and its circumstances, the features upholding its traditions, its anniversary, the values based on its tradition, and to implement these in the marketing mix*

Bruhn et al: P. 573, l. 4-9

In this respect, Bruhn et al. (2012) argue that said implementation can manifest itself in pledges, innovations, and stories that symbolise the values and heritage of a brand (p. 573). Following the theorists' arguments, influencers can thereby obtain a more consistent brand by determining and implementing essential facts, traditions, and values about their personal brand by use of pledges, innovations, or stories that symbolise just that.

The statements from the theorists and the IPs thus demonstrate that influencers can obtain a consistent brand by using their collaborations, stories, et cetera to implement facts, traditions, and values about their personal brand. Implying that influencers should focus on natural brand matches instead of following trends.

The conclusion to finding H is that consistency is theoretically and empirically realised a key driver for authenticity on Instagram because consumers have certain expectations to influencers that need to be met through the promotion of natural collaborations and content from which essential values and traditions are implemented.

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#### 4.2. IMPACT OF KEY DRIVERS ON INSTAGRAM

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After having identified and analysed numerous key drivers for authenticity on Instagram in the previous analyses, this section sets out to analyse and discuss just how impactful said key drivers are on Instagram in comparison to one another. It will thence lead me to answer the third sub-question of: "How impactful are said key drivers on Instagram?". The impact of the different key drivers will be analysed and discussed in a concerted manner, and the analysis will therefore assume a different form than the other analyses. Namely the analysis of characteristics of authenticity on Instagram and the analysis of key drivers for authenticity on Instagram. Hence, it entails that this analysis will not be constituted of findings. It will instead be a unified analysis and discussion of the various key drivers' impact on authenticity which will lead to the constitution of a bubble chart. The bubble chart will visualise the level of recognition and impact the individual key drivers have, and it will thus be a valuable instrument for understanding how influencers can appear authentic on Instagram. However, the bubble chart will be based on a profound analysis and discussion of the various key drivers' impact on authenticity and said analysis and discussion, therefore, have to be unfolded now.

Credibility is the first recognised key driver for authenticity on Instagram, and it is arguably also the most impactful one. That is as credibility has been recognised as a key driver across the various theorists of Fritz et al. (2017), Bruhn et al. (2012), and Driel and Dumitrica (2020), and across the five IPs of IP2, IP3, IP4, IP5, and IP8. Credibility is therefore much recognised as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram from the theoretical framework and the empirical data given how many theorists and IPs recognise it as so. What's more is that there are most statements for drivers (i.e. 15) that relate to credibility, while IP2, IP3, and IP4 also argue that credibility is the most impactful key driver for authenticity on Instagram when asked upon it. This manifests itself in the following statements which demonstrate that credibility (and its other subordinate terms such as trustworthiness) is in fact recognised as an impactful key driver for authenticity from the empirical data:

*Credibility is very high on my list when we talk about authenticity (my translation)*

IP4: 01:06-01:12 (app. 5)

*I deem that trustworthiness is also an important factor, and this should therefore be emphasised nearly as much as expertise and passion (my translation)*

IP3: Q4, 1. 4-5 (app. 4)

From the high quantity of theorists and IPs that recognise credibility as a key driver, and the IPs emphasis on said key driver being the most impactful, it can thus be established that credibility is the most impactful key driver for authenticity on Instagram. On that note, it has been argued by IP3 that authenticity and credibility are two overlapping terms when considering authenticity on Instagram, and said argument might insinuate that credibility is a synonym to authenticity rather than a key driver of it. However, she also argues that the two terms are not identical which serves as a counterargument to that. At the same time, I find it curious that IP1, IP6, and IP7 should not recognise credibility as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram if the two were truly synonymous. Credibility is, therefore, merely considered an impactful key driver on that ground.

