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To Influence and Be Influenced

A Two-Way Perspective of the Effects of Using Micro-Influencers In
Sports Retailing

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Master's Degree Project
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"To Influence and Be Influenced"; A Two-Way Perspective of the Effects of Using Micro-Influencers In Sports Retailing

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Abstract

Marketing efforts using traditional celebrity endorsers have for long been widely used with great success. However, the rise and development of the internet, as well as businesses' products and services becoming more digitised, new forms of product endorsement have emerged. A popular and effective marketing tool is the involvement of social media influencers, a new form of celebrity stemming from the increased popularity and prevalence of social media in today's society. In the ongoing debate about social media marketing, where influencer marketing is projected to grow immensely in the coming years, the explosion of influencers is causing an "authenticity crisis". This study investigates micro-influencers as product endorsers on Instagram and takes the approach from both a consumer and a micro-influencer perspective in order to understand how perceptions of authenticity and identification shape how consumers perceive micro-influencers' marketing efforts. Interviews were conducted with eight female respondents; five consumers and three micro-influencers, both groups active on Instagram. The findings show that micro-influencers marketing efforts are appreciated by consumers as they manage to maintain a more genuine approach towards their followers by conveying authenticity, thus making them more identifiable. In contrast, traditional celebrities and macro-influencers marketing efforts were not as appreciated by consumers as they appear to have an obvious monetary focus and are thus harder for consumers to relate to and identify themselves with, decreasing the perceived authenticity of their marketing efforts.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement, Micro-influencers, Macro-influencers, Social media marketing, Authenticity, Identification

Introduction

As digitalisation and social media become increasingly integrated into society and businesses, new marketing opportunities that reach consumers in a more efficient way are constantly appearing (Hagberg, Sundstrom & Egels-Zandén, 2016). Traditionally, the majority of consumer communication has been mostly one-way, with the manufacturer or retailer feeding consumers with products, messages and marketing content, and with limited opportunity for consumers to react to them other than in social settings with people they meet face-to-face. In today's society, due to the development of technology, consumers are reachable in new environments where they can receive messages, communicate and interact with the brand or brand representatives (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Previously, the internet has mainly been used by consumers to read content and receive information about products and services. Today, however, internet is no longer about just receiving and processing information. Instead, consumers have moved towards using internet platforms, such as blogs, social networking and content sharing sites, in order to share, create and discuss internet content. This is what has become known as the social media phenomenon, which also has been found to have a great impact on a company's reputation and sales (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011).

The concept of social media influencers is a new phenomenon that has emerged in the wake of the explosion of internet and digitalisation. In the triangular relationship between brand, consumer and social media influencer, the influencer is an independent third-party endorser who shape audience's attitudes with the help of blogs, tweets, or other social media posts. The social media influencer may by some be perceived as a possibility to promote a brand or a product, while by others be regarded as profit-seeking and inauthentic (Gorry & Westbrook 2009). Social media influencers communicate through social media platforms (Booth & Matic, 2011) and one of the fastest growing and most used social media platforms is Instagram, where users, both individuals and companies, share images and content and follow other people or brands that they know or have an interest in. Due to the fact that Instagram is a site where individuals tend to spend more time than on other, similar sites, it is a powerful marketing tool for brands to use when communicating their products and services to consumers (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Alongside having their own Instagram accounts where they communicate marketing messages to followers, companies also work with celebrities, as they are at the top of the list of the most followed accounts on Instagram. Messages about a brand or a product coming from an Instagram celebrity is considered by consumers to be more credible than when a message is coming from the brand owners themselves (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Historically, it has been common for manufacturers and retailers to use celebrity ambassadors to enhance and legitimise their own brand, taking advantage of the celebrity's popularity among consumers (Lear, Runyan & Whitaker, 2009). However, one of the risks of cooperating with such a celebrity endorser, is the possibility that they will engage in behaviour that is perceived as unacceptable

to fans and thus also affect the attitude of consumers towards the brand (Lear, Runyan & Whitaker, 2009). Clear evidence of celebrity endorsers possibly being damaging to a brand is the case of Tiger Woods, discussed by Knittel and Stango (2014), where sponsors connected to Woods lost more than 2% of market value in the aftermath of Wood's personal scandal in 2009. Along with the development of internet and social media usage, traditional celebrities that previously have been used for product endorsement have been replaced by influencers, who today are argued to have greater influence than traditional celebrities (Weinswig, 2016).

Previous research has investigated influencers in terms of celebrities (Jin & Phua, 2014; Spry, Pappu & Bettina Comwell, 2011; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017), bloggers (Lee & Watkins, 2016), and brand community participants (Kim, Sung & Kang, 2014). However, looking into the pool of academic literature on the subject, there was found to be limited research on the credibility of different types of influencers within social networks. While influencer marketing is projected to grow immensely in the coming years, the explosion of influencers is causing an emerging trend that points to an "authenticity crisis". The authenticity crisis is caused by influencers often being perceived as inauthentic since they often work with brands they have no relation to and don't believe in (Fishburne, 2018). Within the concept of social media influencers, three levels of influencers have emerged in the social media landscape; micro-influencers (500 - 10,000 followers on social media), macro-influencers (10,000 - 1 million followers on social media) and mega-influencers (over 1

million followers on social media) (Van der Nolk van Gogh, 2017). Micro-influencers represent a new kind of celebrity (Senft, 2008) whom have become famous and has created their fan-base within a particular social media channel (Boyd & Marwick, 2011). This differs them from the traditional kind of celebrity who have become famous due to their occupation with for example sports, acting or politics (Barker, 2018a). As mentioned, and since influencers are considered to be the modern kind of celebrity, micro-influencers can be argued to be a form of "social celebrity", hence this study refers to this social celebrity as either micro-influencer or micro-celebrity.

Moreover, considering the gap in scientific knowledge presented above, our research focuses on finding out more about the effect of using micro-influencers, and more specifically, using micro-influencers as endorsers of outdoor-, ski- and active-wear, in the social environment of Instagram. The company in focus for this case is the Norwegian company Kari Traa, which sells active-wear and ski-gear targeted towards women only (Kari Traa, n.d.a). With the Nordic countries being some of the most health and physical activity-oriented countries in the world, as well as being some of the countries with the largest focus on empowering women, Kari Traa is a good representative of these ongoing trends in Scandinavia. Considering that a high percentage of women tend to buy products promoted by influencers (Barker, 2018b), a company focused on selling only women's wear is argued to be a relevant company to look further into. In addition to this, Kari Traa has a strategy of only working with relatively unknown sports practitioners to market their products and since the focus of this study is to look into the effect of using

micro-influencers for marketing purposes this further induced the choice of focus company (Kari Traa, n.d.b). The topic will be looked at from two perspectives; a consumer perspective and a micro-influencer perspective, who, in the case of Kari Traa, are called brand ambassadors.

This thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of today's social media usage within marketing. From a cultural perspective with social-psychological elements, we aim to understand how aspects of social media are looked upon by consumers and producers of social media marketing. The purpose of this study is twofold; to understand whether micro-influencers are an appreciated communication tool according to consumers and to understand micro-influencers' operations on Instagram in relation to macro-influencers and traditional celebrities. More specifically, the thesis will answer the following research questions:

-What role does authenticity play in how female consumers understand the role of micro-influencers, macro-influencers and traditional celebrities?

-In which ways do female consumers identify themselves with micro-influencers?

The concept of celebrities is wide, and celebrities exist within many different occupations such as entertainment, sports and politics. Celebrities also exist on different levels, some being more famous than others. In this study a celebrity is defined as a person that is publicly known and their actions gather attention from a significant amount of people, a characteristic also shared with the modern

celebrity, known as the influencer. This study will focus on investigating a specific kind of celebrity; i.e. micro-influencers, operating on the social media site Instagram, within the niche of outdoor-, sports- and active-wear. In the following chapter the *Theoretical Framework* will be presented and the concepts of social media, celebrity endorsement, influencer marketing, authenticity, credibility, trustworthiness and identification elaborated on. The theoretical framework is followed by the *Methodological* chapter where the applied qualitative methodology of a single case study will be discussed in relation to the field of social media marketing by using micro-influencers. In the *Discussion and Analysis* section, the three themes identified when analysing the collected data; *authenticity, identification* and *a declining interest in macro-influencers* will be presented and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework. Lastly, the findings will be presented in a final *Conclusion* where the contributions, practical implications, limitations and suggestions for future research will be outlined and discussed.

Theoretical Framework

The following chapter introduces the theoretical framework of this study. The framework gives an overview of definitions and concepts related to the ongoing discussion of how consumers are affected by influencers and celebrities on social media and will cover topics of; *social media, celebrity endorsement, influencer marketing, authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility* and *identification*. The concepts are introduced and elaborated around to give a comprehensive view of the area to be investigated.

Social Media

During the past decades, technology has changed the way businesses operate and given them new tools, especially in the area of marketing. Today, the concept of social media is fast becoming one of the most prioritised subjects on the agenda for many businesses (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media websites represent different forms of consumer-generated content, such as social networks, blogs and virtual communities that is shared on websites like Youtube, Facebook and Instagram (Xiang, & Gretzel, 2010). According to several scholars (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Marwick, 2015; Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012) managers focus increasingly on how to establish their online presence in the most beneficial and strategic way on social media platforms such as Facebook, Youtube and Instagram. The phenomenon of social media has grown as the access of high-speed internet has become more available to the public. Pioneering social media networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook appeared around the year of 2004, and from this on, new social media applications are developed almost every day. One of the most popular social media applications today is Instagram (Marwick, 2015.)

