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Attitudes towards Instagram micro-celebrities and their influence on consumers' purchasing decisions

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Abstract

Background – Nowadays companies tend to use social media platforms as a marketing tool for building brand awareness and brand recognition, as well as for attracting and communicating with customers. One of the most popular and rapidly growing platforms used by marketers is Instagram. Instagram has created a new type of celebrity landscape, so called “micro-celebrity”. In this research a micro-celebrity is defined as people who are famous on social media and have some followers in certain areas. There is a noticeable trend of using micro-celebrities to promote products in three different ways: product placement, discount code offering, and advice giving. However, there is a little research done on the topic of micro-celebrity endorsement, and it is therefore not clear how effective this type of promotion is.

Purpose – This research attempts to determine customer's attitudes towards micro-celebrities, promotion done by them, and their influencing factors, as well as the influence of micro-celebrities on customers purchase decision making process.

Method & Theory – In order to conduct this research, we started by collecting secondary data about Instagram, micro-celebrities, celebrity endorsement, and gym industry in Sweden. We chose the Theory of reasoned action (TRA) and Consumer decision making process as the main theories. Qualitative research was chosen for this particular study, and four focus groups with 24 participants were conducted. Participants were selected by using a convenience sampling method. The discussion guide was developed based on the above mentioned TRA and Consumer decision making process.

Main Findings – This research found that consumers' attitude towards micro-celebrities as mostly positive. The main influencing factor that defined the positive attitude was trustworthiness of the micro-celebrity. The attitude towards promotion done by micro-celebrities varied according to the type of marketing tool: discount code was recognized as the most favorable, followed by advice giving, and product placement was found to be the least favorable one. Positive attitude towards promotional tools was influenced by trustworthiness of the micro-celebrity, and negative attitude was influenced by too pushy promotion and too obvious marketing. Discount code offering seemed to be the most effective tool in terms of influencing the purchasing process. Even though the attitude towards product placement was more negative compared to advice giving, product placement had more influence on consumers' purchasing decision than advice giving.

“ATTITUDE IS A LITTLE THING THAT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE.”

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to introduce the reader to the topics of social media usage in marketing, gymwear industry in Sweden, and micro-celebrity endorsement. Background, problem discussion, as well as the purpose and research questions of the study are presented. The reasoning for choosing a particular research perspective is explained, followed by contribution, delimitations, disposition, and definitions.

1.1 Background

Social media is a rapidly growing marketing tool. Companies today try to profit from the use of social media resources (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). Organizations use Social Media Networks (SMNs) in order to assure a positive interaction between users and promote a positive “word of mouth”. Research showed that building brand awareness in SMNs increases the “word of mouth” traffic (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015). What is specific about social media marketing is that it has a two-way communication. Engagement is the key to success (Howard, Mangold & Johnston, 2014). The most important focuses for organizations are to connect with the audience, grow business, and build a strong brand. It is crucial to establish a virtually interactive environment which would enable users to exchange reliable and rich information whenever needed. There are number of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, online blogs, etc., which are used by marketers. One of the most used social media platform is Instagram (Raice & Spencer, 2012). According to the same source, using Instagram as marketing tool is becoming a large part of social media strategies applied by companies. Different strategies are applied in order to reach the desired goal. An assessment of US social media users found the top 25 most effective marketing tactics where sponsored social media messages on Instagram were ranked third which was higher than Facebook and Twitter, but the first two were on Periscope and Snapchat (eMarketer, 2015).

With 400 million active monthly users (Instagram, 2015), Instagram has become the biggest and the most attractive social media platform for marketers in order to place their product or indirect marketing. This indicates that Instagram can be a profitable social media platform for companies if they apply the correct strategy to their service or product in order to increase their market share and bottom-line (Botha, 2014). One of those strategies can be micro-celebrity endorsement.

Instagram has created a new type of celebrity known as “micro-celebrities” and has increased their visibility tremendously. According to Clarewells (2014), micro-celebrities are people who are not famous in the common way, but who use social media to create a fan-base, gaining followers outside of their circle of friends and acquaintances, and use it as avenue for celebrity (Clarewells, 2014). Companies can select micro-celebrities who are famous in her/his field and pay them to place their products on their personal site/account and state the benefits about the products and encourage their followers to purchase. Through the alliance with a micro-celebrity, the companies desire to build a more direct relationship with consumers in their everyday life. Therefore, they believe that engaging with micro-celebrities can help build a more authentic connection with their target customers (Cultureshop, 2015). Therefore deliver their message to their target audience, given by the number of followers of that particular micro-celebrity which can be very high (hundreds, thousands, or millions).

There are number of industries that use micro-celebrities on Instagram as a marketing tool. In this particular study we shed the light on one of those industries- the gym industry.

The gym market is one of the fastest growing markets around the world (Finance, 2014). Therefore, it is an enormous market with strong competition, and it is also a very dynamic one, affected by trends and fashion. According to Balfour (2015), the days when people were simply wearing an old shirt and shorts to exercise are over. In the fitness and fashion conscious world today, people are willing to pay money to buy new and fashionable gym outfits - often as much as they pay for a formal dress (Balfour, 2015). Euromonitor International research analyst David McGoldrick (2015) says: “Fitness wear is the hot thing right now.”

The significant increase of sales growth in gym industry increases the traffic of new arrivals of the market. According to Finance (2014) the global gym market in 2013 was US\$263 billion, of which US\$53 billion was in Western Europe. Sales were estimated to have grown 6.9% from 2012 to 2013, and the projected growth is for a 7.5% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) through 2017. The focus of this paper is on the Swedish gym industry due to the fact that in Western Europe, Sweden is known as one of the world’s most active sporting nations, where about half of the population is a member of a sports club and Swedes are amongst the highest spenders on sporting goods in Europe (Berglund, 2011). According to the same research, from 2009 to 2010, the sports retail in Sweden grew by 8% to SEK 13.6 billion.

More than 60 % of people exercise regularly in Sweden (Göteborgs Posten, 2015). Statistics from the population of Stockholm showed that one out of four habitants exercise regularly and some of them do it even daily (Svenska Dagbladet, 2016). This makes around 400,000 inhabitants who exercise on a regular basis. 47 % of the Swedish population go to the gym at least twice a week. The results are similar for men and women, high and low income respondents and 50 billion SEK (Swedish crown) are spent annually on gym-related products by the Swedish population (Göteborgs Posten, 2014). Most children and young people in Sweden exercise at least once a week (Demoskop, 2012). According to the same source, there is a correlation between the household income and the amount of hours spent in the gym: the higher the income, the more people train. The popularity of gym increased dramatically during the last decades, which can be seen from the fact that in 1980 only each 14th of female respondents in their fifties were exercising on a regular basis (Göteborgs Posten, 2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that nowadays gym interest in Sweden is distributed among regions, genders, age groups, and others. The gym industry in Sweden has a huge potential for marketers.

Ongoing increases in sales growth of the gym industry and the way that customers are using gym clothes together with society pressure of being considered sportive, have created the perception in the industry as being an attractive field for entrepreneurs (Finance, 2014).

1.2 Problem discussion

As was mentioned above, the increasing of sales in the gym industry increase the competition in the industry as well as influences the way companies promote their products in order to attract more customers and increase their sales. For instance, traditional marketing may shift to social media marketing and micro-celebrity endorsement instead of traditional celebrity endorsement (Boyd & Marwick, 2011).

Even though there is a noticeable trend of micro-celebrities endorsement, it is still not clear how efficient this way of promoting products is, and there are limited reported studies of customers' attitude towards this form of marketing. Most social media marketing research has focused on Facebook and Twitter, but there has not been significant research reported on the effect of Instagram as a marketing tool, and especially the use of micro-celebrities. Moreover, it is not certain, if micro-celebrity endorsement can influence consumers' purchase intention and behavior.

However, due to the lack of research conducted in the field, this makes it difficult for marketing managers to make a clear decision of whether or not to use micro-celebrities in product promotion. Therefore, there is a gap in understanding the value of Instagram micro-celebrities endorsement in marketing which has to be understood better.

1.3 Research Purpose

In the past, companies mainly used traditional celebrities to endorse a product, brand or service, but nowadays companies are increasingly using normal ‘cyber famous’ people - “micro-celebrities” - instead. The use of micro-celebrities is a new trend in the marketing industry and can differ in some aspects from traditional celebrities. An analysis of the marketing strategy that is used on Instagram is relevant and can provide insight of their usefulness and the effectiveness for companies who are willing to use this strategy. Thus, the aim is to determine the effectiveness of using micro-celebrities as marketing tool and access customer’s attitude towards micro-celebrities on Instagram and promotion done by them, as well as what influences this kind of attitude. Moreover, another focus of this study will be on the role of micro-celebrities on consumers’ purchase decision in the marketing.

There are different kinds of purposes that can be achieved in a study. This particular research was chosen to have a combination of evaluative and explanatory purposes. This research sheds light on consumers’ behavior patterns which can be regarded as an evaluative purpose, but at the same time it aims to explain the reasoning behind particular attitudes, which is a characteristic as explanatory purpose (Saunders et al., 2009).

1.4 Research Questions

Following the previously mentioned trends and existing gap in micro-celebrity endorsement, the current research is concentrate on the following three research questions:

RQ1: *What is the consumer’s attitude towards micro-celebrities on Instagram?*

RQ2: *What are the influencing factors of consumers’ attitude towards micro-celebrities and the promotion done by them?*

RQ3: *Which stages of customer’s purchase decision do micro-celebrities influence?*

To be able to answer these questions, four focus group interviews were conducted with 24 people who are users of Instagram, actively go to gym and follow micro-celebrities on Instagram.

1.5 Perspective

There are different perspectives that can be taken into consideration when conducting a research. It was decided for this particular study to have consumers' perspective on using micro-celebrities as a marketing tool due to the purpose of finding how consumers perceive this concept. Therefore, opinions of people who follow Instagram micro-celebrities were considered as the most relevant interpretation.

1.6 Contribution

With this particular study, the authors are aiming to contribute towards an existing gap in the field of micro-celebrities' endorsement. Both academia and marketing managers can benefit from the knowledge gained from the research. To academia the following study benefits from the perspective of covering the gap that exists in the field of influence of micro-celebrities in marketing, since not much of previous research exists. In terms of advantages for marketing managers, they can use the research in order to make a thoughtful decision of whether or not to use micro-celebrities in their product promotions. Looking at the current trends in the field of micro-celebrities, and by knowing what drives customers to make purchases based on promotion through micro-celebrities, marketing managers can develop a plan of what kind of micro-celebrities seem the most effective and what type of people are influenced by promotions by micro-celebrities. The outcomes of this study can provide a clearer picture of successful Instagram micro-celebrity endorsement.

1.7 Delimitations

The focus of this thesis is online micro-celebrities. In this particular research, we refer to the term of "micro-celebrities" as social-media users with high amount of followers (thousands and more). It is also relevant to mention that the approach of using micro-celebrities may vary depending on the different types of organizations or products. Due to the increasing concern of personal look and health issues, in this particular research, the focus is on gym industry. A gap was found in the general understanding of how the role of Instagram micro-celebrities' endorsement can influence customers' purchase decisions, particularly active Instagram users in Sweden. Since this group of people can be considered as a particular segment, the findings may be different in other markets. However, some of the companies that would like to focus on a segment similar to this one might find the study useful for building their marketing strategies.

1.8 Disposition

The structure of this thesis is divided into six chapters: Introduction, Theoretical Framework,

Methodology and Method, Empirical Findings and Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusions. The introduction gives the general overview of the key concepts of the particular study as well as the purpose of the research. Theoretical framework presents the literature background of the research. Methodology and method explains the process of collecting and analyzing the data. Empirical findings and analysis are structured based on applying the collected theories into the information gained during the process of data collection. Discussion summarizes the main findings of answering the research questions. Conclusions offer practical and academic implication of findings, providing the limitations of the research, and makes suggestions for future studies in the field (see Figure 1).

