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“This post is a paid sponsorship” Do we care?

How consumers perceive brands when social media influencers disclose paid partnerships

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Title

"This post is a paid partnership" Do we care?

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Abstract

An over-commercialized society has made consumers prefer the opinions of influential people in online settings. Companies have a harder time reaching consumers and therefore turn to social media influencers (SMIs) for exposure. With the growth of influencer marketing, regulations and guidelines in Sweden have been put in place to ensure consumers integrity. SMIs and companies are required to disclose paid partnerships. However, many companies have the perception that truthful marketing can affect consumers brand perception negatively. Research based on consumer brand perception and disclosed paid partnerships between SMIs and companies have not previously been explored. Therefore, the *purpose* of this thesis is to explore how consumers perceive brands when SMIs disclose paid partnerships. In order to gather consumers' brand perception when SMIs and companies collaborate, a *qualitative* study using focus groups was conducted, where the participants thoughts and opinions have been studied. The *findings* of this thesis indicate that the communication and characteristics of SMIs influences consumers brand perception. The factors analyzed were: *influence of SMIs, content, trust* and *truthfulness*. The factors were important for how consumers perceive the SMI and brand of companies. The most important *implication* of this thesis is that the study can be of use for companies that seek to collaborate with SMIs when the aim is to reach target groups and enhance brand perception.

Keywords

Social media influencer (SMI), consumer brand perception, marketing regulations, influence of SMIs, content, trust, truthfulness

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1. Introduction

There was a time when brands were the influencers in the eyes of the consumer. Consumers looked to brands for inspiration on what was trendy. The influence that brands had made consumers perceive them in a positive way because brands influenced trends (Chan, Chan, & Tang, 2016). As technology grew, it created many opportunities for marketing in online settings. With the development of technology, social media has become a popular tool for marketing. Social media has given consumers new insights on how they can evaluate brands. Consumers now turn to social media for the opinions of peers, friends and family because they are deemed as more trustworthy than companies. Therefore, the influence of brands is diminishing (Vinerean, 2017). Social media is continuously expanding, and by 2021 the number of monthly active social media users are expected to reach over 3,02 billion, which is around a third of the world's population (Gordon, 2017). Many of these users interact with each other on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube or blogs. The effects of innovation in technology and social media, have changed the way communication works. Consumers are now the ones who hold the power of information sharing and not companies. Now, consumers follow trends on social media and not trends created by brands (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Since communication has evolved, marketers have started to seek after different solutions and opportunities on social media. Hence, influencer marketing has emerged (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

Influencer marketing allows people who are influential online to market brand messages to their followers (Sammis, Lincoln, & Pomponi, 2015). Consumers tend to trust other users, especially those who have experienced the service or product. Social media influencers (SMIs) tend to share experiences with products and services, which makes them more trustworthy than companies that advertises or markets (Li, Lai, & Chen, 2011). The information that consumers gather from SMIs is what is recognized as electronic word-of-mouth (Jaakonmäki, Muller, & vom Brocke, 2017). However, with the increased popularity of social media, SMIs have become very influential as marketing tools that can shape consumer behaviors, perceptions and attitudes towards a brand (Gandhi & Muruganatham, 2015). Therefore, it has become very important for companies to identify

and choose potential SMIs that can promote brands in the best profitable way and enhance consumers brand perception (Gandhi & Muruganatham, 2015). Consumers brand perception is very important since negative perceptions can harm companies and result in decreased sales (Ghodeswar, 2008). Perception can be described as how we experience and see things around us. Two different individuals may be exposed to the same stimuli under same conditions, but how they perceive the stimuli is a highly individual process based on different needs, expectations and values. Consumers can therefore interpret marketing messages in different ways (S, Rahul, & Deepak, 2014). The way in which SMIs chooses to market brands might affect consumers brand perception in either good or bad ways because SMIs are considered as extended parts of the brand. Consequently, SMIs have a lot of the same characteristics as brands and are therefore also considered as brands (Gandhi & Muruganatham, 2015).

According to Abendroth and Heyman (2013) companies provide SMIs with products and incentives to generate interest for their brands. However, SMIs do not always disclose their relationship with companies (Abendroth & Heyman, 2013). An example of when a partnership has been kept secret can be seen in the case of Swedish SMI “Kissie”, where she got sentenced for not disclosing several partnerships with brands (Veerabuthroo Nordberg, 2018). Abendroth and Heyman (2013) mention that companies fear to disclose sponsorships and perceive being truthful as something that can hurt their brand negatively. However, the authors state that companies who adopt strategies based on being truthful and transparent have in many cases experienced positive perceptions toward their brands. Transparency in a business sense implies that companies disclose everything to the consumer. All marketing strategies, aims, values and corporate goals are disclosed to all stakeholders and consumers. The strategy of being truthful and transparent with stakeholders is used by companies with the belief of improving brand values, subsequently resulting in better brand perception (Abendroth & Heyman, 2013).

1.1 Problematization

The disclosure of paid partnerships between two or more marketing entities are by Swedish marketing laws a requirement and this law is applicable on social media influencers (SMIs). The Act indicates that both companies and SMIs are required to clearly disclose any form of paid partnerships (Marknadsföringslagen 2008:486). Anker (2016) mentions that there are clear guidelines and regulations regarding truthful marketing. However, there is still lack of honesty in the marketing practice (Anker, 2016). Pereira and Heath (2010) say that some companies perceive that they need to lie or hide the truth to elevate their brand. The authors also say that many companies are dishonest to mask their shortcomings. Some companies feel that showing weaknesses possibly can hurt their brand (Pereira & Heath, 2010). However, Anker (2016) states that truthfulness in marketing leads to better consumer brand perception. Marketing campaigns that are disclosed to the consumer leads to better credibility and authenticity. The author further claims that the effects of truthfulness in marketing leads to improved consumer relations and highly regarded brands (Anker, 2016).

Other findings previous research discusses is the effect of truthfulness and trust in marketing campaigns. Johnstone and Lindh (2017) say that consumers tend to want more information regarding the brand they are purchasing a product from. Consumers are more aware of dishonest marketing campaigns, where companies lie or falsely enhance their products. More and more companies are therefore adopting strategies, where they are upfront with their marketing (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). Honesty creates brand value because companies are seen by consumers as trustworthy towards their environment. Companies that are not honest, often lose credibility and brand value (Abendroth & Heyman, 2013). Another way brands can lose trust, is by misbehaving in the way they communicate. SMIs are highly interactive in their communication with consumers and can therefore sometimes make mistakes. Swedish SMI Felix Kjellberg also known as “Pewdiepie”, said some negative racial slurs on his communication channels, which led to several negative consequences. The negative consequences were that he lost his partnerships with Disney and Youtube. The perception of Kjellberg was also affected where several of his uploaded videos got high numbers of dislikes from his followers (Hern, 2017).

The previous research of Booth and Matic (2011) has delved into how SMIs can shape and form consumer brand perception. SMIs are influential because they have characteristics similar to effective spokespersons, which makes consumers trust them (Booth & Matic, 2011). SMIs become an extended part of the brand when they market a company's product and are therefore important for consumers brand perception (Gandhi & Muruganatham, 2015). SMIs may lose integrity and credibility if they only post marketing and brand related content on their social media feeds, which negatively affects consumer purchasing behavior (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Furthermore, disclosure of partnerships and truthfulness in the context of word-of-mouth marketing have been researched and the findings were that truthfulness lead to better brand value (Abendroth & Heyman, 2013). As presented above, previous researches have focused more on the characteristics of SMIs and how they affect brand perception and consumer purchasing behaviors. However, research about how truthfulness in the context of social media influencer marketing, where it is a requirement to disclose paid partnerships have not to our knowledge been researched from a consumer brand perception perspective yet.

As consumer preference for opinions of SMIs is rising and consumers are increasingly ignoring traditional marketing, the need for truthfulness and transparency is important for how the brand is perceived. The requirement of disclosing paid partnerships has forced companies and SMIs to be truthful. Therefore, this thesis will focus on how consumers perceive the brands of both companies and SMIs when a paid partnership is disclosed.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this thesis is to explore how consumers perceive companies' brands when social media influencers disclose that the products they recommend, or review is part of a marketing ploy and a paid sponsorship. Furthermore, as social media influencers can be considered as brands, the aim is also to explore how consumers perceive social media influencers when they disclose paid partnerships.

1.3 Research Question

How do consumers perceive brands when social media influencers disclose paid partnerships?

1.4 Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter introduces the research background. The problematization presents previous research regarding the theme of this study and argues for a knowledge gap. The chapter ends with research aim and question.

Chapter 2: Theoretical methodology

The second chapter describes the theoretical methodology where research approach, research philosophy, choice of theory and critique of sources are presented.

Chapter 3: Context for Theoretical Background

The third chapter presents the context for the theoretical background. The context for this thesis are Swedish marketing laws and guidelines for SMIs.

Chapter 4: Theoretical framework

In this chapter, we present theories and concepts that relate to SMIs and branding. For SMIs we present influence of SMIs, content, trust and truthfulness. For branding we present consumer brand perception. The concepts and theories are then summarized in a conceptual model.

Chapter 5: Empirical Methodology

The fifth chapter introduces the empirical methodology where the aim is to present what methods that have been used and how the study has been conducted. The method for gathering empirical data was through focus groups.

