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Digital Distance

A qualitative study examining the impact on social media consumption and
consequences for marketing

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Abstract

The digitalization is one of the most revolutionary changes society has seen through history. It comes with enormous advantages, however it has also contributed with side effects we are just seeing the beginning of. The radical growth of social media has resulted in consumers now spending several hours per day being on social media channels. On the other hand, it has been found that many former developers of social media do not use the channels themselves, comparing social media to drugs and mention an addiction that might follow. We see a risk consumers will soon get tired of this addictive behavior and take more distance from the social media world. The purpose of this study is therefore to understand if consumers are taking greater distance from social media, how this may be performed and in that case, assess what the reasons are for this, analyzed from a consumer culture perspective. The aim is to understand how digital distance can affect the consumer culture and to further discuss how the marketing field would need to adapt to this potential change. To investigate in this subject, we used a qualitative method performing eight interviews with social media consumers in the ages 16-25. People within this age range are the ones spending most hours per week on social media. Further, netnography was performed through observing how digital distance is expressed on different social media platforms. The empirical findings and analysis showed an increased awareness and desire towards taking digital distance among influencers and consumers. We also found that new companies are emerging from new subcultures regarding digital distance. Our conclusion is that a majority of consumers do not want to *stop* using social media channels and digital devices. This partly due to the fear of missing out on the communication possibilities and collective identities created on social media. However, being able to separate the offline and online world is a growing desire within the consumer culture. Very few individuals make attempts to perform bigger changes but rather take smaller digital breaks in their everyday lives such as deleting apps or turning off the phone temporarily. This also means consumers are not exposed to marketing to the same extent as they might have been before. One reason for taking digital distance is that consumers experience a high degree of *stress and anxiety* due to ideals and norms on social media related to overconsumption and romanticized lifestyles. Other reasons are *bad influence on relationships, decrease in focus* and *too much advertisement*. Lastly, we can confirm that new symbols, subcultures and values around *not* using social media are emerging on the marketplace. This can transform and reshape the consumer culture and in turn lead to that marketers will have to adapt in order to create sustainable digital marketing strategies.

Key Words

Digital Distance, Digital Balance, Digital Stress, Social Media Channels, Social Media Fatigue, Fear of Missing Out, Communication, Digitalization, Consumer Culture Theory, Collective Identities, Marketing, Influencers, Consumer Resistance, Overconsumption

Vocabulary

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

CCT is a theory within marketing which includes an overview of consumer research within the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption (Arnould, E. et al, 2005).

Consumption

Consumption is the process in which something is used, incorporated or transformed into something else. (Business Dictionary, 2018)

Fear of missing out (FoMo)

Having anxiety or feeling stressed of missing exciting or interesting events that may be happening elsewhere then you physically are located, often posts seen on social media channels. (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018)

Hyperculture

A system of objects and value where everything blends together. Value and excitement can be created by simply remixing objects from completely different eras and forms. What might have been opposing objects can be put together to form new meanings.
(Cyborg Anthropology, 2012)

Influencer

An individual who has power to influence others. Most common through social media channels or traditional marketing channels. (Business Dictionary, 2018)

Social media channels

“Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.” (Oxford dictionaries, 2018).

Social media fatigue

Being overwhelmed by too many social media sites, too many followers and friends and too much time spent online maintaining these connections, resulting in consumers withdrawing from social media channels. (Technopedia, 2018)

Phubbing

Stands for "phone snubbing", describes the act of ignoring someone in a social setting by looking at your phone instead of paying attention. (Ugur & Tugba, 2015)

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1. Introduction

The digitalization is one of the most revolutionary changes society has seen through history. It comes with enormous advantages such as new opportunities for fast communication worldwide and tools for businesses to expand globally. However, it has also contributed with side effects we are just seeing the beginning of (Hansen, 2017). Nowadays people are not only using phones and digital devices every now and then, but are rather constantly connected to social apps which require attendance and engagement. Many of these apps are constructed to be addictive and may therefore cause unwanted behaviour, which can lead to consequences such as stress, anxiety or even mental illness (Lindkvist, 2018). Mental illness among Swedish teenagers has for example increased by over 100% during the last ten years (Socialstyrelsen, 2017) and according to brain scientist Sissela Nutley, the usage of social media could be one explanation (Tisell, 2018).

Ever since the first smartphone was launched in 2007, scientists have been highlighting the negative effects of constantly being online and the importance of taking digital breaks. Anders Hansen (2017) is one of many emphasizing this issue. He recently has been debating the importance of what he calls “digital discipline”. He claims;

“Digital discipline - to turn off the phone a couple of hours per day - is something I believe everyone, grown ups as teenagers, must learn if we want to live and function well as human beings.” (Hansen, 2017-09-19)

There are increasingly more studies on how humans are affected by the fast development of digitalization and further the need to take digital distance. However, these studies are mainly written from a psychological perspective and based on our findings, there are not many studies examining the issue from a *marketing perspective*. We have therefore chosen to study the phenomenon of taking greater digital distance in a world of constant notifications, communication and marketing. What will be examined is if there is a desire among consumers wanting to keep more distance from social media, how this may be performed and further the reasons for this from a *consumer culture perspective*. If the way people consume social media is about to change, it will affect future marketing.

1.1 Problem discussion

Ten years ago, there were about 500 million connected internet units in the world. In 2025 the number is predicted to exceed 50 billion and big parts of our society will be completely digitized (Davidsson, P. & Thoresson, A, 2017). It was announced in their report “*Svenskarna och internet*” (2017) that 94% of all Swedes are connected online, and 98% of all Swedish 11-year-olds have their own mobile phone. Within this digitized world social media is, according to Statista (2017), the most popular online activity. Today 2.46 billion people are using social media channels, and the number of users is expected to grow to 3 billion users in year 2021. The leading social network is Facebook with approximately 2.2 billion users, followed by Youtube with 1.5 billion users and Instagram with 800 million users (Statista, 2017). Social media channels have grown rapidly and made communication for consumers possible across economic, geographic and political borders. It has also opened up for new possibilities to share content, such as photos and videos, further creating new communities and tribes around rituals, interests and consumption (Statista, 2018).

The radical increase in social media users has resulted in consumers now spending several hours per day being on social media channels (Davidsson, P., 2016). This has moreover changed the communication demand from consumers and the whole field of marketing. Nowadays, marketing is known as an advanced mix of strategy and technology, however it has not always been this way (History Cooperative, 2016). During the late 1990s, simple text-based company websites began to flourish as a tool for commercialization. During the past years the importance of using the web and search engines for marketing purposes has increased dramatically. One example is the *blog* phenomenon which developed as an online “diary”. In 1999, there were 23 active blogs registered in the world. In 2016 the number was estimated to be over 150 million (History Cooperative, 2016). Furthermore, Badenhorst (2015), claims traditional marketing channels such as television or radio are today not perceived as trustworthy as it once might have been. Blogs and other social media channels are now an essential part of most content marketing campaigns to provide information, build customer relationships, generate sales leads, increase brand awareness, get customer feedback, etc. His research further investigates in how companies nowadays can, thanks to social media, expand on a global level without being physically present. One way companies incorporate their digital marketing strategies is through influencer marketing. This basically

means companies let an influential person market a product or service through their social media channels to target a specific audience directly (Badenhorst, 2015). An interesting insight is that teens today consider YouTube stars and influencers 17 times more engaging than mainstream celebrities, indicating that there is definitely a shift in who is considered influential by younger generations (Ault, 2015).