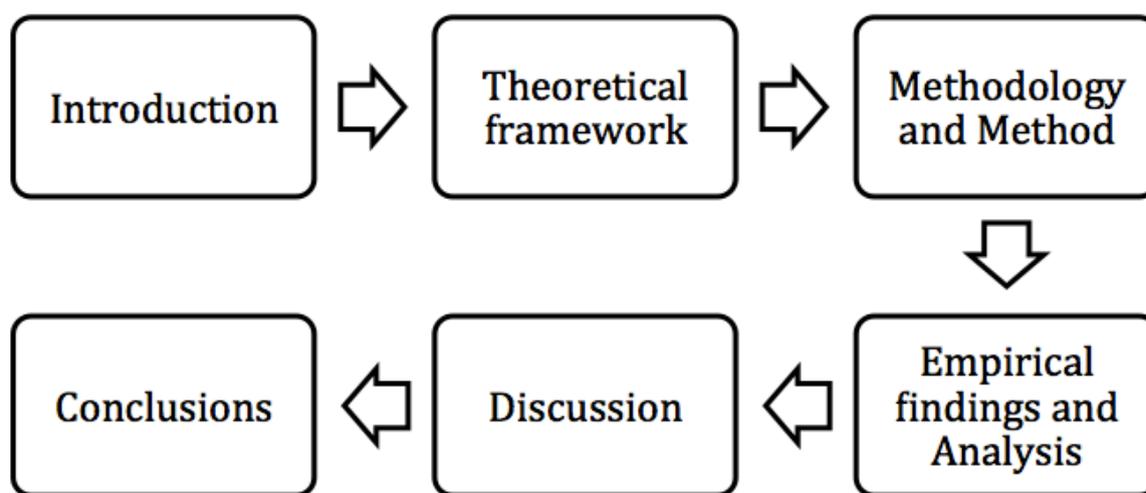


Figure 1. Outline of the thesis.

1.9 Definitions

Instagram: a smartphone photo-sharing app with the purpose of taking a photo and sharing it after applying different filters in the social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr (Benjamin, 2012).

Social media: a broad category or genre of communications media which occasion or enable social interaction among groups of people, whether they are known to each other or strangers, localized in the same place or geographically dispersed (Oxford reference, 2016).

Micro-celebrities: individuals who use social media as a mechanism for creating their audience and people who are not famous in the common way (Clarewells, 2014).

Celebrity endorsement: an advertisement or promotion featuring testimonials for products by a

well-known personality from the field of entertainment, sports, and politics (Oxford reference, 2016)

Theory of reasoned action (TRA): a theory that investigates a relationship between behavioral intention, attitude towards a behavior and subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975).

Consumer decision making process: process that involves the following five stages: need/problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase decision (Solomon, Askegaard & Hogg, 2010).

2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter the relevant literature review is presented. The section starts with the gym industry in Sweden, followed by the use of social media, which includes shift in internet usage and Instagram. Afterwards, celebrity endorsement part is divided into traditional and micro-celebrity. Furthermore, theory of reasoned action and consumer decision making process are introduced. The chapter concludes with a short summary of the whole literature review.

Due to the increasing importance of the gym industry today, the theoretical framework will begin by introducing the industrial trends. A case of Sweden is taken into consideration because of the fact that it is the nation that does gym the most in Europe (My News Desk, 2014). The gym industry is known as the one that uses social media marketing on a big scale (Dagens Nyheter, 2014). Thus, the use of social media follows in this chapter together with introducing the shift of internet use and the literature review of one of the most highly growing social media platforms, Instagram. Furthermore, the concept of celebrity endorsement is presented in order to shed light on some traditional techniques that marketers use. This section is followed by introducing the concept of micro-celebrities' which are the focus of this study.

Next, two theoretical models are presented: Theory of reasoned action (TRA) and Consumer decision making process. These two models were selected since the purpose of this particular research is to determine the attitudes towards micro-celebrities and their influence on the purchasing behavior. TRA can be helpful in defining consumers' attitudes towards micro- celebrities and the products promoted by them, and Consumer decision making process helps understanding which stages consumers go through when it comes to making a purchase.

In order to collect the relevant literatures, it was decided to use the university library website, Google scholar database, and hard-copied books. When limiting the amount of sources to those that can be relevant to this particular study, the keywords were used such as “gym industry”, “social media”, “Instagram”, “celebrity endorsement”, “social media marketing”, “micro-celebrities”, “theory of reasoned action”, and “consumer decision making process”. The sources that were chosen were proved to be reliable in most of the cases by choosing the articles, books, and similar publications to be peer-reviewed. However, when searching for sources that could shed some light on micro-celebrities as a phenomenon, some sources that were chosen were not peer-reviewed due to the novelty of the concept and lack of available information in databases. The newer sources had a priority when selecting which publications to use.

2.1 Gym Industry in Sweden

The growth of gym exercise in Sweden was noticed in 1990s together with the rise of few gym franchises such as Friskis & Svettis (Andreasson & Johansson, 2014). According to the same source, the way of running gym businesses in Sweden has changed as well. Instead of traditional weight-lifting, gyms have become locations where one can get all types of exercise for different people, genders, and age groups. Sweden is the nation that does gym the most in Europe (My News Desk, 2014). Seven out of ten Swedes have reported that they exercise at least weekly (The Local, 2014). According to the same source, only 9 % of the Swedish population never do sport, and the gym industry collects a high level of profit in the country.

According to The Local (2014), one of the reasons why Swedes are exercising so often is the easy accessibility of gyms across the country. The number of gyms available in Sweden is growing rapidly. Sweden's largest gym corporation, Friskis & Svettis, has increased its number of members by 2.4 % from 2013 to 2014 (SVT, 2014). Private gyms are growing their numbers as well. There is a significant social pressure of exercising arising from society in Sweden, since there is a tendency to have a well-defined, muscled body, which motivates people to go to gym more often (SVT, 2014).

Two main motivations to go to gym were found: to keep oneself in shape and because it gives satisfaction. Other benefits from doing gym are the following: diminished risk of getting diabetes, improved balance and coordination, improved immune system (Demoskop, 2012).

The interest in gym can be seen within media and blog posts (Dagens Nyheter, 2014). The Swedish environment itself creates conditions for people to train due to their high income, good life-work balance, and many opportunities of doing gym. Therefore, habitants are likely to grab those opportunities and promote them to friends and even further circles. Through different communication channels, the same message is delivered that exercising is important due to many reasons (Dagens Nyheter, 2014). One of them is social media, therefore, the introduction of current trends in use of social media is presented further.

2.2 The Use of Social Media

Annual growth in the number of active social media users has increased by more than 10% (+ 211 million) and in the number of active mobile social users by 17% (+283 million) since January 2015 (Chaffey, 2015). Influenced by this statistics, many companies have changed

the way of conducting their business and have adapted social media strategies in their business. One of the classic examples of growth of social media usage is the world's biggest sportswear company, Nike, marketing strategy. The spending on Nike's traditional media marketing has decreased, but the budget for social media marketing on the other hand almost doubled from 2000 to 2012 (Fortune, 2012).

Companies use social media platforms for many different reasons such as in order to attract new customers (91%), to cultivate relationships with customers (86%), to increase awareness of their brand (82%) or to communicate the brand online (73%) (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). Also, it is mostly used by business-to-consumer (B2C) companies and not only affects brand awareness, but also increases sales revenue and ROI considerably (Mirchandani, 2012).

Hopkins (2013) stated that different social media platforms give different opportunities for companies to cultivate relationship with their customers. Twitter provides a mechanism for real-time updates and interactivity, while Facebook provides a platform to enrich consumer experiences. However, usage of social media is not always useful, it presents some challenges for companies. Marketers say the top five challenges for companies and marketers in their social media effort is to measure return on investment (ROI), linking social activities to business outcomes, developing a social media strategy, lack of control, and difficulties identifying true customers (Headly, 2015).

On the other hand, from the customer's perspectives of social media, 85% of users strongly agree that it is important for companies to interact with customers via Social network sites (SNS) and 93% of them think that companies should have a social media account (Michaelidou, 2011).

According to Filo et al. (2015), customers interact on social media as part of their decision-making-process. Twitter, Instagram and Facebook seem appealing to customers since they facilitate purchasing decisions about certain products or services, information search, and post-purchase evaluation (Duncan & Barczik, 2012). Past research suggested that when consumers search information, they trust word-of-mouth information more than product attributed information. This belief occurs because word-of-mouth information is considered as trustworthy and it is based on other people's experience (Herr et al., 1991). Moreover, the information provided by others play major role for evaluating pre-purchase information when it comes to buying decision (Beatty & Smith, 1987). This concept has been termed

“electronic word of mouth” (eWOM) which is part of the general shift in internet usage that is presented in the next section.

2.1.1 Shift in internet usage

A recent study was completed exploring the role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the consumer decision-making process (Chen, Nguyen, Klaus & Wu, 2015). The researchers found that high-involvement purchases (such as a holiday) are more likely to be influenced by eWOM, and positive reviews also impact significantly on their purchase decision. Therefore, images were found to be a key factor influencing the purchase decision-making process.

Consumer’s way of gathering information has significantly changed because of the Internet. The study of the global digital influence index (2012) found that 89% of consumers use Internet searches in order to make purchase decision (Fleishman-Hillard, 2012). Currently, when people need to gather more information, they use a phrase “Google it” which explains the importance of the Internet (Cosenza, Solomon & Kwon, 2015).

However, before starting the process of further information search consumers get the initial knowledge about the product. Often this can come from different social media platforms. One of the most popular ones in terms of products’ marketing is Instagram (Dusee, 2016).

2.1.2 Instagram

Instagram was initially introduced as a smartphone photo-sharing app with the purpose of taking a photo and sharing it after applying different filters in the social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr (Benjamin, 2012). Today the platform can be used on all different operation systems and is suitable for almost all kinds of devices (Raice & Spencer, 2012). It is one of the most popular social media applications and was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and launched on the 6th of October 2010 (Instagram, 2015). Instagram currently has 400 million monthly active users and more than 75 million of them are active daily (Instagram, 2016). The incredibly fast growth of the application was noticed since the time it was founded (Raice & Spencer, 2012); and the speed of the growth is nothing but aggressive (Mint, 2015). Instagram continues to grow among smartphone users (Ruggless, 2013). The popularity of this social media channel increases by 8346 people daily. 28% of Instagram fans check their page multiple times a day and spend approximately 28 minutes on this platform every day.

The application is known as being a relatively new but already a popular way of communicating

with consumers (Manikonda, Hu & Kamphambpati, 2014) and a perfect platform in order to reach young consumers (Dusee, 2016).

Instagram has become a platform where one can create an “ideal” image of her- or himself (Sunstrum, 2014). Users spend plenty of time on creating an online self-image. The concept of “ideal self” means creating a profile of a person we would like to be (Solomon et al., 2010). This goes in correlation with the idea of every person’s willingness to realize his or her full potential.

Micro-celebrities with more than 1 million followers post on average 8.58 posts each day, and 20% of marketers use them on Instagram as a marketing tool (Instagram, 2015). Therefore, the concept of micro-celebrities notion can be regarded as the one similar to traditional celebrity endorsement. However, there are still few differences: they are cheaper than regular celebrities and more available.

2.3 Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrities are more than just representation of competence and attractiveness; they are complex bundles of cultural meaning (McCracken, 1989). Therefore, celebrity endorsement is a practice that has been actively used by marketers. It is important to choose the right person who would be able to represent the product in the right way, and who can create the trust among potential consumers (Solomon et al., 2010).

