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#Ad – Influenced by an Influencer?
An exploratory study of how Influencer Marketing is used by beauty brands in Norway

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Abstract

The accelerated growth of social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, give brands innovative marketing tools to communicate with consumers. As social media platforms evolve, brands need to continuously adapt and tailor their brand messages to stand out from the marketing "noise" consumers are exposed to daily. Marketing lies. Brands lie. Consumers are growing tired of marketing messages. Therefore, brands have redefined the marketing stack and recently, brands have collaborated with niche "experts" known as Social Media Influencers to reach new target groups of consumers. Influencer Marketing is particularly common within the beauty industry. Celebrity endorsements have existed for centuries and research on its effects is easily accessible, however, there is a gap in research with regards to the effects Influencer Marketing has for brands. This study explores the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing within the beauty industry in Norway. Specifically, how Influencer Marketing is used to drive Business to Consumer (B2C) sales and its effect on Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) for brands.

To gather data, semi-structured interviews with five communication professionals were conducted. The interview guide consisted of questions related to brand and Influencer collaborations, perception of Influencer Marketing, defining creative content and the future of Influencer Marketing. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The data led to the discovery of four key components necessary for an Influencer and brand to possess to achieve a successful Influencer Marketing campaign. The four components are: credibility, engagement, storytelling and inspiration. These components along with the other findings in the data were used to explore the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing in Norway.

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Introduction

Marketing methods are always changing. The consumer is continuously changing. To stay ahead, brands are continuously adapting to innovative marketing methods to reach their target consumer group. Increasingly, consumers are less likely to respond to traditional advertising and marketing messages have less credibility every day (Dada, 2017). According to a recent consumer survey; 94% skip TV advertisements, 94% unsubscribe from email, 27% of direct mail is not opened and 50% are on do not call lists (Sheridan, 2017). Technology has changed how consumers search and buy, but traditional marketing has not caught up. Consumers are tired of intrusive advertisements with marketer-centric communication messages. They want helpful, attractive and customer-centric communication messages instead (ibid).

With the development of social media, there has been exponential growth in the number of consumers whose shopping patterns have been influenced by social media Influencers. Using influential people or celebrities as Influencers is nothing new. It has been discussed for years by scholars, marketers and media alike. Brand endorsements have existed since the 18th century when Wedgewood, a dishware brand, used their royal warrant to sell their dishware (Wright, 2016). Celebrity endorsements have been used in traditional marketing campaigns for almost a century as athletes, movie stars and other celebrities have been engaged by brands to promote brand awareness and sell products since the 1920s (ibid). Traditional celebrities normally achieve their status by excelling at their profession; i.e. sports, acting, writing, etc. while a new wave of Influencer "celebrities" have risen to popularity for building up their followings for being self-proclaimed experts within certain niche. More recently, beauty brands are collaborating with Social Media Influencers to communicate their brand message and increase sales. Influencer marketing is defined as "a phenomenon of modern marketing that places expert consumers in the role of consultants for buyers looking to make informed purchase decisions." (Ysasi, 2017).

According to *The Huffington Post*, retail and beauty brands are among the top industries using Social Media Marketing (Johansson, 2016). In an interview with *Forbes Magazine*, Head of Marketing and Communications at Tribe Dynamics, Brit McCorquodale said the beauty industry is three to five years ahead of any other industry when it comes to brands using

Social Media Influencers to drive growth and brand awareness (Weinswig, 2017). There are several examples of beauty brands who have seemingly emerged, gained market share and made an impact without notice. With low barriers to entry, new beauty brands can use the power of Social Media Influencers to compete with large brands. NYX is an example of a beauty brand that has used Social Media Influencers to grow into a multimillion-dollar brand since its launch in 2010 (ibid). NYX has grown organically with the help of both paid and unpaid Social Media Influencer engagement and the brand is estimated to have grown its audience to over 15 million users within five years (ibid). NYX has achieved their success by not spending money on celebrity endorsements, rather by sending customers new products to try each month. Their customers in turn post content on various social media platforms showcasing the products and giving make-up tutorials (ibid).

Not only are consumers changing, but consumer groups are evolving as well. The consumer group most beauty brands are trying to win over is Millennials. According to *Forbes Magazine,* this generation of consumers born between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, had over $200 billion in purchasing power in 2017 and by 2018, Millennials will become the generation with the most purchasing power (Schroeder, 2017). Millennials are the last generation to know a life before the internet and in turn, many have grown up with mobile devices and laptops in hand. This may explain why they have different expectations when it comes to shopping experiences and increases the importance of digital channels for reaching this consumer group (Freedman, 2017). Reports show that over 45% of Millennials expect unique and engaging experiences with brands over retailers (ibid). Social media is seamlessly integrated into their lives and an astounding two-thirds of Millennials have moved away from traditional search engines and rely on their social media feeds for inspiration and shopping experiences (ibid).

Social media websites provide a platform for consumers to have his or her own voice in addition to gaining access to product information that facilitates their purchase decisions (Wang, et al., 2012). In recent years, so-called Influencers have emerged by building up a following of their own by conducting online product reviews, showcasing products and brands and posting about their lifestyle. Social media platforms allow consumers to have a public voice, potentially reaching an audience of millions. These platforms, as well as increased access to product information influences purchase decisions (Ashley & Tuten,

2015). There is a direct correlation between user generated online product reviews and their impact on marketing (Henning-Thurau, et al., 2004). Although anonymity has been reduced through the increase in product reviews on social media platforms, the trustworthiness and impact on consumer decision making has increased due to their influential nature (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

While Social Media Marketing is extremely popular around the globe, this paper will explore how the Norwegian market is responding to this growing trend. As well as addressing how beauty brands are using Social Media Influencers to increase brand awareness, reach new consumer groups and grow sales in Norway. The term "beauty industry" includes makeup or beauty products that are a mixture of chemicals, generally used to enhance the appearance or odor of the human body (Rajput, 2016). Within the scope of this paper, companies selling skin care, hair care and color cosmetics in Norway will be the focus when research is conducted. Five in-depth interviews with communication professionals from leading Norwegian public relations firms and magazines will be conducted. The author intends to focus on how Influencer Marketing collaborations are initiated, the content creation and results of collaborations. Therefore, the author believes an exploratory study focusing on Influencer Marketing in Norway presents a rich learning opportunity for understanding how the latest marketing tool is used to drive sales and increase brand awareness for companies in the beauty industry in Norway.

Problem Statement with Research Question

To say social media is popular is an understatement. It's everywhere. People spend their time online and it has become easier with the smart phone – virtually everyone has a computer in his or her pocket. Over the past decade, social media has contributed to the growth of a "digital world" in which consumers socialize, create and consume (Ysasi, 2017). Over 80% of Norway's population over 18 years of age has an account on one or more social media platforms (Ipsos, 2018). Today's consumer has access to a wealth of information and does not like to be on the receiving end of pushy marketing campaigns. The internet has revolutionized the way of marketing in many ways. The increased popularity in social media outlets, such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube have created an opportunity for "regular people" to become experts on a range of topics, including beauty products. These Influencers, build up groups of virtual followers.

My proposed research question is:

How do communication professionals and Influencers in Norway perceive and adopt Influencer Marketing?

In addition to the research question, the following sub-questions were developed to further explore the phenomenon of influencer marketing in Norway:

    a) *Is influencer marketing an effective tool for brands to drive sales?*

    b) *How does Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) effect brands?*

Defining terms

Though Influencer Marketing overall has achieved remarkable success, and has emerged as a widely used marketing method, there has been very little published work to date on the topic. Before proceeding to the theory section, the author will first define some salient terms.

Social Media Influencers are defined as "someone who has the power to influence the perception of others or gets them to do something different" (Dada, 2017, p.1). Dada goes on to mention that influencers do not necessarily need to have a large follower base, but they must have a combination of three factors to fit the definition. They must have "reach, contextual credibility and salesmanship". Reach is defined as an Influencers "ability to deliver a message to a large number of people." Dada goes on to explain that the number of followers is not the most significant qualification to define an Influencer. Micro-influencers are defined as "those with small reach, but high credibility and salesmanship.". Contextual credibility is defined as "the level of trust and authority given by the audience based on the influencer's perceived knowledge and expertise on a specific topic" (ibid).

To fully understand the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing, one must understand the most common mediums used by Influencers. Safko and Brake (2009, p. 6) define social media as:

> *The term social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviors*
> *among communities of people who gather online to share*
> *information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media.*

The social media platforms used by Influencers and discussed in this paper are Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and blogs. Facebook is the oldest social media platform, created in 2004 and it bodes almost 2.2 billion users worldwide (newsroom.fb.com). Instagram is a photo and video-sharing service, owned by Facebook, with over 800 million users worldwide (Instagram.com). With over 187 million worldwide users, Snapchat defines themselves as a camera company and believes re-inventing the camera represents their greatest opportunity to improve the way people live and interact (snapchat.com). Another popular medium Influencers use is YouTube, a free video-sharing website where users can add and watch online videos. YouTube was created in 2005 and is now owned by Google.

YouTube is one of the most popular websites on the Internet and users watch over 6 billion hours of video content each month (youtube.com). The last Influencer medium that will be focused on in the scope of this paper is blogs. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, a blog is defined as: "a website that contains online personal reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks, videos, and photographs provided by the writer." (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) is defined as any positive or negative opinion made by a consumer about a product or service via online platforms (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004). Traditionally, word of mouth has had a powerful impact on consumers buying decisions (ibid). Today's prolific nature of the internet and how it is used in everyone's daily lives has had an impact on how brands react to consumers opinions. Consumer opinions are often communicated via social media platforms and have a longer life span than traditional, offline, word-of-mouth.

The definition of innovation in business was arguably developed by Joseph A. Schumpeter in his book, *The Theory of Economic Development*. Schumpeter defines innovation as market introduction and commercialization of new products, services, processes and ideas (Schumpeter, 1983). Researchers have observed that e-commerce is not one simple innovation, but a collection of separate innovations. Businesses can then choose which of these innovations they make use of and in what sequence (Daniel, 2002). Disruptive innovation is described by Christiansen (2005) as the idea that new technologies can create new markets or radically change the current situation in existing markets.

The author is interested in the strategic innovations Influencer Marketing beauty brands are utilizing in their development of successful sales and marketing campaigns in Norway. The analysis of the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing necessitates a theoretical grounding in consumer behavior theories and their intersection with disruptive innovation. Moreover, we must also consider the power of eWOM. There are several potentially relevant theories we can use to understand the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing. In the next section, the author will touch on theories that will be used in the analysis.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

The purpose of this thesis is to qualitatively examine how Influencer Marketing is perceived and adopted as well as the effects from the perspective of communication professional's rather than the organization's perspective. The literature review includes prior research and information about Influencer Marketing, the theory of Disruptive Innovation, Consumer Socialization theory and the Two-step Flow theory. This research seeks to explore the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing in Norway as well as quantify the effect Influencer Marketing has on brands within the beauty industry.

> "
> Creators (aka influencers) are the new
> celebrity, social media is the new mass media, and
> storytelling is the new form of content marketing.
>
> Carlos Gil, Founder, Gil Media Co.
> "

Social Media and Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing is defined as the process when "individuals who disproportionately impact the spread of information or some related behavior" (Bakshy, et al, 2011). The beauty industry is the most prominent industry to utilize Influencer Marketing (Weinswig, 2017). Comparable to offline opinion leaders, the information transfer between online opinion leaders (Influencers) and their audience is perceived as interpersonal communication as opposed to directly from the mass media (Wang, et al, 2012). Influencers are perceived by consumers as online friends who are sharing their opinions on products instead of aggressive salespeople or brands advertising their products. Studies show Influencer Marketing can help brands achieve eleven times more return on investment annually than by using traditional advertising (Tapinfluence 2018) and 92% of marketers who use Influencer Marketing found it to be effective (Linqia, 2017). This can be attributed to the fact that consumers are buying, engaging and sharing product reviews and other content created by Influencers on social media platforms (Burke, 2017).

Another attribute for the growth of Influencer Marketing is the maturing of the Millennial consumer group. Consumers trust the opinions of Influencers over traditional celebrity endorsements and this also pertains to Millennials (Howland, 2016). This consumer group actively seeks out Influencers when conducting product research before making a purchase decision (Freedman, 2017). Seventy percent of Millennial consumers are influenced by the recommendations of their peers and 72% report buying a fashion or beauty product based on an Instagram post (Barker, 2017; Arnold, 2017). In 2017, Millennials represented approximately 20% of Norway's population, with just over 1 million inhabitants between the ages of 20-34 and this consumer group will grow to over 25% of Norway's population by 2030 (SSB, 2017).

Brands and Influencers

Since the marketable potential of Influencers was recognized, Influencers have been involved in content creation, increasing brand awareness and increasing sales for brands (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). When planning an Influencer Marketing campaign, brands must consider the Influencer profiles available to them. While most collaborations are paid for monetarily and in products, it is common practice for brands to "gift" or "seed" Influencers with free products in the hope he or she will post pictures or write an online review (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). As promotions by Influencers are perceived as earned media as opposed to paid media, concerns from Consumer Agency (Forbrukertilsynet) have been raised and the Norwegian Law of Marketing has strict regulations to protect consumers from hidden advertisements (Forbrukertilsynet, 2017). All advertisements and promotions by Influencers need to be clearly marked and the brand name(s) also need to be displayed clearly (ibid). These rules have been established to help safeguard consumers so they are not misled by Influencer content.

In a study conducted on consumer attitudes towards sponsored content, the results showed that despite products being marked as advertisement, consumers have highly positive attitudes toward sponsored recommendation posts (Lu, et al, 2014). The monetary benefits the Influencer received had no significant outcome on consumer's purchasing attitudes (ibid). While it can be difficult to measure the exact ROI Influencer Marketing campaigns can have on sales, brands are starting to look at the full customer journey (Linqia, 2017). Brands hold

Influencer Marketing accountable for driving brand awareness and engagement in addition to sales (ibid). Marketers report using engagement, clicks and conversions as top performance indicators (ibid).

Digitalization in Norway

It can be suggested that factors such as the economy, access to information and the existing mechanisms of the beauty industry in general can influence the effects of Influencer Marketing in general. We Are Social, a global communications agency, publishes their Global Digital Report annually which gives key insights and an overview of digital trends globally. According to the Global Digital Report 2018, Northern Europe ranks highest in the world for internet penetration; meaning Norway has one of the highest percentages of internet users per capita in the world with 98% (We Are Social, 2018). The most popular social media platform in Norway is Facebook. According to Marketing Research company, Ipsos' latest report, approximately 3.5 million Norwegian adults (over 18 years old) have a Facebook profile (Ipsos, 2018). Eighty-six percent of Facebook users in Norway are daily users and an overwhelming majority of those user's access Facebook via mobile devices (ibid). Instagram has 2.2 million users in Norway with 60% of users being women (ibid). Fifty-eight percent of users over 18 years of age use Instagram every day, which is consistent with previous surveys (ibid).

In order to understand the impact digitalization has on consumers and its use for marketing purposes, this report was used as a tool to gain insight into the most updated information. Norway is a leader regarding both buying power and consumer readiness (We Are Social, 2018). With a Consumer Readiness score of 91.09, Norway leads the pack regarding consumers' response to advertisements seen online as well as their willingness to purchase goods online (ibid). In 2017, Norwegian consumers spent nearly US $4.4 billion on online purchases. The Fashion & Beauty category accounted for the largest percentage of that sum at US $1.85 billion; almost 24% of the total, which is an increase of 11% over the amount spent in 2016 (ibid). The highest-ranking advertising channel that is attributed to first introducing Norwegian internet users to a product or service they subsequently purchased was the online channel (ibid).

Disruptive Innovation

Clayton M. Christiansen's Theory of Disruptive Innovation (1995) applies to innovation that creates a new market that eventually disrupts an existing market and value network, displacing established market leading companies, products and alliances. Examples of disruptive businesses are Airbnb, the world's largest accommodation company, Red Bull, who use content marketing in extreme ways and Snapchat, the application that allows two billion pictures to disappear daily (Dan, 2015). There are four key elements to Christiansen's theory that businesses should fulfill in order to fit into the Theory of Disruptive Innovation. The first being that "incumbents are improving along a trajectory of innovation", meaning more than the "normal" year-by-year improvements most companies make. The second element is "the pace of sustaining innovation overshoots customer needs." The third element is "incumbents have the capability to respond, but fail to exploit it." An example of the third element is Kodak's lack of desire to respond to competitor's innovation around digitalizing photography. The fourth and final element in the Theory of Disruptive Innovation is "incumbents flounder as a result of the disruption" (King & Baatartogtokh, 2015). Christiansen has discovered that innovations typically originate in one of two market types. The first, in low-end markets where incumbents are focused on improving and or marketing their product to a high-end market without focusing on the low-end space. The second, is in new market footholds where disrupters create a market where none existed. Disrupters start by appealing to an unserved market before they appeal towards mainstream markets. Put simply, the disrupters find a way to turn non-consumers into consumers (Christiansen, et. al., 2015, p. 47).