Instagram is a photo-sharing application, where both public and private people, as well as companies, post photos and content from their life and organisations, to promote themselves and to promote various products and services (Marwick, 2015). Taking photos is one of the main activities among smartphone users today and Instagram makes it possible for consumer to upload, edit and share photos with other users as well as "like" or comment the photos uploaded by others (Lee, Lee, Moon & Sung, 2015). The application has experienced rapid growth in terms of both the number of users and the number of uploads since it was launched in October 2010 (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014). Compared to the social media platform Facebook, Instagram is more based on users communicating through images accompanied of a short description called a "caption", whereas Facebook users to a greater extent communicate through more extensive texts, sometimes accompanied by a few pictures (Marwick, 2015). Consumer are motivated to use Instagram for various social and psychological reasons such as: social interaction, escapism, self-expression, archiving and peeking (Lee et al., 2015). According to Marwick (2015) Instagram represents "a convergence of cultural forces: a mania for digital documentation, the proliferation of celebrity and micro-celebrity culture, and conspicuous consumption" (p. 139).

Furthermore, corporations are becoming more and more aware and have realised the importance of using social media as a marketing tool. Without a proper plan and social media strategy companies have no chance of standing out in the today's constantly changing digitalised society. In order to guarantee a successful social media presence companies must take various marketing theories in consideration that will boost their brand in a favourable manner (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012)

Traditional celebrity endorsement

Arguably, there are several ways of promoting products and services. Celebrity

endorsement is one way of doing so and has been argued to be an effective strategy to use in order to gain brand loyalty and consumer interest (Hung, 2014). According to Atkin and Block (1983) celebrity endorsers are an effective tool to use in advertising as consumers tend to trust the celebrity's genuine interest in the product and are not affected by the compensation they receive for marketing the brand. In line with this, Dean and Biswas (2001) argue that celebrity endorsement can result in better product evaluations and good advertisement ratings from consumers. Freiden (1984) argues that celebrity endorsers are effective to use for marketing purposes as consumers find them believable, trustworthy, likeable and persuasive.

McCracken (1989) further claims that the difference between an anonymous model and a celebrity in advertising, is that a celebrity can offer meanings with a more specific precision. Since celebrities are mostly known to the public, they can provide the brand and the products with various personality and lifestyle meanings that an unknown model is unable to provide to the same extent. Friedman and Friedman (1979) found in their research that advertising with the use of a celebrity endorser could lead to greater purchase intention and greater believability compared to advertising using an expert or an ordinary consumer. Furthermore, celebrities manage to play a form of "super consumer", making celebrities a more powerful media tool than someone who is unknown to the consumers. Celebrities have appealing personas since they have managed to create a clear, consistent and powerful self, leading to people desiring to imitate their personas (McCracken, 1989).

However, recent digital development has resulted in new types of celebrities, such as micro-influencers, and the effectiveness of traditional celebrity endorsement is being questioned. Businesses and scholars are realising that traditional celebrity endorsers might not always be the most effective marketing tool as the effectiveness is very much dependent on how well the celebrity and product that is being promoted, go in line with each other. Another possible risk of using celebrities for marketing purposes is that if they were to act in a way that would be perceived negative by the public, their connection to a brand can lead to that brands reputation being damaged (Till & Shimp, 1998). The effectiveness of advertising is dependent on consumers thoughts about whether the celebrity endorsers personal brand and the brand that the he or she promotes is in line with each other. In other words, advertising is considered to be more effective if a consumer believes that the celebrity endorser truly likes and uses the product that he or she advertises (Silvera & Austad, 2004). McCracken (1989) highlights that the choice of celebrity for endorsement is ideally based on the meanings that the celebrity symbolises in relation to the meanings the brand wants to communicate. Furthermore, McCracken (1989) argues that many companies and advertising firms have a narrow selection of variations of celebrities to represent their brands. He suggests that many of the biggest celebrities we have today are very similar to each other when it comes to values, which results in companies having difficulties finding a specific celebrity that distinguishes themselves and is more in line with the brand than others.

According to Silvera and Austad (2004), one of the complications with using

celebrities for marketing purposes is that many companies and advertising firms tends to be satisfied with the specific product being slightly associated with the celebrity endorser and its interests. The belief among many is that the positive image of the celebrity will be directly transferred to the product, however, research shows that the choice of celebrity endorser need to be more extensive for this meaning to be transferred. Silvera and Austad (2004) argue that in order for meaning to be transferred from the celebrity endorser to the product or brand, and for the advertisement to be effective, the fit between them must be more deeply bounded with strong arguments and trustworthy explanations for why the endorsers genuinely like the products. Proctor and Kitchen (2018) argues that companies should be considered when using celebrities as brand endorsers as some consumers might avoid buying a product endorsed by a celebrity they do not like.

The fact that many companies use celebrity endorses and influencers today, seemingly without being particularly concerned or relatively unaware of the actual effectiveness of them, could be an argument for the importance of understanding new kinds of product endorsers (Silvera & Austad, 2004; Proctor & Kitchen 2018). In addition to this and as previously mentioned, the rise of digitalisation has created new forms of celebrities operating online, raising new questions and uncertainties about celebrity and influencer marketing, resulting in a need for research to better understand more about the phenomena.

Social media influencers

As previously mentioned, the recent digital development has resulted in new forms of celebrities and marketing methods. Arguably, the concept of influencer marketing and social media influencers has emerged in the era of digitalisation. The concept of influential marketing refers to a key individual who influence potential buyers of products or brands to facilitate the marketing activities of the brand (Brown & Hayes, 2008 as cited by Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). Social media is about making conversation possible among the audience. It is about building relationships and about making conversations happen in the marketplace. Companies are not able to control the conversations located on social media, however they do have the possibility of influencing them (Booth & Matic, 2011). As companies do not have the ability to control the conversations, but do have the possibility to influence them, one can argue that it is of importance that companies manage to influence conversations between consumers in favour of their own organisations. Not succeeding to do so, could be argued as making companies less successful in the marketplace which in turn could damage their businesses.

Considering this potential danger for companies, social media influencers could be argued as a useful tool to consider in order to influence conversations in favour of companies. Social media influencers have been argued to have a kind of persuasive power. Due to their persuasive power, technologies exist today to identify and track influencers that could be of relevance for an organisation (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011). As understood from the name, a social media

influencer can shape the attitudes of an audience, which is commonly done through for example a blog or twitter. However, other forms of social media platforms for influence missions exists, such as Instagram (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). Arguably, social media influencers are similar to traditional celebrities when it comes to promotion of products in the sense that they are, as McCracken (1989) argues, able to offer meanings with more accuracy than anonymous models unknown to the public.

Today's efforts to identify social media influencers rely on factors such as number of times a post has been shared, number of followers of an influencer or numbers of daily visits on a blog (Freberg et al., 2011). With this in mind, being only quantitative, it can be argued that the efforts companies put in to find suitable influencers to promote their brands and products are not sufficient. Instead other efforts, being more of the qualitative sort, are needed in order to find influencers that can influence conversations online in greater favour for the companies using them.

Micro-influencers

During the past decades, the development of social media channels has created a new type of celebrity. By creating an inspiring account where one post inspiring pictures and texts, social medias have created an opportunity for non-famous people in the traditional sense, to be virally famous and influential among other social media users. This type of celebrity is known as micro-celebrities (Boyd & Marwick, 2011). "Micro-celebrity is best understood as a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies

like video, blogs and social networking sites. Micro-celebrity sometimes looks like conventional celebrity, but the two aren't the same" (Senft, 2008 p.25). Traditional celebrities can use the web as a platform to promote themselves, but the web cannot create traditional celebrities. Instead, the web has provided the concept of micro-celebrities (Senft, 2008). Micro-celebrity, or micro-influencer, has been conceptualised as "a learned practice supported by the infrastructure of social media" (Boyd & Marwick, 2011 p.127). Moreover, micro-influencer is a rather recently emerged concept which includes individuals, with the goal of creating a fan-base and social media awareness within a particular social media channel. Micro-influencer practices include activities such as direct interaction with followers, sharing of personal information, the creation of a friendly personal brand and producing inspiring content (Boyd & Marwick, 2011).

Furthermore, the concept of micro-influencer has been considered to be closely linked to self-branding (Page, 2012; Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017; Kozinets & Cerone, 2014), where individuals attempt to build their personal brand through the use of social media platforms and the identity of the micro-influencer is considered to be a product to be consumed by other individuals (Kozinets & Cerone, 2014). In order for the content produced in self-branding purposes to remain relevant for the consumer, it must in similarity to traditional branding follow a strategy (Page, 2012). The strategy usually includes a set of practices that creates attention through giving insights into the micro-influencers' own private life. In addition, the strategy includes communicating real and authentic

details about the influencer's life, which in turn impersonates micro-influencers narratives and branding as both accessible and intimate for consumers (Khamis et al., 2017).

Considering the concept of micro-influencer being relatively new and unexplored within the area of academic literature, the importance of understanding micro-influencers from new perspectives is arguably needed. As mentioned, previous research put emphasis on the concept of micro-influencers as primarily a tool used by people to promote themselves and their own brand. This research, on the other hand, put new light on the concept focusing more on social factors rather than individual factors.

Authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness on social media sites

According to Holt (2002), postmodern consumers often find modern branding efforts inauthentic as they sometimes ooze of commercial intent from their sponsors, an argument that arguably still today is as relevant. Consumers are critical towards marketing messages and have a notion of authenticity that is challenging for marketers. In order for brands to remain authentic their communication must be perceived as created and distributed by subjective parties that lack economic motives. Instead of the economic factor as motivation, brands should preferably be promoted by people who are truly motivated by the brands inherent values (Holt, 2002).

Even though the term authenticity has various definitions it widely refers to something that is real, true and genuine (Arnould & Price, 2000; Charmley, Garry & Ballantine, 2013; Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). In the mind of consumers, authenticity is associated with truth and evidence and if the standards for authenticity have been manipulated in some way for the purpose of profit making, consumers can become suspicious and cautious (Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

In relation to social media, authenticity is defined as "a post or photo that demonstrates some aspect of the celebrity's true self" (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016 p.347). A celebrity's authenticity on social media has been defined as the perception of to what extent a celebrity acts in accordance with his or her true self (Moulard, Garrity & Rice, 2015). The importance of celebrities being authentic on social media is based on the observation that consumers truly enjoy hearing and seeing that celebrities are ordinary people instead of for example seeing perfect pictures from photo shoots and other aspects of a "perfect" life. Consumers prefer to get to know the celebrity's real personality and wants to have insights into the celebrity's real and authentic life where you can see both joys and struggles. Authentic social media posts are considered to be posts where the celebrity presents his or her daily routines and life in general without it being perfectly staged. Consumers enjoy receiving authentic information from the celebrity as they then can relate more to the celebrity's life. Hence, authentic posts made by celebrities can foster emotional attachment between the consumer and the celebrity (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). In the internet arena spontaneous and authentic conversations are vital, since faked postings or censored posting will most likely

backfire and undermine consumers belief in a company (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009)

However, even though the concept of authenticity is popular, a true concept of universal authenticity does not exist. It is the person at the receiving end who defines what authenticity and authentic marketing is to them. In other words, authenticity is constituted by the audience and one person might define authenticity completely different than another. When it comes to social media, the number and complexity of participants is vast and thus the definitions of authenticity are complex and numerous as well. Therefore, it is difficult for individuals on social media to shift between selves in order to be perceived as authentic, in preference to being perceived as fake (Boyd & Marwick, 2011).

Furthermore, according to Ohanian (1990) there is a belief among marketing and advertising practitioners that a communicator's character has a significant effect on the perception and legitimacy of a message. Historically we can see both a strategy of using consumers as product endorsers as well as endorsements by celebrities such as actors and actresses or athletes, who may or may not be associated with the target audience. When a company is selecting the right person to represent their brand, there are several factors to take into consideration; such as the endorsers attraction towards the audience, the person's trustworthiness in regards of being an expert, but also the trustworthiness spurring from a person's personal reputation. The concept of trustworthiness is linked to the concept of source credibility as source credibility refers to a consumer's perception of how trustworthy the information is coming from the specific source (Ohanian, 1990). Interpersonal trust has been discussed in the academic literature and is explained as "the expectancy held by individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on" (Rotter, 1967 p.651)

Even though an endorser might be regarded as an expert within a certain area, a single personal mistake might cause audiences to repel both the endorser and the brand in regard (Ohanian, 1990). The case of Tiger Woods mishap in 2006, which damaged many of his sponsors and the brands he endorsed, is an example of a celebrity losing his trustworthiness due to an incident not liked by fans and consumers (Knittel & Stango, 2013).

Furthermore, the credibility of the source, in the arena of Instagram, is also dependent on how relevant the post is in regard to the source's personal profile and how well it suits in with the timeliness. In regard to how relevant a post is, it is the extent to which the product presented by the endorser goes in line with who the endorser is as a person and how much insight the endorser is assumed to have in the products function and quality (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). In addition, the number of followers a celebrity has, affects consumers perceived credibility of that celebrity. A celebrity with a high number of followers is considered to be more competent, attractive and trustworthy in the eyes of consumers (Jin & Phua, 2014). Research shows that when celebrities act as co-branding partners, consumers tend to evaluate brands based on the information that the celebrity presents in the advertisement. If the celebrity does not cover the characteristics that are relevant to the brand it makes consumers trust less in

the ability of the brand to deliver a benefit (Ilicic & Webster, 2013).

Interestingly, it has been discovered that micro-influencer practices can be viewed as inauthentic as micro-influencers sometimes focus more on promotions and trendy topics rather than connecting with their followers. For many consumers, authenticity equals no advertising or marketing speak. Other consumers claim that promotion is fine in terms of staying authentic, nevertheless the influencer needs to be clear about that they are promoting something, lying or trying to make something not look promotional (even though it is) is viewed as inauthentic (Boyd & Marwick, 2011). Considering that micro-influencers strategy includes communicating real and authentic details of their lives in order to make their promotions more intimate for consumers (Khamis et al., 2017), it is interesting to try to understand both consumers as well as micro-influencers thoughts of micro-influencers marketing efforts.

Identification with characters in media

Media identification can be investigated from different perspectives such as psychological, socio-psychological and cultural. However, as this study focuses on aspects of social media, where people interact and socialise with each other online, this research will not focus on pure psychological aspects of identification. Instead, the focus lies more on the cultural perspective of identification, with elements of a social-psychological perspective and where less focus is on the individual and more focus is on social interactions. Moreover, this study looks at identification as social interactions where social factors, rather than personal factors, has an effect on

the outcome of the individual's identification.

Kelman (1961) looks upon identification as a social influence and explains identification as a process that "occur when an individual adopts the behaviour derived from another person or a group because these behaviours associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group" (p.63). Kelman (1961) further explains that "accepting influence through identification, then, is a way of establishing or maintaining the desired relationship to the other" (p.63). In other words, identification could be explained as a relationship building process that forms the individuals' self-image.

Media identification has been defined as "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them" (Cohen, 2001 p. 245). In other words, identification is a kind of imaginative process where the audience undertakes the identity, goals and views of a character. When for example watching a film or reading a book, the audience often becomes involved in the plot and identify themselves with the characters presented. Identification is consistent of more than being a response to, attitude towards or judgement of a media character, instead identification engages the audience during message reception (Cohen, 2001). Identification has also been explained as a process of social influence by which individuals adopt behaviours and values of a media character (Fraser & Brown, 2002). However, Klimmt, Hefner & Vorderer (2009) highlights that identification is limited to only cover some personality dimensions. Identification does

not entail a full identity replacement in the sense that individuals forget everything they know about their true self when identifying with a media character. Individuals importation of character attributes into their self-perception is limited by the media technology.

Moreover, identification is a central part of any close relationship and has been considered to be an important mechanism used by people to connect emotionally with other people (Cohen, 2001). Oatley (1999) looks upon the identification process with fictional characters and explains identification as a "species of empathy" in which people do not only sympathise with a character, they become that character (Oatley, 1999).

McCracken (1989) argues that celebrities play an important role in consumers identification process. Celebrities have created the self publicly and the celebrity's persona has emerged from different roles in the celebrity's career. When celebrities enter a product endorsement process they make meanings available in material form for the consumer to buy, in the sense that their meaning as celebrity is transferred to the product. As consumers identifies themselves with the celebrity they appreciate these purchasable meanings and are happy to build their self through buying meaning-induced products. The celebrity supplies an example of self-creation but also the product with which the difficult self-creation process is undertaken. In other words, the process of celebrity endorsement helps the consumer to transfer the meaning of the product into the consumers own life (McCracken, 1989). In line with this, it has been found that people integrate perceived behaviours and values they admire in

celebrities into their own lives. People develop self-defining relationships with their idols and imitate their behaviours and values which results in strong forms of personal transformation. Media consumers identify themselves with celebrities as they regard celebrities as role models. Marketing practitioners has also recognised that individuals' lifestyles are influenced by celebrities. Nike was good at airing their mantra "I want to be like Mike" with the aim of strengthen consumers identification with Michael Jordan and the products that he promotes (Fraser & Brown, 2002).

However, Basil (1996) claims that identification could be an explanation of how effective the use of celebrity endorses are, and explains that in mediation purposes, it is crucial to choose celebrity endorsers that the audience can identify themselves with. He states it is not just about choosing a celebrity that is attractive and well-known. This person will not be effective in terms of advertising if that person is not seen as similar to the audience members.

In summary, the theoretical framework of this study defines and elaborates around concepts of social media, celebrity endorsement, influencer marketing, authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility and identification. These concepts are considered to be important in order to understand the development of brand endorsement from when it first became implemented until today where endorsement is popular on several channels and where social media is one of them.

Research methodology: a qualitative single-case study

In the following chapter the methodology applied for this research will be presented and discussed. First, the choice of method will be motivated, which is then followed by a presentation of an argumentation for choosing single-case study and why we selected Kari Traa as our case study. Later on, the data collection and analysis process will be presented, followed by a clarification of the interview process and the ethical aspects taken into consideration. Lastly, the challenges faced, and the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study is pointed out and explained.