2.3.1 Traditional celebrity

Celebrity endorsement practice requires preliminary knowledge and experience in order to be successful. Some combinations of celebrities and products are better than others due to how obvious is the “fit” (Till & Bussler, 1998). Physical attractiveness, celebrity source likability, and participant product involvement influence the success of celebrity endorsement (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Attractiveness of a particular celebrity plays a huge role in attractiveness of a product (White, 2009). However, this becomes less effective when a product does not intend to enhance one’s attractiveness. In such cases other characteristics of an endorser (such as competence) become important. In general, expertise is usually more significant than attractiveness when celebrities are used for marketing purposes (Till & Bussler, 1998). Moreover, trustworthiness of the celebrity is a vital factor for predicting consumer evaluation of their effectiveness as endorser (Ilicic & Webster, 2011). The number of follower’s influences consumer’s perceived credibility of a celebrity (Jin & Phua, 2014).

Celebrities’ endorsement effectiveness depends on the cultural meaning from which they are

endowed. The endorsement process itself depends on the symbolic properties of the endorser. The secret of successful celebrity endorsement is largely cultural. Such an approach expands the traditional view of celebrity endorsers' characteristics (McCracken, 1989).

Consumers mostly have positive attitudes towards celebrity endorsement which are perceived to be attention-gaining, likeable and impactful (O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998). However, they are not necessarily convincing and believable. Two main characteristics of an endorser that were found the most significant are credibility and expertise. The celebrities' character and credibility play a significant role in marketing and advertising in how persuasive a particular message is (Ohanian, 1990). This factor can vary for consumers from different demographic and geographic groups. A person who is considered to be credible in one part of the world might not have the same reputation elsewhere (Ohanian, 1990). Same goes for differences in perceiving celebrities as credible among consumers of different age, gender, religion, and other.

It is also expected from the consumers' side that there is a correlation between the product and the perceived image of celebrity endorser (O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998). Celebrities have to possess expertise in product categories consistent with their public image and their lifestyle. If there is a "match", then companies will be willing to pay a large amount of money in order to have a big name endorsing their brand.

In the conditions of high involvement, arguments but not celebrities influence consumers' attitudes, whereas in the cases of low involvement, celebrities but not arguments influence the attitude (Kahle & Homer, 1985). However, the involvement effect may be sensitive to variations.

Companies tend to invest a lot into celebrity endorsement (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995). Celebrities make advertisements believable and influence the image recall (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995). Since the purpose of this study is to shed the light on the concept of micro-celebrity endorsement which is similar to traditional celebrity endorsement, the following section introduces this topic.

2.3.2 Micro-celebrities

Nowadays the dream of becoming "famous" can be achieved much easier than before. For a major part of the 20th century, in order to become "famous", it was necessary to have a wide network of influential people. Becoming famous no longer requires having a special talent as long as you have power on social media. The power can be measured by people's

number of followers on their social media account. Fame comes into power, and expanding that power is as easy as uploading or texting a thought through a pc or mobile device (Ecmercer, 2015).

According to Boyd and Marwick (2011), social media has created an opportunity for people to become famous and noticeable among a group of users within a particular channel. Micro-celebrities are the newly emerged concept of individuals competing for a fan-base and awareness in social media (Boyd & Marwick, 2011). Today, in order to become a micro-celebrity, people are required to have the abilities to catch the attention of social-media users (Cultureshop, 2015). Another definition of micro-celebrity was suggested by Clarewells (2014) where micro-celebrities are individuals who use social media as a mechanism for creating their audience and people who are not famous in the common way. Therefore, micro-celebrities would not have been ‘famous’ without social media which works as their mechanism for becoming well-known (Clarewells, 2014). These people do not need to have millions of followers to be micro-celebrities, but may have much smaller number of followers.

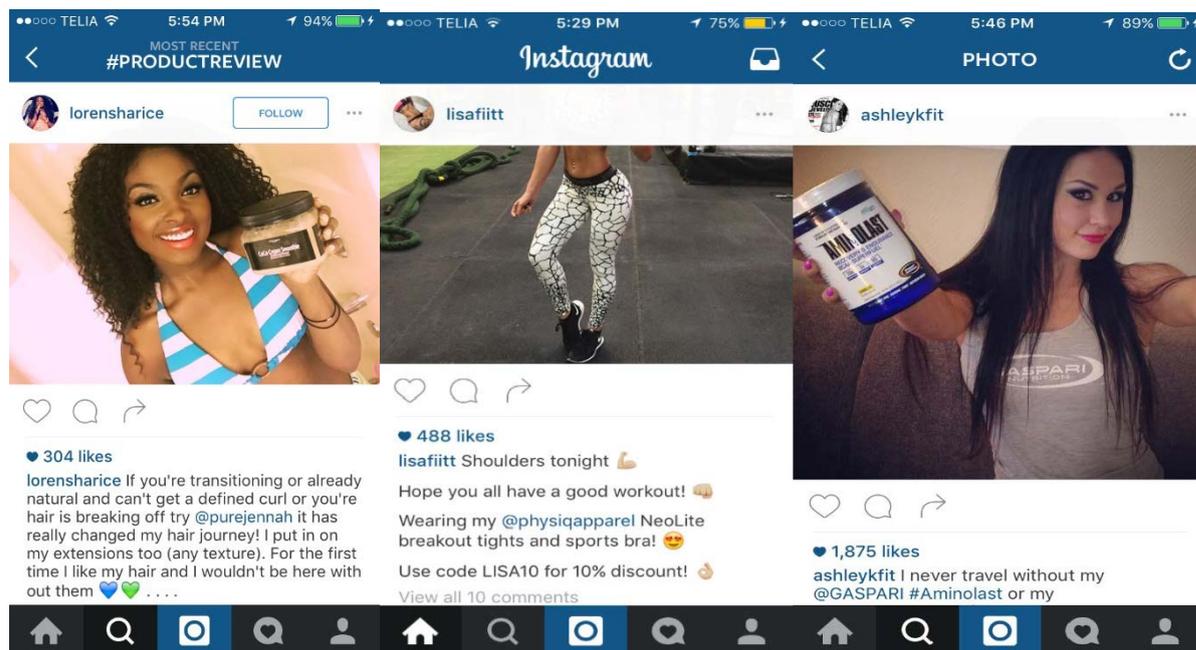
Micro-celebrities are changing the way of being recognized as famous (Senft, 2012). Senft (2012) states that micro-celebrities are changing the dynamics of interaction, where the receivers are both an audience and a community, where the audience is just listening while the community has an interaction. This was the reason for Senft (2008) to introduce the term “strange familiarity” in the first place, based on (Milgram et al., 1992) who used the term “familiar strangers” about people who recognize each other without knowing each other. Senft (2012) suggests that micro-celebrities become such “strange familiarity” by being readily accessible, perhaps sharing personal information, yet being relatively unapproachable. This is quite well demonstrated by Senft (2008) who states that celebrities may be judged by whether it is “real”, while micro-celebrities are instead judged on ethical standards based on who made the micro-celebrity who they are, i.e.; a more personal connection. This means that connection to the audience is much more critical for a web-celebrity instead of the predetermined separation which is the case for celebrities.

Micro-celebrities have existed in a variety of fields including fitness models, athletes, fashion men/women and food bloggers etc. (Clarewells, 2014). Individuals of all levels try to build their brand image through the use of social media platforms (Kozinets & Cerone, 2014). However, in order to stay relevant, the content should follow some kind of strategy. The identity of a micro-celebrity is a product to be consumed by others (Page, 2012). One of the best examples of micro-celebrity is Jen Selter, who has become famous for her nicely shaped

body and her exercises, with 8.6 million followers on Instagram and other social platforms (Instagram, 2016). Accordingly, some of micro-celebrities have been developing their own brands based on their social popularity. Take Alexandra Bring (Instagram micro-celebrity) for example, a Swedish girl who is a fitness trainer with 649.000 followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2016). She is the founder of the Bringsportswear Company and promotes her company's products on her Instagram account. Many other sportswear companies have engaged micro-celebrities, including the major players in the market – Nike and Adidas. For example: Swedish AIM'N sportswear company works with micro- celebrity Linn Löwes, who is a fitness trainer and has 45000 followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2016).

There are different ways of using micro-celebrities in order to promote the products: *discount code offering*, *product placement*, and *giving an advice*. Discounts offered by micro-celebrities ensure that there is a direct link between a person spending money on particular product and the influence of micro-celebrity Product placement is when an advertised product appears on a picture with a hidden intention to catch a follower's attention. Advises from micro-celebrities usually imply that a person has tried several similar products and has chosen the one that is the best (see Illustration 1).

Illustration 1. Examples of micro-celebrities as a marketing tool (Instagram, 2016).



Social media and mainstream media (such as TV, newspapers, gossip magazines etc.) are parallel to each other and they both can have their own celebrities (Boyd & Marwick, 2011). Traditional celebrities endorse product or service through both social media and mainstream media, whereas micro-celebrities mostly endorse via social media. According

to Boyd and Marwick (2011), the connection between micro- and traditional celebrities can be seen from their willingness of increasing the influence, fan base and the interest towards them. Micro- celebrities' value moves from a functional to a symbolic one (Kozinets & Cerone, 2014). The study done on Twitter (Bruns, Highfield & Burgess, 2011) has shown that micro-celebrities have a noticeable influence on users. Twitter micro-celebrities have shown a significant influence on covering issues arising in society. Twitter hashtags allow the audience to find a micro-celebrity which shares the same interests. At the meantime, hashtags allow to navigate the discussions on Twitter.

In order to investigate on the attitude towards micro-celebrities and the promotion done by them, Theory of reasoned action was selected for the reason of helping the research.

2.4 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) is one of most widely used theories to predict individual's behavior based on social factors and is effectively applied to consumer behaviors that are voluntary behaviors (Sheppard et al., 1988). The theory was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975) to investigate a relationship between behavioral intention, attitude towards a behavior and subjective norms. It focuses on the influences of relevant factors on the consumer's intention to behave a certain way towards consumption and attempts to explain human behavior (i.e. why people buy Apple over Samsung, Nike leggings over Adidas, losing weight etc.) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975), but not outcomes or results of the behavior (Sheppard et al., 1988).

In TRA, an intention is referred as a plan or likelihood that someone behaves in a particular way in a specific situation. Beliefs about the behavior lead to consequences, the evaluation of consequences behavior leads to an attitude about the behavior (see Figure 2). If consumers have a positive attitude towards a certain behavior, it increases the likelihood of performing behavior (Albarracin et al., 2001).

Ajzen and Fishbein (1975) stated that the attitude components can be classified as attitude towards a physical object, attitude towards behavior or performing the behavior. According to TRA, there are 2 major components to predict consumer's purchase intention- attitudes and subjective norms. First predictor of intention is an attitude towards a behavior, which is determined by people's negative or positive general evaluation of performing a certain behavior (Elena et al., 2013). Subjective norms are the second predictor of intention and it is determined as social influences of person's behavior and relevant others' perception that one

should or should not perform the behavior (Isaid & Faisal, 2015). Generally, subjective norms can be determined as the sum of opinion of relevant others' perception and motivation of individuals comply to perform (Solomon et al.,2010).

