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Influencer marketing's effect on brand perceptions

– A consumer involvement perspective

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Abstract

- Title:** Influencer marketing's effect on brand perceptions – A consumer involvement perspective
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- Course:** BUSN39, Business Administration: Degree Project in Global Marketing - Master Level, 15 credits.
- Keywords:** Influencer marketing, consumer involvement, brand attitude, brand personality, social media marketing.
- Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to enhance the understanding of how different groups of consumers perceive a brand depending on whether they are exposed to influencer marketing or paid social media marketing.
- Methodology:** A descriptive quantitative study with a between-subjects design was conducted using a digital survey. A combination of one-way ANOVA, independent samples t-test and Spearman's correlation was used to analyse the 339 datasets.
- Results:** The results indicated that brand perceptions are generally higher when respondents are exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing in the clothing industry. In addition, high-ranking involvement profiles have higher brand perceptions compared to low-ranking involvement profiles when exposed to influencer marketing. Also, the relationship between brand personality and brand attitude is stronger when exposed to influencer marketing.
- Theoretical contributions:** This study has contributed to a deeper understanding of which brand personality traits that are associated with positive brand attitudes in influencer marketing. Furthermore, influencer marketing has proven to be more effective in receiving high brand attitude score than paid social media marketing.
- Managerial implications:** Influencer marketing is a better brand building tool than paid social media marketing. It could also be useful for managers to segment consumers according to the consumer involvement profile to maximise their influencer marketing strategy.
- Originality:** This thesis brings originality by presenting an initial attempt to explore how different consumer involvement profiles react to influencer marketing within the clothing industry. It also presents how influencer marketing affects consumers' perception of brand personality and brand attitude.

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Livia Bjurling

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	9
1.1	Background	9
1.2	Problematisation.....	11
1.3	Purpose of the study	14
1.4	Research question.....	14
1.5	Delimitations	15
1.6	Intended contributions.....	15
1.7	Disposition	15
2	Literature review.....	17
2.1	Social media marketing.....	17
2.1.1	Web 2.0 and user generated content	18
2.1.2	Brands on social media	19
2.1.3	Marketing on Instagram.....	20
2.2	Influencer marketing	22
2.2.1	Influencer marketing and credibility.....	23
2.2.2	Paid and sponsored social media marketing	25
2.2.3	Influencer marketing in the fashion industry	26
2.3	Consumer involvement	27
2.4	Brand perceptions.....	29
2.4.1	Brand attitudes	29
2.4.2	Brand personalities	30
2.5	Hypotheses	32
3	Methodology	34
3.1	Research philosophy	34
3.1.1	Ontology	34
3.1.2	Epistemology	35
3.2	Research design.....	36
3.3	Literature search and quality criteria.....	37
3.4	Data collection	38
3.4.1	Survey strategy	39
3.4.2	Data collection using digital survey.....	40
3.5	Measurements	41
3.5.1	Consumer involvement measurements	42
3.5.2	Brand attitude measurements	43

3.5.3	Brand personality measurements	45
3.6	Sampling process and sample size	46
3.6.1	Convenience sampling	47
3.6.2	Sample size	48
3.6.3	Ethical considerations	49
3.7	Data analysis methods.....	50
3.7.1	Preliminary analysis.....	50
3.7.2	Cluster analysis	51
3.7.3	Independent samples t-test.....	52
3.7.4	Analysis of Variance.....	52
3.7.5	Correlation analysis	53
3.8	Research quality criteria.....	54
3.8.1	Reliability.....	54
3.8.2	Internal validity.....	56
3.8.3	External validity.....	57
4	Results and analysis	58
4.1	Consumer involvement profiles	58
4.1.1	Passionate & confident (Cluster 1)	59
4.1.2	Uninterested & indifferent (Cluster 2).....	59
4.1.3	Intrigued but unconfident (Cluster 3)	59
4.2	Brand perceptions.....	60
4.2.1	Brand personalities and influencer marketing (H1).....	60
4.2.1.1	Brand personalities and consumer involvement (H1a)	63
4.2.2	Brand attitudes and influencer marketing (H2 & H2a).....	64
4.2.2.1	Brand attitudes and consumer involvement (H2b).....	66
4.2.3	Correlation between brand personality and brand attitude (H3).....	67
4.3	Result summary.....	69
5	Conclusions and discussion	71
5.1	Conclusions	71
5.2	Discussion	72
5.2.1	Consumer involvement profiles in clothing.....	73
5.2.2	Is influencer marketing more effective than paid social media?	74
5.2.3	Do Passionate & confident consumers like influencer marketing more?	77
5.3	Limitations	77
5.3.1	Convenience sample and digital survey.....	78
5.3.2	Measurements	79

5.4	Theoretical Contribution	80
5.5	Managerial Implications.....	81
5.6	Suggestions for Future Research.....	81
References		82
Appendix 1 – Main Survey		91
Appendix 2 – Clusters		101
Appendix 3 – Preliminary Analysis		102

List of tables

Table 1: Consumer involvement profile antecedents and items on the CIP scale.	43
Table 2: Brand attitude dimensions and items on the scale.	45
Table 3: Brand personality dimensions and items on the BPS.....	45
Table 4: Profile of participants in the study.	48
Table 5: The participants' main field of education.	48
Table 6: Cronbach's alpha for the three measurements	56
Table 7: Respondent distribution	58
Table 8: Results from the cluster analysis	58
Table 9: Descriptive statistics and results from independent samples t-test.	62
Table 10: One-way ANOVA and post hoc table.....	63
Table 11: Descriptive statistics and results from independent samples t-test	66
Table 12: One-way ANOVA and post hoc	67
Table 13 (to the left): Spearman's rho correlation coefficients.....	68
Table 14: Result summary.....	70

List of figures

Figure 1: Conceptual framework.....	14
Figure 2: The disposition of the thesis.	16
Figure 3: Brand personality framework.	31
Figure 4: Theoretical framework.....	33
Figure 5: Paid influencer marketing and paid social media marketing posts.....	44
Figure 6: Two-dimensional graphic illustration of the consumer involvement profiles	60

1 Introduction

The introduction chapter will introduce the fields of influencer marketing, consumer involvement and brand perceptions, with an emphasis on the challenges of the emergence of online marketing and the opportunities which has come with it. It is followed by a problematisation of this research field and a description of the positioning of our research. The purpose is summed up in a research question and appropriate delimitations are presented. Lastly, the introduction chapter provides the intended contributions of this study and an overview of the thesis' structure.

1.1 Background

The number of social media users is growing worldwide every day (Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017) and in 2017, approximately one third of the world's population was using social media on a daily basis (Zahoor & Quereshi, 2017). The spread of social media has changed consumer buying behaviour as well as the way in which information is exchanged between companies and consumers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017; Zahoor & Quereshi, 2017). In turn, this has caused fundamental changes in the landscape of marketing and social media platforms have now become a natural part of companies' marketing strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Zahoor & Quereshi, 2017). With the rise of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s, these new marketing practices have also been gauged by ordinary people, not only by those who already had a strong public image (such as athletes, musicians etc.) (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). Although personal websites and blogs have been used for many years, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube have accelerated the process of transforming ordinary people into lucrative social media influencers (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017).

For this thesis, social media influencers are defined as people who have built a significant network of followers online and who are seen as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches (Abidin, 2016; De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). They range from having a few thousand to millions of followers and Instagram has been regarded as one of the most dominant platforms for following influencers on social media (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). One reason for this might be because the platform, according to Voorveld, van Noort, Mutinga and Bronner (2018), is commonly used for social interaction in terms of giving users

the possibility to gain knowledge of the opinions of others and to share experiences with others. In addition, it has been found that consumers experience advertisements on Instagram as more entertaining compared to marketing on other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Snapchat and YouTube (Voorveld et al. 2018).

As scepticism of traditional marketing increases, recommendations from family, peers or other consumers on the Internet become more important (Wiess, 2014). It has been shown that word-of-mouth is the most trusted source of information and also the form of marketing communication that consumers most likely will respond to (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Jobs & Gilfoil, 2014; Weiss, 2014). The traditional word-of-mouth was extended to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) with the advent of the Internet and Web 2.0 (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, eWOM can for instance be communicated through blogs or online discussion threads and is known to be more persistent and accessible (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). According to Gupta and Harris (2010), eWOM-recommendations are efficient in the consumer's decision making process, especially for consumers with low motivation to process a lot of information. To leverage this eWOM in marketing, researchers have argued that the ability to identify influencers in online social networks is a valuable asset for corporations (Booth & Matic, 2011; Liu, Jiang, Lin, Ding, Duan & Xu, 2015; Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2012). It has been said that many companies operate under the illusion that they can manage the information accessible about their brands, but the consumers have always had the ownership of brands and their reputation, especially on the web (Booth & Matic, 2011; Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thus, the brand is always a construct created in the eyes of the beholder. Since social media influencers are regarded as a more credible form of eWOM compared to traditional paid advertising where the brand itself is the publisher, creating strategic alliances with influencers is a way of leveraging credible third party tastemakers and avoid using the brand as the main sender (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Since influencers are often regarded as role models, the use of influencer marketing contributes to the brand building process as it activates individuals who have direct influence over the company's target audience (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Influencers' eWOM within their networks of followers and to other influencers can promote marketing communication faster and better (Liu et al., 2015; Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017). As these influencers could be

a part of the brand's campaign and contribute to increased reach, awareness or engagement (Sudha & Sheena, 2017), it is a crucial skill to be able to identify influencers that matches the brand in their personal style to make the message credible (Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2012). Thus, the process of choosing influencers that will make the brand's marketing communication more credible is vital for brands in the social media era.

1.2 Problematisation

Influencer marketing

The use of influencers for advertisement purposes has become an alternative to the traditional marketing communication, and is therefore in direct competition with the associated field of paid social media marketing in every company's social media marketing budget. Influencers' potential brand building effects through creating positive eWOM and the possibility of utilising a third party to promote the brand has been well established (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Also, influencer/brand fit is very important to make a brand's marketing message credible. Therefore, brands who do not understand their audience and collaborate with influencers who are inconsistent with the brand will fail using influencer marketing, which in turn can cause harm to the brand by being perceived as ingenuine (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). If companies are going to continue choosing potentially harmful influencer marketing ahead of paid social media marketing, the affecting factors need to be clarified.

Dahlén, Lange and Rosengren (2017) argue that even brief exposure to advertisements in social media or blogs often have a very high impact, as consumers in an active and voluntary manner interact with influencers. This indicates that different levels of active consumer involvement in social media are required to achieve an impact. Although the importance of choosing the right influencer has been emphasised, no attempts have been made to determine how involvement affects the consumer's perception of a brand depending on influencer marketing efforts. This constitutes a clear gap in influencer marketing theory. The theoretical importance of investigating the brand building effect of influencer marketing is not limited only to justify its usefulness as a marketing tool, but also to gain a deeper knowledge of which consumers it attracts and how these perceive the brand.

Consumer involvement

Previous research has found that marketing through influencers often is perceived as more credible and trustworthy compared to marketing activities that are communicated by the brand itself (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Although, it has only been concluded that consumers in general perceive such marketing efforts in the same manner and thus, no individual differences have been considered. Kapferer and Laurent (1985a) believe that the level of consumers' involvement in a specific product category will affect their reactions to marketing and advertising within that category. The common categorisation of consumer involvement is often referred to as high or low, but according to Kapferer and Laurent (1985a; 1985b), this is a serious oversimplification and as such, it is more accurate to divide this dichotomy into several levels ranging from high to low on several involvement dimensions.

Depending on these different levels of involvement, consumers are either passive or active when receiving advertising communication and in addition, their ability to process information either becomes limited or extended (Kapferer & Laurent, 1985a). Since consumers' reactions to marketing stimuli seem to depend on their level of involvement in the product category, this implies that consumers also will react differently towards influencer marketing. In spite of these individual differences and the fact that influencer marketing is considered to be a trustworthy eWOM in most domains, no attempt has yet been made in exploring how consumers with different levels of involvement will react to marketing promoted by an influencer. This lack of knowledge constitutes a clear gap in current literature. To investigate whether influencer marketing activities are perceived differently by consumers with contrasting involvement levels is of theoretical importance as it will provide deeper knowledge on which consumers that are most positive towards influencer marketing.

Brand perceptions

While consumer involvement examines how consumers differ from one another, it does not reveal which dimensions of a brand that are actually liked. Within consumer behaviour research, a sizable amount of effort has been invested in the construct of brand personality (Aaker, 1997). Aaker's research has generated considerable attention to brand personalities and she defines the term as "the human characteristics that consumers attribute to brands" (1997, p. 347). Through the brand personality framework, it is possible to pinpoint the characteristics that individuals associate and like with the brand. Brand personality influences

consumer attitudes towards a brand, since achieving a distinct brand personality is associated with a higher level of emotional consumer response, trust, loyalty, preference, self-expression and improved product differentiation (Guthrie & Kim, 2009). Hence, a distinct brand personality is highly linked to positive brand attitudes.

By using an influencer as the face of the brand, the personality characteristics that the influencer conveys are potentially reflected in consumers' brand perceptions. To categorise influencer marketing according to brand personality dimensions could contribute to the very important process of choosing the right influencer, by aligning brand and influencer personalities, as argued by several authors (Booth & Matic, 2011; Liu et al., 2015; Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2012). In addition, it could also contribute to the understanding of which brand personality traits are associated with positive brand attitudes. However, which personality traits are positive in relation to influencer marketing have not yet been identified. To the knowledge of the authors of this study, there is no previous research within this domain and this lack of research illustrates another clear gap in current influencer marketing literature and a serious managerial limitation.

Problem summary

To summarise the problematisation, two problems concerning the effect of influencer marketing have been identified. First, there is a gap in current literature regarding how consumers with different levels of product involvement will react to advertisements promoted by an influencer. Until now, it has only been concluded that consumers in general perceive such marketing efforts in the same manner, and thus there is a lack of knowledge concerning individual differences. Second, brand personalities are highly linked to brand attitudes and brand personality characteristics could contribute to the process of choosing the right influencers for a brand. Even so, no one has yet identified how strong the relationship between specific personality traits and the overall brand attitude is when a consumer is exposed to influencer marketing. The theoretical importance to investigate how different consumers perceive a brand in terms of personality and overall attitude depending on the type of advertisements they are exposed to, will not only justify the use of influencer marketing. It will also provide deeper knowledge on which dimensions of brand personality that are affected by influencer marketing.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The importance of choosing the right influencers to a brand’s marketing campaign is well established, but factors and mediating variables for the success of influencer marketing need to be tested. While brand attitudes test general perceptions, brand personalities allow the marketer to develop a deeper understanding of the characteristics that drive positive brand perceptions and determine how these differ from competitors. To achieve the purpose, this research will first identify levels of consumer involvement. Secondly, these consumer profiles’ general brand attitudes and brand personality perceptions towards a specific brand will be measured. The differential effects on paid influencer marketing will be measured against regular paid social media marketing.

The purpose of this study is to enhance the understanding of how different groups of consumers perceive a brand depending on whether they are exposed to influencer marketing or paid social media marketing.

1.4 Research question

To achieve the purpose of the study, this research aims to quantitatively examine how the relationship between consumer involvement and brand perception is affected by influencer marketing or paid social media marketing. Therefore, the research question has been formulated as follows:

To what extent does influencer marketing affect the relationship between consumers’ involvement and their perception of brand personality and brand attitude, compared to paid social media marketing?

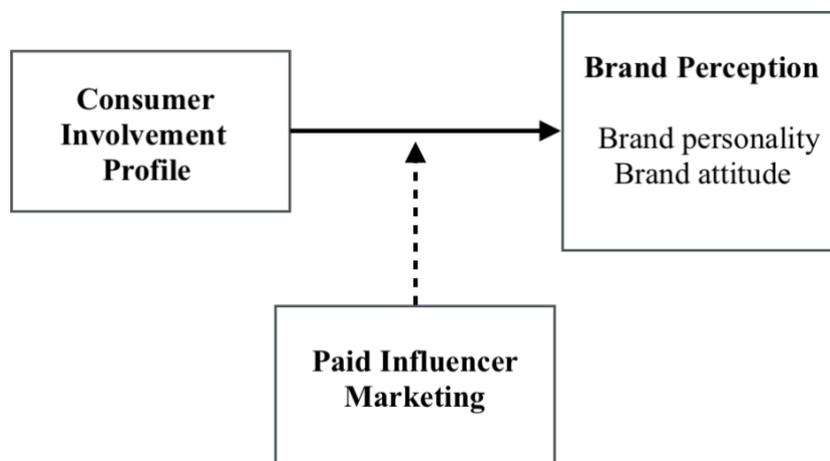


Figure 1: Conceptual framework.

1.5 Delimitations

To perform this study and be able to analyse the research question, several delimitations are noted. Through influencer marketing, brands aim to build up their image among the, often large, base of followers the content of an influencer can reach (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). As previous literature has suggested, Instagram is the most common platform for following influencers on social media (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In addition, paid social media marketing is also prominent on this platform. Therefore, Instagram was chosen for the context of this study. As much of the content on Instagram is primarily based on images, visual content will also be the focus of this study. Consequently, this research will investigate influencer marketing through image-content on Instagram and hence, the results of the study cannot be generalised to the context of other social media platforms. Further, this research will be limited to the most popular clothing brand within the female clothing industry that will be identified in a pre-study. This implies that the results from this study will only be applicable to the female clothing industry, and hence there might be differences concerning gender and other product categories.

1.6 Intended contributions

The intended contribution of this study is to arrive at a conclusion regarding how consumers with different levels of involvement perceive a brand and whether this perception is affected by the brand's influencer marketing or not. By being able to segment different levels of consumer involvement into manageable groups and their brand perceptions, influencer marketing efforts can be more efficiently implemented, analysed and maximised. This has managerial implications as managers can utilise a consumer-centric perspective in order to leverage influencer marketing optimally. This research will also contribute to the crucial skill of identifying strategic influencers, as argued by several authors (Booth & Matic, 2011; Liu et al., 2015; Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2012). The theoretical contribution is the extension of the emerging field of influencer marketing and a more nuanced picture of this multifaceted phenomenon's effects, which has not yet been clarified.