Methodology selection

As mentioned in the introduction, there was in the beginning of this research process found to be rather limited empirical evidence on the effect of using micro-influencers as marketing tools. In order to develop an as deep and thorough contextualisation of the phenomena as possible, a case study was found to be the most suitable method, since it reveals detailed facts about the subject and gives the researcher a better understanding of the context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). For the researchers to, in a more focused way, be able to connect existing theories within the field of study to actual situations and in order to build a deeper contextualisation of the phenomena, a single case was chosen to be studied (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). By using the single-case method we were able to look into the case in-depth, allowing ourselves to gather as much information about the specific case as possible. In addition, considering that this study investigates a cultural perspective, with social psychological elements, a qualitative methodology was considered to be suitable in order to achieve a deeper understanding for the area to be investigated (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

Qualitative Single-Case Study

Since the objective of this research was exploratory and interpretative, a case study was deemed suitable for the purpose of giving the reader a deep understanding of the specific case (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The complexity of the organisational and managerial implications when it comes to influencer marketing created a suitable case for an in-depth investigation of a single company. By looking into a single company our aim was to reveal the implications of celebrity marketing from the view of consumers and ambassadors in this specific case (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The characteristics of a single-case study made it possible for us as researchers to create an understanding of the different dynamics that interact within the specific setting of Kari Traa, its ambassadors and its consumers (Eisenhardt, 1989). The single-case study method allowed us to combine our own thoughts and interpretations with the experiences of the interviewed ambassadors and consumers as well as with the relevant theories (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Case selection

In regard to the company chosen for this study, we wanted the focus company to, in addition to working with micro-influencers as their marketing strategy, mirror the societal interests and trends where Swedish people has great interest in health and

exercise (Lembke, 2017) as well as empowering women (Weller, 2017). Considering these requirements, the choice of company to study fell on the Norwegian company Kari Traa as it was deemed to be a suitable and interesting company for this study. Kari Traa is a women's outdoor-, sports- and active-wear company, distributing their products in Europe and in the United States (Kari Traa, n.d.a). Kari Traa is a company with the approach of empowering women and allowing them to be themselves, encouraging them to be active no matter what size or level of training (Kari Traa, n.d.a). In an industry, with a history of marketing brands and products with the help of celebrities, and where a trend towards implementation of micro-influencer marketing could be argued as evolving, Kari Traa proved to be an interesting case to look deeper into. By interviewing consumers of Kari Traa's products, the case gave the opportunity to take in the perspective of young female consumers and to investigate how their perception of authenticity and identification influences their acceptance of marketing messages. In addition to the consumer perspective, we chose to include the perspective of the ambassadors employed by Kari Traa to carry out their marketing messages, which helped us build more extensive context around the case (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Furthermore, it was apparent on Kari Traa's webpage who their ambassadors were (Kari Traa, n.d.b), which made it easy for us as researchers to identify and contact the relevant people. In addition, the ambassadors of Kari Traa showed themselves being very cooperative and invested in enabling the research from the beginning, which only spurred the motivation for our choice of focus company further. The ambassadors were keen on

sharing their experiences and knowledge within social media marketing, which was key factors for being able to create stronger and more informed interpretations of the data collected from the consumers.

Data collection and analysis

The type of qualitative data used in this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with brand ambassadors and consumers of the outdoor-, sports- and active-wear brand Kari Traa. Considering there being little known about this specific area and the intention being to gather detailed insights from the individuals, interviews were deemed to be an appropriate method. Interviews were also preferable since parts of the topic being explored was considered to be of sensitive character as it included the mentioning of brands and the ambassadors opinions of working with Kari Traa, and it was considered that the likeliness that the individuals would disclose information and experiences was higher when asked in a more relaxed and private environment face-to-face (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Since the study is of exploratory character the semi-structured interviews allowed us as researchers and also the respondents to diverge from the main topic to explore a side-topic or a response in more detail, as there was no need to strictly stick to the interview manuscript (Gill et al., 2008). The interviews were conducted in the relaxed setting of a café, on the phone or via Skype, which in combination with the structure of the interviews promoted the conversation but still enabled the collection of detailed information (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

Following the interviews, which were all recorded, they were fully transcribed and thereafter coded. The data was during the coding process structured into different themes where three themes were considered to be of most relevance to the research; authenticity, identification and a declining interest in macro-influencers. All of the transcribed text was coded and the most including and describing quotes were chosen. After this, discussing texts around the two respondent groups were created, which were then analysed with the support of the theoretical framework.

Interview process

During the course of this research, eight deep interviews were conducted face to face, over the phone and via Skype, three of them being with ambassadors and five with consumers as presented in table 1. All interviews were recorded and during each interview, notes were taken about thoughts around the subject and interpretations of the respondents' answers and behaviours. After the interviews, each recording was transcribed in detail and then analysed. All interviews were held with women from the age of 21-30 and the length of the

interviews varied from 45 to 90 minutes. Respondents from both groups, ambassador and consumer, were purposefully chosen on the basis of their knowledge of the brand and inclusion within this context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As mentioned in the section above, Kari Traa clearly communicates who their ambassadors are, which made it easy for us as researchers to get in touch with them. Regarding our consumer respondents we chose to contact the people in our surroundings who followed two or more micro-influencers and who had some kind of relation to Kari Traa as a brand.

The interview scripts differed slightly between ambassadors and consumers where the questions for the consumers were more open for them to interpret and where it was assumed that they did not have that much previous knowledge within the field of influencer marketing. The ambassador respondents were however assumed to have some insight and knowledge within the field and therefore their interview scripts were considered to be more advanced in terms of expertise knowledge and notion.

Respondents	Age	Occupation	Type of interview
Ambassadors			
Ida	22	Skier/Skiguide/Personal trainer/Entrepreneur	Telephone
Lisa	30	Student - Industrial Engineering & Management	In person
Hildur	21	Student - Skiing university	Skype
Consumers			
Beata	24	Student - Naval Architecture	In person
Julia	24	Student - Environmental Business & Economics	In person
Jessica	28	Strategy Consultant	In person
Sanna	26	Student - Navigation & Logistics	Skype
Frida	26	Student - Marketing	In person

Table 1

Ethics

An important part of this research was making sure valid ethical considerations were taken into regard. In today's digital society, the question of ethics and privacy when it comes to personal information is a sensitive subject to many. In order to ensure the respondents of their personal information and statements being properly handled, the ethics concerns were involved already at the beginning of the research. By being transparent with what and how the material from the interview would be used in the research, good and honest relationships were created between the researchers and the respondents (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The purpose of this was to create a situation where most issues concerning the research was known by both the researchers and the respondents. The respondents were also asked if they were willing to participate in the study and whether or not they wanted to remain completely anonymous or if they would consent to their first name being used in the research, to which all of them agreed.

Challenges

As many of the respondents were not situated in Gothenburg, one of the main challenges when conducting this research was being able to plan for where and when the interview was to take place. In the initial phase where the ambassadors were contacted, they were all positive towards taking part in the research. However, after this initial contact many of the ambassadors were hard to get in touch with to plan the meeting or call. The respondents busy schedule as well as the physical distance between researchers and respondents made it difficult to do all interviews in person,

although this would have been preferred in order to interpret the interviewees responses fully. In the initial phase of the study, five ambassadors were contacted and supposed to participate, however, due to them having a busy schedule no data was collected from two of them.

Since some of the interviews were forced to be held via Skype, due to geographical distance, internet connection was a critical factor in these cases. Due to bad internet connection it was at times difficult to interpret the respondents' reactions to questions as the picture lagged behind. For one respondent, not even Skype was possible, and the interview was thus held over the telephone, which resulted in us not being able to read the respondents reactions at all.

Furthermore, all of the interviews were held in Swedish as this was the native language of both the interviewers and the respondents. After the interviews were conducted in Swedish, they had to be translated into English as this was the language used in the study. Even though Swedish was the most apparent choice of language for the interviews, the translation process might create problems in interpreting the material if the researchers are not to recognise the important role of the translation and interpretation of meaning (Larkin, Dierckx de Casterlé, & Schotsmans, 2007).

Trustworthiness and authenticity

The concept of trustworthiness and authenticity, used in the theoretical framework, are certainly relevant in the methodological section of this study as well. Trustworthiness and authenticity were

two criteria used in order to assess this qualitative study. In order to assess the trustworthiness of this study, respondent validation was ensured, meaning that the researchers provided each respondent with a review of what she said in the interviews and gave feedback about the impressions and findings of the study. Another way of assessing trustworthiness was to consider the transferability of this study. As a restricted and specific culture is studied, this study produces rich details of a culture that could be transferred to another environment. This study gives rich insights into social media cultures including young females which could be transferred into other social media settings. Moreover, we as researchers made sure to act in good faith, meaning that we did not allow personal values to sway the construction of the research and its findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited by Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Furthermore, the authenticity of this study was assessed by considering aspects of fairness. We have in this study been particular about that it presents different views among members of the social setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited by Bryman and Bell, 2011). The fact that this research includes two perspectives; one consumer perspective and one micro-influencer perspective, it gave the micro-influencers the possibility to confirm or reject the viewpoints of consumers.

In summary, the methodological chapter covers the different steps taken towards finishing this research in order to make it clear for the reader why this path of road was taken. Throughout the chapter we have discussed the choice of method, qualitative single-case study, why we chose the specific case of Kari Traa, how the data was collected and analysed, the interview process and ethics taken into regard, the challenges faced along the way as well as the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study.