Chapter 6: Results and Discussion

In chapter six, the results of the empirical findings are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion and an analysis of the empirical findings.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the last and final chapter, a brief summary of the thesis and the concluding remarks are presented. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research and implications.

2. Theoretical Methodology

When a research is conducted, there are several methods to choose from. Different research studies require the researcher to choose the most appropriate method. In this thesis, each choice has been considered and argued for. This chapter will present which research approach, research philosophy, choice of theory and critique of sources that has been used to construct this thesis.

2.1 Research Approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2015) there are three different research approaches to choose from: *induction*, *deduction* and *abduction*. An inductive approach indicates on the fact that researchers begin by collecting data that is relevant and interesting to their topic. After, the researchers move from data to theory. In other words, the researchers move from the specific to the general. The deductive approach implies that researchers test theory with empirical and research data. Lastly, the abductive approach aims to provide a mix of the previous two approaches (Saunders, Lewis, & Adrian, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this thesis, an abductive approach has been used. An abductive approach enables us to analyze existing ideas and theories concerning our research with new collected empirical data. Adding to this, exploring consumers brand perception is a part of the aim of this thesis, which suits an abductive approach as human thoughts requires a flexible approach.

2.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy forms the basis for how data about a phenomenon should be collected, used and analyzed (Saunders, Lewis, & Adrian, 2012). Interpretivism, realism and positivism are three main research philosophies that explain how people view and understand their surroundings, and the world around them (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Interpretivism also called interpretivist, emphasizes qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis. The philosophy interprets humans as complex and intricate, and therefore tries to comprehend how humans behave and experience around assured phenomenon in their social world (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The philosophy also indicates on the fact that individuals understand and experience the same “objective reality” in different means,

which makes it more inconvenient to draw some kind of generalization regarding their individual behavior (Saunders, Lewis, & Adrian, 2012). In this thesis, we have chosen interpretivist philosophy since the aim is to explore how consumers perceive brands when social media influencers disclose paid partnerships.

2.3 Choice of Theory

The context for the aim of this thesis are Swedish marketing laws and regulations because they affect companies and SMIs that collaborates. The laws and regulations are therefore also the context for the theoretical background, where concepts about SMIs and branding are presented. The concepts and theories chosen about SMIs are: *influence of SMIs*, *content*, *trust* and *truthfulness*, which are based on previous research. The concepts and theories chosen about SMIs explain how their characteristics and communication influences consumer brand perception. The concepts and theories chosen about branding are consumer brand perception, which is built on: *brand image*, *attitude* and *credibility*. The concepts and theories about branding were chosen to explain brand perception.

2.4 Critique of Sources

The information gathered for the context for the theoretical background was from the Swedish government and the Swedish consumer agency. Peer reviewed articles from Summon@HKR, were also used to increase the validity. Some websites were used to give different perspectives and aspects to the guidelines that SMIs follow.

For the theoretical background peer-reviewed articles that were commonly cited within the field of SMI and branding were used to increase the validity of this study. The articles also derived from Summon@HKR. The concepts and theories we present in a conceptual model can therefore be considered as reliable, because the research from the articles are published in well-known academic journals.

3. Context for Theoretical Background

In this chapter the Swedish marketing laws and guidelines that affect companies and social media influencers (SMIs) will be presented. Swedish marketing laws is the context of this thesis, since they affect the research aim and question. All theories presented in the theoretical background is also affected by the regulations and guidelines.

3.1 Marketing regulations and guidelines for SMIs

Marketing utilizes tools to manipulate decisions of consumers in order to achieve profitable sales. Therefore, boundaries and regulations must be in place to define the limits of acceptable behavior. The regulations should provide companies with guidelines to protect the consumer (Salem Press, 2016). In order to answer the research question in full, a broader understanding of Swedish marketing regulations is important as this thesis is based on Swedish SMIs. Liu et al. (2015) argue that SMIs in general, are not educated in marketing and tend to make mistakes when they market a product that they have been provided with. Further, the authors say that companies need to take responsibilities and give guidelines on how to market properly (Liu et al., 2015). Based on the lack of marketing guidelines for SMIs, a more in depth look into which regulations that affect SMIs will be presented.

3.1.1 The Swedish Marketing Act and the SMI

The Swedish marketing Act (Marknadsföringslagen 2008:486) was issued on June 5th 2008 in accordance with a decision by the Swedish parliament (Riksdagen). The Act was issued based on EU-directives. The purpose of the Act is to promote the interests of consumers and businesses in connection with the marketing of products and to prevent marketing that is unfair to consumers and traders. Furthermore, the purpose is to regulate marketing campaigns and advertisement that are deemed as questionable. According to the Swedish marketing act (Marknadsföringslagen, 2008:486), the marketer is required to present all types of marketing in clear ways. The marketing-message should clearly state that it is some kind of marketing and also clarify who the message is coming from. All types of messages with commercial purposes are deemed as marketing (Marknadsföringslagen, 2008:486). For SMIs, it is sometimes hard to interpret if a post has a commercial or non-commercial

purpose. What is also important to note is that there is no clear regulation on writing or posting something positive about a company or product/service as long as it is done with a non-commercial purpose. A marketing message is deemed as an ad, when SMIs gets paid to say something positive about a company, product or service. Another rule worth mentioning is that both companies and SMIs have legal responsibilities to disclose paid partnerships (SwedenInfluencers, 2016).

According to the Swedish marketing Act (Marknadsföringslagen, 2008:486), the sanctions for transgressing the law is punishable. If companies or SMIs do not follow the marketing Act they may be banned from doing any type of marketing at all. The most common penalty for transgressing the marketing Act is paying a monetary fine (Marknadsföringslagen, 2008:486). Bennett et al. (2013), argue that other than being punished by law through regulatory enforcement, marketing misconduct can also lead to other negative consequences (Bennett, LoCicero, & Hanner, 2013). According to Chen et al. (2009), marketing misconduct often leads to negative economic consequences resulting from litigation, negative publicity, consumer skepticism, reduced quality perceptions and reduction in brand equity (Chen, Ganesan, & Liu, 2009).

3.1.2 Marketing guidelines for SMIs

According to Emrich (2017), the regulations of SMI marketing is sometimes difficult to define since it is not always clear if a published post is paid or not. The regulations have also lead to very few cases where SMIs and companies have been punished by law (Emrich, 2017). Zaki (2018) mentions that there is a need for clearer guidelines regarding SMI marketing because it is an unofficial industry (Zaki, 2018). In Sweden, the Swedish consumer agency (Konsumentverket), provides SMIs with guidelines regarding marketing in online settings. The first guideline is to define what a compensation from a company to a SMI is. According to Konsumentverket (2015), any type of incentive from a company is regarded as a compensation. The incentives could be money, a free product or a free service (Konsumentverket, 2015). Another guideline regards to disguised marketing. Followers of a SMI should immediately be able to identify if a post has a marketing purpose or not. SMIs should not mislead their followers into thinking that their posts have non-commercial purposes. Yet, SMIs should also be very clear when they inform their followers about their marketing posts that are considered as ads. The last guideline aims to inform marketers and

SIMs to be careful when marketing to kids. Children do not have the same ability to be critical towards marketing as adults, which is why SIMs should reflect and adjust to their followers' demographics (Konsumentverket, 2015). Furthermore, social media platforms are also starting to take responsibilities in the matter of SIM marketing. Instagram has added features where SIMs can ad-mark their posts and manage their advertisement (Instagram, 2018).

4. Theoretical Background

In order to explore how consumers, perceive brands when social media influencers (SMIs) disclose paid partnerships, this chapter will explain, and present relevant theories, concepts and terms related to SMIs and branding. Firstly, theories regarding SMIs will be described and explained. Theories regarding SMIs are relevant because they are the tool for the aim of this thesis. Secondly, theories regarding consumer brand perception will be defined and described because brand perception is the focal point of this thesis, which will lead to the results of this study. Lastly, a conceptual model based of all theories described will be presented.

4.1 Social media influencers

The marketing laws and guidelines shape how SMIs must behave and act on social media. The content they put on their online feeds are also influenced by the regulations (SwedenInfluencers, 2016). Since the research question in this thesis regards to how consumers perceive brands when SMIs disclose paid partnerships, it is important to understand the concept of SMI. Booth and Matic (2011) say that the communication SMIs have with their followers can shape consumer brand perception (Booth & Matic, 2011). The way SMIs communicate with their followers is therefore also important to understand. SMIs affect consumers in different ways, which is why it is interesting to see if their influence can affect consumers brand perception in paid partnerships.

4.1.1 The Influence of Social Media Influencers

According to Booth and Matic (2011), SMIs are influential in many different ways. SMIs can shape attitudes, opinions and perceptions of their followers. The authors argue that this is due to their characteristics of being effective spokespersons. SMIs spokespersons abilities can be seen in how they converse and interact with their followers (Booth & Matic, 2011). The communication that SMIs have with their followers is relational and this type of communication has been proven to be more influential on consumers attitudes and behavior than the influence of mass media (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). In online

communities SMIs have authoritative power and are often seen as the representative of that community. The authoritative power SMIs have, influences consumers because their opinions matter (Miao, Meng, & Sun, 2016).