1.7 Disposition

This thesis is divided into five separate chapters. First, the reader has been introduced to the topic and why it is relevant, which has paved the way for the purpose, research question and delimitations of the study. Second, a literature review of the academic literature regarding social media marketing, influencer marketing, consumer involvement, brand personalities and

brand attitudes is introduced. In addition, the reader is presented with the theoretical framework from which testable hypotheses have been developed. Third, the research philosophy and methodology used in this study is thoroughly explained. In the third chapter, the pre-study and main study will be described in detail. The result of the pre-study will also be presented in the methodology chapter as it was merely conducted for methodological purposes. Fourth, the results of the main study will be presented and the hypotheses will be tested. Fifth, the conclusions of the study will be provided. The results will also be discussed and analysed in relation to previous research and theoretical contributions as well as managerial implications of this study will be presented. Lastly, limitations and suggestions for further research will also be given in chapter five. An illustration of the thesis disposition is presented in Figure 2.

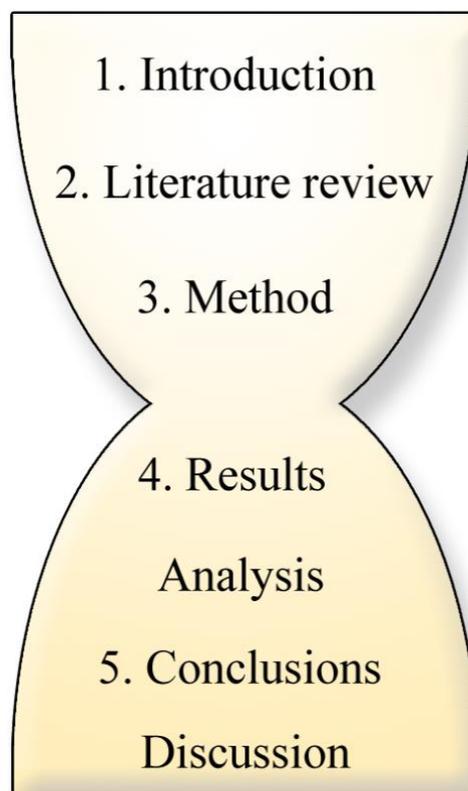


Figure 2: The disposition of the thesis.

2 Literature review

In the following chapter, an outline of existing literature in the following theoretical fields of interest in this study will be provided; social media marketing, influencer marketing, consumer involvement and brand perceptions.

2.1 Social media marketing

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that the roots of social media go as far back as 1979 when, Usenet, a worldwide discussion forum that allowed Internet users to post images was created. However, the authors further claim that social media, as people know it today, started approximately 20 years ago when the first blog forum emerged. They state the reason for this was that the growing availability of high-speed Internet access led to the creation of many new social networking sites, such as Facebook and Myspace in the early 2000s, which in turn coined the term social media. Today, approximately one-third of the world's population is using social media (Zahoor & Qureshi, 2017) and it has become an integral part of everyday life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The constant information sharing, which has come with the growth of social media, has profoundly affected consumer behaviour and purchase decisions (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Labrecque, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013). For instance, search algorithms control what kind of information consumers can access, and bloggers or other opinion leaders can influence purchase decisions through recommendations distributed through social media (Labreque et al. 2013). Thus, Labreque et al. (2013) explain that the Internet has the ability to empower consumers through increased information access, choice and options. Consequently, this leads to a power shift from the brand to the consumer and therefore, it is hard for brands to control their marketing messages within social media.

Brands can use social media sites in many different ways to engage with their target audience, including paid advertisements or sponsored posts, brand pages and eWOM (Evans, Phua, Lim & Jun, 2017). In accordance with Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004), eWOM in this study will be defined as: any positive or negative statement that is available to a large amount of people via the Internet and that has been made by former, actual or potential consumers about a brand or its products. Social media provides consumers with immediate access to information and the availability of peer-to-peer information about brands and

products affect consumers' attitudes and purchase decisions, both in a positive and negative manner, according to Virtanen, Björk and Sjöström (2017). For instance, they describe that a consumer who is satisfied with a brand or product, has the opportunity to spread positive eWOM to a large number of other consumers. On the other hand, they also argue that a dissatisfied consumer has the same possibility to spread negative eWOM to millions of other consumers if the post goes viral. On social media platforms, brand-related eWOM is in many cases propagated by individuals who feel the need to share information about their brand experiences with others in their social network (Chu & Kim, 2011). In turn, this explains why companies have less control over their brand messages now than they had before the social media era (Booth & Matic, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kontu & Vecchi, 2014).

2.1.1 Web 2.0 and user generated content

Even though the usage of social media is widespread, academic researchers do not seem to entirely agree on what should be included in the term social media. To find an accurate definition of the term, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that one must first draw a line to two nearly related concepts, which are often used in conjunction with social media, namely Web 2.0 and user generated content. They go on to explain that Web 2.0 was developed in 2004 and it describes a new way in which people started to use the Internet, namely that content is continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative way. According to them, Web 2.0 was the platform that enabled the evolution of social media. Furthermore, user generated content is a term used to describe different forms of publicly available social media content that is created and shared by end-users. User generated content can take a multitude of different forms, such as status updates on Facebook, videos on YouTube, tweets on Twitter or consumer-produced advertisements and reviews (Dhar & Chang, 2009).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) go on to describe that user generated content can be regarded as the sum of all ways people make use of social media. This has paved the way for the definition of 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” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). On the other hand, Zahoor and Qureshi provide another definition: “social media is the usage of web-based and mobile technologies to create, share and consume information and knowledge without any geographical, social, political or demographical boundaries through public interaction in a

participatory and collaborative way” (2017, p. 47). Furthermore, the American Marketing Association (2013) defines the term marketing as “the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for consumers, clients, partners, and society at large”. In reference to the above definitions of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Zahoor & Qureshi, 2017) and marketing (American Marketing Association, 2013), social media marketing in this study will be defined as the use of social media platforms for marketing purposes.

2.1.2 Brands on social media

With the rise of social media, corporate communication has been democratised as communication about a brand takes place with or without the permission of the brand itself (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). According to Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker and Bloching (2013), marketing in the social media environment resembles the interactive and chaotic game of pinball. Just as in pinball, the focus is continuously shifted in different directions and it is impossible to be aware of everything that happens on social media in relation to the brand. According to them, this entails increased active participation among users and a strong level of interconnectedness, which in turn results in consumers having increased power and the change of their behaviour in the marketplace. Since the usage of social media is a widespread tool for consumers to find and talk about products or brands (Jobs & Gilfoil, 2014; Kietzmann et al., 2011), it is important to incorporate social media into companies’ marketing strategies in order to gain trust from consumers (Jobs & Gilfoil, 2014). In addition, Kietzmann et al. (2011) state that users need to be made aware of companies on social media, because if brands are absent, consumers are unlikely to discover them by chance.

Despite the many advantages of social media marketing, there are some disadvantages that marketers sometimes are confronted with (Fournier & Avery, 2011). For instance, they might experience that the brand is not welcome on social media as marketing activities that originate from the brand itself might be experienced as intrusive and inauthentic by consumers. As mentioned above, companies do not have full control over their brand messages within social media (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and a dissatisfied consumer has the tools to spread a negative eWOM to millions of other consumers (Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017). On the other hand, Kimmel and Kitchen

(2014) have found that the impact of positive WOM spread by consumers, is actually greater than negative WOM about the brand.

The first step towards getting consumers to engage with a brand is to really listen to the needs and wants of the consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It is of utmost importance for a brand to know what their consumers find enjoyable, interesting and valuable in order to develop content to fit their needs, and thus to create successful social media marketing campaigns (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). By knowing what users have in common and identifying social media marketing content that appeal to those consumers, common interests for sharing and endorsing can be exploited (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Besides reach, Mangold and Faulds (2009) state that another positive effect of endorsing and sharing social media content is that brand-related messages shared by peers are perceived as more credible than content spread by the brand itself. In addition, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also state that brands should avoid overly professional content, and instead try to blend in with other users. By doing so, as well as engaging consumers in their social media content, brands can leverage eWOM, which several authors state is one of the most trusted sources of information that consumers are most likely to act upon (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Jobs & Gilfoil, 2014; Weiss, 2014).

2.1.3 Marketing on Instagram

Instagram entered the social media landscape in 2010 and is today one of the most widely used social media platforms (Statista, 2017). This platform is a free social networking application that allows users to edit and share videos, pictures and so called “Instagram Stories” from their mobile devices. In 2017, Instagram had more than 800 million active users worldwide (Instagram, n.d.; Statista, 2017), whereof 500 million were daily users. As Instagram users easily can share their content on other social networks, such as Facebook, it benefits from a strong social integration and has high levels of user engagement (Coelho, de Oliveira & de Almeida, 2016; Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017; Statista, 2017). In their study of consumers’ usage of social media platforms, Phua, Jin and Kim (2017) found that Instagram was the most used platform for following brands. In addition, according to Sheldon and Bryant (2016) and Lee, Lee, Moon and Sung (2015) it is the fastest globally growing social networking site. Lee et al. (2015) state that Instagram has become an empowering and social networking medium that is popular among young consumers. The most active Instagram users

as of January 2018, are women in the ages of 18-24, although women between 19-34 years are also highly active (Statista, 2018).

According to Lee et al. (2015), some of the motives for why people use Instagram is to browse pictures or videos related to their interests, get updates and connect to users with similar interests or lifestyles. The authors also found that Instagram users often actively seek social relationships with a variety of other users that seem to share their interest. Thereby, people often feel an important connection to like-minded Instagram users. Except for interacting with only friends, the findings of Lee et al. (2015) suggest that people often utilise the Instagram platform to escape their real lives and engage with people they have never met offline before. The authors further argue that individuals can, for instance, form parasocial relationship with celebrities who have thousands or millions of followers on Instagram.

These aforementioned motives for why people use Instagram could be classified as some kind of surveillance behaviour (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Sheldon and Bryant (2016) found that such behaviour is linked to endorsing (i.e. liking or commenting on a social media post) other user's posts on Instagram. In turn, they argue that this surveillance behaviour can provide an explanation for why people endorse familiar as well as unfamiliar users or brands on Instagram. Endorsement behaviour is very common among consumers, but it can also be beneficial for brands to adopt this behaviour in their social media strategy as being active on Instagram can lead to increased brand awareness (Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017).

According to Lee et al. (2015), Instagram serves as a channel where users, both consumers and brands, communicate with others through images rather than text. Moreover, Miles (2014) explains that images and visual content enable consumers to understand information better and it is a way for brands to break through all the constant information consumers are daily exposed to on the Internet. As previously stated, Instagram is a widely used and appreciated social media channel. Therefore, it is of importance for marketers to understand the specific motives consumers have regarding their Instagram usage, how a brand can satisfy consumer needs and thereby reinforce the consumer-brand relationship (Lee et al. 2015). Neher (2013) states that Instagram has become one of the most popular marketing platforms in social media, both because of the large number of users and the advantages of visual content. The author further argues that visual content is effective in building brand awareness and increasing conversation, traffic as well as spread. Moreover, companies that use

Instagram have the possibility to enhance the brand's visual storytelling instead of just presenting textual information about the product or brand (Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017). Storytelling has the power to provide meaning to a brand as well as enhancing consumer's emotional connection to it (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Additionally, Krallman, Pelletier and Adams (2016) have found that consumers show the highest level of brand involvement when interacting on Instagram, compared to other social media platforms. Therefore, it is important for marketers to incorporate Instagram in their social media marketing strategy, at least if the brand wants to increase brand involvement (Krallman, Pelletier & Adams, 2016).

To become successful on Instagram, it is of importance to have many followers, comments and likes as people will perceive such brands as more popular and therefore, rather follow them than brands that are perceived to be unpopular (Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017). Although, Miles (2014) states it is important for all types of brands to maintain a balance between those they follow and their own followers. This is due to the fact that a company following a very large amount of users could be perceived as a spammer and thus, non-authentic (Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017). Furthermore, to successfully incorporate Instagram into a brand's social media marketing strategy, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) advise brands to take the lead and be active. Otherwise, it will neither be possible to create, nor increase awareness about the brand or its products. To take the lead and be active goes beyond only filling one's social media account with content (Fournier & Avery, 2011). It also means to actively engage in consumers' feeds on the social media platform (Fournier & Avery, 2011), hence actively using endorsement behaviour (Virtanen, Björk & Sjöström, 2017). In other words, it is all about being social to be able to create a successful social media strategy (Fournier & Avery, 2011). In addition, the brand must also find out what consumers find pleasurable, valuable and what they desire to see on social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). One way of actively engage in consumers' feeds on social media is through influencer marketing.

2.2 Influencer marketing

Today, global companies are struggling to fully understand the impact social media has on their brands according to Booth & Matic (2011). The authors argue that along with the growth of social media, a new level of activism from an influential group that did not have a voice in the past has emerged, namely ordinary consumers. They say that due to the power of the

Internet, many of these consumer “influencers” have the ability to bring together people who share the same interests and thus also have a strong voice in the market. According to Abidin (2016), influencers are people who have built a sizeable social network of followers on social media and are regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches. This will also be the definition of influencers used in this study.

According to Sudha & Sheena (2017), there are two types of influencers: paid and earned. The authors explain that paid influencers are hired by brands to market products, whereas earned influencers spread eWOM without receiving any compensation. In this study, the focus will be put on paid influencers as brands are actively collaborating with these as part of the marketing strategy, whereas earned influencer marketing is not within the brand’s scope and thus difficult to incorporate into an active marketing strategy.

Sudha and Sheena (2017) state that marketing through influencers, also known as “influencer marketing”, is an extension of the concept WOM and activates individuals who have direct influence over a brands’ target audience and therefore, the use of this marketing activity contributes to brand building. In addition, it has been shown that influencers contribute to increased reach, sales, awareness and engagement towards the brand that is being promoted (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). One of the reasons for this contribution to brand building might be because influencer marketing often can be perceived as a powerful mechanism for eWOM (Evans et al. 2017). Phua, Jin and Kim (2017) further state that social media-based influencer marketing has become increasingly popular for brands that want to engage consumers online. This is because influencers have the ability to reach a large consumer segment in a short time period at a relatively low cost, compared to traditional advertisement campaigns (Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017). In addition, influencer marketing is a way through which brands can expand their audience and turn consumers into loyal consumers by providing trust and authenticity (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

2.2.1 Influencer marketing and credibility

Several authors have found that consumers often perceive influencers as ordinary people who spread a more credible eWOM compared to promotion from the brand itself (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Thus, traditional marketing is not as effective today as it has been in the past (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Since influencers often have a strong relationship with their

audience and are regarded as role models, they accumulate a high degree of trust from followers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Thus, several authors have argued that there are strong arguments for brands to use influencers in their social media marketing strategy (Booth & Matic, 2011; De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2012; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Furthermore, Gürkaynak, Kama and Ergün (2018) state that consumers are more prone to listen to influencers on social media as they believe these persons are not actually trying to sell them products. This is one of the reasons for why influencer marketing has skyrocketed in popularity and usage during recent years (Gürkaynak, Kama & Ergün, 2018).

De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) argue that one of the biggest challenges in influencer marketing is to identify which influencers who are right for the brand. However, this challenge is one that should be taken seriously and needs to be a vital part of any social media campaign with focus on influencers (Booth & Matic, 2011). With the immense growth of bloggers and their increasing power to affect consumer attitudes, analysing and evaluating the most influential social media influencers becomes increasingly important (Booth & Matic, 2011). In addition, previous research has found that use of social media influencers as celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) and bloggers (Lee & Watkins, 2016) leads to significantly higher purchase intentions and brand attitudes. Booth and Matic (2011) further state that the ability to identify influencers who fit into a brand's social media strategy will ensure consumer engagement that produces measurable results and in addition, positively contributes to a positive brand perception. Additionally, Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen (2012) also highlight the extreme importance of the match between a blogger or influencers' personal style and the brand, because if it does not match, the marketing will not be perceived as credible and authentic. To create effective marketing content when using influencer marketing, a brand therefore needs to know what attracts its audience (Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2012; Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), Instagram has been identified as one of the most dominant social media platform for following influencers. The authors further suggest that brands carefully need to consider what type of celebrity, as an Instagram influencer, that would appeal to a particular target group most effectively. Hence, the importance of knowing your audience and collaborating with influencers that fit your brand is once again strengthened. The findings of Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) also showed that non-

traditional female celebrities, such as bloggers, were more influential to young women compared to traditional celebrities (e.g. actors). This was due to the fact that the former was perceived as more credible and relevant to female users as the brands and products endorsed by such influencers were perceived as more affordable (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Furthermore, Mangold and Faulds (2009) have found that consumers are more likely to talk about a brand when the brand's products support the consumers desired self-image. As influencers are often regarded as role models in their domain (Sudha & Sheena, 2017), it could be argued that they illustrate self-images consumers wish to achieve themselves. To ensure a successful social media campaign, it is thus important that consumers can relate to the type of influencers a brand use for their advertising (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

2.2.2 Paid and sponsored social media marketing

It has been shown that social media users have a limited amount of patience with advertising when they perceive the advertisement as having a persuasive purpose (Bang & Lee, 2016), and with commercial content that appears without any social connection (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). In attempts to persuade consumers without triggering such advertisement recognition and scepticism, brands incorporate social media marketing strategies that minimise the disturbance of the actual social media usage (Lee, Kim & Ham, 2016), such as influencer marketing. Lee, Kim and Ham (2016) explain that such marketing attempts should be similar to its surrounded social media content. However, today there exist a series of regulations regarding such content and the influencer must be transparent in regards to which posts are sponsored or paid for (Evans et al. 2017). Thus, to mark posts as "paid partnership" is now a feature that Instagram offers its users.

van Reijmersdal, Fransen, van Noort, Oprea, Vandenberg, van Lieshout, Boerman (2016) have found that consumers who recognise advertising in any sponsored social media post will react with a decreased purchase intention and more negative brand attitude towards the brand being endorsed. This finding has been supported by Evans et al. (2017) who studied word disclosure on Instagram advertisements. The authors found that disclosure language featuring "Paid Ad" and "Sponsored" conveyed that the content was an advertisement, but it did not alone account for a direct effect on brand attitudes. When such language is used, it clearly conveys that the relationship between the influencer and the brand is characterised by a business agreement and thus, that the advertisement is of persuasive nature (Evans et al. 2017). In situations where consumers understand that an Instagram post is advertising, Evans et al. (2017)

actually found that it has a significant negative impact on brand attitudes. Therefore, it exists a need to further clarify if this is applicable on both influencer marketing and paid social media marketing.