Simultaneously with this boom of social media users, it has been found that several top managers and developers at social media platforms have limited their own use of the platforms. For example Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, Greg Hochmuch, one of the first software engineers at Instagram, Justin Rosenstein, “the man behind the like-button”, and Tristan Harris, a former Google employee, are only some who have shared in interviews how they strongly limit their own social media usage as well as the usage for their children. Hochmuch, realized he was about to create a motor of addiction and explains;

“The problem is not that consumers are lacking the ability of will power, but that thousands of employers concentrate on breaking down people’s self control. The social media technology is not neutral, it is on the other hand created for our human weaknesses. There’s Facebook with its bottomless news feed, there’s Netflix autoplaying the next episode, etc. And then there are the constant notices and reminders — a friend liked your photo; a colleague wants to connect with you on LinkedIn — which automatically induce feelings of social obligation. You damn yourself to distraction if you respond, and to fear of missing out if you don’t ”
(Singer, 2015, p. 4)

Nick Bilton (2014) interviewed Steve Jobs in 2010, after the launch of the iPad. Jobs praised the infinite possibilities. However, he afterwards revealed his own children were not allowed to use it. Further Justin Rosenstein, compared Snapchat to heroine and stated he deleted both Snapchat and Facebook from his phone and claims “*everyone is distracted, all of the time*” (Lewis, 2017). Lastly, Tristan Harris, believes this is one of the most urgent problems in society today;

“It’s changing our democracy, and it’s changing our ability to have the conversations and relationships that we actually want with each other.” (Lewis, 2017).

One person who has commented this startling dilemma is Ivar Arpi (2018). He states that “*never get high on your own supply*” are words of wisdom from drug dealers, and reflects on that something similar seem to be the case for social media.

Baréz-Brown (2014) states that the digitalization has made the edges between work and private life more abstract, which has given people flexibility, but moreover it has also become harder to be completely free. According to Gertrud Dahlberg (2017), a lifestyle of constant distraction is not sustainable. She predicts consumers will soon get tired and take more distance from the social media world. She further claims young people seem to be the ones leading the development since stability, organizing and having your life in order today is what many in the young generation are striving for. Dahlberg further says an underlying reason for this is that millennials (people born between 1980 and 2000) have grown up with globalization, digitalization, climate changes and a world of uncertainty, and therefore value organization and structure. It has been shown that less psychological stress is what increases the most among young people’s desires (Dahlberg, 2017). She states that this may embed for a crash between different generations’ values, or that maybe the importance of the digital world amongst everyone, regardless of age, is about to change? This relatively unexplored field of study, is what will be examined from a marketing perspective.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand if consumers are taking greater distance from social media, how this may be performed, and in that case what the reasons are for this, analyzing it from a *consumer culture perspective*. Moreover, the aim is to understand how digital distance can affect the consumer culture and to further discuss how the marketing field would need to adapt to this potential change.

1.3 Research questions

We have formed two concrete research questions, in order to fulfill our purpose and further to investigate in marketing implications in the discussion part;

- What are the reasons for people to take or to not take digital distance and how may digital distance be performed?
- What effect does digital distance have on the consumer culture?

2. Literature review

Coming chapter will present some previous research within the area of digital stress, digital distance and a potential change in consumer behaviour.

Ward, A., et al. (2017) conducted a study of five hundred American students to measure the concentration and memory when taking a test in school. Some students were told to bring their phones, although only keeping them in their pockets, and the others were told leave their phones outside of the classroom. The result showed that the ones leaving their phones outside received a significant better result on their test. This was explained by if you have something that gives you doses of dopamine close to you, the brain will put most focus on that thing, in this case, the smartphone.

Further, Ugur & Tugba, (2015) have been studying the phenomenon of *phubbing*, the misuse of mobile phones, among students in university classrooms. The study shows how a majority of students nowadays use their smartphones during class, which leads to a decrease in focus when studying, generates cheating during courses and an overall change in social behaviour. Many students are for example rather communicating by texting than having real conversations, face-to-face. Ignoring people and situations through phubbing can today be found in almost any social setting. This study is however focusing on the problem in an educational context. Many of the students do not even know they are distracting others, or affecting their own learning curve by using their phone in certain situations. What further is concluded is that the distraction of smartphones in schools is having negative consequences for the teaching and learning processes. A country who has emphasized this is France, where a total ban on students using mobile phones in primary and secondary schools is about to be imposed in September 2018. Phones are already forbidden in French classrooms since a few years back, but now students will be banned from taking them out at breaks, lunch times and even between lessons (Samuels, 2017).

Turkle (2015) investigates in how smartphones are changing human relationships, creativity and productivity. What is concluded is that we nowadays spend too much time connecting

with each other online, instead of connecting in real life. Already in 2012, Turkle presented her research with regards to this issue;

“Our little devices in our pockets are so psychologically powerful, that they do not only change what we do, they change who we are” (TED Talks, 2012)

Nonetheless, Turkle (2015) has a positive view on the future. The study highlights the importance to remember how we are still in the early days of shaping technology and our habits around it. In addition, there is still time to consider how to find digital balance in everyday life. Not to stop using digital devices, but reconsider how to use them, and not to be *anti-technology, but rather pro-conversation*.

Allwood (2014), investigates in the negative aspects of digitalization in society and mainly on human interaction. The digitalization has developed dramatically in the last years, and Allwood means it now might be time to take a step back and reflect on the consequences. He claims we need to learn how to digitize with care to avoid disruption of already well-functioning practices in our everyday lives. Further, Allwood is not focusing on the individual perspective but instead investigating more into the societal problems and risks regarding digitization, for example that human service professions are disappearing.

Studies have shown that the mental illness has increased dramatically during the past years. For example, Socialstyrelsen reported in 2017 that mental illness among Swedish children in the ages 10-17 has increased by over 100 percent since 2006. Other reports have also showed an increase in physical symptoms. Folkhälsomyndigheten (2018) reported that, over a time period of thirty years, they have seen a double of young people suffering from headaches, stomach pains and insomnia problems. Brain scientist Sissela Nutley is doing research on the formability of the brain and on problems connected to insomnia. Nutley explains that social media could be the trigger to health issues in today's society, such as the ones Socialstyrelsen and Folkhälsomyndigheten reported (Tisell, 2018). Scientists have so far not been able to clarify exactly how social media affects the brain, but what is known is that there is a strong connection linked between social media usage and depression (Lin, L., et al., 2016). This is something Folkhälsomyndigheten also highlights by reporting that there is not enough research made to make conclusions regarding the digital usage;

"Future research needs to clarify whether the proliferation of computers, iPads and smartphones, which exploded during the 2010's, has contributed to the increase of symptoms of mental illness." (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2018, p.28)

Yet, Lin, L., et al., (2016), has shown that the ones who spend more than two hours per day on social media have twice as strong probability of having depression symptoms compared to people who spent 30 minutes or less per day. Nutley further explains to Tisell (2018) how Facebook activity is linked to reward structures in the brain;

"The reason why we use social media in this large extent is because all people are longing to be meaningful for each other. But what has happened is the total opposite - children and teenagers are home in their bedrooms more than ever, when they actually need to see and hear each other physically to receive natural and biological effects in the brain".

Author and lecturer Tomas Dalström explains to Högberg (2017) how the technology has affected us in the ten recent years; In 2008, our brains were exposed to a completely new influence from our surroundings - it was around this time mobile internet and smartphones with social media got their big breakthrough. This new technology made it possible for users to get small, pleasant dopamine rushes many times a day by, for example, checking e-mails or how much attention the latest status update had received. But even if these kicks are perceived as pleasant, our brain gets stressed. Dalström explains that for each disruption it actually takes up to twenty five minutes before the brain can regain full concentration. He further describes the years before 2008;

"We had our phone in our pocket, it was ringing now and then but it was nothing that really disturbed us, which made us more focused on the present and less stressed".