Some characteristics and perceptions identified with SMIs are admiration, association, aspiration and recognition. The characteristics SMIs have, triggers consumers desire for a brand (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Since SMIs have the ability to promote brands for a larger scale of online followers, they can be impactful to create brand attitude and brand loyalty (Lv, Guang, & Tian, 2013). Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), also found that consumers refer to SMIs when they are in the process of evaluating a brand (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Furthermore, SMIs are also considered as influential when their characteristics are matched with consumers' social identities. As Booth and Matic (2011), state social identity is the part of a person's self-concept that comes from perceived solidarity in a social group. In other words, social identities are consumers sense of who they are (Booth & Matic, 2011). By being trusted and having matching characteristics, SMIs can increase the consumers self-image, self-esteem and behavior (Langner, Hennings, & Wiedmann, 2013).

4.1.2 Content

According to Hulyk (2015) influencer marketing maintains its presence on social media where information is built for short-format visuals. Instagram is a social media platform that primarily focuses on pictures. SMIs use Instagram to market brands (Hulyk, 2015). Visual content can evoke significant cognitive effects on consumers attitudes towards a brand and determine if the brand can be trusted or not (Kim & Lennon, 2008). Furthermore, visual and verbal content that is deemed positive often leads to increased brand awareness and brand attention (Shaouf, Lü, & Li, 2016). According to Mikhailitchenko et al. (2009), visual imagery in advertising is more effective if it is matched to the target groups social identities. Imagery that is recognizable and relatable often evokes positive brand attitudes. (Mikhailitchenko, Javalgi, Mikhailitchenko, & Laroche, 2009).

Furthermore, Redondo and Bernal (2016), argue that visual and verbal content impacts recipients by taking them into a mental transportation evoked by imagery and sound created by a narrative from the sender of the message. The aim of the narrative is to create brand interest and shape brand perception (Redondo & Bernal, 2016). Kim and Lennon (2008) add that visual and verbal content are connected to the human's sensory system, which can stimulate consumers in a positive and negative way (Kim & Lennon, 2008). For SMIs, the post on their feeds can be considered as a narrative, which is created to evoke a mental transportation and stimulation to affect consumers attitudes towards a brand.

4.1.3 Truthfulness

Due to the Swedish marketing laws, SMIs need to disclose their paid collaborations. Anker (2016) says that over-marketed consumers now expect more truthful marketing. Therefore, truthfulness has become an important part of the marketing cycle (Anker, 2016). Consumers expect that the information they receive is truthful and honest. Companies that are perceived as untruthful can reduce its chances to stay in business because consumers will not trust them anymore (Lubomira, 2008). Truthful marketing creates opportunities for innovation and expansion, since the company has more loyal consumers that are willing to try the products or services that the company provides (Anker, 2016).

However, consumers that perceive companies as untruthful can feel betrayed and switch brand loyalty. Consumers are not dependent on one company or one brand, contrary there are other companies and brands that are ready to fulfill their wants and needs (Lubomira, 2008). According to Hall and Caton (2017) like companies, SMIs also need to be truthful to their followers. One of the reasons why followers like and follow SMIs is because they relate to them with their social identities (Langner, Hennings, & Wiedmann, 2013). If SMIs publish marketing ads without being truthful, it can harm the image the follower has towards SMIs and might also harm SMIs social network (Anker, 2016). Truthfulness is an important aspect to consider for marketing and for brands to build up relationships because if falsity is detected, it may harm the companies brand reputation and the relationship with consumers (Khan, Lew, & Park, 2015).

However, even if truthfulness and trust are quite similar concepts there are still some differences that need to be distinguished. Truthfulness is the quality or state of being true to something or someone while trust is reliance on a quality or a person (Lubomira, 2008). In this case, SMIs are being truthful to their consumers by disclosing their paid partnerships, which can be interpreted a trustful act by their consumers. In other words, truthfulness leads to trust. Below, a more in-depth description of trust will be presented.

4.1.4 Trust

In a well-functioning positive human relationship, trust is considered to be an essential element. Trust creates an environment where humans can collaborate, because trusting someone provides a sense of security and attachment (Keszey & Biemans, 2017). In a marketing definition of trust, the term is defined as how consumers believe in the content that is directed towards them (Nejad, Sherrell, & Babakus, 2014). According to Liu et al. (2015), trust is essential to the relationship between SMIs and their followers because it can impact the degree of influence SMIs have over their followers (Liu et al., 2015).

SMIs can also gain trust by disclosing their partnerships and marketing efforts on social media platforms (Anker, 2016). A disclosed partnership or disclosed marketing can be interpreted as transparency, which is defined as sharing information among corporations, employees and consumers that may be welcomed or inconvenient (Bonson, Torres, Royo, & Flores, 2012). Even though the information may be perceived as inconvenient, it is still important to share, because a transparent communication indicates on straight facts, honesty and trust, which consumers expect and appreciate (Bonson, Torres, Royo, & Flores, 2012).

However, the authors also state that SMIs are interpreted as trustworthy because they are considered as “experts” in their area of content (Liu et al., 2015). According to Booth and Matic (2011) trust between SMIs and consumers is important because it is essential in shaping peoples brand perception (Booth & Matic, 2011). SMIs that have gained a lot of trust, have bigger impacts on consumers and their behavior (Liu et al., 2015). SMIs that perceive themselves as “experts” often tend to be motivated to use their trusted opinion on products and brands. Therefore, SMIs opinions evoke brand awareness and brand

perception (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). Hsu, Lin and Chiang (2013) add that SMIs content regarding products is seen as more personalized than the information coming from companies. The content from SMIs is thus seen as non-commercial and more desirable (Hsu, Lin, & Chiang, 2013).

4.2 Branding

According to Ghodeswar (2008) branding is a marketing communication method that differentiates a company from its competitors. The aim is to make a lasting impact on consumers (Ghodeswar, 2008). A strong brand enables the consumer to assess value and quality simply by knowing the brands name and image. Furthermore, a brand that is considered to be strong also presents trustworthiness and has the opportunity to develop favorable attitudes (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van Den Bergh, 2013). SMIs have a lot of the same characteristics as strong brands have and utilizes branding tactics to gain more followers. SMIs are therefore considered as brands (Gandhi & Muruganantham, 2015). The aim of this thesis is to explore consumer brand perception from two perspectives: *the brand of the company* and *the brand of the SMI*. In order to answer the research question in full, a broader understanding of brand perception needs to be described and explained.

4.2.1 Consumer Brand Perception

According to Park et al. (2010) brand perception is based on all types of interaction a consumer has with a brand. A positive brand perception often leads to a consumer choosing a brand over another. Brand perception is composed of brand attitude, brand image and brand credibility which are all influenced by communication. The foundation of a brand perception is therefore built on how it communicates with consumers (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010).

Brand attitude is a consumers' overall evaluation of a brand. The consumers attitude could be both positive and negative depending on the consumers experience with the brand. The attitude can also last for a long time and only be changed if people gain new experiences or reflections of the brand (Ghorban, 2012). A further definition of brand attitude is that it is based on the perception a consumer has of a brand. The attitude also greatly affects the behavior the consumer shows towards the brand. Brand attitude is an antecedent to the consequence of brand loyalty. If consumers have positive brand attitudes, it often also

generates a will to be loyal towards the brand (Liu, Li, Mizerski, & Soh, 2012). Park et al. (2010) add that a strong brand attitude towards a brand affects brand consideration and brand choice, which are key factors from a company's perspective (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). A single marketing campaign that consumers get exposed to can shape their whole opinion of an entire brand. A campaign that is perceived as distasteful can therefore create a negative opinion that spills over to the entire brand (Praxmarer & Gierl, 2009). According to Park et al. (2010) brand attitude is a key factor in affecting how consumers behave. Therefore, brand attitude is important for how consumers behave towards a brand. A consumer might go from wanting to recommend a brand to a friend to completely ignoring it (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010).

Brand image is the perception of the brand in the minds of consumers. When companies market their brands, one of their goals is to create positive perceptions in the minds of target consumer groups and these perceptions are what constitutes the brand image. The brand image can be based on rational or emotional perceptions, meaning that consumers can have the feeling of added value. The success of a brand image can be measured by seeing if consumers show preference towards a brand over other competing brands. Brand image is closely connected to brand attitude and brand loyalty in the sense that they affect consumer behavior (Doyle, 2016). Ghodeswar (2008) says that the product a company provides to its consumers also is a part of the brand image (Ghodeswar, 2008). The brand is just as important as a product because it exists in the mind of consumers. The brand image is therefore essential in situations where the product is similar to the brands competitors because having a strong brand image makes the product stand out more than the others (Meenaghan, 1995; Bian & Moutinho, 2011).

Brand credibility is the credibility a brand has to continuously provide what has been promised. A brand's credibility is defined and comprised by two components: *expertise* and *trustworthiness*. Expertise suggests to the ability a brand has when it comes to delivering what it says it can. Trustworthiness suggests to the willingness a brand has to offer what has been previously promised by them. An individual marketing campaign can therefore affect consumers' perception of a brand's credibility in a negative or positive way. Brands have to be consistent in order to be perceived as credible (Bougoure, Russell-Bennett, Fazal-e-Hasan, & Mortimer, 2016). A credible brand conveys information that consumers

see as truthful and reliable. To achieve a credible brand, the consumer has to interpret previous communication and marketing campaigns a brand has done and then form that credible judgement towards the brand. If a brand is seen as credible it can be one of the most important antecedents to influence consumers choice and behavior (Bougoure, Russell-Bennett, Fazal-e-Hasan, & Mortimer, 2016). According to Cotte et al. (2005) a credible brand is more likely to have a positive brand attitude if consumers deem the brand as credible (Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005).