2.2.3 Influencer marketing in the fashion industry

Within the fashion industry, blogs have become one of the most efficient ways to share recommendations online, according to Sudha and Sheena (2017). In addition, they explain that the fashion industry as people know it today, is almost entirely driven by influencer marketing. They argue that social influencers who are perceived as experts within this industry have a great impact on consumers' purchasing decisions as they through their personal opinions can influence what becomes a trend and a 'must have'. As argued above, consumers tend to trust influencers more than the brand itself when it comes to marketing and WOM is regarded as the most powerful force in the fashion marketplace (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Langner, 2010). Thus, as consumers trust eWOM spread by influencers, people tend to copy the style of their favourite bloggers or influencers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Wiedmann, Hennigs & Langner, 2010).

Wiedmann, Hennigs and Langner (2010) have found that different social media influencers within the fashion industry will attract different consumer groups. For instance, involvement in fashion is prominent in both consumers and influencers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Wiedmann, Hennigs & Langner, 2010). Wiedmann, Hennigs and Langner (2010) have identified three types of social influencers in fashion: the fashion super spreaders, the narrative fashion experts and the helpful friend. Firstly, the fashion super spreaders have a rather low involvement in fashion. Secondly, the narrative fashion experts are excited about fashion whereas the third type, the helpful friend, is concerned with risks in relation to the fashion purchase. These types of fashion influencers will influence consumers in different ways (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Langner, 2010) and therefore, it is of utmost importance to choose influencers that both match the brand and the targeted consumers (Booth & Matic, 2011; Liu et al., 2015; Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2012).

Sudha and Sheena (2017) state that many consumers do not associate fashion purchases to risk, and thus they do not always have strong ties to all types on fashion influencers. In addition, they have found that consumers use fashion blogs as a way of validating their purchase decisions. The authors also explain that young women tend to behave in line with

those social influencers they can relate to. Thus, by investing in relationship building with a fashion influencer, such as a blogger, and thereby indirectly engage with the brand's target consumers, the authors claim that brands can increase company trust, consumer loyalty and sales. Since influencers have a strong and widespread presence within the fashion industry, clothing is the product category used in this thesis. The operationalisation of influencer marketing in this study is further explained in section 3.5.

2.3 Consumer involvement

In attempts to fully understand the behaviour of consumers related to possessions, consumer researchers have often utilised the construct of involvement (O'Cass, 2004). Previous research on consumer involvement has tried to understand the effect involvement has on various purchasing and consumer behaviours (O'Cass, 2000; O'Cass, 2004; Guthrie & Kim, 2009; Kapferer & Laurent, 1985b; Kim, 2005). O'Cass (2004) has argued that different kinds of relationship marketing and how individuals assign certain meanings to products can be explained by the construct of involvement. He also argues that this is particularly applicable to the fashion industry. In the context of consumer activities and fashion clothing, involvement is defined as "the extent to which the consumer views the focal activity as a central part of their life, a meaningful and engaging activity in their life" (O'Cass, 2000, p. 550). High fashion clothing involvement implies greater relevance to the individual (O'Cass, 2000).

Rothschild (1979) defines involvement as a motivational state of arousal and interest. This state is induced by either external factors such as the situation, the marketing communication and the product itself, or by internal factors such as ego or central values. In other words, the consumer will become involved if the product or service of interest is perceived as being important to meet the consumers' needs, goals, and values (Kim, 2005). On the other hand, in an attempt to measure involvement, Zaichkowsky (1985, p. 342) defines the construct as "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests". Hence, values play a critical role in forming consumers' involvement with different products (Kim, 2005). In turn, this means that consumers' tendencies to perceive specific products as more important or to engage in particular product acquisition activities will vary based on their involvement levels (Kim, 2005).

Due to involvement's abstract nature, illustrated above, researchers have operationalised involvement using antecedents and treated involvement as a latent construct (Kapferer and Laurent, 1985a; 1985b). Kapferer and Laurent (1985b) advanced the model for measuring antecedents of consumer involvement into the consumer involvement profile (CIP), which is the involvement model used in this thesis. They conducted three independent data collections with more than 4400 respondents and identified five antecedents of involvement across product categories: interest, pleasure, sign, risk importance and probability of error. These antecedents are summarised by Kapferer and Laurent (1993), who explain interest as referring to the interest and importance in a product category while pleasure is the satisfaction resulting from the product purchase. According to Kapferer and Laurent (1993), sign value is the appeal, personality and identity that the product class or brand communicates. Risk importance is the importance placed on the outcome of a purchase. This antecedent symbolises how the consumer will feel if they purchase the wrong product. Probability of error measures uncertainty based on the possibility of a mispurchase. All antecedents to consumer involvement are correlated, but each facet has its own variance (Kapferer & Laurent, 1985b).

The CIP lets marketers identify and segment markets along several multidimensional factors (Guthrie & Kim, 2009). For example, in Kapferer and Laurent's research, the authors identified 10 consumer profiles in which consumers differ in character (Kapferer & Laurent, 1985b), which later was validated on an American sample (Laaksonen, 2010). The questionnaire Kapferer and Laurent have been using ranges from 12-20 statements (Kapferer & Laurent, 1986a; 1985b; 1993). Guthrie and Kim (2009) validated a 16-statement questionnaire for female make-up products based on Kapferer and Laurent's work. The CIP has received some criticism for using perceived risk in the model, as it could be seen as a distinct construct rather than the fact that risk influences involvement (Laaksonen, 2010). Kapferer and Laurent (1993) argue against this criticism, due to the importance of measuring what the consumer perceives is at stake in a consumer behaviour situation.

However, personal characteristics, such as values and involvement, influence consumer behaviour in many ways according to Kim (2005). He argues that involvement influences consumer's information search patterns and decision making processes, which is of significance for brands when targeting consumers. He notes that the personal importance of functionality and practicality might have a different effect on how consumers evaluate a

clothing product compared with consumers who are more interested in brand image and fashion. This means it is important for brands to know the dynamics of both the product and the brand perceptions of the target segment. This is where brand attitudes and brand personalities come in.

2.4 Brand perceptions

Branding literature is filled with terms and buzzwords. In the following sections, two brand perception concepts will be thoroughly described. Firstly, the general concept brand attitude is discussed and secondly, the narrower concept of brand personality is explained.

2.4.1 Brand attitudes

Brand image is the way brands are perceived by consumers and has been defined as the set of associations attached to the brand in the mind of consumers by Keller (1993). These associations are categorised into three types: attributes, benefits and attitudes. Brand attributes are the expressive characteristics that define the brand name (Keller, 1993). These brand attributes involve both product and non-product related associations (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). Consumers' perceived benefits symbolise the value delivered by the brand attributes and according to Keller (1993), they are characterised as functional, experiential and symbolic. Brand attitude is the evaluative dimension of brand image, which results from consumer's opinions and feelings about the attributes and benefits the brand offers (Keller, 1993). He summarised brand attitudes as consumers' overall evaluation of the brand. Into this definition, Percy and Rossiter (1992, p. 266) add: "with respect to its perceived ability to meet a currently relevant motivation". Motivation is seen by Percy and Rossiter (1992) as a part of a stimulating mechanism that helps consumers relate perceived benefits of a brand with the underlying needs. This motivation indicates that some kind of consumer involvement is involved and it has traditionally been regarded as either high or low (Percy & Rossiter, 1992).

The strategic brand attitude model presented by Percy and Rossiter (1992) is used to categorise products into high involvement, low involvement, transformational and informational dimensions. Hence, it is completely overlooking the individual and their specific category preferences. Rather, it assumes the same involvement by every consumer in a product category. Consumer-centric models, such as the CIP, are better used when trying to identify brand attitude effects of marketing efforts. Attitudes have been researched mostly in

relation to how they affect purchase intention (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Percy & Rossiter, 1992; Guthrie & Kim, 2009), while this thesis studies factors affecting brand attitudes.

Increases in positive brand attitudes have been proven to increase market share, and as such, positive brand attitudes lead to more successful and profitable brands (Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001). This makes brand attitudes an important aspect of many businesses. One way of understanding brand attitudes and consumers' relation to brands on a deeper level is through brand personalities.

2.4.2 Brand personalities

The term personality is used differently in the context of brands in consumer behaviour, compared to persons within psychology (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). A person's personality is determined by multi-dimensional factors (such as appearance, traits and behaviour), while a brand, in its nature is an inanimate object, has a personality that is determined by other factors (such as attributes, benefits, price, user imagery) (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). Subsequently, the term brand personality is a metaphor and although brands are not people, they can in fact be personified (Aaker & Fournier, 1995).

As previously mentioned, considerable attention has been given to the brand personality construct. Aaker's definition, "the human characteristics that consumers attribute to brands" (1997, p. 347), is the most widely accepted (Freling & Forbes, 2005). From the classic five human personality dimensions, Aaker (1997) designed a five dimensional brand personality framework to identify the traits consumers associate with a brand. From this, she developed the brand personality scale (BPS), in order to measure how consumers use brands emotionally and symbolically. The BPS was developed with a representative U.S. sample with more than 600 respondents (Aaker, 1997). From a 114 x 114 personality traits correlational matrix, 5 factors were identified using principal component analysis (Aaker, 1997). The factor names sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication and ruggedness were chosen to represent the 15 sub-personalities. Brand personalities have been found to make a difference in how consumers feel towards brands, the relationships they facilitate, the self-expression they allow and the simplification of brand choice they enable (Keller, 1993; Freling & Forbes, 2005).

In the popular works of Aaker (1997), it is suggested that the brand personality dimensions might influence consumers and their preferences in different ways. She believes that sincerity, excitement and competence are achievable and positive personality traits, while sophistication and ruggedness are personality dimensions that individuals might aspire to, but do not possess. Because of this, ruggedness and sophistication have not been expected to exist in influencer marketing, since influencers are perceived as normal people, as argued by several authors (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). These personality dimensions have therefore been excluded from the hypotheses presented in section 2.5.

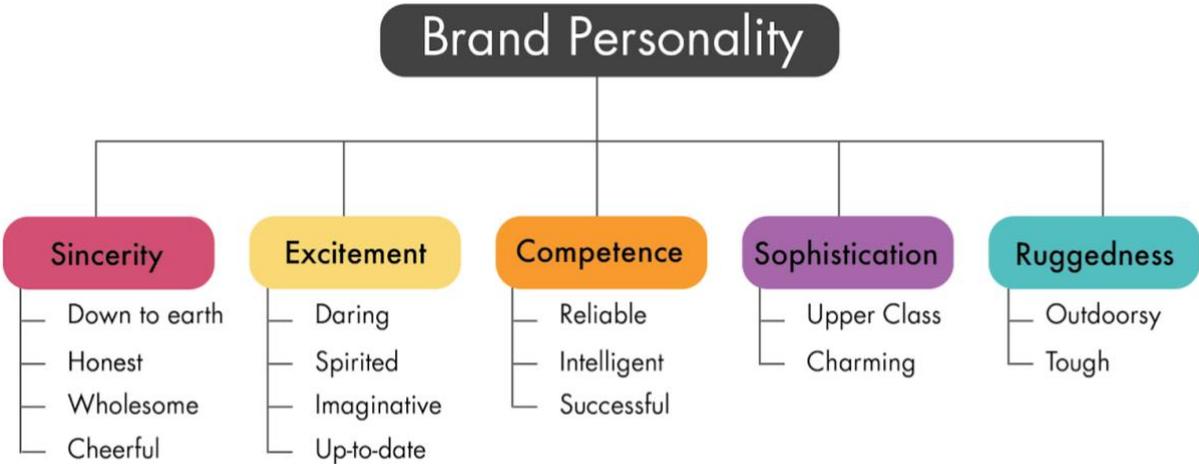


Figure 3: Brand personality framework (Superskill, 2017).

Achievable and aspirational personality traits have, of course, brand building implications as to how the brand wants to be perceived. Should the brand be ordinary and have an achievable personality or have a more idealistic, maybe unachievable personality? Aaker (1997) explain that while product focused attributes tend to serve a utilitarian function for consumers, brand personality tends to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function, which the BPS and the brand personality framework can generalise across product categories. She suggests that the effects of marketing variables, for instance advertising, on perceptions of brand personality dimensions need further assessment (Aaker, 1997), which will be tested in this thesis. Studies exploring the relationship between brand personality and consumer involvement are limited, but Guthrie and Kim (2009) successfully found differences in brand perception and consumer involvement between three American cosmetic brands. The brand personality scale is, as previously mentioned, thought to be product independent and in this thesis this will be tested on another product category, namely clothing.

2.5 Hypotheses

To connect back to the purpose of this study, the effects of influencer marketing on the relationship between consumers' involvement and their perception of brand personality and brand attitude has not yet been tested. These concepts has been tested and proven valid individually, but not together.

As previous research has suggested, it is important to find influencers who match the brand, but which dimensions that are perceived as good influencer traits need to be tested. In the first hypothesis and its sub-hypothesis, the aim was to test the difference between influencer marketing and paid social media marketing's effect on brand personality. First confirming the consumer involvement profiles and then testing the difference between the profiles:

H1: All consumer involvement profiles will show a significantly higher score on brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence and excitement when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing.

H1a: High-ranking involvement profiles will show significantly higher levels of the brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence and excitement when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to low-ranking involvement profiles.

As previous research has suggested, influencer marketing has been proved to lead to positive brand attitudes, but this has not yet been tested in relation to consumer involvement. Therefore, the aim of the second hypothesis and its sub-hypotheses firstly is to confirm the difference between influencer marketing and paid social media marketing's effect on brand attitude for all respondents. This is then further divided into testing the consumer involvement profiles and lastly, potential differences between the profiles:

H2: Respondents exposed to influencer marketing will show a significantly higher score on brand attitude, compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing.

H2a: All consumer involvement profiles will show a significantly higher score on brand attitude when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing.

H2b: High-ranking involvement profiles will show significantly higher positive brand attitudes when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to low-ranking involvement profiles.

As previous research has suggested, achieving a distinct brand personality is highly linked to positive brand attitudes. Therefore, in the third hypothesis, the aim is to confirm whether there exists a difference in the relationship between brand personality and brand attitude depending on the type of marketing respondents are exposed to:

H3: Respondents exposed to influencer marketing will show a stronger positive correlation between brand personality dimensions sincerity, excitement, competence and brand attitude, compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing.

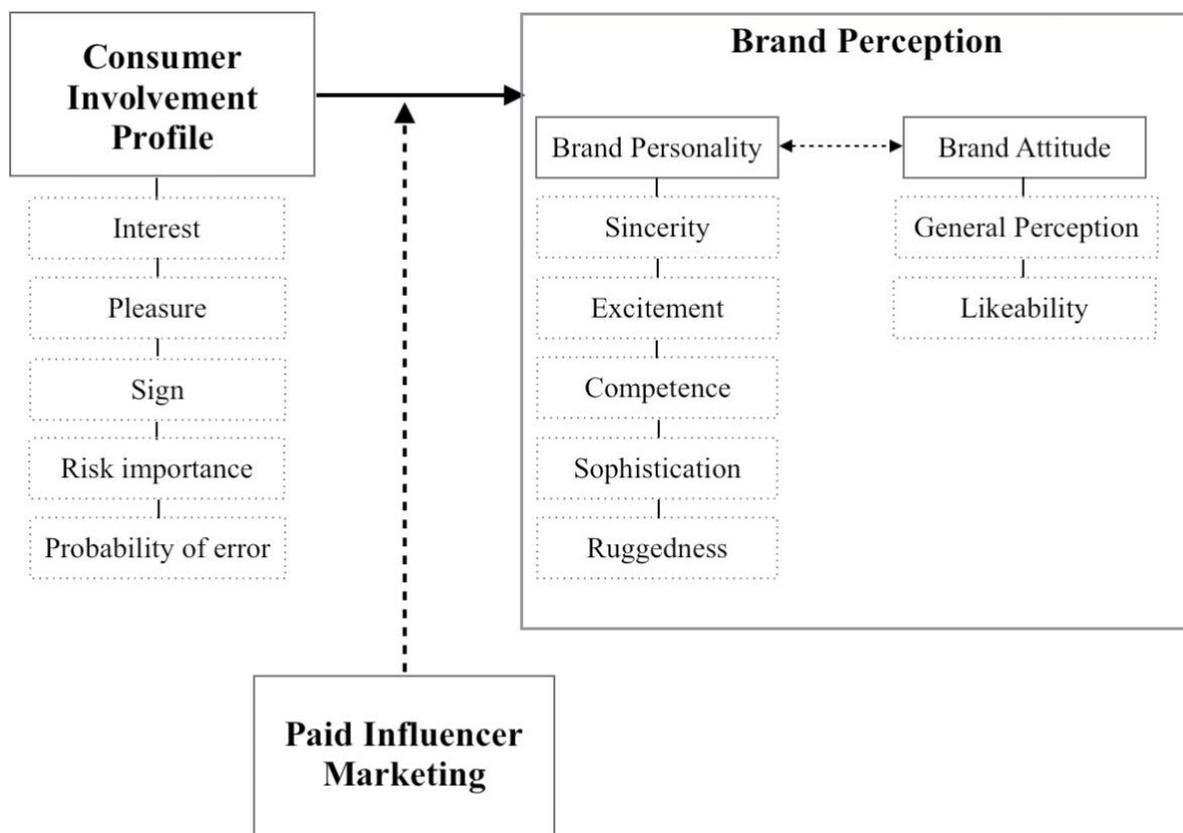


Figure 4: Theoretical framework.

3 Methodology

In this chapter, an in-depth description of the methodological aspects of this thesis will be presented and discussed. First, our philosophical standpoint is presented with ontological and epistemological discussions. This is followed by a description of our research design, literature search and data collection. The technicalities of our measurements, sampling process and data analysis methods are also discussed and lastly, the research quality criteria with reliability and validity are reflected upon.

3.1 Research philosophy

The methods and data collection techniques are the most visible features of a research project, but they strongly depend on the decisions about ontology, epistemology and methodology (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). To be able to apply the most appropriate methods for optimally answering the research question of this study, it is vital to clearly discuss and outline the underlying assumptions of this research.

3.1.1 Ontology

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), ontology is about how the researchers consider the nature of existence and reality. As this study seeks to investigate if influencer marketing affects the relationship between consumers' involvement and their brand perception, it implies an ontological philosophy of realism. More specifically, this study applies the internal realism perspective, which according to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) assumes that there is a single true reality. However, as facts are concrete, but cannot be accessed directly, it is impossible for researchers to completely access this true reality. It is thus only possible to gather indirect evidence of what is occurring in the reality or the observed state of the phenomenon being studied (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The ontological view of this study is that there is a single truth about the effect influencer marketing has on the relationship between consumer involvement and brand perceptions. However, due to the necessity of operationalisations, it is not possible to directly access and accurately measure this phenomenon in an absolute sense, as it only will be an approximation of the "true" phenomenon. Nonetheless, through accurately performed research it is possible for us to gather empirical support and, thereby, interpret the truth in a relevant way.