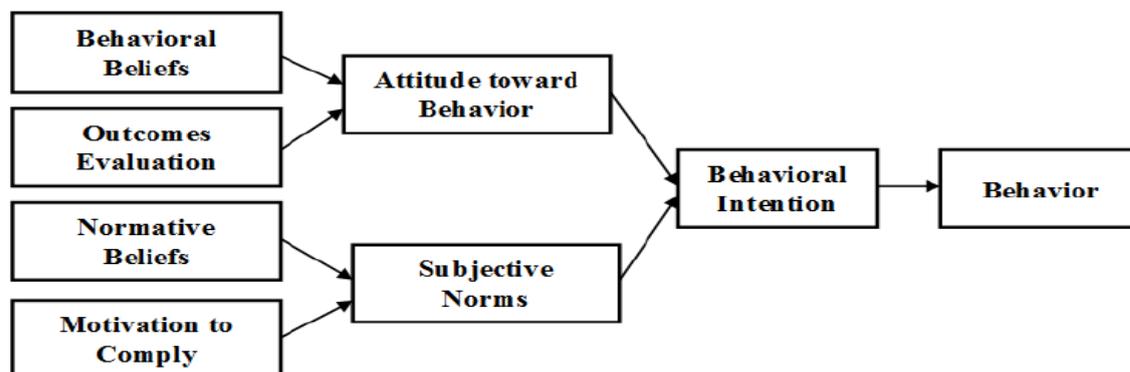


Figure 2. The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975).

In the field of marketing, TRA is mostly used to explain consumer's purchase behavior based on their intention (Ming-Tien et al., 2010). Furthermore, some industries such as banking, education, and health and information technology use the model to predict an individual's behavior (Mishra et al., 2014).

A previous study on TRA stated that attitude and subjective norms are the important factors to predict consumer's behavior (Kim, Lee & Yoon, 2015). However, according to Shih and Fang (2004) attitude significantly controls consumers' intention, while subjective norm does not. Furthermore, they stated that the behavioral intention also significantly affects actual use (Shih & Fang, 2004). A recent study by Kim et al. (2015) suggests expanding the normative part of TRA by analyzing personal descriptive and injunctive norms in order to predict the behavior of people on social media. Personal descriptive norms refer to how an individual considers his/her behavior being popular by friends and family, while personal injunctive norms describe how the family/friends consider how the individual approves of their behavior (Bergstrom & Neighbors, 2006).

Therefore, a study on beliefs about the use of Instagram was made (Ting, Ming & Run, 2015) and the research findings were applied into TRA. This exploratory study states that the beliefs about the behavior (which is one of the components of attitude on TRA) are generally defined as specific statements about the attributes of the objects. Furthermore, five categories of behavioral beliefs were found in this particular study: personal gratification, features' usefulness, role of socializing, product information and entertainment. For example, the features' usefulness is a behavioral belief as it explains the attributes or characteristics of

Instagram and why it is useful. Therefore, study found that the relevant others (subjective norm of TRA) have six factors, which are siblings, relatives, close friends/peers, friends in general, Facebook friends and application reviewers.

After shedding the light on TRA which was selected for determining the attitudes of consumers, it was decided to use the Consumer decision making process theory to analyze the influence of micro-celebrities on consumers' purchase decision. The theory is presented in the following section.

2.5 The consumer decision making process

Purchase is just one part of the larger buying process which begins with the need for recognition and is followed by several other steps (see Figure 3) (Kotler, Armstrong & Parment, 2016). It is suggested that consumers go through a series of stages when they are in need of purchasing a particular product or service. This process is called the consumer decision-making process (Solomon et al., 2010) and it involves the following five stages: need/problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase decision.

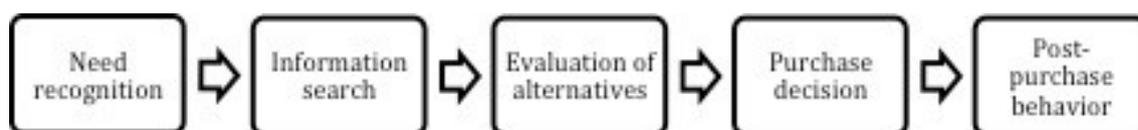


Figure 3. Stages in consumer decision making process (Solomon et al., 2010).

The decision-making process model suggests that consumers can go through five stages in their purchasing process. However, depending on the importance of the purchase decision, consumers often skip some of the stages and the amount of effort they put into each stage can vary (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Below, all the stages of decision making process are introduced in a more detailed way.

2.5.1 Need recognition

The very first step in the decision-making process is the need/problem recognition. Problem recognition occurs when a consumer realizes or recognizes his/her needs from the difference between an ideal state (the way consumers would like a situation to be) and an actual state (the real situation consumers perceive as now) (Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieter, 2012). The larger the difference between the actual state and the ideal state, the higher is the level of motivation

to act. When consumers do not see a problem, they will have a low motivation to act. Solomon et al. (2010) stated that in this stage marketers attempt to create primary demands and convince consumers to solve their problem by buying a product.

On top of that, problem recognition can be triggered by internal stimuli (something from within that gets you doing something such as feeling hungry or thirsty) or external stimuli (an external factor that makes you do something) (Kotler et al., 2016).

2.5.3 Information search

The second stage of the consumer decision-making process is information search. In this stage consumers begin by collecting more information concerning the solution to her/his need (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004). Consumers search information through either one of four different types of sources (Kotler et al., 2016):

- Personal sources: family, friends, neighbors, or similar.
- Commercial sources: web-sites, advertising, salesperson, displays.
- Public sources: mass media.
- Experiential sources: examining and using the product or service.

These sources of information can have a different relative influence depending on the product and the consumer. Among all these sources, consumers usually acquire the most information from commercial sources (Kotler & Keller, 2012). However, personal sources tend to be the most decisive source because they are generally trusted more and they are more “real”.

While consumers gather information, they become aware of competing brands and their characteristics. Kotler and Keller (2012) stated that there is a total set of brands that are available on the market when consumers search for information about certain products. The consumers are aware of some of these brands - called the awareness set. Next, the consumer will consider a smaller set of these brands after learning more about the product attributes, which is called the consideration set. However, only a few will be in the consumer’s choice set that he/she will make his/her decision based on. Total sets of brands are presented in the information search stage, awareness set and consideration set are in evaluation of alternatives stage, and choice set and decision set are in purchase stage (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Successive sets involved in consumer decision making (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

2.5.3 Evaluation of alternatives

At this stage of the decision-making process, consumers evaluate the information gathered in the information search stage and rank the brands, reduce the total set of brands into consideration set and choice set (Kotler & Keller, 2012) and form their purchase intention in order to make a choice. The way consumers evaluate purchase alternatives depends on their personality and the purchasing situation (Kotler et al., 2016). For example: in some cases, consumers use careful calculations and logical thinking while at other times they do little or no evaluation. Also, consumers evaluate the brands or product attributes in terms of the functional or psychological benefits that they offer (Solomon et al., 2010). Furthermore, consumers' choice of attributes can be influenced by a particular consumer's attitude towards the brand or the product and level of involvement in their purchase (Jobber, 2007).

2.5.4 Purchase

Purchase is the fourth stage of the decision-making process. In the evaluation stage, consumers form an intention to buy the brand from the choice set, whereas at this stage consumers make a decision to buy the most favored brand and select a brand that fulfill their desired needs from the choice set of brands and buy it (Kotler & Keller, 2012). However, according to Kotler and Keller (2012) there are in general two factors at this stage that might affect the purchase intention before consumers make a purchase: attitudes of others and unanticipated situational factors such as lack of funds, unavailability of the brand and even close competitor brand might drop its price etc. Furthermore, physiological needs, uncertain product availability and price are the three interlinked factors that are ones of the most crucial

in purchase decision (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2010). Also perceived risk is one of the reasons consumers postpone, change or avoid a purchase (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Another factor that might occur while making a decision of whether or not to purchase a certain product through internet is the lack of ability to sense a product (see it in the real life, touch it) (Trocchia & Janda, 2003).

Kotler and Keller (2012) explained that attitude of others depends on two criteria: (1) how intensive the other person's negative attitude toward our preferred alternative is and (2) how motivated the person is to comply the wishes of others. However, Azjen and Fishbein (2005) stated in their theory of reasoned action model, the purchase intention is the result of consequences of subjective norms and attitude towards behavior. They suggested that the subjective norms are determined by the belief of important others and the motivation to comply.

2.5.5 Post-purchase behavior

This is the final stage of the consumer decision-making process. At this stage, consumers will evaluate the purchase they made. Consumers are either satisfied or dissatisfied with their purchase for the moment. The consumer's expectations and the product's perceived performance are the key factors determining consumer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2016). A product meeting expectations creates a satisfied consumer, but one that does not creates a disappointing customer. The larger is the difference between performance and expectation, the larger is the dissatisfaction. Exceeding expectations makes the customer delighted. A satisfied customer is very likely to become a loyal and regular customer, whereas a dissatisfied customer may exclude the brand or product from awareness set of brand choice.

It is again important to note that consumers being satisfied or dissatisfied depends on whether they have high or low involvement in the purchase. Some researchers (Jobber, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Kotler et al., 2016; Kotler, Armstrong & Parment, 2012) have explained that these stages of the decision-making process are not equally significant for the purchase decision. Jobber (2007) suggested that all stages in the consumer decision-making process (Fig. 2) are not always performed equally by each individual. The stages that are used depend on the consumer's purchase involvement. Low-involvement purchases do not always include all stages; for example when buying fruits and beverages. On the other hand, high-involvement purchases might be the result of following all the stages, such as buying a house or a car.

2.6 Summary

In the past chapter different topics relevant to the particular research were presented. Firstly, general concepts of gym industry in Sweden and current trends in social media, including Instagram and shift in Internet usage were introduced. Secondly, the literature review of traditional celebrity endorsement and micro-celebrities phenomenon were presented. This was done in order for a reader to become familiar with the main aspects of the particular study.

Lastly, Theory of reasoned action and Consumer decision making process were introduced. Those two models were later combined into one (see section 4.2). This was done in order to facilitate answering of the research questions in terms of data collection and analysis. The more detailed overview of data collection and analysis methods is discussed in the following chapter.

3 Methodology and Method

This part of the manuscript sheds the light on the techniques of collecting and analyzing the data that were used in the research. The choices of methodology and method are described. Theoretical and practical aspects of choices are explained. The process of sampling, investigating and analyzing is further presented. The chapter concludes by the criticism of the research conducted by the following four aspects: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Hereby, the practical steps of the research process are presented. The logical steps of choosing the methodology and method are explained. The reasoning for choosing a particular philosophy, followed by research approach and design are introduced. After the general methodology is set, the further procedure of data collection and analysis are presented.

3.1 Methodology

Prior to structuring the data collection itself, an overview of the research methodology was performed. In this section the choices of philosophy, approach, and design are defended.

3.1.1 Research philosophy

There are different kinds of philosophies that a research can have: *positivism*, *realism*, *interpretivism*, and *pragmatism* (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). *Positivism* includes working with an observable reality; *Realism* is related to scientific enquiry; *Interpretivism* stands for understanding the differences between people in their roles as social actors; *Pragmatism* philosophy puts in focus the research question as the most important element of the study.

Hermeneutics concept is the most appropriate one for this particular study which is a synonym of interpretational philosophy (Bruns, 1984). *Interpretivism* was considered the most suitable due to the fact that the interpretation of people's opinion on the subject was used in the study.

3.1.2 Research approach

In this particular work an abductive research approach was chosen. Before explaining the reasoning behind choosing this particular way of research, it was decided to shed a light on other types of approaches that exist in order to see the reasoning of not choosing them. Deductive approach is a scientific way of research where a particular hypothesis is in focus (Saunders et al., 2009). Inductive approach is an opposite one. According to Saunders et al. (2009), inductive approach is based on collecting empirical data and creating a theory based on the data collected in order to make a sense out of it.