To conclude this section, what is mentioned earlier is that consumer brand perception bases on all interaction a consumer has with a brand. Uzunoglu and Kip (2014) say that brands can directly interact and communicate with consumers on social media (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). The ones who can communicate with consumers more effectively are SMIs because they have a lot of influence on social media. SMIs are therefore integral in creating consumer brand perceptions (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

4.3 Conceptual model

Based on the problematization, context for theoretical background and the theories discussed in the theoretical background, we developed a conceptual model exploring how consumers perceive brands when SMIs disclose paid partnerships. The aim of the conceptual model is to clarify the connections between the different concepts and theories. The model is divided into three categories: *the SMI*, *the characteristics* and *communication of SMIs* and *consumer brand perception*.

Marketing regulations guidelines how companies and SMIs will act and behave. Both companies and SMIs have to comply to the laws and guidelines, which influences the way SMIs act on social media. If SMIs market a product they have to follow the guidelines for how to do it correctly by disclosing paid partnerships. The SMI needs to be truthful in order to create trust. Likewise, trust and truthfulness are characteristics that SMIs need to become influential. The regulations and guidelines are therefore also influencing the characteristics of the SMI. The content of SMIs is also affected by marketing regulations and guidelines because of the consideration they have to take before posting anything online.

Consumer brand perception is based on all types of interactions a consumer has with a brand. Brand perception is built on communication and is the foundation of brand image, attitude and credibility. SMIs are highly interactive and communicative with their followers and are therefore integral in affecting and creating consumer brand perception. Consumers brand perception towards companies is affected when SMIs post that they have a collaboration with a brand. Usually the SMI posts a picture with the brands product and makes a review or recommendation. Depending on the review, consumers brand perception will be shaped towards brands of companies but also SMIs since they are the ones that posts the collaboration and market the product.



Figure 1. Conceptual model exploring how SMIs influence consumer brand perception when they disclose paid partnerships.

The conceptual model gives an overview of the interplay of how the characteristics and content of SMIs influence brand perception when they disclose paid partnerships. The starting point of the model is the SMI while the ending point is the consumers brand perception. The characteristics and content of the SMI is made up of four parts and are the tools the SMI have that influences consumer brand perception. The marketing regulations influences all parts of the model, as the context for the theories and therefore exists in the background of it all. Subsequently, this conceptual model will be used as a framework when exploring how consumers perceive brands when SMIs disclose paid partnerships.

5. Empirical Methodology

The method is divided into two parts where the first part is introducing the chosen methods as research design, data collection, focus groups and how the participant selection was conducted. The second part describes the different guidelines for focus groups and how they were conducted. Further, explanations regarding how data analysis, transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability were completed is described. Lastly, limitations and ethical choices are highlighted.

5.1 Research design

In this thesis, an exploratory research design is applied. An exploratory research design is conducted when there are only few earlier studies or no earlier studies regarding the research problem. The researcher is then focused to gain insights and familiarity regarding the problem. The design is used to create an understanding of how to proceed in studying the research problem or to understand what practice or method to use when gathering data about the problem (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). As explained in section 1.1, there have been earlier research about similar concepts as consumer perceptions, but an in-depth research about our research question have to our knowledge not been conducted yet. Therefore, an exploratory research design is considered as most suitable to our research aim and question.

5.2 Data Collection

Primary data and secondary data are two types of empirical data that can be utilized to conduct a research. Primary data suggests that the author is collecting new data that did not exist before, while secondary data suggests that the author is using existing data that comes from old sources (Saunders, Lewis, & Adrian, 2012). In this thesis, primary data was collected through focus groups. The primary data have been selected since it is appropriate to understand why or how a phenomenon appears.

5.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups are semi-structured group interviews where discussions regard to a specific theme or subject (Chadwich, Gill, Stewart, & Treasure, 2008). In these group interviews, a moderator maintains and guides the conversations forward, while participants share their opinions and thoughts with each other (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). Through the discussions, different opinions between participants can influence one another, which can lead to agreements, disagreements and create wider image of their own realities (Kitzinger, 1995). The discussions within focus groups are beneficial for the actual researcher behind the study. The researcher of the study can obtain new glimpses and insights of the researched topic, by observing and collecting the important parts of the discussion (Saggoe, 2012). The role of the researcher in focus groups is to moderate. As a moderator, it is important to promote group discussions without guiding the participants towards certain expressions or opinions. Otherwise, it will be difficult to understand the underlying logic in the participants answers (Rabiee, 2004). There are many advantages with focus groups as it allows investigating complex motivations and behaviors of the participants and it allows participants to exercise an equitable degree of control over their interactions. The difference between individual interviews and focus groups is that the participants in the focus groups ask questions to each other and express themselves to each other. Such interactions create data to the researcher that are valuable. By using focus groups, it allowed for this study to have the ability to observe agreements and disagreements among the participants which is a strength that comes out from having those groups. Furthermore, focus groups enabled us to ask the participants about their views and experiences. The answers by the participants were then compared with one another (Kruegger & Casey, 2015).

Focus groups have many strengths but they also have some weaknesses. One of the weaknesses is to create the focused interactions which are influenced by the moderator. For instance, in individual interviews the interviewer gets to know its informant better since more time and weight are offered to the informants to introduce themselves. On the other hand, the moderator in the focus groups tries to guide the discussions between the participants which sometimes can lead to interactions and disruptions and therefore result in the loss of important data. Often, it is the moderator rather than the participants that decides the agenda and forms the discussions, which gives the moderator greater control

(Kruegger & Casey, 2015). However, the weakness was met by asking the participants to listen and respect each participant that was speaking. In other words, this meant that gathered data from the participant would not be lost and it was a way of ensuring that each participant had the chance to share their experiences and thoughts. When the topic of discussion became irrelevant, a way of confronting the weakness was by guiding the discussion for the participants. In addition, by moderating and guiding the conversation, it allowed the participants to share their thoughts openly. In this thesis, we believe that the information gathered from focus groups was the most suitable method for our research aim and research question.

Furthermore, according to Kitzinger (1995), an ideal group size of a focus group should consist of six to nine participants where the participants can share different opinions without making the discussion unmanageable (Kitzinger, 1995). The reason why two focus groups with six participants were chosen and not nine is because we wanted to have small groups, so that the participants could have more space and time to discuss with each other and share their opinions with each other. We believe that small groups led to more in-depth answers and made all the participants more involved in the discussions. The authors Bryman & Bell (2015) also argue that small focus groups are more suitable in less extensive researches, as in this thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). All of the participants were Swedish students, which made it easier for language complications to be avoided. The focus group sessions were then also conducted in Swedish. Furthermore, the transcription of the focus groups sessions was translated to English. Some corrections in grammar and formulations were made to ensure that the correct content of the discussions was conveyed.

5.3.1 Participant selection

According to Saunders (2012), the selected participants should share similar interests as each other for the discussion to be ongoing, and opinions to be shared (Saunders, Lewis, & Adrian, 2012). Hence, the selected participants needed to fulfill two criteria in order to participate in the focus groups. The first criterion for the participant selection was that the participants had to follow two or more social media influencers (SMIs) on Instagram. The criterion was of relevance since we wanted to see if the participants' attitudes changed towards SMIs depending on if they followed them or not. The second criterion for the

participant selection was that the participants needed to be between the ages of 19-25. Davidson (2016) also mentions that people in between these ages are considered to use social media in a daily basis, which is why the criterion was of importance. Further, participants were selected through convenient sample which means that the selected participants were close at hand. All of the participants went to Kristianstad University. To select participants that fulfilled the two criteria, mails through Kristianstad University's online platform were sent out to randomly selected students. In the mail, an invitation to the focus groups, a presentation of the thesis and the criteria as earlier mentioned to participate in the focus groups were presented.

In total, 12 participants approved to participate in the focus groups. The participants consisted of seven females and five males, see *Table 1*. Most of the participants knew each other since they studied together, but some of them were not familiar with each other. However, the discussions were not affected by the relationships that the participants had with each other since everyone were given the time and chance to speak and elaborate on their answers.

Table 1. Focus group participants

Group	Gender	Age	SIMs the participants followed
1	Female	19	Kenza, Kissie
	Female	21	Kenza, Blondin Bella
	Female	22	Kissie, Blondin Bella
	Female	23	Angelicka Blick, Kenza
	Male	22	Sam Ezeh, Språkföralla
	Male	24	SamirBadran, Kristiantaljeblad
2	Female	21	Zeinas Kitchen, Kissie
	Female	22	Kenza, Jennysmatblogg
	Female	23	Angelicka blick, Kenza
	Male	22	SamirBadran, Skyze_life
	Male	23	Skyze_life, Kenza
	Male	23	Sam Ezeh, RandomMakingMovies

5.3.2 Guideline of the focus group sessions

The participants in the two focus groups were informed before the sessions about place, time and discussion topics. The participants were also asked to think about what opinions they had of brands that collaborated with SMIs. The purpose of preparing the participants was executed so that the meetings would flow more easily and allow for more thought out answers. By preparing the focus group participants, they spent less time trying to understand and think about the questions. The results of the preparation led to more effective discussions because the participants had the chance to think about how they felt when SMIs disclosed paid partnerships. However, even if the preparations led to more effective discussions, one could argue that the answers shared among the participants were constructed beforehand, which may have resulted into giving non-neutral answers compared to if one were to ask the participant directly. Nonetheless, this weakness was confronted during the discussions between the participants since they had the opportunity to elaborate more on their answers.