Dalström continues by saying how in 2017, social media notifications, job emails etc is continuing to reach us constantly. He further argues that multitasking makes us less attentive, less creative and it takes a longer amount of time to adopt to new assignments. When describing the future, Dalström has a positive vision for how we take care of our brains. He predicts that to always be available is not longer status.

He says;

“I believe in 2030, multitasking will be outdated and we are going to laugh when we look at how worried we were earlier of not being connected and available all the time.”

Högberg (2017) further mentions brain scientist Torkel Klingberg who forecasts that people will be going to “mental gyms” in the future, both via computers and in reality, to expand memory and help us from external disruptions. Klingberg predicts it will also be used to big extent in schools.

Two phenomenons that Dhir, A., et al. (2018) is exploring are *social media fatigue* and *fear of missing out* (FoMo), and the relation between these two. The study presents the rapid development of online social media features and services which has attracted and increased the number of users. Nevertheless, some users have lately deviated themselves from social media use and taken a step back, due to what they call *social media fatigue*. Social media fatigue means consumers are feeling exhausted and stressed because of an excessive social media use, constantly having to be online. This excessive use has shown might lead to a decrease in mental strength and behavioural conditions which further can lead to consumers wanting to withdraw from social media channels. Whereas for businesses, it may result in a withdrawal from channels where big marketing strategies are in focus and could further on affect profits. Dhir, A., et al. (2018) explains how FoMo, on the other hand, makes consumers not leave social media but instead might increase the use. This due to a fear of missing out on what is happening on social media, and not being able to connect with people.

Abel, J., et al. (2016) further investigates more profound into the phenomenon of FoMo. FoMo is not itself a new concept; human beings have since way back in history wanted to belong to social groups and take part of the values within those groups. However, the intensity and discussion of FoMo has increased with the growth of social media. Due to the easy access to enter social media, we can now receive information much faster than before. This easy access to see what others are doing makes many social media users compare their own lives to others. This can in turn can make people feel less satisfied with their own life situations, which can lead to a feeling of missing out on things that seem better. (Abel, J., et al. 2016) .

Overviewing the literature review chapter, previous literature has examined some of the consequences of digitalization on individuals and on relationships. What has been brought up is for example decrease in school performance, phubbing, effects on human relationships, mental illness, depression, social media fatigue and FoMo. Further the consequences for the *consumer culture* have only been explored to a smaller extent. Högberg (2017) investigates in an expected change in behaviour of consumers taking more distance from digital devices, which shows there are some research within the area starting to emerge. However we see a gap in research within the marketing and consumer culture perspective. Therefore, we hope to address this gap by our study, applying the consumer culture theory (CCT) framework. We find this study area important in order to understand how consumers potentially could change behaviour in the future, and in turn change the consumer culture.

3. Theoretical framework

In order to study the reasons for consumers to take, or not to take digital distance, the consumer culture theory (CCT) will be applied as main theoretical framework. Further, theory of consumer resistance and subcultures will also be applied.

Consumer culture theory (CCT) can be explained as an overview of consumer research within the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption.

CCT examines sociocultural processes and structures related to 4 perspectives (Arnould, E., et al, 2005);

- (1) Marketplace cultures
- (2) Consumer identity construction
- (3) The socio - historic patterning of consumption
- (4) Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers interpretive strategies.

3.1 Consumer culture theory

3.1.1 Marketplace cultures

In the first perspective, Arnould, E., et al, (2005) state that the marketplace offers consumers an expansive and heterogeneous palette of resources which they can use to construct identity. Also, research within the consumer culture theory has shown that most people use consumption to be a part of a community. Through shared values, rituals, social practices and meanings, consumers can together create a *collective identity*. These collective identities can further overlap differences between individuals, creating a bigger meaning in life. Most often, these collective identities define symbolic meaning through resistance to dominant lifestyle norms or mainstream consumer behaviour. (Arnould, E., et al, 2005)

3.1.2 Consumer identity project

The marketplace is also a place where consumers can find resources for their own identity creation, both physical resources as well as symbolic ones. Arnould, E., et al (2005) call this the *consumer identity project*, where consumers are seen as *identity seekers* who are constantly reworking and transforming symbolic meanings found in the marketplace to suit

their personal and social circumstances. Symbolic meanings can be found in, for example, advertisement, retail settings, brands or products.

3.1.3 The socio - historic patterning of consumption

The third perspective investigates in *the institutional and social structures*, for example class, gender and ethnicity, which further can influence consumption choices. Consumers are here seen as *actors* of social positions and roles. One example is when ethnic identities become hypercultural because the country of origin is reconstructed into something consumable with its food, music, arts etc. This is furthermore creating more fluid social contexts, based on the consumption rather than the ethnicity.

3.1.4 Mass mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies

In the fourth perspective, consumers are seen as *creative, interpretive agents* on the marketplace rather than passive consumers. This means that consumers' lifestyle goals and projects often shape the way consumers interpret mass media and advertisements. Further, the advertisement is transformed to fit their own circumstances in life instead of adapting to ideological representations.

3.2 Theory of consumer resistance & subcultures

Cronin, et al., (2015) discuss *the theory of consumer resistance & subcultures*. This theory means consumers have a cooperative ability to challenge societal rules and market-led norms and instead establish their own through new practices, processes and other choices than the typical mainstream. Through these practices and processes, consumers can perform collective identities and create new communities around consumption. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies conducted a study in 2015 on subcultures which consumed distinctive styles that broke away from traditional class-based identities (Cronin, et al., 2015). This study examined how once a person's own consumer resistance became a part of a community, or group of people, an alternative is established to the mainstream norms and a certain style is formed around it, being the opposite of the existing consumption practices. As an increased statement of resistance, communities of consumption sometimes collectively criticize or question material objects and interact with the market in a critical way.

4. Method

In this chapter, the design of the research will first be presented. Moreover, how collection of data was performed, the method procedure, data analysis and lastly discussing the reliability, validity and credibility as well as presenting delimitations.

4.1 Research design

First, the topic digital distance from a consumer culture perspective was chosen. The topic was chosen partly due to personal interest within the area, but mainly due to a perceived gap in research regarding this specific relation. Research questions were further developed and formulated in a way in which the research questions could be in the forefront for our data collection method (Bryman & Bell, 2011). After the area of study was chosen, a *qualitative method* was applied. Bryman & Bell (2011) explains a qualitative method is valuable to use when studying complex identity processes, contexts and social interactions regarding consumption. Since the purpose of our study was to get better understanding for the *reasons* related to digital distance within the consumer culture, a qualitative method was an evident choice.

To conduct the study, qualitative interviews was used as core method. Alvehus (2013) discuss qualitative methods further and mean qualitative interviews is a normal and valuable method to use when investigating in how people think, feel and act. Being able to have a dialogue with respondents, ask questions, see patterns and symbols, and to get a profound understanding in the subject is possible, which was necessary for our study. Additionally, to understand what the opinions and meanings were regarding digital distance on a broader level, *netnography* (observations on internet) were made. This was important in order to observe collective identities, individual identities and common meanings within the digital world. Information on internet is commonly based on recent issues in the society today, which was relevant for this study, studying a quite new phenomenon (Alvehus, 2013). Beneficial for our study was further that the netnography was easy to access. Moreover, an inductive approach has been used throughout the research process. According to Bryman & Bell (2011), this approach means observations are primary, and after that a theory is formed

by a view of the world that has been created. In our study, the (CCT) theory was applied after collecting responses and observations.