According to Thomas (2010), abduction is an anatomy of case normativity and it relies on phronesis (does not rely on development of theory). The abductive research approach was implemented in this particular manuscript. The reasoning behind this choice is that our findings can neither be regarded as typical, nor are the model to follow (Thomas, 2010). This study outcome is based on a weaker or stronger, yet generalization which is typical for abductive approach. The results and findings can be therefore interpreted. One more reason for choosing an abductive approach is because this particular study was aiming to find practical implications.

3.1.3 Research design

According to Kotler et al. (2012) deciding on research design is an important step of marketing research. There are three types of marketing research design which are used by marketers: descriptive, exploratory and causal research. Marketers use descriptive research design in order to describe things such as market potential for a product or the demographics or attitudes and behaviors of consumers who buy the product or service (Kotler et al., 2012). Causal research is used to determine the nature of cause-and-effect relationship. It is performed for forecasting result of what might happen if changes are made (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Exploratory research is done by marketers when they are lacking information and have limited knowledge about the research problem. This research is known as the most suitable way of gaining background information on a specific marketing issue that is not well understood by researchers. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to define new terms and existing concepts, to identify beliefs, opinion, attitudes and motivations towards a certain issue. In exploratory research, data analysis can be qualitative or quantitative.

As we mentioned earlier, nowadays there is a number of companies especially in gymwear industry using micro-celebrities to promote their product and service, but it is still not certain how effective this way of promoting products is, what consumer's attitude towards this form of marketing is, and if micro-celebrities really influence consumers to purchase a certain product. Also, there is a very limited number of researches done on this particular issue. In terms of these circumstances and based on our research purpose, this research's overall design was exploratory research. This particular study uses the qualitative research method.

3.2 Method

After deciding on the research philosophy, approach, and design the more technical details of data collection and analysis were provided. Criticism of the research concludes the Method part.

3.2.1 Choice of data collection

Primary data and secondary data were the main data sources of this research in order to achieve our purpose. We started our research by collecting secondary data in order to support the research purpose and got better understanding of the issue. Secondary data is data, which has already existed and collected by others for purpose other than the problem at the hand (Saunders et al., 2009). Compared to primary data, secondary data is readily available, cheap and fast way to obtain data. There is a number of secondary data sources that are available for researchers such as, academic literature, books, government publications, electronic sources, websites and social media. Primary data are the data that is directly collected by researchers first time for a specific problem at hand (Currie, 2005). Primary data can be either qualitative or quantitative (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The difference between these two particular methods is that quantitative method focuses of collecting numerical data to explain a particular phenomenon, whereas qualitative method focuses on gathering non-numeric data to understand marketing issue. Qualitative research provides ability to gain a rich and deep understanding of how people experience a particular research issue and gives opportunity to find out people's attitude, opinion, belief and perception of a certain research issue (Hox & Boeije, 2005). The three most common methods of collecting qualitative data are conducting focus group, in-depth interview and observation.

In this study qualitative research was done because the notion of qualitative research matches with our research purpose which was to determine the effectiveness of using micro-celebrities in marketing and assess customer's attitude, experiences, opinions and perspective towards micro-celebrities on Instagram. Focus group method was decided to be used. The reasons for using focus group were the following ones: the ability to compare views, perspectives, and experiences. Also interaction and group dynamics is essential, it widens a range of responses, activates latent details, and focus group releases inhibition of participants (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The dual moderator focus group type was used in this particular approach with one leading, and one assisting moderator. One is responsible for a smooth flow of the session, and another one is responsible for ensuring the coverage of all the issues.

3.2.2 Sampling

Sampling process is important part of any research design. It includes closely interrelated several steps (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). It begins by determining the target population and is followed by such steps, to develop the sampling frame, determine the sample size, to specify sampling technique, execute the sampling process and validate the sample. In the following paragraph, steps that are used in this research will be discussed.

According to Malhotra and Birks (2007), the target population is a particular group of individuals who have certain characteristics that researchers are interested in. The target population of this research were the people who are users of Instagram, follow micro-celebrities and do gym regularly in Sweden. There are no distinction between people regarding age, gender, nationality, and other factors. It is necessary to mention that the exact number of target population of this research is undefined due to the fact that there is no such statistics which shows the amount of people who regularly go to gym and follow Instagram micro-celebrities at the same time.

A sample is determined as subgroup of target population (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Determining the sampling size is the vital step of sampling process. Therefore, if a sample size is small it will not accurately represent the entire target population, on the other hand if a sample is too large it may require a lot of time and effort (Aghili, 2011). In this research data collection was done in Jonkoping, Sweden with the total amount of 4 focus group with 24 participants.

According to Malhotra and Birks (2007) there are numbers of sampling methods used by researchers and they can be classified into categories of either probability sampling or nonprobability sampling methods. The choice for using sampling method depends on purpose of the research. Probability sampling represents the methods that assures individuals in target population have equal probability of being selected. Nonprobability sampling method does not give chances to individuals in population being selected equally. This is the method where participants are selected because of their easy access and convenience (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). In order to perform focus group interview with our wanted qualities we chose to rely on a non-probability sampling method. A decision was made to recruit participants who go to gym and use Instagram in order to represent the target population. However, convenience sampling method is often biased in some way. The main

reason is self-selection bias which occurs when participants select themselves into the sample because they have a personal interest in this issue (Moule & Hek, 2011). This bias was not present in this research because the participants were selected based on judgment of the researchers and they were asked pre-questions before they participated in order to ensure that (1) they were users of Instagram (2) they follow micro-celebrities on Instagram (3) they do gym regularly, since research focused on a gym industry.

3.2.3 Procedure of data collection

3.2.3.1 Pilot interviews

Prior to running the focus groups, it was decided to run two test interviews in order to ensure the understandability of the questions. Two respondents were asked to evaluate the questions by their understandability, layout, and clarity according to Saunders et al. (2009) guidelines. The feedback was taken into consideration, and the questions were afterwards revised. Thus we ensured that the content provided during the focus groups sessions is easily comprehensive. All the pilot interviews were run using the same language as focus groups (English).

3.2.3.2 Details of focus groups

Four focus groups were conducted during the 16th, 18th, 22th, and 24th of March 2016, 80 % of the participants were recruited from Jönköping University 20 % were non-students. Research team members performed recruitment of participants by approaching personal contacts by e-mail, telephone and Facebook messenger. The invitation to the focus group meetings was delivered one week before each focus group meeting was conducted. A total of 117 people were approached and asked to participate and 24 agreed to participate. The participants were from 15 different countries, gender distribution was almost equal with a slightly bigger amount of male participants (see Table 1). Almost all of the participants go to gym regularly 2-5 times a week and have been training for more than one and a half year. All participants were user of Instagram and majority of them follow micro-celebrities in different industries such as fashion, food, technology, comedy and makeup but mostly gym.

Table 1. Details of focus groups.

	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3	Focus group 4
Number of participants (male)	6 (3)	6(3)	6(4)	6(3)
Nationality of participants	Sweden	Argentina	Sweden	Netherlands
	Canada	Iran	Sweden	China
	Iran	Pakistan	Sweden	Sweden
	Bulgaria	Netherlands	Mexico	Romania
	Germany	Estonia	Romania	Egypt/Sweden
	Romania	USA	Germany	Tajikistan
Moderator	Tsetsegsaikhan	Anastasija	Tsetsegsaikhan	Anastasija
Assistant moderator	Anastasija	Tsetsegsaikhan	Anastasija	Tsetsegsaikhan
Duration	1 hour 16 min	1 hour 8 min	1 hour 21 min	1 hour 11 min

The discussion guide (see Appendix 1) was developed based on the purpose of the study. It was structured into seven major dimensions such as background questions, attitude towards micro-celebrities, attitude towards product and service which is promoted by micro-celebrities, information gathering and recall, intention to buy product/ service, differentiation of subjective norm and behavior. Researchers developed figure/model based on combination of TRA and consumer purchase decision-making process model in order to analyse the empirical findings (see Figure 5) and each discussion guide dimensions were developed based on that. Discussion guide included open ended and semi-structured questions and was developed after a comprehensive review of relevant academic literature as well as after receiving the results from the pilot interviews. Each group discussion started with a short, structured introduction, which included a brief description of the ground rules, the purpose of the study and a short definition of “micro-celebrities”. In order to get an accurate answer, participants were presented with picture of micro-celebrity on Instagram

and screenshot of their way of promoting a product. All answers were listened carefully to and participants were given plenty of time to answer the questions thus ensuring that no pressure was placed upon them. The answers were recorded using digital recording device during each of these focus groups and used to assist with accurate and thorough data capture and subsequent analysis. The research team conducted debriefing sessions together shortly after each discussion, going over key points and clarifying the content of statements made by the participants. The focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. Detailed notes were taken from the recordings and analyzed for content themes, current ideas and key points.

3.2.4 Data analysis

Content data analysis was used to analyze the data. This method is one of the most used methods for analyzing qualitative research. Content analysis includes all methods that involve systematic and objective identification of certain characteristics or messages in order to understand those (Shields & Twycross, 2008). Using content analysis, each focus group interview was transcribed verbatim and detailed notes were taken from the recordings and the current ideas, key points, and emerging themes were listed. Relevant quotes were noted.

The analysis of the data was performed by interpreting the meanings of words, non-standardized data was classified into categories, and conceptualization was used during the process of analyzing. The audio recordings collected during the interviews, were typed down after the empirical data were collected. Themes, patterns, and relations of different key concepts were identified in the process of data analysis. Categorization of attitudes towards micro-celebrities and concepts related to a particular attitude were identified. In order to make sense of the data collected, each of the focus group conversations was summarized.

3.2.5 Criticism of the research

When conducting a research, one of the main struggles that researchers face is striving for the highest quality possible (Cope, 2014). Both quantitative and qualitative research have their different criteria of critique. In case of qualitative research there are four common components used to evaluate the research trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

3.2.5.1 Credibility

Credibility can be defined as an objectiveness of the data and the way researchers interpret it (Polit & Beck, 2012). In order to enhance the credibility of qualitative study, researchers have to use demonstration of engagement, observation of the methods, as well as audit trails (Cope, 2014). The engagement from the moderators' side was shown by enhancing the relaxing atmosphere among the participants, so that they would feel comfortable and open-minded. Each focus group started with a small talk in order to create a friendly feeling among the respondents. Focus groups were led according to the general question guide, however, when needed, some probing questions were asked in order to receive the in-depth knowledge on a specific aspect. Body language was used in order to observe the reaction of participants on a certain question or statement, and was used for follow-up and probing questions. For the reason of not missing any comments and answers provided by participants, an electronic device recorder was used. In order for participants to understand the whole concepts of the study, prior to the discussion they were presented with a picture of micro-celebrity on Instagram, and screenshot of their ways of promoting products.

3.2.5.2 Dependability

Dependability can be defined as consistency of data over similar conditions (Cope, 2014). It has to be achieved through data collection process taking place under similar conditions and participants, giving similar results. Participants were screened according to the criteria of being active gym goers and Instagram users. Therefore, it ensured the maintenance of the participants' profile among all the four focus groups. All four focus groups' settings were same; the process of data collection took place at Jönköping University in a separately booked rooms with a friendly atmosphere creation. All four focus groups gave similar results under the similar conditions.

3.2.5.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to ability of researchers to provide an unbiased data based on participant's responses, not on a subjective judgement of research performers (Cope, 2014). Examples of how conclusions and interpretations were made can prove the confirmability of a study. This can, for instance, be exhibited by quoting some answers and statements of participants. Each focus group was transcribed word by word, and the transcripts were used for the further data analysis. In this particular study, quotes are used in order to support the data analysis and conclusions made from it. The findings were used directly from the data.

3.2.5.4 Transferability

Transferability stands for an ability to apply the gained findings into other settings (Cope, 2014). This means that it should be easy for a reader to generalize the research done to the own experiences. Researcher should provide enough information in order for it to be recognized as “transferable”. In this particular research some suggestions for managerial and academic implications of findings were suggested which support the transferability of this work, and its ability to be applied for conditions other than the ones set during the study itself.