Relatability is the second recognised key driver for authenticity on Instagram, and it is deemed a somewhat impactful key driver. That is as relatability has been widely recognised as a key driver by Fritz et al. (2017), Beverland and Farrelly (2010), Kate (2004) and Leigh, Peters, and Shelton (2006)

as well as by IP2, IP4, IP5, IP6, and IP8. In fact, Fritz et al. (2017), Beverland and Farrelly (2010), Kate (2004), and Leigh et al. (2006) emphasise the importance of this exact key driver in the following statement, which testifies to the fact that relatability is considered a rather impactful key driver from a theoretical stance:

*In this context, congruence between a brand's values and norms and those of its consumers (i.e. cultural fit) is identified as an important driver of brand authenticity*

Beverland and Farelly, 2010; Kates, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006 in: Fritz et al., 2017

However, none of the IPs emphasise relatability as one of the most impactful key drivers for authenticity on Instagram and the statements about relatability do not insinuate that relatability should be particularly impactful either. Along those same lines, relatability has the fewest statements for drivers (i.e. 12) in the empirical data, and that stands as another argument for why relatability is not that impactful even though it has been widely recognised as a key driver by numerous theorists and IPs. Hence, relatability is important in the sense that it is recognised as a key driver by many, but it is not deemed one of the most impactful because the IPs do not emphasise it at all when they contemplate what the most impactful key drivers are.

Spontaneity is the third recognised key driver for authenticity on Instagram, and it is deemed a rather impactful one. In this respect, it is only deemed an impactful key driver because of the magnitude in which the IPs refer to it and emphasise it as one of the most impactful key drivers on Instagram. That is because spontaneity has not been recognised as an impactful key driver from the theoretical framework because only Bruhn et al. (2012) recognise it as such. However, since the minimal theoretical recognition can be a result of numerous things; here among that spontaneity might be a key driver that has emerged more recently, the empirical recognition is valued highest. On that note, the seven interviewees of IP1, IP2, IP4, IP5, IP6, IP7, and IP8 recognise spontaneity as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram and one IP even state that the most important thing relative to authenticity is natural appearance and to not use filters in the following statement:

*I really think it is the thing about quitting filters (my translation)*

IP6: 24:03-24:08 (app. 7)

From this, it has been demonstrated that some of the IPs place the most emphasis on spontaneity in terms of impactfulness and that therefore supports the notion that spontaneity is rather impactful. At

the same time, spontaneity is one of the key drivers with the most statements for drivers (i.e. 15) related to it, and that acts as another argument that supports the high impact spontaneity has on authenticity on Instagram. Spontaneity is therefore considered one of the more impactful key drivers based on the high levels of empirical recognition and emphasis.

Vulnerability is the fourth recognised key driver for authenticity on Instagram, and it is deemed the least impactful one. However, being least impactful is not the same as being unimpactful; especially because all key drivers have been selected for their significance and impactfulness, and I will therefore now argue what makes it impactful and why it is less impactful than the other key drivers for authenticity on Instagram. Vulnerability is a key driver that has not been recognised in any of the included theories and it does, therefore, not have any theoretical support. That in itself is not enough to deem it less impactful because there might be numerous reasons as to why that is. However, vulnerability has also been recognised by the least number of IPs (i.e. 4) in the fewest number of statements for drivers (i.e. 12), and it is therefore not widely recognised as a key driver from empirical data either. However, the IPs that do recognise it as a key driver argue that it is very impactful, and IP7 and IP8 even emphasise it as the most impactful key driver for authenticity, when asked upon it. This manifests itself in the following statements, where IP7 and IP8 contemplate what the most important thing is for them relative to authenticity:

*I would say that the thing about showing more aspects of your life. Both the good and the bad things is probably the things that I attach the most importance to (my translation)*

IP7: 05:47-05:57 (app. 8)

*That they are so open about something that is vulnerable (my translation)*

IP8: 08:45-08:52 (app. 9)

Vulnerability is therefore the least impactful key driver for authenticity on Instagram because it has been recognised as so by the fewest number of theorists and IPs. However, the IPs that do recognise it as a key driver emphasise it as an impactful key driver for authenticity on Instagram and its impact is, therefore, still significant.