Findings and Discussion

The following chapter presents the findings of this study and discuss them in relation to the theories presented above. In the data gathered, three themes were identified; *authenticity, identification* and *a declining interest in macro-influencers*. Each theme is presented separately where the viewpoints of the consumers are presented first, followed by the ambassadors' viewpoints and then both viewpoints are discussed in relation to the relevant literature. The chapter ends by discussing all three themes in relation to existing views of influencer marketing and suggest how the three themes could be combined into one concept; *genuineness*.

The importance of *authenticity* in terms of trustworthiness and credibility

The first theme identified in the gathered data was the importance of the influencers level of authenticity. Authenticity demonstrates the influencer's ability to show some aspect of the influencer's true self and affects the way the influencer is perceived by consumers. The theme was discussed by all eight respondents, both consumers and ambassadors, and appeared to be of high importance both to consumers when receiving marketing messages and to ambassadors when giving them. The consumer respondents spoke positively about authentic posts made by influencers and described how they enjoy them and

makes them feel as if they get to know the influencer on a deeper level. The following two sections could be summarised as follows; consumers find micro-influencers marketing efforts on Instagram more genuine than the posts of macro-influencers and the ambassador respondents aim to inspire their followers by posting genuine pictures of what is really going on in their lives on Instagram.

Consumers find micro-influencers genuine

The majority of our consumer respondents explained that micro-influencers manage to communicate a truer picture of themselves through their social media channels than macro-influencers and traditional celebrities usually does. When an influencer communicates not only perfectly staged pictures, but also aspects of who they are as a person, the consumer respondents argue that they increase their authenticity. By showing consumers and followers parts of themselves and their lives that aren't perfect, they present themselves as real people, to whom consumers can relate. For example, Jessica described how she thinks when following micro-influencer Kajsa Larsson:

"She shows her true self, not only cool skiing pictures or pretty selfies, but also snaps when she's studying or cooking or just fooling around. She shows that she sometimes struggles with having a lot to do in school and I think that shows that she is a real person too. Nobody's life is perfect, but many celebrities seem unwilling to show that to their followers, it seems like they only want to show how perfect lives they lead" Jessica

As mentioned in the quote, the authenticity of micro-influencers is increased by them being more spontaneous in their Instagram posts and posting pictures that are totally perfect. The quote suggests that consumers enjoy hearing and seeing parts from an influencer's life that are not just about their fame or the products they promote. When they show a side that consumers can relate to, our consumer respondents argue that they also are perceived as more authentic when marketing products. One of the main arguments for consumers perceiving micro-influencers as more authentic is that they manage to make the post revolve more around what they are doing in the post than the actual product. Consumer respondent Beata believes that micro-influencers such as the brand ambassadors of Kari Traa perform their sport or activity and manages to inspire to an active lifestyle whilst wearing the Kari Traa clothes and promoting them. She argues that micro-influencers are more genuine since they do things they would probably do even though they were not sponsored:

"Even though they would not be ambassadors for Kari Traa they would very likely still ski, run or climb because it's their interest, it's what they do regularly, and they do it for themselves not for anyone else. Macro-influencers promote things because they earn money and it's what they live off of, and that makes it less genuine" Beata

This quote suggest that consumers appreciate when the marketing message is not direct and that the focus is not always on the actual product promoted but revolves around the activity performed. Indeed, the theme suggests that consumers follow micro-influencers because of what they do

and who they are and not because of what products they represent.

Ambassadors aim to inspire

According to all ambassador respondents they aim to be perceived as inspiring and authentic by their followers through what they post on Instagram. When for example posting pictures where they wear Kari Traa clothes they want their pictures to be connected to a positive and playful context that also reflects themselves and who they are as people. Lisa explains that many other sport brands are presented in a rough and tough context, almost like it is meant for people performing a sport on an elite level, which makes it less inspiring for someone who is not a professional athlete. Kari Traa and their ambassadors, on the other hand, has a focus on wellbeing and happiness, which Lisa wants her Instagram account to express. Lisa aims to inspire women to let go of the feeling of pressure and stress and to enjoy the positive attributes and how fun exercising can be:

"In school and in life everything is so competitive and serious, training and sports is supposed to be fun, I want to show them that it doesn't have to be so serious. Everything doesn't have to be about performance and sports should be something that makes you happy. I think both my pictures on Instagram and Kari Traa's clothes reflects that" Lisa

This quote suggest that ambassadors want to communicate their opinions and values through their posts on Instagram. It also suggests that Lisa's individual values are reflected by the values of Kari Traa and how important that is in a collaboration. She believes that when expressing your own

true opinions and that she chose to collaborate with Kari Traa, whose values reflects her own, she stays true and authentic towards her followers. According to ambassador respondent Ida consumers want to see the celebrity's *"true self"* and get inspired from it. They seek for people with the same values as them and whose opinion they feel that they can trust. Furthermore, she argues the importance for influencers to stay true and show their real personalities:

"Once, a big international sports brand contacted me and said that they wanted me to become one of their new brand ambassadors. However, they also said they wanted me to be willing to engage more on Instagram and post more photos. The problem for me was that by following their orders I would become a reflection of my Instagram instead of my Instagram being a reflection of me. I am not a girl that has time or even want to post something every day and put my whole life into Instagram, so I therefore turned their collaboration offer down" Ida

This quote shows that for some influencers, such as Ida, it is important that she continues to be herself even though she has more followers on Instagram and is sponsored by a company. Furthermore, she claims that if she would not stay true to who she is, she would lose her authenticity and the trust her followers have in her and her recommendations. Further she claims that many macro-influencers lose their authenticity as they promote a wide variety of products. She claims that when not staying true to who you are and promoting products that are not in line with your personality and the life you lead, your

product recommendations will also not be trustworthy:

"There are way too few influencers who keeps it real. They project a false picture of what they think people want to see, without actually living that life. This is where people misinterprets things, that girl who gets like 10 ski-bags for free, perhaps goes skiing a couple of days during the entire winter, and is this someone's opinion everyone should trust when it comes to ski-gear? Many influencers are just Instagrammers, they do not have a real connection to the world as they are not out there meeting actual people on the mountains, and that does not make them inspiring. People will become truly inspired when companies find ambassadors that are more than just a pretty face, that actually can inspire with what they do and who they are" Ida

Again, this quote demonstrates the importance of staying authentic and carefully choosing what brands you, as an influencer, collaborate with. By collaborating with brands that does not go in line with the influencers personality and interests, the influencer might compromise with their own authenticity.

Staying true is vital

When looking to both ambassador and consumer respondents, it is obvious that authenticity is an important factor when it comes to trusting an influencer and her recommendations. What was expressed by both consumers and ambassadors was the importance of ambassadors staying true to themselves and allowing followers to take part of their everyday life which is in line with existing research stating that authenticity refers to something that is

considered to be true or genuine (Arnould & Price, 2000; Charmley et al., 2013; Thomson et al., 2005; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). By letting consumers take part of their everyday life, the micro-influencers in this research were said to create a more genuine and relatable content, where not everything is presented as being perfect. A traditional celebrity, on the other hand, was by the consumer respondents considered to be less authentic as their marketing messages were considered to be more direct, which makes it obvious that they have a stronger commercial intent than micro-influencers. This observation goes in line with previous research, claiming that consumers find things less authentic if the authenticity has been manipulated in order to make a profit (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Holt, 2002).

Moreover, previous research puts focus on the fact that celebrities with a high number of followers are considered to be more trustworthy than someone with fewer followers (Jin & Phua, 2014). However, in contrary, the results from this research show that micro-influencers were considered to be more trustworthy than traditional celebrities even though they have a smaller number of followers. The higher degree of trustworthiness, highlighted by both consumers and ambassadors, was the fact that micro-influencers often work within a smaller niche, where they are considered to be experts within the area. Micro-influencers are also able to prove that they are experts within that niche as their whole lives on Instagram revolve around it. With this in mind, their recommendations of products become much more believable. When for example a macro-influencer, that is mostly focused on fashion in general, is sponsored with a skiing jacket, consumers

know that the focus is probably not on how well the item performs in harsh conditions as this influencer would probably not go skiing in heavy snow and wind. A micro-influencer, on the other hand, considered to be an expert within her area makes the products she promotes achieve higher legitimacy amongst consumer. As argued in previous research a trustworthy Instagram post needs to be relevant in terms of the endorser that presents the product. The endorser must be a good fit with the product characteristics (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). One can argue that micro-influencers are seen as being more authentic as they manage to show followers their true lives where they are experts within a field and therefore match the product characteristics very well. Overall, micro-influencers are considered as more genuine and experienced than traditional celebrities and macro-influencers, making consumers more open for marketing messages sent out by micro-influencers.

Identification with micro-influencers

Identification and belonging is the second theme that was identified from the data and refers to consumers being able to identify themselves with the celebrity, the importance of which was highlighted by both consumer and ambassador respondents. The viewpoints of consumers are presented first, followed by the viewpoints of the ambassadors. The section is rounded off with a discussion of both groups viewpoints in relation to relevant literature. Consumers highlighted the importance of seeing the influencer in situations and doing things the consumer could imagine herself being in or doing. At the same time ambassadors expressed the importance of showing not only the best and

most exciting parts of their life but also struggles and difficulties they encounter, in order to present a more realistic view of their lives. The following two sections could be summarised as follows; consumers feel a connection to micro-influencers from what they choose to post on Instagram and ambassadors feel that it is important to build relationships with their followers on Instagram.