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) internal realists often have difficulties in defining and measuring social concepts, but disagreements on the definitions and measurements of such concepts do not change the fact that they actually have consequences in reality. Thus, by coming to a definition and relevant measurement of each concept in this study, it will be possible to come to a conclusion of the reality regarding the relationship between these concepts.

3.1.2 Epistemology

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) explain that epistemology is about the theory of knowledge and through a general set of assumptions, it helps the researchers to understand the optimal ways of enquiring into the nature of the world. They state that there are two contrasting views on how research in social science should be conducted: positivism and social constructionism. The idea of the latter, relies on the interpretivistic paradigm (Burns & Burns, 2008), and focuses on the different ways in which people make sense of the world through the use of language and experience sharing (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

However, the epistemological view of positivism has been undertaken in this thesis. As the perceptual difference between influencer marketing and social media marketing has been measured in this research, the aim was not to study the phenomenon as a social construction, but rather as an absolute observable opinion. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) explain that the key idea within the positivistic approach is that the social world exists externally and that objective methods are more effective in measuring this world, compared to subjective methods such as reflection or intuition. Thus we, as researchers in this study, are independent from what is being observed, which according to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) is referred to as *independence*. In addition to independence, the authors explain that there exists a number of other philosophical assumptions of positivism, which are explained in relation to this study below. The choice of studying the effect of influencer marketing on consumer involvement and brand perceptions has been based on *value-freedom*. This study builds on three main *hypotheses* derived from previous research and will *deduce* the empirical observations as true or false, i.e. to either support or not support the hypotheses.

In order to test hypotheses, positivists need to *operationalise* theoretical concepts to be able to measure these facts quantitatively. In this study, this was done based on previous research on influencer marketing as well as consumer involvement and brand perceptions, in terms of brand personality and attitude. As positivistic research is based on *reductionism*, the concepts measured in this study were reduced into meaningful and manageable scales, which are presented in section 3.5. Furthermore, a *cross-sectional analysis* was conducted to enable comparisons across individuals in the research sample. Lastly, a random and large sample allows positivists to make *generalisations* from a sample onto a larger population. This was also the aim throughout this research process, but these possibilities were limited due to resource constraints. This will be further discussed in sections 3.4.1 and 3.6.1.

3.2 Research design

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how different consumer involvement profiles perceive a brand depending on whether the consumers are exposed to influencer marketing or paid social media marketing. To evaluate their brand perceptions, measurements of brand attitude and brand personality were used. Since the relationship between these concepts not have been studied by other researchers, an in-depth theoretical review of influencer marketing, consumer involvement, brand personality and brand attitude was made before conducting this research. As this study has tested hypotheses developed from existing theory regarding these concepts, it has taken a deductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Burns & Burns, 2008; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This approach allowed the study to test a new phenomenon with existing theories. As the inductive approach has an interpretative nature and starts from observations with the aim to explore a phenomenon to generate new theory, it was inconsistent with the purpose of this study and was therefore not applicable.

In accordance with Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), a theoretical framework for the concepts investigated in this study was developed, and thereafter the framework was subsequently tested. In this research, a deductive approach has thus been central to enable the testing of influencer marketing's effect on the relationship between consumer involvement and brand perceptions. By testing theories through theoretical considerations that have underpinned the hypotheses of this study, the theoretical considerations could be confirmed or disconfirmed through statistical inference (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Malhotra, 2010).

Based on the purpose of this study, a descriptive study was conducted (Burns & Burns, 2008). Thus, this research will provide a description of the differences in brand perceptions when different consumer involvement profiles are exposed to influencer- or paid social media marketing. According to Burns and Burns (2008), descriptive studies are commonly used in marketing research, but the major disadvantage with this approach is that the actual reasons for associations found between variables will remain quite uncertain. This is due to the fact that such associations do not imply causality (Burns & Burns, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). To the authors of this thesis' knowledge, this study is one of the first studies of its kind and therefore, the aim was not to find causality. Instead, the aim was primarily to investigate whether significant differences between the variables of interest exist, depending on what type of marketing the respondents were exposed to. In reference to the above, a descriptive study was appropriate to use in this research. Investigating possible causal relationships could be done using experimental studies, but as experimental conditions were considered to be too extensive in this data collection phase, it would be more adequate in future research.

Lastly, since the research question in this study aimed to investigate a particular phenomenon at a particular time, a cross-sectional design was used (as described in section 3.4.1). Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister (2012) explain that cross-sectional designs are ideally suited when the goal of the survey research is of descriptive or predictive nature. The aim in this thesis has also been to confirm the scales and the survey for use in future research where causality can be explored. As this study has the aim of description, a cross-sectional design enabled us to compare differences in brand perceptions between various consumer involvement profiles and advertisements. Therefore, a cross-sectional research design was considered to be best suited for this study.

3.3 Literature search and quality criteria

When conducting a descriptive study, the researchers need to have a clear understanding of the phenomena they wish to investigate, prior to the data collection (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). To achieve a clear picture of the different concepts relevant to this study, a thorough literature search and a critical source evaluation was applied throughout the literature review. As suggested by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), purpose, authorship, timeliness as well as credibility and accuracy have all been considered as evaluation criteria throughout the literature search.

Both relevant books and articles have been used throughout the literature review. The articles and books have been found through course literature lists from Lund University or the trusted database LUBSearch. LUBSearch is Lund University's library database and only peer-reviewed articles have been used. Keywords such as "social media", "social media marketing", "influencer marketing", "social media influencers", "Instagram", "consumer involvement", "brand personality" and "brand attitude" have been used during the literature search. Some complimentary websites, such as Statista and Instagram's webpage, have been used to support the argumentation in this study. As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) recommended for studies that seek to develop hypotheses from existing theories, a literature review with the aim of representativeness on current research has been undertaken in this study. Since the research of this thesis has taken a positivistic approach, other authors' personal opinions have consistently been excluded to the greatest extent possible. This enabled the establishment of an objective perspective on the concepts relevant for this study.

3.4 Data collection

The data collection in this thesis consisted of two phases: one pre-study and one main study, together with a pilot study. First, the pre-study was conducted with the aim to identify the most popular clothing brand used by the target population: females studying in Skåne in the ages of 18-34 years. This geographical area was mainly selected due to the possibility of finding appropriate respondents, as our resources in terms of time and financial aid were limited. Furthermore, females between 18-34 years have been found to be most the active Instagram users (Statista, 2018) and were therefore a logical target group for this research. The usage of university and high school students were based on their accessibility as a group and the fact that most of these qualify into the age span 18-34 years.

In total, 23 female university and high school students, both Swedish and international, participated in the open-ended pre-survey. After 20 respondents had answered, a clear pattern of influencer and brand preferences had developed. The number of respondents was considered to be enough at that point, since the purpose merely was to identify a popular clothing brand and influencer. These pre-survey respondents were chosen through a convenience sample (see section [3.6.1](#)) and as the main survey was targeting both Swedish and international high school and university students studying in Skåne, it was ensured that a variety of such respondents were included in the pre-study. The respondents were asked to list

three of the clothing brands they used most often as well as their top three favourite influencers on Instagram. This enabled the identification of the most popular brands and influencers, without any bias from the authors. Through the pre-study, one very popular clothing brand often used by the respondents, Gina Tricot, and one of the most internationally known Swedish influencers, Kenza, was identified. The identified brand and influencer will be further described in section 3.5. The use of only one influencer and one brand was due to the complexity of measuring brand perceptions based on involvement. If tested on more than one brand and influencer, the required amount of respondents would have to be doubled. This is further discussed in section 5.3 [Limitations](#).

Second, the main study was conducted using a digital survey tool with the aim to test the aforementioned hypotheses of this study. Before conducting the main study, the survey was tested through a pilot study to find possible mistakes or questions that could potentially be misunderstood. In total, 11 respondents participated in the pilot study: eight university students and three high school students. The respondents in the pilot study did not find the survey difficult and only minor changes were made. The approved pilot study was then used as main study. See the next two sections (3.4.1 and 3.4.2) for an in-depth description of the main study.

3.4.1 Survey strategy

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), the most common strategy used in cross-sectional studies is surveys. This was also the data collection method used in this thesis. In accordance with Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), this cross-sectional survey involved the selection of different units from a population in order to investigate how different variables varied across these units. Since this thesis has a positivistic approach and aimed to generalise the obtained results onto a larger population, a survey strategy was considered to be a suitable approach as it allows for quantification in the sample.

Examining the research question of this study through a qualitative approach was also considered in the beginning of the research process. As qualitative research assumes that the world is subjective and socially constructed (Burns & Burns, 2008), it would have been of interest to explore the possible multiple realities of how influencer marketing affects brand perceptions in different consumer groups. However, although qualitative research is valuable for understanding and describing the world of human experience, it is difficult to apply

measures of reliability and validity (Burns & Burns, 2008). In addition, the possibility to make generalisations from focus groups or interviews to a wider context was considered to be too limited for this study. Instead, by quantitatively studying if influencer marketing has an effect on different consumer involvement profiles' brand perceptions, possible significant differences between groups could be found. If such considerable differences are found in a quantitative study, Burns and Burns (2008) argue that a selection of a few subjects from each end of the spectrum for a more detailed qualitative study could reveal underlying reasons for the differences between individuals. Thus, as this study is one of the first of its kind, it was considered to be more appropriate to start the research quantitatively, and if considerable differences between consumer involvement were found it would be valuable to further continue this research from a qualitative approach.

As for this study, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) state that surveys are appropriate for deductive research approaches and for researchers with limited resources in terms of time and economy. In regards to the circumstances mentioned above, the use of a survey was considered to be most appropriate to answer the research question in this particular thesis. In addition, a survey also enabled for easy comparison between standardised data and allowed for the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This was of importance in the data analysis since both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics gave a profile on the variables of interest for the collected data and by the use of inferential statistics the hypothesis of this study could be tested. This is further described in section 3.7. To increase the availability for the target group and to enable a fast and smooth data collection process, the survey for the main study was constructed digitally through the software Google Forms.

3.4.2 Data collection using digital survey

There are several digital survey tools available online. One of the major concerns of the main study was the ability to randomly assign respondents between being exposed to influencer marketing or paid social media marketing. Most softwares are, however, costly and more advanced than what was necessary for this particular study. It was therefore decided, after consultation with a professional statistician at Lund University, that a simple randomisation question in the free software Google Forms was enough to ensure randomisation of respondents. Six different two-digit numbers, which were presented in a random order for every respondent, were used for randomisation purposes. Half of the numbers lead the

respondents to an advertisement with influencer marketing and the other half to paid social media marketing. Double-digit numbers were considered to be more neutral than words when randomising to avoid the situation where respondents had a preference in the wording, which would have created a systematic error. One of the major disadvantages with surveys that are distributed via email or on the Internet is that the response rate is low. To increase the response rate, as many reminders as the email service provider allowed were sent out and the survey was tested in a pilot study to verify that it was perceived as smooth and easy for the respondents to complete.

3.5 Measurements

The survey in the main study consisted of four different sections which contained relevant measurements of consumer involvement, influencer marketing or paid social media marketing, brand attitude as well as brand personality for the brand identified in the pre-study. Since the aim was to investigate the mediating effect of influencer marketing, the paid social media marketing was merely used as a control group. This enabled us to investigate if the findings in existing literature, concerning the fact that influencer marketing is perceived as more credible than other marketing attempts, appeared to be true or not.

The respondents started the main survey by answering general demographic questions about their education, age, gender and Instagram usage. The influencer marketing concept was operationalised into one real influencer through the pre-study, the international Swedish blogger Kenza Zouiten. She was the most followed influencer, according to the conducted pre-study. In addition, Kenza fulfils the definition of an influencer used in this study, which was proposed by Abidin (2016). Kenza has a sizable network of followers on Instagram (1.7 million), she is not a spammer (follows 152 accounts) and is a highly regarded tastemaker in fashion and lifestyle. In Wiedmann, Hennigs & Langner's (2010) terminology, Kenza is a narrative fashion expert. In this study, Gina Tricot was identified as the most used clothing brand and was therefore also used in the main study. Gina Tricot is a Swedish fashion chain that started in 1997 and has more than 2 000 employees in 180 stores across five European countries (Gina Tricot, n.d.). Gina Tricot has more than 396 000 followers on Instagram, do not follow any other users and is, according to Virtanen, Björk and Sjöström (2017), considered to be a popular brand. Gina Tricot uses Instagram's advertising features for promotions (Instagram, 2018).

The main survey used a between-subjects design and each respondent answered questions about the brand and was either exposed to paid social media marketing (advertisement from Gina Tricot) or influencer marketing (advertisement from Kenza) from the brand. By randomising the two different advertisement types and only exposing each respondent to one of the possible two conditions, order effects could be eliminated. This means that the respondents did not judge one advertisement in light of the other. The questions in each section of the survey were shown in a randomly rotated order, which means that each respondent answered them in a different chronological order. The differences between the marketing efforts were analysed independently and then compared between groups. Thus, the section on brand attitude and type of marketing was available in two different versions for the one brand examined. A more detailed description of the four different sections in the main survey will follow below. In addition, an illustration of the main survey can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

3.5.1 Consumer involvement measurements

Firstly, consumer involvement was measured and operationalised using Guthrie and Kim's (2009) validated adaptation of Kapferer and Laurent's consumer involvement profile scale, including 16 items related to the respondents' involvement in clothes. As an introduction to the CIP scale, the respondents were presented with a definition of what was included in the concept clothes in this particular study. Many clothing brands today also offer shoes and other accessories, but this study was delimited to clothes in the sense of textile garments, such as dresses, skirts, pants, tops and jackets. The CIP scale measures the five antecedents of consumer involvement; interest, pleasure, sign, risk importance and probability of error (Kapferer & Laurent, 1985a; 1985b; 1993; Guthrie & Kim, 2009). Furthermore, CIP is a multidimensional measurement of involvement, which provides a more complete picture of consumer involvement than other involvement classifying theories (Guthrie & Kim, 2009). Each statement on the 5 item scale was answered on an ordinal five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Q6 and Q11 in Table 1 have negative connotations, which means that they had to be inverted to match the other questions in the scale.

Table 1: Consumer involvement profile antecedents and items on the CIP scale.

Antecedents	Items
<i>Interest</i>	Q1 I really enjoy buying clothes. Q2 Whenever I buy clothes it is like giving myself a present. Q3 To me, clothes are pleasurable.
<i>Pleasure</i>	Q4 What clothes I purchase is extremely important to me. Q5 I am very interested in clothes. Q6 I could not care less about clothes. (Reversed)
<i>Sign</i>	Q7 I can tell a lot about a person from the clothes she buys. Q8 The clothes a person buys reflects who she is. Q9 The clothes I buy describe the person I am.
<i>Risk Importance</i>	Q10 It is very irritating to buy clothes that are not right. Q11 It does not matter too much if I make a mistake when buying clothes. (Reversed) Q12 I am annoyed with myself if it turns out that I made the wrong choice when buying clothes.
<i>Probability of Error</i>	Q13 When I am in front of the clothing section, I always feel unsure about which to choose. Q14 When I buy clothes I can never be exactly sure if the choice was right. Q15 Choosing clothes is quite hard. Q16 When I buy clothes I can never be quite certain about my choice.

3.5.2 Brand attitude measurements

Secondly, regarding the measurement on brand attitude and the influencer marketing efforts made by the brand, the respondents were exposed to either a real paid social media advertisement or a real influencer marketing advertisement. The difference being that paid social media is using the brand name and shows up in the Instagram user's feed as a sponsored advertisement, while an influencer is normally using their own name and account that users are voluntarily following. Each respondent only answered questions for the clothing brand Gina Tricot, and was exposed to either the brand's use of paid social media marketing or their use of influencer marketing. Thus, the respondents who were assigned to the paid social media condition were exposed to a paid advertisement from Gina Tricot themselves, whereas the respondents assigned to the influencer condition viewed a post Kenza had posted on her private Instagram account in collaboration with Gina Tricot (see Figure 5 for illustration of the two conditions).

Advertisements appear based on Instagram's own algorithms and by searching for Gina Tricot and Kenza after the pre-study had been conducted, the "Sponsored" post from Gina Tricot used in this thesis appeared in the private Instagram feed of the authors. It contained one sentence in Swedish but the main message was, regardless, considered to be communicated clearly. The picture by Kenza, in collaboration with Gina Tricot, was chosen from Kenza's Instagram feed based on similarity in clothing style and content. The two posts clearly displayed the two different marketing approaches. These two different types of Instagram

posts were randomised so approximately half of the respondents were exposed to paid social media marketing and the other half to influencer marketing.

