



LUND UNIVERSITY  
School of Economics and Management

# The social media paradox

*How social media and influencers affect consumers' perception of quality of life*

*CRITICAL STUDIES OF MARKETING AND CONSUMPTION*

By

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## **Abstract**

### **Title**

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*How social media and influencers affect consumers' perception of quality of life*

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### **Keywords**

Social media, Influencers, Conspicuous Consumption, Quality of Life and Consumer Behavior

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how consumers perceive the consumption of influencers and social media and how it affects their QOL.

### **Methodology**

The research has a phenomenology approach where the focus lies on consumers' different explanations of different subjective experiences. This is conducted through semi-structured interviews.

### **Theoretical perspective**

The main theories that the study is based upon, are theories about consumer behavior, quality of life and conspicuous consumption in relation to social media and influencers.

### **Analysis and discussion**

This research aimed to understand the interviewee's different worlds, therefore the analysis and discussion had a more holistic approach. The analysis and discussion are based on the interviewee's explanations.

### **Conclusion**

Influencers and social media affect consumers' perception of QOL mostly in a delightful way by creating a form of togetherness through social media and seeing influencers as role models. Moreover, the findings show that lack of control on social media has an unfavorable effect on consumers' perception of QOL.

### **Originality/Value**

This research sheds light on how consumers make use of social media and influencers in their daily lives and what influence it has on consumers' QOL. Consumer behavior is always difficult to predict, however, our research sheds light on how consumers think and act in a social media context.

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Social Media	2
1.2 Influencers	3
1.3 Conspicuous consumption	5
1.4 Social media and Quality of Life	6
1.5 The Problem	7
1.6 Aim and Purpose	7
1.7 Outline of the Thesis	8
2. Literature review	9
2.1 Social media's impact on consumer behavior	9
2.2 Quality of life components	10
2.2.1 Marketing and Quality of life	11
2.2.2 Consumers and Quality of life	11
2.3 Conspicuous Consumption	13
2.4 Summary	15
3. Methodology	17
3.1 Research Philosophy	17
3.2 Research Strategy	18
3.3 Research Design	19
3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews	19
3.3.2 Interview guide	21
3.3.3 Sampling	21
3.3.4 Recording and transcribing	22
3.4 Empirical Analysis	22
3.5 Trustworthiness	23
3.6 Ethical considerations	25
3.7 Limitations of the methodology	25
4. Analysis and discussion	26
4.1 Togetherness	26
4.1.1 Efficiency	27

4.1.2 Online Communities	29
4.2 Role Models	31
4.2.1 Narcissism	33
4.2.2 Lack of critical thinking	34
4.2.3 Rat race	36
4.3 Lack of control/infinity	37
4.3.1 Stress	39
4.3.2 Delusion	40
4.3.3 Frustration	41
4.3.4 Hostility	42
4.3.5 Addiction	43
5. Conclusion	46
5.1 Theoretical contributions and managerial implications	48
5.2 Further research and limitations	49
6. References	50
7 Appendix A	57

**List of Tables**

*Table1. Source: Theofilou, (2013)* .....11

**List of Figures**

*Figure1. Inductive approach, source: Bryman & Bell (2011)* .....18

*Figure2. Paradox model, source: Lund & Haux (2018)* .....47



# 1. Introduction

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in sharing, liking and updating about what you are doing on social media. Social media has multiple platforms and countless ways to use them and therefore social sharing is an influential tool, which can be summarized from several sources. BBC (2018a) reports that around three billion people use social media and about 40 percent spend at least on average two hours per day on social media, sharing, liking and updating what is happening in their lives. This can be linked to Thoumrungroje (2014) who states that there has been an increase in people who spend time on social media, connecting with each other and searching for information. In addition, social media has changed the way people carry out their daily routines (Thoumrungroje, 2014) and social interaction is replaced with social media platforms (McCloskey, Iwanicki, Lauterbach, Giammittorio & Maxwell, 2015). Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) define social media as “*a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content*” (p. 101).

According to Winter and Neubman (2016), social media enables the opportunity for people to express their opinions on different social media platforms. In doing so people can influence other people and shape people's attention to a specific purpose (Winter & Neubman, 2016). This can be explained as the phenomenon influencer, which is a consumer “*who exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others*” (Özgen & Duman Kurt, 2013 p.26). Zhang, Moe and Schweidel (2016) argue that rebroadcasting (sharing) is an important tool to disseminate information about brands on social media. Through an understanding of rebroadcasting behavior, it is easier to disseminate and control communication on social media (Zhang, Moe & Schweidel, 2016). This can be done through seeding influencers (giving them incentives to rebroadcast the message immediately) and tailoring message content to match the interests of the influencer (without incentives) (Zhang, Moe & Schweidel, 2016). Moreover, research from Sudha and Sheena (2017) explain that influencers can be used in marketing, which can be explained as the process to find the right individuals who can make an impact on the target audience in order to boost sales, reach and engagement of brand campaigns. Hence, it is a form of word of mouth marketing and an opportunity to form strong relationships with customers, which can be a useful tool for marketers to use in order to expand their consumer base and make them loyal towards the brand (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). The main source of word of mouth are influencers because they can influence people to act in a certain way (Nunes, Ferreira, Freitas, & Ramos, 2017), for instance, influence people's thoughts, attitudes and behavior of their followers to accept the provided information (Mann & Blotnicky, 2016; Mohamad, Ahmad, Mohamed Salleh & Wan Sulaiman, 2017) and serve as a positive source of word of mouth for products and services (Özgen & Duman Kurt, 2013). In addition, Sudha and Sheena (2017) claim that people trust influencers more than other sources and therefore influencers have a big impact on consumers.



One could therefore argue that influencers are an important marketing tool to reach out too many people and have a critical role in marketing and a critical impact on consumers' behavior.

Furthermore, Cho, Keum and Shah (2015) highlight that influencers who play an important part when it comes to the role of consumption activities in today's social media because they are in general always up to date with the latest and innovative brands. Moreover, Cho, Keum and Shah (2015) state that influencers have an important part regarding consumer behavior because they affect social status awareness. Duan and Dholakia (2018) proclaim that social media enable people to express themselves and attract attention to show off social status, as well as express feelings about consumption. This could give an impression of other people who are happier and live in connectedness, which create feelings of isolation in comparison (Primack, Shensa, Escobar-Viera, Barrett, Sidani, Colditz and James, 2018). One could therefore argue that, influencers have an impact on consumers' consumption activities, set the latest trends and have the power to influence people in a specific direction. Moreover, it becomes more and more important for consumers to always have the latest brands and post it on social media to express material status, however, in relation to this, lately, young people experience depression, anxiety and have issues with body image and self-identity by using social media platforms, especially Instagram (CNN, 2017; BBC, 2018a; BBC, 2018b).

## 1.1 Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) highlight that social media has its roots dating back to roughly decades ago, when the internet became a collection of newsgroups, where people could read and post messages. The newsgroups developed into discussion forums, which allowed people to exchange user-generated content and became a relevant source of information for customers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Research from Kumar and Argawal (2017) point out that there are different forms of social media, for instance, blogs, Twitter, Youtube, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Freitag, Arnold, Gardner & Arnold (2017) furthermore describe social media as a platform, which is organized by keywords or phrases, recognized by hashtags, which are shareable and in turn allow people to find related posts. According to Kumar and Argawal (2017), the common denominator for social media platforms are status updates, video and picture sharing content. Moreover, Arli and Dietrich (2017) argue social media has become an essential part of people's everyday life and enable people to communicate, for instance, with friends, family and colleagues. Users also turn to social media for the latest information and to stay updated (Freitag et al., 2017). It is therefore possible to conclude that social media is a necessary tool to find information and share content.

Moreover, Kumar and Argawal (2017) explain that social media is an effective tool, which can be referred to something that can help individuals, organizations and groups to use, create and share information such as ideas, perceptions, affections, statements, pictures and videos. In addition, Kumar and Argawal (2017) state that social media enables people to create an account

with their names in order to share content between each other and help people to stay updated and in touch with family and friends. More specifically, social media is used for effectively networking, interaction, participation and collaboration (Kumar & Argawal, 2017). This is in line with Arli and Dietrich (2017) who claim that people gain social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing, and status updates by using Facebook. In addition, 84 percent of global consumers rely on judgments from their network on Facebook, which indicates that reviews and word of mouth are an important source for information search (Arli & Dietrich, 2017). Han and Myers (2017) highlight that social media takes a lot of people's time and therefore it gives people a hard time to concentrate and get enough with sleep. Moreover, people feel pushed to comment on their networks posts, which can be a reason why people take vacations from social media platforms where they do not use these platforms for a short period of time (Han & Myers, 2017; Han, 2018). Besides, Milbourne and Wilkinson (2015) state that infinity comes with social media and that social media has enabled a society where everything is linked and connected to each other. This makes people scared of missing out on the endless information, which is being shared on social media (Milbourne & Wilkinson, 2015). One could therefore argue, social media could become overwhelming for consumers and be a source of stress, on the other hand, it also enables people to stay updated and in touch with friends.

## 1.2 Influencers

The concept influencers have its roots, which dates back primarily from studies made by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, who explored the relationship between mass media usage and voting behavior (Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman, 1996; Winter & Neubaum, 2016; Mohamad et al., 2017). Furthermore, Winter and Neubman (2016) explain that Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet studies explored how influencers got their information via mass media and then spread the information to their network, which is something called two step flow communication. According to Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet influencers can convince society through interpersonal communication (Mohamad et al., 2017). The more frequent the communication between society and influencers are, the more influencers can have an impact on individuals' motivation, attitudes, perceptions and actions (Mohamad et al., 2017). Winter and Neubaum, (2016) define influencers in the following way: people "*who were likely to influence other persons in their immediate environment*" (p.2), Nunes et al. (2017) explain influencers "*who can influence thoughts, attitudes or the behavior of people, leading them to act in a certain way at a certain frequency*" (p. 58). Another way to describe influencers are opinion leaders for a specific topic, hence, companies want opinion leaders to talk about their products (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). According to Venkatraman (1990) the attributes of influencers are to share information. In addition, opinion leadership among influencers occur when someone tries to influence buying decisions of others in a specific product field because they can give advice (Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman, 1996). In short, influencers could have an impact on consumers' behavior and life quality because they affect their motivation, attitudes, perceptions and choices in life.

According to Winter and Neubman (2016) the characteristics of influencers are that they have a more central role in their network. They can be described as individuals with high personality strengths, for instance, charisma and self-perceived ability to be outstanding and convince others (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). The motives behind certain characteristics engaged in opinion expression are to present oneself positively, convince others and show a link between personality characteristics and opinion leadership (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). Winter and Neubman (2016) also claim that social media networking sites function as an arena for influencers, which enable for people to express themselves and reach their entire network through regular status updates. Nunes et al. (2017) point out in their research that, Instagram is the social media platform, which is mostly consumed by influencers as a medium to express their opinion about products. Moreover, Sudha and Sheena (2017) state that influencers who have a lot of followers in a specific niche market can reach millions of followers through social media platforms by promoting products, which are often relevant for them. Influencers preserve a strong relationship with their followers and the followers often believe in the influencer's opinions (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Hence, the number of likes, comments, visual images, videos and the interaction between the influencer and its audience is an important aspect of the recognition of information for customers (Nunes et al., 2017). One could therefore argue that, an influencer is a person with strong opinions and has the desire to express it to others. Moreover, social media enables influencers to express their opinions to many consumers within a specific niche market. This means that followers are targeted to the area they are interested in, further it could impact consumers' behavior when they get influenced from their influencer. Depending on what kind of influencers consumers follow, they get influenced in different ways that could have an impact on their life quality.

Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman (1996) proclaim that influencers cannot exist without people who follow them, and one important aspect for people to follow influencers is that they want to make a satisfied purchase decision. This is in line with Nunes et al. (2017) who state that influencers function as a risk reducer because people want to find ways that simplify their decision-making process. Influencers have in general more knowledge, experience and a higher involvement with products (Nunes et al., 2017). According to Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1996) consumers get influenced in different ways, for instance, via word of mouth, copying consumption patterns and seeking advice from people who have greater awareness. Influencers are an attempt to satisfy consumer needs, which make consumers seek information among others they know have knowledge (Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman, 1996). Sudha and Sheena (2017) explain that at the beginning of the purchasing process, consumers tend to seek information on different social media platforms in order to realize the need for the product. In doing so consumers find information, which helps them considering buying products (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). According to research from Özgen and Duman Kurt (2013) influencers also shop more carefully by comparing different alternatives to others, however, they are not satisfied with just good enough products, and they feel excitement by buying new products. In light of this, influencers could not

exist without followers, and the fact that consumers believe their influencer has the right knowledge, it helps consumers to make satisfied decisions in life. Therefore, influencers can have an impact on consumers' quality of life by helping them making better decisions.