Consumers feel a connection to micro-influencers

One of the main arguments for following micro-influencers, pointed out by our consumer respondents, was that micro-influencers are people that they, as individuals, can identify themselves with and whose life they feel a connection to. The majority of our consumer respondents argued that the fact that they are able to relate to an influencer is a decisive factor when it comes to how much they trust the content posted by him or her. Consumer respondent Julia argues:

"Micro-influencers are good at posting pictures that gives me the feeling that I know them personally" Julia

Furthermore, Julia highlights that she is able to relate to certain micro-influencers and their personal life as she shares the same interests and values as they do. This argument is also supported by consumer respondent Jessica who states that she can relate to certain micro-influencers as she knows the sports that they are performing. Jessica explains:

"When a micro-influencer ski off-piste and post a picture of it, I can relate to what she

is doing as I have skied a lot off piste myself and knows how cool it is" Jessica

Furthermore, Jessica also argues that she has difficulties relating to an influencer posting images related to fast fashion as many macro-influencers usually does and that they do not intrigue the same interest in her. Jessica has decided to unfollow many macro-influencers as they tend to promote a wider range of unrelated products and brands, which she believes compromises the trustworthiness of the influencer as well as her interest in them. With this in mind, Jessica highlights that by following micro-influencers she knows what kind of content will fill her news feed on Instagram, which results in her feeling in control of the kind of content that reaches her.

Consumer respondent Beata argues that it is not just the specific niche that is crucial to if she as a consumer can relate to the influencer and her life or not, but also how reachable and close the surrounding life attributes are to her own life. Beata gives the example of world famous skier Lindsey Vonn and argues that even though she shares the same interest of skiing as Lindsey Vonn, her life is unreachable considering that she is one of the best skiers in the world and therefore the life she leads is also very different. By leading a different life, Beata means the fact that Lindsay is meeting with other celebrities, has a completely different income and stands on world cup- and Olympics podiums, a reality that is very far from Beata's own life and even life goals. Beata also states that the brands and products that Lindsay promotes are not as interesting as the ones of a micro-influencer, as Lindsay's level and type of skiing is so far from her own. A micro-influencer's life, on the other hand is one

that Beata can identify herself with to a greater extent and on several levels, and she therefore enjoys and prefers following the life of a micro-influencer on Instagram rather than a world-famous sports woman. In line with Beata, Julia argues that the similarity between her and a micro-influencer makes it easier to relate to the content and is thus more inspiring.

"It is easier to relate to a micro-influencer's life as I could actually be one myself, in some way" Julia

This quote demonstrates that the level of connection and identification that a consumer feels to the influencer is very much dependent on how relatable it is to the consumer and her life. In other words, Julia feels that she relates to a micro-influencer as their lives are so close she could live the same life as the micro-influencer is living.

Ambassadors feel the importance of relationship building

Ambassador respondent Ida puts big emphasis on the importance of the relationship between influencer and consumer. She argues that people in today's society oftentimes are isolating themselves from the outside world and have a tendency to turn to their social media platforms instead of focusing on actual human interaction. The biggest issue with this, she believes, is that social media platforms, such as Instagram, are filled with flawless images from people's lives. Influencers post pictures of their luxurious lifestyles, with expensive handbags and travels, flying first class and living in four-star hotels. Ida believes that feeding consumers with this type of content, leaves them with a feeling of loneliness and sadness, as they feel they

are not able to reach these unrealistic ideals. Ida explains that she has always aimed to maintain her Instagram account on a more realistic level, providing her followers with content they can relate to. In addition, Ida has recently spotted a trend where consumers search for a certain type of entertainment that is more relatable, hence also more appreciated.

"The television industry has been quick to understand that consumers appreciate to see the real life of celebrities and watch documentaries about celebrities' real lives. Perhaps this is a bad example, but just look at the TV-show "Wahlgrens värld" for example. People love to watch this TV-show as they are invited into the family's private life and can witness those less glamorous things occur within famous families as well, such as family arguments and other things" Ida

Ambassador respondent Lisa argues in line with Ida's idea about maintaining an Instagram account that is more relatable to their followers. She too, aims towards having an Instagram account that does not look "too staged", and therefore from time to time, post images that represent her daily life. Lisa believes that consumers in general are bad at seeing through those perfectly staged pictures to the real lives of influencers, where not everything is joyful and perfect. She wants to show her followers that even though she is very fit and works out a lot, she too, sometimes has issues motivating herself to go outside and have workout. She explains that she feels that it is important not to hide the challenges with keeping motivated and that she also has backlashes when it comes to staying fit since consumers aren't able to see that. She points out that she wants her followers to

believe that they are involved in and can take part of the entire spectra of her life and that she invites them to see both the positive and negative sides.

"The only thing they see is that I travel and work out and then don't understand how I can afford or have time to do that. On the other hand, they mostly see the positive part of my life, rather than how my life actually is. I try to post the negative parts as well, but people seem to only see the positive parts since the majority of my posts are positive. People are bad at sorting out and seeing that I don't post all of the negative parts in life. I pay a price for travelling as much as I do, I don't have furniture and sometimes I have to shower in meltwater, but somehow people seem to romanticise that" Lisa

Another important factor is pointed out by ambassador respondent Hildur who claims that it is important that people can see that Kari Traa is used by regular people, and that the brand ambassadors are great representatives of such. She thinks that the fact that Kari Traa's choice of working with "regular" people like herself instead of supermodels or celebrities, sends out a different message about the brand to consumers, which leaves them looking to themselves in a more positive and healthy way.

"I think it is important that people can see that Kari Traa is used by regular people, instead of just seeing commercials and models wearing the clothes. I think that us as ambassadors give another, more positive, view of the brand and the clothes" Hildur

To sum up, what was found was that both consumers and ambassadors put great emphasis on consumers being able to relate to the influencer and her life. For the ambassador respondents this means to post content that is not only about the products but to invite the consumers to see all aspects of their life and to act honest towards consumers.

As pointed out previously, consumers can relate to micro-influencers as they feel that they can relate to who they are and what they spend their lives doing. Consumers feel they can relate to micro-influencers as they share the same values and attitudes in life. However, in contrary to McCracken (1989) claiming that traditional celebrities play an important role in consumers identity creation process, the respondents in this research argued that the life of celebrities is too far away from their own lives, making celebrities lives unreachable and non-relatable and therefore also not of interest. Instead focus was on the importance of feeling that the life of the micro-influencer was one that the consumer actually could see themselves living. The importance of finding celebrity endorses that people can identify themselves with, instead of primarily focusing on finding celebrities that are attractive and well-known to the public, has been pointed out in previous research (Basil, 1996). The findings of this study are in line with Basil (1996) thoughts, however our study suggests that celebrity endorses are in general viewed to be difficult for consumers to identify themselves with and companies will therefore struggle finding traditional celebrities that consumers are able to identify themselves with today.

Moreover, the feeling of connection was an important aspect brought up by both consumers and ambassadors. In order for consumers to identify themselves with a micro-influencer they needed to feel a certain type of connection to the influencer. It is not enough for a consumer to connect to a character just by sharing the love for the same sport, as highlighted by consumer respondent Beata. Instead a deeper connection is needed, which refers to the feeling of that consumers could see themselves in the shoes of the micro-influencer, that they could actually be a micro-influencer themselves almost. Fraser and Brown (2002) claims that consumers identify with celebrities as they see them as role models. As this was not confirmed in our research one can argue that consumers do no longer see celebrities as idols as they have realised that they will never be able to live the life celebrities live. Instead they step down and look for role models that they actually could be themselves. They are tired of trying to become something they cannot. As mentioned by Cohen (2001) identification is an important mechanism to connect emotionally with people. As found in this research, when consumers no longer can feel an identification with the traditional celebrities, one can argue that they will not get emotionally attached to them which means that they will not get affected by the products they endorse either. As pointed out by ambassador respondent Hildur, presenting Kari Traa as a brand used by regular people just like herself, makes the brand more relatable for consumers.

A declining interest in macro-influencers

The first theme that emerged during the analysis of the data gathered was that, in contrary to the theory of traditional

celebrities being a powerful tool for marketing brands and products, there is a declining interest in macro-influencers and a tendency towards preferring micro-influencers. The viewpoints of consumers are presented first and is then followed by the viewpoints of the ambassadors. Later on, the section is rounded off with a discussion of both groups viewpoints in relation to relevant literature. The theme was evident among all respondents, both consumers and ambassadors, where it could be seen that consumers had a strong preference towards following micro-influencers on Instagram rather than following macro-influencers. Furthermore, consumers had strong arguments for trusting the marketing messages coming from micro-influencers rather than macro-influencers, which was also supported by the strategies expressed by the ambassador respondents. With this said, the third theme we found was a declining interest in macro-influencers and traditional celebrities. The following two sections could be summarised as follows; consumers find macro-influencers marketing efforts on Instagram irritating, ambassadors choose brands they believe in and can fully support.

Consumers feel an irritation against macro-influencers and their way of marketing

What was highlighted by the majority of our consumer respondents was that they were often negatively affected by marketing messages sent out by macro-influencers. Even though all of the consumer respondents were aware of micro-influencers targeting them with marketing messages as well, they did not perceive it as negatively as when the message came from a macro-influencer.