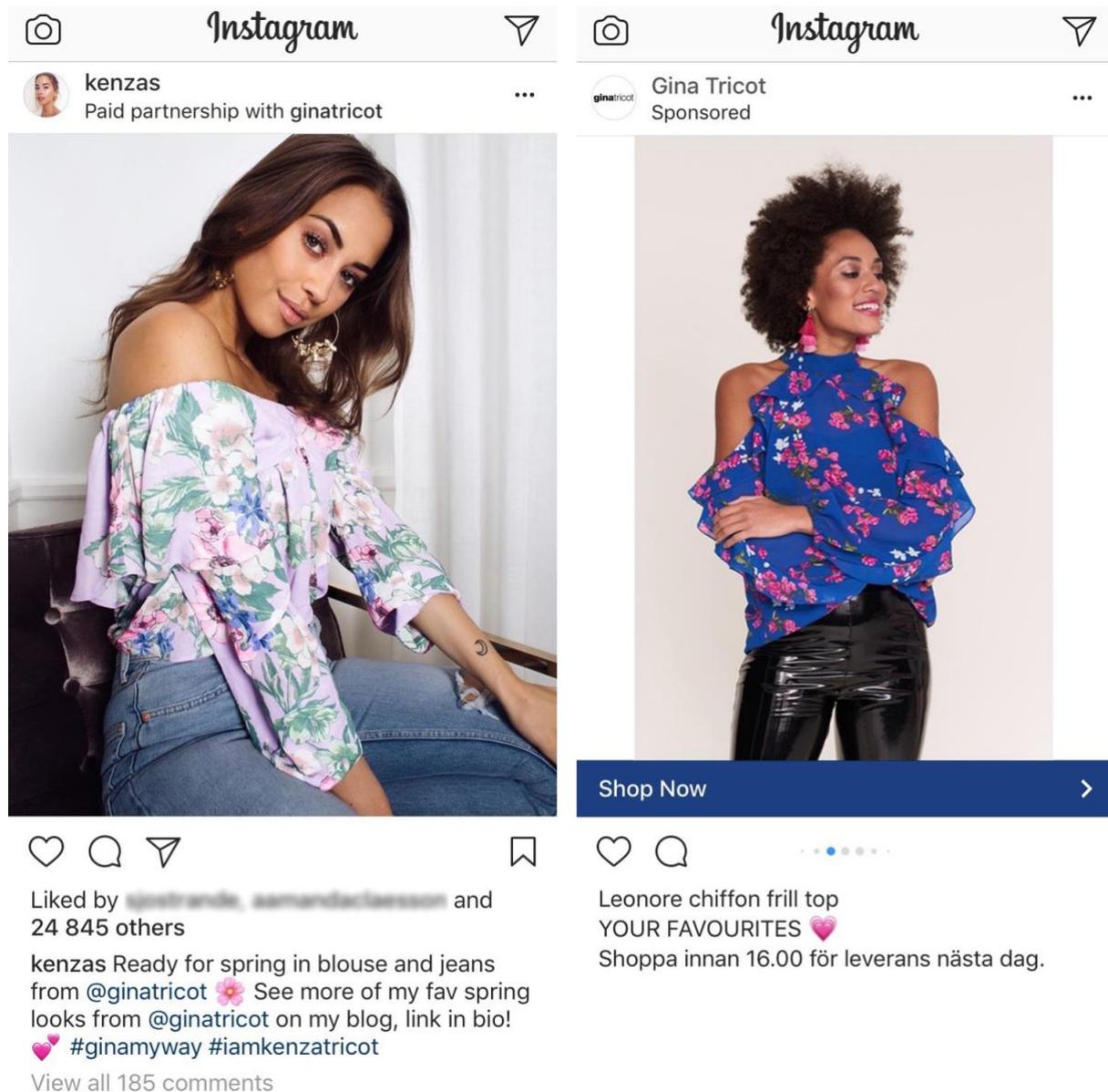


Figure 5: Paid influencer marketing and paid social media marketing posts.

After being exposed to one of the two different advertisements, the respondents answered two questions regarding brand attitude on a five-point Likert scale. Adapted from Guthrie and Kim (2009), the first question sought to measure the respondents' general perception of the brand based on the Instagram post (ranging from 1 = very negative, to 5 = very positive), whereas the second question captured the likeability of the brand based on the same post (ranging from 1 = strongly dislike, to 5 = strongly like).

Table 2: Brand attitude dimensions and items on the scale.

Brand attitude dimensions	Items
<i>General perception</i>	Q1 Based on this Instagram post, what is your general perception of Gina Tricot?
<i>Likeability</i>	Q2 Based on this Instagram post, how much do you like Gina Tricot?

3.5.3 Brand personality measurements

Lastly, the scale for measuring brand personality was adapted from Aaker’s (1997) Brand Personality Scale (BPS), which was developed to provide a theory for understanding the symbolic use of brands. The respondents were asked to imagine the clothing brand as possessing human qualities. The scale measures how brands are perceived based on 15 brand personality traits, which make up the Big Five dimensions; sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997; Guthrie & Kim, 2009). The extent to which the respondents feel that the brand is described by each personality trait was rated on a five-point ordinal Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree. Aaker’s (1997) BPS has been proven to be generalisable across product categories (Aaker, 1997), and thus it was suitable to use the BPS as measurement of brand personality in this study. Furthermore, personality scales are often only of limited use in building theory, but appropriate to use in deductive approaches (Aaker, 1997), such as this thesis.

Table 3: Brand personality dimensions and items on the BPS.

Brand personality dimensions	Items
<i>Sincerity</i>	Down-to-earth Honest Wholesome Cheerful
<i>Excitement</i>	Daring Spirited Imaginative Up-to-date
<i>Competence</i>	Reliable Intelligent Successful
<i>Sophistication</i>	Upper Class Charming
<i>Ruggedness</i>	Outdoorsy Tough

3.6 Sampling process and sample size

As previously mentioned, the target population in this study is females studying in Skåne in the ages of 18-34 years. Therefore, the survey was administered to students enrolled at Lund University, Malmö University and the high schools Akademi Båstad Gymnasium, LBS Lund and Apelrydskolan located in different parts of Skåne. The elements were selected through a non-probability sample. Non-probability sampling design has the characteristic that it is not possible to state the probability of each element in the population being included in the sample (Burns & Burns, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2012). As opposed to probability sampling, sampling error cannot be calculated in a non-probability sample and therefore, generalisations to a larger population can be challenging (Burns & Burns, 2008).

Furthermore, Burns and Burns (2008) state that non-probability sampling often is used in business research when it is not possible to justify the time and economic expense of probability sampling. The authors also state that non-probability sampling should only be used when probability sampling is impossible. The initial aim of this study was to distribute the survey based on a true probability sample with the goal to generalise research results, as this is the basis for positivistic research. After contacting the student data handling service, LADOK, at Lund University and Malmö University, administrative constraints were detected which made a probability sample impossible. Instead, program administrators at each university faculty and high school were contacted. Since a random selection of respondents was not feasible, a probability sample was not possible for this study. Due to the resource limitations and the inability to perform a probability sample, it was important to control the structure of the sample by representing different groups, such as different levels of education and fields of study. Although the respondents were not randomly sampled, a mixture of sampled faculties and fields of study was applied to avoid potential faculty specific preferences and thereby to obtain the most heterogeneous sample as possible. In addition, the assignment of influencer marketing and paid social media marketing conditions to approximately half of the respondents in each group allowed for some randomisation even though the sampling process did not allow for any randomisation of the elements included in the study.

3.6.1 Convenience sampling

The elements in the sample for both the pre-study and main-study were selected through an opportunity sample, also called convenience sample, which involves the selection of participants based on the fact that they are available and willing to respond (Burns & Burns, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson 2015; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2012). Burns and Burns (2008) and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) further state that convenience sampling is quick, uncomplicated and low in cost, and thus it was appropriate for the limited resources at hand for conducting this study. Although, as the probability of being included in the sample is unknown, convenience sampling can never assure that the sample is representative of the defined population and thus, generalisation through this sampling process is limited (Burns & Burns, 2008; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2012). Even though convenience samples are not fully representative of the population being studied, results emerging from studies using this sampling technique can still be valuable (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). As this study is one of the first of its kind, the results found in this research could still be valuable in spite of the use of convenience sampling as they can be considered to pave the way for future research within the same area.

To find the sample group for this study, 45 administrators at different university faculties and 13 high schools around Skåne was contacted. Several programs at Malmö University and Lund University as well as the high schools Akademi Båstad Gymnasium, LBS Lund and Apelrydskolan participated in the survey. As the target population for this study was females between the ages of 18-34 years studying in Skåne, male students, females above 35 years and other invalid answers (non-students) were excluded before performing the data analysis. Hence, all responses included in the analysed data set exclusively came from individuals in the target population of this study. Since all questions in the survey were mandatory, the dropout rate was not recorded, meaning that if a respondent started the survey but did not complete all the questions it was not accessible through the survey tool.

Table 4: Profile of participants in the study.

Highest current/finished education		Age		Instagram usage	
High School degree	15 %	18-26	78 %	Do not use it	13 %
Bachelor's degree	62 %	27-34	22 %	Use it daily	73 %
Master's degree	23 %			Use it weekly	10 %
				Use it monthly or less	4 %

Table 5: The participants' main field of education.

Main field of education	
Art	1 %
Business/Economics	22 %
Humanistic/Theology	9 %
Law	27 %
Medicine	11 %
Natural sciences	3 %
Social sciences	17 %
Technical	10 %

3.6.2 Sample size

Positivist and deductive research requires a large number of randomly selected respondents to have the possibility to make generalisations through statistical probability (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). As selecting respondents based on probability was not possible, the opportunity for generalisation of the results in this study is moderately limited. To compensate for this, to some extent, the aim was to obtain the largest sample size possible. The sample size for testing the effect of an advertisement is typically between 200 and 300 respondents (Marañón, 2018). In the beginning of this research process, the assumption was at least six different analysis conditions; at least three different levels of consumer involvement, distributed on the two different advertisement types (influencer marketing and paid social media marketing). To be able to properly analyse data based on the assumption of normal distribution through the statistical methods chosen (see section 3.7), a minimum of 30 respondents in each analysis condition was set up according to recommendations by Aron, Aron and Coups (2014) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009). With the assumption of six different conditions and an equal distribution of 30

respondents in each, the sample size in this study added up to an absolute minimum of 180 respondents. Although, due to the limited representativeness of the sample, it was concluded that it would be more appropriate to achieve a larger sample, preferably between 200 and 300 respondents.

A total of 2319 survey requests were sent out. 388 responses were recorded and 339 were valid after data cleaning. This equals to an overall response rate of 16,7%, which is around the average for digital surveys (Perkins, 2011) and was therefore deemed satisfactory. Recommendations for improving digital survey response rates presented by Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister (2012) were applied. The survey request that was sent out emphasised the minimal effort required to complete the survey, followed by an attempt to identify with the respondents by stating that we, like them, are students.

3.6.3 Ethical considerations

Bryman and Bell (2011) explain that there are four ethical principles researchers need to take into consideration when conducting research. First of all, it is of importance that the respondents are *informed* about the purpose and content of the study and that they have the right to exit the study at any time. This information was given to the respondents in an introductory text as a first section of the survey. As none of the respondents were obliged to participate and had the right to exit the survey if they felt uncomfortable, the principle of *consent* was also fulfilled.

Bryman and Bell (2011) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) highlight the principle of *confidentiality* in research. In this study, no personal data with the possibility to trace answers to a specific individual were collected. With the confidentiality principle in mind, only demographic questions of wide character were included, which in no way could lead back to individual respondents. As the survey was distributed digitally, anonymity was assured even further. Furthermore, the collected data was only utilised for the academic purpose of this research and thus, the *utilisation* principle was also fulfilled. This study did not violate any ethical aspects and the respondents were all presented with this information in the introduction of the survey, see [Appendix 1](#).

3.7 Data analysis methods

The theories that constitute the foundation of this deductive study provide some initial guidance for the data analysis. The CIP scale is developed for cluster analysis and the BPS is generally used to compare mean differences, which in this study was done using t-test and analysis of variance. Normally, t-test and analysis of variance can only be conducted when the research is based on a probability sample. However, as this study is based on a convenience sample, the use of t-tests, analysis of variances and correlation will merely be utilised as benchmark tests. Hypothesis testing through benchmarking will allow us to investigate if it would be interesting to continue further studies within this research field.

When conducting the t-tests and tests for analysis of variance, a 90 % confidence interval was used. These statistical techniques are described in detail in the following subsections. Additionally, to ensure the internal consistency of the items in the digital survey, Cronbach's alpha, which is one of the most frequently used methods for calculating internal consistency (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009) was conducted on the different scales. This is presented in section 3.8. Before testing the hypotheses of this study, a preliminary analysis was conducted to ensure correct handling of the data set.

3.7.1 Preliminary analysis

Before conducting the analysis using the methods described above, a preliminary analysis was performed. As previously mentioned, no missing item was observed due to the software design, which does not allow blank answers. No incomplete responses were recorded, but male students, females above 35 years and non-students were deleted during the data cleaning.

Many statistical methods require normally distributed data. The CIP and BPS dimensions all showed significance in Kolmogorov-Smirnov's test of normality, which suggest violations of the assumption of normality. After inspection of histograms and normal q-q plots the data set was estimated to be acceptably close to normal distribution. For large sample sizes, deviation from normality may not be too detrimental to the ANOVA or t-test, which are used here solely as benchmarks. A measurement for evaluating the impact of outliers is the 5 % trimmed mean. The trimmed means for this data did not deviate notably from the normal means, which indicated that the outliers did not affect the data. See [Appendix 3](#).

3.7.2 Cluster analysis

To examine consumer market segments, based on the dimensions in the consumer involvement profiles, cluster analysis was performed. According to Malhotra (2010), cluster analysis is useful when one wants to find homogeneous structures in the heterogeneous market. In addition, Malhotra (2010) states that when conducting a cluster analysis it is of importance to use variables based on past research or theory. In this study, the consumers were segmented based on the consumer involvement profile. The profile variables (as shown in Table 1) are derived from the research on CIP by Kapferer and Laurent (1985a; 1985b; 1993). As stated above, cluster analysis is often performed in marketing research to segment consumers and it was concluded that it was the most appropriate data analysis to answer the hypotheses in this study, which has previously been done by Kapferer and Laurent (1985a; 1985b; 1993) and Guthrie and Kim (2009). As the clusters in this study emerged, illustrative names that captured the essence of each consumer cluster were given to them. These CIP clusters were then used as the basis for testing the hypotheses. The consumer involvement profiles identified through the cluster analysis are presented in the next chapter (see section 4.1).

For this research, a K-means cluster analysis was used, as this method is considered to be appropriate in marketing research, according to Malhotra (2010), and is suitable for large datasets (Norusis, 2012). The non-hierarchical K-means cluster analysis uses various approaches, which allows for faster formation of segments. In the SPSS program, the K-means procedure starts with selection of initial seed points, which are used for preliminary assignment of respondents. Once the groups are formed, the respondents are reassigned depending on the recomputed cluster means. The reassignment process continues as long as at least one respondent is allocated to another cluster. The analysis of clusters is, hence, on a group segment level. The individuals in the clusters are not analysed. Choosing the number of clusters is always a subjective process and the major drawback with K-means clustering (Everitt, Sabine, Morven & Stahl, 2011). After running the cluster analysis several times with the number of clusters ranging from 2-5, a 3-clustering model was deemed most suitable based on their distinct and significant cluster means. See [Appendix 2](#).

3.7.3 Independent samples t-test

The independent samples t-test is a statistical test for determining the probability that the values of a numerical variable for two independent samples are different from each other (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This test assesses the probability that a difference between these two samples occur purely by chance (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In this thesis, the mean differences between the exposure of influencer marketing and paid social media marketing were examined using the t-test. The t-test has been proven to be robust for deviations from normal distribution in data sets (Borg & Westerlund, 2012) and this method was therefore considered to provide accurate results, as the data set in this study was not fully normally distributed. The independent samples t-test enabled testing of the hypotheses H1, H2 and H2a.

As the t-test is a parametric test, it has a few strict assumptions that need to be fulfilled. These assumptions are: 1) random sampling, 2) normal distribution, 3) the dependent variable is interval or ratio scale, and 4) independence of observations (Pallant, 2013). As the data in this study was acceptably close to a normal distribution and fulfilled independence of observations, but not the other assumptions, the t-test is only used as a benchmark to describe if this research field is interesting to investigate further.

For each comparison, the effect size between the groups was calculated. According to Pallant (2013), the effect size explains the magnitude of the difference between the groups compared in a study. In this study, eta squared was used to calculate the effect size. Pallant (2013) explains that eta squared can range from 0 to 1 and the measurement represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the grouping variable. Lastly, Cohen's guidelines to interpret the generated values were used. These guidelines state that an eta squared value below 0.06 signifies a low effect size, above 0.06 is a moderate effect size and an eta squared higher than 0.14 indicates a strong effect (Pallant, 2013).

3.7.4 Analysis of Variance

Mean scores for brand personality dimensions and brand attitudes were calculated in order to compare the perceptions each consumer involvement cluster had of the clothing brand, Gina Tricot. This was done across each of the consumer profiles, but only for respondents who had been exposed to influencer marketing. Furthermore, one-way between-group analysis of variances (ANOVA) was conducted across each consumer involvement profile for both the

brand attitude and brand personality dimensions. As we wanted to compare the mean differences between the clusters identified in this study, an ANOVA was considered to be more applicable than t-tests, as the latter only allow for comparisons between a maximum of two groups (Aron, Aron & Coups, 2014). In addition, ANOVA is robust for moderate deviations from normal distribution in the data being analysed (Aron, Aron & Coups, 2014). As previously mentioned, it is important to note that the tests for ANOVA used in this study was merely used as benchmarking, which allowed hypothesis testing even though a convenience sample was used.

ANOVA has the ability to display if there is an overall significant difference between the groups compared (Aron, Aron & Coups, 2014; Burns & Burns, 2008). As the ANOVA in this study confirmed some significant differences, Tukey's post hoc test was conducted to determine between which groups such differences had occurred. Hence, the post hoc test revealed which brand attitude and brand personality differences that existed between the different consumer profiles. This enabled us to test the hypotheses H1a and H2b.

For the significant results found in the one-way ANOVA, the effect size between groups was calculated. Just as for the t-test results, the measurement of eta squared was used. To calculate the effect size of the ANOVA results, the sum of squares between groups was divided by the total sum of squares (Pallant, 2013). To interpret the generated eta squared values, the same guidelines as for eta squared in the t-test were used.

3.7.5 Correlation analysis

Finally, a Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted to emphasise the relationship between the two brand perception variables, brand attitude and brand personality. To find an association between two variables, either Spearman's rho correlation or Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) can be conducted (Aron, Aron & Coups, 2014). Pearson's r is used when researchers seek to find an association between ratio- or interval variables, whereas Spearman's rho is appropriate to use when examining the relationship between ordinal variables (Burns & Burns, 2008). This study is based on ordinal measurements and therefore, Spearman's rho was used. It is of importance to note that the use of correlation analysis also will be used as benchmark in this study.

By the use of Spearman's rho, it was possible to investigate if there were significant differences in associations between brand personality dimensions and brand attitude for the clothing brand, Gina Tricot, across the two different types of advertisements: influencer marketing and paid social media marketing. Thus, a correlation analysis enabled the discovery of associations between the variables in this study, but it is important to note that the results do not imply causality (Aron, Aron & Coups, 2014; Malhotra, 2010).

Lastly, Fisher's exact test for correlations was used in order to investigate if there were any significant differences between the correlation coefficients for test variables for the two groups (Körner & Wahlgren, 2006). Furthermore, Cohen's guidelines were used to evaluate the strength of the association between the variables where 0.10-0.29 indicated a weak relationship, 0.30-0.49 indicated a medium relationship and 0.50-1.0 indicated a strong relationship (Pallant, 2013). To confirm the relationship between the brand personality and brand attitude variables, a correlational data analysis enabled the testing for hypothesis H3.

3.8 Research quality criteria

Reliability and validity are two very important terms related to the quality of quantitative studies. Reliability is the degree of stability of a measure - it describes if you would get the same result if you perform the same measurements again, on the same person under the same circumstances (Aron, Aron & Coups, 2014). Validity is a second quality aspect, it is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Simply put, validity explains if you are measuring what you intend to measure.