3.2.6 Limitations of method

Qualitative research method has its advantages and disadvantages (Malhotra & Bricks, 2007). There are certain limitations which go along with this type of research. It was acknowledged that this kind of studies provide readers with a generalized and holistic perspective instead of being a rule that can be applied to any situation. Another limitation connected with qualitative research method is unavoidable presence of the researchers during the data collection process, and therefore it might have an influence on the research participants (Saunders et al., 2009).

Convenience sampling method which was selected for this study has its limitations as well (Malhotra & Bricks, 2007). It can in some cases lead to under- or over-representation of a certain group within a sample. This undermines the ability to generalize accordingly to the chosen sample (Saunders et al., 2009).

4 Empirical Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical findings collected through all four focus group interviews and an analysis based on the combination model of TRA and consumer decision making process. The background information, the combined model, and model-related analysis are also presented.

The background information part provides all the basic information of all focus groups, such as importance of social media, purpose of and interest on Instagram, as well as experience of going to the gym. This type of data was collected in order to ensure that participants met the required criteria. The next part describes the use of combined model of Theory of reasoned action and Consumer decision making process. The most important findings are applied and analysed into the combined models' stages in order to facilitate answering the research purpose.

4.1 Background information

All the participants were active gym users and exercised from at least once a week to daily. They have all been working out for a while starting with the experience of one year to most of life. All of the participants can be regarded as active social media (or Instagram specifically) users.

Most of the participants mentioned that social media plays an important role in their lives. There are two ways of how they use those platforms: passive and active. Active mostly means staying connected to friends, creating posts, commenting on and sharing the posts of others while passive would mean being informed about events, reading news, educational purposes or checking others' posts. They were active users of Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. Participants said that the purpose of using Instagram is to get inspiration and motivation from other people, to follow celebrity and micro-celebrities in order to learn from them, and to be entertained, which are the passive ways of using Instagram, and staying connected with friends is an active way of using it.

The following topics are of the interest of the respondents: gym was the most popular one (which was quite expected given the general interest in gym among the target audience), then it comes fashion, educational pages, food, restaurants, comedy, makeup, and science.

4.2 The combined model

Below you can see a model which combines the two theories: Theory of reasoned action and the Consumer decision-making process (see Figure 5). It represents the flow which leads to buying a particular product. It starts with need recognition followed by information search, then the evaluation of alternatives, intention to buy a product (which is influenced by attitude and subjective norms), purchase and post-purchase behavior. This model combined both the Solomon et al. (2010) and Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) theories.

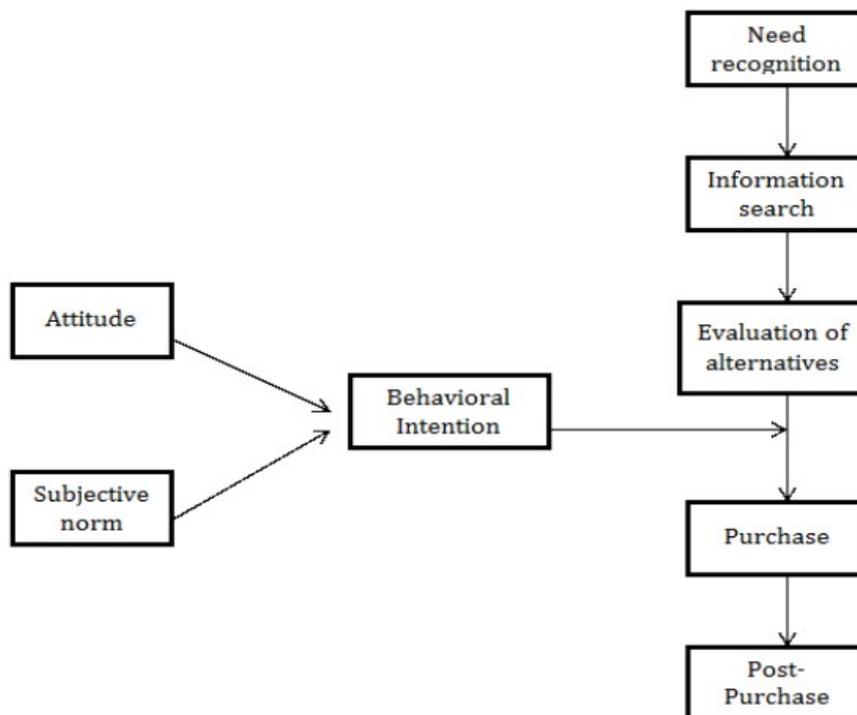


Figure 5. The combined model of TRA and Consumer purchase decision making process.

Solomon et al. (2010) see five stages which can be included in the consumer decision making process: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Sometimes consumer are likely to skip one of the stages. This depends on situations and the amount of effort that they want to put into a certain purchase decision.

Theory of reasoned action suggests that there are two factors that can influence our behavior: subjective norms and attitude towards behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Subjective norms represent the influence on a behavior by the relevant others' opinion of what a person should or should not do. Attitude towards behavior is people's general opinion about a certain type of behavior.

Ming-Tien et al. (2010) suggests that theory of reasoned action can be applied to the purchase behavior. It can explain what can influence an intention to buy a certain product. Therefore, intention to buy a product can be a missing step in the consumer decision making process which should take place before the actual purchase and after the evaluation of alternatives. In other words, purchase plays the role of behavior when combining TRA and Consumer decision making process. Intention, influenced by attitude and subjective norms is an important step before the actual purchase is performed. Therefore, it was seen as important step between the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the Consumer decision making process. Due to this, it was decided to combine the two models into one. The following section of analysis follows the stages of Combined model.

4.3 Model-related analysis

4.3.1 Need recognition

It was found during the data collection that after seeing a post by a micro-celebrity with a certain product, the need for purchasing the same product was triggered. Furthermore, the findings of this research shows that the micro-celebrities are regarded as external stimuli for provoking participants' need (Kotler et al., 2016). On this stage it was determined that micro-celebrities as a marketing tool create a push towards the desire of a product and need (Solomon et al., 2010). Among the participants there was confirmation of thesis that Instagram micro-celebrities might trigger need recognition, and this can be exemplified by quoting two typical answers: *"When I see a micro-celebrity wearing nice leggings, it reminds me that my leggings are washed out, or I need to buy same as hers"* *"Sometimes when I go to a store, I suddenly get this feeling that I want to buy a product, and then I might understand that I saw it on Instagram"*. This is well correlated with Hoyer et al. (2012) who mentions that the needs are our understanding of the difference between the desired and actual states. As can be seen from the research, participants can feel the difference between those two states as they see a promotion by a micro-celebrity. It was defined that depending on the urgency of the problem recognition, this might lead them to further information search (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004).

4.3.2 Information search

Most participants stated that after recognizing the need provoked by a micro-celebrity, further research on internet is taken into consideration in order to make their decision. The following ways of searching for more information were found: to go to micro-celebrities' blogs, read reviews, go to Google for more information, watch YouTube reviews, read online reviews (public sources (Kotler et al., 2016)); ask friends for a piece of advice (personal sources Kotler et al., 2016)); or go to the official website of a product (commercial source (Kotler et al., 2016)) in order to learn more about it. Some typical ways of information collection can be exemplified in the following quotes: *"Reviews really influence me in my purchasing decision since in this I have to trust someone else, but not one person, many people at the same time."* *"I watch different YouTube clips about the product and how people have used it."* As was mentioned in the study done by Chen et al. (2015), eWOM plays a huge role in consumers' decision making process.

Amongst the ways of searching information, the majority agreed that friends' advice play an important role when they look for more information on a certain product, which goes in correlation with the statement by Kotler et al. (2012) that friends opinions are usually considered as the most "real" which can be observed in the following quotes: *"I usually ask for the opinions of my friends"; "If I see a product promoted by a micro-celebrity, and I become interested, I would try to gather opinions from ordinary people, my friends."* Furthermore, searching for more information was found to be helpful to making the purchase decision. This finding is supported by the study by Fleishman-Hillard (2012) which showed the results that 89 % of customers use Internet in order to decide on a purchase. Different kinds of additional information gained through the information search stage are helping the potential customers to move from the total set of products to the decision set (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

4.3.3 Evaluation of alternatives

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), after gathering information about a certain product, consumers come to the phase of evaluating alternatives. In this research, the following factors were found to be as important when evaluating alternatives: price of the product, location-accessibility of product, shipment policy, quality of the product, its uniqueness, and attractiveness of promotion, level of urgency and riskiness of the purchase. These factors can be exemplified in the following quotes: *"I will not buy expensive things based on micro-celebrities' review. The factor for buying a product would be the level of urgency. If I see a product that I really need, maybe I will buy it."*; *"Something that can stop me is if I know that too many people will be using the product."* Kotler and Keller (2012) stated that attributes of interest of consumers vary by products. It could be location, atmosphere and price which correlates well with some findings of this

research.

4.3.4 Intention of behavior

In this section the findings of the current research were applied into the TRA based on two determinants: attitude towards the behavior and subjective norms. Attitude was divided into two parts which are attitude towards micro-celebrities in general and attitude towards products promoted by micro-celebrities.

4.3.4.1 Attitude

4.3.4.1.1 Attitude towards micro-celebrities

It was found that the following reasons were expressed as the main ones for following a particular micro-celebrity: educational purposes, cognitive learning, how many followers the micro-celebrity has (Jin & Phua, 2014), sharing similar interests, passion and values, living in the same location, first impression of their profile, and how they brand themselves. This is confirmed by following quotes mentioned by participants: *"I would choose somebody from whom I could learn"*; *"It's definitely content. Also, I follow some people who encourage me because we do the same things."* Also, the lifestyle of most micro-celebrities is believed to be reachable for individuals, which puts them somewhere in between ordinary people and celebrities. This finding is supported by Rogers (1983) statement that compatibility of the celebrities' lifestyle with the consumer's lifestyle is a crucial factor that influences consumer's attitude. This statement was illustrated in these quotes: *"I like following micro-celebrities because they are somewhere in between ordinary people and celebrities"*; *"They have reachable lifestyle. I believe that I can be same as her"*.

In this study it was found that almost all the participants had a positive attitude towards micro-celebrities. The main reason for causing positive or negative attitude amongst the respondents was depending on the perception of micro-celebrities' actions and their genuinity (Albarracin et al., 2001): If they felt that the micro-celebrity was promoting or giving advice to motivate people, or simply because he or she was being paid for passing on certain messages.