Consumer Socialization

In order to define Consumer Socialization, one must first understand what is meant by the term *socialization*. The term broadly defines the "processes by which individuals learn to participate effectively in the social environment" (Ward, 1974). Consumer socialization is defined by Scott Ward as "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (1974). There are three main aspects of Ward's definition of consumer socialization. The first aspect focuses on childhood socialization and how the experiences in early life affect early learning. The second aspect is "the discussion is limited to marketplace transactions, even though it is recognized that these are only a subspecies of transactions in general" (ibid). Ward goes on to explain the

third aspect regarding consumer socialization is necessary to distinguish between skills, knowledge and attitudes that are directly relevant and those that are not. Consumer skills, knowledge of products and attitudes toward products that could be directly relevant are things like the relationship the consumer has with whomever is influencing their purchase decision; for example, a spouse, friend, or employer. Aspects that may be indirectly relevant are things like the consumers ability to budget and determine if a product fits into that budget. In addition, how a consumer feels about peripheral aspects such as where they will shop and the role that sales people play in the purchase process may factor in (ibid).

Digitalization, especially social media has altered how consumers communicate, socialize and impacted their decision-making process (Wang, et al., 2012). This constant development requires marketers to think outside the box with regards to traditional marketing methods. Consumers skepticism of traditional advertisements and marketing campaigns is growing. Word-of-mouth and peer recommendations are a more reliable source for consumers than traditional advertisements. User-generated product reviews found online as well as increased access to product information influences consumers' purchase decisions (ibid). According to Wang, et al., Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) not only increases marketing messages, it also alters consumer information processing, especially when the source is the consumer's peers (2012). Traditionally, consumer socialization occurred between individuals who knew each other, for example; friends or relatives, but through social media, individuals are connecting with strangers from across several communities as well as those they know from existing relationships (Wang, et al., 2012). In figure 1, Wang et al. illustrates the process of consumer socialization through social media. The process below indicates the strong ties and identification between peer groups and product purchase. According to Wang, et al. the relationship between peers is defined as the beginning of the Consumer Socialization process. Consumers' buying decisions are strongly influenced through peer communication. Lastly, attitudes towards brands are ultimately decided through influence from one's peers.
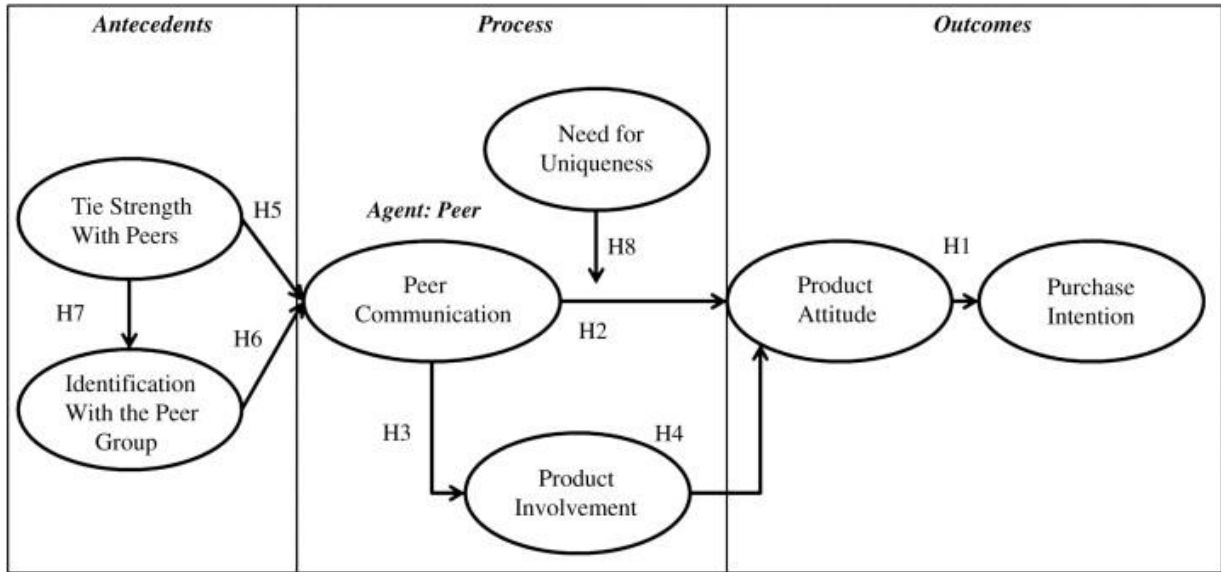
Figure 1. Consumer socialization framework through social media.
Source: Wang et al., (2012)

Two-step Flow Model

In digital platforms, long standing communication theories, like the 1955 two-step flow model, are still valid. In their book, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, p. 15) discussed the two-step flow theory and explored the idea that messages pass from the media to opinion leaders to opinion followers. The two-step flow proposed that ideas flow from mass media to opinion leaders first, who put them into context, and from them to a wider population. This is one of the reasons Katz and Lazarsfeld suggest celebrity endorsements can be successful (ibid). Nearly two years later, Elihu Katz observed that "opinion leaders themselves often reported that their own decisions were influenced by still other people", which could be interpreted to mean that opinion leaders can also influence other opinion leaders. (Katz, 1957, p. 68). In the figure below, the two-step flow theory is illustrated to show how the Mass Media, in the context of this paper; *brands*, push out a message which is then in turn interpreted by an opinion leader; *Influencers*, and then communicated further to a wider population; *consumers*. Opinion leaders, in this case, Influencers, use interpersonal communication to influence inactive or slightly inactive consumer groups which can lead to purchasing products or services (Scott, 2011).
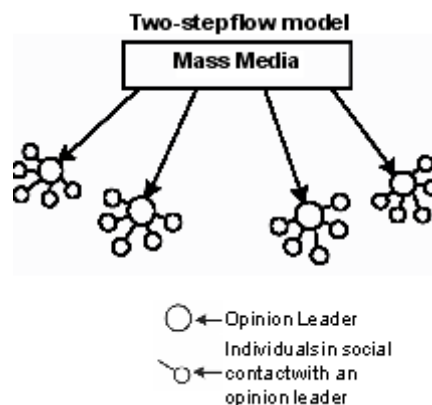

Two-step flow model

Mass Media

◯ ← Opinion Leader

Individuals in social contact with an opinion leader

Figure 2. Two-step Flow of Communication Model.
Source: Katz, E. & Lazarsfeld, P. (1955)

Methods

Research philosophy

In social science research, methods are not simply neutral tools; rather they are inextricably linked to different visions of how social reality should be studied (Bryman, 2008, p. 4). The philosophical orientation held by the researcher has implications for what, how, and why the research is conducted. Understanding the philosophical assumptions underpinning the different perspectives is central to designing and evaluating good research. Moreover, it enables the researcher to develop a clear sense of her reflexive role in research methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). In this section the author will consider some of the varying philosophical viewpoints about management and business research, before staking out her position.

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015, p.86), the central debates within the philosophy of research concern matters of ontology and epistemology. Ontology can be understood as the philosophical assumptions a person makes about the nature of reality and existence. Among philosophers of the natural and social sciences, the main ontological debate has primarily been between *realism* and *relativism*[1]. Realism asserts that the world is "concrete and external, and that science can progress only through observations that have a direct correspondence to the phenomena being investigated (ibid., p. 89)." For realists there is only a single reality, or truth, which is independent of any observer, meaning that scientific inquiry exists independently of the scientist. (Yin, 2014, p. 17). The realist ontology stands in stark contrast to relativism, which not only acknowledges the existence of multiple realities having multiple meanings, but it also holds that these realities and meanings are not simply out there to be discovered, but are in fact created by people (Yin, 2014; Easterby-Smith, 2015). For the relativist, there are many possible truths.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and deals with the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline; it is the set of assumptions about how we come to

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[1] There are several varieties of both realism and relativism, but an in-depth discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. The focus here is rather general so as to provide an overview of the basics of the author's position.

understand knowledge (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Bryman, 2008). As with ontology, there are two primary competing epistemologies in the social sciences: *positivism* and *social constructionism.* Positivists believe that knowledge is only real and significant if it is based on observed facts. For positivists, the social world exists externally, and can only be measured through objective methods. Positivist principles are primarily associated the scientific method and are ontologically linked to realism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

In contrast to positivism's notion of a single reality determined by objective and external factors, social constructionism holds that numerous aspects of social reality are determined by people. For constructionists, reality is socially constructed and given meaning by our interactions with other people. As such, social science research for constructionists should be about gathering rich data that helps us to appreciate the various constructions and meanings people give to their experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). In their textbook, *Management and Business Research,* Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) nicely summarize the contrasting features of positivist and constructionist approaches to research.

	Positivism	Social Constructionism
The observer	must be independent	is part of what is being observed
Human interests	should be irrelevant	are the main drivers of science
Explanations	must demonstrate causality	aim to increase general understanding of the situation
Research progresses through	hypotheses and deductions	gathering rich data from which ideas are induced
Concepts	need to be defined so that they can be measured	should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Units of analysis	should be reduced to simplest terms	may include the complexity of 'whole' situations
Generalization through	statistical probability	theoretical abstraction
Sampling requires	large numbers selected randomly	small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons

Table 1: Contrasting implications of positivism and social constructionism
Source: Easterby-Smith, et al. (2015)

As a researcher, the author categorizes her philosophy as being ontologically relativist and epistemologically constructionist. Given the novelty of Influencer Marketing, the author believes constructionism's epistemological commitment to examining the embedded context and background of the object of study to be of fundamental importance in answering her research questions.

Research design

This thesis is interested in answering the following research question and sub-questions:

How do communication professionals and Influencers in Norway perceive and adopt Influencer Marketing?

> a) *Is influencer marketing an effective tool for brands to drive sales?*

> b) *How does Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) effect brands?*

In order to answer these questions, the author needs a research design that enables her to probe both the effect Influencer Marketing has for brands, as well as the socio-economic and cultural context in which those novel strategies are embedded. Given the lack of detailed research published on Influencer Marketing, the research will be of an explorative nature. The main objective with exploratory research is to investigate and identify the essence of the problem or phenomenon (Streb, 2010, p. 372). In line with her epistemological orientation as a social constructionist, the author has chosen to use an exploratory research design that will incorporate a variety of qualitative methods, including semi-structure interviews and document analysis. The author believes an exploratory research design is best suited to helping unravel the complexities inherent in the research questions.

Epistemology

As discussed earlier in this paper, Influencer Marketing has grown in popularity, especially among Millennial consumers. The author has chosen to focus on the effect Influencer Marketing has as a tool to drive sales and increase brand awareness, as her primary research question as she is interested in exploring how communication professionals and Influencers in Norway perceive and adopt Influencer Marketing. The focus of this study is bounded by its examination of how Influencer Marketing is perceived by consumers, and specifically its use

as a means to drive sales and brand awareness as opposed to only using traditional marketing efforts.

Data Collection

In order to gather the necessary data, a number of different methods will be employed. The author began her research by finding both Influencers and communication and media professionals in Norway. Influencer names will primarily be sourced online in a systematic manor, with the use of Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. In some cases, it is best to obtain a broader view when collecting research, thus more than one group of informants should be interviewed (Dalen, 2004, p. 56). It has become common practice that media and PR agencies act as the liaison between brands and Influencers, therefore a selection of communication professionals were also selected. The author will contact the leading PR agencies, Influencer talent agencies and magazine publications in order to gain access to key informants. The author will interview communication professionals within varied professions including PR agencies, a talent management agency that manages Influencers and a leading Norwegian magazine publication to gain insight from several groups of informants. The data collected consisted of five in-depth interviews with communication professionals who had first-hand experience with the inner workings of Influencer Marketing in the beauty industry in Norway. The duration of the interviews varied from 20-40 minutes. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Oslo and they were completed over a three-week period in March 2018. All interviews were recorded and transcribed shortly after the interviews commenced.

Selection of informants

A purposeful sampling approach was introduced to select the informants for the research. Purposeful sampling was chosen because it was important to select the participants in this study "based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study's research questions" (Yin, 2011, p. 311). The sampling procedure was based on three criteria that interviewees had to meet to be considered for the research project. The first criteria was that all interviewees had to be based in Norway as they needed to be familiar with the inner workings of Influencer Marketing in the Norwegian market. Secondly, the communication professionals needed to have minimum one year of experience working with beauty brands in the Norwegian market in order to speak to the industry that is the focus of this study. Finally, it was a requirement for the interviewees to have originated multiple

collaborations with Influencers and brands in order to gain insight around the collaboration process from both the Influencer perspective as well as from the brand perspective.

Although Influencer Marketing has increased in popularity in recent years, the phenomenon has not been extensively studied. The aim of the author's research is to gain more insight into the mechanisms and ways Influencer Marketing is used in Norway. Therefore, the collaboration between Communication Professionals and Influencers is the one of the main focuses of this research. With the rise in popularity of Influencer Marketing, PR agencies, publishing houses and digital marketing agencies have taken on the role of advisors for companies in Norway who decide to use Influencer Marketing. These agencies act as a liaison between Influencers and brands to set campaign goals and content production ambitions. These practices were used as the baseline for the author's informant selection in order to obtain the most relevant information on Influencer Marketing in Norway.

For identifying relevant communication professionals, Influencers and their agents, an online search was conducted. The focus of the search was primarily in the capital city, Oslo, as not only is the author located in Oslo, the largest concentration of agencies is found here as well. Search terms such as "Influencer Marketing agency", "PR and Communication agency" and "Bloggers Norway" were used in order to source relevant potential informants. The search produced 14 PR and Digital agencies, four beauty magazine publications and five Influencers that the author approached for the possibility for an interview. When possible, the author attempted to come in direct contact with the individuals who are responsible for Influencer Marketing Campaigns within the beauty industry. Of the agencies and individuals contacted, the author was successful in securing face-to-face interviews with five individuals from four different agencies and/or magazine publications. The author was successful in securing two interviews with Influencers, but they then later cancelled and were not willing to reschedule. However, one of the interviewees manages Influencers at Norway's largest Influencer Agency and was therefore able to provide useful insight that proved to be fruitful in the data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using John Creswell's six step process as shown in the
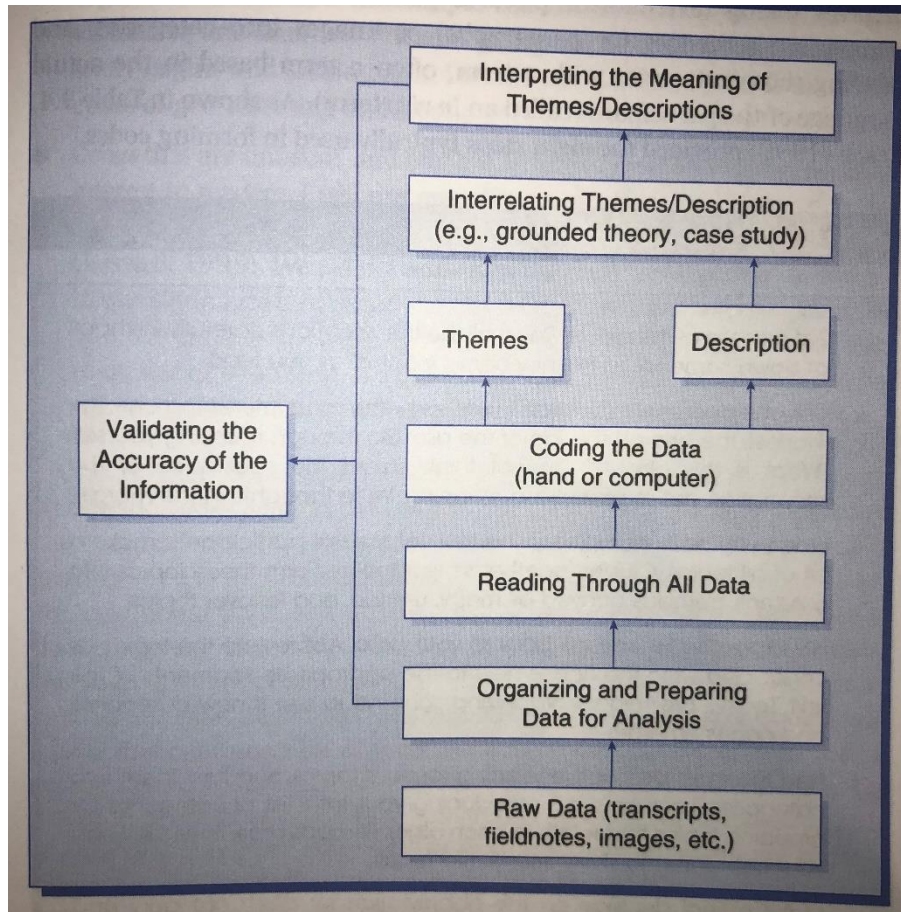figure below (2014).

Figure 3: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research
Source: Creswell (2014)

First, the interviews were transcribed by the author within one week of the interviews
commencing. This was with the intent to, as Dalen (2004) suggests, become immersed in the
findings and become well acquainted with the data collected. After the transcribing process,
the recorded interviews were again compared to the written transcripts in order to ensure the
data was transcribed correctly. The second step of the data analysis was to read through all the
data and make notes about the information. Then the coding process commenced with the
data being recorded in Excel as opposed to a software program. Coding is defined as the
process where data is broken down, gestated and put back together in different ways (Strauss
& Corbin, 1990, p. 57). It is the fundamental process by which theories are developed from
data (ibid). Main topics began to surface and the most descriptive wording for the topics was
noted by the author. The coding process revealed both themes that the author expected to find

as well as unexpected themes. Codes that are unexpected are of conceptual interest to readers (Creswell, 2014). The author developed codes strictly based on the emerging information collected from participants as she did not have a distinct theory she wanted to test and therefore did not create predetermined codes (ibid). Step four in Creswell's six step analysis process is using the coding process to create a picture of the background or people as well as themes for analysis (ibid). This was achieved by reading the transcribed interviews again and noting described traits specific to the Norwegian market in order to gain insight as to how Influencer Marketing is used in the local beauty industry. The final steps, five and six, include advanced reflection "…on how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative" (Creswell, p. 200, 2014). Finally, an interpretation of the findings is to be executed (ibid).