5.2.3 Interview guide

The interview guide was constructed by a semi-structured interview guide since the topic of the discussion build a necessity of flexibility during the two focus group sessions. A semi structured interview is open while a structured interview has strict questions and does not allow the participants to divert. The researcher in the semi structured interview has a framework of themes to be explored and therefore allows the participants to come up with new ideas that are brought up in the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this thesis, the ideas of the questions that were asked were developed from our conceptual model which highlights the important theories and the aim with this thesis. Thus, the questions were divided into the themes that consisted of: *influence of SMI, truthfulness, content and trust*, see *appendix 1*. Follow-up questions were also applied when more explanations for some questions were needed.

5.3.4 Focus group guide

The focus group sessions were conducted on May 3rd and May 4th at Kristianstad University. Both discussions lasted approximately one hour. Before the discussions began, an introduction was given to the participants as well as thanking them for participating in the focus group interviews. It was essential for us to ensure that the participants felt comfortable since we did not want the participants to feel like they were interrogated. Therefore, the participants were asked to introduce themselves, in terms of name, age and the current program they were studying. The opening questions for the focus group interview were *Why do you follow SMIs?* and *How do you perceive SMIs that collaborate with brands?* These questions allowed the participants to share their thoughts about SMIs and their collaborations with companies. The semi-structured design of the interview guide allowed us to be flexible by asking questions in accordance to the themes of the conceptual model (*Influence of SMI, Truthfulness, Content and Trust*), and at the same time still being able to moderate the participants. Furthermore, since we were two that conducted the focus group session, one of us was able to ask and lead the discussion, meanwhile the other took notes of the significant answers. The person that took notes was later in the end of the focus group able to ask follow-up questions that was not elaborated enough. The follow up questions were asked in the end since we wanted to avoid interrupting the participants during the focus group discussions. The formulation of the question asked were mostly descriptive questions (how? and what?), explanatory questions (why?) and close-ended questions (yes/no). Alvehus (2013) mentions that this kind of formulation of questions is done to collect in-depth material, consequently leading to more in-depth discussions (Alvehus, 2013).

By having in-depth discussions, deeper insights in the discussions were found (Denscombe, 2017). The experiences that the participants had with SMIs they followed, allowed the participants to relate on situations that they were familiar with which made them compare, agree and disagree with each other's answers. The discussions intended to proceed on its own without interruptions from us moderators. As mentioned in section 5.3, it is difficult to create focused interactions when conducting focus groups since interruptions from moderators can occur and important discussions can then be missed (Kruegger & Casey, 2015). It was thus very important for us moderators to only interrupt when properly needed.

The interruptions were only made when the discussion between the participant went to irrelevant directions that did not cover the intended topic of the discussions.

As moderators, it was important to make the participants answer and speak as much as possible. In other words, it was in our hands to keep the conversations on going. Our presence in the focus group interviews may have had an effect on the participants answers and how they behaved and felt. However, in order to ensure that the data collected was not biased, this challenge was met by the follow-up questions to ensure that the data collected was valid. Once the questions and follow-up questions were asked, we moved on to the next step which will be further elaborated in the following section.

5.4 Data analysis

A qualitative data analysis is a crucial part of the qualitative research. The researcher initially begins by gathering data to the qualitative research. The gathered data is then organized and construed to help the researcher draw conclusions on the theme of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A data analysis is constructed on three steps. The first step is to transcribe all the collected data because without transcriptions the gathered data is often unstructured and difficult to understand (Denscombe, 2017). In this study, the focus group sessions were recorded with recording devices, so all the information needed could be gathered. After the recordings, the transcriptions and organization of the transcriptions were made verbatim, which ended up in a total of 22 pages. The transcriptions were read individually by us moderators, so we could get our own sense of the material. However, the second step is to organize all the transcribed data because once the transcription is made, a large amount of information will be scattered. To organize the transcribed data in an effective way, the researcher may go back to the research question and then organize the gathered data according to the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To fulfill the second step, the transcriptions were discussed and organized to fit the research question. The last step is the coding process. When coding the data, the researcher will be able to categorize the collected data into different concepts, patterns and properties (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As mentioned, the conceptual model of this thesis was the focus point for the interview questions and the categorization of the themes. After the transcriptions and the organization of the transcriptions were done, the coding process started. Motives were

searched which could explain why consumers changed or did not change their brand perception when SMIs disclosed paid partnerships. The answers that the participants gave was then categorized into the different themes. Some of the answers were almost the same and some of them were repetitions which allowed us to remove some questions and merge some of the questions. An example bellow is figured of how the categorization and coding process were done.

Table 2. Coding of Themes and Examples of Meaning Units

Themes	Meaning units
Influence of SMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SMIs I follow only market products that they have knowledge about, which is why I know that their recommendation is not biased • I follow and appreciate SMIs more if they have similar personality and humor as me • What she posts is important for my personal fashion style I like almost every kind of outfit that she shares everyday • I appreciate her recommendations because I have troubles sometimes when I want to buy something and if she posts a product it really helps me to choose
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I appreciate content that is original if a SMI posts something that is too commercialized, I feel like they do this only because they have to • I follow influencers because their content is entertaining and relatable. They often do fun stuff which inspires me • I like that my Instagram gets filled with meaningful content and when I see posts with commercial I feel like its boring • I like when influencers share their everyday life on Instagram
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I look to influencers for fashion inspiration and often think to myself "If she uses this product it has to be good" • I trust Kenza because I have followed her for a long time and she has not done anything that would make me think otherwise • I would not trust SMIs that only posts paid partnerships, because it feels like they only do it for the money. • For me I cannot trust someone I do not know
Truthfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like influencers that are transparent because then I know if they are biased or not.

- I think that trust and truthfulness go hand in hand. If I trust a SMI then I expect him to be truthful as well
 - Marketing regulations are good because it forces the SMIs and companies to be truthful
 - I believe that honesty is the best way long term, because it makes the SMIs behave better on social media
-

5.5 Transferability, Credibility, Dependability and Confirmability

According to Bryman & Bell (2015), reliability refers to that the researcher must have significant results and not just one-off findings. Other researchers should be able to generate the exact same results under same conditions with same experiment. Validity on the other hand refers to whether the findings can measure the expected concepts. To achieve validity four different criteria, need to be taken into consideration, which are: *transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability* (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Transferability indicates on the fact that the researcher states that the research study's findings are suitable to other contexts. The "other contexts" can be interpreted as similar phenomena, similar situations or for instance similar populations. The qualitative researcher can then use thick descriptions to apply the research study's findings to different situations and circumstances (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this thesis, thick description was provided through focus groups. As mentioned, the focus groups were both recorded and transcribed to guarantee that every word was understandable and analyzed with room for limpidity. Further, the recordings and transcriptions also allowed us moderators to guarantee that no important data was lost during the data collection. By recording and by transcribing, the transferability of the results was strengthened and thereof enabled the ability to transfer the results to other contexts. Credibility on the other hand, questions if the researchers account is acceptable to others, as for instance interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this case, credibility was achieved through the focus groups. The participants were handed all the transcriptions, so they could comment if something was wrong and needed to be changed. Dependability means that the researched study could be repeated by other scholars and that the findings would be compatible. The researched study should thus

have enough information so that other researchers can gather similar findings as the researched study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Lastly, confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the qualitative researcher's findings. This means that the findings are obtained from participants' responses and not from the researchers' personal motivations. It is of importance that the researcher does not interpret what the research participants said in a different way to fit it in to a certain story (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To achieve neutrality in our thesis, transcriptions and recordings were shared with the participants so they would feel comfortable with the content and ensure that we did not change any word and related it to our personal motivations. Further, each section of the thesis has been shared and discussed by our supervisors.

5.6 Limitations and ethical choices

In this thesis, there are few limitations that we believe may impact the transferability of the results. Firstly, we only chose to create focus groups that consisted of students from Kristianstad University and that consisted with two focus groups with six participants in each. Secondly, the participants were only between 19-25 years old since the segment represents the topmost majority of Instagram users in Sweden. We believe that people in different ages have different interests and perceive things in different ways. The discussions in the focus groups would probably be different if we had people between ages of 12 and 60. Lastly, Instagram was the only social media platform that was reputable in this thesis since a majority of the participants followed social media influencers on Instagram.

When data collection is gathered with human engagement as for example focus groups, it is important to consider the ethical dilemmas that can arise. By knowing the key requirements and applying them, the ethical dilemmas can be anticipated and even rejected. These four key requirements are: *the consent requirement*, *the information requirement*, *the confidentiality requirement* and *the utilization requirement*. The requirements indicate on the fact that the participants must be informed about the purpose of the plan and the conditions. Moreover, the participants must be informed about their right to terminate their participation whenever they want, and they also need to be informed that the participation

is voluntary. Lastly, it is also required to inform the participants that they have the right to determine under which conditions they will participate and how long they will participate. In this thesis, the above-mentioned requirements were followed. The participants were informed about their ethical choices and that they could interrupt whenever they liked.