Amongst the factors causing a positive attitude towards following micro-celebrities, one major factor was found: trustworthiness of micro-celebrities (Ilicic & Webster, 2011). This finding can be supported by these quotes from the participants: *"If I feel something fake in their content, I lose my trust and interest following them"*; *"If they do it to make money or gain popularity, it is not good to follow them. It decreases trustworthiness"*. This result is coincident with the statement by Solomon (2010) that choosing a right person who could create trust among consumers is

vital for a company (Solomon, 2010). In addition to the main factor, a few more were found: providing a positive content and practical information about specific products or services, offering good value, providing useful pieces of advice, spreading positive vibes amongst the followers and giving inspiration and motivation to the followers (O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998). These findings are proven in the following quotes: *"I like if the person has positive and beneficial content"*; *"On social media when you see someone who is at a higher level than you, you get a feeling that you will learn something from them, but if you just follow your friends who are at the same level as you, you don't feel like they can teach you much."*

On the other hand, being too pushy was the main factor which created negative attitudes towards micro-celebrities. This statement was confirmed by the following quotes: *"When they are so pushy I would not like them. Pushy means their content does not seem to be real"*; *"If I see that they are pushed by companies too much I do not take them seriously"*. The other factors that were found are if micro-celebrities are conceived to only be acting in order to (1) gain popularity, (2) increase their profit, (3) content does not match with their real personality, or (4) it is not beneficial enough. The idea that micro-celebrities perform in order to increase their profit is supported by the findings by Temperley and Tangen (2006) that most celebrities endorse a product in order to increase their net profit. Consumers perceive it as celebrities doing it just because of money. Furthermore, it was additionally found that sometimes micro-celebrities can create mixed attitudes towards themselves. People can feel inspired by a certain micro-celebrity, but feel down due to the fact that it is very hard to achieve their level. This can be seen in the following quotes:

- *"Some micro-celebrities whom I follow really give me inspiration and show some tips, but other celebrities look very skinny or very beautiful so you can find yourself not beautiful enough"*
- *"They might influence you positively to go to the gym, but if you can't get result or don't look like one of them it creates negative impacts especially for teenagers"*

- *“Sometimes information you get will be biased because people are being paid to review a certain product then it is biased obviously.”*

4.3.4.1.2 Attitude towards promotion by micro-celebrities

It was noticed that companies use micro-celebrities in order to promote their products and/or services in three ways: by giving a piece of advice (comparing product with competitors' products), offering discount code and product placement.

The majority of the focus groups participants expressed that they have positive attitudes towards receiving a piece of advice on products or services and obtaining a discount, but not towards product placement.

About two thirds of the participants had a positive attitude towards getting a piece of advice, or product information from micro-celebrities. As was determined, this can often be a push for the further information search. However, it was found that they do not necessarily make a purchase decision based on those. This is exemplified in the following quotes: *“I like to get a piece of advice, but don't make my decision based on that. I go for further research on websites and Google”*; *“I will get that advice I will make my own decision”*.

The majority of the participants had a positive attitude towards discount codes promoted by micro-celebrities. It was found that need of certain product is provoked by discount codes, and that might lead to further information search. As well, this can be regarded as an advantage when evaluating alternatives. For a few of the participants, interest in a discount code was followed by actual use of the discount. Research showed that the intention to use the discount code depended on: the percentage of the discount, the product itself, and the initial price. These findings are supported by the following quotes: *“I would definitely use that but it's again depends on the product and price”*; *“If it's a big discount I would go for it. If it's small discount no maybe it's good for other people”*. A few participants had a rather neutral attitude towards discounts. The statement is supported by the following quotes: *“Many times I considered to buy some products with discount but that's still not push me to make decision”*; *“Even with the discount I wouldn't buy it”*.

The attitude towards product placement was strongly negative. Furthermore, this type of promotion was found by the participants to be too commercial. Some factors influenced the negative attitude to become less, such as honesty about the sponsorship and being open regarding being paid as mentioned in the following quotes: *“If I feel that it's a product placement*

I find it that it's too commercial"; "If you see some advice or product placement on someone's account you should be more curious about if it's trustworthy enough"; "If they tell honestly about the payment and sponsorship, I will ok with that". However, some participants admitted that they still bought a product due to the product placement on micro-celebrities' accounts.

Four vital elements were formulated that influence their attitude for making a decision on buying or not buying a product/service:

1. Customers trust in the micro-celebrity who is promoting the product is the most important (Ilicic & Webster, 2011). It was found that people's trust in micro-celebrities is earned by following a certain micro-celebrity for a certain amount of time and this gives them a clear knowledge about who they are, their lifestyle and pattern, which helps them to develop trust.
2. The product itself
3. The urgency they feel about the product/service
4. Their involvement or interest in the product/service (Kahle & Homer, 1985).

Examples of these factors are illustrated in following quotes: *"It depends on trust they have earned from me when it comes to a product"; "If I trust the person, I say yes"; "It depends on the product. If I don't like the product, I don't care".* Moreover, in addition to these important elements, some other minor factors were found that influence participants' attitude. For example, expertise in the product, performance over time and reconcilability makes followers /consumers/ consider buying the product or at least leads them to search for further information (Pugazhenth, 2014). A positive attitude towards these factors has an influence on whether the individual would buy the product or service (Albarracin et al., 2001).

However, a few general factors were found that make participants skeptical of a product/service promoted by a micro-celebrity:

1. Noticeable marketing
2. The promotion being too pushy
3. Content of micro-celebrity does not match with a product

These factors are explained in the following quotes: *"Many fitness people promote Oreo and Milka chocolate, of course they would never have that"; "I sincerely do not like it very much. It feels like those people are bribed to do that"; "If I feel that it's a product placement I find it that it's too commercial"; "If*

micro-celebrities try to sell some products I mostly believe that they are paid for that so I wouldn't consider to buy"; *"It makes me suspicious if they promote a product too much"*. Rashid, Nallamuthu, and Sidin (2002) also suggested that a match between celebrity spokesperson and product type is important element to consider when companies select the celebrity to endorse their product.

However, it was found that they would not necessarily be purchasing the product or service. Most of the participants said that they mostly become prompted to conduct further research on official web pages, blogs, etc. on the internet, even if they like the product/service. Among the participants there was a confirmation of this notion in the following quotes: *"I like to get a piece of advice, but don't make my decision based on that. I go for further research on websites and Google"* (Fleishman-Hillard, 2012).

Additionally, during the discussion about attitude towards a product and service, it was determined that teenagers are more naturally influenced by micro-celebrities when they make their purchasing decision because they are often searching for their own identity and determining who they are and they look at micro-celebrities as their role model. Thus, they are more likely to follow, buy and do whatever their role model does. This statement is exemplified in the following quotes:

- *"I think that teenage girls are easily influenced a lot by micro-celebrities"*
- *"It's very popular trend among young people to look up towards micro-celebrities"*
- *"Young people start to do the same as micro-celebrities so they look at them as at their role models"*

However, the study by Suri and Maneesh (2011) on the fashion industry in the US found that not all teenagers are influenced by celebrities and paid form of advertisement with celebrities is less effective than seeing their picture with casual clothes, or on the street.

4.3.4.2 Subjective norms

After exploring the participants' attitude towards micro-celebrities and attitude towards products and services promoted by them, the influence that others have on participants was investigated. The majority of participants seemed to be generally influenced by what their closest friends think or say when they need advice on buying or choosing something. This finding goes in correlation with the statement by Asiad and Faisal (2015) that stated relevant others opinion (close friends, relatives, etc.) plays important role in the decision making. The main reason for listening to them was that they believe that their opinions are more trustworthy than other people's opinions.

It was expressed that depending on the situation they may choose to listen to either micro-celebrity or friend based on how much they feel which one has more experience and/or knowledge. The statements were highlighted in quotes: *“Sometimes friends have a completely different taste, but sometimes they have identical with yours so whom you listen to really depends on how close your tastes are”*; *“Sometimes I am more likely to listen to micro-celebrities because they have more knowledge within a certain area. Maybe they found or know something that my friends don’t”*

It was found that some people look at micro-celebrities as their long-distance friends and they are prepared to listen to them over real friends. This is shown in the following quotes: *“Sometimes I feel like she is better than my real friends”*; *“I accept micro-celebrities, if they are professional I would say they are like my distance friends sometimes I accept them as my friends”*; *“Some micro-celebrities are like my distance friends”*. This finding matches with the study by Ting et al., (2015) who found that TRA have six influencing factors which are related to subjective norms; Facebook friends were one of them.

Around two thirds of participants felt that they are not influenced by the opinion of others when it comes to making their purchase decision (Shih & Fang 2004). The following quotes illustrate this statement: *“I wouldn’t buy the product because of a micro-celebrity, but it’s nice for the information”*.

4.3.5 Purchase

After the choice set of products is selected, consumers have to narrow their search down and decide on which product to buy (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Three types of behaviors were determined when it comes to purchase:

1. Actual purchase of the product promoted
2. Decline of buying a product
3. Purchase of a similar product, or an alternative

It was found that half of the participants bought a product promoted by micro-celebrities, such as protein, leggings, make-up, food, and books. Food was the most common purchase made. It was mentioned by some participants that it is affordable, and therefore it is worth trying. Some of the quotes that show examples of products bought are presented below:

- *“I bought leggings and protein, which has promoted by micro-celebrities.”*
- *“I have bought books from amazon.com. That book was suggested and recommended by micro-*

celebrities”

- *“Maybe the food because it’s affordable thing”.*

The types of promotions used in those cases were either product placement or discount codes’ offers.

Around one third admitted that they did not purchase a product based on micro-celebrities promotion. During the study it was understood that the intention of buying a concrete product did not always meet with the actual purchase.

Different barriers stopping the participants from making a purchase were detected, which are the price (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2010), shipment difficulties, lack of ability to try a product (Trocchia & Janda, 2003), inability, location and lack of urgency (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2010). The most important barrier towards buying a certain product was the price, which are proven in the following quotes: *“Price is important to me”*; *“The price plays a huge role”*; *“Price is the biggest factor”*; *“Price plays the most important role”*.

Shipment difficulties were found to be the second most important obstacle. Quotes that confirm this statements are:

- *“Shipment policy plays a huge role to me”*
- *“I do not like shipping things, especially from different country”*
- *“Difficulties in shipment policy can stop me from buying a product”*

These barriers were followed by lack of urgency; around a quarter of participants mentioned that they would not buy something if they do not feel an urgent need associated with a product. This arguments are illustrated by the following quotes: *“For me the main factor for buying a product would be the level of urgency”*; *“I will not buy a product if I do not feel a need for it.”*

Some participants mentioned that even though the product seemed attractive, they would prefer not to buy it because of lacking the opportunity to check it in the real life (Trocchia

& Janda, 2003). Confirmation of this statement was found in the quotes presented further: *“When it comes to clothing, I am more likely to try, if a product really fits. Therefore, I would rather buy these kinds of products offline.”*

There was also another category of participants, around a quarter of the total number who did not buy an actual product, but have got something similar to it. This can be found in the following statements expressed by participants: *“I bought products similar to the ones promoted, or like an alternative”*.

4.3.6 Post-purchase behavior

After the product was bought consumers move to post-purchase part. It was investigated whether or not they would recommend the product or service to a friend. When it comes to recommend the product which is promoted by micro-celebrities to friends, participants opinions can be separated into three categories:

4. Those who would recommend to the friends
5. Those who would not recommend to the friends unless they did not use the product and did not satisfied with the product
6. Those who would not recommend to the friends anyway

The categories were separated into three groups based on the following prevailing quotes: *“I would think about doing that, if I used that product and liked it. I would also give the source where I found the product.”*; *“I will for sure recommend the product, if I have bought it myself, and I am satisfied with it.”*

Consumers also evaluate their purchases and create an opinion about them which is exemplified by the following quote: *“I liked the product after the purchase. It satisfied my needs and was as expected.”* As Kotler et al. (2016) mentioned, meeting the expectations set for a product is an important factor for customer satisfaction.

4.4 Summary

This chapter discussed the empirical findings of the particular research and the analysis based on the Combined model was presented. All the findings were separately presented based on all the stages of TRA and Consumer purchase decision making process and supported by quotes mentioned by focus groups' participants. Most of the findings were supported by other researchers' work presented in Theoretical framework.

5 Conclusions

This chapter presents the most important findings which are related to the purpose of this research. Answers to all three research questions are provided.

This chapter presents the applications of the analysis into answering the research questions of this study, which are:

RQ1: *What is the consumer's attitude towards micro-celebrities on Instagram?*

RQ2: *What are the influencing factors of consumers' attitude towards micro-celebrities and promotion done by them?*

RQ3: *Which stages of customer's purchase decision do micro-celebrities influence?*

The answers for **RQ1** and **RQ2** are presented together in the section 5.1 while **RQ3** is discussed in section 5.2.