Data Validity and Reliability

Validation of findings occurs in each of the six steps for data analysis as described above (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative research, validity does not have the same implications as it does in quantitative research (ibid). "Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (Gibbs, p. 201, 2007). The author compared the transcribed interviews with the recordings in order to ensure accuracy. To ensure the consistency in the coding process, the author made clear notes to describe each code that were followed throughout the process.

The literature review has commenced and the author has identified potential relevant theories related to innovation and consumer buying power. The interviews commenced in March 2018 and were recorded and transcribed manually shortly thereafter. The interviews were qualitative in nature and consisted of semi-structured questions related, but not limited to, how Influencer Marketing collaborations are initiated, content creation and collaboration results.

Analysis and Discussion

This study had an exploratory character and sought to examine the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing in Norway by focusing on collaborations between Influencers and beauty brands. One of the intentions of this research was to investigate the impact Influencer Marketing has on brands, specifically if Influencer Marketing is an effective tool for brands to drive sales as well as to examine the collaboration process. The specific concepts that were explored and analyzed within the theoretical framework were: 1) the impact Influencer Marketing has for brands with regards to sales and brand awareness, 2) the collaborative process and how content is created and 3) the effects of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM).

This chapter is structured based on the research question and sub-questions of this study. The relevant theoretical concepts are discussed individually by presenting key themes that transpired from the data analysis. Discoveries will be accompanied by quotes from the respondents to support the author's key findings. The findings were analyzed first and then relevant conclusions were compared with potentially relevant theories mentioned in the literature review, namely, Disruptive Innovation, Consumer Socialization and the Two-step Flow of Communication model.

Influencer Marketing and Sales

Influencers adopt the role of opinion leaders in various platforms such as Instagram, Facebook or blogs (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). To explore the potential of Influencer Marketing in Norway and the effect it has for beauty brands, it was essential for the author to explore how Influencer Marketing affects brands and if there is any correlation with sales. This section of the analysis is focused on answering the sub-research question: *How do communication professionals and Influencers in Norway perceive and adopt Influencer Marketing?*

To increase the effects of marketing communication, many beauty brands have implemented online consumer review programs where customers can rate products and give their opinions for others to read (Lu, et al, 2014). Recently, Influencers have partially taken over this role by reviewing products while they simultaneously promote said products to their social media networks. While the credibility of reviews has been explored, earlier studies on Influencer sponsored recommendation posts are scarce (ibid). As mentioned previously in the

literature review, there have been concerns from consumer rights organizations as to whether or not online reviews from Influencers is an acceptable form of marketing when not correctly marked "advertisement". Unlike some other countries, Norway has implemented strict rules as to how sponsored posts need to be marked by Influencers. For example, each sponsored advertisement must be marked with 'sponsored' at the top of the post, as opposed to the bottom. If these laws are not followed, Norwegian Influencers risk fines and social media account closure by the Norwegian Consumer Authority (Forbrukertilsynet).

According to previous research, product reviews from Influencers can have a stronger impact on customers' purchase decisions than celebrity endorsements (Chen & Xie, 2008; Arnold, 2017; Howland, 2016). When asked about experience with Influencer Marketing campaigns and sales, every informant concurred that there is a direct correlation between Influencer Marketing campaigns and sales and most concluded that the required marking of sponsored ads does not seem to have an effect on sales, especially with the millennial generation. The data analysis revealed two factors that Influencer Marketing can have on a brand's sales in Norway and were coded as: trustworthiness and *Janteloven*. *Janteloven* is specific to the Norwegian market and will be further explained below.

Trustworthiness

While trustworthiness seems like an obvious quality Influencers need to possess, the data analysis showed that there is no correlation between the perceived level of trustworthiness and Influencers who engage in a high number of collaborations and those who do not. When asked if Influencers who have done a small amount of collaborations verses those who have done a lot of collaborations have an effect on sales, Interviewee 3 said:

> *I think it really depends on the quality of what they produce. I think it's like any business. You need to be reliable, you need to deliver what they expect of you, maybe go the extra mile. I think it comes down to how professional each Influencer is. We do see there's a huge difference there. The client can get quite fed up if the person doesn't deliver and I think that's why if you are under our publishing house, we also provide the clients with market research and Google Analytics and we show them how successful it has been.*

During the interviews, the impression was given that as long as Influencers continue to deliver engaging content to their readers, they will not reach a point of saturation with regards to having too many brand collaborations. All communication professionals interviewed agreed that as long as brand promotions were presented in a creative way, integrated with the Influencers life style, they are perceived as natural content for the Influencers followers. Interviewee 5 said "The difference is that the Influencers who have done several collaborations, essentially, they know what they're doing and they will charge more compared to the ones who haven't done a lot of collaborations in the past."

To summarize, the analysis shows when an Influencer engages in several collaborations, this does not necessarily have a negative effect on the Influencers perceived trustworthiness to recommend new products or brands to his or her followers. Brands and Influencers are still able to achieve sales goals despite an Influencer engaging in multiple brand collaborations.

Janteloven

In Norway, there is a principle called *Janteloven* which places importance on equality and justice while discouraging uniqueness and individual success (snl.no, 2018). The power of *Janteloven*, or Norwegian society's expectation of most people being equal, presents an interesting twist to the challenges Influencer Marketing faces particularly in Norway. The author sought out to explore the impact Influencer Marketing has on consumer sales in the Norwegian beauty industry. When asked about the main differences or challenges Influencer Marketing faces in Norway, Interviewee 2 said:

We want to 'poke our neck out' or break free, but at the same time we have Janteloven above us that can put a cap on how unique some Influencers feel they can be. Influencer Marketing in Norway is more about self-realization.

According to Interviewee 2, the unspoken law of *Janteloven* can have a strong impact on the degree to which individuals are influenced on social media. She continues to say "Suddenly [a consumer] sees an Influencer is traveling to Mexico and feels inspired by that, but one also feels the aspiration that the Influencer has the life [the consumer] wants for herself." *Janteloven* can be a hindrance for Influencer Marketing campaigns to influence some consumers. Interviewee 4 said:

One aspect to Influencer Marketing in Norway that should be taken in to consideration is Janteloven – where we're not "allowed" to be different. Sometimes Influencers get a bad rap for presenting this perfect lifestyle. This is very special in Norway as we're not used to bragging or "being different" like most other cultures; USA, UK, Spain for example. I think Norwegians are evolving beyond Janteloven, but there are still some consumers that think Influencers are not believable because they are too perfect.

Tapping into consumers' emotions seemed to be a reoccurring theme as to what makes Influencer Marketing more believable than traditional marketing despite both approaches having the same goal, namely sales. Interviewee 1 said "The most common objective with collaborations is to increase sales." She continued to say:

We have worked with several beauty brands who were launching new products and wanted to have strong sales from day one. Online shopping is so common now and with the 'swipe up' function on Insta-stories it makes it so much easier to have a campaign that is sales driven. We had one client that launched a new line of face masks and they hadn't gotten a huge response from traditional marketing campaigns, Facebook ads or PR, so we helped them create an Influencer campaign. They used 8 micro-influencers and 2 larger Influencers with 80-100,000 followers. They saw a huge increase in sales and the ROI of the campaign was better than they budgeted.

Although consumer's trustworthiness to Influencers and the unwritten cultural expectation that 'everyone should be the same', it seems Influencer Marketing is a promising strategy for brands to drive sales. This supports the discovery previously mentioned in the literature review that Influencers are partly responsible for increasing brand awareness and driving sales for brands (Ashly & Tuton, 2015). Interviewee 3 said:

We had a case where a beauty brand wanted to raise brand awareness and make it more accessible for young people. We helped them through quite a big campaign that lasted over several weeks where we included the magazine's brands but also the most suitable Influencers. Our market research shows that that was very successful. Sales actually went up 93%. That was a great case study of how when we combine all our forces, if you like, include Influencers — not just influencers, but the magazine too — I think it's a combination that can be successful.

This shows both what an impact Influencer Marketing can have on sales as well as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), which will be discussed in the next section.

Influencer Marketing and eWOM

This section is dedicated to analyzing the key findings from the research in order to answer the sub-research question: *How do communication professionals and Influencers in Norway perceive and adopt Influencer Marketing?* What would have usually taken months or years to transpire before the use of the internet, takes a fraction of the time now. Technology has changed how consumers search and buy, but marketing has not kept up. The concept of word-of-mouth is not new. People have always shared their experiences and opinions, both positive and negative. With the arrival of social media, sharing these experiences and opinions has only become more accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. These changes have an impact on the ways brands can use the power of word-of-mouth for marketing purposes. Word-of-mouth communication is commonly perceived to be one of the most crucial factors influencing the adoption of new products (Kawakami & Parry, 2013). With this, follows the impact word-of-mouth can have for brands.

Influencers have the power to influence large groups of people. Their actions can have both positive and negative effects on brands. Recent examples of how Influencers have negatively impacted brands, are when Kylie Jenner tweeted to her 25 million followers that she did not like Snapchats' latest update and their stock lost six percent of its value in one day. Or when Microsoft collaborated with Oprah Winfrey to promote the brand's new tablet, *Surface*. Oprah tweeted to her 12 million followers "Gotta say love that SURFACE! Have bought 12 already for Christmas gifts. #FavoriteThings". This was a great start to a collaboration, until *via Twitter for iPad* appeared to reveal Oprah tweeted from an iPad, Microsoft's competitor, instead of from the Microsoft Surface that she was to promote. These examples show the importance of what Interviewee 1 said about collaborations "It's really important that [Influencers] know the brand and that they engage with and have some kind of interest in the brand, otherwise the campaign won't work." This is especially true in the digital age. Even if an Influencer or a brand updates the Influencer's post, thousands of people will have likely already seen the mistake before it is edited.

One of the reasons Influencer Marketing campaigns can spread faster than traditional marketing campaigns, is due to the shift from being brand-centric to audience-centric.

Traditional marketing campaigns are brand focused, free to lie and one-sided (Sheridan, 2017). On the other hand, Influencer campaigns are audience or lifestyle focused, can be more truthful and have more of a balance (ibid). Influencers use several channels; Instagram, Facebook and blogs to name a few. It is important for Influencers to know the channel and adapt content to each specific channel (Informant 4). By doing this, Influencers can reach consumers when they are in the correct mood. An example of this is Instagram. Consumers often want to be inspired, look at aesthetically appealing photos and browse. An example of an Influencer campaign for beauty products on Instagram could include a photo of the Influencer using the product, be staged in a flattering light with flowers or other aesthetically pleasing props in the photo. A caption could be something along the lines of: "I've been using these amazing products and had to tell my followers about them. Enjoy!" In this way, the Influencer weaves in products she likes with her lifestyle. This taps in to the feeling that the Influencer, a trusted friend, is recommending something that her followers should try. The followers then share the recommendations with their own followers and the communication flow described in the Two-step Flow Model comes in to play. A brand (mass media) reaches out to an Influencer (opinion leader) who then redistributes the information through their channels to the consumer (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Influencer Marketing campaigns are used for building brand awareness, product launches and generating sales (Informant 1). All informants had been involved with Influencer campaigns where the main goal was to increase brand awareness, but only some shared a specific experience. Informant 1 mentioned a noteworthy example of how Influencer Marketing is used to increase brand awareness quoted below:

A brand engaged five Influencers from different target groups with the goal of communicating different messages about the product to each target group. The brand gave the Influencers substantial information about the product and free range to write what they felt was important to focus on for their followers. The campaign was a major success and they sold out! This was because the brand gave enough information to the Influencers so they felt comfortable speaking to the uniqueness of the product tailored to their followers.

The informants gave examples of success stories that reiterated the importance of brands choosing Influencers who match the brands' values, are genuinely interested in the brand and allowing the Influencer to create engaging content. While most informants recounted positive

outcomes, a couple of the informants could share a negative experience or scenario. Informant 4 was quoted saying:

Unsuccessful campaigns occur when the client has too many frames. Sometimes that will happen when brands have a small local office but the frame of the campaign or collaboration comes from the international headquarters and they don't understand that they work with people and that the person needs to be able to speak their own language. If not, the readers will just look at it as an advertisement.

Informant 4 continues to say that "the world of Influencers is human and not like a poster." Despite Influencers desire for creative freedom, it is still important for brands to retain a degree of control over what is said about their products. If an Influencer makes claims about a product that are not accurate, consumers can be disappointed when a product is presented with a benefit the Influencer experienced which is not actually a benefit claim the product can deliver. Control over creative content is not only important for branding purposes, but also from a legal standpoint as well. Norway has strict regulations for how sponsored posts should be marked and what type of content can be used. Breaching these regulations can result in fines and the authorities demanding the Influencer's post be deleted. Informant 1 mentioned a collaboration between a new brand and an Influencer where the Influencer wrote the wrong ingredients and product claims in a sponsored post, quoted below:

The client was not happy that the Influencer said their products contained seal oil instead of their patented SEA3oil which comes from wild salmon, not seals. This could have potentially been damaging for the newly established brand's reputation, but the Influencer was able to edit the post within a few hours so it was controlled.

According to the literature review, traditionally, consumer socialization occurred between individuals who knew each other, but through social media, Influencers have become "friends" with their followers. This relationship has a direct correlation to the perceived usefulness of a product and consumers' purchase intentions (Wang, et al. (2012).

How Influencer Marketing is Adopted

This section is dedicated to analyzing the key findings from the research in order to answer the research question: *How do communication professionals and Influencers in Norway perceive and adopt Influencer Marketing?* based on key findings from the research. The

interviewees expressed similar attitudes on how Influencer Marketing is adopted in the Norwegian beauty industry and what attributes campaigns must possess to be deemed a success when asked the interview question: *In your opinion, what defines a successful collaboration?* The coding process revealed four key attributes that all interviewees alluded must be present for an Influencer Marketing campaign to be successful. The key attributes; credibility, engagement, storytelling and inspiration, are illustrated by the author in the figure below.
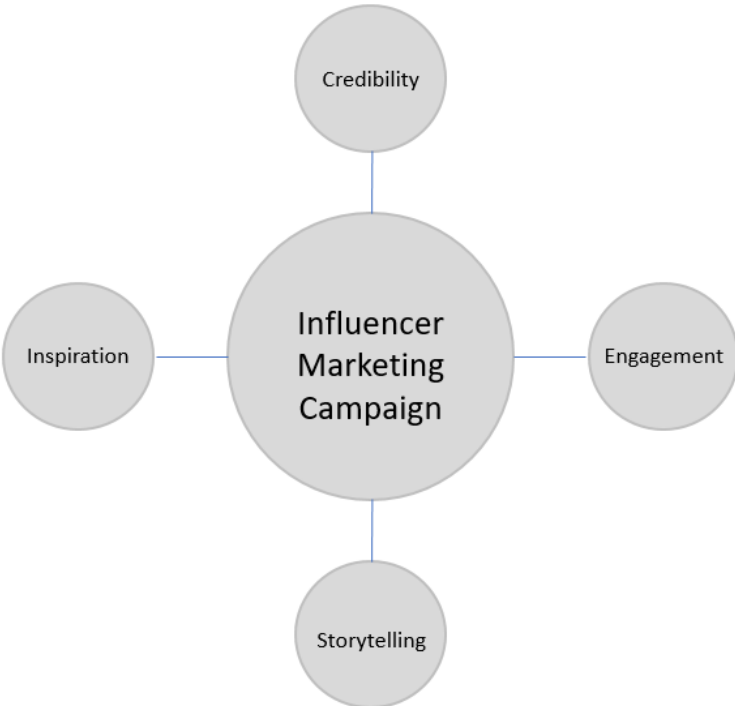

Figure 4: Components of successful Influencer Marketing campaigns

Credibility

The axial code *credibility* includes several different codes, for example, good fit for the brand, brand values and consistency, among others. It can be argued that Influencers have risen to popularity for several reasons. According to the five informants interviewed, the most important aspect for brands to consider when choosing an Influencer is his or her values. It was repeatedly mentioned that for a collaboration to be successful, a brand's values need to align with an Influencer's values. For example, Informant 1 said "First and foremost, we always consider [which Influencers] match the key values in terms of design, lifestyle and price segment."

Influencers pride themselves on their ability to connect with their audience and build up their follower base from small audiences to thousands, sometimes millions of followers. An Influencer's ability to connect to his or her follower base is dependent on them curating their own brand; reinforcing who they are through blog posts and/or posts on social media. This connection is suggested in the research to be the reason some Influencers succeed and others fail. As previously mentioned in the theoretical framework, the information transfer between online opinion leaders and their audience is perceived as interpersonal communication as opposed to directly from the mass media (Wang, et al, 2012). Through the findings of the research, it was suggested that the main reason Influencer Marketing has become a commonly used marketing tool can be attributed to an Influencers' ability to connect with their readers/followers in a more unique way than brands are able to do so through traditional marketing campaigns. The research suggests that an Influencer needs more than just a lot of followers to drive a successful campaign for a brand. All informants mentioned that Influencers who are consistent in delivering engaging content tend to build the strongest, most engaged followings. Informant 2 was quoted saying:

> *People like people more than people like brands. As humans we create connections with other humans. Social media platforms allow us to build relationships with these people. When someone follows an Influencer's everyday life, that person feels like they know the Influencer and a foundation of trust is built.*

This supports Ward's findings previously discussed in the literature review where his views on interactions with peers are essential acts which stem from psycho-physiological and sociological need fulfilment (Ward, 1974).