### 1.3 Conspicuous consumption

Research shows that social media highlight the consumption of products, for instance, by people sending a Facebook post on their vacation trips, which in the past was harder to make visible (Bronner & Hoog, 2018). Moreover, Bronner and Hoog (2018) state that consumers like to signal different aspects of their situation, as well as personality to other individuals, which mainly focus on showing success in life, to feel important or to gain respect from others and to show others who you are. This is in line with Taylor and Strutton (2015) who claim individuals can show off products on social media they have bought, to show that they have exclusive things or that they have had a wonderful time, which enhances their digital extended self. This can be explained as the phenomenon conspicuous consumption, which can be defined as the need to signal higher social status in society (Jaikumar, Singh & Sarin, 2018). Therefore, consumption plays an important role in the consumers' identity formation. Conspicuous online consumption can be explained through social media behaviors, which leads to a greater desire to promote oneself through conspicuous consumption (Taylor & Strutton, 2015). Jaikumar, Singh and Sarin (2018) argue conspicuous consumption is important when considering one's own perception of economic well-being.

Furthermore, according to Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1996), the concept influencer has been an interesting aspect for marketing managers and consumer research because influencers have a considerable role when it comes to creating successful marketing strategies. Moreover, Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1996) claim that the concept influencers make key contributions to the models of consumer decision-making processes. Research from Shuda and Sheena (2017) highlight that in regard to marketing, influencers can be used to establish credibility in the market and create conversations around the brand. Influencers also have a great impact on consumers' in regard to what should become a new trend due to consumers who copy influencers' style, trust them and spread word of mouth (Shuda and Sheena, 2017). One could therefore argue, that influencers are a part of conspicuous consumption because they show new trends, create conversations around brands and show successful lifestyles. This could have an impact on consumers when being exposed to influencers because individuals want, for instance, to gain respect from others, feel important and form an identity on social media.

Furthermore, prior research from Duan and Dholakai (2018) has characterized consumption and social media as a tool to show off property to gain social status. This can be linked to Langner, Hennigs and Wiedmann (2013) who claims that the type and amount of goods that individuals buy can be interpreted as a sign of social identity. Individuals may buy a particular kind of house in a specific neighborhood to indicate their social status and income, they may also use fashion

in a certain way to show their taste or membership of a social group (Langner, Hennigs & Wiedmann, 2013). According Cho, Keum and Shah (2015) influencers create a rat race among consumers to always have the latest and most innovative brands. Bronner and Hoog (2018) state that social media enables us to make consumption visible by displaying it on social media with status updates, which is consumption patterns that people want to convey to others and that the importance of visibility can be referred to as conspicuous consumption. In literature, it is commonly argued that if conspicuous consumption matters to people, people work harder and consume more, which means that the economic situation is a rat race (Arrow & Dasgupta, 2009). Therefore, we believe that social media, more specifically influencers, could create stress among consumers to always make people aware of and show off their latest possessions and experiences.

## 1.4 Social media and Quality of Life

Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) show that increased time spent on social media and increased amount of memberships on different social media platforms have resulted in higher stress-levels among consumers and lower quality of life (QOL). QOL can be defined as *“individuals’ perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns”* (Pinto, Fumincelli, Mazzo, Caldeira & Martins, 2016 s.7). Primack et al. (2017) suggest a connection between time spent on social media and heightened symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as a decline in subjective wellbeing. Furthermore, present studies focus on stressful experiences a social media user can experience by usage of social media (Han & Myers, 2018) and suggest that depression is related to internet usage (Tekinarslan, 2017). According to McCloskey et al. (2015), emotionally, people become more depressed by using Facebook and also gain worse psychological QOL. On the other hand, research from Campisi, Folan, Diehl, Kable and Rademeyer (2015) highlight that social media users have different experiences, motivations and QOL and therefore it affects people differently. For instance, people who use social media to stay in touch with friends increase QOL and people who use social media for dating purposes is lowering QOL (Campisi et al., 2015). This is in line with Radovic, Gmelin, Stein and Miller (2017) who explore both positive and negative effects of social media usage. On the contrary, Yang, Yuan, Archer and Ryan (2016) proclaim that older adults can enhance QOL by using social media. Moreover, Brusilovskiy, Townley, Snethen and Salzer (2016) claim that social media usage among people with serious mental illness could create a shared sense of community and remove feelings of loneliness, psychiatric symptoms and lower QOL. Therefore, one could argue that previous research is conflicting regarding the aspects of how social media impact consumers’ QOL.

## 1.5 The Problem

Based on the introduction we see the problem, more specifically, as a paradox of how social media has the possibility to make people feel more connected to each other, to show off your properties and oneself, which can increase self-esteem and feelings of happiness. On the other hand, idealized self-presentation may make people feel less happy and create feelings of stress and anxiety when comparing oneself to one another. In light of this, we would like to look deeper into social media, influencers and conspicuous consumption, and how it affects consumers' QOL to understand the paradox.

Few attempts have been identified regarding the need to understand the role of influencers and their effect on consumers' lives (Cho, Keum & Shah, 2015), how social media usage is related to users' general wellbeing (Bevan, Gomez & Sparks, 2014) and how social media can affect QOL (Campisi et al., 2015). Moreover, Campisi et al. (2015) call for future research about the hidden aspects of what makes social media delightful to some people and unpleasant to others as well as the hidden aspects, which describe how these differences affect individuals' QOL. Therefore, this study will present a paradox as seen in the consumers' interest in using social media as a medium of communication and knowledge sharing and their simultaneous reluctance or ambivalence to it based upon negative effects upon QOL. Previously there has been a lot of research regarding QOL, social media, influencers and conspicuous consumption as separate entities however, these studies have not addressed them in conjunction with each other. Compared with prior research we look at the problem from a consumer perspective by investigating how consumers perceive influencers and social media and how they affect consumers' QOL. The majority of previous research within this field is quantitative. Therefore, this study will make use of a qualitative approach.

## 1.6 Aim and Purpose

As pointed out previously, it is important to comprehend how social media and influencers affect consumers and to understand how consumers think and behave in regard to this phenomenon. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how consumers perceive the consumption of social media and influencers and how it affects the consumers' QOL. The aim is to get an insight into the consumers' world regarding their thoughts about influencers, social media and QOL to understand the paradox better and to be able to generate knowledge that contributes within consumer behavior theory. The research will have a consumer perspective and generate insights about consumers' perceptions, response and sense-making when being subjected to social media and influencers.

This leads us up to the following research question:

*How do influencers and social media affect consumers' perception of quality of life (QOL)?*

## 1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The outline of the thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one starts with the introduction, where the reader is introduced to social media, influencers, conspicuous consumption, QOL and the paradox. Moreover, the aim, purpose and contribution are presented, which will result in a research question. Chapter two consists of a literature review where we present literature within the chosen field of research to understand the paradox and to be able to answer the research question. At the end of the literature review, a summary is given. Chapter three will go through the methodology to explain our research philosophy, research design and strategy, empirical collection, empirical analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations and methodological limitations. Chapter four presents the analysis and discussion of the findings, which will result in a conclusion, which is the last chapter. After the conclusion we will present managerial implications, theoretical contributions, limitations of the research and areas of future research.

## 2. Literature review

*In this chapter we present additional literature within our chosen field of research to understand the paradox better and to fulfil the research purpose, which is theory about social media's impact on consumer behavior, QOL and conspicuous consumption. In the end of the review we present a model in order to help the reader understand how the different theory streams are related to each other.*

### 2.1 Social media's impact on consumer behavior

Literature shows that social media has a critical impact on all aspects of marketing and consumer behavior (Anubha, 2017). Bartosik-Purgat (2016) state that consumer behavior is the mechanism where activities aim to choose the best sort of products for customers and that it is related to three types of reactions, which is communication, purchase and consumption. Moreover, Anubha (2017) argue that social media has become a considerable aspect that impacts consumer behavior due to the advanced technology and its communication. This is in line with the research that was presented in the introduction. Influencers and social media have a critical impact on consumers because consumers' use influencers and social media as a source of information to make satisfied purchase decisions, which furthermore has an impact on consumers' QOL.

Hamilton, Kaltcheva and Rohm (2015) investigated how social media activities are connected to brand and consumer interactivity, by overlooking how brand and consumer interactions occur across social media platforms and consumers' motives to imitate these brand interactions on social media platforms. Hamilton, Kaltcheva and Rohm's (2015) research show that consumers are driven to interact with brands by different motives, which are associated with different platforms users. Therefore, it is important for brands to adopt ambidexterity over multiple communication platforms (Hamilton, Kaltcheva & Rohm, 2015). The motives for interacting with brands are for instance promotions and incentives, product information, engagement and entertainment (Hamilton, Kaltcheva & Rohm, 2015). Moreover, in a quantitative study from Sumathy and Vipin (2016), they highlight that social media is the most popular mechanism to deliver online promotion and that Facebook is the most influential tool, which impacts much more in the sociocultural life of human beings. Sumathy and Vipin (2016) state that advertising on Facebook help consumers evaluate purchase decisions because it gives the ground for comparison of products and services. However, Sumathy and Vipin (2016) found that advertisements on social media can make consumers feel disturbed. This is in line with Anubha (2017) who highlights that social media is the right tool for marketers to get the right messages to consumers at the right time. However, social media gives the consumer control by enabling consumers to make reviews, collect information and make decisions by comparing different products from home instead of in a brick and mortar store (Anubha, 2017). This is in line with Bartosik-Purgat (2016) who portrays that social media users post their consumption on social media to share what products they have bought with others. With basis from the above, it could



be important for marketers to obtain trust among consumers by understanding the consumers' needs. One could therefore argue that knowledge of how to target and segment consumers in an online setting is important.

Hermida, Fletcher Korell and Logan (2012) found a significant relationship between how social media users value their personal network as a way to regulate information they get from social media. Hermida, Fletcher Korell and Logan (2012) results provide indications of how hierarchical relationships between the mass media, the consumers and producers of social media content are being solved because social media represents a sphere where news are being reformed and reshaped by the networked public. Moreover, Bartosik-Purgat (2016) identified different type of products and services that are related to specific consumer behaviors, such as information search, contributing with new information and influencing others. One could, therefore, argue that social media plays a critical role when it comes to opinion sharing, which can have an impact on consumer behavior.

## 2.2 Quality of life components

The concept of QOL has its roots dating back to Plato and Aristotle's time and it started as a matter of social indicator movement, however, it developed in Scandinavia and the US in the 70s when economic indicators alone could not describe QOL among the population (Pukeliene & Starkauskiene, 2009). QOL can be defined in many ways (Pinto et al., 2016; Pukeliene & Starkauskiene, 2009; Theofilou, 2013) and there is no right or wrong way to define QOL because it is a complex area and requires multiple angles from different theories (Theofilou, 2013), hence, QOL is negotiated between researchers of different fields of science (Pukeliene & Starkauskiene, 2009). Theofilou (2013) state that it is fundamental to see QOL as a concept consisting of several social, environmental, psychological and physical values, as well as how people define what is good or bad in different aspects of life. This is in line with Pinto et al. (2016) who claim that the majority of authors define QOL as the way individuals interpret their own world regarding physical, social and mental dimensions. Moreover, Pinto et al. (2016 p. 7) claim the world health organization's definition of QOL is widely used, which is "individuals' perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns". Within economic research, QOL can be explained and measured by objective standards of living (Pukeliene & Starkauskiene, 2009). However, Pukeliene and Starkauskiene (2009) point out that conversationally the concept QOL circuits around happiness, well-being and life satisfaction, which makes it hard to put a specific label on QOL. In general terms, QOL can be seen as a multidimensional concept, which points out an individual's current state of mind (Theofilou, 2013) and an umbrella term for various approaches of the good life (Pukeliene & Starkauskiene, 2009). It could therefore be concluded that quality of life is an individual's own perception of what affects them positively or negatively in life.

Table 1 highlight different aspects regarding general components for QOL and how QOL can be understood in different ways (Theofilou, 2013).

Pleasant affect	Unpleasant affect	Life satisfaction	Domain satisfaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joy</li> <li>• Elation</li> <li>• Contentment</li> <li>• Pride</li> <li>• Affection</li> <li>• Happiness</li> <li>• Ecstasy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guilt and shame</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Anxiety and worry</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Envy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to change life</li> <li>• Satisfaction with current life</li> <li>• Satisfaction with past</li> <li>• Satisfaction with future</li> <li>• Signification others' views of one's life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Leisure</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Finances</li> <li>• Self</li> <li>• One's group</li> </ul>

(Table 1. Source: Theofilou, 2013).

### 2.2.1 Marketing and Quality of life

Lee and Sigry (2004) define QOL marketing as “marketing practice designed to enhance the well-being of customers while preserving the well-being of the firm’s other stakeholders” (p.44). QOL studies are an important topic of research in behavioral and social science research (Sirgy, 1996). Regarding QOL and marketing Sirgy (1996) highlight that QOL within marketing can be referred to ethical theory of marketing. However, the concept QOL is a mission where marketers have to target a specific segment of society in order to develop products that not only delights the consumers but also establishes well-being and long-term relationships by focusing on different needs and wants and satisfy them in a meaningful way to boost consumers’ lives (Sirgy, 1996). Moreover, Lee and Sigry’s (2004) research draw the conclusion that the construct of QOL marketing is important for contemporary marketing. Marketing objectives based on QOL should, for instance, focus on improvement of dimensions of consumer’s wellbeing by offering consumers affordable products (Sirgy, 1996). Moreover, Sirgy (1996) highlights that society gives business the right to do profit as long as business serves society well. This is in line with Po-Keung (2009) who examine how business and ethics are connected with the wellbeing of a country and find that business ethics is a crucial part of a country's well-being. In light of this, QOL is a mission for ethical marketers of how they should boost consumers’ lives, target and segment consumers in a way, which improves consumers’ wellbeing, which ultimately would generate better profits for companies and generate satisfied consumers.