4.2 Data collection

4.2.1 Theory and literature review

Before starting with our qualitative method, we collected data for the literature review chapter, as well as data for the theoretical framework. To conduct this, we used the framework by Bryman & Bell (2011) as a guide regarding searching for and collecting literature review and theories. Some keywords were first formulated. Keywords used were for example *Digitalization*, *Digital Detox*, *Digitalization Consequences* and *Social Media Channels*. According to Bryman & Bell (2011) this is a valuable way of searching for previous literature, in our case within the area of digital distance. Databases used when searching for material were e-journals from the university as well as Google Scholar.

When we had found articles within the area of digitalization and digital distance, these were read carefully and the most essential and relevant parts for the study were written down. Bryman and Bell (2011) highlights the importance of using a critical approach when collecting data to be sure to confirm the methodology and credibility. Moreover, when searching on internet, it is even more crucial to be critical towards what is reliable and not. We therefore applied this critical approach to increase the credibility of our own study, through reading the articles more than once and trying to find patterns and connections between the articles. For example, if several authors mentioned similar things, we assumed it was more reliable to pick for our own study. An aim was also to use primary sources in order to confirm the reliability. However, due to the fact that our chosen subject is a relatively new issue, it was in some cases hard to find academic articles. Therefore non-academic sources have been used supplementarily. Due to this, some of the citations are missing page numbers, however the direct links to the citations can be found in the references.

4.2.2 Selection of population

The requirements we had when choosing population for the interviews were that the respondents should be in the ages between 16-25 years, using social media channels on a daily basis. No more requirements were needed since factors such as gender or ethnicity was

not a relevant focus for this study. In 2016, people between the ages 16-25 was the group of people who spend the most hours on social media per week. After the age of 25, the numbers are decreasing for both women and men (Davidsson, P., 2016). This motivated why we chose to interview people within this age range - to increase the chances of finding the ones who use social media the most, and if they now are taking more distance. However, how old individuals were within this age range, was not relevant since age differences was nothing we studied. The amount of respondents was decided during the process, since it was based on the outcome and how much more data that was needed to be able to analyze, discuss and conclude. Regarding the netnography, our findings were selected throughout the research process. However, when doing netnography, the influencers we observed are using social media actively and because of this, age was not relevant.

4.2.3 Description of population

Eight interviews were conducted. Since our only limitations were to interview people between the ages 16-25 who use social media daily, we chose to interview friends and people in our surroundings. Some of our respondents expressed they wanted to be anonymous when using them in our study. We therefore chose to name all of our respondents "Respondent 1-8" to keep a consistency throughout our analysis. Nevertheless, one of our respondents (respondent 3) is working as an influencer and will be mentioned in chapter 5.1. Even though we interviewed both male and female respondents, this was not something we took into consideration in our result since it was not relevant for our study. Further, the people on which we based our netnography are all influencers who we have been following in our everyday lives. These observations were made continuously during our writing process, within a time frame of ten weeks. Since the individuals we observed were all influencers, they have all been presented by name and profession.

4.3 Method procedure

Since we used an inductive approach, qualitative interviews was the first step to collect data. This was made after forming our purpose and research questions as well as collecting relevant prior literature within the area. Here we found a research gap within the marketing field and wanted to start interview and observe as soon as possible in order to get a perception of the subject and afterwards apply a theory to understand it.

Questions for the qualitative interviews were formed in line with our purpose and research question (see appendix 1). They were conducted with a low degree of standardization as well as low degree of structure, which according to Patel & Davidson (2015) is valuable when doing a qualitative analysis. This means questions were decided before doing the interviews, although formulated open so that the respondents were able to frame the answers - what is called a semi-structured interview. This structure gives the interviewee freedom to decide the order of the questions throughout the interview process (Patel & Davidson, 2015). Before interviewing, a test interview was conducted as a pilot study in order to evaluate questions and if the outcome that was suitable for our study. After the test interview, questions were adjusted and when being satisfied with the material, selected respondents were contacted by mail or on Facebook Messenger. The respondents received information about the topic, purpose and the reason for being contacted. They were further informed about the interview being recorded, however that their answers would be presented anonymously. Almost all respondents were able to participate, however, some of them did not have time and therefore we had prepared some back ups who we could contact instead. The time and place for the interviews were further planned together with the respondents. Lastly, before starting the interviews, both authors interviewed each other, practicing on the questions in order to know the interview material inside and out. This was an important part since the ones who interviews, are a part of constructing the data since interviewees are framing the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Eight interviews were made, whereas six were conducted face-to-face and two by phone. The interviews were made at the university, at cafés close by or at home where the environment was calm and quiet. All of our interviews were made in swedish, later translated by us into english and written down. Before asking our questions we introduced the subject and the purpose of our study to the respondents to get an overview of our chosen area. The time frame for our interviews varied between 20 to 30 minutes. Since limitation of time as well as coordination of schedule, interviews were divided and made by one of the authors at a time. The interviews were recorded, to be able to listen to the material several times and by both authors.

Further, *netnography* was conducted by observing influencers' and consumers' comments, posts and feedback regarding digital distance. This was fundamental in order to observe collective identities and common meanings online of taking distance from the digital world and to get an increased understanding of the phenomenon. The netnography was performed mainly on Instagram and various blogs.

4.4 Data analysis

After listening to the recordings from the interviews, the interviews were translated from Swedish into English and written down in another document. It is impossible to translate into the exact same words and sentences, however we put a lot of effort in our translation process to not leave out the significance of the answers. When we had gathered all of our material, we started summarizing the outcome and putting the responses into different themes dependent on what had been said. Words and sentences that confirmed each other were highlighted so that we could be able to make conclusions from our theoretical foundation. The answers that could represent the patterns and themes the best were chosen as citations in our analysis chapter.

4.5 Reliability, validity & credibility

In our qualitative interviews, most respondents highlighted the same things when talking about social media. We could further confirm these patterns in a broader perspective through making observations on internet which gives the study a high degree of reliability. Moreover, the data collected from interviews as well as netnography was further carefully analyzed by both authors several times, in order to capture the right message from individuals.

Furthermore, the qualitative interviews were made on eight individuals within our group of friends. What might be questioned is if the result would differ if we would have interviewed people outside of this group. However, interviewees not familiar with us, might have been less communicative when sharing their thoughts and experiences. We therefore believe interviewing people in our group of friends did not affect the result of the study in a negative way. Moreover, the respondents were all in the age range using social media the most and Swedish individuals with access to internet and social media. We can therefore assume the

study has a high degree of *validity*, however that the result cannot be generalized into a global context. Finally, we can confirm the *credibility* of our study by seeing our results were in line with previous studies within the same field. As presented in our empirical analysis, we could connect to previous literature when analyzing our result.

4.6 Delimitations

Those we interviewed, were young people in the ages 16-25. The thesis investigated thus not in any other ages. Furthermore, our study is limited to the consumer culture theory as theoretical perspective. Therefore, other aspects in the society outside our theoretical framework, will not be examined. For example, throughout the writing process, the Facebook scandal has received a lot of attention in daily news. The scandal evolved around Facebook leaking personal information and according to a study made by Sifo in March 2018, 21% of Swedish users considered leaving Facebook (SvD, 2018). However, online privacy will not be included in our analysis since it is not relevant for our theoretical framework. Furthermore, when social media is discussed and analyzed, we mainly focus on Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and blogs. These channels were found to be the most common social media platforms today based on our qualitative interviews.