6. Results and Discussion

In this chapter the empirical findings of how the focus groups perceive brands when social media influencers (SMIs) disclose paid partnerships with companies is analyzed. The empirical findings were analyzed to illustrate how marketing regulations guide companies and SMIs to create consumer brand perception. The structure of the analysis will be divided into two types of brand perception: the consumer brand perception towards brands of companies and the consumers perception towards SMIs.

6.1 Summary of Focus Group Results

In the following section, a summary of the focus group seminar is presented. The interview guide questions asked to the participants can be found in *Appendix 1*. All of the questions that were asked are connected to the different parts of the conceptual model. The results are presented by following the same structure as how the focus groups were conducted. This means, starting off with a description of the results based on the themes: *influence of SMIs, content, truthfulness* and *trust*. Influence of SMIs and content are based on the communication that SMIs have with their followers and is therefore analyzed together. Trust and truthfulness are based on the characteristics of the SMI and is therefore analyzed together. After the description, an analysis and discussion will present how the participants perceived SMIs and brands of companies in paid partnerships.

6.1.2 Consumer Brand Perception towards Companies

In this section, the participants in the two focus groups discussed about how they perceived the brands of companies when SMIs disclose paid partnerships. The participants discussed their perceptions towards companies' brand image, credibility and attitude. The themes of the conceptual model that influenced consumer brand perception were also mentioned.

6.1.2.1 Influence of SMIs and Content

In the discussion of the influence of SMIs and content, the image of the brand was first discussed. In the first focus group the discussions regarded around association. What the participants associated with SMIs were also associated to the brand SMIs collaborated with. Several participants mentioned that the perception the participants had of the SMI would transcend onto the company. Some participants said that they would perceive a company as serious and credible if they collaborated with a SMI that was perceived in the same way. One participant namely shared:

If a SMI that I have followed for a long time and like recommends a product from a company that they collaborate with I am more likely to also like that company. For example, my favorite SMI “Kenza” have collaborations with the company Daniel Wellington. Before she recommended the watches, I was not particularly interested in that company. Now, I am obsessed.

Female participant Focus group 1

The female participant was asked why she thinks that her perception of a SMI transcended to the company. She answered that “Kenza” made the watches look good and that she probably felt this way because she looked at “Kenza” as a role-model when it came to fashion. Other participants also agreed on this answer and also argued for similar reasons for why they felt that SMIs they followed affected their brand perception. Another participant shared that he perceived that brands looked “cooler” when SMIs he followed recommended them.

In the second focus group, the opinions of the participants varied. Some participants felt that a SMI could not change their perceptions of a brand. The participants argued that the product of the brand was more influential to how they would perceive a company. A participant subsequently shared:

My perception of a company’s brand is not determined of whom they choose to collaborate with. My perception is more determined of the product a company provides. If I for example think about “Apple” what comes up in my mind is not which SMI they collaborate with, rather I think about their products, such as the iMacs and iPhones.

Male participant Focus Group 2

One participant argued against what the participant said by arguing for how he would feel if a company would collaborate with a SMI that was a “bad” person and for example an

individual with Nazi ideology. Most of the participants in the second focus group concurred with this argument and agreed upon that the choice of a SMI is important for how they would perceive a brand. Several participants mentioned that they would boycott and unfollow companies that chose to collaborate with SMIs that they did not had the preference for.

All participants in both focus groups, agreed on that they would choose a brand that a SMI recommended over competing brands. A participant said that the reasoning behind why he preferred brands SMIs recommended was because he always looked to the opinions of others before creating his own. Many other participants also shared that they based their opinion of a brand on reviews of influential people online. Most participants also agreed that their perception of a brand would be more positive if SMIs were knowledgeable about the products they recommended. One participant namely shared:

I trust what the SMI “Zeinaskitchen” says about food because I know that she knows alot about food. I have followed her recipes for a long time and have used the same products that she recommends. She always shares facts about the products that she recommends and always has a reason for why she recommends the products.

Female participant Focus Group 2

In both focus groups, the participants discussed how SMIs could make brands stand out more. The participants were keener and more aware of brands that collaborated with SMIs they followed. Several participants mentioned that they would not know about a lot of brands that they use today if the SMIs did not recommended them. One participant shared:

If “Blondinbella” did not post about different cosmetic products, I would have never known about a lot of brands and which products to choose from.

Female Participant Group 2

However, some participants argued that they bought products SMIs were seen to use in non-marketing posts rather than marketing posts, since they felt that the SMIs used the products without any paid partnership and because they liked it.

6.1.2.2 Truthfulness and Trust

In the discussions about the SMIs characteristics truthfulness and trust, the first focus group, discussed about which type of SMIs companies should collaborate with. The participants mentioned that they would have a positive image of companies that collaborates with SMIs that they follow and look up to because they trust this SMI. The participants in the second focus group discussed characteristics when it comes to choosing the correct influencer. SMIs who stands for positivity and “good vibes” were mentioned as most suitable for companies to collaborate with. A participant mentioned honesty and truthfulness as characteristics that SMIs companies collaborate with should have. Another participant shared:

Companies should choose to collaborate with SMIs that have followers who trust them. For me, I would consider every product recommendation a SMI I trust makes.

Some participants mentioned that they would not appreciate companies that collaborated with SMIs that misbehaved publicly. The participants mentioned scandals where SMIs has been front figures in. The participants discussed that the scandals often occurred because of dishonesty and fakeness. In the second focus group, a participant mentioned a Swedish SMI called “Kissie” as a person she would not want a company to collaborate with because the participant felt that “Kissie” stood for values the participant did not share. Others also mentioned differences in values and character flaws as factors that would negatively influence their perception of a brand. One participant namely shared:

I would not support a company that cooperated with SMIs with bad attitudes towards women. An example of this is a SMI that participated on a reality-show on tv, where he behaved very bad towards women. This guy insulted the women on the show constantly and was unapologetic for every action he did. I would never want to be associated with a person with these values.

Female participant Focus Group 1

6.1.3 Consumers Perception towards SMIs

According to Booth & Matic (2011) the perception consumers have of SMIs differs to what they have towards companies. SMIs are human beings and are therefore capable of shaping perceptions in more ways than brands of companies can do. SMIs are therefore usually perceived as role models in the communities that they are influential in (Booth & Matic, 2011). In this section, the participants in the two focus groups discussed about how they

perceived SMIs when they disclosed paid partnerships. The discussion regarded around the concepts of the conceptual model.

6.1.3.1 Influence of SMIs and Content

In the discussion about the influence of SMIs and content the opinions varied, most of the participants expressed that they followed SMIs because they perceived them to be entertaining and inspiring. The participants shared that they were influenced by SMIs because of their characteristics, personality, lifestyle, fashion sense and expertise. The participants that mentioned characteristics and personalities as qualities for why they followed SMIs, felt that they followed them because they perceived the qualities as similar to their own. The similarities mentioned was ethnicity, interests, humor and social belonging. The participants also brought up the SMIs recommendations as an important part for why they felt influenced by them, some participants mentioned product recommendations from SMIs such as clothing or cool gadgets. Other participants mentioned food and workout recommendations as important factors for why they followed SMIs. One participant namely shared:

I follow SMIs because I like their content. I am for example interested in fashion and follow therefore influencers that have good fashion sense and are knowledgeable in fashion. It feels good to have someone to be inspired by when you have a hard time choosing between different options.

Female participant Focus Group 1

During the discussions some participants also mentioned that most SMIs are sponsored by companies that fits the SMIs area of knowledge, for example that fashion influencers recommend clothes and that tech-influencers recommend electronic products. The participants were positive towards SMIs they perceived to be knowledgeable. A participant namely shared:

I think that SMIs with knowledge about fashion will recommend brands and products that they really like because they have to wear and show the products on their social media. They choose which brands they want to collaborate with and probably markets the products they think are good

Female participant Focus Group 2

A participant said that he was positive towards SMIs, when they were knowledgeable about the products they recommended, because he felt that it would decrease the degree of bias. Most participants agreed on what he said, and another participant added that many SMIs are free to choose which brands they want to collaborate with because companies approach them and not vice versa.

However, a few participants had negative perceptions towards SMIs when they disclosed paid partnerships. The participants felt that SMIs recommendation of a product could not be trusted in any way because the SMIs were paid to say what companies wanted. A participant mentioned that a lot of marketed social media posts seems to be written and posted by someone else, namely the company that collaborates with the SMI. The participant said that the content of the SMI becomes impersonal when it clearly is not them who has posted it. Another participant concurred with these statements:

I am fine with influencers that cooperate with companies, but they should at least make an effort to make the post more unique and personal. I follow influencers because I trust their judgement. If SMIs post generic ads it does not feel authentic.

Female participant Focus group 2

The female participant responded negatively to SMIs with impersonal content and therefore perceived SMIs in paid partnerships as individuals she could not trust. All participants agreed that SMIs should try to make the paid partnership posts more personal. One mentioned that personalized content makes SMIs more credible, because the SMI has put effort into it. Another participant answered that she would not care and just scroll past the post, because she sees the content as regular commercials she gets exposed to on a daily basis. The participant would also consider unfollowing the SMI, if the SMI would have repeated posts with impersonal content.