### 2.2.2 Consumers and Quality of life

Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) state that there is a positive connection between life satisfaction and Facebook usage because social media enables consumers to have a larger social network, which leads to higher levels of life satisfaction. In addition, Campisi et al. (2015) claim that having a wide social network is generally an advantage for QOL. Moreover, this is in line

with McCloskey et al. (2015) who claim that Facebook can be used as a tool to establish in-person relationships and social support, which is important to improve QOL. In a quantitative study from Yang et al. (2016) they showed that social media usage among older people can increase QOL, for instance, reduce stress, depression, improve life satisfaction and well-being, as well as it enables to stay in touch with family and friends. In addition, as Brusilovskiy et al. (2016) states, for people with serious mental illness, social media can boost QOL because it enables them to learn more about people they know in real life and keep in touch with them, as well as reduce loneliness (Brusilovskiy et al., 2016). Another impact on QOL by usage of social media according to Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) is that an individual's self-esteem and well-being increases by social media usage because it creates the ability to present oneself on these sites. People can express themselves in a favorable way through images and captions in a path, which lights up themselves in a favorable way (Bevan, Gomez & Sparks, 2014). One could therefore argue that social media usage also can boost consumers' QOL.

However, Shensa et al. (2018) and Primack et al. (2017) claim that a high volume of social media usage has increased the risk of anxiety and depression among young adults. For instance, frequent status updates and regular checking for likes can lead to depression among individuals who do not receive feedback from their social media audience, or/and can feel a fear of missing on out something important (Shensa et al., 2018). This is in line with Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) who emphasize that the more time spent on social media the higher the stress level, which lowers QOL. According to Primack et al. (2017) regular exposure to unrealistic social media content gives the impression that other people are being happier and live a better life. Moreover, Primack et al. (2017) argue that social media usage results in multitasking, which have an impact on people's cognitive mental health outcomes, for instance, lower subjective well-being. Interaction on social media can also lead to misunderstandings, negative interactions or feelings of being left out, which can result in a bad mood (Primack et al., 2017). In addition, McCloskey et al. (2015) and Primack et al. (2017) claim that it is evident that face-to-face social support can reduce symptoms of depressions and enhance QOL. Those who use social media in order to reduce depression are unlikely to make improvements (McCloskey et al., 2015). One could therefore argue, social media also has a negative impact on consumers' lives.

Another explanation is that people differ in their motivations to use social media and therefore, social media have different impacts on individuals' QOL, which can be explained by Campisi et al. (2015) who claim that individuals, which are stressed by using Facebook have an inferior health compared with individuals that did not have Facebook-induced stress. For instance, individuals feeling sad, stressed and angry by using social media had lower QOL and individuals who felt happy by using social media had a higher QOL (Campisi et al., 2015). According to Radovic et al. (2017) social media usage of people who are depressed can be a frustration because people tend to compare themselves with others on social media. Moreover, Radovic et al. (2017) highlight that oversharing, trigger posting, or stress posting can help people seek social

support when being unhappy. Therefore social media can improve their mood by gaining social support, releasing emotions or searching for an online community, which they can feel social support from, in other words, social media can help to interact with people's mood (Radovic et al., 2017). Moreover, Jha and Agrawal (2017) claim that social media usage between men and women with the same background is different and men showed more happiness of social media usage than women. In light of this, there are different aspects, which facilitate social media's impact on consumers' QOL.

## 2.3 Conspicuous Consumption

The concept conspicuous consumption was coined more than 100 years ago (Bronner & Hoog, 2018) and can be defined as *"the extent of one's behavioral tendency of displaying one's social status, wealth, taste or self-image to one's important reference groups through consumption of publicly visible products"* (Chen, Yeh, & Wang, 2008, p. 686). This citation can furthermore be divided into Veblenesque factors (reputability and social status) and Bourdieu's factors (taste and personality) (Jin, Wang, Li & Deng, 2015). This is in line with Trigg (2001) who claims that theory about conspicuous consumption is developed by Veblen and can be explained as individuals who imitate consumption patterns from other individuals from a higher point in the social hierarchy. Conspicuous Consumption can affect both experiential consumer purchases and material purchases (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Individuals always try to adopt new consumption patterns in order to differentiate themselves from others (Trigg, 2001). Therefore, conspicuous consumption is a way to show off wealth, which confirms status and esteem (Arrow & Dasgupta, 2009). In addition, Cho, Keum and Shah (2015) state that conspicuous consumption is when individuals' purchase behaviour aims to show social status to other people, in this case, buying material goods can be seen as a status game. This can be shown by individuals purchasing luxury fashion products like fashion designer brands, luxury cars or expensive handbags to show off social status (Cho, Keum & Shah, 2015). In light of this, conspicuous consumption is a way to display status to other people and could be seen as a status game where consumers imitate consumption patterns from people they look up to.

Research on conspicuous consumption has traditionally analyzed how people spend money on products that signal status, however, Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan (2017) argue that a busy and overworked lifestyle, rather than a leisurely lifestyle, has become a desirable objective and symbol of status. Moreover, Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan (2017) found that conspicuous display of busyness and lack of leisure time gave a perception of being competent and ambitious. On the other hand, undeliberately long working hours and limited leisure time weakened the positive effect (Bellezza, Paharia, & Keinan, 2017). Additionally, social media has provided a new way to convey one's level of busyness through status updates and tweets (Bellezza, Paharia, & Keinan, 2017). Jaikumar, Singh and Sarin (2018) examined the relationship between conspicuous consumption and subjective economic well-being (SEWB). Their results showed that high conspicuous consumption may result in improved SEWB and that the effect is higher

for poorer households. This challenges the Easterlin paradox, which states that rich people report higher levels of well-being (Jaikumar, Singh & Sarin, 2018). Jaikumar, Singh and Sarin (2018) suggest that companies would benefit from marketing their products to a lower income group with a conspicuous value that highlights the social benefits. However, while promoting a product as status rewarding, it instills a false sense of economic well-being, which may result in a vicious circle, where poor remain poor in the long term, and inhibits the company's ability to sell premium products to them in the long term (Jaikumar, Singh & Sarin, 2018). From previously stated literature, it can be concluded that conspicuous consumption can be shown by status updates on social media, which shows the level of business. From previously stated literature, conspicuous consumption can improve SEWB and marketers benefit from this by marketing to poorer households, however, it creates a false sense of SEWB. One could therefore argue that this could have a negative impact on consumers' QOL in the long run.

Materialistic possessions can symbolize social ties with one's family, community and social groups (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, experiential purchases can also facilitate social connection and give a sense of belonging with others because experiences often are shared with them (Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Raghunathan & Corfman, 2006). Walther (1996) argues that idealized self-representation online is much easier than offline due to anonymity, asynchronicity and the level of control regarding profile management. Therefore, it is easier to conspicuously elevate one's status by optimizing one's profile details and what you choose to post (Faucher, 2014). In this setting, Facebook friends and likes become proof of affinity and approbation and is being seen as a measure of social wealth and popularity (Faucher, 2014). Identity exploration and experimentation is also easier in a virtual surrounding, such as Facebook, than in the real world (Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005), and finding new friends online and transferring the friendship to an offline surrounding (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). Furthermore, Faucher (2014) states that what one consumes becomes a sign of purchasing power and a high number of friends and likes becomes a sign of one's social power. Taylor and Strutton (2016) showed that Facebook usage is also positively related to envy and narcissism, which increases the desire for self-promotion and a tendency to perform and display conspicuous consumption. In addition, Dean, Carrol and Yang (2007) showed that materialism could have a negative impact on couple relationships. Gudmundson and Beutler (2012) also showed that advertising that leads to greater child materialism leads to increased parent-child conflict, and child unhappiness. In light of this, status could be gained from idealized self-representation online, which can be optimized by what is posted on social media. Moreover, a high number of friends and to show off purchasing power becomes one's status and social power. One could therefore argue, this could have an impact on consumers' lives when it becomes important to display conspicuous consumption.

Research from Wills (1981) highlight that social comparison can either increase or lower self-regard. Comparing oneself to those who are worse off increases self-regard, whereas upward social comparison may result in negative emotions (Wills, 1981). According to Duan and

Dholakia (2017) posting purchases of conscious consumption on social media increases happiness and has a positive impact on consumers' self-concept, self-image and self-identity, this user-generated content that shows purchases can be a carrier of conspicuous consumption. Moreover, Bronner and Hoog (2018) argue that there is an increasing importance of immaterial experiences over material things in postmodern society. Their study found that experiential purchases (for example vacations) demonstrated two conspicuous consumption factors, the Veblenesque status and wealth and Bourdieu's personality and identity demonstration. The latter was the most important and characterized by unique experiences, trendy locations and showing other people who you are (Bronner & Hoog, 2018). With basis from the previously stated literature, happiness can be increased by conspicuous consumption. One could therefore argue that conspicuous consumption affects consumers' QOL.

Furthermore, Thoumrungroje (2014) highlight that individuals can present themselves as they want other humans to perceive them and mostly individuals paint the picture of themselves as positive because they know their close ties follow them on social media. From all the positive social media posts people share, they receive positive feedback from their network, which boosts that individual's self-esteem and increase well-being (Thoumrungroje, 2014). To post purchases on social media enables consumers to express feelings and thoughts about their purchases to their social media followers (Duan & Dholakia, 2018). What drives consumers to do this is the motivation to show off wealth and express oneself to others. Duan and Dholakia (2018) state that social media is transforming conspicuous consumption because before the social media era, conspicuous consumption was hard to achieve through the physical display of material purchases and the reach was limited. Hence, today conspicuous consumption can be visible and conveyed through social media (Duan & Dholakia, 2018). In light of this, the new social media era makes material purchases visible to consumers. Posting purchases on social media can therefore have an impact on consumers' QOL when they do not/get the feedback they expect.

## 2.4 Summary

The literature within our chosen field of research touch up on social media's impact on consumer behavior, QOL and conspicuous consumption, which is needed in this study to be able to see differences and similarities between the theory and the collected empirical material. QOL is a topic that is difficult to define. Therefore, it is an individual's own perception, which determines what QOL is for him or her. It is only the individual who can decide what increases QOL for them. Although, there are some common definitions that are widely used to explain QOL. Most commonly, QOL can be described as what makes an individual happy and satisfied, while common things that could decrease QOL is stress, anger and anxiety. QOL in relation to social media can both increase and decrease QOL depending on one's own situation. However, social media is a tool that enables individuals to participate on different platforms, where they can share and create content, in other words, it empowers value co-creation. From the introduction the influencer is someone who communicates on social media platforms and has a

lot of followers who copy their behaviour, which in turn functions as a risk reducer and facilitate consumer decisions. This is because influencers' followers mostly trust them and believe in them. Influencers have a central role in their networks and display consumption, which can change consumers' attitudes and motivation. This can be linked to conspicuous consumption since individuals want to show other people who they are, and this is easier to do on social media than in the real world. Moreover, social media can be used to highlight positive aspects and present an idealized self. This desire to increase self-promotion is related to envy, narcissism and a tendency to perform and display conspicuous consumption. In addition, what one consumes becomes a sign of purchasing power and a high number of friends and likes becomes a sign of one's social power. In sum, this theory is used to be able to answer the research question "*How do influencers and social media affect consumers' perception of QOL?*"

### 3. Methodology

*In this chapter, we present the methodology in order to explain how our research was performed, how information was collected and how the information was interpreted. The methodology consists of our research philosophy, research strategy, research design, empirical collection, empirical analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and methodological limitations.*

#### 3.1 Research Philosophy

To be able to answer the research question and achieve the aim it was important to get an insight into the consumers' world to understand how they see influencers and social media and also how they define and believe that social media and influencers affect their QOL. Therefore, to fulfill the purpose and contribute within consumer behavior, research philosophy is necessary to discuss. To get an insight into the consumers' world, it was necessary to understand how consumers interpret the phenomenon influencer, social media and QOL. A philosophical approach where the individual creates their own meaning in their own world is called phenomenology (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which investigates the meaning and essence of the given phenomena (Higginbottom, 2004). Since we chose to understand how the consumer perceives influencers and social media we took the research philosophy and methodology of a phenomenology approach. The research philosophy that was in line with our own view is social constructionism. We search for things based on the consumers' perspectives to understand why they act as they do. For instance, this can help us answer how social media and influencers affects their QOL. Therefore, we needed to understand how individuals establish their own experiences from their own mindsets. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) consumers create their own world based on their background and experiences. We took our research further by generating an understanding of how the consumer perceives the consumption of influencer. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) the language and discourse that can be used to make sense of the environment are needed in order to understand the consumers' different interpretations of reality. Hence, one could therefore argue, that a philosophy within positivism was not suitable for this research. According to social constructionism, meaning and truth are constructed through interaction and cannot be treated as a definite entity and, therefore the truth is in a constant state of revision (Bryman, 2011). One could therefore argue, that consumers generate social interaction, which makes the truth in a constant state of revision, and this is a reason why this perspective was in line with our own viewpoint. Nevertheless, this research reserved itself from not being too hard headed with the concept of social constructionism. In all, from consumers', we could generate rich empirical data and in-depth information, which consumer ideas were included. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) highlight that rich research progress where the thick empiri is included can be linked to social constructionism.