Engagement

Engagement not only refers to an Influencer's engagement with his or her followers, but also to a brand's engagement with the Influencers they choose to collaborate with. Most of the informants revealed that the Influencers who create engaging content that seems to fit into his or her lifestyle, are still perceived as credible among consumers regardless of the number of collaborations he or she engages in. "Scandinavia is having a moment. Influencer Marketing is seeing a huge increase in Norway due to the rise of Scandinavian Influencers in general." (Informant 3) As informant 4 mentioned, "Forget Parisian chic, it's all about Nordic cool." There seems to be a rise in engagement between followers and Influencers recently as Norwegian bloggers are perceived to be "at the top of their game." (Informant 3).

While audience loyalty and engagement are important, a large focus for brand collaborations with Influencers is content creation. In order to have a high level of interaction with consumers, the branded content needs to engage the reader (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). All interviewees stated that when a collaboration is initiated, PR agencies usually set up a meeting between the Influencer that has been chosen and the brand to discuss the strategy for the campaign and determine the branded content. Informant 2 explained that Influencers want to feel needed by brands just as much as they want to feel needed by their followers. When brands 'just push play', the Influencer campaign usually is not successful. "As brands engage more with the Influencer, the better the results become." Informant 2 also suggested that "[Brands] should integrate the Influencer into the company in all the communication [the brand] wants to do during the year and make [the Influencer] feel like they are on the team."

According to Interviewee 2 from Norway's only full-service Influencer Marketing agency, Influencer Marketing as we know it today, has only been professionalized in Norway since 2013. Before 2013, Influencers, were often referred to as bloggers. The bloggers preceding 2013 were usually not affiliated with agencies and they operated more isolated. Today, Influencers in Norway have taken on a new position when collaborating with brands. Many of the Influencers within the beauty industry have built up their following organically through engaging posts and presenting a lifestyle that is appealing to their followers. When asked about content creation, Interviewee 2 stated:

"[In order to reach a decision on content] We look at the vision of the organization, we look at the value of the communication that is coming through and we see that kind of audience

we have in Norway. Not just demographic, but what are their aspirations, user behavior,

because what we want to touch down on it what we need to do in order to

get the audience over there to actually buy the product."

The interviewees all stated that success happens when Influencers can create the content themselves together with the brand, but that the Influencer should have the final word. Informant 4 stated that she had a client who collaborated with an Influencer on a campaign and was dissatisfied with the content the Influencer created. "The brand changed almost every word in the campaign and in the end, the campaign was not successful because the Influencer's followers could feel that the content was disingenuous and not in [the Influencer's] 'tone of voice'". The brand also wanted to change where the content was distributed, so in the end, the campaign did not perform well or reach the target audience for which it was intended. Informant 4 emphasized the importance of how content should be distributed. She said: "You have to know the channel and you have to adapt the content to the channel."

Ashley & Tuten (2015) explored how brands should approach branded content with creative messages in a way that maximizes psychological engagement. They found that psychological engagement is dependent on consumer desires, motives and goals. Psychological engagement with regards to branded content is significant because it is known that consumers are not passive receivers of information; they are participants too (ibid). This, together with the findings of this research, indicates that in order to have successful Influencer campaigns, brands need to work closely with Influencers to create engaging content that consumers find interesting and want to consume. According to Interviewee 5, millennials are the consumer group that respond best to Influencer Marketing campaigns. As mentioned in the Literature Review, millennials grew up connected to the Internet. It its completely natural for this consumer group to share personal details about their lives in real time. Interviewee 5 was quoted as saying:

I think Influencer Marketing is so popular because we have so many brands popping up every day. In the beginning, when influencer marketing became a thing, these smaller niche brands were using Influencers as marketing tools and it was very effective. In my experience, millennials respond best to influencer campaigns as most beauty Influencers are under 30.

Inspiration

Another significant finding in the research was with regards to *inspiration* and *aspiration*. To decipher between the two, the author will define the terms according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary. *Inspiration* is defined as "the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative." The same dictionary defines *aspiration* as "a hope or ambition of achieving something." This key finding is supported by the theory of consumer socialization. Digitalization, especially social media, has altered how consumers communicate, socialize and how decision-making process are impacted (Wang, et al., 2012). In the literature review, the author showed the consumer socialization flow according to Wang et al. (2012). Beginning with peer social bonds, which then lead into peer communication; both can be compared to the relationship, or the bond, consumers have with Influencers. After peer communication is initiated, the need for uniqueness appears and this is where the consumer is influenced. At that point, the product attitude is determined and the purchase intention is solidified (ibid).

According to Informant 2, aspirations are the reason one follows Influencers. "You follow them because their life appeals to you." Through an Influencer's social media content, they can build up strong relationships with their followers, and through this bond, Influencers are able to inspire their followers to either buy products or aspire to a certain lifestyle. The informants were unanimous in their opinion that the key to a successful collaboration between an Influencer and a brand is about how well the Influencer translates his or her passion for the brand and how that in turn, can inspire consumers. Informant 4 said:

> *If someone I trusted told me about something, that would inspire me and I would probably buy the product, but there's another factor here and that's aspirations.*
> *Where does [the brand's] target group get their aspirations? Where do they go to look for things, and [brands] have to put [their] product in that environment.*

The reason Influencer Marketing works is that people aspire to be X—whomever that may be. With regards to how Influencers inspire consumers, Informant 1 said brands need to ask themselves "Who is believable to talk about this?" and try and initiate a collaboration with those Influencers who are most relevant to speak about a certain product. Informant 2's view that "people like people more than people like brands" also supports that 'content is king'. Previous evidence suggests that non-celebrity endorsers are viewed as more credible than

celebrity endorsements, especially by the Millennial generation (McCormick, 2016).

An attachment between Influencers and his or her followers is created through social media. Millennials are savvy users of technology and 37% state that they are "missing something" if they are not on social media everyday (ibid). This generation wants to share what they ate for dinner, everyday experiences and their purchases because it is gratifying to them. Millennials also want to consume this information by following Influencers. Interviewee 5 said "In my opinion, Influencer Marketing can be successful, especially when targeted towards millennials because that age group wants to read and see inspiring images that they can relate to, as opposed to branding from big companies."

Storytelling

According to Katz and Lazarsfeld, most people form their opinions based on the influence of opinion leaders (1955). Influencers like to influence – hence their title. To influence others, they need to be early adaptors and focus on brands and products before they are liked by the mainstream. This can be a challenge for brands as the Influencers are often used for product launches, where traditionally, brands would launch products themselves via traditional marketing channels. Influencer Marketing requires more from brands as they need to brief Influencers on what to say about new products and each Influencer has the desire to differentiate themselves. Interviewee 1 said "The main reason brands use Influencer Marketing is because they want a more personal approach to telling the story about their product and they want it to be more natural to what is everyday life. It's all about painting the picture – telling a story." She continued to say "traditional advertising is not that personal. Brands are trying to channel a more personal side of advertising with storytelling, using more effects to appeal to the viewers emotions."

All the interviewees were unanimous in their experiences that the Influencers who are the best storytellers are the most successful. They have the most loyal, dedicated followers and can curate their own brands better than Influencers who just post pictures. Storytelling is important, because consumers are growing tired of being marketed to. This is especially true for millennials. They know they are being marketed to and they have grown up being bombarded by brands and commercial media (Van Den Bergh & Behrer, 2011). Influencer Marketing is a way for brands to communicate about their products by placing them in what

appears to be natural settings, especially for the millennial consumer.

Branding is important because it's the perception consumers have when they hear or think of a brand. Influencers are in the unique position of being able to say virtually anything they desire about a brand. The informants were unanimous in their belief that Influencers need to be able to control the content they create about a brand or a product to stay true to their brand and appear sincere with their followers. Informant 1 was quoted with saying that when brands try to control the content "it takes away from [Influencer's] 'blogger magic'." This can be challenging for a brand to surrender all control over what is to be communicated to an Influencer. When Influencers have more control over a brand's image, the traditional brand guidelines companies have can be diluted. When asked about sponsored content, Interviewee 5 said:

> *Sponsored content tends to be produced by collaborators, i.e. Influencers, and it*
> *should be a collaborative effort between the Influencer and the brand.*
> *When sponsored content is published through Influencers channels, usually he or she links*
> *back to the brand. It's just an extra outlet for brands to reach new consumer groups with*
> *stories told in someone other than the brand's words.*

While there is a fine line between brands controlling what should be communicated and what Influencers write, the informants reiterated how important it is for brands to collaborate with Influencers who are professional and have experience creating content to avoid harming a brand's reputation.

Discussion

One of the most applicable existing theoretical frameworks that can be applied to the phenomenon of Influencer Marketing is the Theory of Disruptive Innovation. Through the research, the author discovered that Influencer Marketing has both disrupted the existing marketing mix and it fulfills the four key elements Christiansen's theory says businesses should fulfill in order to fit into the theory. The first key element is to improve along a trajectory of innovation. Influencer Marketing is achieving this as it is a growing practice. Both the number of Influencers is growing exponentially, as well as the number of brands engaging in Influencer Marketing campaigns. Secondly, the pace of innovation needs to exceed customers' needs, which Influencer Marketing does through engagement. The number

of consumers engaging with Influencers increases daily. The third element refers to others having the capability to respond, but failing to exploit it. The author chose to apply this third element to the innovative approach Influencer Marketing takes to delivering a marketing message. The final key element in the Theory of Disruption is others struggle as a result of the disruption. Influencer Marketing has created a massive shift in the way brands communicate with consumers. This innovation is discussed further below.

Despite the newness of Influencer Marketing in Norway, brands spanning various industries have initiated collaborations with Influencers and the number is growing daily. Early in the interviewing process, the impact Influencer Marketing has on brands became apparent. As the newest tool added to the marketing mix, Influencer Marketing can be used to reach new target groups, increase brand awareness and drive sales. The industry that initiates the most collaborations between brands and Influencers is the beauty industry. The research confirmed traditional marketing is less effective as consumers do not want to receive push-style communication messages. People do not trust brands, they trust each other. This has created an opportunity where Influencers – self-proclaimed experts – can claim the role as both friend and brand spokesperson to bridge the two worlds that have traditionally been separated.

With this newly established role, Influencers hold great power. While Influencer Marketing has been recognized as a profession, there is still a fair amount that remains undefined. The research revealed that while brands are eager to engage in Influencer collaborations, there is still a gap in the creation of best practices defined for the Influencer profession. Regulatory agencies have the consumer's best interest in mind and Influencer's agents have the Influencer's best interest in mind. Brands are left to rely on the help from communication professionals and their own marketing departments to navigate the best practices for the brand. This can be a challenge when Influencer Marketing has only been recognized as a sustainable marketing tool in Norway since 2013. The communication professionals interviewed said that there is a pressing need to gain experience with Influencer Marketing in the PR industry. As agencies are generally the responsible party for managing the partnership between brands and Influencers, the pressure for PR agencies to have in-depth knowledge has increased dramatically. Brands are relying on PR agencies to be the expert on defining Influencer Marketing campaign goals, while in fact, the research suggested this would be a better suited task for the brand's in-house marketing team because they should know the

brand best. Influencers have a great responsibility to engage ethically in collaborations, both with regards to the social responsibility they hold to their followers – the consumer and to the brand. As the pool of Influencers grows daily, this becomes a more challenging task for authorities to regulate.

In the research, trustworthiness was highlighted as an important factor when using Influencer Marketing to drive sales. Several interviewees stated that collaborations with micro Influencers have recently become a point of interest for brands. This was due to micro Influencers smaller size and seemingly more loyal following. Micro Influencers appeared to be more desirable among brands that target their products towards millennials. The research found that millennials are more responsive to Influencer Marketing campaigns and seek out new Influencers to follow more often than older consumers. The reason interviewees singled out millennials, was because they were born with access to the internet and almost expect that people should share details of their daily life in real time. They seem to be more affected than other consumer groups by the need for inspiration and the need to engage more than other customer groups. One potentially negative aspect that should be noted with micro Influencers, their small audiences can be challenging for long-term collaborations with brands due to the limited reach.

As revealed in the analysis above, credibility, engagement, storytelling and inspiration are the key components to successful Influencer Marketing campaigns. Influencers have a responsibility to present collaborations in an ethical manner. This is regulated by government agencies and can have strict implications when the laws are not followed. The research revealed that the best Influencer collaboration outcomes occur when brands give the Influencer the freedom to be creative and incorporate their personal touch. This was confirmed by several informants who revealed that the most credible collaborations were those where brands avoiding placing too many creative restrictions on the Influencer. When Influencers are able to control the creative content, their followers, the consumer, become more engaged, thus becoming more responsive to the campaigns call to action. If brands insist on placing restraints on Influencer's content creation, the Influencers run the risk of being perceived as inauthentic and less credible. The talent for storytelling and creating engaging content is more important than ever. Statistics show that up to 75% - three out of four consumers, trust the product recommendations that come from friends or Influencers over

recommendations from brands themselves (Sheridan, 2017). The last key component to successful Influencer Marketing campaigns that transpired in the analysis was inspiration. 98% of decisions are emotional (ibid). When consumers follow Influencers, they are looking for inspiration, aspiring to have the life the Influencer presents through social media. When Influencers present products the claim to love, their followers are triggered to feel they need to use those products as well. From a psychological perspective, this triggered desire is nearly impossible to avoid.

Brands are capitalizing on consumers' emotions and the connections consumers have with Influencers. To drive sales, brands engage Influencers to test, promote and advertise their products. These collaborations can be measured with specific key performance indicators to aid in achieving the goals of the campaign. It was proven in the research that Influencer Marketing is effective as a tool for driving sales. Informants cited multiple Influencer Marketing campaigns they had first-hand experience with where driving sales was the main objective. All communication professionals in the study revealed they had experienced positive effects of Influencer Marketing and often suggested it to their clients as a tool to drive sales. The author found the successful impact Influencer Marketing can have on sales as the most interesting finding in the research. According to the research, consumers do not seem to be affected by an Influencer's use of '#sponsored'. Sales do not seem to be affected by the Influencer informing their followers that a post is sponsored. This was revealed by several informants based on their experiences with Influencer Marketing campaigns.

In general, Influencers use multiple social media platforms to communicate their messages. Influencer Marketing campaigns are often published on more than on platform to increase the campaign reach. When multiple platforms are used, the potential for organic spreading is higher. Organic distribution occurs when consumers re-post the original post from an Influencer. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) increases the rate at which brand awareness can occur. The analysis revealed the downside to eWOM. The informants revealed several cases where Influencers were given creative freedom and wrote something potentially harmful for the brand they were promoting. There was a significant gap in available research around the harmful effects eWOM can have on brands, but the author suspects that with the growth of Influencer Marketing, this potential risk will also increase. Brands who choose to engage in

collaborations should carefully evaluate Influencers previous collaborations to ensure a satisfactory quality level of work has been delivered.

Conclusion

This research stemmed from the growth of Influencers Marketing in Norway. Influencers can be compared to other opinion leaders regarding the creation and spreading of content. (Sheridan, 2017). Influencer Marketing is a relatively new concept and has gained popularity due to successful collaborations between brands and Influencers and it does not seem to be slowing down. The research aimed to assess the affect Influencer Marketing has on brands as well as how it effects sales and eWOM. With the newness of Influencer Marketing, the author had to be creative in finding applicable theoretical framework that could be applied to this phenomenon.

Digital marketing in the form of advertisements on television, websites and email is declining. Consumers do not want to receive push marketing messages, they want to search for information. With regards to the effect Influencer Marketing has on sales, the findings indicated that Influencer Marketing can have a positive effect on both sales and increased brand awareness. Scandinavia is considered to be one of the leaders in the world of Influencer Marketing. 'Scandinavian cool' is a trend that is gaining attention worldwide. The effects Norwegian Influencers have on beauty brands cannot be ignored. It can be concluded that Influencers have an impact on consumer purchasing decisions which is aligned with Wang, et al.'s findings on consumer socialization through social media. Consumers form bonds with Influencers via social media channels and can thus inspire consumers to act on their product recommendations.

It can be concluded that Influencers have adopted the role as Opinion Leaders in Katz & Lazarfeld's Two-step Flow of Communication model. Social media takes on the role of mass media and thus acts as the main channel for Influencers to convey their messages to individuals with whom they have contact with via social channels. Influencers are commonly used in the beauty industry and brands can benefit from using Influencer Marketing to reach new target consumer groups. Influencers have a strong impact on eWOM and can affect a brand's reputation both positively and negatively. When Influencers are given creative freedom to produce content, brand messaging can be portrayed in a skewed light. Brands engaging with Influencers should create best practices for the selection of Influencers as well

as determine how much creative freedom Influencers have when promoting brands.