Consistency is the fifth and final recognised key driver for authenticity on Instagram, and it is deemed a very impactful key driver. That is as consistency is widely recognised as a key driver by Bruhn et al. (2012), Karakoç, (2016), and Hansen (2016) as well as the six interviewees of IP1, IP3, IP5, IP6,

IP7, and IP8. What's more, is that both theorists and IPs recognise it as one of the most impactful key drivers; if not the most impactful one, and that many statements for drivers from the empirical data (i.e. 14) relate to it. In this respect, Karakoç, (2016) finds that "brand consistency has significant positive effect on PBA" (p. 10, l. 21); PBA being short for perceived brand authenticity, and the statement by Karakoç, (2016) thus bears witness to consistency being a key driver that is particularly impactful. Said notion is further supported from the empirical data where IP1 emphasises consistency as the most impactful key driver and IP3 emphasises it as one of the more important key drivers. This comes to show in the following statements where they contemplate what the most important things are for them relative to authenticity:

*The thing about that you are true to what you have done from the beginning.*

*That you do not change (my translation)*

IP1: 01:50-01:55 (app. 2)

*Besides that, you can mention other factors that also drive authenticity, like maintaining a common thread (...) (my translation)*

IP3: Q4, l. 2-3 (app. 4)

Consistency is therefore a very impactful key driver for authenticity on Instagram because many theorists and IPs emphasise it as such. One even emphasises it as the most impactful one. However, consistency is not considered to be as impactful as credibility because the included theorists and IPs do not emphasise the impact consistency has on authenticity to the same degree as credibility. To exemplify the claim; three IPs deem credibility one of the most impactful key drivers, while two IPs deem consistency one of the most impactful key drivers.

Having now analysed and discussed the impact of all the recognised key drivers for authenticity on Instagram, I will now insert the findings of said analysis and discussion in a bubble chart that makes the findings more comprehensible. In this respect, the bubble chart is comprised of all the recognised key drivers and is positioned in a quadrant that on the X-axis demonstrates how many IPs recognise it as a key driver, and on the Y-axis demonstrates how many theorists recognise it as a key driver. At the same time, the magnitude of the different bubbles demonstrates the number of statements that relate to each key driver and the assessed impact of those statements. The assessed impact is in this respect deemed the most valued data, and it, therefore, controls the magnitude of the bubbles for the most part. Hence, the bubbles with the most magnitude are the ones that have been emphasised as the most impactful ones in most statements. This implies that the bubbles with the most magnitude that is

placed towards the upper right corner of the quadrant are the most recognised and impactful key drivers for authenticity on Instagram.