## 3.2 Research Strategy

This study took a qualitative research approach focusing more on words rather than quantification regarding the collection of empirical information and empirical analysis in order to accomplish the aim. This is in line with a qualitative research approach according to Bryman and Bell (2011). Moreover, Bryman and Bell (2011) highlight that qualitative research has a knowledge-based characteristic rather than quantification, which means that knowledge of a qualitative research method is being used to get an in-depth understanding of the meaning and cause and effect on relationships. This is also in line with a phenomenology approach, as this research has, which according to Smith and Thomasson (2018) is the psychological study of subjective experience. Since this research aimed to contribute to the field of consumer behavior we used semi-structured interviews, which enables individuals to talk more openly and go more in-depth into certain areas of the interview process. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) a social constructionist perspective uses language to put a name on the phenomenon that the research attaches, more specifically, the phenomenon is formed by the language used.

A qualitative research strategy is naturally inductive, which means that the relationship between theory and practice is grounded on the collected empiri (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Grounded theory aims to generate the theory that creates an understanding of the social and psychological phenomena (Higginbottom, 2004). Bryman and Bell (2011) claim that an inductive approach mainly can be described by the following steps:



*(Figure 1. Inductive approach, Source: Bryman & Bell, 2011).*

The picture shows the inductive approach, which reflects our research strategy and can be explained by the following; we started to create the introduction and background, which lead us up to our research question. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) the starting point of the research is to implement research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The second step involved choosing investigation persons (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For this research, investigation persons were based on convenience sampling, which is explained in chapter 3.3.3. Moreover, Bryman and Bell (2011) emphasize that the third step requires a collection of relevant empiri. In our case, the collection of empirical information was based on semi-structured interviews, see chapter 3.3.1. Step four constitutes of interpreting the empiri (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To interpret the interviews, we analyzed different themes that appeared in the interviews. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) different themes will appear along the analysis process of the interviews. In relation to our study, we discovered new possible themes that we used to place in a context that

will be relevant to theories within social media, influencers, QOL and conspicuous consumption, see chapter 4. In step five, the conceptual and theoretical works are applied (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We did this by searching for different kinds of peer reviewed articles about consumer behavior, QOL and conspicuous consumption in relation to social media and influencers, see chapter 2. Step six consists of results and choice (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We did this by generating an understanding of how influencers and social media affect consumers' perception of QOL, which can be found in chapter 5.

### 3.3 Research Design

We aimed to provide simple and relevant theory in order to explain and solve our research question to be able to make a general contribution to theory. A favorable research design considers a link to theory, which means it is necessary to use theory to demonstrate the contribution to the theory (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Academic theory is looking for generalizations in order to describe what is going on, therefore, a good theory needs to be simple, have an exploratory power, to be relevant in order to explain the issue the study is trying to solve (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) emphasize that a research design is to order activities, such as collection of empiri, to be able to reach the aim of the study. To reach the aim, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which is presented in the following paragraphs.

#### 3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

To be able to get an insight into the interviewee's world and get a deeper insight into the research question, this research applied semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were applied in this research to get the most out of the interviewees and the important part was to see how the interviewees perceived the questions and what they believed was an important explanation of influencers, social media and QOL. Considering the aim of this research, we needed to get into and understand the consumer's world. According to Kvale (1996), interviews allow individuals to communicate to others about their situation from their own viewpoint in their own language. Through the interviews, we were able to get information that observations would not give. As stated by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) a qualitative research interviews circle around a specific topic, which questions and answers reflect (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Interviews were the best tool because we got an in-depth view of how consumers' perceived social media and influencers. Interviews also enabled consumers to explain their real life stories. This is in line with, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) who claim no interview is the same and it enables mutual discovery, understanding, reflection and explanations. An interview is based on several questions that are used in order to answer the research aim and to develop in-depth experience (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Moreover, since this research investigated a consumer perspective, it is important to know what hold their thoughts, for

instance, we sought for the consumers' stories. Therefore, the qualitative interview technique gives the interviewee's perspective, why they hold a specific viewpoint on a specific topic (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews are based on a list of questions that are asked in a more flexible way as stated by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015). This was important for this research because if the interviewees said something interesting we wanted to know more about that and not being addicted to a structured interview (or a structured interview guide) because that could prevent the generation of interesting insights from the interviewee's. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the questions in the interview guide can be asked in a different order, or questions not provided in the interview guide can be added during the interview. Moreover, in a view of the phenomenological approach, a semi-structured interview was a suitable tool to get into the consumers' different worlds, which enabled us to answer the research question. To generate thick descriptions, laddering up and laddering down techniques were used. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) highlight two interview techniques that can be used by the researcher to get more out of the questions, these techniques are laddering up and laddering down. Laddering up can be described as a tool to reveal the individual values by asking why question and laddering down is a tool to generate example or illustrations, which the researcher will get by asking for examples (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Regarding this research, which aimed to get close to the consumers' world, it was necessary to ask those questions to get the most out of the interviews'.

Furthermore, it is also likely that the interviewees told different stories, which is why interview technique was a suitable collection of information to this research. In addition, QOL is a sensitive topic to talk about in a group, therefore we found it more suitable to conduct interviews in an environment where the interviewees felt comfortable to speak freely about their perspective of the topic. It was therefore the interviewees that chose the place where to be interviewed. When it comes to sensitive topics, where people might doubt to be truthful, interviews are a more suitable technique to collect empirical material (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In addition, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) claim that when collecting qualitative empiri, the researcher should have in mind to obtain trust, social interaction, using the appropriate attitude and language, getting access, choosing the location for the interviews and recording interviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, we obtained trust at the beginning of the interview by presenting ourselves for the interviewees and giving a quick brief of the interview. Moreover, social interaction is the interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer, hence, the interviewee often selects answers that they think will be easy to understand by the interviewer (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, in order to not get biased results, we did not ask too leading questions. Regarding attitude and language, we kept in mind to appear knowledgeable, competent and we avoided mentioning too many theoretical concepts in order to respect the interviewee's language. At the end of the interviews,

the interviewees had time to think and reflect on their own answers. Getting access, choosing the location for the interviewees and recording did we by being flexible for the interviewee.

### 3.3.2 Interview guide

We formulated an interview guide (see, Appendix A) to facilitate and remember, which questions to be asked. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) an interview guide should cover the important areas for the research in a semi-structured interview. In our case, 11 questions were relevant to talk about. Moreover, it is crucial to have questions that enable for the interviewees to tell about their perception of their own world (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, we asked questions like “what does it means to you”. In phenomenological interviews, the interviewer and interviewees both participate and questions like “what does it means to you” is a sense of structure in order to uncover the meaning of the phenomenon (Higgingbottom, 2004). The guide focused on gaining a perspective of the meaning of the interviewee's experiences. Although we aimed to have flexibility in our interview guide and we had in mind to not make the guide too specific, which could prevent new insights or ideas to the research, in other words, we wanted the interviewees to speak more freely, but still, we wanted to cover social media, influencers and QOL. During the interviews some interviewees talked more than others, which made the interview guide less relevant, however, we tried to cover the topics influencers, social media and QOL in the conversation. For those interviewees who talked less the interview guide was more relevant. As in line with Bryman and Bell (2011) we used an understandable language that suited the interviewees, we also did not ask leading questions that could reveal the research question. Moreover, we took background information from the interviewees to be able to put their answers in a bigger context. To avoid bias researchers left questions opened (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Moreover, probing techniques were used to sharpen up the interviewee’s answers if it was necessary, to develop further explanations if they said something we wanted to know more about.

### 3.3.3 Sampling

We interviewed 14 individuals regarding their experiences when it comes to social media and influencers. If the number of individuals would have been larger, it would have been possible to make statistical generalizations (Kvale, 1996), however, this was not the intent of our thesis. In phenomenology, the size of the type of methodological path is usually associated with small sample sizes due to the in-depth nature (Higginbottom, 2004). Moreover, we found saturation was met at 14 interviews, where further interviews provided little or no new knowledge. The goal was to understand the world as experienced by the individuals with regards to social media and influencers and investigate the relationship of specific behaviour and feelings evoked in this context.

The interviews were based on convenience sampling. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a convenience sample consists of persons that appear to be available at the moment for the

researchers. Hence, this sampling strategy is not impeccable because the sample consists of individuals that appear to be available at the moment, which can be hard to generalize (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, this research sought to make logical generalizations by generating a theoretical understanding of a comparable category of phenomena, rather than probabilistic generalizations to a population. Bryman and Bell (2011) claim it does not mean researchers should not use a convenience sample, hence, a convenience sample have a bigger impact than what people believe. Regarding management science, it is common to use a convenience sample (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011) claim that a convenience sample can create a perfect starting point for contribution to future science and lead to new connections between existing results. Since our aim was to generate knowledge to the existing research of consumer behaviour, we found convenience sampling being in line with our aim. According to Pahn (2011), social media is mostly used by young adults (individuals up to 40 years old) because they have grown up with these technologies. Therefore, we made sure that the interviewees were in the category young adults. A large sample shows heterogeneity (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which we found important since we wanted to reach different kind of people's viewpoints. Another requirement we had was that they were familiar with social media applications and influencers.

### 3.3.4 Recording and transcribing

To assist the analysis of the interviews we recorded and transcribed the interviews. It enabled us to concentrate on the topic and dynamics of the interviews in real time. However, it is important to take into consideration that recordings give a decontextualized version of the interview where facial and bodily expressions are overlooked (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, the level of transcription depends on the researchers aim and methodological approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), therefore, the most important parts of the interviews were transcribed in this research. Before the interviews that were transcribed and recorded we also did test interviews to practice and see if the questions were suitable. The interviews were made in the interviewee's native language (Swedish) to enable them to talk more freely.

## 3.4 Empirical Analysis

Since this research wanted to understand the consumers' world, the grounded analysis approach is in line with the research aim. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) grounded analysis aims to understand the meaning, which the empirical information in a specific context was created. Therefore, this kind of analysis enables us to reach our aim and give answers to the research question. Moreover, this empirical analysis had a more open and spontaneous approach to be able to understand different explanations from the interviewees, which according to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) is in line with grounded analysis. Because this research aimed to understand the interviewee's world, a more holistic approach is necessary to have in mind when analyzing the interviewee's answers. This is in line with grounded analysis as well, because it aims to compare different empirical frames with one another, which makes this approach open to find new theories (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe &

Jackson, 2015). Therefore, the interpretations of the empirical information were based on the interviewee's explanations, by this, we meant that it was important to put their explanation in the center, which we did by highlighting their citations. Moreover, we started to look at the interviews independently to interpret the interviewee's different worlds. Different themes appeared along the analysis process, which was more or less relevant to the theoretical framework. These themes were positive, negative or neutral, which in a bigger context could be related to middle themes. These themes became a central part of the analysis and could be drawn to how it affects consumers' QOL. To be able to find connections between the grounded theory and the literature and theoretical review we focused on sorting, reducing and discussing to find themes and see something new that could broaden the relevance of theory.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) claim that there are seven concerns a researcher should have in mind when doing grounded analysis, these are familiarization, reflection, open coding, conceptualization focused re-coding, linking and re-evaluation. To get the most out of the empirical analysis we had these steps in mind. Regarding familiarization, we reminded ourselves to not lose the focus of the study concerning what the empiri suggested and whose view was being revealed. Regarding reflection we asked ourselves what the empiri was about and if it supported existing knowledge, if the empirical information challenged the existing knowledge and what was different. Regarding open coding, we linked the empiri to categories and created sets of codes that were related or similar. Moreover, we had in mind whose view it reflected and how this view was expressed. When it came to conceptualization, we tried to find patterns among the different codes we made to be able to identify themes. After that, we linked the different concepts to see how they were related to each other and tried to make explanations of patterns that appeared from the interviews. Regarding re-coding, unfortunately, due to the time limits, it was not possible to make.

### 3.5 Trustworthiness

According to Amankwaa (2016) research is not worth paying attention to if it is unreliable, therefore proof of validity and reliability is required. Depending on the researcher's epistemological and ontological background, the researcher is likely to use different criteria to decide the quality of the research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Moreover, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) emphasize that this will also affect how the researcher design and conduct research. Since this study took a perspective from a social constructivist approach, validity, reality and generalizability will have a standpoint from the constructionist perspective. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the quality of a study can be decided by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in order to show that there is more than one continuous possibility to explain the reality.

Credibility involves the confidence in the truth of the findings (Amankwaa, 2016), among the many realities that exist (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011) highlight that credibility mainly can be found in the explanation of how credible the research is for other

individuals. In this study, we made use of respondent validity in order to increase the credibility. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), one way to explain credibility can be through respondent validation, which enables the participants in the research to see the results of the study. When the thesis was done, the interviewees had the opportunity to see the finished version. In addition, we recorded and transcribed the interviews, which Bryman and Bell (2012) believe increases the credibility of our findings.

Transferability was highlighted by describing the interviewees in detail, which was useful for us to evaluate if the extent of the conclusions were transferable to other settings. This is in line with Bryman and Bell (2011) who claim that transferability is about how transferable the results are to another setting. Activities that can enhance transferability are thick descriptions (Amankwaa, 2016). This is important because within qualitative research the results are contextual for the social world it studies (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, thick descriptions were important to be able to explain the interviewees' different worlds and to be able to transfer the knowledge to other settings.