Consumers are more receptive to marketing messages from people instead of from brands directly. With regards to the nature of collaborations, four key components were identified as essential to achieve success with Influencer Marketing campaigns. The four components are credibility, engagement, storytelling and inspiration. Influencers have developed specific characteristics that differ from traditional marketing tools. These characteristics should be focused on on in order to get the most out of brand – Influencer collaborations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

There are two theoretical implications of this master's thesis. First, the research contributed to the discussion about the effects of eWOM and the impact on consumer purchasing decisions (Lu, et al., 2014; Burke, 2017; Arnold, 2017). The findings in the research indicate that eWOM has a greater impact on purchase decisions than traditional marketing. Secondly, the research contributed to the discussion about the Two-step Flow model (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and how the model that was designed over 60 years ago, is still as relevant today as it was in 1955. Social media is the new mass media and Influencers are the new opinion leaders in contact with consumers.

The practical implications of the analysis show that success is defined at the start of the collaboration process by the brand and the PR agency assisting in the collaboration. Four key components to a successful Influencer Marketing campaign were defined as engagement, credibility, inspiration and storytelling. There is a correlation between increased sales and brand awareness when brands engage in Influencer collaborations. These can be measured digitally, but are not always guaranteed. The most important factor for brands to consider when choosing and Influencer to collaborate with is values. Key values should match up between the brand and Influencer to ensure an equal partnership is created.

Limitations

This research revealed valuable insights regarding how Influencer Marketing is adopted by beauty brands in Norway, however, the research presents certain limitations that should be disclosed. The subjective nature of qualitative research can be considered a limitation in and of itself. The author's cultural and professional background had the potential to affect the

interview process and the analysis results. The author made a conscious effort to set any predispositions aside and complete the processes with transparency and precision.

A second limitation to this research could potentially be the limited theoretical frameworks that could be applied due to the newness of Influencer Marketing in general, combined with the small market size of Norway. This created a challenge for the author to find relevant frameworks that could be applied. Therefore, related concepts such as Digitalization in Norway, the Two-step Flow Model, Consumer Socialization and The Theory of Disruptive Innovation were included as the theoretical foundation for this thesis.

A third possible limitation to the research is the fact that there was no research collected directly from Influencers. Due to interview scheduling challenges and limited time constraints, Influencers were excluded from this study. Nevertheless, the author was able to obtain useful information from communication professionals who work closely with Influencers which proved helpful to the research.

Recommendations for Future Research

As previously mentioned, there is limited research conducted on Influencer Marketing, especially with regards to the Norwegian market. This indicates that there are several angles that could be researched further. This study used a variety of qualitative methods, including semi-structure interviews and document analysis. It would be interesting to further explore the effects Influencer Marketing has on sales with the use of a quantitative study to obtain concrete statistics on the effect Influencer Marketing has on product sales. This study could be expanded by adding two new groups of informants. These groups could include both consumers who have purchased products recommended by Influencers as well as communication professionals employed in various roles in marketing departments of brands who engage in Influencer Marketing collaborations. With the addition of these two informant groups, the researcher could gain a broader perspective of what motivates consumers to purchase products recommended by Influencers as well as what are the pre-defined goals of a specific collaboration.

Future research could also include studies on how Influencers collaborate with existing brands in a special collection called "Influencer x Brand" and the effect these collaborations have on

the existing brand's sales. An example of this is "EirinXHardangerBestikk", where Norwegian Influencer, Eirin collaborated with existing silverware brand, Hardanger Bestikk. Insight into the inner workings would assist Influencers in exploring new collaboration opportunities. The research could also be relevant for brands to know how to create more long-lasting Influencer collaborations as opposed to, what is common at present, one-off or short-term collaborations between brands and Influencers.

In addition to the growing trend of brand collection collaborations, Influencers are branching out and creating their own product lines. Examples of this include Norwegian Influencer, Celine Aagaard – self-proclaimed fashionista – who recently launched her own clothing line. Or Norwegian Influencer, Camilla Pihl who launched her own skincare line in 2017 after being a self-proclaimed "beauty junkie". Future research could investigate the level of sustainability Influencer created brands have compared to established brands, as well as the potential lifetime sales over time.

Since Influencer Marketing is a relatively new channel added to the marketing mix, the pricing structure is not established and it appears Influencers are collecting as much as they can for each collaboration. New professionals, both Influencers and communication professionals alike must navigate through common practices until they gain enough experience to establish norms. With the lack of regulated prices, new Influencers are best suited to find and agent who can negotiate prices on their behalf. Brands often engage PR agencies, who then take their cut for the liaison task between the agents and Influencers. It appears that the middle people will be cut out at some point soon in order establish free market pricing not inflated by several links in the collaboration process.

This Master Thesis was an opportunity to explore Influencer Marketing in the beauty industry in Norway. The author found it fascinating to discover how Influencer Marketing is perceived and implemented in the Norwegian market. It was thought-provoking to explore the effect Influencer Marketing has on brand sales and Electronic Word of Mouth. As literature and theoretical framework on Influencer Marketing is limited, relevant theoretical framework was applied to give an innovative approach as to why Influencer Marketing has become an essential tool in marketer's tool kits going forward.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Criteria for being selected for an interview is that the influencer or communications professional has worked on a campaign with a brand in the past 6 months.

Introduction
Hi! My name is Lauren Jensen and I am an MBA student at Nord University. I chose to write about influencer marketing in Norway and I am interested in researching the correlation between beauty/lifestyle bloggers, brands and communication organizations. For these reasons, I would like to hear about your experiences and insight on certain influencer marketing topics. The questions will be open-ended. Is it ok if I record the interview for transcription and analysis purposes?

Introduction

Can you introduce yourself?

What is your occupation and how long have you worked in the industry?

How long have you been working with bloggers/influencers?

Questions for Influencers:

How many followers/subscribers do you have?

Which social media channels do you use?

What is your motivation for working with brands?

How many brands do you/have you collaborated with?

Collaborations

How are collaborations initiated?

What is the objective of collaborations?

Describe how a collaboration looks.

Why do your clients engage in collaborations with influencers?

In your opinion, what defines a successful collaboration?

How do you and the brand reach a decision on the content?

How are sales measured?

Have you had a negative experience with a collaboration?

What makes a collaboration unsuccessful?

Do you see a difference in the result of a collaboration initiated by an agency rather than a brand going directly to the influencer?

Perception

How are influencers selected?

What specifically makes an influencer interesting for you and/or a brand?

Is there a difference in influencers who have done several collaborations vs. those who have done fewer?

Does the amount of followers an influencer has make a difference on the outcome of the collaboration?

Content

Do you view blogs and other social media channels as effective marketing outreach tools?

What effect do influencer collaborations have on a company's brand?

How do you define branded content and sponsored content?

Do you experience a difference in the two?

In what ways do you recommend branded content is presented?

Norway

What is the difference between influencer marketing in Norway compared to other countries?

Are there characteristics specific to the Norwegian market with regards to Influencer Marketing?

Future

Why is Influencer Marketing so popular?

How does the future of influencer marketing look?

Appendix B: Lauren Jensen Interview with Interviewee 1 of Polhem PR

Lauren Jensen (LJ): I am Lauren Jensen. I am doing my Master's thesis on Influencer Marketing. Thank you for letting me interview you. First, please introduce yourself.

Interviewee 1 (I1): My name is XXX. I am a Press Officer at Polhem PR in our Oslo office and I have been working here since 2017.

LJ: Okay. How long have you been in the industry?

I1: I have been working in the industry since 2011. I've had many different roles. I've done everything from freelance styling to writing and now I'm doing PR, so I've kind of been an all around the fashion industry kind of person.

LJ: Good. How long have you been working with Bloggers and Influencers?

I1: Primarily, it's been ever since i started working in PR so since August basically.

LJ: Okay. If we go into collaborations, particularly collaborations between brands and influencers, how are collaborations initiated?

I1: I think this really depends because, at least within my role, I have everything from brands that I work with that want to do something different with their brand and would like to use influencer marketing as part of their strategy, towards either branding or building brand awareness or launching and stuff like that but also we have bloggers or influencers contacting us directly, knowing about the brands we work with and if they are interested or see themselves working with a particular brand they might even actually contact us saying, "I would like to work with this and this brand. Could you see that working?" Sometimes it's people that have been, let's say, kind of flirting with a brand, have posted about it before, shown interest, attended events, written about it on their own and they just see this as the next step and sometimes it's super random and they just are interested in doing collabs, and in those cases, it's usually a dead end basically.

LJ: So they ask you for an introduction to the brand because they see you are working with them?

I1: Yes. So they can say, for example, it can be a fashion profile, because at Polhem we work with fashion, beauty and interior so they can be a fashion profile that segues into interiors, for example, and then they can see that we are working with an interior brand that they are interested in collaborating with. Sometimes they will suggest a particular project or just show interest and then it's kind of our job to see whether that's a good fit, both for the brand and the profiling style and how they work because the influencers work differently and some of them have different channels — some do YouTube, some do Snapchat but most of them are all about Instagram and their blog.

LJ: What would you say is the objective of the collaborations? Who sets the objective? Is it the brand? Is it the people who want an introduction? They say, "I want an introduction and what their goal is.". How is that defined?

I1: Well, this is so particular from brand to brand. This is also what takes the most time when we define a collaboration because some brands are super commercial and are selling very, very well but it might be, for example, we can take a customer who is super commercial, they are selling a lot but they feel they aren't trendy enough or they want to reach a new target group, so that might be a strategy. So a KPI that we set for that project may be that we don't necessarily want to make a lot of money and we have to sell a lot, it can just be like we have to make this brand cooler, we have to speak more towards the designer addicts and the trendsetters. So that can be the goal. When that is the case we will set a whole different type of strategy, but the most common cases we work with are to increase sales, build brand awareness, and for some who are in a very competitive market that have a lot of similar competition, it is about creating a "top of mind" effect. It's so different from brand to brand. The strategy we set up is based on what is the main goal of that collaboration.

LJ: So the next question is why do your clients engage in collaborations with influencers but you kind of talked about that, in that they want to be top of mind, or want to change their image, or reach a different group.

I1: Yes, but I think that a lot of the reason that influencer marketing has become something is because traditional advertising is not that personal. Brands are trying to channel a more personal side of advertising with storytelling, using more effects to appeal to the viewers emotions. Now you see commercials on TV that are the grandfather, so you can see that traditional commercials have taken a lesson from influencer marketing by being more personal and showing personality when you're advertising is actually a common thread.

LJ: Yes.

I1: But I think the main reason why brands are using influencer marketing is because they want that more personal approach to telling the story about their product and they want it to be more natural to what is everyday life. It's all about painting the picture – telling a story. Then you can start the whole discussion about "is it like that anymore?" because that is what really started off the whole blogger influencer scene. It was kind of these girls finding a crowd through the internet and they were writing about everything from what they had to eat, putting up their shopping bags saying "Oh, I got this at H&M for blah, blah, blah." and now it's become a whole industry … brands spending a lot of money promoting their stuff, so it has changed a lot, but I think the main reason is still that they have that personal touch and a lot of brands see it as a really nice way to promote it. It's a whole other discussion about how personal that personal touch is, now that it's become so commercialized.

LJ: So in your mind, what defines a successful collaboration?

I1: I think definitely the influencer that the brand is working with, that they have a genuine interest for the brand, that they know the brand and they know the products in depth, that it's not like, for nail polish, to take a lot of nice pictures and say "it's nail polish" and say where you can buy it. I think they have to know the brand and are interested because now the brands are reaching out to the influencers, I feel it's not that much that they are seeking anymore unless they are, like we talked about previously, that they are interested in working in a new field like interiors, etc. Also, because we have agencies now, everything goes through the agent, so it's really important that they know the brand and that they engage some kind of interest in the brand in the brand, otherwise the campaign won't work. I think the only way to really care about something is to know it, if you don't really know it, you're like "Yeah … it's

nail polish. It's pink. You can buy it here.", and like we talked about earlier, adding a lot of hashtags.

LJ: So it's more product-placed and not genuine.

I1: Yes, yes; and I also think that a lot of times when it goes through agencies it's this blog post, it's this Instagram that you paid for and nothing else that I think takes away some of the "blogger magic" because it feels very much, as you said, like product placement and very "hashtag ad", so if you can see them, like this first blog post to come and break everything off, if you do it right and they care about the brand, care about the products, it's kind of nice to see them take it back here [to the beginning] every now and then when it's appropriate. We had one client who wanted to increase brand awareness so we helped them with an influencer campaign. The brand engaged 5 influencers from different target groups with the goal of communicating different messages about the product to each target group. The brand gave the influencers substantial information about the product and free range to write what they felt was important to focus on for their followers. The campaign was a major success and they sold out! This was because the brand gave enough information to the influencers so they felt comfortable speaking to the uniqueness of the product tailored to their followers. Then one of the influencers wrote at the end of the year saying, "These are my beauty favorites for this year." It was really perceived believable for her audience.

LJ: So they are talking about the products again.

I1: Yes. So it's like "Yeah, I remember you've written about that before, so you actually like it." They are approached by so many brands and so many products, I feel like at the end, they kind of lose their own voice a little. Some of them really try to hold onto it but for some of them, I don't know if they actually know at the end of the year what their favorites were because sometimes it feels very random what ends up on those lists. I think it's very important for the influencers and agencies to understand that the influencers are in that position because their readers and followers trust them. They are nothing without the followers. If the followers don't trust them, their brand is broken.

We talked about this with one collaboration we did, I don't know the proper English word, common thread; a consistent connection. So if they say on one blog post "Oh, I LOVE this eyeshadow!" and then you never see that eyeshadow again, don't say you LOVE the eyeshadow. It's better to be honest. Don't work with brands that you don't genuinely like …

LJ: And that you don't genuinely use. Like randomly mentioning pink nail polish but you never have your nails painted.

I1: Yes! It's also important that Influencers fact check their work. We had one collaboration where an Influencer was testing out a new skincare brand and she wrote that she loved their ingredients and they made her skin so soft, but she mentioned the wrong ingredient. The client was not happy that the Influencer said their products contained seal oil instead of their patented SEA3oil which comes from wild salmon, not seals. This could have potentially been damaging for the newly established brand's reputation, but the Influencer was able to edit the post within a few hours so it was controlled.

LJ: Ok, that's scary. Moving on to how collaborations are measured. How are sales measured in a campaign? And do you have any experience with sales that exceed expectations?

I1: Usually brands define the goal or goals of the campaign in the initial meeting as we talked about before. We have worked with several beauty brands who were launching new products and wanted to have strong sales from day 1. Online shopping is so common now and with the 'swipe up' function on Insta stories it makes it so much easier to have a campaign that is sales driven. We had one client that launched a new line of face masks and they hadn't gotten a huge response from traditional marketing campaigns, Facebook ads or PR, so we helped them create an Influencer campaign. They used 8 micro-influencers and 2 larger Influencers with 80-100,000 followers. They saw a huge increase in sales and the ROI of the campaign was better than they budgeted.

LJ: That's interesting. I want to hop to the topic of Branded Content and Sponsored Content. I think that is what you're mentioning now because some brands give a script for "Say this. Do this. Hashtag this." and everything is all wrapped up, but then, as you said, they can't work their "blogger magic". There is a fine line between Branded Content from them, the bloggers, and Sponsored Content, which is the brands basically dictating what is communicated and then paying the blogger. How do you define Branded Content and Sponsored Content?

I1: I feel that Branded Content is kind of a mix between, well it's kind of like when two brands come together, it's like the silver blonde talks about the silver shampoo. Because influencers have a brand themselves, or at least they should have, so I feel that Branded Content is when two brands come together (the influencer brand and the product brand) and they unite forces. So the girl you always see with the pink nail polish is the spokesperson for the new pink nail polish.

LJ: and Sponsored Content?

I1: I think that is very much how you describe it … manuscripted. It doesn't seem, uh … a lot of the stuff we see in Sponsored Content can be good. For example, when you see Det Nye, I think they are doing this really, really well with their whole influencer part of the magazine. They can talk about anything, from like, i don't know, pizza to makeup to clothing to everything so the products they're talking about aren't always Branded Content or a perfect match between that profile and the brand but they are still given a lot of freedom to actually make it their own. So they can be like these two outspoken, fun girls talking about something very random like tools. It's obvious they are not talking about it because this is their passion but they are given the kind of freedom so they can show their take on whatever they're talking about. I feel that is the case with Det Nye because usually sponsored content is very manuscripted but they do it how it really should be done.

LJ: Excellent! That's really interesting. How are Influencers selected? You talked a little about how some approach you as a PR Officer but then how are others selected?

I1: First, we look into what we want to accomplish with the campaign. So let's say that the goal is to increase sales. We would look into what is the profile for this brand, what are they all about, what are their key values? First and foremost, we always look into who matches the key values in terms of design, lifestyle, price segment and everything. Who is believable to talk about this? At that point, we may have five names so then we discuss what we are doing this time. In this example, we are trying to increase sales. So which of these five have the most engagements in their profile, things like that, then they will be selected for that

campaign. Then there may be two that look amazing for the brand. They may be great ambassadors for the brand based on how they look and how they write. Maybe more like trendsetters and "it girls" instead of just the commercial ones. Because there is a big difference between the girl you dream to be and the girl you actually are. So there are the ones you want to copy/paste and then there are the ones you look to because they are just super cool.

