Instagram - from a social platform to an ad-arena?

An empirical study aiming to grasp consumers' experiences and feelings of the increased exposure of advertising on Instagram

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Abstract

Title: Instagram - from a social platform to an ad-arena? An empirical study aiming to grasp consumers' experiences and feelings of the increased exposure of advertising on Instagram

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Thesis purpose: The main purpose is to provide a prospect of how the increased exposure to advertising on Instagram influences consumer resistance. We further aim to provide useful insights to future marketers on how to proceed with advertising on Instagram.

Methodology: This study has utilized a qualitative methodology based on a relativist and social constructionist philosophical position. The study has adopted an abductive approach relying on a grounded analysis. To retrieve the insights needed for our research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four focus groups.

Theoretical perspective: The theoretical perspective of this study has been on different consumer culture theories such as consumer resistance and consumer behavior.

Empirical material: The key findings are presented under four themes that emerged from the empirical material. These themes are commercialization, (in)authenticity, reflexive resistance and fear of social loss.

Conclusions: The conclusions stem from our own theoretical model 'The Glass Cube' and indicate how consumers experience and cope with advertising on Instagram. No radical resistance is exercised by consumers due to the fear of social loss. Instead, immunity is developed.

Practical implications: Managers should pay attention to uniqueness as opposed to mainstream and search for new methods in situations where immunity is not yet developed. Additionally, managers need to be ready to change direction and mindset, and quickly adjust their in-house strategy as trends come and go.

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1 Introduction

The present chapter aims to illustrate the context that supports the focus of the research. The background regarding consumer resistance and the increased presence of advertising on social media and Instagram will first be presented. In order to induce the relevance of this phenomena, a problematization will follow. After the background and problematization, the purpose of the research will grasp the objectives of this research and introduce the research question which this paper will circle around. Lastly, an outline of the thesis is presented.

1.1 Background[1]

Imagine yourself sitting on an early morning train, on your way to a meeting in the city center. You login to Instagram to check what your friends and family have been up to the last couple of hours. The first thing you see is a clothing-collaboration from an influencer you are following. You decide to unfollow her to clean your sight. You continue scrolling in your feed, but are being interrupted by sponsored ads popping up everywhere and in between your friends 'my-stories'. You are getting irritated. It feels like every other post is advertising, consisting of influencers' recommendations of clothes, yoga-mats, and extraordinary razors or sponsored ads about trips to child-friendly destinations, weight-loss diets, or bicycles. You feel that these ads are trying to make you spend money, are time-consuming, and irritating. Wait, how did Instagram know that you are looking for a new bicycle? That's creepy. You close the app as fast as you opened it, feeling fed up with all social media advertising; you simply cannot stand it anymore. As a consequence, you delete the app and promise yourself to not use the platform again for a while. After all, you just wanted to check Instagram to see what your friends were up to.

Consumer resistance to marketing is not a new phenomenon. In 1994, Calfee and Ringold reviewed six years of research regarding consumers' perceptions of commercial and advertising. The results showed that skepticism abides as about 70% of the consumers felt that advertising was aiming to get them to buy products and services they did not want or need (Calfee & Ringold, 1994). By creating brand- or product awareness, or by communicating brands and products in terms of the functional, social or emotional benefits, research claims that advertising is designed to persuade consumers (e.g. Fransen, Verlegh, Kirmani & Smit, 2015). Further, previous research has demonstrated how consumers understand the relationship between marketing (as a perceived power) and themselves (as resistant to that power) which could be fueling and fostering different degrees of consumer resistance; from avoidance to extreme acts of activism (Cambefort & Roux, 2019). The resistance target could be the marketplace in general (Kozinets, 2002) or a specific entity such as a company, brand, or organization (Holt, 2002). In this study, we want to investigate

[1] Parts of 1.1 were also used in BUSR31 and BUSP37, 2020.

consumers' emotions and experiences with the increased presence of advertising on Instagram, as this seems to have become more visible and unavoidable in the era of digitalization and the Internet.

Social media usage is one of the most popular online activities. In 2018, an estimated 2.65 billion people were using social media worldwide; a number projected to increase to almost 3.1 billion in 2021 (Clement, 2019). These platforms are generally seen as platforms where friends and family have the opportunity to connect and share information. However, the digitalization and the new, online-based postmodern consumer culture have had an abundant influence on the proficient increase in social media advertising. In 1984, experts estimated the average American being exposed to around 1500 advertisements per day (Rumbo, 2002). In 2015, this number was up to 4,000 to 10,000 per day, according to digital marketing specialists (Marshall, 2015).

Statistics show how the vast majority of online users are tired of social media advertising (Gitlin, 2019) and how consumer usage of ad blockers is on its rise (Business Insider, 2017). During 2018, the trend of sponsored content in terms of influencer marketing grew by 133% over the year (Socialbakers, 2019). In the meanwhile, targeted advertising has become a highly relevant marketing strategy among companies in which information about consumers browsing behavior is collected (Dehling, Zhang & Sunyaev, 2019). This has led the European Union to impose the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to protect people's privacy rights, which require companies to provide more transparency in their marketing attempts (Wolford, 2020). As a result, more visible commercials are experienced from the eyes of consumers. These new implications make the topic of consumer resistance towards an increased presence of social media advertising very timely and relevant to investigate further.