5. Empirical analysis

In this chapter, empirical findings from doing netnography as well as qualitative interviews will be presented. Furthermore, findings will be analyzed in relation to CCT and prior studies within the literature review.

5.1 Influencers expressing desire for digital distance

When observing individuals on internet in order to see how digital distance takes form on social media, the desire for digital distance is in many cases expressed by influencers. These are influencers who raise awareness about the consequences of digitalization, and reflect on their own digital behavior. Moreover, some are also starting to make concrete changes in their lives such as taking more digital distance, which they show and express on their channels. One of them is the Swedish media profile Calle Schulman, with over 172 000 followers on Instagram who published on his Instagram 2018-02-26, (see appendix 2):

“Two weeks with this Nokia phone now. I may sound crazy. But I experience big differences in life. Feeling more calm in some kind of way [...] The most important difference: I get time to reflect. After meetings I do not start looking at that freaking phone. I think about what has been said. I think about what is up next and I think about the evening, my family and - nothing.“ (Schulman, 2018) (*author translation*)

Schulman decided to take a real break from the digital world. He began by exchanging his smartphone to a Nokia phone with no features except from calls and texts. After two weeks, he posted a picture on Instagram with the text cited above, explaining that he had already experienced big differences in his life. Furthermore, this was not only a temporary adjustment, but rather a durable change since we have been observing that Schulman is still maintaining this lifestyle.

We can understand this citation from Schulman (2018) by looking at the study about *social media fatigue* by Dhir, A., et al. (2018). Schulman might withdraw from social media channels because of fatigue for the constant connection and stress it causes. Changing values and meanings of the practice on his own channels can, according to CCT, be a symbolic meaning for other consumers who would want to follow his example. This can further create a *collective identity* around these changed values. Moreover, Schulman’s behaviour can be

seen as moving away from the mainstream and the norms on social media which can be interpreted from the *theory of consumer resistance & subcultures*. For someone working within the social media industry, as Schulman does himself, it is a big step to post something like this, criticizing the most dominant lifestyle today - using social media. By his statements, Schulman can be seen as challenging rules and market led norms in order to open up discussion for a new type of behaviour which could further affect the following community he has.

Another famous influencer and social media profile is Hannah Andersson, known as “Fashionablefit” on Instagram with over 118 000 followers. She posted a picture 2018-04-22 (see appendix 2) of her with her nephew and wrote;

“I love my work, but for years I struggled with putting pressure on myself to always be online or sharing on social media. My nephew started to say “*Hannah, see me!*” and it broke my heart that my attention was on my phone/computer rather than on him. It was truly eye opening... there is always time for work and sharing. But I never want to lose sight of what is really important... and especially miss the opportunity to collect memories and moments with the people I love...” (Andersson, 2018)

Andersson (2018) here explains how social media takes up too much time from other things and expresses a desire to sometimes go offline and focus on the real relationships in life. In the post she expresses how her attention has been somewhere else, influencing the relationship with her nephew negatively. This confirms Ugur & Tugba (2015), that social media use can lead to phubbing. What has been observed by Turkle (2015) and Allwood (2014), is how the usage of digital devices can lead to a change in human relationships, putting more attention the devices than the real life. Why Andersson has been paying more attention to her phone, could moreover be explained by FoMo (Abel, J., et al., 2016) from the social interactions she has created on her social media channels with followers.

In addition, we can understand Andersson’s expression from perspectives within the CCT. The *consumer identity project* explains how consumers can rework and transform symbolic meaning on the marketplace, in this case social media, to suit their own identity. Even if Andersson writes that she is still working a lot with social media and that she loves her job, she explains she feels a pressure to constantly update the identity she has created online,

Fashionablefit, which is probably seen as an icon, or a symbol, by her following community. The consumers who follow Fashionablefit might relate to the aura and image she has created and might therefore follow her to find daily inspiration to apply to their own identities and lifestyles. However, when the icon and influencer now expresses it is important that social media does not take over our lives or the true relationships we have, a new type of value within this symbol is taking form. This might affect her followers and the way they act, because they might identify themselves with the values, routines and meanings Fashionablefit stands for. However, Andersson is not completely moving away from the mainstream or showing resistance towards the norms, but instead is raising awareness of the importance to use social media with moderation and to not forget to focus on the present.

Further observations online showed that digital distance in many cases takes forms in unexpected situations when it is not an active choice. We found one interesting post from Elin Skoglund, as well as from our interview with respondent 3, both influencers and bloggers at *nouw.com*, Scandinavia's biggest blog platform. Starting with Skoglund, her phone got stolen and afterwards she wrote a blog post about it and how she felt when not having her phone (see appendix 2):

”The lesson I have learned with not having my phone is that I should take more breaks from it. Yesterday I had **real panic** when I could not check my phone every fifth minute.” (Skoglund, 2018) (*author translation*)

Also respondent 3 expresses in the interview a pressure to always be available;

“I have pressure on me to follow deadlines in different collaborations with companies. So often I don't really have a choice to let go of my social media. However, a few weeks ago I unconsciously did a digital detox when I was with my boyfriend and his family on a ski trip. I almost didn't use my phone at all. Both out of respect but also because I didn't have the time to do it” (Respondent 3)

Reading the citations from Skoglund as well as respondent 3, we can see they express feelings of FoMo (Abel, J., et al. 2016). Skoglund states she got panic from not having her phone with her, respondent 3 states she does not really have a choice to take a digital break.

They both seem to not only having a fear to miss out on things in their private lives, but also work possibilities since being influencers and collaborate with companies is their job. If the device with its social media channels is then unexpectedly taken away from them, they might experience a strong feeling of missing something that they are used to have access to every second of our their day. When analyzing these expressions from a CCT perspective, we can understand they are having a fear of missing out on the *collective identity* they both have created on their social platforms, yet the cultures they are a part of as consumers themselves. CCT states these collective identities, where consumers are sharing rituals and practices with each other, are most often creating a bigger meaning in life. When not having the possibility to enter these collective identities, it might cause feelings like panic or stress because they have become such a big part of their lives.

However, Skoglund further ends the blog post by analyzing her behaviour and states;

“We are so used to take up our phones and fill it with information when we have some time to waste. That is not a sustainable behavior. I really felt like I lived in the moment yesterday” (Skoglund, 2018-04-30) (*author translation*)

Skoglund is criticizing her own behaviour. It seems that an unexpected digital break like this, opened up for new reflections on everyday human behavior on social media and might lead Skoglund to a better digital balance. If this pattern will be repeated, reminding her of the issues with social media, behavioural change might appear in small steps, creating new routines and a change in lifestyle, which may affect her following community.

To conclude the netnography part, we can see signs of what Högberg (2017) predicted for the future; where multitasking will be outdated and that we will have changed our digital behaviour. We could find expressions of this from influencers. However, analyzing the expressions from the CCT perspective we have concluded that influencers are responsible for collective identities, while at the same time feel a need to update their own identity as a symbol for others. If influencers, such as Schulman, Andersson and Skoglund continue raising awareness, they might influence their following community to do the same. If new social practices, such as using a Nokia, or taking more digital breaks, are becoming even

more common, this can further create new identities and communities around consuming less social media.