To increase the dependability of this study we did not make promises we could not keep and tried to explain everything in detail. Moreover, the interviews were transcribed and recorded which, was a comfort to have in order to keep important information. Dependability shows that value of the research is created when the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Amankwaa, 2016). Bryman and Bell (2011) claim that it is important to describe all the stages of the different research processes in detail to show dependability.

Confirmability can be explained as to what degree the findings are shaped by the respondents or not (Amankwaa, 2016) and involved the researchers thinking of their own role in the research when collecting the empirical information (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2015). A researcher's own values should not consciously or unconsciously affect the research and means thinking through, for instance, the role of language, knowledge connections or social interests (Alvesson, 2008). The way this research worked with reflexivity was the semi-structured interviews because during the interviews we enabled the interviewees to speak freely and contribute to the empirical collection without too much input from the interviewer. Our reflexivity approach is in line with Alvesson (2008), who explained that knowledge is something people create together. Moreover, we took notes, recorded and transcribed the interviews, which facilitate reflection about what we interpreted and what we had heard during the interview regarding the empirical analysis. We also did test interviews where we practiced to not influence the interviewee's thoughts with our own thinking and feelings at the time. Our goal was to not do inappropriate assumptions when interviewing and if we did not get the answer we expected we accepted that. The aim was to get insights about the participants' world and therefore reflexivity was important for this study to have in mind.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

Regarding the empirical collection, some of the questions that were asked could be interpreted as sensitive to the participants. For instance, the questions about QOL, how social media and influencers affect their lives and remaining answers from the interviewee's that they did not want to be disclosed by themselves. Hence, the questions touched upon personal beliefs and private life that could harm the participant if it would be used in a wrong way. These reflective thoughts are in line with ethical considerations, which consist of how individuals, which participate in research, are treated (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The researchers must consider if there are any activities that could harm the individual who participates in the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), those activities, that should be considered are voluntary (interviewees are willing to participate, not being forced or nagged), integrity, confidentiality and anonymity among individuals who are participating. To protect our participants in this research, we took Bryman and Bell's (2011) ethical principles into consideration. This was done by informing the participants about the purpose of the study and that is was voluntarily to participate. If we got their permission to include them in an interview we promised to accept their private life and did not ask any questions that they felt forced to answer or did not want to answer since QOL can be a sensitive topic. To protect privacy the participants were also anonymous.

### 3.7 Limitations of the methodology

This research has a phenomenology approach, where the focus lies on the interviewee's own world, truth, knowledge and thinking. Therefore, the knowledge could be hard to generalize onto other settings, which is a disadvantage with qualitative research. Moreover, this study worked with trustworthiness to a greater extent. Moreover, a qualitative research has a limited number of interview persons, which can also limit the answers and the generalizability, however, the intent with this research is to generate knowledge of the particular in its context. Even if this research is not generalizable onto other settings, it is not the purpose of the thesis and therefore, a qualitative study was more suitable than a quantitative study.



## 4. Analysis and discussion

*In this chapter, we present the analysis of the interviews and discuss the findings. The findings are based on the interviewees different explanations, which show that influencers and social media affect consumers' perception of QOL mostly in a positive way by creating a form of togetherness through social media and seeing influencers as role models. Moreover, the findings show that lack of control on social media has a negative affect regarding consumers' perception of QOL.*

### 4.1 Togetherness

Togetherness was important among many of the interviewees. Which can be summarized in the following statements:

Interviewee P1: *“Stay in contact with people... Easy to communicate to many at the same time”*

Interviewee P2: *“Searching for togetherness in some way but no big difference between young and old”*

Interviewee S2: *“Follow how other people have it”*

Interviewee H1: *“Contact, communication and friendship... I would have no clue of what my friends were doing if I didn't have social media”.*

The interviewees' answers are in line with Arli and Dietrich (2017), Amonrat (2014), Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014), Kumar and Argawal (2017), Nunes et al. (2017), Sudha and Sheena, (2017), Yang et al. (2016) who claim that social media could function as a communication tool and enable people to stay in contact with family and friends. This brings people together on social media which can improve life quality.

Interviewee B1: *“When it is a collaboration, to solve problems social media can be good. E.g. jobs in Kalmar where people help each other to find jobs. It makes me happy to see other people help each other and when someone steer the group and are engaged in it”.*

As interviewee B1 expressed, it made him happy to see people engaged together in social communities where they help each other. To be happy increased QOL (Theofilou, 2013). Moreover, this is in line with Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) who state that social media enables user-generated content where people can help each other to share information. As Kumar and Argawal (2017) stated social media enables people to share information, which can help others. Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) highlighted, social media enables a wider network, which

enables better life satisfaction. McCloskey et al. (2015) claimed that social media enables social support. This can also be linked to Anubha (2017) who stated that social media has become a considerable aspect that impacts consumer behavior due to the advanced technology and its communication. This is also in line with interviewee M1 who said that he can see what is happening in the world and what his friends are doing.

Interviewee R1: *“I want to know more about the opinion I have, and it makes my opinion stronger because I want to hear it from the right people, which I believe is right”*.

According to interviewee R1, he could find support from other people on social media, who has the same opinions as himself. This is in relation to Brusilovskiy et al. (2016) who claimed that social media could create a shared sense of community, which can increase QOL. Togetherness can in a bigger context be seen as a risk reducer in life because social media enables user-generated content, which can help people on different occasions. Further, this increases consumers' QOL because it enables social support and could function as a communication tool to stay in touch with others. Togetherness could also be a form of social support because being together on social media and finding support from others can reduce loneliness. People can feel strong together, for instance in forms of communities where they can be with each other. An example of this could be, interviewee S2 and interviewee A2 who discussed that they like to follow humorous people such as Mia Skäringer and Ricky Gervais on social media, where humor brings people together and creates a shared sense of community. Therefore, we see togetherness as something, which mostly increases consumers' QOL because it makes the interviewees feel connected to other people on social media and in real life. Individuals can hang out with each other more often, which social medium enable, and is a form of togetherness that can make people happier.

#### 4.1.1 Efficiency

Efficiency was highlighted as a common theme among the interviewees and it was important that communication goes fast. Efficiency enables quick and real-time communication, which enables people to uphold a bigger social network than they would be able to in real life. This phenomenon has both positive and negative effects upon consumers' QOL. Fast communication enables people to uphold social ties but on the other hand, people can become stressed with being updated about what is going on around them. These statements from the interviews summarize efficiency:

Interviewee T1: *“It is important that it goes fast”*.

Interviewee R1: *“Important for me to be updated”*.

Interviewee S1: *“I do not like to talk on the phone and these applications make the communication faster. It is easier to send a message on messenger instead”*.

Interviewee H1: *“It is not like you call people so often because it takes time. To call someone and talk about how they are, takes much time. It is easier to just send a Snapchat or write on Facebook”*.

Moreover, interviewee P1 and Interviewee T1 also said that social media enables them to have a bigger social network than they would be able to offline and that it makes it easier to communicate with many at the same time. The interviewee’s citations are in line with Kumar and Argawal (2017) who claim that social media is an effective communication tool, which can be used to help individuals share information in a fast way, communicate and to see information. However, as stated by Shensa et al. (2018) and Primack et al. (2017), high volumes of social media activity can have a negative impact on an individual’s life quality and people can be scared of missing out on something (Shensa et al., 2018) and make people stressed the more time they spend on social media (Bevan, Gomez & Sparks, 2014). One could therefore argue that, social media brings efficiency because it easier to communicate to many people at the same time, which can increase consumers’ QOL. On the other hand, it increases stress, which lowers consumers’ QOL.

Interviewee R1 saw efficiency among influencers, which could reach out to the mass and reach many people faster. *” I see that as something to reach out to the mass, you can reach many people and influencers are important to them. They can influence very fast and easy in a good way everything in one place”*. This can be linked to Mohamad et al. (2017), Sudha and Sheena (2017), Winter and Neubaum (2016), which highlight that influencers effectively reach out to the mass and influence people in a direct environment. Moreover, this can be linked to Anubha (2017) who highlights that social media is the right tool for marketers to get the right messages to consumers at the right time. One could therefore argue that, an effective way is to use influencers in marketing. Moreover, interviewee H1 described social media as something that made her fast updated about what is happening in society. *“Social media enables me to be more updated about the society and about what’s happening around me. I am busy a lot, it’s not like I would sit down and read the newspaper, I get it on my phone on my feeds it’s accessible”*. Moreover, she did not have time to read the newspaper and therefore social media enables efficiency for her. In sum, efficiency can in the bigger context be seen as something, which enables quick and real-time communication that social media enables. This has both good and bad outcomes on consumer’s QOL because it enables fast communication but on the other hand, people become stressed. It can be good in a way to use social media to reach out to many people fast and social media can make people updated about what is happening in society, however,

consumers can fear of missing out on something and therefore always feel that they regularly need to check their social media account to be updated about what is happening in their surroundings, which can make consumers stressed of not being updated and/or less present in real life. From the interviews, we saw that social media enables efficiency, in other words, real-time communication, but it can affect consumers' QOL both to the better or worse.

#### 4.1.2 Online Communities

Many of the interviewees made use of online communities to get inspiration and recommendations about products, trips and hotels, home decoration, fashion, music, programming news and support, new medicines within the field of their illnesses and special interests such as *“how to take care of your animals”* (interviewee E1) and available jobs (LinkedIn). Some of the support groups that were mentioned were ADHD Forum, Seven Cups, Girls with Asperger, Change for Life, More to Life and SVERAK. Interviewee E1 expressed that anonymity makes it easier to *“share information with people online that you can't offline, which makes people feel better understood and less lonely”*. This phenomenon has a positive impact on QOL and substantiates the research made by McKenna, Green and Gleason (2002) who showed that people who can better express their true self via social media are more likely to form close online relationships and transfer these friendships into a real-life context. However, anonymity can also be used with an intent to insult other people and share inappropriate content, which is presented in more detail in section 4.3.4 Hostility. According to (Walther, 1996) anonymity makes it easier for people to share an idealized self-representation online, which makes it easier to conspicuously elevate one's status. One could therefore argue, that it makes it easier for people to express their conspicuous consumption, opinions, themselves and a lot more, however, it could have a negative impact when it becomes too overwhelming or stresses people to feel the desire to always show off.

Interviewee B1: *“When it is a collaboration, to solve problems social media can be good. E.g. jobs in Kalmar where people help each other to find jobs. It makes me happy to see other people help each other and when someone steers the group and are engaged in it”*.

As interviewee B1 expressed, it made him happy to see people engaged together in social communities where they help each other. To be happy increased QOL (Theofilou, 2013). This is in line with Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) who stated that social media enables user-generated content where people can help each other to share information. As Kumar and Argawal (2017) stated social media enables people to share information, which can help others. This is also in line with Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014) who highlighted social media enables a wider social network, which enables better life satisfaction. McCloskey et al. (2015) claimed that social media enables social support. In light of this social media can increase happiness by social support from online communities. This is also in line with interviewee M1 who said that he can see what is happening in the world and what his friends are doing. Moreover, interviewee B1

wanted to see social media being for people's advantages, which he discussed in the interview, could be forums where people helped each other, that made him happy to see. This is in line with Radovic et al. (2017), which state that social media online communities can support people's mood when they find support from them. One could therefore argue, online communities are mostly a form of togetherness, which can affect people QOL better.

Interviewee R1: *"I want to know more about the opinions I have, and it makes my opinion stronger because I want to hear it from the right people, which I believe is right"*.

Interviewee N1: *"Some aspects are important to find around the specific area that is common platforms for different things"*.

According to interviewee R1, he could find support from other people on social media, who has the same opinion as himself. Interviewee N1 could also find support from social media platforms. This is in relation to Brusilovskiy et al. (2016) who claimed that social media could create a shared sense of community, which can increase QOL. One could therefore argue that support could be found from online communities, which impact consumers in a delightful way. Moreover, social media enables user-generated content, which can help people on different occasions. Further, this increases consumers' QOL because it enables social support and could function as a communication tool. Therefore, there is a lower risk of people being and feeling alone and can be seen as a form of togetherness. Moreover, the empirical findings showed that influencers and social media could function as an information source to get tips, inspiration and knowledge.

Interviewee P2: *"Influencers have the knowledge and information about the latest things, which I don't have so I get information from them. They are updated, and I follow them specifically because they have knowledge"*.

Interviewee P2 mentioned that the influencers he followed have the latest things and he followed them specifically because they had knowledge. As Nunes et al. (2017) stated, influencers have the latest knowledge and are highly involved with products. Therefore, influencers can be seen as a trustworthy source when it comes to the consumer who seeks information among other consumers to make a satisfied decision (Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman, 1996). As interviewee P2 stated he followed them specifically because they had the knowledge, hence, this can make help him make better decisions, which can increase satisfaction.

Interviewee H1: *"To get inspiration and they have nice and pretty pictures and I get to know what's happening in the famous world because it's that I am talking about..."*.