5.1 Consumer's attitudes towards micro-celebrities on Instagram and promotion done by them. Influencing factors

Overall, the research showed that consumers have positive attitude towards micro-celebrities as a phenomenon. However, three different attitudes can be defined towards micro-celebrities: positive, negative, and mixed, based on the influencing factors. The summary of influencing factors can be seen from the Table2.

Table 2. Consumer's attitude and influencing factors of attitude.

Attitude towards micro-celebrities	Positive	Negative	Mixed
Influencing factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Big amount of followers • Interests • Location • Good self-branding • Genuinity • Inspiration • Positive content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too pushy • Acting due to the selfish reasons • No match between personality and content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling inspired • Feeling down

In case of the attitude towards promotion on Instagram performed by micro-celebrities, it was found that it depended on the types of promotional tool. Discount code was perceived as the most appealing marketing tool which keeps the positive attitude until the purchase stage. Consumers did have a good attitude towards micro-celebrities giving advice; however, it was not strong enough to lead to a purchase. Product placement was perceived mostly negatively, but it did, however, sometimes lead to a further purchase. Factors influencing the consumers' attitude towards micro-celebrities' promotion were detected (see table 3). The summary of attitudes towards micro-celebrities' promotion can be seen below.

Table 3. Consumer's attitude towards promotion and influencing factors towards attitude of promotion.

Attitude towards micro-celebrity promotion	Positive	Negative
Influencing factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trustworthiness of micro-celebrity • Quality • Urgency • Product involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too pushy • Obvious marketing • No match between micro-celebrity and product

Additional factor that was found in this study on attitudes were age of the micro-celebrity followers. A majority seemed to believe that the younger audience, teenagers, are more likely to be influenced by micro-celebrities in comparison with the older audience. Also, it was found that friends play an important role when creating an intention to use a product promoted by micro-celebrities due to trustworthiness of their opinions. Sometimes, however, if a micro-celebrity has more experience in a certain area, they were more likely to be chosen as the ones more influentive in comparison with friends. There was also a common view identified which defines micro-celebrities as distance friends.

5.2 Influence of micro-celebrities on stages of customer's purchase decision

During the course of the current research, it was found that promoting a certain product by micro-celebrities influences customers purchase decisions in the following stages of the consumer decision making process (see Table 4), but it differs depending on the way of promoting the product.

The table below shows which stages are taken when promoting a product in different ways.

Table 4. Selected stages of promotions in consumer decision making process.

Stages of decision making process	The ways of promoting product by micro-celebrities		
	Product placement	Discount code offering	Giving advice
Need recognition	✓	✓	✓
Information search		✓	✓
Evaluation of alternatives		✓	
Purchase	✓	✓	
Post purchase			

Amongst the three ways of promoting product by micro-celebrities, offering discount code was found to be the most efficient one. Discount code offering promotional tool affected four stages of the decision making process model. It provokes customer's need, creates desire to use discount code, then it leads customers to search for further information about the discount code to find out whether it is worth using, or if other similar micro-celebrities offer a higher discount. Based on the evaluation of information, customers make their decision to purchase or not to purchase. However, it was clear that their decision depends on factors such as the product itself, the price of the product, urgency of the customer's need and amount of the discount.

Using micro-celebrities in order to do product placement was determined to go through two stages of the consumer decision making process: need recognition and purchase. It was clear that the customers' need is stimulated after seeing a product promoted as a product placement, but too obvious a product placement creates avoidance of product which leads them not to do further research about the product and to conduct an evaluation of alternatives. However, interestingly, purchases were made even when customers did not want to admit that it was because of product placement. It is probably due to the fact that even though participants seemed to be attracted by an aggressive marketing which led to the actual purchase, they did not want to confess to it. However, the research was able to recognize this pattern due to the fact that questions about attitude and purchase behavior were asked during different times, and did not follow one another. Therefore, this made it more difficult for focus groups' participants to hide their real behavior.

Giving advice by micro-celebrities on a specific product as marketing approach was taken as the first two stages of the consumer decision making process such as need recognition and information search. This provoked customers' need and moved them to go for further research through internet or official webpages of products, but it is certain that most customers do not make their purchase and purchasing decision solely based on this marketing tool.

6 Discussion

This part provides the summary of the research conducted in this thesis. Implications for managers are provided in order to show the relevance of the research as well as implications for academia. Limitations of the study are presented together with the suggestions for the future research.

The study presented in this thesis was conducted on the role of micro-celebrities on the attitudes of consumers' purchasing decision as a gap in the existing knowledge was identified. This current study conducted four focus groups with 24 participants and the findings were analyzed based on Combined model of theory of reasoned action and consumer purchase decision making process. Answers to the research questions were presented in Discussion chapter. Here we summarize the main findings:

- Consumers mostly had a positive attitude towards micro-celebrities as a phenomenon.
- The influencing factors of attitudes towards micro-celebrities were found.
- The attitude towards promotion done by micro-celebrities was found to be dependent on the type of marketing tool: discount code offering was found to be the most attractive tool of promotion done by micro-celebrities, followed by advice giving, and product placement was found to be least favorable.
- Influencing factors of attitudes towards promotional tools were found.
- Discount code offering influences most of the stages of consumer decision making process including the actual purchase; product placement and advice giving each influenced two stages of consumer's decision making process, however, out of those two only product placement influenced the actual purchase.
- Product placement influenced the actual purchase even though the attitude towards this kind of promotion was mostly negative.

6.1 Implications

In this chapter implications to both marketing managers and academia based on the findings of this research are presented. Managerial implications are divided into two parts: how to select the right micro-celebrity to promote their product and recommendations of how to use each of the promotional tools successfully. Academic implications present the use of the research findings by academic world.

6.1.1 Managerial implications

The findings of the current research suggest several implications for marketers and companies who are interested in using micro-celebrities as a marketing tool. Based on our findings, some essential factors are suggested here that should be considered when companies select a particular micro-celebrity to promote their product:

- It is crucial to choose a micro-celebrity who has a positive content and whose content matches with the product itself;
- Select a micro-celebrity who has been “cyber famous” for a long time because the findings from the participants were that micro-celebrities who have been famous for a long time are more trustworthy;
- In order to reach the potential target market, it is essential to choose a micro- celebrity at the regional level because it was found that one of the main reasons why people follow a particular celebrity was their location;
- Choose a micro-celebrity who has a large number of followers for the following reasons: Firstly, their number of followers gives a bigger exposure for the marketing campaign. Secondly, micro-celebrities with many followers are believed to be trustworthy.

Moreover, companies should keep some additional elements in mind when they use micro-celebrities as a marketing tool. In general, it is important to be careful about being too pushy in the promotion, having the marketing too noticeable and making it obvious that the micro-celebrities are paid for the promotion which all make customers skeptical. The following are recommendations for three ways of successful promotion using micro-celebrities:

- It was found that *product placement* is not an efficient tool to promote a product by micro-celebrities. However, it is clear that honesty about sponsorship, micro- celebrities being open about payments changes the customer’s attitude towards the product placement. Thus, the companies and the micro-celebrities need to be honest and open about the sponsorship.
- *Giving advice* can be a good tool for companies who are launching new product lines to the market. Micro-celebrities are known as being useful for giving advice and information about products and their features. This marketing approach leads customers to seek further information/details. Thus, it is also an important incentive to link the promotion with the company’s official web-page and the micro-celebrities personal blog for further information.
- Companies who are willing to use *discount code offerings* as a marketing tool should consider the amount offered as discount, because it was found that the bigger the discount, the higher the probability that the consumer will purchase the product. Furthermore, do not let other retailers offer lower discounts than those offered by the micro-celebrity. This helps strengthen the role of the micro-celebrities as their followers realize they obtain benefit from following them through obtaining these special offers. Thus, the link

between the company and the customer is also strengthened.

6.1.1 Academic implications

The findings suggest several implications for academia. Firstly, a general overview on the phenomenon of micro-celebrities' industry and their relevance in today's world was provided. Hence, some foundation for future research in the area was established. The underlying logic of creating an attitude towards micro-celebrities and their promotion was found.

Secondly, this study showed which type of promotion can influence different stages of consumers' purchase decision making process, which has not been shown in the academic literature before.

This newly gained knowledge can be presented as a social media strategy for marketing students. Additionally, the research findings could be published in academic books, articles, and similar sources. The findings can also be used by psychology researchers as an example of attitudinal and behavioral phenomena. Therefore, this study provides a wide foundation for further academic research.

6.2 Limitations

In this particular research, the authors investigated consumers' attitude towards micro-celebrities and their influence on purchase decision making. Due to the shortage of time, the convenient sampling was used which might have influenced the objectiveness of data collected. Still, the main influencing factors were found and overall trends were investigated.

However, a broader and more diverse sampling might have provided a more in-depth collection of data. Even though the study answered general question regarding micro-celebrities, the focus was on sample consisting of only active gym users.

Additionally, the location of the sampling was limited to the Jönköping area and people who go to gym and are interested in Instagram. A more holistic view on a trend could have been established given more time to investigate other locations. Convenience sample was chosen in this particular research which created an additional limitation for the study. The whole population was not represented by this particular research. Therefore, the findings should be rather interpreted as suggestions, not the rule.

Deeper investigation on some findings such as the difference in attitudes between the ages

of followers can be conducted. Still, the findings of this research can be generalized to the broader audience.

6.3 Future research

During the course of the current research it has become clear that there is a clear gap in this field of study. As mentioned earlier in this report, there are not many past studies reported about micro-celebrities and their role as a marketing tool. Therefore, this lack of previous work made it difficult to find appropriate literature to support many of our findings.

It is very clear that the present study only covers a small part of this existing knowledge gap. Therefore, the following possibilities for future research are suggested: During the data collection it was found that teenagers are easily influenced by micro-celebrities when they make their purchase decision. However, the purpose of this study was not focused on that and it did not cover the influence of micro-celebrities on different age groups. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct further research on the influence of micro-celebrities for different age categories since people with different age behave differently.

Another suggestion for further research would be to investigate what kind of companies currently use or would consider using micro-celebrities as a marketing tool. This is suggesting because the present data collection showed that affordable product categories, such as food, seem to be easily and effectively promoted by micro-celebrities.

Furthermore, it would also be interesting to further research a comparative study on the effectiveness of micro-celebrities on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram since the utilization of all social media platforms differ in their usage of functions.

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Appendix 1

Interview questions

Background questions

1. How often do you go to the gym?
2. How long have you been working out?
3. How important is the use of social media in your life?
4. What is your purpose of using instagram?
5. What are your interests on Instagram?

Attitude towards micro-celebrity

1. What is your opinion about micro-celebrities?
2. What type of micro-celebrities do you follow?
3. What could be a reason for you to choose a particular micro-celebrity among the similar ones?

Attitude towards product or service, which are promoted by Micro-celebrities

1. What is your attitude towards a product or service, which are promoted by micro-celebrity?
2. What makes you believe that the product is worth buying?

Need recognition

1. Have you ever felt that a micro-celebrity provoked your need of buying a certain product?

Information gathering

1. After seeing the product promoted by micro-celebrity, how do you gather more information?

Intention to buy product/ service

1. What would motivate you to buy a product promoted by micro-celebrity?
2. What would be a barrier stopping you from buying a product promoted by micro-celebrity?

3. What would be your reaction on discount code promoted by micro-celebrity?

Differentiation of subjective norm

1. How influensive are the advices of micro-celebrities if you compare them with your friend advices?

Behavior

1. What is your experience with buying a product promoted by micro-celebrity?
(What kind of product was it?)

2. What is your experience with using a discount code promoted by micro-celebrities?

3. Would you suggest the product promoted by micro-celebrity to your friend?