In another case, like I talked about, there are some brands that are selling really well but they want to be more trendy, then it's the perfect direction to go more towards these trendsetters, these really cool people that are so cool that they will wear amazing, crazy outfits, they are super creative, they hang out in a really cool crowd, they go on really cool vacations, they are always one step ahead — early adapters is what we call them, but maybe they are a little too crazy or a little too cool for the normal girl next door to actually emulate; maybe she doesn't have the self-confidence to actually go out and be like that but maybe she'll have other role models that she feels she can actually copy that look or buy that sweater. So it's all about answering what is the goal. But I think we always try to find who matches the key values, who is believable to use this product, what segment is it in, what kind of lifestyle is this profiling, because we always want to, even if they haven't heard of the brand, he or she could be a good match — like this is believable. Then you go into the dialogue of the profile to see if this is something for you, is this interesting to you. There are several brands out there that you may have never heard of but once you do and you start learning about it, you may say, "This is the brand I've been looking for forever." and it ends up being the perfect match. But it's really important that they show some interest, otherwise they are not going to make good content.

LJ: Exactly. So is there a difference in Influencers who have done several collaborations as opposed to those who have done fewer? For example, would you say they get tired or worn out? What is your view on that?

I1: I think that depends more on profile to profile rather than those who have done more or not so many. This a very, very special type of job, being an influencer, and we have seen influencers who are doing so many collaborations but they still put the same type of professional, engaged expression to it and they are super serious about their brand. They don't want to put their name on anything that is not going to be top quality and no matter how many years they go on or how many collaborations they do, they still manage to keep their magic touch. But then you see other big profiles that are doing the same amount of paid collaborations and they are making their content like a robot and it is not really a personal touch anymore. Those are the kind you want to avoid. You can also see micro-influencers that haven't done that many and some of them are amazing and they put so much effort into creating great content and they're not even getting paid but are being sponsored with the product and they can make amazing content and they can give so much more and they can put into it the consistency. They can do it even though they are not getting paid because they love what they do and they see future goals they want to achieve. Maybe they want to be one of those big names one day. And then you can see people that are just starting out but are already not putting their heart into it. It's sad to see. We now know you can actually live off being an influencer but you don't become [Pernille Teisbaek] or [Camilla Phil] overnight. It's important to know and always remember that these really big names started doing this even before, you know they had jobs on the side. This was kind of their hobby and their release and it was something they did because it was fun and they really loved it. But now, people are quitting their jobs at the point where they have 4,000 followers to become an

influencer. [laughs] And I think that might be where it kind of goes wrong because I think it's important to give your brand the time it needs to grow in a natural way to not let the stress of making money guide you, because in the end, you're supposed to be an influencer. You're supposed to inspire, and if everything you do is because you needed money this week, it's not going to be inspirational.

LJ: So to the point about the amount of followers an influencer has, do you think that has an impact on the outcome of the success of the collaboration?

I1: Not necessarily. I think what is super important is to have the right kind of followers. There is one example I heard of that I thought was quite interesting. It was about this farmer on Instagram who had a farmer profile. He was always posting about his life on the farm, i.e. what tractor he was driving, and what products he used. Let's say he had 900 followers on Instagram, which in our world is like nothing! One day there was a brand, let's say like Felleskjøpet saying we are having this product coming out. They contacted him and said we're having a day to show everyone this new blah, blah, blah. He went on Instagram and invited all his followers and SO many people came. He only had 900 followers but he had the 900 RIGHT followers — 900 people who were super committed to this farmer. Because, as I talked about earlier, there are those you follow just because they are inspirational and then there are the ones you actually want to copy/paste. You can have 10,000 followers that are the RIGHT followers if 5,000 of them buy the product. That's a success! As opposed to someone with 250,000 followers but 150,000 of them being ghosts that never leave comments, never engage; they just follow because everyone else is following them but they're not really engaging in the content they're producing, they're not really more useful than the one that has 10,000 followers. I think the whole thing with micro-influencers is really interesting because you can kind of fit the brand towards the influencers much more easily.

LJ: Right. Be the farming brand that finds the farmer on Instagram.

I1: Yes. I see that in like the Norwegian brand Fall/Winter/Spring/Summer. They use the strategy that they are all about the cool Oslo girl, and the cool Oslo girl can be anything from the cool, aspiring young actress to the musician to the one that works at the coffee bar that everyone is always talking about and it's more towards the identity and what the girls are all about more than how many followers they have, because it's more about the branding part, especially if they are not even leaving comments. I think that is the future … more of the modern way to work with influencers.

LJ: One last question before we move on to the last portion of the interview. Do you see a difference in the results of a collaboration initiated by an agency rather than by a brand going directly to the influencer?

I1: I think that really depends on the brand. Some people have brand managers and people within the brand that are used to handling campaigns and some don't. I feel it's always nice — you always have to have a strategy ahead. And this has a lot to do with how you brief influencers. We've seen instances where the brand was supposed to take care of it themselves and when they brief influencers they say "We want it just to be cool. We want a lot of hype." but what they really want is sales, just want to sell a lot of product. Hype and sales do not always go hand in hand. They CAN go hand in hand but I think the way you would put up a campaign if you want to increase sales is completely different than if you just want to hype something. If you say it's all about hype, about how cool it is, then it's a whole different

strategy. It's important to have a strategy first of all and that depends on what resources are within the brand and that is usually why brands work with PR agencies.

LJ: I see. Because they also want to set the goals together with the brand.

I1: Exactly. And sometimes they can say that they don't really know how to put those goals into KPI. When they've only looked at the campaign from the outside they don't know the process.

LJ: Okay. So if we talk about Norway, because I'm writing about Norway compared to the rest of the world too, what would you say is the difference between influencer marketing in Norway as compared to other countries?

I1: Everything! Just kidding.

LJ: Because it's become more popular.

I1: It's definitely become more popular and what I can say about both, because I've worked with brands from all over Europe and we also have Polhem offices all over Scandinavia and the Baltics. We talk a lot and I can definitely say that Norway is standing out in regards to influencer marketing. A lot because it is a smaller country so the business and industry is smaller here so it's kind of easy, say with Sweden in Stockholm, from the point where you start out as an influencer to the point where you're actually being invited, you're in the crowd, that's a longer way than here because it's such a small industry so you're always going to know someone who is going to let you in. And also, I don't know if this is typical Norwegian, or if it's just happened here but I think that we have a capitalist edge. It has affected the influencer market in a, a don't know how to say this, very interesting way. Like my colleague here, she has been studying and working as an intern in New York for two years and one of the PR agencies she interned for was a small PR and they would have like superstars, like people who are stars here, big, big, big stars come into their office after having just borrowed a pair of shoes and they would say things like "Wow, these are amazing! Let me know if you're having a sample sale." or "I would really like to buy this if you could let me know where I could.". If they wanted it, they could definitely get it for free. It is amazing to see that kind of interest. The fact that superstars are saying "Can I buy this?" and being super humble versus here where they are not like that. They are more "Well, I'm an influencer so I should get this for free."

LJ: Yeah, like "Can you send me some samples?".

I1: Yeah, but we have to ask "What have you proven?". Have you proven you are worthy? Because it's all about return of investment. What can you show to prove your worth to us? Do you have any examples? It sounds really bad but, everyone is special, everyone is precious, but you have to understand that influencer marketing is kind of like the new sister or brother for traditional marketing and advertising. It's still the same thing but it's in a different wrapping. With traditional advertising and marketing, people have never doubted that we're here to get the word out there, that we're here to increase sales, or to build brand awareness. But with influencers, I feel it's important for them to know that we are we're working with them because we want to reach their followers, not because we want to fill up their wardrobe, decorate their homes or stock their bathroom shelf. We want to use them as a voice and to promote the brand in a more personal way.

LJ: Exactly.

I1: I think this is really interesting because I feel like, even though they are serious about working as influencers, we see that all of them are not serious about being professional in that role.

LJ: Right. So they expect to get things because they have given themselves the title of Influencer?

I1: Yes, yes. I feel like you have to, like we talked about before, with the really big names; Elin Kingsrød, Camilla Phil, these girls started out buying their own tickets for fashion week and using stuff out of their own wardrobe and they were just all about inspiring people and it seems more like they decide they're going to be an influencer and expect that brands are going to just be willing to put it out there. It's important to remember that you still have to pay your dues, go step by step and build your brand and maybe for the first 2-3 years you have to have a paying job on the side if this is something you really want to do. It's important to know this is still a job. This is still people investing in you and expecting results. It's important to know that even though Influencer colleagues are being paid you still have to prove yourself and can't rely on the title "Influencer" for someone to pay you.

LJ: Right. Exactly. So the last question is, and you kind of touched on it, How does the future of Influencer Marketing look? You mentioned it is the same as traditional marketing only in different wrapping and it's a way to promote brands in a more personal way. You also mentioned about the 'ghosts' and these people with 200,000 followers not necessarily being successful. So what do you think the future of Influencer Marketing in Norway looks like?

I1: Obviously, we've made a business out of it and I think that, I hope that it stays on because it is definitely interesting, but I think it's also important that they take a step back and realize what made influencers interesting to begin with. Things like the personal touch, the fact that they were, you know how you could follow a girl in another city or another country and you could feel like "I know this girl." She's kind of like a friend in the distance and when she talked about things you could say "oh that's so her" and you could identify with the brand and know what they were all about. You could separate "oh that's very her or that's very him" so I think it's very important that the agencies kind of take a step back and kind of let the influencers be personal and not dictate that they write about this and this when they get paid and encourage them to keep making content just for the sake of being creative because you can see, especially on Instagram that there are a lot of big personalities that every post they have on is hashtag add. And then you see other influencers that have every fifth or seventh post is hashtag add but they are still dressing up, going out with their friends, having photo shoots, because they still care about the kind of creative part of being an influencer and they still feel inspired to create stuff. I think that's really important; to take a step back and going a little old school about it and keeping that part. I also think that we're going to see more micro-influencers and not just the typical blogger-type influencers that that are only bloggers but are influencers in the way that used to be. Like musicians, actors, actresses, people who are like doing something they are passionate about to begin with and that brands are teaming up with because they feel like they have equal values. It's amazing to live a life where it's all about events and breakfasts and dinners and parties but I think that it's also important to have something that's all your own because that's what the whole influencer thing started out

being; why it became interesting in the first place. I remember one of the people that i first followed and that I keep following is Man Repeller because I love the fact that she started her account because she felt like she had a personal style that she thought repelled men. She was always pulling crazy outfits and doing crazy layering. It was all about color and she wore fruit cases on her head and it was crazy but that was a stand that she took. It was all about her love of fashion and less about her being sexy for a man so she had this whole purpose for women; saying f*** what they want, let's do what we want and that was her brand. That was what she was all about. She's married now and she has kids. She has a podcast, she has a magazine. She's doing so many things, but it all started with that purpose of telling women "You go do you and I'm going to do me." And I think the identity, part of the personal project is key to influencers staying relevant, so fingers crossed that we're going to see …

LJ: Right. So you're saying they just have to be more genuine, like this Man Repeller. She built up a whole person based on her personality and her values. It wasn't like "If this brand will pay me to do this, I'll do that", it was "No. I want to do this and this is me."

I1: And it's important that they can say no as well. Obviously if a brand reaches out to you, it's flattering and it can also possibly mean money and all of that, but I think that it's kind of like slow and steady wins the race, and this is also kind of the thing with the really big names in the influencer world, internationally, the ones that have made it and are still relevant and the biggest profiles we have, even though they are super different, the one thing they have in common is that they stay truthful to their brand and that they never lose sight of that and they keep their personal touch on everything they do. And we know who they are. We know what they're all about.

LJ: Exactly. I think they then get more genuine followers because they identify with that influencer and they are more die-hard followers. Interesting! Thank you!

Lauren Jensen Interview with Interviewee 2 of United Influencers

Lauren Jensen (LJ): Please introduce yourself.

Interviewee 2 (I2): My name is XXX and I work as a Content Manager here at United Influencers here in Norway. I been here from the start so I have been through it all; all the phases.

LJ: That is exciting. How long have you been working in the industry?

I2: In the media industry, since I started United Influencers, it's been three years now. Actually, a little more than that, I think it's 3-1/2 years.

LJ: How long have you been working with bloggers and influencers?

I2: Since the beginning.

LJ: Let's talk about collaborations first. How would you say collaborations are initiated?

I2: How we work, we have a management team that gets to know all of our influencers early in the beginning and talk about what their values are, what they stand for, what they want their footprint to be, what area they are in. How close of a relationship we can make between this influencer and this brand. What fits perfectly. If they don't fit we should neglect them, we shouldn't use them at all.

LJ: Right. What would you say is the objective of collaboration? The goal, both from the perspective of the influencer and the brand?

I2: I think that if you really want to engage the audience, and you want to move them in another way where you do advertising and you stand for your own communication as a brand and also for the influencer we give them content that is engaging and in that way we can produce a lot of good campaigns that are great for the result at the end of the day.

LJ: Can you describe how a collaboration looks?

I2: Collaborations looks very different from when we started in the beginning. It was one sponsor post, one blog post, one Instagram post. But the audience has become smarter so now the influencer needs more substance. More in depth in the collaboration so they understand what they are supposed to do. I can stand for everything about the product. So now we see more long-term collaborations are popping up and not just to take the first movers in the audience to try it but to actually win the whole audience. Also it has become more technical, I think, because before we could only trust in the audience relationship to the influencer, but now with digital marketing, if you have a strategy around it it's easier to actually optimize the results. Some days the influencer may have 44,000 unique readers and other days they have 55,000, but in terms of a week, if you take that number and times it by three you will have a bigger audience so to make sure we reach all the audience instead of just focusing on one blog post we optimize the results.

LJ: In your opinion, what defines a successful collaboration?

I2: It is when you integrate the influencer into the company in all the communication you want to do during the year and make them feel like they are on the team. Because if you do that, I think sometimes we forget that we work with humans; everybody has their own expectations, their own goals. They want to feel needed, they want to feel part of something that is bigger than themselves usually, so just treating them like a media, like you just push 'play' … so many marketers when we bring them onboard they are frustrated because they say "we pay them this money and it's like a billboard. I just press 'play' and it's perfect" but as you engage more with the influencer, the better results you will get. As brands engage more with the Influencer, the better the results become.

LJ: Right. How do you and the brand reach a decision on the content?

I2: That depends on what the customer/brand has in mind about how to succeed. If you talk to a business that wants to increase sales or increase brand love, but in the end that leads to sales, branding awareness when you launch products or whatever, so that depends. For the brand love we usually do concepts instead of focusing on what type of influencers you should work with. We look at the vision of the organization, we look at the value of the communication that is coming through and we see what kind of audience we have in Norway. Not just demographic but what are their aspirations, user behavior, because what we want to touch down to is what do we need to do in order to get the audience over there to actually buy the product. So maybe it's a new makeup brand that is fun and flirty so we do a concept around fun and flirty and we call it, maybe Supergirls, or whatever and then we look at the price range. Is it cheap, is it expensive? What does it need to do? So then we look at influencers from the last period based on what we are supposed to do, based on the concept, based on the community, we pick the influencer. If you've been trying out a collaboration because you know it fits perfectly between influencer and brand, we recommend you do an ambassadorship instead because you don't want any competitors to take that gold you just found so you can do a long-term collaboration with one specific profile and then add on with some micro-influencers also.

LJ: Have you had any unsuccessful collaborations?

I2: Yes.

LJ: What do you think is the reason for that?

I2: I have to say expectations I think. Expectations in all that we do and usually we are very hard on that now, but before, we were very eager to satisfy the customer and we let the customer talk directly to the influencer, not only about the brand values and explaining their vision but we also let them talk to them on a daily basis when they were supposed to write something or post something and then suddenly they were coming with feedback, asking "can you please change that sentence because it doesn't fit with us" or "can you put a link on that" or "can you rearrange the blog posts and put new pictures on that" and then me as a follower, I would say I've been following you for seven years and that doesn't even sound like your voice anymore. They've been bought and published.

LJ: Right. So it's important to let the influencer speak and be who they are.

I2: Yes. Or else you may as well just do a Facebook ad and be done.

LJ: I'd like to ask what specifically makes an influencer interesting for a brand. Do you see a difference between influencers who have done a lot of collaborations versus new ones or other ones who are much more selective?

I2: I would say that if you are going for the premium influencers who have a big audience, you know that it's a commercial influencer and you know the reason this influencer is having so many collaborations is because it works. If you see our biggest Influencers, you see that the brands are coming back and back and back again so of course, yes, she does a lot of commercials but it works so we're going to come back and continue with that but if you as a brand have a big budget and you want to have an exclusive influencer, I would focus on the micro-influencers so that we can build them up with the brand instead.

LJ: Interesting. Do you view blogs and other social media channels as effective marketing outreach tools?

I2: Absolutely.

LJ: If we take Instagram, Facebook, blogs, YouTube, and Snapchat. How many channels would you say you need?

SK: Again, that depends on what you want to achieve.   If you are very sales focused, right now the return on investment is like very many marketers these days, so if that is important for you then we would do a blog, we would do Facebook, we would maybe do Instagram if it was in fashion or beauty segment, but if you wanted to do something that had a big reach it would look differently. We say blog posts are good if you want to have a lot of information and measure in a commercial way but also Instagram right now because of the swipe up function and you can link sites.

LJ: Exactly. So it's all in the blogosphere.

I2: As much exposure as you can have in the influencer world is better for the audience because suddenly you can say "I believe in it because it 'fits'".

LJ: Regarding branded content versus sponsored content, how would you define branded content?

I2: Branded content, you need to help me with that word.