6.1.3.2 Trust and Truthfulness

According to Anker (2016), SMIs that disclose paid partnerships have the possibility of creating trustful relationships with their followers. Keszey and Biemans (2017) say that trust is gained through consistent messaging and is important for how followers perceive SMIs. Hall and Caton (2017) mention honesty and truthfulness as factors that can influence trust SMIs have their followers. Being truthful is a characteristic that SMIs needs to be

influential. Liu et al. (2015) claim that consumers tend to be positive toward brands that are familiar because it makes them more credible, this was something that was brought up amongst the participants. If the brand SMIs collaborated with was familiar to the participants, they perceived the SMI in a positive way. The knowledge the participants had of the brand made them trust the SMI more. One participant namely shared:

If a SMI I like and follow collaborates with a brand that I know and like, I feel like it is something positive because if two things I like collaborate only something positive can be the outcome. I will perceive the SMI as a more inspiring person because I myself also would want to collaborate with a brand that I like.

Male participant Focus group 1

The participant further agreed that SMIs that collaborate with what the participant perceived as credible brands are more trustworthy because companies are cautious with who they collaborate with. Many of the participants had followed their favorite SMIs since they had less followers and a collaboration with a brand made them feel that the SMI had reached success. Similar to how the participants become happy when someone in their family or friend have successes, the participants felt joy for the SMI when they collaborated with a respectful brand. However, a few participants reacted negatively towards SMIs that collaborated with brands. The participants that were negative towards the SMI that collaborated with brands felt that the SMI was “selling out”, meaning that the influencer sacrifices his or her integrity just to become more successful.

In the discussions about truthfulness most participants appreciated SMIs that were transparent. The transparency of SMIs was according to the participants, something that they appreciated because they could evaluate if the SMIs really liked the product or not. Another positive thing about disclosed partnerships that was brought up during the discussion was that the followers often also got incentives such as sales codes. According to Anker (2016) paid partnerships could potentially be biased, which the participants knew about and reflected on.

It is good that influencers show that they have paid partnerships because then I can know if they are biased towards the product or not. In the same time the influencers know that us followers will question their bias on the things that they are promoting. I have seen several influencers say, “I know that I am sponsored by this brand, but their product is really good”.

Female participant Focus group 1

All participants also agreed on that they trusted SMIs that were upfront and truthful with collaborations. The discussions moved towards specific SMIs that disclosed paid partnerships. One participant namely shared:

The social media influencer Kenza is someone I trust because I feel like she has a good balance with what she posts and that she always discloses paid partnerships. I mainly trust her because everything she recommends looks good and it does not feel like she collaborates with brands just for money. She has her own brand called “Ivy Revel” and every time she posts something about this brand it is disclosed as a post with marketing purpose. I appreciate that she does this because it lets me know the purpose behind the post.

Female participant Focus group 2

The participant considered the SMI Kenza to be trustable because of her consistency with disclosing paid partnerships. The transparency of Kenza is also appreciated by the participant. Her truthfulness regarding which brands she chooses to collaborate with as well as her own brand was regarded by the participant as something positive. Forbes (2013) say that transparency desire is a result of over marketed consumers that have become skeptical towards marketing. The openness and truthfulness of disclosing paid partnerships were something that the participants appreciated because they got information about the purpose of the post that SMIs shares. A participant also mentioned that she appreciated and trusted SMIs with larger followings. According to the participant, SMIs with larger following were more trustworthy because they have bigger spotlights on them. Another participant argued that SMIs with a lot of followers needs to consider their content more and is therefore more trustable. The participants also perceived more popular SMIs as trustworthy because they are popular for a reason. The participant who mentioned “Kenza”, said that “Kenza” was popular because of her fashion sense and her taste is trusted because what she likes in fashion is then shared with her 1,7 million followers.

The discussion made some participants realize that not all SMIs always disclosed that their posts had marketing purposes, which Abendroth and Heyman (2013) also imply. Some of the participants did not know that SMIs were required to disclose paid partnerships and were therefore informed of this. When all of the participants realized that disclosing of paid partnership is a requirement according to Swedish marketing laws, the discussion of the participants shifted towards SMIs that not always disclosed paid partnerships. One participant namely shared:

The marketing law is probably there for a reason, I think that the law is good because it reduces the possibility for influencers to lie to us followers. Or that companies can take advantage of influencers. With the law I can trust that SMIs do not post content that is immoral and unnecessary.

Male participant Focus Group 1

The Swedish marketing law requires SMIs and companies to be truthful about collaborations and this was appreciated by the participants. The participants also expressed that the regulations were something that was appreciated as it made influencer marketing feel more tangible. SMIs that clearly follows marketing regulations felt according to the participants to be more trustworthy as they felt more authentic. One participant mentioned that the marketing laws could clean up explicit content that many SMIs sometimes post on their social media. The general opinion of the participants were that SMIs are easier to trust if they followed the marketing laws and regulations.

6.2 Analysis and Discussion

In this section we will analyze and discuss the empirical results. The analysis will be based on the theoretical background presented in the second chapter. The analysis will be divided into two categories: *The consumer brand perception of companies* and *the consumers perception of SMIs*.

6.2.1 Consumer Brand Perception towards Companies

The empirical data regarding the influence of SMIs demonstrates similar patterns as discussed in previous studies. Consumers were found to admire SMIs and this admiration made the consumers keener towards brands that SMIs recommended, which also Djarafova and Rushworth (2017) imply. Consumers looked to the opinions of SMIs when they were choosing between different brands. If a brand was recommended by a SMI, it was regarded to be better, which aligns with Lv et al. (2013) who note that consumers refer to SMIs when they are in the process of evaluating a brand. Social identity was also found to be important for how consumers perceived brands. The consumers of this study, followed SMIs because they had similar characteristics as themselves and preferred brands that they used, which Booth & Matic (2011) imply. However, some consumers argued that their perception of a brand were not influenced by SMIs, rather it was the product of the brand that made up their perception. Consumers were also negative towards brands that collaborated with SMIs

that had different characteristics and ideologies than their own, which aligns with Ghorban (2012) who implies that a consumer's brand attitude can change from positive to negative based on what the brand communicates.

Consumers who followed SMIs were found to be influenced by the content they shared on social media. The SMIs give consumers visual imagery on how products they recommend looks like and functions. The visual content made consumers aware and positive towards brands they did not know of before. The visual imagery the SMI shares with their followers, connects to what Shaouf *et al.* (2016) say about visual content leading to positive brand attitudes and brand interest. Mikhailitchenko *et al.* (2009) argue that visual imagery in advertising is more effective if it is matched to target groups social identities. The results show that consumers are more likely to be positive towards a brand if a SMI they relate to, recommends a brand with visual imagery.

The results indicate that trust and truthfulness are characteristics SMIs need to influence consumer brand perceptions in paid partnerships. The consumers of the study, mentioned the importance of trust and truthfulness when companies collaborated with SMIs. Liu *et al* (2015) imply that SMIs that have gained a lot of trust have bigger impact on consumers. The consumers who trusted the SMIs they followed, also trusted the brand the SMI followed. The perception consumers had of SMIs transcend onto companies they collaborate with. This study also show that consumers are negative towards companies that cooperate with disliked SMIs, which aligns with Praxmarer and Gierl (2009) who imply that a single marketing campaign that consumers get exposed to can shape their whole perception of a brand. Lubomira (2008) says that damaged trust often is the result of individuals being untruthful. SMIs were disliked by consumers because of scandals where they had been untruthful, which resulted in distrust.

6.2.2 The Consumers Perception of SMIs

The influence of SMIs was found to be very important for how consumers perceive SMIs, especially if the SMI had the similar social identities as the consumers, which Booth and Matic (2011) also imply. Another factor that influenced consumers brand perception was the trusted expertise that the SMIs had. The consumers of the study felt that most SMIs

likely are knowledgeable about the products they recommend, and this expertise makes SMIs more preferable. SMIs are therefore more influential when they are perceived as knowledgeable about products they recommend, which aligns with what Winter and Neubaum (2016) say. Consumers perceive SMIs as more credible and authentic when they share the same social identities as them and when they perceive them as knowledgeable. Therefore, when SMIs disclose paid partnerships they need to be influential to be perceived as credible and authentic, which also Bougoure et al. (2016) imply. It is evident that the influence of SMIs is important for how consumers perceive SMIs because it trumps outside factors such as paid partnerships. However, it was also found that many SMIs recommend products outside of their area of knowledge. These SMIs were perceived as “sellouts” and too commercialized, which the participants did not appreciate.

Furthermore, the content that SMIs shares on their social media was also found to be influential for how consumers perceived SMIs and companies. When SMIs disclose paid partnerships, consumers argued for how SMIs should share the message. The consumers of this study, felt more positive towards SMIs if the content they shared was more personalized, this aligns with Hsu, Lin and Chiang (2013) who imply that SMIs with personalized content are more trusted than mass corporations. Uzunoglu and Kip (2014) also imply that personalized content from SMIs can make consumers feel that the content is directed towards them personally. The recommendations SMIs make in paid partnerships were better appreciated by consumers if it was original, rather than content that were directly scripted from companies. Over commercialized posts were not appreciated because the participants did not know if the SMI truly liked the product or not.