"With products and collaborations in mind, I would listen more to a marketing message coming from a niched micro-influencer more than a message coming from a macro-influencer. There lies much more genuineness in a promotion coming from a micro-influencer and they often promote something new that I'm interested in trying" Frida

Consumer respondent Sanna explains that she has unfollowed many macro-influencers and traditional celebrities due to her Instagram feed containing of mostly advertisement and sponsored posts from macro-influencers. She explains that there is a limit for how much advertising one can take in during a day and that too much advertising in the end creates a disinterest and a feeling of annoyance in regard to the influencer and the brand.

"Sometimes it feels like my whole Instagram feed only involves advertising, when every other post includes something related advertising I feel the need to unfollow macro-influencers immediately" Sanna

Consumer respondent Julia argues in line with Sanna, explaining that she feels targeted and sometimes almost attacked by advertising on Instagram, which has led to her choosing to unfollow many macro-influencers and public accounts. Furthermore, Julia believes that another reason for her lost in interest in macro-influencers is that they promote a wide variety of products that does not always have a clear connection to them as a person. In these cases, the focus of the collaboration appears to be is to earn money more than that actually is a product or service that appeals to them.

The issue of macro-influencers having a monetary focus was discussed by the majority of our consumer respondents, and they argue that some macro-influencers engage in too many and too big of a variety of collaborations, which they argue gives the impression that their focus is on earning money regardless of what they promote. Consumer respondent Jessica argues that macro-influencers lose their genuineness when their monetary focus shines through in what they post on Instagram. Consumer respondent Beata explains that she feels that when some macro-influencers post pictures that are extremely staged, where they have taken pictures of different outfits in the same location and it seems like the photoshoot took them a long time to organise. These types of pictures do not inspire her as they are not based on their life with pictures taken in the moment. She feels more inspired when a micro-influencer posts a picture while performing a sport and at the same time wears for example a Kari Traa outfit, as it feels that they need that outfit to perform the sport well.

"Micro-influencers have a different relationship to consumers. They have a more genuine and long-lasting relationship and they do not use their Kari Traa clothes just once for a photoshoot and then upload a picture from it. Instead they use the same outfits during activities, and therefore shows that they really work. By following micro-influencers, I see that the same jacket or the same trousers appear again and again which makes what they promote much more genuine" Beata

According to consumer respondent Julia, she feels that micro-influencers chose collaborations carefully and only chose to collaborate with brands that have a relation to their own personal interests. She thinks that a micro-influencer would not promote a brand or a product if it was not something they would potentially use themselves even though they would not be ambassadors for the brand.

Furthermore, Jessica explains that if she sees an Instagram post from a micro-influencer, who is really good at skiing, wear a specific jacket or base-layer, she automatically believes that this garment must be of good quality and function, otherwise the micro-influencer would not use it. If a macro-influencer, on the other hand, promotes a jacket for skiing, she does not find the promotion trustworthy as this influencer does not have skiing as their main interest, and therefore does not have the knowledge to determine whether the jacket is good or bad for the purpose. She states that macro-influencers do not manage to show the functionality in the products that they are promoting, they just make it look good and the quality and functions of the garment are less important. Jessica gives an example of this from macro-influencer Kenza Zouiten who in an Instagram post does advertisement for a pair of boots that she reveals also gives her blisters although it is still worth it wearing them since they are so fashionable. In this post she encourages her followers to purchase the boots even though they clearly have no other functionality than being fashionable, which Jessica believes undermine Kenza's trustworthiness. However, what is worth pointing out in this case, is that the perception of Kenza's trustworthiness depends on who the consumer is. A consumer such as Jessica who prioritises functionality and comfort before fashion, would never be intrigued to buy a pair of boots for 10 000 SEK that will end up being

useless because of their uncomfortableness. However, not all consumers have the same priorities. The argument that many macro-influencers promote low quality products is supported by consumer respondent Beata who argues that even though she sometimes buys products that has been promoted by macro-influencers she ends up being disappointed by them almost every time.

"Once I bought a skirt that a macro-influence wore in a picture, but when trying it on at home it did not fit well so I had to return it. I often find clothes looking very good on them in their pictures, which I then sometimes end up buying. However, when I try it on I realise that the clothes are super ugly on me and the fabric is low quality. The clothes look really nice in their pictures because the pictures are staged and edited, but then end up not being nice in reality. I have come to learn that macro-influencers promote clothes with really bad fit and quality" Beata

Ambassadors choose brands they truly support

The argument that micro-influencers are more genuine in their collaborations with brands than macro-influencers is also strengthened by ambassador respondent Lisa, who claims that this is a very important aspect to her when choosing which brands to collaborate with. She believes in both Kari Traa as a brand, as well as their products. She argues that she as a micro-influencer chose her collaborations with greater care than perhaps a macro-influencer and that the relationship between her and the brand is deeper and more long-term than many of the collaborations a macro-influencer does.

"We reach another type of consumer, a macro-influencer reaches the broader spectra since they have many different collaborations. Also, this way I as an influencer have a very strong connection to the brand since I've had a collaboration with them and worn their clothes for almost three years and it's one of the few brands I do collaborations with" Lisa

Ambassador respondent Ida confirms Julia's argument above regarding micro-influencers choosing their collaborations more carefully and explains that she is willing to support Kari Traa as she stands fully behind their products and the brand. She explains that she would never have agreed when they offered her a spot as brand ambassador if she felt that she could not stand behind the products or the brand. For her, the value does not lie within receiving free products or other compensation, but instead the greatest value for her is to stay true to her followers. Staying true to her also includes not allowing her collaborations control how she engages in social media, but to allow herself to act and upload pictures in a way that comes natural to her. She also believes that if she wouldn't believe in the company and their products her followers would be able to see that and lose their trust in her.

"Kari Traa called me and asked if I wanted to become an ambassador. They said I was the right person to promote their brand as I truly enjoy a sporty and healthy lifestyle. I said I was willing to promote their brand as I can stand 100% behind their products. Otherwise I would never have said yes. I don't care about money and stuff" Ida

Ambassador respondent Lisa agrees, in similarity to Ida, and explains that she took

on the role as brand ambassador for Kari Traa as she can stand behind the company's vision. Lisa explains that sometimes Kari Traa sends her clothes that does not fit perfectly or are not a perfect match for the sport she is performing. Instead of wearing the clothes in pictures and claim to her followers that they are good she avoids posting pictures with them on and instead post pictures with other Kari Traa clothes that she likes, and feel could improve the lives of her followers. She explains that if she would not act like this she would lose credibility amongst her followers.

Monetary focus and weak product knowledge is uninspiring

In summary, this research shows a declining interest in macro-influencers on Instagram, which refers to consumer respondents unfollowing macro-influencers or stopping to pay attention to what the macro-influencers post on Instagram due to a loss of interest. The main reason for the interest decline, highlighted by consumers respondents, was the fact that the monetary focus of macro-influencers often shines through in what they post on Instagram. When macro-influencers post something on Instagram it is many times obvious that they do so in order to earn money and not to show a product that they truly think is good. Previous research claims that consumers are not affected by that celebrities gets payed for endorsing products (Atkin & Block, 1983). Our study contradicts this finding with the majority of consumer respondents claiming that they have lost interest in macro-influencers due to the fact that they understand that celebrities promote product as they earn money by doing so. Another important factor related to the monetary focus is that consumer respondents felt

attacked by advertising coming from macro-influencers on Instagram. There is a limit for how much advertising the consumer respondents said they were able to take in and when it was too much advertising it resulted in a disinterest for macro-influencers.

Moreover, previous research claims that celebrity endorsers are an effective marketing tool to use as consumers find their marketing messages trustworthy (Atkin & Block, 1983; Freiden; 1984; Friedman & Friedman, 1979). What was found in this research also contradicts this earlier finding. All consumer respondent stated that they tend to trust macro-influencers less as their monetary focus shines through, which makes consumers suspicious regarding the quality and function of the product being endorsed. The ambassador respondents in turn explained that they aim to be trustworthy on Instagram and post pictures with products that they truly like. In addition, the ambassadors explained that consumers today are too clever to just swallow marketing messages that are too obvious.

Previous research claims that companies should choose collaborations with celebrities that symbolises the meanings the brand wants to communicate. However, many celebrities today have similar characteristics, which makes the selection of characters and personalities limited to choose from for companies (McCracken, 1989). Similar to McCracken's (1989) findings, another reason for a declining interest in macro-influencers found in this research was that macro-influencers tend to promote a wide range of products that, according to consumers, does not have a clear connection to them as people. One can

argue that the findings in this research suggest that a declining interest in macro-influencers is due to companies not being able to match macro-influencers with the correct products. Micro-influencers, on the other hand, can be argued as easier to match as they have a more niched approached.

Another important aspect brought up by the ambassador respondent side is that micro-influencer collaboration leads to longer and stronger relationships. This is because they truly like the products that they endorse and are honest towards consumers. With this in mind, one can argue that by having collaborations with micro-influencers companies will achieve stronger relationship with their customers that will last for long, making the number of loyal customers large.