LJ: Branded content would be something like L'Oreal: Because you're worth it. Where it is in their voice. Like you were saying earlier about following Maria and all of a sudden, her voice changes more towards the brand. What I've also seen, when I have sponsored content as a brand, then it's the brand talking, but like you said it's best to let the influencer speak in their voice using their words. But then they all of a sudden start branding. Then Maria could say L'Oreal: Because it's the best, instead of because you're worth it. So what is your position about brands basically giving up the power of the dialog that shapes their brand to influencers?

I2: First of all, the branded content is very important for the brand. If you are only focusing on the product, the sales and the benefit of it, then you've missed the story. If you are going to stick with that all the time you will be recognized as "white noise" among readers. It's

irritating and I don't want to be a part of that. The sponsored part, because we work with influencer marketing, you have to make sure that the influencer mechanics are taken care of. The reason you would choose influencer marketing is because you want to have the influencer mechanics that is word of mouth. These influencers have been existing for several years now. We always talk about the cool kids at school, if they were using something, everyone at school would go and buy it. But in the digital world of social media, instead of influencing 10 people in the schoolyard you can influence 100,000 people with just a 'press play'. So you need to understand as a marketer that you use influencer marketing you use an influencer because you want to use word of mouth, you want to have a powerful person with a big audience, you want to generate enough interest that it's good.

LJ: That's really interesting. So would you say it's word of mouth marketing as where some other brands used that strategy before but didn't have the power of social media, so would you say that is a better way to build a brand so you can constantly have a 'brand buzz'? Electronic word of mouth?

I2: Yes. You have the word of mouth effect because the audience has been reading the blog or following the influencer on Instagram or YouTube or whatever, they know what they stand for and what kind of brands they will be working with, they know what kind of brands they love because they have been sharing that with their audience all the time. So if you are a true fan and you feel like you know the person and the person is all of a sudden saying you need to try this product (slams hand on desk), and they actually do and are happy about the product and then another advice comes out that you need to try THAT product, so I buy that also. Word of mouth is effective, it's there, but you also need to think about aspirations. It's the reason you follow Carolina Berg Eriksen for example or Komikerfrue or another person is following Camilla Phil or Benedicthe Bjerke. It's all about the aspiration here. Not the inspiration, but the aspiration. You follow them because their life appeals to you.

LJ: Right. So my take-away is that for influencer marketing to have an effect, brands need to choose the right influencer and respect the audience they have built up because if they say, for example, "I love pink lipstick" but they always go out with nude lipstick, the audience is going to be like, "What is this?" Obviously, it's sponsored.

I2: So part of it is to be in on the selection of products. If you want to be part of a product launch, make sure that the influencers can choose which colors they use.

LJ: Interesting. Lastly, I'd like to talk about Norway and the future of influencer marketing. So what do you see as the difference between influencer marketing in Norway versus other countries either in Europe or the US or Australia?

I2: The main thing is you need to understand the culture of the other countries. If you look at Norway you have *Janteloven* that is standing above everything. So even though we have influencers or people — and I want to say people because everyone is an influencer in some way — we want to 'poke our neck out' or break free but at the same time we have the *Janteloven* above us that can put a cap on how unique some Influencers feel they can be. Influencer marketing in Norway is more about self-realization.

LJ: So like the self-realization of saying "Oh I can do this! I won't be better than everyone else but I can still do this."

I2: Because I deserve it in a way. You must aim for something because we are so lucky living here in this country. Suddenly you see an Influencer is traveling to Mexico and you feel inspired by that, but one also feels the aspiration that the Influencer has the life one wants for herself. So the next time I am going to book a trip, it might end up being Mexico because I have been influenced. We also look at the economy. Because Norway is also a rich country so we can actually do good in the exclusive, high-end brands as well as consumer brands; there is a big range here. Also, in Norway, you can almost have influencer marketing with any type of product …beauty, fashion, food, whatever. I was actually talking to a guy in the US and he said everybody there is watching YouTube. Maybe it's because they don't like to read in the United States. That's a generalization but maybe it's a thing because in Norway now everyone is reading, but maybe the amount of people who read blogs will decrease. But in Norway, if you are engaging the audience and you are there, the audience is still coming. So blogs are not to be ignored in Norway, but in Sweden, we see a decline and blogs are getting ignored more and more. So what channels give you the best effect? You need to make sure you know the country and the media habits of the audience.

LJ: Concerning the future, why is influencer marketing so popular? You've talked about aspiration and for the consumer to not just be inspired but they aspire to the lifestyle of this person.

I2: In my opinion, if you look back in history, it has always existed, it's just taken a new form. People like people over brands. And people believe in other people over brands. And people follow people. As humans we create connections with other humans. Social media platforms allow us to build relationships with these people. When someone follows an Influencers everyday life, that person feels like they know the Influencer and a foundation of trust is built. So right now it's called influencer marketing but when we began it was called blog marketing and before that it was word of mouth and before that it was, I believe it was Levi's who went to the schoolyard and gave the cool kids free pants. So it has always existed and will continue to exist. As new social media channels pop up new opportunities pop up. Technology is advancing so fast so I think – just sit tight!

LJ: So the future of influencer marketing … you've mentioned new social media channels and that it's always existed but how do you think influencer marketing will look in the future in Norway?

I2: One thing is the people that are big now; I often do a recognition with football players because I played football before; so you see one team and the football star, they get changed because suddenly you're not relevant anymore, or you quit or you choose another path. The new generation, the new influencers we've got coming up all the time, we're going to have new channels popping up. Like *Vine*, and what it's done for a lot of people in the US, it's just exploded. So new influencers are coming. New channels are coming. I also think you will see more range of the influencer — like in the US now they influence politics. Everybody wants to build a brand. Everybody wants to stand for something.

LJ: Perfect. I think that's really good. Thank you for your time.

Lauren Jensen Interview with Interviewee 3 at Costume Magazine

Lauren Jensen (LJ): Hi. My name is Lauren Jensen. I'm doing my MBA on Influencer Marketing. Please introduce yourself.

Interviewee 3 (I3): My name is XXX and I work at Costume Magazine, which is Norway's biggest fashion magazine.

LJ: How long have you been working in the industry as a journalist?

I3: As a journalist, about 20 years, and in the fashion industry, about 15.

LJ: How long have you been experiencing bloggers and influencers becoming a bigger thing?

I3: Well, I was around when it all started. I was sort of intrigued when the first blog sort of came up, which you would probably know better than me how long ago that was. It was a street-style blog; so right from the start, maybe 14-15 years ago? But they weren't called influencers back then. It was just bloggers who covered street style. They did street style photography and it evolved into street style stars and the industry got more engaged and started sending products and then they started paying them to wear the products and post. So it has really been professionalized.

LJ: From your perspective, how would you say a collaboration works. Does the magazine have any relationships with collaborators or, how does a collaboration look?

I3: We definitely have collaborations. We have our own influencers that are under our brand and are featured on our website. Currently we have four. We just signed the fourth one; sent out a press release today. That is 100% commercial so our sales team work with them and advertisers to set up agreements and you can also get a combination of ads in the magazine or on our webpage. You can get collaborations with our sponsors, for example.

LJ: How would you say an objective is set for the collaboration between the customer and the influencer?

I3: I think they come in with an idea of what they want to achieve and then we suggest how they can best achieve that with our brands and our influencers. For example, we had a case where a beauty brand wanted to raise brand awareness and make it more accessible for young people. We helped them through quite a big campaign that lasted over several weeks where we included the magazine's brands but also the most suitable Influencers. Our market research shows that that was very successful. Sales actually went up 93%. That was a great case study of how when we combine all our forces, if you like, include Influencers — not just influencers, but the magazine too — I think it's a combination that can be successful. We also see that our clients, our advertisers, that they demand that now. They like to have different areas, because before it was just the magazine. Now you have Instagram and all these new channels.

LJ: Right. And they can reach different people through different channels.

I3: Right. Right.

LJ: Moving on to how influencers are selected, using the example of Clarins, did they say, "We want to work with a certain influencer"?

I3: I think it varies. We can recommend but it obviously comes down to what we believe is the best match for their brand and we tend to have the same opinion because it's usually pretty clear what a brand wants to be, so it's easy to advise when it comes to which influencer is best for Costume Magazine. But if you want to go really young, we can go with Snapchat which is kind of the same but with a much younger audience. We have some influencers there if we want to reach a teenage group.

LJ: In your opinion, if there is an influencer who has done lots of collaborations and those who have done fewer, do you see a difference in the success level if they have been more commercial or not?

I3: I think it really depends on the quality of what they produce. I think it's like any business. You need to be reliable, you need to deliver what they expect of you, maybe go the extra mile. I think it comes down to how professional each influencer is. We do see there's a huge difference there. The client can get quite fed up if the person doesn't deliver and I think that's why if you are under our publishing house, we also provide the clients with market research and Google Analytics and we show them how successful it has been.

LJ: So it is more transparent?

I3: Yes, much more so. You can't really say now "Oh, that was a huge success!" because now the numbers speak for themselves.

LJ: Right. Concerning content, do you view blogs differently than other social media channels as effective marketing outreach tools? Do you view them differently than, say, YouTube or your magazine?

I3: Yes, I would say in the marketing universe we are trying to think 360 all the time. Like if we are doing something in the magazine, how can we sell it on Facebook, Instagram, video. That's the new … that's what everybody does now. You always have to think of the 360. If you make any kind of content, you have to make sure it's suitable for all your channels.

LJ: Right. I'm interested in talking about branded content v. sponsored content, because in the beginning, it was more like "Here is our jacket. Say that you really like it, you like the color and you really like our brand" because the brand wanted to control the "brand" so they created a manuscript for the bloggers and influencers. Now I've noticed the trend changing to where the bloggers and influencers are wanting to voice their own opinions because their followers want to hear their voice because they have come to know and appreciate that, so now it's up to the influencer to describe everything about the jacket. So, what is your opinion about the influencer speaking about L'Oreal changing the tagline from "because you're worth it" to "because I like it!"?

I3: It's different from clear marketing, as in an advertisement as we officially know it. And I think that's what both the brands and the audience likes, because I think it's a little more real and authentic. The problem is that now everything is so professionalized and glossy. Street style used to be something that was very organic. Now it's something that's very styled and calculated and paid for in many ways. It's a bit of a staged performance. I think it's also

becoming like ads, people recognize it for what it is … an ad for something. That person walking down the street with her phone saying she loves *Mango*, I think it's become more recognizable where before it was more blurred. But it has to become more recognizable, it needs to be marked if it's to follow more ethical guidelines of marketing. It's a positive development but it's also taken away some of that rawness and quirkiness that we had before. I think the most successful ones are the ones that have a mix and manage to keep their own style, or their own voice if you like, and just manage to say "no" because we've seen influencers who have a very strong standpoint on some matters but when they get a big enough paycheck it's very easy for them to say, "maybe just this once I'll forget about my anti-fur or anti-meat stance" or whatever. The smartest ones are true to their brand or their profile and work with brands that match that and say no to the others, which I think that is what fashion magazines have been doing all along. We don't take an ad for something we don't believe in.

LJ: Right. And you don't run a feature on something you don't believe in either.

I3: Yes because I think you can see it straight away when they're not comfortable with what they're promoting. If you know that influencer and their profile, maybe because I'm in fashion, but I can tell if they don't really like those shoes or whatever. I think in the long run, it may be a little less money but it's more authentic.

LJ: Exactly.

I3: You need to be true to whatever style you have. Because like Pernille Teisbaek, from Copenhagen; she's probably one of the biggest in Scandinavia right now, and she has that very unique style that she keeps up.

LJ: Like wearing the pink shoes?

I3: Right. I think that is just very important right now.

LJ: That is what I've tended to find in my research, that the influencers who are the most consistent are the ones who are actually going to last and the brands are going to choose to collaborate with, so it's interesting that you confirm the same thing.

So let's talk about Norway and the future of influencer marketing and then we will wrap up. What would you say is the difference between influencer marketing in Norway compared to other countries?

I3: Uhmmm. I don't know. If you're asking about fashion and beauty?

LJ: Yes. About the fashion and lifestyle bloggers and influencers.

I3: Scandinavia is definitely at the top of their game at the moment. They are leading the pack in many ways. Internationally, they've never been more popular, which we see during Oslo Runway which is not a very significant fashion week in many ways internationally, but because of the influencers who are in the top league internationally, the world fashion press is here. Everybody comes to cover Oslo Runway because of our influencers — because they are so good and their style is so attractive right now.   Scandinavian style has never been more sought after. Even in Britain, it's not so much about French chic as it is about Scandinavian

cool right now. Pernille Teisbaek was on cover of Time Magazine and she's an Influencer from Denmark. Also, living in the US, it was interesting to see what a high status it has to be Scandinavian when it comes to style and lifestyle and our political model is very attractive here too, and life quality and gender equality and other things like that, so I always felt, maybe because I lived in America in a city like DC but everyone wanted to be my friend because I was Scandinavian, you know? They were like "She's Scandinavian. She's very cool." I had this whole new status I wasn't used to living abroad. It wasn't like that before but I think it's on this new wave now.

LJ: Yes! Scandinavia is definitely having a moment!

I3: Yes! And it's lasting and lasting. It's a strong wave. When it comes to food, interior, etc., so you know I felt really proud to be Scandinavian! People really look to us for inspiration when it comes to how we live our lives and organize ourselves politically, and fashion and style. So that's something to be really proud of from a commercial point of view. We've never been more attractive.

LJ: Exactly. I agree. Looking to the future, why would say influencer marketing is so popular and what will it look like going forward?

I3: This is what everyone is asking themselves at the moment I guess because it is running its course but it has become very very professionalized but influencers say "I can't pay my taxes with a bag" so they are asking for more than getting something cool. That's really important for the brand and also for the girls because they work really hard and it has become a respected profession. People didn't take it that seriously in the beginning and some of them felt like "I'm just a blogger" but it has become something taken more seriously and the guidelines are better so as a business, they are getting paid for what they do. I don't know … they say the smartphone is dead in 10 years so where does that leave all the influencers? I don't know but it will be exciting to see because we didn't see it coming when they first arrived on the scene and it has pretty much shaken up the fashion industry. So I'm excited to see. It's at this tipping point where soon, something new will happen because it's become so established and professionalized so I'm sure something new or very organic will pop up. What do you think?

LJ: I think it will be interesting to see how it evolves. If people will trust them. People always like campaigns from Louis Vuitton. They are like, "Ooo, look at that picture". Will it continue like that or will it just blow over? It will be interesting. Thank you for your time.

I3: Sure. I've seen a change at the fashion shows in London and Paris. Before, there used to be several influencers at every show and now they've really cut down. They were afraid to approach this whole new thing. Before, it used to only be the buyers and editors. And then lots of bloggers were there, but now they've really cut down on the invites to bloggers. The ones that are the most serious are the most successful. For example, I read that Chanel, their fashion strategy is the same as Dior, in that they would never work with influencers on their main lines but they do on beauty lines so they invite them on the press tour and pay for their content and dress them in Chanel but they will never do it with their main line. They would never let the influencer portray … because it's a whole universe they are trying to convey with the catwalk show and campaign and they still want to be in control of that image. And then use the influencers more for the beauty lines, because that is their bread and butter.

LJ: Exactly. and I think that's what's interesting about this whole thing because they still have control of the actual content that stays out there forever and influencers can help with the word of mouth, and makes the brand top-of-mind.

I3: Yes, top-of-mind/buzz, and yet it's still very controlled, by invitation if you like, so they can still run the dialog. Most fashion houses require approval if you want to WEAR something from them. I think we have two people in Norway who are approved to wear something from Louis Vuitton at press events/awards and it was streamlined into their campaign model. They all have their guidelines.

LJ: Exactly. So they can still control it. Very interesting. Thank you!

Lauren Jensen Interview with Interviewee 4 at United Influencers

Lauren Jensen (LJ): Hi. My name is Lauren and I'm doing my MBA research on Influencer Marketing. Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

Interviewee 4 (I4): Yes. My name is XXX and I come from the marketing world. Studied International Marketing and Business both in Norway and in Spain. I worked in Spain for a couple of years with both direct marketing and branding. I came home in 2003 and started a small PR agency in Scandinavia and I run the Norwegian branch and built that up from three customers and a one person show to eight people and 45 clients in eight years.

LJ: Cool!

I4: Then I went to a more corporate PR agency called Gambit Hill + Knowlton. I was there building up their fashion and beauty department for about four, almost five years and then I got the opportunity to come to United Influencers because I thought influencers are the future of communication. I met the owner and asked if I could help him find someone and after a while I said "Are you asking me to take the job or do you want me to help you?", so that's where it all started.

LJ: Okay. Cool. The next question is how long have you worked in the industry with marketing, PR and influencers? Since 2003?

I4: It was 2003 but I actually started a couple of years before that so 2000-2001.

LJ: How long have you been working with bloggers and influencers?

I4: At United it's been two to 2-1/2 years but I've been working with them from the start. When they began to build themselves up was when it was looked at as PR tools and they were not paid, so I've been through the whole process from when it first started which is kind of cool.

LJ: Exactly. If we talk about collaborations, how would you say collaborations are initiated?

I4: Well it depends. There are a lot of ways to initiate them. For us as an agency, people contact us or we contact brands that we think we can do great things with, so it can go both ways.

LJ: What would you say is the objective, or goal, of these collaborations, and how are they set?