Another result found was that consumers perceived that they had some kind of a relationship with the SMIs. The participants saw SMIs as role models and therefore identified with them. Jaakonmäki et al. (2017) explain how SMIs can interact with consumers on a deeper level. It is indicative that the perceived relationship that the participants had with SMIs was found to be based on trust. The participants discussed how they had followed some SMIs for a longer period, which made them trust the content and messages of SMIs. The trust was built on the consistency in the content and messages that the SMI had conveyed over the period that the participants had followed them. Consistency was appreciated by consumers and connects to what Anker (2016) mentions about

consistency creating trust. It was further found that truthfulness also was an important characteristic in influencing how consumers perceive SMIs. The participants discussed how truthfulness made them trust the SMI more. Most of the participants were positive towards SMIs if the SMIs disclosed paid partnerships and were transparent with their collaboration. The perceived truthfulness of a SMI made the participants trust a SMI more. In the discussion, it was also found that many SMIs were open with their collaborations and the purpose to why they choose to work with a specific company. The openness was appreciated by the participants because it gave them knowledge if a SMI were biased or not.

7. Conclusion

In this last section, a summary of the thesis followed by concluding remarks and different implications for the study are presented. The aim with this section is to describe the purpose with this thesis and to answer the research question. Lastly, possible future research hints will be presented.

7.1 Summary of thesis

This thesis aimed to explore how consumers perceived brands when social media influencers (SMIs) disclosed that they had paid partnerships. In order to understand, how SMIs influence consumers and how consumer perception is formed, several theories regarding SMIs and consumer brand perception were applied throughout the thesis. The research question for this thesis was thus: How do consumers perceive brands when social media influencers disclose paid partnerships?

By using an abductive approach, we were able to analyze existing ideas and theories concerning the research aim and discover new interesting findings and provide a framework in relation to empirical data. The findings were then collected based on a conceptual model that described how marketing regulations guidelines the way SMIs act and communicate towards their followers and how the *influence of SMI, trust, content* and *truthfulness* can influence consumers brand perception. The brand perception was then analyzed from consumers brand perception toward companies and consumers perception toward SMIs. To gather the findings and see if the conceptual model could be implemented in the qualitative study, two focus groups were conducted. The focus groups were conducted by using semi-structured interviews. The ideas of the question were taken from the conceptual model where the different themes: *influence of SMI, trust, content* and *truthfulness* were constructed. The empirical data was then discussed and analyzed.

7.2 Concluding Remarks

The main results found in this exploratory study showed that consumer brand perception was influenced when SMIs disclosed that they were in a paid partnership with a company. Consumers brand perception towards both the company and the SMI was shaped in disclosed paid partnerships. When SMIs disclosed that they were in a paid partnership, the consumer brand perception was influenced by the communication and characteristics of SMIs.

The influence of SMIs and content are the communication factors that influenced the consumer brand perception. Consumers are more influenced by SMIs with similar social identities and SMIs that they perceive as knowledgeable. Consumers showed preference towards brands that SMIs recommended because of the positive perception they had of SMIs who they felt were influential. The SMIs that are perceived as more influential are therefore also perceived positively by consumers. The positive perception of SMIs transcends to companies who also get perceived positively. However, there were some consumers that did not care for which SMIs companies collaborated with and based their brand perception on the companies' products. The content SMIs shared with their followers also positively affected consumers brand perception. SMIs use brands and showcase them visually on Instagram. Consumers follow SMIs because they look up to them and are therefore keener towards brands that SMIs post on social media. The content needs to be personalized as consumers were negative towards posts that are too commercialized.

Trust and truthfulness are the characteristics factors that influenced consumers brand perception. SMIs built the trust of consumers because they are humans, which are easier to relate to than companies. SMIs were found to be perceived as trustable if they were consistent with what they posted on social media. Another thing that consumers felt built trust was truthfulness. SMIs that were open and honest with their reviews and recommendations of products were perceived as trustable. The characteristics of SMIs were important for consumers because they would not appreciate companies that collaborated with SMIs they did not like.

To conclude, what consumers perceived of SMIs transcended onto companies they collaborated with. It is therefore important for companies who want to reach specific target groups with influencer marketing to choose SMIs that are perceived well. The brands of companies will also be perceived well if the SMI they collaborate with is. The posts of paid partnerships also need to be considered because it captures the consumers interests.

7.3 Theoretical Contribution

The aim of this study has been to explore how consumers perceive brands when SMIs disclose paid partnerships. Previous research has only focused on how SMIs generally can shape brand perception. The focus of the researches has been on the characteristics and influence of SMIs as factors that affect brand perception (Booth & Matic, 2011; Liu, 2014; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). SMIs and how they affect brand image, attitude and credibility is also something that has been previously researched. Furthermore, truthfulness in marketing has also been researched. However, with influencer marketing becoming bigger and traditional media becoming more ignored the need for transparency has emerged. The Swedish government has adapted by implementing regulations and guidelines for SMIs and companies. This study can therefore be of academic value as it explores the consumer brand perception together with the phenomena of marketing regulations that influences SMIs. The characteristics of SMIs analyzed by previous researches such as *influence of SMI*, *content*, *trust* and *truthfulness* have been included in the research as factors that shape consumer brand perception when SMIs disclose paid partnerships. The inclusion of the different factors has contributed to a study that can be studied further using more or different factors.

7.4 Practical Implications

There are several practical implications and contributions found in this thesis. Firstly, the practical implications of this thesis are in the field of SMIs and influencer marketing. Companies and SMIs that are affected by Swedish marketing regulations could use this study when they decide to collaborate with each other. The characteristics of the SMI such as *trust*, and *truthfulness* are important for how the brand and SMI will be perceived by consumers. For companies, this study can be useful when they assess which SMI they

should collaborate with. For SMIs, they can try to alter their image and how they convey the messages they share on social media to expand and create better brand value. Therefore, can this study contribute with a deeper understanding of how consumers evaluate brands based on the influence SMIs have over their followers. Hsu, Lin and Chiang (2013) mention the importance of personalized content, and this can for example be of use for companies and SMIs when they strategize on how the paid partnerships should be disclosed.

Secondly, many companies still see transparency and truthfulness in marketing as something that can hurt their brand negatively because they do not want to show their weaknesses. The perceptions that the companies have of transparency, make some companies enhance or even lie about their brands (Anker, 2016). This study can contribute with information about how consumers perceive truthfulness when companies collaborate with SMIs. This thesis can therefore contribute to better ethics in marketing as companies will be more transparent and do not feel to have the need to lie to consumers.

7.5 Critical Review and Further Research

This thesis has been conducted with two focus groups that consisted of 12 students in Kristianstad University. For future research, there are several different unexplored fields within this topic that could be examined. Firstly, the study could be examined in a larger scale. As the authors Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009) also mention, researches that are conducted in larger scales with additional focus groups, give larger observational sample and can therefore strengthen and contribute to more general conclusions (Saunders, Lewis, & Adrian, 2012). Secondly, for future research the study could be further examined by looking into differences in brand perception depending on gender. In this thesis, 7 females and 5 males participated in the focus groups where the genders were mixed in each focus group. To see if there is any difference between the answers depending on gender, focus groups with only women and focus groups with only men and lastly focus groups with men and women could be implemented.

Furthermore, future research could also conduct more social media platforms since this thesis has only concentrated on consumers that have followed SMIs on Instagram. For

instance, blogs and YouTube are also popular platforms where SMIs publish and market brands. Lastly, the research could also examine consumers with less social media engagement and see what factors influences their brand perception.

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Appendix 1 - Focus Group Interview Guide, English/Swedish

Opening Questions

- *Why do you follow social media influencers? Motivate*
Varför följer du sociala medier influencers på sociala medier? Varför? Motivera
- *How do you feel about SMIs collaborating with brands? Why?*
Vad är din åsikt om SMIs som samarbetar med varumärken? Why?

Influence of SMIs

- *How do you perceive brands SMIs disclose a paid partnership with a company? Why? Motivate*
Hur upplever du SMIs när de avslöjar att de ingår i ett betalt samarbete med ett företag? Varför? Motivera
- *Similar social identities and expertise have been found to be factors that make SMIs influential do you agree with this? Why? Motivate*
Liknande sociala identiteter och expertis är faktorer som påvisat att SMIs är inflytelserika håller du med om detta? Varför? Motivera

Trust

- *Do you trust SMIs when they disclose paid partnerships?*
Litar du på SMIs när de visar att de ingår i ett betalt samarbete?
How does this affect your perception of them and companies?
Hur påverkas din uppfattning av SMIs och företag?

Truthfulness

- *When SMIs recommend a product are they always truthful?*
När SMIs rekommenderar en produkt tror du att de alltid är ärliga?
How does this affect your perception towards SMIs/companies?
Hur påverkas din uppfattning av SMIs/företag?
If they are paid to recommend a product, do they always like the product do you think?
Om de är betalda att rekommendera en produkt, tror du att de alltid gillar produkten?

Content

- *How does the content that SMIs shares on their social media affect your perception of them and brands?*
Hur påverkas din uppfattning av varumärken av innehållet SMIs de delar på sina sociala medier?
- *How do you perceive companies when they collaborate with SMIs?*
Hur upplever du företag när de samarbetar med SMIs?