Appreciation of micro-influencers due to authentic and relatable content

As presented, three themes were evident in the data gathered for this study. The first theme refers to that consumers find micro-influencers authentic. The fact that they find micro-influencers authentic makes them trust and believe in the products that they promote more. In comparison, macro-influencers and traditional celebrities were said to be less authentic leading to consumers believing in their marketing messages less. The second theme found refers to consumers being able to identify themselves with micro-influencers as they share similar interests and values in life. The identification leads to consumers relating more to what micro-influencers post on Instagram as well as the products they promote. The third and final theme refers to a decline in interest in traditional celebrities and macro-influencers amongst

consumers. The decline in interest is due to that consumers tend to believe that traditional celebrities and macro-influencers has an obvious monetary focus and less product knowledge compared to a micro-influencer. With above reasoning in mind, this study extends previous research on authenticity, where it is argued that consumers find things less authentic if the authenticity has been manipulated or tampered with, in order to make a profit (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Holt, 2002). As this study brings on a social media perspective of authenticity, this study finds that even though social media arguably makes it possible for people to "polish" and "stage" their lives to look perfect, the authenticity cannot be manipulated in this environment either. This study also extends previous research on media identification where it is argued that identification is important in order for people to connect emotionally with other people (Cohen, 2001). Bringing in a social media perspective of identification, this study finds that social media characters operating on Instagram must have the ability to show aspects of their lives and selves that consumers can relate to. This study also brings a relatively new and unexplored concept of micro-influencers into light and finds that previous research on celebrity endorsement, claiming that celebrities are effective marketing tool in product endorsement purposes (McCracken, 1989; Atkin & Block, 1983; Freiden; 1984; Friedman & Friedman, 1979), is no longer as effective.

Moreover, the findings of this study put emphasis on the importance of looking at marketing from a new perspective, at least for products such as outdoor- and sports- and active-wear. According to Lee (2012),

traditional marketing such as advertising, public relations and branding is a dead paradigm. He claims that social media marketing and the usage of customer influencers is a new way of reaching consumers and becoming successful in the marketplace. Companies using influencer-based marketing will achieve authentic customer relationships, hence creating sustained growth for their businesses (Lee, 2012). Jiang, Lin, Ding, Duan and Xu (2015) claims that it is vital to understand effective influencers based on trust. They argue that effective influencers are people who have the ability to affect followers' acceptance of product choices, recommendations and purchase decisions. In line with Jiang et al.'s (2015), this study finds that it is not just about finding and using influencers for marketing purposes, it is about understanding whether the type of influencers found is suitable for the products promoted and whether the influencers are appreciated by consumers.

Micro-influencer - the genuine marketing tool

As previously mentioned, our study has found that three themes are evident in order to understand why micro-influencers has become an appreciated communication tool amongst consumers, and to understand why consumers find micro-influencers more authentic and identifiable compared to other forms of celebrities, such as traditional celebrities and macro-influencers. The three themes found has previously been presented separately. However, the three themes discussed in this study could arguably be combined and explained as one holistic theme, called *genuineness*. The following section will clarify how the concepts of *authenticity*, *identification* and *a declining*

interest in macro-influencers could be combined and explained as *genuineness*.

The first theme discusses micro-influencers marketing efforts as appreciated by consumers due to the content they post on Instagram conveying the feeling of authenticity. Consumer enjoy feeling part of and included in the micro-influencers own lives and the activities they perform. Most importantly, consumers enjoy following micro-influencers as they do not show a completely polished and perfect part of their lives through what they post on Instagram. Instead consumers are invited into an authentic lifestyle, where micro-influencers struggle and intimate thoughts are regularly posted. When posting unpolished pictures and thoughts micro-influencers quickly becomes more relatable according to consumers, which arguably brings us into the second theme found in this study; *identification*.

The fact that micro-influencers manages to present an authentic picture of themselves through what they post on Instagram, consumers feel that they can identify themselves with the micro-influencer characters. Consumers can identify themselves with micro-influencers as they, as previously mentioned, post from true aspects of their lives, similar to the lives of consumers. The focus on giving insights into micro-influencers private lives instead of product promotion being the primarily focus, was also appreciated by consumers. Micro-influencers were constantly compared to other forms of celebrities by the consumers in this study. What was highlighted by consumers, in relation to authenticity and identification, brings us into the final theme found in this study; *a declining interest in macro-influencers*.

Consumers have lost interest in macro-influencers as macro-influencers have a monetary focus that shines through on Instagram. In addition, what macro-influencers post on Instagram does not feel authentic and reliable as they post pictures in order to earn money, and not invite consumers into aspects of their true lives. This in turn makes consumers ignore marketing messages coming from macro-influencers. With this said, and as motivated above, the three themes found in this study can arguably become merged into one single theme known as genuineness. The concept of genuineness is argued to be a suitable theme and definition of all concepts as micro-influencers are appreciated and liked by consumers due to their genuine approach on Instagram. In line with this, the rise in popularity for micro-influencers is arguably suggesting that social media is facing a sort of challenge. One can argue that when social media was first introduced and used by people it was something new and exciting, where one could play with identities, and twist things into one's benefit. Filters made it possible to look "better" than in reality and the possibility of choosing what to show and not to show made it easy to filter out boring aspects of life. This in turn, led to people presenting a desirable, but not completely genuine character, to other people online. However, one can argue that social media in general has come across a sort of backlash in today's society. From what was found in this study today's consumers are no longer open for marketing messages presented by influencers that are too polished and perfect and where no relatable content is presented. Instead, social media today has ended up in a form of counter reaction amongst consumers where they seek for content that they believe in, content that feels genuine.

Content that does not reach up to this is quickly ignored and rejected by consumers. As found in this research, micro-influencers are able to hold the capacity of genuineness while promoting products.

Conclusion

In the following chapter, the contributions of this study will be presented and motivated. Later on, the practical implications, including guidance for companies and micro-influencers on how to use this research in practice, is presented. The practical implications are followed by a presentation of the study's limitations as well as suggestions for future research. The chapter is then concluded with a short section of the authors acknowledgements.

Contributions

Considering today's explosion of social media marketing and that the usage of influencers for marketing purposes is causing an "authenticity crisis" (Fishburne, 2018), the importance of looking into and understanding new forms of influencer marketing is arguably needed. With this in mind, this research has extended existing research on micro-influencer marketing and developed a conceptual framework of micro-influencers role on the social media site Instagram. This framework includes aspects related to authenticity and identification and highlights the fact that micro-influencers are an appreciated communication tool according to consumers due to their genuine approach. This in turn makes consumers perceive micro-influencers as authentic and identifiable and are thus more willing to buy the products that they promote. The perception of authenticity was connected to

how micro-influencers managed to present themselves on Instagram and was closely linked to the trustworthiness and credibility of the pictures uploaded. Identification was connected to consumers being able to identify themselves with micro-influencers as consumers find themselves sharing similar interests and values in life. Macro-influencers and traditional celebrities are a less appreciated communication tool as they are claimed to have a monetary focus which makes their marketing efforts less genuine, which in turn makes consumers ignore marketing messages coming from them. In addition, macro-influencers were claimed to be difficult to identify themselves with, as their lives are not relatable to the consumers own life. Furthermore, they were not perceived as authentic as they do not invite consumers into viewing the real aspects of their lives.

Moreover, the concept of micro-influencers has not been investigated to a large extent in previous research, hence this study gives new insights related to an area of social media that is fairly unexplored, and an area that arguably is gaining more and more popularity in today's society. This study also extends existing theory related to identification, authenticity and genuineness, by combining the three concepts in the analysis of the socio-cultural interactions of consumers, influencers and brands in social media marketing.

Practical implications

The findings of this research suggest implications for consumers, micro-influencers and brand owners, as motivated below.

Consumers

The findings suggest that consumers are well aware that they are daily being exposed to different marketing messages. Due to being aware of this, consumers have become selective regarding the marketing messages they receive and are good at sifting away messages that are uninteresting to them. They know what they want and seem to act relatively rational in the social media environment related to marketing. Consumers appreciate relatable and genuine social media content and trust influencers that act in a similar way. They tend to ignore messages coming from larger influencers due to them lacking genuineness in their social media appearance.

Micro-influencers

This study contributes with insights for people working as micro-influencers. Micro-influencers can from this learn that their efforts are appreciated and that they are good at catching the consumers' attention. However, they still need to keep in mind that consumers are becoming less and less attentive of marketing messages and that micro-influencers need to be careful not to become "too commercialised" as that will lead to followers becoming uninterested and less receptive of their marketing messages

Brand owners

As previously mentioned, the findings suggest that consumers are no longer as receptive for marketing messages coming from larger influencers, such as macro-influencers and traditional celebrities. With this in mind, this study contributes with

important information for companies operating in similar businesses, selling outdoor-, sports- and active-wear. Consumers are more attentive regarding marketing messages coming from micro-influencers and companies should take this into consideration when deciding which influencer to use in Instagram promotions.

Research limitations and future research

One limitation of this study is that we only looked at one social media site; Instagram. Looking at more than one social media site would have given a broader understanding for the phenomena of micro-influencers. With this in mind, further research could focus on investigating other social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook in order to understand how micro-influencers operate on these sites and if there is a difference between how consumers perceive micro-influencers on different social media sites.

Another limitation is the sample size used in this study, the sample was limited to young females and drawn from just one country; Sweden. This made it possible for the authors to explore initial patterns related to Instagram usage among young Swedish females. However, future research might benefit from using a larger sample size and collect data from other countries to extend the findings further.

A third limitation is that this study only uses two perspectives; a consumer perspective and micro-influencer perspective. Future work could focus on investigating a macro-influencers perspective as well and investigate macro-influencers attitudes regarding their positions as influencers. Bringing in a third perspective and investigating it in relation to other perspectives would give a more comprehensive understanding for influencer and social media marketing.

Acknowledgements

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