I4: It really depends on the client. What we really aim for is trying to figure out the client's needs, but sometimes the client doesn't even know that so can be a very short process or a very long process.   I think from my experience, very often the client comes with a thing, but that's not the real problem. Sometimes they want to sell more but then we dive into it and say "What about your product?", are you happy with your product and start from there. It depends on how deep you can get with your client. It's usually one of three things: (1) sell more, (2) build the brands, or (3) build knowledge. I can speak about this for hours! There's no black and white.

LJ: I know! So in your opinion, what defines a successful collaboration between brands and influencers?

I4: You really need to find a match with the influencer. Their values need to connect well with the brand and their values. That said, some brands can go with a lot of influencers; some brands are naturally in the influencers channel, and if not, you can introduce them to it because we're all human beings and we use a lot of brands during our day, so a lot of brands can be relevant. Then from there to be the face of something or to communicate something, like if it's a long-term ambassadorship, then you really have to go deep so the brands can align with that. The brand really needs to understand that the relationship to the influencer is very important. They have to realize that this is not the channel, it's humans that we work with, and even if it is a paid collaboration you can't treat it as a paid collaboration. It's so much more than that.

LJ: Right.

I4: So a successful collaboration between the brand and the influencer would be that they can communicate and create concepts together so they can really go together as a team.

LJ: Right. Have you ever had any negative experiences with a collaboration? If yes, what made it unsuccessful?

I4: Well, unsuccessful is really when the client has too many frames. Sometimes that will happen when brands have a small local office but the frame of the campaign or collaboration comes from international headquarters and they don't understand that they work with people and that the person needs to be able to speak their own language. If not, the readers will just look at it as an advertisement. So again, it's really about the inter-relation so that won't happen and they really understand each other. The world of influencers is human, and not like a poster, so the times when it has been unsuccessful, I will say, for example, when the client really needs to read through and correct a lot of things, the communication that was supposed to come from the influencer doesn't seem authentic anymore.

LJ: So the brand changes everything the influencer wrote?

I4: Yes. We've been working with this for about 3 years now and we've learned so much. Now when these kinds of situations come up we just say "No. We can't do it." but before when we were just starting, we wanted to try and please the client and everything but now we know if it's working or not so it's a lot easier.

LJ: Exactly. How would you say influencers are selected? You talked a little bit about they needed to be a good match for the brand and something they think is authentic; like they are talking about red lipstick when all they normally wear is lipgloss, etc.

I4: For collaboration?

LJ: Yes.

I4: First we really need to go in knowing what is the problem and communicate that. And then who is the target group? We need to find an influencer that actually talks to the target

group the client wants to talk to, right? And then, if the product is not already something that is naturally in the influencers channel, we can introduce it little by little so it becomes natural. Because if you usually only wear lipgloss, you can sometimes choose to wear really red lipstick, you just have to do it in your own natural way, right? It takes more time to do this, so maybe they try it once and we as "What do you think?" and then the call to action will come. We have a process we call "See. Think. Do. Care." See the product, and then they use it. Then the client thinks about it. And then we make them do something, like a call to action, maybe a competition or something. And then you make them care so in the end you create brand love, which is what everyone wants, right?

LJ: Definitely. Would you say there is a difference between influencers who have done several collaborations versus those who have done fewer?

I4: Well first, if you have more experiences, you know what will work. On the other hand if you do way too much, it really depends. If you want to use influencers no more than twice a year it can work. It really comes down to what you want to communicate.

LJ: So if you have a big influencer, just because he or she has done lots of collaborations, could it still be profitable for a company, sales-wise? Is there a better return on investment?

I4: Absolutely. We have profiles for everything. Some of them are really good to build brands, some of them are really good to make sales, some of them can talk about environmental issues, some can talk about food, some can't. You need to know the category and find the natural match. Sometimes it's just really important to find the right match. It can be a small profile but can reach, you know? It's always good to take a step back and go a step up and look at the influencer, not as a channel but within the total marketing. So if the brand does a lot of other stuff, your collaborator needs to go together with all the other stuff. So we've seen a lot of campaigns that go together but if you want to do long-term and do really good work in the communication you need to lift it up in total.

LJ: Right. Very good. Regarding content, at United Influencers you work with different bloggers, Instagram and Facebook and YouTube and other channels, would you say there is any specific channel that is better than the others?

I4: You have to know the channel and you have to adapt the content to the channel. You cannot use the same content in different channels; you have to adapt it. At the moment, it is hard to give you an answer because like Snapchat is younger, Instagram stories are growing exceptionally, Instagram pictures work more long term. People still read blogs where you can tell a lot of information and we just love video on all channels. We look at distribution, what channels to look at so we know what we want to communicate and then we decide where to distribute.

LJ: What effect would you say influencer collaborations have on a company's brand?

I4: Wow. That answer is huge. Influencer marketing is new. There are so many new techniques we have seen work and we have other channels like the social media we didn't have before. Brands have used celebrities as influencers since the 1800's. It's just that people want to listen to other people and not to brands, and just imagine the word-of-mouth marketing that we didn't have just a few years ago. That is just so much more effective, so if

I want to buy something, I would go to someone I trust and ask. If someone I trust would tell me about something, that would inspire me and I would probably buy the product, but there's another factor here and that's aspirations. It's also about aspirations. Where does your target group get their aspirations? Where do they go to look for things? That's the environment you have to put your product into.

LJ: How would you define branded content versus sponsored content?

I4: I thought of Googling that because I think a lot of people are mixing those terms. I would like to add branded content, sponsored content and native content as different and I would actually have to go back and look at that because I thought what they found was really interesting. In-native advertising would be like a call to action. Sponsored content is more building the brand, talking about the brand but not a call to action but building the brand using what they do, what they stand for; to position the company as an expert in their industry. For me, I thought sponsored content would be more like native content and branded content would be just from the brand but I think that's the discussion in which a lot of people use these terms. Also, being Norwegian, I'm not sure we are using them correctly.

LJ: Yes. I do think they get mixed up a little bit.

I4: What would YOU say branded and sponsored would be?

LJ: What I've understood of branded content, it's something that comes from, for example, L'Oreal: "Because you're worth it", or "this mascara gives length, color and definition", but if you have sponsored content, then it would be more like "I think this mascara give me more length." It mirrors the brands words but it is more of a manuscript for an influencer. They have to use hashtag ad or sponsored for ethical purposes but it's not coming so much from the brand, they're just saying "this is a really good product to use if you have dry skin." and then as the influencer you say "oh yeah, this is great because it gave me tons of moisture and glow and it took away all of my pimples." but really there's no active ingredient in it to take away pimples so people are now like "oh this is an acne product". So now it's sponsored content but doesn't come from the brand.

I4: In my experience, the influencers really do have control over what gets put out there about brands. Brands can try and influence the influencers with what to say, but in order to have a successful collaboration, brands need to know the influencers they're seeking and approach those who are a good fit for their brand.

LJ: If we focus on Norway, what would you say is the biggest difference in Influencer Marketing in Norway compared to other countries?

I4: Scandinavia is a leader in Influencer Marketing and we really have a 360-degree approach to Influencer Marketing. By that I mean that that compared to the US and European market, in Scandinavia, we tend to be a little smaller scale which allows our influencers to be more genuine and true to the brands he or she represents.

LJ: Would you say there are characteristics specific to the Norwegian market with regards to Influencer Marketing?

I4: Yes, for sure. Instagram and YouTube are very popular in the United States. One of my

business partners said this is because Americans don't read that much and they only want to watch videos. In Norway, blogs, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat are all very popular. It depends on which target group a brand is aiming for, but generally, all of the mentioned channels can be successful. One aspect to Influencer Marketing in Norway that should be taken in to consideration is Janteloven – where we're not "allowed" to be different. Sometimes Influencers get a bad rap for presenting this perfect lifestyle. This is very special in Norway as we're not used to bragging or "being different" like most other cultures; USA, UK, Spain for example. I think Norwegians are evolving beyond *Janteloven*, but there are still some consumers that think Influencers are not believable because they are too perfect.

LJ: Switching gears to talk about the future. Why do you think Influencer Marketing is so popular today?

I4: I would say Influencer Marketing is very popular because of not only technology, but the world is a much more transparent place now than just 10 years ago. Strangers are connecting with other strangers and they are inspired by lots of different things. People want to connect with other people and that's why Influencer Marketing has become so popular. It's all about the psychological aspect of the shopping process. When people feel a connection to others that they trust, they tend to listen to them. Consumers are tired of listening to brands and supermodels/celebrities. They want "real" people and these connections are built through Influencer Marketing.

LJ: Wrapping up, how does the future of Influencer Marketing look?

I4: The future is changing quickly. People and brands cannot fool anyone anymore. Brands should try new things and different channels and see how that works for them. It's important to reach the brand's target group through the right influencers.

Lauren Jensen Interviewee 5 from PR agency The & Partnership

Lauren Jensen (LJ): Can you please introduce yourself?

Interviewee 5 (I5): Yes. My name is XXX. I am a Publicist with The & Partnership, which is a marketing company that owns about eight different public marketing disciplines.

LJ: How long have you been working in the industry?

I5: I have been working in the industry for six years, starting in 2012.

LJ: How long have you been working with bloggers and influencers?

I5: For about five years. My first year in the industry I wasn't working with bloggers and influencers but at the end of that first year it kind of blew up with bloggers and influencers.

LJ: Can we go right into how collaborations are initiated?

I5: Collaborations are initiated either on the brand side or the agency side, depending on how a company is set up. We sometimes reach out to people or other companies for collaborations but depending on how the brand is set up, essentially, you'll either have a person who works for the brand or the marketing department of the brand setting up collaborations.

LJ: Excellent. How would you say the objective for the collaborations is set?

I5: The objective is usually always sales, but sometimes the objective could be awareness or a re-brand to try and target a different audience. In my experience, Influencer Marketing can be successful, especially when targeted towards Millennials because that age group wants to read and see inspiring images that they can relate to, as opposed to branding from big companies.

LJ: Define sponsored content.

I5: Sponsored content tends to be produced by collaborators, i.e. Influencers, and it should be a collaborative effort between the Influencer and the brand. When sponsored content is published through Influencers channels, usually he or she links back to the brand. It's just an extra outlet for brands to reach new consumer groups with stories told in someone other than the brand's words.

While branded content tends to be produced in-house by the brand, sponsored content is usually a collaborative effort between the publisher's editorial staff and the brand. Similarly, while branded content lives on brand-owned properties such as micro-sites or content hubs (like the one you're on right now!), sponsored content is hosted on the publisher's site, and therefore reaches the publisher's audience. Think of it this way: When a brand wants to build sponsored content, they commission a publisher to both produce the content and to publish it on their website.

LJ: In your mind, what defines a successful collaboration?

I5: A successful collaboration is, well you kind of have to backtrack to what the goals of the collaboration are, so if the goal is awareness or targeting a demographic or sales, if those things are hit within the parameters of what the company views as goals, it's a success. If the goals aren't met, you have to consider why they weren't hit and figure out how to retarget or reach out for our client to make those collaborations as successful as possible.

LJ: How do you and the brand reach a decision on the content to produce for the collaboration. So what I'm trying to explore here for the Master's Thesis is, for example, most bloggers like to do it in their own way. They have their own way to communicate and talk about products and brands that connect with their audiences, so I am wondering how the PR agencies and Brands talk about, or reach the decision about how the content should be made or created so that the brand still has control of the content.

I5: So the Brand will basically reach the decision a lot of times during the contract phase of these collaborations, we will figure out how this person, brand, influencer, whatever it is, usually deliver content. A lot of times the brand or agency does have final say over the content because we are paying this person or brand, so we have the final say. However, there are some people or brands where they will refuse, um, they will take direction, but at the end of the day it is their brand that is out there but we are paying them so it is a joint venture. We will try to navigate those waters where we're not aligning ourselves with people or brands that don't have our same values or don't see the things the way we do.

LJ: Right. Have you ever had a negative experience with a collaboration?

I5: I have not. I have heard horror stories but I have never personally had a negative experience with a collaborator.

LJ: Do you see a difference in the result of a collaboration initiated by an agency rather than a brand finding an influencer and then reaching out themselves?

I5: Yes. A lot of times I do notice that in an agency you work with so many different brands and your perception on how the brand should be perceived and how the brand thinks they should be perceived don't always align but sometimes they align perfectly. So a lot times when brands reach out to influencers directly, they have one kind of mindset about this is how our brand will be defined but sometimes it isn't always executed as properly as it could have been. With an agency that basically does this for a living, they know these influencers and how these things kind of go about, so depending on whether or not a brand has a dedicated division for influencer collaborations and they are having a random marketing person going out and finding influencers that have followers, the relationship and the collaboration isn't always going to be as succinct as possible.

LJ: OK. I understand. I'd like to move on to selection. How are influencers selected?

I5: Influencers are selected using a number of ways. It could be how many 'likes' they have, how many followers they have, the content on their social pages, on their blogs, who they follow, the demographic of the people they follow and who follow them back, the dialog in their comments section … there are a number of ways we can select, depending on what category we want them in — the beauty brand, the lifestyle brand, fashion, literacy — it all just depends.

LJ: Would you say there is a difference in an influencer who has done several collaborations versus one who has done fewer?

I5: Yes. The difference is that the influencers who have done several collaborations, essentially, they know what they're doing and they will charge more compared to the ones who haven't done a lot of collaborations in the past.

LJ: OK. Moving on to content. Do you view blogs and other social media channels as effective marketing outreach tools?

I5: Depends on the brand and what they're marketing. They are effective channels depending on the price point of the brand; that also factors in. For instance, if you have a very prestige brand with products ranging from $100 up to thousands of dollars, I don't believe blogs or social media channels are influential but if you have these mass brands, consumer focus brands, those are effective marketing tools. Just because, people who read these blogs or social media, they don't have the money a lot of times to buy the $4,000 products but they can afford a $10 Maybelline lipstick that this blogger happened to purchase at the store around the corner from their house.

LJ: What effect do you think an influencers collaboration has on company's brand.

I5: It can be either negative or positive. It can be positive if goals are aligned from the influencers perspective and the company's perspective, however sometimes the synergy between the influencer and the company is horrible and you don't get what you need. You just end up working with an influencer or company that just doesn't see the end goal the same as you do.

LJ: I have noticed in my other interviews that there has kind of been a question around branded content and sponsored content. What is your take on it if there IS any difference between those two things?

I5: I don't particularly think there is a difference between branded and sponsored content because in my head it means you've been paid to say this. I think they are just synonyms for each other.

LJ: OK. If we talk specifically about Norway, what would you say is the difference between influencer marketing in Norway in comparison to other countries?

I5: I would say the difference between influencer marketing in Norway versus America would be … I feel like Europeans in general aren't as 'in your face' with their branded sponsorships, not that they don't say they are sponsored or branded but they are very well curated and you sometimes have to look very closely at what brand sponsored them or what they are selling, which does lend itself, in a good way to the brand, because a lot of the time, we have become so savvy, we already know this blogger or influencer is being sponsored by XYZ company so half the time you keep scrolling and you don't pay attention to it but if there is a lovely picture that is so on brand for the influencer, like "hey, I'm using this new Colgate White toothpaste. I've used it for six months and it's amazing. You should try it. XYZ is where you can buy it." If it's one of those generic, smiling in a mirror photos that American influencers tend to do a lot, it's kind of just like another ad like you could have on a billboard and it doesn't resonate with the consumer.

LJ: Lastly, regarding the future of influencer marketing, why would you say influencer marketing is so popular?

I5: I think influencer marketing is so popular because we have so many brands popping up every day. In the beginning, when influencer marketing became a thing, these smaller niche brands were using influencers as marketing tools and it was very effective. In my experience, millennials respond best to influencer campaigns as most beauty Influencers are under 30. In hindsight, other larger companies like Proctor & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson and the brands that are under those umbrellas, they saw the success that these smaller companies were having so they also started implementing influencer marketing programs as a way of staying in touch with the consumer because that is what they seem to have been receptive to as opposed to environmental marketing on billboards, TV, magazines, etc.

LJ: How do you think the future of influencer marketing looks? Do you think it will look the same as it does now?

I5: Honestly, I think influencer marketing is at an all-time peak right now. It grows like a bubble that will eventually pop. Five years ago, I would have thought it would pop by now but it's just getting bigger and bigger. I think it depends on how the sales from these collaborations continue. If they continue to increase due to influencer marketing, I think consumers will begin to get savvy as to what this is all about — basically we're just selling product — it won't look too well. Especially if influencers aren't allowing themselves to align with brands that make sense for THEIR brand.

LJ: I think that's all. Thank you so much for your time.

Appendix D: Coding

Example of open codes extracted from the transcribed interviews for the analysis.

Open code
Having a moment
Lots of money
Commercial
Accessibilty
Good fit for the brand
Brand values
Consistency
Long-term collaborations
Selective
Credibility
Recommendations
Trust
Authentic
Match
Quality
Professional
High budget
Digital
High expectations
Recognizable
Own style
Rawness
Scandinavian style
Scandinavian cool
Disruptive
Innovative
Serious
Successful
Inspiration
Top of mind
Word-of-mouth
Millennials
Guidelines
Creative freedom
Controlled
Dialoge
Sell more
Build brands
Build knowledge

Human
People
Ambassadorship
International
Define problem
Process
Product
Channel
Total marketing mix
brand love
Adapt content
Techniques
The new celebrity
Where do they look for inspiration
Building the brand
Strangers
Smaller scale
Real people
Connections
Agency
Goals
Broad reach
New market
Consumer group
Brand perception
Alligned goals
Well curated
Savvy
All-time peak
Selling products
Customer connection