5.2 Companies emerging from digital stress

From our observations we further found organizations and companies expressing their view on digital distance. These organizations are focusing on finding a balance between the everyday use of technology, and tech-free time. They are therefore not anti-technology, but instead advocates that taking a break from digital devices is fundamental for health reasons and even for the future of humanity. Digitaldetox.org is one organization focusing on ways for people to “disconnect to reconnect”, wanting to raise awareness on the issue of digital addiction and are offering offline retreats for companies and consumers. Another interesting company with a similar approach is the Swedish company “OAS” (2018). They want to help individuals, organizations and companies to find a more healthy attitude towards the overflow in information we are surrounded by everyday. They are for example hosting “tech-free” events and afterworks where they educate people to create better conversations and learn how to be silent in a social context (OAS, 2018). The founders, Victoria Palm and Navid Modiri wanted to create a functioning digital culture, after they both experienced an overflow in digital communication. Their ambition is to make people better mentally trained to manage to live the modern life and not be afraid of missing out online (Lundahl, 2018). Victoria Palm, explained to the magazine HR People (2018) why many people experience it is hard to log out:

“Swedes are quick with following trends. We have a **fear of missing out** if we don’t take part in new podcasts, apps, social medias and other fun things that show up. Eventually the brain becomes addicted to the rewards the technology gives.”
(Lundahl, 2018, p.34) *(author translation)*

Looking at how digitaldetox.org and OAS describe their core values, for example to “disconnect to reconnect”, it confirms Turkle (2015) when she advocates it is not too late to find digital balance in life. Turkle further claims this does not mean we need to stop using digital devices, but rather learn how to use them with moderation. Further analyzing the citation by Palm (2018) on how people do not want to miss out on exciting things they might see on social media, it can be related to the study by Abel, J., et al. (2016) about FoMo. With

the concepts that OAS are offering, Palm and Modiri are trying to teach people how to tackle FoMo in a more sustainable way. They state they want to make people better mentally trained to manage to live a modern life with incorporating digital distance more naturally (OAS, 2018). This can be related to Högberg (2017) with Klingberg predicting people will be going to mental gyms in the future, to help us from external disruptions. However looking at the fourth perspective in CCT; “*Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers’ Interpretive Strategies*”, we can interpret that the aim of OAS is trying to teach consumers how to be interpretive agents on the marketplace rather than passive consumers. Instead of being exposed to the overflow in information online, consumers should actively take action to separate the offline and online. Palm claims “*Prioritizing in being offline is an investment in yourself, just like going to the gym.*” (Lundahl, 2018, p.33).

However, what has not yet been analyzed is how these new organizations can be seen as a new *sub-culture (of consumer resistance)* emerging within the consumer culture. The statements from these organizations on promoting digital balance might not be a part of the dominant lifestyle today of using social media. For example to go on a digital detox retreat, or to attend an afterwork with focus on being quiet, might stick out from the mainstream and seem odd for some consumers, who therefore might not join the subculture. However others may find it interesting because they feel a connection to the expressed values. In turn, this can create new groups of like-minded people, ending up with a collective identity around different consumption patterns consumers want to be a part of.

Concluding the last section of the netnography findings and analysis, we see organizations are emerging with the purpose of integrating digital distance into the consumer culture. This can further create new sub-cultures to connect people with the same values and social practices.

5.3 Consequences of being social media consumers

In the two first sections of the analysis, netnography was presented with observations on influencers and organizations related to the CCT and consumer resistance framework. In the following section, we will present our empirical findings from qualitative interviews where

we analyze if consumers are taking greater distance from social media, how this may be performed and what the reasons are for this.

5.3.1 Signs of digital distance

In our interviews, we found that six out of eight respondents are already making concrete adjustments in their everyday lives regarding their digital usage. This is mainly performed by setting rules for when to log out, or deleting apps which are perceived as unnecessary;

“Me and my boyfriend have actually started with ”phone-free” nights. From around 7.30 PM we put away our phones and it has had really positive effects on us” - Respondent 7

Another respondent said;

“My boyfriend stopped using social media 3 months ago. He deleted all his apps he found unnecessary! He decided to do this because he got too stressed by using his phone all the time.” - Respondent 2

These are examples of consumers taking more distinguished breaks from social media. Most respondents are not completely withdrawing from social media communities but rather using it with moderation. For example, respondent 6 explained she delete specific apps before a important tasks such as a big exam. Moreover, eight out of eight respondents, no matter how they use social media today, agrees on that digital distance is important. New attitudes and adjustments towards a better digital balance was explained by one of our respondents;

“It feels like the era of always being perfect on social media is starting to fade out. People are becoming a bit more ”free spirit” and it even feels a bit trendy and cool to disconnect nowadays.” - Respondent 7

Even though all respondents had a positive view on taking digital distance, some have still not made any adjustments at all in their social media use. What are then the reasons for not taking digital distance?

5.3.2 Reasons not to take digital distance

When performing our qualitative interviews all of our eight respondents claimed the most important thing with social media is the possibility to keep contact with family and friends.

“Of course it is important to be able to keep in touch with people I otherwise don’t meet very often. Many of my friends live in different cities or even countries, in those cases social media makes it possible for us to always have contact” - Respondent 7

The citation above, basically reflects what all of our respondents said. It seems like being able to communicate and “keep in touch” with your close ones, no matter where you are, is the most appreciated feature with social media channels. Moreover, it is important to make clear that when referring to social media channels, people value different types of apps differently. Some apps, such as Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp, are strictly for conversation, while others, such as Instagram, is more of a social platform. One of our respondents summarizes this in her interview;

“I wouldn't want to take away WhatsApp where me and my friends communicate all the time. That app doesn't disturb me. Instagram on the other hand affects me negatively, it's a completely different app.” - Respondent 6

Analyzing the answers from our respondents, apps like Instagram, which focus on creating images and being part of virtual communities, seem not as highly valued as the communication channels. On the other hand, many respondents explained how they still use them. How come the respondents still use these social media channels if they do not enjoy them? According to the perspective of *marketplace cultures* within the CCT, one *reason not to take* distance could be that users have become a part of a social context which they do not want to miss out on. For example, it could be important decisions, news, social events etc. Moreover, responding quickly and to always be available seems to be social *norms* today rooted in a *collective identity* our respondents seem to be a part of. Further, Abel, J., et al. (2016) explains being part of different social groups is a human need that can be satisfied through social media. Taking distance from such groups, can therefore result in *FoMo*. Additionally, the CCT theory also explains how people can use consumption to be a part of a community, but also to create an identity. One respondent said for example;

“On Instagram I follow friends and then I follow health accounts, because fitness is a big passion of mine. I can for example look for the right tights, for nutrition and workout tips from inspiring people. “ - Respondent 2

Following health accounts in order to get advice that suits a specific healthy lifestyle is an example of how using social media consumption can create identity and a feeling of

belonging to a certain community. Most of the respondents expressed they follow influencers and accounts that goes in line with their life goals and lifestyles, just like respondent 2. The possibility to consume something that is appealing for one specifically, seems to be appreciated. This can explain why many respondents still stay on social media, even if they said they could imagine living without it. It can therefore be easier said than done to take digital distance.

5.3.3 Reasons to take digital distance

Nonetheless, when further analyzing our interviews we found that a majority of the respondents referred social media to consequences such as **stress** and **anxiety**. They expressed how the virtual world are creating unrealistic ideals and images of a perfect world that is not real;

“You get quite a wrong view that people always live an amazing life. I believe you get a romanticized image of everything, and kind of downsize your own lifestyle, thinking about what you don’t have. I would say it can cause anxiety in moments” -

Respondent 8

According to Dhir, A., et al. (2018) these unrealistic ideals is one factor that can lead to social media fatigue, wanting to withdraw from various social media channels. When analyzing it from the *consumer identity project* within the CCT, consumers might never be fully satisfied with their own identity since there is always a possibility to rework and transform their identity through consumption. When constantly being exposed to these **romanticized images** consumers might find new consumable symbols to apply to their own identity. For example, seeing influencers who show expensive clothes, travelling to exotic places etc. on social media can be seen as symbols which can lead to anxiety when feeling they are not applicable to your own social circumstances.