Interviewee H1 mentioned that she got inspiration and knowledge of what was happening in her surroundings when she was using social media. In addition, it made her happy to see what her friends were doing, and she got happy when her friends were sharing information on social media about their success. One could therefore argue that using social media to see information about her friends could increase her QOL. This can be connected to McCloskey et al. (2015) and Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014), who claimed that social media increases QOL. In sum, information exchange can be seen as a form of community function where individuals get information from influencers or friends to be updated, find inspiration, knowledge and help individuals make satisfied decisions. Therefore, online communities could increase their life quality because it enables the interviewees to find a form of togetherness.

## 4.2 Role Models

The empirical findings indicate that role models are important for the interviewees. This can be supported by the following comments:

Interviewee P1: *“You want to be a little like them, and act like them...They become a role model”.*

Interviewee R1: *“Deep inside me, I want to be like them, so they inspire me but not the choices I make in life...A potential that you actually think you have”.*

Interviewee P1 and interviewee R1 statements can be linked to Sudha and Sheena (2017) who state that influencers have followers, which individuals trust and that influencers have a big impact on their followers. Moreover, according to Sudha and Sheena (2017), influencers show the latest trends. One could therefore argue, that people look up to role models and have them as an inspiration source, which is confirmed by interviewee P1 and interviewee R1.

Interviewee R1: *“There are so many users and they inspire in so many ways, in a good way and then there are influencers who don't. For example, bad people who influence kids in a bad way. The Paul brothers, for example, they are two teenage idols, which show off a lot of money, pranks and talk shit... they show freedom in a way”.*

Interviewee B1: *“I think many young people follow influencers and try to do these kinds of videos by themselves... People get inspired”.*

In regard to interviewee R1 and interviewee B1 statements, influencers have a big impact on people and inspire other individuals. However, they thought that kids are especially affected, which can be confirmed by Nunes et al. (2017) who claim that influencers affect peoples' thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, this can be linked to Gudmundson and Beutler (2012), who showed that advertising leads to greater child materialism and increased parent-

child conflict and subsequent reduced QOL. We interpreted interviewee R1 statement in a way so that they exhibit conspicuous consumption, which will make young people eager to become like them by purchasing the same items and acting like them. Interviewee R1 expressed that influencers present alternative ways of living and consuming (freedom in a way), which could be a reason why people see them as role models. Freedom could be something that affects people's lives in a good way because it allows life satisfaction and therefore could increase QOL (Theofilou, 2013).

Interviewee P1 *"Influencers affect me more than commercials...I want to have the same things that they have"*.

Interviewee T1: *"I want to be like them... you want to live up to something you don't have"*.

Interviewee T1 and interviewee P1 statements are another way of support, for the theme role models, since they stated that they wanted to have the same things as the influencers and influencers are someone to look up to. We interpret this as something that could affect their QOL for the better because in a bigger context it can motivate people. However, depending on what kind of influencer they use as a role model they can be motivated to do good or bad things. Moreover, interviewee P1's statement can be linked to Trigg (2001) who claims that individuals adopt new consumption patterns in order to differentiate themselves from others. Interviewee P1 said that he wanted the same things as the influencers and therefore it could elevate self-esteem and increase his QOL. According to Arrow and Dasgupta (2009) conspicuous consumption is a way to elevate status and esteem. This challenges the Easterlin paradox, which states that rich people report higher levels of SEWB (Jaikumar, Singh & Sarin, 2018), because in our case, we did not interview any rich people. When influencers (role models) promote products as status rewarding it could give consumers a false sense of economic well-being. After all, we believe that influencers are role models for the interviewees because they look up to them, keep them better informed about trends and affect their purchase decisions and behavior. We believe this could improve consumers' QOL. Moreover, social media enables more influencers to be visible and therefore impact more people. Another example of this phenomenon is when interviewee P1 stated that influencers inspired him to make a better purchase decision: interviewee P1: *"My gaming chair, I would not have bought it if the company hadn't sponsored a lot of competitions and so on, the same with my keyboard"*. Moreover, familiarization with influencers that are seen as role models was also indicated as important for the interviewees. This can be seen in the following citations:

Interviewee P1: *"You can see that they are like regular people to... Follow persons that you think is cool"*.

Interviewee S2: *“Fun to see when they are real because then you can see that everyone has good and bad sides in life, to see what different kinds of people do...I like to see real and natural pictures and to follow their everyday life. I don’t like to follow perfect pictures, which people have been fixing for hours”*.

The interviewees felt familiarization with influencers when they saw that influencers were like regular people too and to see real pictures, which had not been fixed for hours. This can be linked to Radovic et al. (2017) who stated that posting and sharing can help individuals to find support when being unhappy, improve mood and gaining social support when individuals feel support from online communities. Furthermore, individuals who feel happy by using social media experience increased OQL (Campisi et al., 2015). It could therefore be discussed how influencers can be used in social media among marketers to create familiarization through real and natural pictures instead of showing off conspicuous consumption since familiarization with influencers increased happiness and reduced stress among consumers. Individuals trust influencers to make better decisions in life and therefore influencers can be seen as a risk reducer when making purchases.

Interviewee S2: *“People get influenced by influencers and have them as role models in many ways. I do not follow that many and I do not think I get affected that much. I follow just positive influencers and I try to be positively affected by them, to get a positive attitude...It makes me comfortable with people like her that want to promote women and change power in the society. She gives me pushes and motivation”*.

Interviewee S2 tries to be positively influenced by influencers. Interviewee S2 statement suggests that influencers give her motivation and a push in the right direction, which can be linked to Sudha and Sheena (2017) who claimed that influencers perceived a strong relationship with their followers. Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1996) stated that people seek advice from influencers because they have the greatest amount of awareness. One could therefore argue, interviewee S2 motivation and push in the right direction is based on familiarization with her influencer, which can enhance life quality. This is also in line with interviewee A1” *A confirmation that this is what life looks like for more people than me and that I am not alone”*. After all, familiarization is common for the interviewees because they feel that you can see that influencers are like regular people too. We believe that this can affect an individual’s QOL in a positive direction and enhance satisfaction when finding support and familiarization from their role models/influencers. Individuals trust influencers because they have strong opinions and have a lot of followers that support their opinions and lifestyle.

#### 4.2.1 Narcissism

The interviewees also highlighted narcissism as a negative factor that affects people's QOL. This is in line with Taylor and Strutton (2016) who portrayed that social media usage is associated



with envy and narcissism. Narcissism is the ambition to display self-promotion and conspicuous consumption (Taylor & Strutton, 2016).

Interviewee R1: *“I believe people share too much of their life on Facebook and I do not feel comfortable with that. It’s not what I’m comfortable with but I’m ashamed of how they are acting. I think, why do you do 10 updates every day about shit that doesn’t matter, I just think this is sad...”*.

For interviewee R1 it made him sad to see people sharing too many posts on Facebook and he was ashamed of how people were acting. According to Theofilou (2013) sadness affects an individual’s QOL in a negative way. Narcissism is therefore something, which can make interviewee R1 social media experience worse.

Interviewee B1: *“It is good that they can express themselves, but I think it’s infected now”*.

Interviewee S1: *“Everyone is just posting training pictures and shit and its too mainstream things and no creativity. I want to see something new and get new ideas”*.

Interviewee B1 thought social media was infected with everyone’s ambition to express themselves and interviewee S1 thought everyone on social media was too mainstream. Duan and Dholakia (2018) explain what drives the consumer to express themselves is to show off wealth. They present themselves in a way they want other individuals to perceive them to increase their own well-being and self-esteem when generating feedback (Thoumrungroje, 2014). One could argue, that this boosts an individual's QOL. However, according to the interviewees, not everyone is satisfied with seeing peoples’ conspicuous consumption. Therefore, many of them block certain people on social media that make too many irrelevant updates and interviewee N1 even took vacation from her Facebook page to not spend too much time on it and to be more present while doing other things in life. This is in line with Han (2018) who pointed out that individuals take vacations from social media platforms nowadays to be able to relax. Narcissism could therefore, be the negative side that comes with influencers as role models and social media, which consumers perceive as something that impact their QOL.

#### 4.2.2 Lack of critical thinking

Another theme that appeared was lack of critical thinking. A minority thought there was no difference in social media usage among young and old individuals. For instance, *“Depending on what kind of persons you have to deal with in life you get affected in some way. Not just influencers”*. However, the majority of the empirical findings suggest that individuals have lack of critical thinking and the interviewees expressed that young individuals were more affected by social media and influencers. This can be linked to these comments from the interviewees:

Interviewee R1: *“The younger you are the less is the possibility to have critical thinking and abstract thinking...The older you are the more critical you get and can create your own viewpoint because it’s so easy that you take everything as true when you are young“.*

Interviewee S2: *“Young people follow more influencers and become more influenced than older people. But I think there is a broad variety of users on social media”.*

Interviewee E1: *“Older people are more selective when it comes to the choice of friends and use social media mostly to upload pictures and stay in contact with friends”.*

According to the interviewees they thought that the younger you are the higher is the possibility of not being critical when being on social media and those young individuals follow more influencers. However, older individuals are more selective when it comes to the choice of friends and uploading material on social media. We interpret this as young individuals having a lack of critical thinking while older individuals are more selective. According to Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1996), Nunes et al. (2017) and Winter and Neubaum (2016) influencers have a critical impact on individuals. From the interviewees, it can be concluded that influencers could have a more critical impact on young individuals than older individuals. Regarding marketing it is therefore necessary to discuss how influencers impact young individuals’ QOL, this is further explained in section 4.3.4 Hostility. Moreover, this was especially highlighted by interviewee R1.

Interviewee R1: *“I think this affects people negatively because adults must fix every shit their kids do and if the kids get more influencers they believe it’s fine to do stuff in a way and they will become like them”.*

As interviewee R1 expressed, he thought that young people were more affected and that they wanted to be like their influencer, which in interviewee R1 world could backfire if the influencers have a negative effect on kids. Therefore, adults need to oversee and control what their kids do. According to Winter and Neubman (2016), influencers affect people in a certain way because they have a central role in their networks and therefore can convince others. One could therefore argue that young individuals have a lack of critical thinking and are more affected by influencers. Hence, interviewee R1 thought influencers become more visible on social media, which could affect young people trying to be like them. Therefore, in this case social media and influencers can be perceived as something that affects especially young kids QOL.

Interviewee B1: *“I think people buy it because they like the person and see that the person uses it, and then it comes naturally that people want it and gets affected. ... Some people are more*

*affected than others... But it is their own freedom and they can do what they want... you can't stop them. I hope they get affected neutrally so they do not use any stupid shit".*

According to interviewee B1 people have a free will and they can do whatever they want. However, when people get influenced in a smooth way they lose their sense of critical thinking. The characteristics of influencers are to express oneself positively and to convince others (Winter & Neubman, 2016) and influencers have a strong relationship with their followers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Customers trust influencers and what they say, therefore influencers could function as a risk reducer for customers, which make customers seek advice from them (Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman, 1996; Nunes et al., 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Özgen & Duman Kurt, 2013). One could therefore argue that consumers trust in influencers makes them less critical. Freedom of expression on social media also creates a flow of information that is not always safeguarded by consumer law and therefore it puts the consumer at risk if he/she does not think critically on his/her own.

#### 4.2.3 Rat race

Our findings showed that social media, influencers and conspicuous consumption have a tendency to create a rat race. As Cho, Keum and Shah (2015) claimed the rat race could be a matter of the influencers who always have the latest possessions. Moreover, this can be linked to conspicuous consumption because people want to convey consumption patterns to others, which social media enables them to (Bronner & Hoog, 2018). This is also in line with Bartosik-Purgat (2016) who highlighted that people post their consumption on social media to share with others the product they have bought. However, if conspicuous consumption matters to people, people work harder and consume more, which means that the economic situation is a rat race (Arrow & Dasgupta, 2009). This can be shown in the empirical findings:

Interviewee B1: *"People trigger each other"*.

Interviewee P1: *"You get jealous of what other people have and do not appreciate what you have, if you stop, you see the world you have and then you can appreciate it for that instead of being jealous of others"*.

Interviewee S2: *"She is doing this today and then I need to do it too, or she is on that diet, then I need to do that too...she has these kinds of shoes, so I want them too"*.

Interviewee P1: *"I'm Zlatan and I love this shaver, it's so good. Then I already know he gets a lot of money to do that... When I see what other influencers use, what chair they have, what they eat, then I feel, oh that is good to eat and so on. So, I get affected"*.

It is possible to conclude that the less information the interviewees see how other people live their lives, the less likely they are to compare and get stressed about it. The younger you are the more influence you get by the rat race, as can be seen below:

Interviewee S2: *“People see influencers so highly and want to be like them, so people rush after them. I hope it makes them happy but for young people it becomes a rush or an ideal of how life should be. I think young people are easy to influence and have another picture of life”.*

Interviewee B1: *“They get an unreal picture of the world to only see what one person does and it is easier to get influenced when you are younger e.g. to try different things”.*

Interviewee A1: *“I think young people focus more on consumption rather than social contacts. The question is if young people post the best of themselves or if they compare themselves to others more”.*

Interviewee S2, interviewee B1 and interviewee A1 statements can be drawn to Wills (1981), who argue that social comparison can decrease your self-esteem if you compare yourself to someone who has it better. However, posting a purchase on social media can make someone happier and have a positive effect on consumers' self-esteem (Duan & Dholakia, 2017) and receive positive feedback from this can boost the individual's self-esteem (Thoumrungrroje, 2014). This can be drawn to Faucher (2014) who claim that purchasing power, high number of likes and the number of friends becomes an individual's sign of popularity. One could therefore argue, that if the rat race makes people happy it increases QOL, since, Pukeliene and Starkauskiene (2009), Pinto et al. (2016) and Theofilou (2013) stated QOL could be defined as something, which is happiness and what is good in an individual's current state of mind. Happiness could be gained from confirmation from others or social status. On the other hand, it could affect an individual's QOL negatively when it stresses people to always be up to date with the latest possessions and way of lifestyle that their role models/influencers have and being fed with an unreal picture of reality. As interviewee P1 mentioned about social media and influencers, *“It would be nice to not worry about what others do”.* A purchase or experience created by the rat race could give a short-term pleasure, however it is never long lasting as the urge for new possessions and experiences continue and is never-ending. It is important to take into consideration that social media enables comparison across nations and different cultures where the standard of living is completely different and therefore can portray an unattainable ideal.