3.8.1 Reliability

Two reliability measurements are test-retest reliability, when the same group is tested twice and internal consistency, when half the answers are tested against the other half (Aron, Aron, Coups, 2014). Internal consistency is expressed using Cronbach's alpha, which is a value between 0 and 1. Test-retest and Cronbach's alpha have in earlier studies proven that the BPS has high levels of reliability and also that it is valid and generalisable (Aaker, 1997). The CIP scale has also been proven to be a reliable measurement (Guthrie & Kim, 2009; Kapferer & Laurent, 1993) using Cronbach's alpha. In this study, Cronbach's alpha on the CIP scale was 0.76, whereas the BPS and brand attitude scale displayed an internal consistency on 0.88. According to Pallant (2013), Cronbach's alpha is considered to be acceptable if above 0.70,

but values above 0.80 is preferable. Thus, it has been proven that the scales in this study have a strong internal consistency and are therefore considered to be reliable measurements. Cronbach's alpha on the five antecedents for consumer involvement and the five dimensions of brand personality can be found in Table 6.

Risk importance (CIP), excitement (BPS), sophistication (BPS) and ruggedness (BPS) have not exceeded an internal consistency of 0.70 in this study and could therefore be considered to have an insufficient reliability. However, Pallant (2013) argues that low internal consistency can depend on a small number of items, which is the case for the four aforementioned dimensions. Excitement has four items, risk importance only consists of three items, whereas sophistication and ruggedness only consists of two items each. The same applies to brand attitude, as only two items were tested in this measurement. Two items are the minimum for calculating a Cronbach's Alpha and consequently there is no individual alpha presented for the two items in brand attitude in Table 6 below. Due to the fact that the calculated internal consistency for CIP and BPS scales in total were high, it was concluded that the measurements in the study were reliable. In addition, as both the BPS and CIP scale have already been validated several times, it is better to not remove or modify categories from the scales (Pallant, 2013). Removing these categories would limit the generalisability of this study, as it will not be comparable to other studies using the same scales. Therefore, it is more appropriate to still include risk importance, sophistication and ruggedness in this study.

Lastly, by conducting a pilot study for the main survey, it could be ensured that no questions in the survey were ambiguous and as the questionnaire was proven to be easy to understand, this further enhanced the reliability of the survey.

Table 6: Cronbach's alpha for the three measurements used in this study: CIP scale in total and its antecedents, brand attitude and BPS in total as well as the sub-dimensions of BPS.

	Cronbach's alpha
Consumer Involvement Profile	0.76
Interest	0.78
Pleasure	0.73
Sign	0.76
Risk importance	0.69
Probability of error	0.74
Brand Attitude	0.88
Brand Personality	0.88
Sincerity	0.78
Excitement	0.69
Competence	0.76
Sophistication	0.55
Ruggedness	0.56

3.8.2 Internal validity

Internal validity in relation to surveys refers to the ability of the survey to measure what it intends to measure (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The CIP and BPS, used to measure involvement and brand personality perceptions in this study, has in previous research been well-tested. The BPS is constructed to be generalisable across products and samples (Aaker, 1997), and has been proven to hold true for both internal validity and content validity (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). Content validity refers to the survey's capacity to provide adequate coverage of the research questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Construct validity is a form of internal validity that refers to the extent to which the measurement questions actually measure the presence of the constructs they intend to measure (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Construct validity is of interest, as the CIP questions do not explicitly state what construct it measures, but its convergent and divergent validity have been confirmed in previous studies (Guthrie & Kim, 2009; Kapferer & Laurent, 1985a; 1985b; 1993). This supports that the different questions is in fact measuring the different aspects of involvement it intends to. Divergent validity tests measurements that are supposed to be unrelated in fact are unrelated, whereas convergent validity test measurements that are supposed to be related in fact are related.

3.8.3 External validity

According to Burns and Burns (2008) the external validity of research refers to the extent to which the results of a sample are transferable to a population. This is also referred to as the generalisability, which relies on whether the observed measurement is representative of the entire population (Burns & Burns, 2008; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The external validity in this study is limited, as the conducted convenience sample does not allow for generalisations to an entire population. This is further discussed in section [5.3.1](#).

One of the major concerns for external validity in research is when it is based on unrealistic assumptions or conditions that do not reflect reality, also called ecological validity (Burns & Burns, 2008). In this study, the operationalisation of influencer marketing and paid social media marketing are real examples of actual marketing efforts through Instagram. The images that have been used reveal the Instagram posts as they are seen in real Instagram application usage. The real marketing effort and the real application interface can be said to improve the external validity of this research as it replicates a realistic situation.

4 Results and analysis

In this chapter, an overview of the data analysis and the results from the main study are presented. First, the three clusters derived from the consumer involvement profile measurements are discussed. Second, the following sections present the results from the testing of the hypotheses in this study.

4.1 Consumer involvement profiles

From the 16-statements questionnaire, means were calculated for each of the five antecedents to consumer involvement. Through a K-means cluster analysis, three consumer involvement profiles were identified and the characteristics of each profile were examined based on the means each cluster had on the five antecedents. Then, labels for each of the three consumer involvement profiles were developed, which are displayed in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Respondent distribution in consumer involvement profiles and type of advertisement.

	Influencer Marketing	Paid Social Media Marketing	Total
Passionate & Confident	63	63	126
Uninterested & Indifferent	49	40	89
Intrigued but Unconfident	63	61	124
Total	175	164	339

Table 8: Results from the cluster analysis and means for each consumer involvement profile.

	Passionate & confident (N = 126)	Uninterested & indifferent (N = 89)	Intrigued but unconfident (N = 124)	F	p	Tukey's post hoc Subset for alpha = 0.1
	M	M	M			
Interest	4.57	2.81	3.72	234.87	0.000***	1 vs. 2 vs. 3
Pleasure	4.40	2.74	3.64	223.07	0.000***	1 vs. 2 vs. 3
Sign	3.92	2.74	3.17	81.21	0.000***	1 vs. 2 vs. 3
Risk importance	3.70	2.85	3.98	59.29	0.000***	1 vs. 2 vs. 3
Probability of error	2.21	2.48	3.19	64.38	0.000***	1 vs. 2 vs. 3

*** p < 0.01

4.1.1 Passionate & confident (Cluster 1)

All involvement dimension means for the first cluster were very high, except for probability of error. This consumer involvement profile is very interested in clothing, she finds much joy from buying them and expresses her identity through clothes. Additionally, she perceives the possibility of a mispurchase quite negatively but does not feel that it is likely to happen. She is convinced that her clothing choices are the right ones and would be dissatisfied if a bad choice was made. This consumer profile was named the Passionate & confident consumer to describe her strong feelings towards clothes. From now on, this consumer involvement profile is considered to be the high-ranking profile mentioned in the hypotheses, as she is deeply involved in clothes.

4.1.2 Uninterested & indifferent (Cluster 2)

The second involvement profile that was identified in the cluster analysis scored low on all dimensions. This consumer involvement profile has little interest, does neither find any joy in buying clothes nor expresses herself through what she wears. In addition, she would not be disappointed if she bought the wrong clothes because she does not feel that it is a difficult or even important task. This consumer profile was named the Uninterested & indifferent consumer to describe her low involvement in clothing. From now on, this consumer involvement profile is therefore considered to be the low-ranking profile mentioned in the hypotheses.

4.1.3 Intrigued but unconfident (Cluster 3)

Apart from the high and low-ranking profiles identified in the cluster analysis, a third consumer involvement profile was found. It scored relatively high on the interest, pleasure and sign dimensions but even higher on risk importance and probability of error. This consumer involvement profile has some interest in clothing, she finds a little bit of joy in buying them and to a small extent even expresses her identity through clothes. However, she perceives the possibility of a mispurchase negatively and feels that it might happen when buying clothes. This consumer profile was named the Intrigued but unconfident consumer to describe her mild and cautious involvement in clothes.

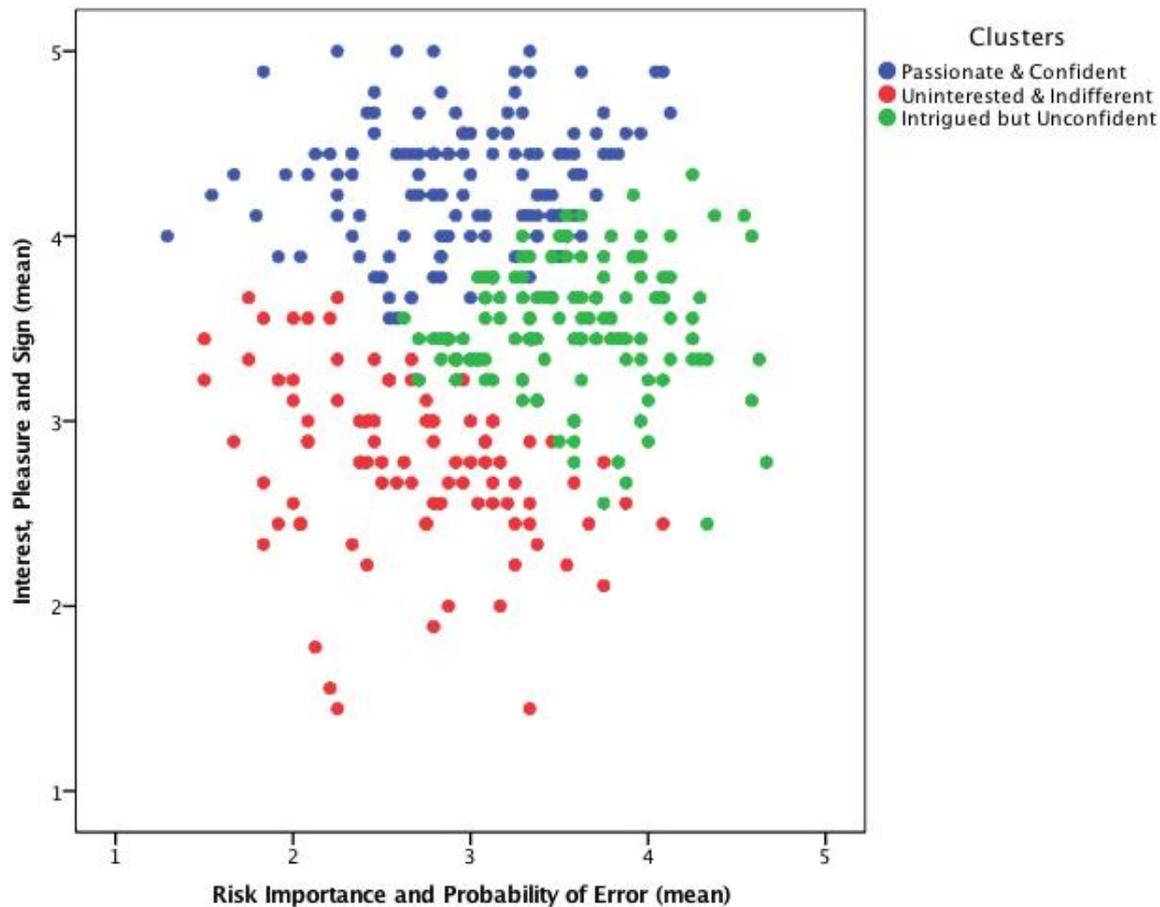


Figure 6: Two-dimensional graphic illustration of the three consumer involvement profiles. Please note that means for interest, pleasure and sign versus risk importance and probability of error has been calculated. These variables have not been used in the analysis and are presented here for illustration purposes only.

4.2 Brand perceptions

In this section, the clusters developed in the previous section are applied to test the hypotheses of this study.

4.2.1 Brand personalities and influencer marketing (H1)

To test the first hypothesis of this study, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H1: All consumer involvement profiles will show a significantly higher score on brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence and excitement when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing.

The t-test compared the brand personality dimension scores for influencer marketing and paid social media marketing. Overall, respondents who were exposed to influencer marketing showed higher mean scores for sincerity, excitement and competence with the exception of the Intrigued but unconfident consumer profile on competence and the Passionate & confident profile on excitement. However, these mean scores did not display any statistically significant differences between the respondents who were exposed to influencer marketing or paid social media marketing. A detailed description of these results can be found in Table 9.

Instead, significant differences were found in the two dimensions that were not included in the hypothesis, namely sophistication and ruggedness. For the Passionate & confident consumer profile, there was only significantly higher mean differences in scores for the brand personality dimension sophistication for respondents exposed to influencer marketing ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.94$) compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.82$; $t(124) = -1.91$, $p = 0.06$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.31, 90% CI: -0.56 to -0.04) was small (eta squared = 0.029). This indicates that only 2.9% of the variance in sophistication is explained by the type of advertisement the respondents have been exposed to.

In the Intrigued but unconfident consumer group, there was only a significantly higher mean difference in scores for the brand personality dimension sophistication for respondents exposed to influencer marketing ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.64$), compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.66$; $t(122) = -1.64$, $p = 0.10$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.19, 90% CI: -0.39 to -0.00) was small (eta squared = 0.022). The mean difference for sophistication in the Uninterested & indifferent profile was not statistically significant.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics and results from independent samples t-test for all five personality dimensions, type of advertisement and consumer involvements profiles.

	Type of advertisement						90% CI for Mean Difference	t	df	p
	Influencer marketing			Paid social media						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n				
Sincerity										
Passionate & confident	3.15	0.89	63	3.03	0.69	63	-0.36, 0.12	-0.84	117	0.41
Uninterested & indifferent	2.86	0.69	49	2.63	0.72	40	-0.49, 0.01	-1.59	87	0.12
Intrigued but unconfident	3.05	0.60	63	2.93	0.68	61	-0.31, 0.07	-1.06	122	0.29
Excitement										
Passionate & confident	3.14	0.79	63	3.17	0.70	63	-0.19, 0.25	0.21	124	0.84
Uninterested & indifferent	2.91	0.61	49	2.79	0.70	40	-0.35, 0.12	-0.82	87	0.41
Intrigued but unconfident	3.14	0.59	63	3.09	0.73	61	-0.25, 0.15	-0.41	122	0.68
Competence										
Passionate & confident	3.03	0.94	63	2.91	0.84	63	-0.38, 0.15	-0.73	124	0.47
Uninterested & indifferent	2.71	0.70	49	2.53	0.72	40	-0.42, 0.08	-1.16	87	0.25
Intrigued but unconfident	2.83	0.69	63	2.85	0.76	61	-0.20, 0.24	0.17	122	0.87
Sophistication										
Passionate & confident	2.94	0.94	63	2.63	0.82	63	-0.56, -0.04	-1.91*	124	0.06
Uninterested & indifferent	2.73	0.66	49	2.50	0.95	40	-0.53, 0.06	-1.32	67	0.19
Intrigued but unconfident	2.90	0.64	63	2.71	0.66	61	-0.39, 0.00	-1.64*	122	0.10
Ruggedness										
Passionate & confident	1.91	0.87	63	2.25	0.91	63	0.07, 0.60	2.11*	124	0.04
Uninterested & indifferent	2.08	0.81	49	2.15	0.85	40	-0.23, 0.36	0.39	87	0.70
Intrigued but unconfident	2.18	0.79	63	2.26	0.84	61	-0.16, 0.33	0.60	122	0.55

The brand personality dimension ruggedness for influencer marketing was, as stated in H1, not expected to score higher than paid social media marketing. From the independent samples t-test, a statistically significant lower mean score for influencer marketing (M = 1.91, SD = 0.87), compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing (M = 2.25, SD = 0.91; $t(124) = 2.11, p = 0.04$) for the Passionate & confident consumer group was observed. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.34, 90% CI: 0.07 to 0.60) was small (eta squared = 0.035).

This result thus indicates that there were some significant differences in how the three consumer involvement profiles perceived the different personality dimensions presented by Aaker (1997). Although, statistically significant differences were only found for the dimensions sophistication and ruggedness, which were not included in the hypothesis. Since

the brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence and excitement mean scores did not show significantly higher scores, although most were non-significantly higher, H1 was not supported.

4.2.1.1 Brand personalities and consumer involvement (H1a)

To test our first sub-hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. This hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H1a: High-ranking involvement profiles will show significantly higher levels of the brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence and excitement when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to low-ranking involvement profiles.

A one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of consumer profile membership on the personality dimension means for all respondents that were exposed to influencer marketing. A statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.1$ level in mean scores for the brand personality dimension competence between the Passionate & confident profile and the Uninterested & indifferent profile: $F(2, 172) = 2.35, p = 0.098$ was found. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean score between the groups only had a small effect. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was 0.027. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that the mean scores for the Passionate & confident profile ($M = 3.03, SD = 0.94$) was significantly higher than the Uninterested & indifferent profile ($M = 2.71, SD = 0.70$). The Intrigued but unconfident profile ($M = 2.83, SD = 0.69$) did not differ significantly from either the Passionate & confident or the Uninterested & indifferent profile.

Table 10: One-way ANOVA and post hoc table displaying the mean differences between consumer involvement profiles.

	Passionate & confident ($N = 63$)		Uninterested & indifferent ($N = 49$)		Intrigued but unconfident ($N = 63$)		F	p	Tukey's post hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			Subset for alpha = 0.1
Sincerity	3.15	0.89	2.86	0.69	3.05	0.60	2.07	0.130	—
Excitement	3.14	0.79	2.91	0.61	3.14	0.59	2.13	0.122	—
Competence	3.03	0.94	2.71	0.70	2.83	0.69	2.35	0.098*	1 vs. 2
Sophistication	2.94	0.94	2.73	0.66	2.90	0.64	1.06	0.349	—
Ruggedness	1.91	0.87	2.08	0.81	2.18	0.79	1.62	0.201	—

* $p < 0.10$

High-ranking involvement profiles showed higher mean or equally high mean scores for sincerity, excitement and competence compared to low-ranking involvement profiles. However, only competence between the Passionate & confident profile and the Uninterested & indifferent profile showed statistical significance, whereas the remaining dimensions did not statistically differ between the profiles. Therefore, H1a is only partially supported. To clarify, H1a was supported on the brand personality dimension competence but not supported on sincerity and excitement.

4.2.2 Brand attitudes and influencer marketing (H2 & H2a)

To test hypothesis H2 and H2a, an independent samples t-test was conducted on the brand attitude measurements. These hypotheses were formulated as follows:

H2: Respondents exposed to influencer marketing will show a significantly higher score on brand attitude, compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing.

H2a: All consumer involvement profiles will show a significantly higher score on brand attitude when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing.