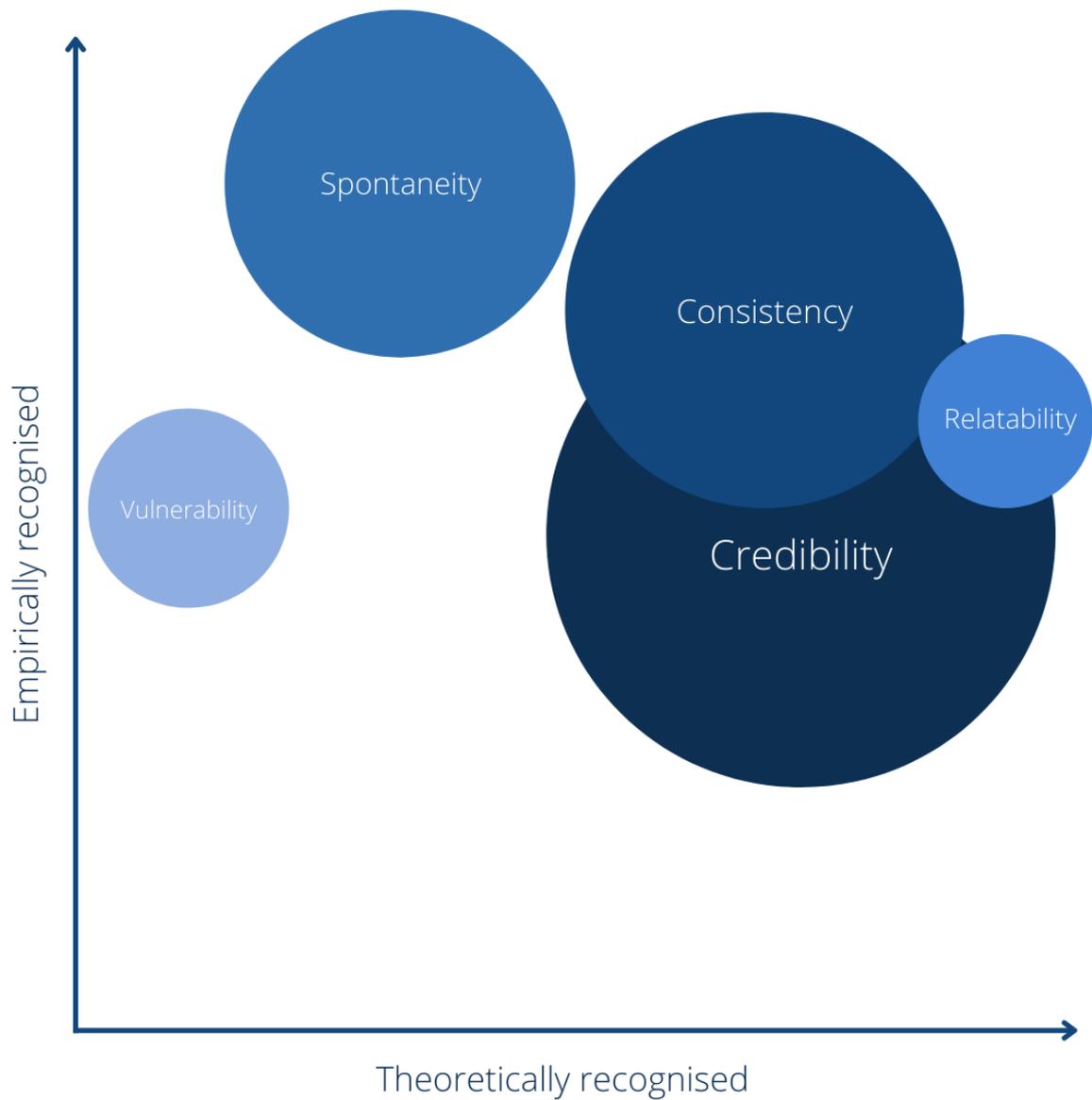


Figure 7: Illustration of the impactfulness of the recognised key drivers by me.

From the bubble chart that summarises the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that credibility is without a doubt the most impactful key driver for authenticity on Instagram because of its wide theoretical and empirical recognition and the great emphasis that is put on its impact. The same goes for consistency and it is therefore also considered a very impactful key driver. However, the number of IPs that put emphasis on its impact is fewer and it is thus not considered to be an as impactful key driver as credibility. Furthermore, spontaneity is also deemed a rather important key driver for its wide empirical recognition from which great emphasis is put on its impact by numerous IPs even though it has not received wide theoretical recognition. On that note, relatability thence follows as another key driver that has received wide theoretical and empirical recognition; but because no emphasis is put on the impact of the driver, it has been deemed somewhat impactful. Hence, the magnitude of the bubble. At last, vulnerability has been deemed the least impactful key driver for its minimal theoretical and empirical recognition even though great emphasis is put on its impact by the few IPs that do recognise vulnerability as a key driver for authenticity on Instagram.

## 5. CONCLUSION

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The purpose of this master's thesis has been to understand how influencers can appear more authentic on Instagram because influencer marketing is considered an emerging discipline from which authentic demands arise. To gain such an understanding and thus answer my research question, I have studied what characterises authenticity on Instagram, what the key drivers for authenticity are on Instagram, and how impactful said key drivers are on Instagram.