### 4.3 Lack of control/infinity

Many interviewees commented upon the infinity of social media. The interviewees thought it would be nice to see limits (a beginning and an end of their feeds) and more qualitative information, which would make their everyday life better. For instance, interviewee H1 talked

about violence and assaults that appeared on her news feed even if she did not want to see that, which made her angry. Interviewee B1 also talked about how you could sit and scroll down the Facebook feed, which never ended. Moreover, the interviewees mentioned that there was an infinity of commercials that appeared on social media and hidden commercials from influencers that they were fed up with and never ended. Therefore, limits would make their social media experience better, as well as a dislike tool. This is in line with Milbourne and Wilkinson (2015) who states that social media enables endless connections. However, Milbourne and Wilkinson (2015) claimed that people are fearful of missing out on information, which is in line with the interviewees' opinions of being overwhelmed with information and consequently wanted more limits.

Interviewee S2: *"I think I can do so much already by myself and I can decide what I want to see and if it's something I do not want to see I do not follow those people"*.

Interviewee P2: *"I decide by myself what I want to see... If I do not want to see more of something I unfollow and if I want to see more of something I follow it..."*.

Interviewee J1: *In periods, I have closed down my account or when I was away on vacation because it was nice to be without it"*.

As interviewee S2, interviewee P2 and interviewee J1 stated, they decide by themselves what they want to see in their feeds and if there are influencers that they do not want to see they unfollow them. They could therefore, be interpreted as strong individuals, who know what they want to see and do not get affected by social media and influencers that much. Moreover, it can also be a matter of how they have grown up, what lifestyle and values they have. From the theme infinity, we see that some people can be able to, by themselves, control information on social media, while others are not. Consequently, for the majority of the interviewees, it was a struggle with all the information that affected their QOL by creating anger. The interviewees said they could sit and scroll forever and there was no end. In the bigger context, we see the theme lack of control, which creates dissatisfaction among the interviewees. One could therefore argue, that more control is needed for social media and influencers. Infinity gave some of the interviewees the feeling of being stuck in a loop, which could impact upon individuals' QOL negatively. For instance, this appeared:

Interviewee B1: *"Now you can scroll forever and get new things all the time, like what other likes and share... You can start it over and new things come up directly again, so they suck you into it...You either see things you just follow, or it's built so we need to check it all the time and cannot stop. The experience economy is so important to us, that you have to click more and more and more...You just follow what you like, so you do not get influenced by others"*.

This can be drawn to Freitag et al. (2017) who highlighted that social media is coordinated as something, which is known as hashtags where people can find related posts. One could therefore argue, that people are stuck in a loop where they get fed with information regarding the same topic over and over again. Further, this creates a dependency where they want to see more and more. Hence, this could be a form of loss of communication or control because all the information that is shared is just coming back to people again and people just see things they want to see when searching for hashtags. Getting new information regarding a specific topic you like is seen as positive until saturation is fulfilled. However, it also creates a narrow-minded view of what you see on social media and it can affect people's QOL negatively when they do not get any influences from others.

#### 4.3.1 Stress

Stress could be a result of infinity and many of the interviewees said it affects their QOL negatively. Stress is something that affects an individual's QOL to the worse according to Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014). In a bigger context, stress could arise from a lack of control of content shared on social media.

Interviewee J1: *"The newsfeed creates stress for me with so much information from many different directions and then I choose to unfollow everyone so I do not get anything in my feed, I choose to go into these sites to get information and to make an active choice instead...Stress is when everyone is posting just the positive sides in life, new outdoor furniture and now we're sitting and enjoying (but we cannot sit on our balcony yet or we haven't done anything this weekend). Nice dinners and we're sitting and eating fast macaroni. How can everyone afford and manage all that? But at the same time, we know that it's not that good. On the other hand, you can get affected by other people who are sharing just negative things all the time"*.

The conclusion we draw from this statement is that interviewee J1 becomes stressed when she sees the conspicuous consumption her friends share on social media. Theofilou (2013) highlighted that stress has an unpleasant effect on individuals' QOL. Moreover, this is in line with Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014), who states that social media enables people to present themselves in a favourable way. In addition, Primack et al. (2017) state that exposure to unrealistic social media content gives the impression that other people are being happier and have it better. One could therefore argue that unrealistic social media content creates stress for people when they see that others live a better life and start to compare themselves with others.

Interviewee N1: *"It would be nice for me to live more at the moment. I have felt abstinence when I checked the feed too often and I felt it was hard. I am used to always have something to do and if nothing is happening you get restless"*.

Interviewee A1: *"To meet in real life cannot be replaced with social media. Status updating on social media can splinter my time and it becomes an annoying moment in the calmness. I put my phone aside or turn off the sound when I am at my allotment to not be disrupted"*.

Interviewee N1 and interviewee A1 said they wanted to live more at the moment. To reduce the stress of conspicuous consumption, they turn off their phones so that they do not have to compare their own lifestyle with others and update them about what they are doing and consequently check how many likes and comments they have received. According to interviewee T1 she felt harmony when she was without social media for a while and she thought people should do it more, to live at the moment and see the real world instead because it would make people happier. *"I felt harmony. But that is because I do not feel I have to string along with everything that happens. It would affect me positively, I think people will see the real truth without social media and be with people in real life instead, to live at the moment"*. In addition, Interviewee B1 highlights that social media makes people compare themselves with each other. This is in line with Primack et al. (2017) who claim that exposure to regular social media content can make people feel that other people are having it better. The fact that people compare themselves to others makes them stressed. For instance, interviewee R1 stated *"I know that I should train more but when everyone writes about how good they are all the time, it makes me angry... It's constant reminders, stress and this makes me sad"*. This is in line with Radovic et al. (2017), which stated that social media comparison can be frustrating for people. According to Theofilou (2013), frustration lower an individual's QOL. One could therefore argue, that social media creates stress, and to live more at the moment instead could increase QOL.

#### 4.3.2 Delusion

The findings also show that social media and influencers can lead to delusion.

Interviewee S2: *"I think it's so boring to just follow things that influencers paint as positive because I know life isn't always that positive. If it's someone who posts pictures three times a day and its only positive things, it's not that interesting because I know it's not true and it's not fun to follow because it's so fake and plastic. It's not the truth"*.

Interviewee H1: *"They say that this skin product is the best and so on, but actually they don't think so, they use another skin care product. It makes me angry because they post things that they actually don't like! But they say this is the world's best night cream but actually, they don't think so they just use it for the moment"*.

This can be linked to the fact that influencers are always up to date with the latest and innovative brands (Cho, Keum, & Shah, 2015) and that they are used within marketing to boost sales (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). However, from the interviewees, it might not be seen as marketing and could, therefore, create a delusion of an idealized world. This is in line with Sumathy and Vipin

(2016) who stated that advertisements on social media can make consumers feel disturbed while encountering with online advertisements. Therefore, it is important to tailor message content to match the interests of the influencer (without incentives) instead of giving them incentives to rebroadcast the message (Zhang, Moe & Schweidel, 2016). Influencers paint a positive picture of reality and influencers say things they actually do not mean, which could be seen as lack of control regarding communication of social media and influencers because consumers do not always interpret that as marketing. One could, therefore, argue that this creates dissatisfaction and could affect the interviewees QOL negatively because the fake truth is not understandable by everyone and people could be happier to be without it sometimes. According to Hamilton, Kaltcheva and Rohm (2015) the motives for consumers to interact with brands on social media are, for instance, promotions and incentives, product information, engagement and entertainments. Therefore, it would be better if influencers to get rid of the delusion of an idealized world, and interacted more with their followers.

### 4.3.3 Frustration

The findings also show that social media creates frustration among the interviewees. This can be summarized by these comments:

Interviewee B1: *“It’s commercial, fake news everywhere and sponsored things. I don’t like it anymore before it wasn’t that much of everything. Now it is higgledy-piggledy”*.

Interviewee P1: *“Less off commercials and that they steal your personal information, less of fake sites of people, which comes with social media... commercials that show up that you have to watch, that’s so frustrating and shallow contacts”*.

Interviewee H1: *“Overall, I don’t like to see clips on Facebook with violence and assaults, there are so many clips that I don’t want to see. It makes me angry and irritable. For example, there are clips when they assault their dogs”*.

As the interviewees stated, they become frustrated and angry by information that is irrelevant to yourself. According to Theofilou (2013), frustration and anger have an unpleasant impact on a person's QOL. According to Radovic et al. (2017), social media can be frustrating when people start to compare themselves to others. However, the findings show that sharing other things on social media can be frustrating to. The findings showed that social media and influencers were perceived by the consumers as something that creates frustration. The frustration could be shown as too many commercials that are targeted based upon your browsing information, too much fake news, too many shallow friends that you would not be in contact with in reality and too many video clips that are shared and displayed in your news feed that are not relevant to yourself. This is in line with Hermida, Fletcher Korell and Logan (2012) who claims that social media represent a sphere where news are being reformed and reshaped by the networked publics. One could



therefore argue that social media sites need more control in the form of administrators to improve consumer perception of life quality.

#### 4.3.4 Hostility

The findings emphasize hostility from social media and influencers. This can be explained by Interviewee B1 and interviewee R1:

Interviewee B1: *“Influencers start new trends and then people adopt the new trends and spread them to more and more people. Another example is the tie pod (dishwashing tablet) challenge, young people ate the tie pod and died... People get so affected by others and people like to watch it”*. Moreover, he mentioned *“Fight with each other and send evil shit to others... Today everyone has become critics... This creates unnecessary debates and narrow views... think it is just shit... I do not get something out of it”*.

According to interviewee B1 people do things to get likes and friends on the internet to become popular, which is a measure of social wealth, which in turn has a positive effect on QOL. Social media enables freedom of speech, however, it can also affect people's QOL negatively, when hatred, fascism and dangerous actions such as the tie pod challenge is being spread. Interviewee E1 and interviewee S2 also mentioned that they were fed up with anonymous insults and filmed assaults online. Therefore, there is a need to have better control over what is happening on social media on an ongoing basis and to discuss the consequences of what is going on in the online world in educational institutions.

Interviewee R1: *“I would like to see less freedom of opinion. It hurts when I say this but there is so much hate on the Internet, fascism and propaganda, which is not in line with the worldview I have. It is so much Nazism and I think they should control that better overall. If someone reports it then they should do something about it and take it away....I would feel happier because when you have a constant feed with information and opinions, which appears to you all the time then your freedom disappear and you think less and that is for me to feel lower life quality... to always see other people’s presentations and see their failures in your face all the time, it affects you more than you think“*.

It is possible to conclude that there will always be a continuum of radical opinions and behaviors on social media and that it is necessary to think through what you gain and lose emotionally by engaging in those activities. Interviewee R1 mentioned that a constant feed of information and other opinions, which appears to you all the time and takes your freedom away, which can affect your life quality. As stated by Kumar and Argawal (2017), social media enables people to share content and information, for instance, ideas, perceptions, affections, statements, pictures. Social media is an endless information source (Milbournce & Wilkinson, 2015). Interviewee R1 suggestion of less freedom of opinion is not in line with what social media stands for but would

increase QOL for him because it would make him happier to not being fed with everyone else's opinions. Freedom of expression enables people to communicate their free opinion. However, it can have an impact on consumers' QOL. Imagine if this was another form of media, for example, a newspaper, what the newspaper publishes is regulated and controlled and they have a responsibility for all the content. When it comes to social media, there is a lack of this control. An event like the tie pod challenge, as interviewee B1 mentioned, would never happen if this was another form of media. Therefore, we suggest that social media platforms need a form of regulation, for instance, an organization that overlooks criteria's for marketing that affect QOL.

#### 4.3.5 Addiction

The majority of the interviewees mentioned that they felt addicted to social media that they use social media as a time killer and that they would feel that they missed out on a lot if they were not using social media for a longer period of time. According to Shensa et al. (2018), frequent status updates and regular checking for likes can lead to depression among people when they do not get the feedback they wish. On the other hand, some interviewees said they were not addicted to social media, but they used social media anyway as a time-killer. This could be a sign of lack of meaningfulness in real life, and therefore people spend more time on social media, which creates either a conscious or unconscious dependence on social media. Lack of meaningfulness can be summarized from these statements from the interviews:

Interviewee P2: *“If I do not have anything to do I take up my phone...If I have some time over I spend it on Facebook to see what is happening”*.

Interviewee T1: *“Every time I take up my phone I think my thumb goes to the Facebook bottom.... It goes automatically for me”*.