The t-test compared the brand attitude scores on general perception, likeability together with an overall brand attitude mean for influencer marketing and paid social media marketing. Respondents who were exposed to influencer marketing consistently showed higher attitude mean scores towards the brand, compared to paid social media marketing (H2). The independent samples t-test on all respondents, independent from cluster membership, showed statistical significance for the two brand attitude components, general perception (mean difference = 0.23, 90% *CI*: -0.39 to -0.07) and likeability (mean difference = 0.24, 90% *CI*: -0.41 to -0.06). An overall brand attitude mean (mean difference = 0.23, 90% *CI*: -0.39 to -0.07) between the two components was also statistically significant higher for influencer marketing. The magnitude of the differences in mean scores for general perception, likeability and the overall brand attitude were ranging between 0.014 and 0.017 using eta squared. These are small effect sizes, as only 1.4 % to 1.7 % of the variance in brand attitude is explained by the type of advertisement the respondents have been exposed to. See table 11 for a more detailed description of the results.

Since all respondents, independently of their consumer profile, had a significantly higher mean score on brand attitude when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing, H2 was supported.

To test hypothesis H2a, the same t-test comparing the brand attitude scores for each consumer involvement profile was used. Respondents who were exposed to influencer marketing consistently showed higher mean attitude scores towards the brand across all consumer involvement profiles, compared to paid social media marketing. However, statistically significant differences were only found in the Passionate & confident profile. Respondents exposed to influencer marketing had significantly higher overall brand attitude scores ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.12$) compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.84$; $t(115) = -1.94$, $p = 0.06$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.34, 90% CI : -0.63 to -0.05) was small (eta squared = 0.029).

In addition, Passionate & confident respondents exposed to influencer marketing had a significantly higher general perception ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.10$) compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.87$; $t(118) = -2.17$, $p = 0.03$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.38, 90% CI : -0.67 to -0.09) was moderate (eta squared = 0.059)

All consumer involvement profiles had higher overall brand attitude mean scores when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing. However, only the Passionate & confident consumer profile showed significantly higher mean score. Significantly higher mean scores for the Uninterested & indifferent and Intrigued but unconfident consumer profiles were not supported. Therefore, H2a was partially supported.

Table 11: Descriptive statistics and results from independent samples t-test for brand attitude, type of advertisement and consumer involvements profiles.

	Type of advertisement						90% CI for Mean Differences	t	df	p
	Influencer marketing			Paid social media						
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n				
Overall brand attitude										
All respondents	3.26	0.92	175	3.03	0.88	164	-0.39, -0.07	-2.38**	337	0.02
Passionate & confident	3.52	1.12	63	3.18	0.84	63	-0.63, -0.05	-1.94*	115	0.06
Uninterested & indifferent	3.03	0.74	49	2.79	0.72	40	-0.50, 0.02	-1.57	87	0.12
Intrigued but unconfident	3.17	0.76	63	3.03	0.99	61	-0.41, 0.11	-0.95	122	0.34
General perception										
All respondents	3.39	0.92	175	3.16	0.91	164	-0.39, -0.07	-2.31**	337	0.02
Passionate & confident	3.65	1.10	63	3.27	0.87	63	-0.67, -0.09	-2.17**	118	0.03
Uninterested & indifferent	3.20	0.74	49	2.98	0.70	40	-0.48, 0.03	-1.50	87	0.14
Intrigued but unconfident	3.29	0.81	63	3.18	1.06	61	-0.39, 0.18	-0.62	122	0.53
Likeability										
All respondents	3.13	1.00	175	2.89	0.99	164	-0.41, -0.06	-2.19**	337	0.03
Passionate & confident	3.40	1.21	63	3.10	0.96	63	-0.63, 0.02	-1.55	118	0.12
Uninterested & indifferent	2.86	0.82	49	2.60	0.87	40	-0.56, 0.04	-1.43	87	0.16
Intrigued but unconfident	3.06	0.82	63	2.87	1.04	61	-0.47, 0.08	-1.16	122	0.25

* $p < 0.10$

** $p < 0.05$

4.2.2.1 Brand attitudes and consumer involvement (H2b)

To test the sub-hypothesis H2b, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H2b: High-ranking involvement profiles will show significantly higher positive brand attitudes when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to low-ranking involvement profiles.

To explore the impact of consumer profile membership on brand attitude for the respondents that were exposed to influencer marketing, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted. There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level in mean scores for high-ranking involvement profiles and low-ranking involvement profiles on both brand attitude components and the overall brand attitude mean. Additionally, high-ranking involvement profiles also differed significantly from the Intrigued but unconfident profile on overall brand attitude and general perception according to Tukey's post hoc comparison. See

Table 12 for more detailed results. The effect sizes, calculated using eta squared, ranged from 0.045 to 0.051, which indicates a small effect size.

Table 12: One-way ANOVA and post hoc table displaying the mean difference between consumer involvement profiles.

	Passionate & confident (N = 63)		Uninterested & indifferent (N = 49)		Intrigued but unconfident (N = 63)		F	p	Tukey's post hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			Subset for alpha = 0.1
Overall brand attitude	3.52	1.12	3.03	0.74	3.18	0.76	4.58	0.012**	1 vs. 2 & 3
General perception	3.65	1.10	3.20	0.74	3.29	0.81	4.06	0.019**	1 vs. 2 & 3
Likeability	3.40	1.21	2.86	0.82	3.06	0.82	4.39	0.014**	1 vs. 2

** p < 0.05

High-ranking involvement profiles showed significantly higher mean scores for brand attitude compared to low-ranking involvement profiles. Therefore, H2b was supported.

4.2.3 Correlation between brand personality and brand attitude (H3)

To test hypothesis H3, a Spearman's rho correlation analysis was performed. This analysis was followed by Fisher's exact test for differences in correlation coefficients to investigate if the correlations differed between the two groups: respondents exposed to influencer marketing and respondents exposed to paid social media marketing. The hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H3: Respondents exposed to influencer marketing will show a stronger positive correlation between brand personality dimensions sincerity, excitement, competence and brand attitude, compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing.

Table 13 (to the left): Spearman's rho correlation coefficients for respondents exposed to influencer marketing and paid social media marketing. Significant differences in correlation coefficients between the two groups are displayed with a square around the two coefficients.

	Influencer/Paid social media	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness	Overall brand attitude	General perception	Likeability
Sincerity	-								
Excitement	.65**/.63**		-						
Competence	.74**/.72**		.60**/.52**	-					
Sophistication	.58**/.60**		.49**/.53**	.60**/.56**	-				
Ruggedness	.24**/.39**		.40**/.39**	.29**/.44**	.16**/.37**	-			
Overall brand attitude	.68**/.40**		.59**/.38**	.62**/.44**	.53**/.43**	.17*/.23**	-		
General perception	.67**/.41**		.57**/.39**	.62**/.42**	.53**/.41**	.16*/.20**	.95**/.93**		
Likeability	.63**/.34**		.56**/.33**	.57**/.40**	.49**/.40**	.17*/.22**	.96**/.94**	.83**/.73**	-

* p < 0.1

** p < 0.05

In Table 13, it can be found that the correlation coefficients for each group with each concept are positively correlated. Furthermore, respondents who have been exposed to influencer marketing all show strong positive correlation coefficients for brand personality dimensions sincerity, excitement and competence with overall brand attitude, general perception and likeability. These coefficients are ranging from $\rho = 0.56$ to $\rho = 0.68$, and a correlation coefficient above $\rho = 0.50$ indicates a strong relationship between the two variables measured (Pallant, 2013). Thus, respondents exposed to influencer marketing demonstrated a strong positive correlation between brand attitude and all brand personality dimensions in H3. As for respondents who were exposed to paid social media marketing, the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients ranged from $\rho = 0.33$ to $\rho = 0.44$ for brand personality dimensions sincerity, excitement and competence with overall brand attitude, general perception and likeability. This only indicated a relationship with a medium strength for brand personality dimensions and brand attitude for this group of respondents.

However, even if the correlation coefficients above were different in the two groups, this does not automatically indicate that there is a significant difference between the groups. By conducting Fisher's exact test for correlations, such differences could be identified. Fisher's exact test revealed that the correlation coefficients for respondents in the influencer marketing group was significantly stronger ($p < 0.05$) for sincerity, excitement and competence with all components in brand attitude, compared to respondents in the paid social media group. The correlation between sophistication and brand attitude as well as between ruggedness and brand attitude did not show a significant difference between the influencer- and paid social media marketing groups.

Since the correlation coefficients for sincerity, excitement and competence with brand attitude were significantly different between the respondents exposed to influencer marketing and paid social media marketing, H3 was supported.

4.3 Result summary

The hypotheses tested in this thesis are summarised in Table 14 on the next page. In each of the three sections, both influencer marketing and consumer involvement are tested in relation to brand perceptions.

Table 14: Result summary.

Hypothesis	Description	Type of analysis	Result
Brand Personality			
H1	All consumer involvement profiles will show a significantly higher score on brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence and excitement when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing.	t-test	Not supported
H1a	High-ranking involvement profiles will show significantly higher levels of the brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence and excitement when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to low-ranking involvement profiles.	ANOVA	Partially supported
Brand Attitude			
H2	Respondents exposed to influencer marketing will show a significantly higher score on brand attitude, compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing.	t-test	Supported
H2a	All consumer involvement profiles will show a significantly higher score on brand attitude when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing.	t-test	Partially supported
H2b	High-ranking involvement profiles will show significantly higher positive brand attitudes when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to low-ranking involvement profiles.	ANOVA	Supported
Brand Personality & Brand Attitude			
H3	Respondents exposed to influencer marketing will show a stronger positive correlation between brand personality dimensions sincerity, excitement, competence and brand attitude, compared to respondents exposed to paid social media marketing.	Correlation	Supported

5 Conclusions and discussion

This chapter concludes this study with several conclusions, a discussion around the results, the limitations of this study, theoretical and managerial contributions as well as suggestions for the direction of future research.

5.1 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to enhance the understanding of how different groups of consumers perceive a brand depending on whether they were exposed to influencer marketing or paid social media marketing. The three hypotheses and three sub-hypothesis tested in this study have in various ways contributed to this through benchmarks.

The first hypothesis and its sub-hypothesis tested if the brand personality dimensions sincerity, excitement and competence differed significantly depending on the type of marketing the respondents were exposed to and on their involvement in clothes. From the t-test it was found that influencer marketing received higher mean scores on all personality dimensions, with the exception of ruggedness. However, on the contrary to our beliefs, these mean scores were not significantly higher for the personality dimensions sincerity, excitement and competence (H1). When comparing the impression of influencer marketing between high-ranking and low-ranking involvement profiles (H1a), it was concluded that high-ranking profiles had higher mean scores compared to low-involvement consumers. Again, on the contrary to the expectations, these differences were only significant on the personality dimension competence. This means that the expectation that respondents exposed to influencer marketing would have stronger brand personality perceptions was only partially supported in this study.

The second hypothesis and its sub-hypotheses tested influencer marketing's effect on brand attitude based on different consumer involvement profiles. From the t-tests and the ANOVA, influencer marketing did in fact receive higher mean scores, compared to paid social media marketing. However, depending on the level of analysis all these were not statistically significant. When sorting for all the respondents (H2), a significant difference was found for influencer marketing, but contrary to the expectations, not all consumer profiles (H2a) scored significantly higher. When comparing high-ranking (Passionate & confident) with low-ranking profiles (Uninterested & indifferent) (H2b) a significant difference was found again.

This means that the third profile (Intrigued but unconfident) might have been too similar to the other consumer involvement profiles. For further discussion of the clustering, see section [5.2.1](#).

The third hypothesis tested the relationship between the brand perception variables: brand attitude and brand personality. The correlation analysis confirmed that the three achievable personality traits and brand attitude were statistically significantly higher for influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing. This showed that brand attitude and brand personality perceptions had a strong positive connection to each other. Finding the causality between these two variables is a suggestion for future research, see section [5.6](#).

The research question that has guided this study was to what extent influencer marketing affects the relationship between consumers' involvement and their perception of brand personality and brand attitude. From the empirical findings of this study, it can be concluded that brand perceptions are generally higher when respondents are exposed to influencer marketing. In addition, it seems that respondents in the high-ranking involvement profile had higher brand perceptions than the low-ranking involvement profile when exposed to influencer marketing. Although, these differences were to some extent inconclusive in this study. The dimensions that significantly differed from each other showed small to moderate effect sizes, which indicates that type of marketing and involvement profile only had a small effect on brand perception in this study.

5.2 Discussion

In the initial chapter of this thesis, it was argued that there is a gap in current marketing literature regarding how different levels of consumer involvement could affect the perception of influencer marketing. Individual preferences and differences' effect on influencer marketing have not been studied and this was where it was argued that the general brand attitude measurement and the more narrow brand personality concept were applicable as evaluative tools. In the problematisation of this thesis, it was also stated that one problem concerning the effect of influencer marketing is that no one has yet identified the strength of the relationship between specific brand personality traits and brand attitude when a consumer is exposed to influencer marketing. In the following sections these initial ideas are discussed.

5.2.1 Consumer involvement profiles in clothing

The consumers in this study did, like Kapferer and Laurent (1985a) have argued, reacted differently to the marketing stimuli they were exposed to. However, the clusters identified using consumer involvement profiles within the clothing industry resulted in a generally low risk importance, consistent with Sudha and Sheena's (2017) argumentation about low fashion risk importance. While the three involvement profiles were statistically significant at the 0.001 level, the brand used in the survey was neither exclusive nor extraordinary. As Kim (2005) argues, the goals and needs of consumers might influence the perceived importance of the product, the combination between generally low risk importance and the use of an unexclusive brand has potentially made the profiles less differential. Consumer involvement profiles who place greater importance on brand image compared to functionality could have been significantly different from other profiles if the brand used would have been an expensive high fashion brand. Also, the influencer's effect could have been greater and significant between the consumer profiles for brand personality dimensions in H1 and H1a, as well as brand attitude in H2a. Due to the relatively large variation between the profiles' mean scores for pleasure, sign and interest, a larger variation could have been expected if the brand Gina Tricot was more extreme in its fashionability, price range or other brand attributes as argued by O'Cass (2004). These are attributes that consumers associate with symbolism or experientialism, as argued by Keller (1993).

One point that has to be acknowledged is the fact that when using the consumer profiles derived from the cluster analysis, H1 was not supported whereas H1a and H2a were only partially supported. Only hypothesis H2b, of the hypotheses testing differences between the consumer profiles, was fully supported. This is a considerable shortcoming in the application of the consumer involvement theory. The model has been validated several times and proven to be generalisable across product categories (Kapferer & Laurent, 1985a; 1985b; 1993; Guthrie & Kim, 2009). When looking at H2, not using the consumer involvement profiles and running the t-test on the basis of what the respondents had been exposed to, a significant difference was found between influencer marketing and paid social media marketing. However, when breaking this down to this exposure between consumer involvement profiles in H2a the result was inconclusive, which leads us to believe that the clustering was inadequate.

5.2.2 Is influencer marketing more effective than paid social media?

As argued above, previous research has found that influencer marketing in general is more credible than marketing activities with the brand as primary sender (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Sudha & Sheena, 2017), as influencer marketing is considered to be a powerful type of eWOM (Evans et al. 2017). The fact that influencer marketing leads to higher brand attitude has been confirmed before (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016), but how different levels of consumer involvement affect this has not. In this study, it was found that the mean scores for brand attitude were generally higher when the respondents had been exposed to influencer marketing as opposed to the paid social media marketing communicated directly from Gina Tricot. Even if all mean differences did not show statistical significance, these results might indicate that marketing activities and eWOM promoted through an influencer instead of from the brand itself, is to a small extent perceived as more positive and credible. In addition, almost all consumers who were exposed to influencer marketing had higher mean scores on all brand personality dimensions proposed by Aaker (1997), with the exception of ruggedness.

Also, brief marketing exposure in social media often has a high impact (Dahlén, Lange & Rosengren, 2017) and consumers often perceive paid social media marketing as intrusive and inauthentic (Fournier & Avery, 2011). In our study, influencer marketing had a generally higher brand perception impact than paid social media marketing and was supported in H2, H3, partly in H2a but not in H1. As mean scores for both brand personality and brand attitude were lower for paid social media marketing, compared to influencer marketing, this might indicate that the advertisement communicated directly from Gina Tricot to a small extent was perceived as more inauthentic than the post from Kenza. Even though the mean scores for brand attitude towards Gina Tricot as a brand were lower than when Kenza promoted the brand, they were still around 3 or higher (H2). This could indicate that both types of advertisements actually had a rather high impact on the respondents. In addition, only the Passionate & confident consumer profile displayed significantly higher brand attitude when exposed to influencer marketing, which supports the argument of intrusiveness from Fournier and Avery (2011), but only for this profile.

For a social media marketing campaign to be successful, several authors have highlighted the importance of using influencers who a brand's consumers can relate to or who they regard as role models (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Sudha & Sheena,

2017). As influencer marketing has been proven to be more credible than paid social media marketing, the non-significant results in this study might depend on the fact that the participants did not perceive Kenza as a role model within the fashion domain and thus, did not believe that she reflected the self-image they wished to achieve themselves. Another possible explanation for why H1 was not supported and H2a was only partially supported might have been because both of the advertisements used in this study reflect professional content. As the picture posted by Kenza is rather similar to the picture posted by Gina Tricot themselves, they might both have been regarded as professional content. Therefore, the influencer post might not have been perceived as more authentic and credible than the paid social media post. Therefore, these two advertisements do not follow Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) argument that brands should avoid overly-professional content and instead try to blend in with other users to be successful on social media. If the influencer post would have appeared as less professional and more as a post from a peer, compared to the paid social media post, significant differences in brand perceptions might have been more prominent.

As many other authors, Gürkaynak, Kama and Ergün (2018) have also argued that consumers are more prone to listen to influencers instead of the brand on social media since they do not believe influencers are trying to sell them products. However, while influencer marketing often received higher mean scores than social media marketing in this study, these were only statistically significant in H2 when measuring brand attitude, whereas no significant differences were found in H1 and only partially in H2a. This indicates that influencer marketing only to a small extent affect the perception of brand personality for the brand used in this study, whereas attitudes towards a brand seem to be higher when respondents are exposed to influencer marketing. Therefore, Gürkaynak, Kama and Ergün's (2018) argument seem to be true when it comes to brand attitudes, but is on the other hand more questionable when concerning the perceptions of brand personality.