Moreover, many respondents highlighted that being online can have **bad influence on relationships**. Respondent 8 highlighted that for example when someone is taking a picture for Instagram or Snapchat, it can ruin an entire moment. Many further expressed how the virtual world can interrupt the present. One respondent said;

“The more viral time we spend, the more we lose what we have around us” -

Respondent 1

People paying attention to their screens rather than the people they spend time with is what Ugur and Tugba (2015) explain as “phubbing” in their study from 2015. Another respondent commented on this;

“I’m bad at putting away my phone when I’m with my family even if I should just hang out with them. On the other hand, if I’m at a dinner for example and other people are on their phones it really disturbs me.” - Respondent 5

Several of our respondents confirmed this feeling by saying they feel less prioritized and even hurt when people around them are using their phones in their presence. The result from our interviews showed that the relationships that seem to be affected the most by phubbing, are the ones with family and close friends. This can further be understood by the CCT framework where consumers are seen as *identity seekers*. According to the theory it could be because consumers feel there is no need to uphold an identity in front of family and close friends. In those situations it might be a great opportunity to instead uphold the identity online, leading to phubbing. Nevertheless, all of our respondents agreed this behaviour of paying attention to your screen instead of the present, is not sustainable and is hurting relationships.

Furthermore, we could also see a pattern of respondents mentioning “**decrease in focus**” when discussing social media, and when having their phone close to them.

“When I am studying, or working hard, and take a small break just to scroll through the Instagram feed, then I get out of focus faster than I think and it is just really unnecessary. I lose focus from the most important tasks. “ - Respondent 8

It seems like staying focused is harder even when simply having your phone close to you. This confirms what was found in the literature review by Ward, A., et al. (2017) of 500 American students taking a test in school where the ones who had their phones in the same room, got the worst results. This can be analyzed from the first perspective within CCT: *marketplace cultures*. It seems like the marketplace have created such strong consumption communities, which consumers want to be a part of, that it is leading to a decrease in focus on other important tasks in life. However, respondents mentioned that when they truly need to focus on an important task, they can withdraw from the consumer culture on social media channels. Respondent 6 mentioned for example that before exams she sometimes delete apps to be able to study better.

Lastly, four out of eight respondents highlighted how **advertisement** can destroy the meaning of using social media. They mentioned that for example ads on Instagram, or collaborations influencers do, is what makes social media less authentic and less personal. This has lead to attempts trying to ignore the advertisements and scroll pass most ads. For example, one respondent said;

“Today I feel like 50% of social media consists of ads from companies, and it destroys the whole feeling you want to have on social media.” - Respondent 8

Relating this to the *CCT*, consumers might want to take part of collective identities, which includes symbols and products, that appeals to themselves and their own identity, but when advertisements and consumption alternatives becomes too integrated into the collective identities and communities, it may destroy the purpose of using social media.

Furthermore, what was found is that there is an existing “**consumption stress**” among consumers, which one respondent highlighted:

“I do not like the way people consume today, buying new things all the time and then throw it away” - Respondent 1

Respondent 1 one further explained how the marketing on social media can manipulate to consume more, even though you really do not want to. Another respondent mentioned how the marketing on social media does not affect the decision to buy something new, but instead leads to anxiety and generates a feeling of pressure because you might compare yourself to others, what they have and what you do not have. This stress to consume to always have something new seems to be deeply rooted in the marketplace cultures nowadays created on social media. However, some consumers are starting to criticize this, neither seeing it as sustainable nor realistic.

5.4 Digital distance emerging within the consumer culture

To summarize the empirical analysis, we can see that if digital distance is increasing, it will most likely change the consumer culture. First of all, some influencers are stepwise starting to raise awareness about digital distance. Even though we only highlighted a few, these are according to the *CCT* leaders and symbols for others with following communities who can be affected by their decisions. Second of all, we found a couple of companies emerging with focus on digital distance. These can be seen as new subcultures, promoting new habits

regarding digital distance into consumers everyday life. Lastly, after interviewing consumers, we could see a pattern of consumers already taking more digital distance. This means they are not as exposed to social media anymore and the marketing that comes with it, which in turn changes the structure of the consumer culture.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this bachelor thesis was to understand if consumers want to take digital distance, analyzed mainly from a consumer culture theory (CCT) perspective. We can conclude that consumers from our research do not have a desire to *stop* using social media channels and digital devices. However, finding a distance and balance in life to be able to separate the offline and online world is a growing desire within the consumer culture. This can be related to what Turkle (2012) states; “*I am not anti-technology, but instead pro-conversation*”.

It is, however, not always easy to take digital distance. One reason is the great possibility to communicate through social media which consumers do not want to miss out on but rather find necessary in today’s society. Another reason is that social media consumption can contribute with creating identity and a feeling of belonging to a certain community. It seems that social norms and collective identities on social media are difficult to resist, even if most of our respondents said they could imagine doing it. Nonetheless, to constantly improve your identity by consuming romanticized images and ideals on social media may lead to a consumption stress. Anyhow, consumers are beginning to question these ideals and images, realizing they are not sustainable. We can conclude that factors such as *stress and anxiety, bad influence on relationships, decrease in focus* and *too much advertisement* are all reasons for incorporating a digital distance into the everyday life. The respondents explained they are implementing this by taking more distinguished breaks from digital devices to exclude social media or deleting specific apps temporarily. This further means consumers are not exposed to marketing to the same extent as they might have been before.

In the beginning of this study, Hansen (2017) advocated how digital discipline is something everyone must learn if we want to live and function well as human beings. Notwithstanding, it is important to highlight that social media itself is still a young phenomenon that will continue developing. However, alongside with the development we can with this study conclude that the younger generation is becoming more aware of the importance of digital distance. New symbols, subcultures and values around *not* using social media are emerging on the marketplace. This can transform and reshape the consumer culture and in turn lead to that marketers will have to adapt in order to create sustainable digital marketing strategies.

7. Discussion

In this chapter, we will mainly present how our study contributes with new knowledge for marketers which was the aim of the study. Additionally, we will discuss suggestions for future research within the area of digital distance.

7.1 Marketing and managerial implications

Our study showed that digital distance might increase in popularity with consumers taking more distinguished breaks from social media. This leads to a risk of consumers not being reached by essential advertisement which can in turn be challenging for marketers.

Consumers are starting to prioritize their mental health and the “offline present” even more and we believe this is a trend that will only grow stronger. If consumers want to spend more time focus on the present instead of being on social media, it is a fact that they will not be exposed to marketing to the same extent. We believe this change in consumer behavior can be a challenge for marketers that must be taken seriously. Many marketing strategies today are created around an addictive social media usage with consumers being constantly connected. However, we are starting to see that this is not a sustainable approach. If marketers want to build long lasting customer relationships, we think they should be a part of consumers’ well-being and not be a reason for social media fatigue. Concrete examples that can be used for marketers to *take advantage* of digital distance could be to promote living in the present and focus on what really matters in life. To incorporate these kind of values into their marketing strategies and communicate this to consumers, we assume will be beneficial in the long run. If consumers get a feeling companies care about their well-being outside of the social media world, we believe they might build more trust and loyalty towards that specific company. Marketers might also have to consider who they collaborate with on social media. For example, to only work with influencers that the company truly identify themselves with, and to capture the subcultures around specific interests, values and practices. Even if this could mean a decrease in the number of collaborating influencers, this would build loyalty with the consumers within these subcultures. As seen from our study, there is an existing overload of information today and we believe consumers will assimilate what feels genuine and authentic and eliminate what is not appealing for themselves.