Interviewee P1: *“I feel addicted to it when you sit down and do nothing you always take up your phone and go through your apps and nothing has happened but I do it anyway...I feel that I always need something that stimulates me...I don't learn something but it is a time killer and my social life does not get better because I am sitting and watching someone's horse...it is such an unnecessary thing to do and you actually do not get something out of it”*.

Interviewee S1: *“I just check Instagram to see if something fun appears, a picture or something. There is not much fun stuff on Instagram but sometimes there is something I like...I am not addicted to social media. I use it just as a time-killer”*.

Interviewee S2: *“I think it is more important than what I believe, to be on social media, but I convince myself that I am not addicted to social media”*.

When the interviewees took up their phones it came naturally to check social media platforms even though it was an unnecessary thing to do. To be addicted to social media can lower an individual's QOL (Bevan, Gomez & Sparks, 2014; Primack et al., 2017; Shensa et al., 2018; McCloskey et al., 2015), it creates, stress of always checking for likes or doing status updates and people are scared of missing out on something (Shensa et al., 2018). Moreover, unrealistic social media posts create the feeling of others having a better time and people comparing themselves to others (Primack et al., 2017). This is in line with the majority of the interviewees. Some of the interviewees highlighted that they would feel stressed if they did not make use of social media for a while and that they would feel that they missed out on a lot of information. This can be seen in the following statements:

Interviewee H1: *"I would feel that I had much to catch up with and that I would miss out on a lot...The more time goes by, the more stressed I would feel about not catching up on what is happening"*.

Interviewee S2: *"If I were without social media, I think it would be hard"*.

Interviewee A1: *"I would wonder if there is something exciting that has happened or if something is waiting for me"*.

One could therefore argue, that social media has a direct impact on consumers' QOL. This can be linked to Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014), McCloskey et al. (2015) and Primack et al. (2017), which portrayed that high volumes of social media can create stress and lower QOL. Although, social media have a different impact on particular individuals depending on the person's motivation to use social media (Campisi et al., 2015). Regarding QOL in general, most of the interviewees mentioned being present in the moment, enjoying the nice weather, going training, eating dinner together with family, playing the guitar, to have goals and something to strive for and to not being forced to do anything that creates stress. Social media, on the other hand, created stress regarding updating what they were doing and checking if they got likes and comments, which was the opposite of their definitions of QOL. Therefore, a social media detox would make them focus more on real-life interactions with people around them.

Interviewee B1 mentioned that social media makes people addicted and that they could use their time spent on social media more effectively to learn new things such as, for example, taking piano lessons or learning a new language. According to interviewee P2 it was his own fault that he followed something he did not like. *"I know I can stop follow them, but I do not stop following them because I want to see what they are doing so it is my fault too"*. Interviewee S2 believed that it would be empty without social media and she did not know what to do with her free time instead. *"It would be so empty because I stay in contact with many people through social media and it would be so weird to send a SMS...I would not know what to do with my time"*

*instead. But maybe I would clean instead and do more activities*". Social media could also be used as a tool to escape reality and sit down and relax. This is based on interviewee S2 argument where she stated that if she were without social media she would be bored because she did not know what to do instead, which can be interpreted as lack of meaningfulness in real life. This can be linked to McCloskey et al. (2015) and Primack et al. (2017), which stated that social media among older individuals can reduce stress, improve life satisfaction and well-being. Interviewee S2: *"I would be so bored because I spend so much time on social media so during that time I would have to do something else. I think it is so relaxing to sit down and scroll on Facebook or something"*. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they lost control of the time spent on social media, which could be defined as an addiction. We believe that addiction of social media can in the short term have a positive impact upon people's QOL, however, in the long term it has a negative impact due to the amount of time spent on social media that can be used to other more productive things.

## 5. Conclusion

This study set out to assess how consumers perceive the consumption of influencers and social media and how it affects their QOL. The aim of the dissertation was to get an insight into the consumer's world regarding their thoughts about influencers and social media and QOL to understand the paradox (how social media usage makes consumers happier and at the same time less happy) and to be able to generate knowledge within consumer behavior theory. Therefore, the research question was; how influencers and social media affect consumers' perception of QOL. This is the first study to our knowledge that investigates social media, influencers and conspicuous consumption in conjunction with each other.

The main findings of our thesis are how influencers and social media affect consumers' QOL in a way that creates togetherness, reduce loneliness and make people feel connected to each other. This is in line with studies from Brusilovskiy et al. (2016) and Yang et al. (2016) who stated that social media usage can reduce loneliness and increase QOL among older individuals and people with mental illnesses, however, our study shows that social media enables togetherness among different ages. Moreover, social media and influencers affect consumers' perception of QOL by creating efficiency, which affects QOL to both the better and for worse. When efficiency enables fast communication, it makes consumers feel satisfied, but on the other hand, it makes consumers scared of missing out on something important, which makes them feel stressed and less present in real life. These findings describe for the first time, to our knowledge, how efficiency has both positive and negative effects on consumers' QOL. Moreover, our research also shows that online communities could function as an information source and affect consumers' QOL mostly in a good way by helping consumers making satisfied buying decisions and to stay updated with trends. This can be linked to literature from Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1996) and Shuda and Sheena (2017) who claims that influencers have an impact on consumers' decision-making process. In addition, online communities enable people to feel better understood and less lonely, however, people can also be anonymous and share content that can affect people's QOL negatively when it is content that is irrelevant for them.

Moreover, this research demonstrates that social media and influencers could affect consumers' perception of QOL by having influencers as role models, which affects consumers' perception of QOL to the better when they feel familiarization with influencers. Influencers are role models to consumers because they look up to them, keep them better informed about trends and affect their purchase decisions and behavior, which could improve consumers' QOL. On the other hand, influencers as role models and social media could affect consumers' perception of QOL negatively when it creates a rat race to always display conspicuous consumption. A rat race could also increase QOL if consumers feel happiness gained from confirmation from others, or social status. Further, this brings up narcissism, which affects consumers' perception of QOL negatively because not all consumers are satisfied by seeing others conspicuous consumption and

they become stressed when comparing themselves to others who present an idealized self. These findings describe for the first time, to our knowledge, how influencers seen as role models have an impact on consumers' QOL both good and bad.

Findings also indicate that social media is experiencing lack of control, which mostly affects consumers' QOL by creating stress and anger. This was shown by the infinity that comes with social media by making consumers feel that they are stuck in a loop. Hence, this could be a form of lack of control and it affects people's QOL negatively when they do not get any influences from others. This phenomenon could create a narrow-minded view of what you see on social media. Lack of control on social media impact consumers' QOL by creating a delusion of other people who are living a better life. Lack of control also has an impact on consumers' QOL because social media platforms lack governing and therefore it can create hostility, which affects consumers negatively. For instance, freedom of expression leads to sadness and anger when consumers are exposed to irrelevant content. Findings also indicate that social media creates addiction and that it impacts consumers' perception of QOL when they feel that they lose their control of social media usage. Considering lack of control on social media, this finding was unexpected because there were so many aspects of social media, which creates lack of control. However, lack of control is a finding that comes with social media and affects the consumer's perception of QOL. The most likely explanation for this could be the infinity of information and advertisements that comes with social media and suck people into it and creates addiction of always being up to date about what is going on.

Since the aim of the research was to get an insight into the consumers' world regarding their thoughts about influencers, social media and QOL to understand the paradox better and to be able to generate knowledge that contributes within consumer behavior theory, this model summaries the paradox, which shows how influencers and social media creates conspicuous consumption, which can have an impact on consumers. Social media and influencers make consumers happier, at the same time, they become less happy, which is the paradox.

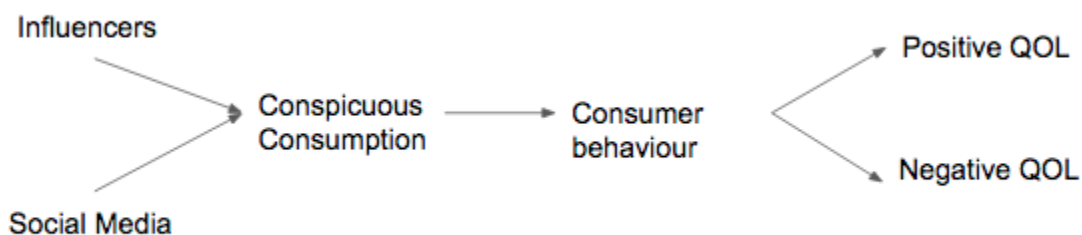


Figure 2. Paradox model (source: Lund & Haux, 2018).

## 5.1 Theoretical contributions and managerial implications

We believe these findings contribute to the existing knowledge of consumer behavior. We argue that Bevan, Gomez and Sparks (2014), Han and Myers (2018), McCloskey et al. (2015), Pinto et al. (2016) and Primack et al. (2017) studies show a more negative relationship between social media and peoples' QOL. Brusilovskiy et al. (2016), Campisi et al. (2015), Radovic et al. (2017) and Yang et al. (2016) studies show a more positive relationship between social media and peoples' QOL. Therefore, we have added new knowledge by explaining how social media, influencers and conspicuous consumption affect consumers' perception of QOL by presenting the paradox, to generate a deeper understanding of these contradictions. This research adds knowledge to the missing gap by understanding the role influencers and their effect on consumer QOL (Cho, Keum & Shah, 2015), how social media usage is related to user's general wellbeing (Bevan, Gomez & Sparks, 2014) and how social media can affect QOL (Campisi et al., 2015). Further, this research has a theoretical contribution in this area by doing a qualitative research. We have added knowledge to the conflicting theories of how social media usage and influencers impact on consumers' QOL.

Moreover, the results are also of practical relevance. In regard to marketing, this study is important to have in mind when it comes to ethical considerations in an online setting. To understand the positive and negative effects (paradox) on consumers' wellbeing, as well as to have in mind for marketers when segmenting and targeting customers. Our study is of practical relevance because it contributes to Lee and Sigry (2004) who claim that the construct of QOL marketing is important for contemporary marketing. It is up to marketers how they want to use our findings. However, we believe it can be interesting to know how to use influencers in marketing to optimize consumer satisfaction. For instance, our findings confirm that it is better to use influencers, who naturally use the company's products, rather than seeding influencers with products that create a delusion for consumers. Freedom of expression on social media creates a flow of information that is not always safeguarded by consumer law and therefore puts the consumer at risk if he/she does not think critically on his/her own. Therefore an organization that overlooks criteria's for marketing on social media that affects QOL, is needed. This is in line with Sirgy (1996) who claimed that marketing objectives should be based on QOL by focusing on improvement of dimensions for consumer's wellbeing. Our findings also suggest that our research would be beneficial in other sectors as well. In educational institutions, it is also important to educate young people about the risks of replicating what is shown on social media, to always think critically and how social media should be used moderately to decrease the risk of induced stress and social comparison. Moreover, consumers can also benefit from this study by creating an understanding of how they can improve QOL by social media usage. In all, we have contributed by generating knowledge of how consumers think and behave regarding social media and influencers, which in general could be useful for marketers to use, especially in such an online society we live in today.

## 5.2 Further research and limitations

The main limitation of this study is lack of transparency and generalizability, which according to Bryman and Bell (2011) could have an effect on the outcomes of the thesis. The aim was to get an insight into the consumers' world regarding their thoughts about influencers and social media and how they are interrelated with QOL to understand the paradox better. Therefore, the answers from the interviews were very specific from the interviewees point of view, which can be hard to generalize into other settings, and other people, which we could get other answers from. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), it could be hard to generalize a qualitative study into other settings. However, it is a qualitative study where we want to investigate the particular in its context and not the general. Therefore, this study could be interesting to use to understand how consumers think regarding influencers and social media in relation to QOL. More research in this area is necessary, for instance, to investigate in more detail what consumers think about influencers and social media, how it affects their purchases or choices in life and what outcome it has on their QOL. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2015) analyzing and interpret empiri for a research philosophy within social constructionism may be difficult. It was something this study had to deal with by the many different truths that exist, which could have limited this research. The social constructionist perspective is not impeccable. Moreover, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) highlight that it could be very time-consuming work, as well as the analysis and interpretations may be difficult. In order to minimize this problem, we transcribed and worked with reflexivity to analyze the empiri in a fair way. Considering the time limit of this research, it limited our collection of empirical information when doing the interviews. Since this research had a phenomenological view where different individual's worlds were at the center, it would be necessary to do longer interviews to get really deep into different interviewees worlds. However, we were not able to interview longer, and it may have had an effect on our results. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that the interviewees might not be sincere about how much time they spent on social media or about QOL. Several questions remain to be resolved, in particular how influencers and social media affects the perception of kids QOL, how social media and influencers affects elderly individuals QOL. Moreover, research regarding how men and women's perception of QOL differ remains to be resolved and could be an area for future research.



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## 7 Appendix A

1. What does social media mean to you?
2. How often do you make use of social media?
3. Which applications do you make use of?
4. Do you follow any influencers on social media? why?
5. What does influencers mean to you?
6. Do you believe there is a difference between young adults and adults usage of social media and influencers?
7. If you would not make use of social media for 24 hours, how would it make you feel? why?
8. What do you want to see more of on social media? Why?
9. What do you want to see less of on social media? Why?
10. What makes you happy? Why?
11. What's makes you sad? Why?