In addition to the argument above, users also have a limited amount of patience with marketing of persuasive purposes that appears without any social connection (Bang & Lee, 2016; Ellinon, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). As both influencers and brands need to be transparent on Instagram when advertising products, the posts used in this study are of persuasive nature as the aim is to sell products. In spite of this, it did not seem to decrease the perception of the brand considerably as the three different dimensions in brand attitude were approximately in the middle of the Likert-scale used to measure the respondents' attitudes.

Although, most respondents exposed to influencer marketing actually rated a more positive brand attitude than respondents exposed to paid social media marketing. As significant differences were found based on all respondents in this study (H2), independently of their involvement level in clothes, this could indicate that the influencer post is regarded as being of less persuasive nature. This finding is not in line with previous research which argue that any social media posts recognised as sponsored or paid for will result in negative brand attitudes (Evans et al., 2017; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Thus, it could be argued that influencer marketing to a small extent was perceived as more credible compared to paid social media marketing in this study. This is due to the fact that mean scores for brand personality (H1) and brand attitudes (H2 and H2a) were higher for influencer marketing even though significant differences were not found for all dimensions in H1 and H2a. Although, if this study would have taken a repeated measures approach, with one advertisement with the word disclosure “Paid partnership” and another with no such word disclosure, more prominent differences in brand perceptions might have been found.

As for the last hypothesis in this study (H3), the relationship between brand personality dimensions sincerity, competence, excitement and brand attitudes was significantly stronger when the respondents were exposed to influencer marketing. This strengthens the argument of Guthrie and Kim (2009), who state that a distinct personality is highly linked to positive brand attitudes. Although, it should be noted that H3 only tested differences between influencer marketing and paid social media marketing for all respondents. Hence, it did not take the different consumer profiles into account. This result, together with H2, also suggests that when a brand within the fashion industry uses influencer marketing they can reap the benefits of a credible influencer marketing campaign to achieve more positive brand attitudes. In this case, Gina Tricot seem to have identified an influencer who is perceived as sincere, competent and exciting. In line with Kulmala, Mesiranta and Tuminen (2012), Gina Tricot seem to have succeeded with the match between Kenza’s personal style and their brand, as the influencer marketing post indicates a strong relationship between positive brand attitudes and the three achievable personality traits central for this study. Based on hypotheses H3 and H2, it is therefore implied that influencer marketing is better than paid social media marketing.

5.2.3 Do Passionate & confident consumers like influencer marketing more?

As argued in the beginning of this thesis, no attempts have been made to clarify the consumers' involvement in influencer marketing. It was the belief and prerequisite of this study that the more involved a consumer is, the higher their appreciation for influencer marketing would be. Due to influencer's alleged status as role models. Comparing high-ranking and low-ranking consumer profiles proved to be ambiguous. While their differences in brand attitude were significant in H2b, the differences in all brand personality in H1a were not. The argumentation by Guthrie and Kim (2009) that distinct brand personality is highly linked to positive brand attitudes was not confirmed in this study when the different involvement profiles were taken into account. Brand personality is a more precise tool for measuring brand perceptions (Aaker, 1997), compared to the more general brand attitudes. Considering the sample size and the two conditions, each group contains between 40-63 respondents (see Table 6). It is, in retrospect, highly likely that this was not sufficient for measuring brand personality, in combination with the discussion in 5.2.1 about the inadequate clustering. In contrast, the few dimensions tested for brand attitude were obviously suitable for finding statistical significance for high-ranking versus low-ranking involvement profiles, which further corroborates that the multifaceted brand personality scale needed a larger sample size. Aaker (1997) has suggested assessment of the brand personality scale in other areas, but in the conclusion of this study there is still a need for further testing of its application in influencer marketing.

5.3 Limitations

This study is not without limitations, and these need to be critically acknowledged. Firstly, the fact that significant results were limited regarding the three consumer involvement profiles in this study can possibly depend on the cluster analysis conducted to identify the different consumer involvement profiles. If more resources in terms of time and preparation had been available for the researchers of this study, a hierarchical cluster analysis could have been performed instead of the chosen K-means clustering. Hierarchical cluster analysis is more advanced than K-means and would possibly have contributed to a more adequate clustering.

As no large differences between the different consumer involvement profiles were found, the depth in the analysis of the results was limited. A qualitative study would have allowed for a more in-depth analysis and would perhaps have revealed other truths about how different

consumer groups perceive a brand if they are exposed to influencer marketing. As brand personality could be hard to assess when only exposed to one advertisement for less than a minute, more prominent differences might have been found if a mixed-methods or a qualitative approach would have been used. In spite of this, small differences between groups were in fact identified, where some were significantly different from each other. It would therefore be interesting to continue this research deeper using a qualitative approach.

5.3.1 Convenience sample and digital survey

Low response rate biases from digital surveys are to be expected, but they can nevertheless distort the representativeness of the sample, as argued by Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister (2012). This study had a response rate of approximately 16 %, which is around the average for digital surveys, but as this sample was not based on probability, even an acceptable response rate cannot account for the limitations in the chosen sample. As our sample was based on accessible individuals, it is of importance to note that the sample in this study was biased and the mean differences therefore were used as benchmarks. In this sample, students from the faculties of business and law were overrepresented, which also could limit the generalisability of the results, as they might not represent the actual distribution of female students. A probability sample with representative individuals from each faculty and program from the schools that participated in the research would have resulted in higher external validity of this study. Thus, generalisations from these results should be done cautiously.

When conducting research through Internet surveys, Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister (2012) also state that there are risks for selection bias and lack of control over the research environment. These factors have also limited the external validity of this study. A selection bias was present because only students with available email addresses on a selection of schools in Skåne were selected to participate in the study. Therefore, respondents who do not actively use these registered addresses or who are between the ages of 18-34 but do not go to the selected schools, were excluded from the sample.

As mentioned above, the use of digital surveys does not allow the researcher to have any control over the research environment. Therefore, there was no possibility of determining if respondents have answered conscientiously, under undistracting conditions or had a clear understanding of the instructions. However, by conducting a pilot survey the latter has hopefully been prevented to an acceptable extent. See [Appendix 1](#).

5.3.2 Measurements

Due to time limitations and the large amount of respondents needed, only one brand and influencer was used, which led the main study of this research to be very brand and influencer specific. It would have been advantageous to include more than one influencer as well as more than one picture from the chosen fashion brand to enhance the reliability of this study's results. To only use two Instagram posts, one representing the concept of influencer marketing and one representing the concept of paid social media marketing, can have affected the results in a negative way. As the brand and influencer identified in the pre-study are both well known in Sweden, the respondents' previous knowledge of Gina Tricot and Kenza can have contributed to distorted empirical findings. For instance, respondents who already had a positive attitude towards Gina Tricot might have rated the brand more positively, whereas participants who do not like or follow Kenza on Instagram might have scored lower points on the brand perception measurements. Hence, a considerable limitation of this study is that respondents' previous knowledge could have distorted their answer to be brand or influencer specific, instead of objectively advertisement specific. To include several influencers, clothing brands, as well as more than one picture from each brand, such distortions could have been excluded to a larger extent. Unfortunately, this would *inter alia* require more resources in terms of time and a much larger sample size, which is why it was not possible to accomplish in this specific study.

To draw any further conclusions regarding if Kenza is an appropriate influencer to use for the Gina Tricot brand, an evaluation of which of the personality traits, proposed by Aaker (1997), Gina Tricot wants to be associated with should be made. In this study, the perceived personality traits associated with Gina Tricot were only analysed depending on if consumers were exposed to influencer marketing or paid social media marketing. Therefore, it could not be concluded if the use of influencer marketing was beneficial for the clothing brand in terms of desired brand personality. However, this was outside the scope of this study and could instead be further examined in future research.

One of the shortcomings in this study was the difficulty to find significant differences in the brand personality measurement. This might be due to the low exposure time of the two advertisements that were the basis for this study. It could thus depend on the fact that respondents might not have had enough time to properly evaluate the personality of the marketing they were exposed to, as it is a rather narrow concept to evaluate.

5.4 Theoretical Contribution

The intended contributions of this study were to arrive at a conclusion regarding how consumers with different levels of involvement are perceiving a brand's influencer marketing and provide deeper knowledge on which dimensions of brand personality that are affected by influencer marketing. None of the aimed theoretical contributions were fully achieved. However, the results point towards that higher involvement is followed by higher influencer marketing appreciation, through higher brand attitude as well as higher rating of favourable brand personalities. In the case of unexclusive female clothing, sophistication and ruggedness were excluded from the hypothesised relationship. Neither of them received mean scores above 3, which corroborates the assumption of their unsuitable use in influencer brand personality.

Through this study, it can to some degree be stated that high-ranking involvement consumers seem to attribute the personality trait competence to a brand using influencer marketing, to a higher degree than low-ranking involvement consumers. This contributes to theory by stating that the competence dimension of brand personality seems to be more affected by influencer marketing in consumer groups with a high involvement in clothes. Additionally, the results of this study also indicate that the brand personality traits sincerity, competence and excitement are strongly related to positive brand attitudes when using influencer marketing. This relationship is weaker when using paid social media marketing and thus, the use of influencer marketing has been justified to some extent. Therefore, this study has partly contributed to the understanding of which brand personality traits that are associated with positive brand attitudes in relation to influencer marketing.

Lastly, the theoretical importance of investigating different consumers' general attitudes towards a brand depending on the type of advertisement they are exposed to were also highlighted in the initial phase of this study. It has been proven that all respondents in the study had significantly higher general attitudes towards the brand when exposed to influencer marketing, compared to paid social media marketing. As stated above, high-ranking involvement consumers display significantly more positive brand attitudes compared to the two lower involvement consumer groups when exposed to influencer marketing. This contributes to existing theory as it provides deeper knowledge on which consumers that are most positive towards influencer marketing as well as further justifying the use of this marketing activity within the clothing industry. We maintain the belief that this research has

in fact contributed to a more nuanced picture of the influencer marketing phenomenon's multifaceted effects.

5.5 Managerial Implications

The implications of the results of this study are practically useful. Influencer marketing is still a valid marketing tool as it scored higher means on all three achievable personality traits and significantly higher brand attitudes for all respondents exposed to it, compared to paid social media marketing. Independent of what kind of brand image the clothing brand would like to represent, it is still important to reflect sincerity, excitement and competence in order to build a strong brand, as they significantly correlate with positive brand attitudes. The brand personality scale, which is usually applied to brands and not the face of the brands, is useful in comparing the consumer perception of the brand itself and, in our case, for matching these perceptions strategically with an influencer. For managers, it could be helpful to segment their consumers according to their involvement, as high-ranking involvement consumers did score higher on brand attitude when exposed to influencer marketing. Managers who find that their consumers are highly involved could utilise this information to maximise their influencer marketing strategy, and thereby ensure successful social media marketing campaigns. While this study could not statistically confirm that different involvement levels affected brand personality perceptions, its application in the influencer marketing field should not be abandoned.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

This study has been an initial attempt to establish consumer involvement, brand personality and brand attitude's relations to influencer marketing, but should neither be seen as establishing nor denying these relations. It is suggested in this thesis that further research on brand personality and consumer involvement is done using larger probability samples, hierarchical clustering, several brands, checking for validity and also by qualitative research approaches. Finding causality between brand attitude and brand personality is also of great importance for future research. This could be done through an experimental design where the researcher can control and manipulate the variables of interest. In addition, it would also be valuable to confirm if the use of influencer marketing can affect consumers' perceptions of the specific personality dimensions a brand strives to be associated with, as this was outside the scope of this study.

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Appendix 1 – Main Survey

Survey - Social Media Marketing

Hello!

How nice of you to click the link! This survey consists of 33 five-point scale questions in four different sections and takes about 2-4 minutes to answer. In this survey we are only interested in women's opinions.

This survey is part of a master's thesis in International Marketing at Lund University. No personal data is stored, you are completely anonymous and the results are used for academic purposes only.

Please answer the survey truthfully, your opinion matters a lot to us. Feel free to exit the survey at any point, but please notice that unfinished answers are not usable.

*Obligatorisk

Fortsätt till frågan 1.

General information

1. Do you use the social media platform Instagram? *

Markera endast en oval.

- Yes, daily
- Yes, weekly
- Yes, monthly
- Yes, yearly
- No
- I have used it, but not anymore

2. What is your main field of study? *

Markera endast en oval.

- Social science
- Business/Economics
- Natural sciences
- Medicine
- Technical
- Art
- Law
- Humanistic/theology
- Övrigt: _____

3. How old are you? *

Markera endast en oval.

- 18-20
- 21-23
- 24-26
- 27-29
- 30-32
- 33-34
- 35 -

4. What is your highest current/finished education? *

Markera endast en oval.

- High school degree (gymnasiet)
- University - Bachelor's degree
- University - Master's degree
- University - PhD and above

5. Gender: *

Markera endast en oval.

- Female
- Male
- Other/Prefer not to say

Customer involvement clothes

Please answer the following 16 statements regarding your involvement in clothes (in this study, clothes only refers to textile garments, such as dresses, skirts, pants, tops, jackets etc).

6. I really enjoy buying clothes. *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

7. The clothes a person buys reflect who she is. *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

8. **When I am in front of the clothing section, I always feel unsure about which to choose.***

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

9. **It is very irritating to buy clothes that are not right.***

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

10. **I can tell a lot about a person from the clothes she buys.***

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

11. **I could not care less about clothes.***

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

12. **It does not matter too much if I make a mistake when buying clothes.***

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

13. **I am very interested in clothes.***

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

14. **What clothes I purchase is extremely important me. ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

15. **Whenever I buy clothes, it is like giving myself a present. ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

16. **To me, clothes are pleasurable. ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

17. **Choosing clothes is quite hard. ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

18. **The clothes I buy describe the person I am. ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

19. **When I buy clothes I can never be quite certain about my choice. ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

20. **When I buy clothes, I can never be exactly sure if the choice was right.** *
Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

21. **I am annoyed with myself if it turns out that I made the wrong choice when buying clothes.** *
Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

Randomization question.

Please click on one of the numbers below to be assigned to a randomized group and to view next section.

22. **Pick a number:** *

Markera endast en oval.

- 53 *Fortsätt till frågan 23.*
- 79 *Fortsätt till frågan 23.*
- 28 *Fortsätt till frågan 25.*
- 37 *Fortsätt till frågan 23.*
- 84 *Fortsätt till frågan 25.*
- 42 *Fortsätt till frågan 25.*

Instagram Marketing

Please look at the Instagram post in this section and then answer the two questions.

23. **Based on this Instagram post, how much do you like Gina Tricot?** *
Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly dislike Strongly like

24. **Based on this Instagram post, what is your general perception of Gina Tricot?** *
Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very negative Very positive

kenzas
Paid partnership with ginatricot



Liked by [@stranda](#), [@samanthajesson](#) and 24 845 others

kenzas Ready for spring in blouse and jeans from [@ainatricot](#) 🌸 See more of my fav sprina

Fortsätt till frågan 27.

Instagram marketing

Please look at the Instagram post in this section and then answer the two questions.

25. Based on this Instagram post, how much do you like Gina Tricot? *

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

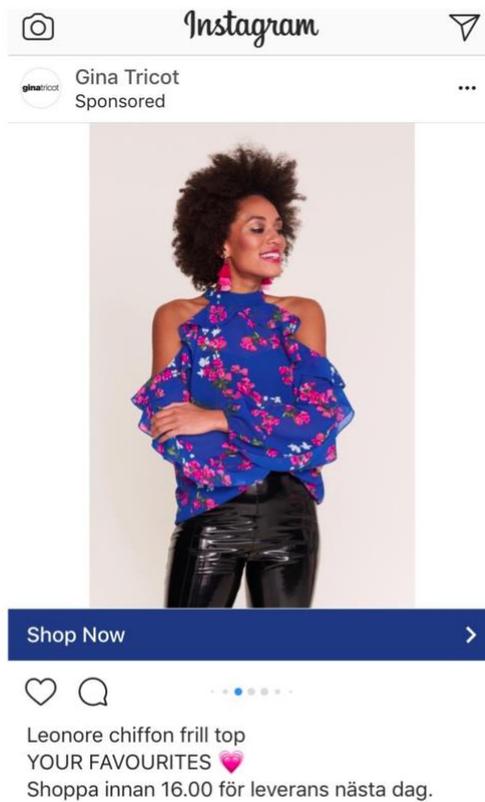
Strongly dislike Strongly like

26. Based on this Instagram post, what is your general perception of Gina Tricot? *

Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very negative Very positive



Brand personalities

The last section. Please imagine that Gina Tricot is possessing/having human qualities. How well do you feel that Gina Tricot is represented by the following 16 qualities? Please answer all questions.

27. **Up-to-date** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

28. **Intelligent** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

29. **Daring** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

30. **Honest** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

31. **Spirited** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

32. **Outdoorsy** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

33. **Charming ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

34. **Tough ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

35. **Reliable ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

36. **Cheerful ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

37. **Imaginative ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

38. **Upper class ***

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

39. **Successful** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

40. **Wholesome** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

41. **Down-to-earth** *

Markera endast en oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree				

Appendix 2 – Clusters

Distances between Final Cluster Centers

Clusters	1	2	3
1		2,842	1,711
2	2,842		1,895
3	1,711	1,895	

Iteration History **a**

Iteration	Change in Cluster Centers		
	1	2	3
1	2,393	2,466	2,665
2	0,237	0,221	0,178
3	0,16	0,134	0,124
4	0,064	0,039	0,061
5	0,034	0,041	0,04
6	0,025	0,019	0,026
7	0	0,031	0,022
8	0	0	0

***a** Convergence achieved due to no or small change in cluster centers. The maximum absolute coordinate change for any center is ,000. The current iteration is 8. The minimum distance between initial centers is 5,598.*

Appendix 3 – Preliminary Analysis

Descriptives

Exposed_Ad		Statistic	Std. Error
Paid Social Media Marketing	Mean	1,99	0,068
	90% Confide Lower Bound	1,88	
	Upper Bound	2,1	
	5% Trimmed Mean	1,99	
	Median	2	
	Variance	0,761	
	Std. Deviation	0,872	
	Minimum	1	
	Maximum	3	
	Range	2	
	Interquartile Range	2	
	Skewness	0,024	0,19
	Kurtosis	-1,692	0,377
	Influencer Marketing	Mean	2
90% Confide Lower Bound		1,89	
Upper Bound		2,11	
5% Trimmed Mean		2	
Median		2	
Variance		0,724	
Std. Deviation		0,851	
Minimum		1	
Maximum		3	
Range		2	
Interquartile Range		2	
Skewness		0	0,184
Kurtosis		-1,623	0,365