Another challenge for marketers is that consumers are starting to question how content on social media often is romanticized and revolves around overconsumption. This can be for example when influencers are constantly consuming new clothes, trips and items, showing lifestyles that in many cases seem unachievable. We believe this critical approach has partly developed by young consumers with increased knowledge about sustainability in the society. Marketers should therefore keep both the sustainability aspect and the desire for digital distance in mind when creating their marketing strategies. It is important to keep the marketing authentic and transparent and promote lifestyles that are perceived as “real” and not too superficial.

Furthermore, influencers and other digital entrepreneurs, who in many cases rely their business completely on their social media channels, might meet new challenges if their followers are taking more digital distance. One example is if a large number of an influencers’ following community take digital distance in specific time intervals, then it is not beneficial of sharing content during those specific times. Due to this, we believe influencers and digital entrepreneurs should focus on delivering quality instead of quantity with a greater purpose to not be perceived as disturbing. Additionally, it might even be smart to promote digital distance and incorporating it into their content on various social media channels. Ways to do this could be to build strategies around being more in the present, to value relationships and to focus on what really matters. Also to show the followers how the influencers themselves feel good by taking digital distance and in that way may be seen as role models and icons. A concrete example of how influencers and digital entrepreneurs can take advantage of the desire of digital distance could be to host events where the guests are asked not to bring their phones, but instead enjoy the present. This could be a way to inspire followers to find a digital balance and live a more sustainable lifestyle.

However, for more traditional marketing platforms such as TV, radio and magazines, digital distance could be seen as a benefit. Companies who today are using traditional platforms to market themselves are not really affected by the trend of digital distance on social media. They could on the other hand use this trend focusing on creating consumer resistance against constantly being on social media. For example by highlighting the issues connected to this behavior such as mental illness, bad influence on relationships and decrease in focus. What

can further be discussed is that traditional marketing channels such as TV, radio and magazines could be connected to nostalgic feelings and memories reminding consumers of a time before social media was established. This can be understood from a retro marketing perspective, which involves making old symbols and products attractive by using nostalgia. Traditional medias can therefore become an even stronger supplement to social media channels.

Crucial to remember is that social media is, and will most likely continue to be, a big part of our everyday lives. To still be able to see social media as fun, appealing and interesting is something we hope for. Digital distance does not automatically mean consumers are anti-social media, but instead that they want to find a better balance in life regarding their digital use. Therefore we believe, no matter if it is small businesses or bigger companies, all marketers can benefit from leading the development of finding a balance between the online and offline world.

7.3 Suggestions for future research

Due to the chosen theoretical perspective (CCT), all aspect related to digital distance could not be investigated in this study. One example is (as mentioned in the method chapter 4.6), the Facebook scandal which could be an interesting area to investigate in since online privacy and safety issues might be a strong motivation to leave social media channels. However we could not make any conclusions on this from a CCT perspective.

Further, *the perspective of the socio - historic patterning of consumption* within the CCT framework which investigates in institutional and social structures, could not be applied anywhere in our analysis. This due to our delimitation of only studying a young generation using social media with no focus on differences in different social structures. However, studying differences in social media usage and desire for digital distance between such social structures; for example class, age, gender & ethnicity, could be other interesting aspects to investigate in. However, this was not the purpose with our study and was therefore excluded. Moreover, the aim of our study was to be a basis for how marketing could adapt to digital distance. On the contrary, we do not know if marketing managers are seeing any signs of digital distance. Therefore, a suggestion for future research could be to do a qualitative study

from a business perspective. In our study we also found new subcultures emerging with focus on digital distance. These subcultures were mentioned several times, anyhow, we did not have the possibility to analyze these in a deeper context. Hence it would be an interesting area for future research.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. What social media channels do you use and how often do you use them?
2. How important are these channels for you?
3. What do you consider is the best with these social media channels?
4. How does social media and the use of mobile phones affect you?
5. Does commercial on social media channels affect you and how?
6. Have you ever felt that social media takes up too much of your time?
7. Have you heard about the concept “digital detox” or noticed that people in your surroundings are taking distance from the digital world?
8. How would you feel towards taking a digital break, or even a detox, and how do you think it would affect you?

Appendix 2 Netnography



Instagram, calleschulman, 2018-02-06



calleschulman • Följer

Taverna Brillo

calleschulman Två veckor med den här telefonen nu. Jag låter kanske nyfrälst. Men upplever så stora skillnader i livet. Känner mig lugn på något sätt. Mer närvarande. Mer kreativ. Man ska akta sig för att ge råd till andra människor. Men om nån av er känner att användandet av smartphones börjar slå i taket - testa. Det händer numera att jag glömmmer telefonen hemma. Och är ok med det. Så otroligt skönt. Har en iPad i väskan. Men den är så besvärlig att den liksom inte åker fram i onödan. Telefonen laddar jag var femte dag. Viktigaste skillnaden: att jag får mental ställtid. Efter möten börjar jag inte fippla med den satans telefonen. Jag tänker på det som sades. Och tänker på nästa steg. Och på kvällen och på familjen och på ingenting. Men som sagt. Ni kanske sköter mobilen med måtta.



Instagram, fashionablefit, 2018-04-22



fashionablefit • Följ

Marbella, Spain

fashionablefit Captured in the moment playing with my favorite person 🥰👶 my nephew Jack 🥰 this photo reminds me of how important it is to be more present and in the now. Life is so so precious! 🥰 I love my work but for years I struggled with putting pressure on myself to always be online or sharing on social media. My nephew started to say "Hannah, see me!" and it broke my heart that my attention were on my phone/computer rather than on him. It was truly eye opening... there is always time for work and sharing. But I never want to loose sight of what is really important... and especially miss the opportunity to collect memories and moments with the people I love... Food for thought 🥰 Happy Sunday! 🥰

Som ni läser i rubriken blev jag rånad i helgen, på min mobil. Mitt på ljusa dagen av en ficktjuv. Märkte det först när jag kom hem. Alltså den sjuka ångesten att jag inte säkerhetskopierat mina bilder på 1 år. Alla mina texter jag har i anteckningar. Fyfan. Tips till er alla, säkerhetskopiera ALLTID. Köp till sånt minne på iCloud för de hade ju inte jag gjort...

I vilket fall har jag inte haft en sån här ledig helg på flera år känns det som pga denna händelse. Det är en sjuk känsla att inte ha någon mobil - jag har vart och är helt okontaktbar. Får ny telefon imorgon dock så då är det back to business men tills dess, hej livet! Läxan jag lärt mig med detta är att jag borde ta mer ledigt från min mobil. Igår hade jag på riktigt panik i min kropp för det kändes så konstigt att inte kunna kolla mobilen var 5:e minut. Vi är så vana med att så fort vi får en sekund över att tänka då tar man upp mobilen och fyller huvudet med mer information från omvärlden. Det är ju inte sunt. Jag kände verkligen igår att jag var i "nuet" hela tiden.

Haft världens bästa helg ändå dock för kompisar från Göteborg var på besök och tanken var att jag skulle ha en lugn helg. Men så blev det inte riktigt! Alltså har skrattat så mycket denna helg och är fylld med positiv energi. Så himla underbar känsla.

Nu är jag på kontoret och ska in på ett möte. Valborg idag ju - jag vet inte riktigt hur planerna blir för kvällen. Men jag är rätt sliten efter helgen (haha...) så blir nog lugnt. Puss puss!

Nouw, Elin Skoglund, 2018-04-30

<http://elinskoglund.com/min-helg-blev-ranad-33689789>