In this respect, it has been concluded that credibility, relatability, and spontaneity are characteristics of authenticity on Instagram because numerous theorists and IPs characterise authenticity in terms of naturalness, realness, immediateness as well as trusting, and relating to others. Credibility, relatability, and spontaneity have also received theoretical and empirical recognition as key drivers for authenticity on Instagram because those key drivers can make influencers seem like more complete and realistic human beings, which in turn makes consumers feel seen and represented while it also incites trust and personal connections. Credibility, relatability, and spontaneity are thus both qualities within authenticity itself and qualities that can drive and incite authenticity on Instagram. The remaining key drivers of vulnerability and consistency have not been recognised as characteristics and are therefore just considered as key drivers. Hence, as qualities that can incite and drive authenticity on Instagram. In this respect, vulnerability and consistency have been recognised as key drivers because it makes influencers seem more vulnerable and reliable, which in turn makes consumers feel like the influencers are vulnerable, realistic, and consistent.

The impact of the different key drivers has been determined based on the number of theorists and IPs that recognise them as drivers and based on how many statements relate to each key driver and how much emphasis that is put on the different key drivers in those statements. In light of that, credibility is considered the most impactful key driver because of its wide theoretical and empirical recognition and the emphasis that is put on its impact. Consistency is considered another impactful key driver for those same reasons, but it is considered less impactful than credibility because its impact is not equally emphasised. Spontaneity thence follows as another rather impactful key driver because of its wide empirical recognition and the emphasis that is put on its impact even though it has not received great theoretical recognition. Following that is relatability that has received wide theoretical and empirical recognition but has had no emphasis put on its impact, and it is therefore not considered that impactful. Vulnerability is at last considered the least impactful key driver because of its missing

theoretical recognition and its minimum empirical recognition. However, its impact is still significant because some IPs emphasise its impact.

The answer to the research question: “How can influencers appear authentic on Instagram?” is thus that influencers can appear authentic on Instagram by tapping into the recognised key drivers of credibility, relatability, spontaneity, vulnerability, and consistency, whereof credibility ought to incite the highest levels of authenticity on Instagram. On that note, it should be mentioned that the findings of this master’s thesis might be evidence of tendencies and contemporary trends on Instagram and the findings could therefore vary in future times.

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## 6. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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After having researched and concluded how influencers can appear authentic on Instagram in this master’s thesis, I will now introduce some of the implications and recommendations that have emerged from it. On that account, I will first introduce the managerial implications and recommendations before I will introduce the research implications and recommendations for future research.

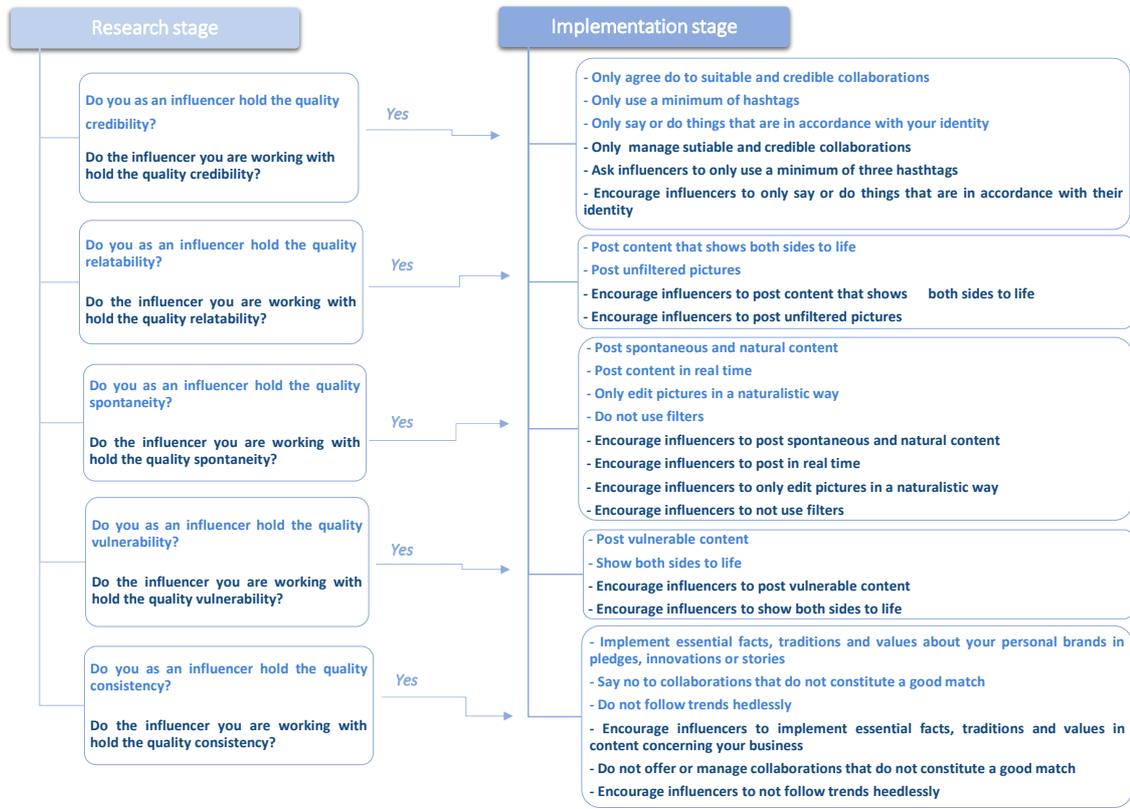
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### 6.1. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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From the conducted research and the related findings, I will now introduce some managerial implications and recommendations that make the research more applicable for influencers and businesses. Said introduction is deemed necessary because the findings in this master’s thesis are not pragmatic and implementable for influencers and businesses per se; even though the findings do contribute to a greater understanding of authenticity in influencer marketing on Instagram. On that note, I will now introduce a model that demonstrates how influencers and businesses can implement the findings of this master’s thesis in their business plan before I will account for its different stages and make recommendations:

- For influencers
- For businesses who use influencers



Model 1: Implementation model for authentic drivers by me (app. 10).

As the model demonstrates, influencers and businesses have to enter into two stages to appear authentic on Instagram or to make others appear authentic on Instagram. The first stage is named the research stage and consists of a bunch of questions influencers and businesses must answer before moving onto the implementation stage. In this respect, it is only when influencers and businesses answer “yes” that they can move onto the implementation stage. The research stage has the purpose of screening whether the qualities of an influencer correspond to one or more of the recognised key drivers for authenticity on Instagram. The correspondence between the qualities of an influencer and the drivers has been proven necessary because the master’s thesis finds it important that influencers remain consistent on Instagram. Any actions or drivers that work against the qualities of an influencer will therefore ultimately be counterproductive. Thus, the research stage ensures the foundation for implementing one or more of the recognised key drivers for authenticity on Instagram.

The second stage is named the implementation stage and consists of numerous recommendations on how to appear authentic on Instagram for each driver. The recommendations are taken straight out of

the various analyses and are assembled in a way that makes it easier for influencers and businesses to understand and implement.

The model is therefore a process-oriented and pragmatic one that originates from the findings of the master's thesis and supports influencers and businesses in their implementation of a more authentic appearance through relevant questions and useful recommendations. It is thus recommended that influencers and businesses make use of this model instead of the bubble chart that has been introduced in continuation of the analysis.

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## 6.2. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Having introduced the managerial implications and recommendations, I will now turn to the research implications and recommendations of this master's thesis. The research implications are numerous because the formalities of this master's thesis have restricted the research in different ways and future research might therefore focus on some of the points that have not been researched this time around even though there has been sentiment for it. Such points relate to the incongruencies between drivers recognised by IPs and theorists, incongruencies between theorists, testing of propositions, the relevance of the findings over time, and the applicability of the findings on other platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. Further research of the listed points will ultimately add to the theory that has been built throughout this master's thesis and thence make it more valid and applicable and it is, therefore, recommended that I, or other interested candidates, perform such additional research in the future.

In this respect, research on how applicable the findings of this master's thesis are for other applications such as Facebook and YouTube seem to be the most interesting and relevant matter of research because numerous IPs have already contemplated how authenticity manifests itself in different ways on different applications. On that note, there seem to be incongruencies in the data of this master's thesis in the sense that some IPs believe authenticity manifests itself the same across the various applications, while other IPs believe there is a distinct difference. So, while the data from this master's thesis can constitute the first empirical data in future research, additional data collection and analyses will be much needed in future research.

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