Instagram, the social media platform with over 1 billion active users (Newberry, 2019), is one of the most popular social media apps in modern times. In 2018, the parent company Facebook Inc, gave directions to Instagram to double the number of ads (Heath, 2019) and today Instagram offers seven types of different ads for marketers (Sherley, 2019). In 2019, Instagram launched the 'check-out' in-app purchase, making it more seamless for consumers to buy products directly from the platform (Leaver, Highfield & Crystal, 2020). In the meanwhile, an increase of targeted advertising (Jung, 2017) and collaborations with influencers has become marketing techniques that lately has exploded (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). With a comprehensive and unique culture where the number of ads has increased the last couple of years, we argue that Instagram is the optimal platform to investigate consumers' emotions and experiences to the increased presence of advertising.

1.2   Research Problem[2]

Research has shown that the vast majority of social media users are becoming tired of social media ads as it is harming their consumer experience (Gitlin, 2019). As a result of Facebook Inc's directions of doubling the number of ads on Instagram in 2018 (Heath, 2019), Instagram users have recently been portrayed with an increased exposure of advertising in their Instagram feeds. Furthermore, the disclosure of transparency in marketers' branding attempts, stemming from the new GDPR law (Wolford, 2020) has also contributed to more visual marketing for consumers. The platform which intentionally was aimed for social purposes (Leaver, Highfield & Crystal, 2020) now consist of users that are being hunted by targeted marketing, sponsored ads and influencers (Socialbakers, 2019). It is therefore possible to acknowledge how the increased exposure of advertising seems to harm the consumer experience on the platform.

As a response to the increased presence of advertising and the harmed consumer experience, users may start to conduct forms of resistance tactics, which this study is aiming to identify and further investigate. Everyday resistance can often go unnoticed and be experienced only by the individual who is resisting (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). Resistance toward social media advertising can become problematic for companies if the consequence results in their marketing attempts not being seen nor recognized. It is important to rapidly identify and acknowledge these everyday resistance tactics in order for marketers to quickly adapt to the rapidly changing consumer culture on social media. Therefore, it becomes important to further investigate how consumers experience the increased amount of social media advertising, as their resistance tactics may not become visible until it is too late for marketers to adapt. Marketing agencies and companies who aim to use Instagram as a part of their marketing strategy will therefore benefit from our conclusions. This topic is important, not only because social media and digital marketing may be seen as the future of marketing, but also because this area of social media resistance is fairly untouched in the academic world.

Previous research regarding consumer resistance towards an increased presence of advertising is modest when applied to Instagram. As much did change over the last years, the phenomena is relevant to further investigate. Additionally, previous research on the connection between advertising on Instagram and consumer resistance is limited. Besides research on consumers' perceptions and attitudes to advertising, more often indicated on traditional means such as printed or broadcast media, we do not know much about consumers' actual emotions and experiences towards the phenomena on Instagram. While much previous research has taken a managerial approach towards the phenomena of social media advertising, the consumer perspective is not widely explored. We wonder what consumers will do if they are feeling trapped in between their cultural space on Instagram and the implicit invasion of businesses and marketers. How do consumers experience and feel about targeted messages that they did not ask for? What actions, and potential resistance strategies

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[2] Parts of 1.2 were also used in BUSR31 and BUSP37, 2020.

are consumers taking towards the increased presence of advertising that in theory is somewhat avoidable? With the comprehensive market of social media, it is crucial to investigate how Instagram users feel about marketers marketing approaches, and to investigate what potential actions of resistance means for businesses and marketers.

According to statistics released in November 2019, the most active users on Instagram are between the age of 16-25, as 85% of the respondents within this age group were using Instagram (Tankovska, 2019a). The following most active groups were in the age span of 12-15 (81%) and 26-35 (74%). Statistics also show that 72% of the female-respondents were using Instagram, while this number only reached 42% among the male-respondents (Tankovska, 2019b). Based on these statistics, the average and most representative Instagram user in Sweden is a female in the age of 16-25 years old. Therefore, we have conducted a qualitative study focusing on the feelings and experiences of participants suiting these criteria, as these represent the average Instagram user in Sweden. Furthermore, throughout this study we refer 'advertising' to all types of commercials occurring on the platform. This includes influencer's collaborations and companies marketing attempts through photo ads (most common type of ad), sponsored ads (allow the brand to promote their posts through paid ads), mapped – guided ads (using the tagging option to direct customers to the business page), story ads (ads placed on the 'my story' function), video ads (typically 30-60 second long video ad), IGTV ads (a relatively new feature on Instagram similar to YouTube) and lastly carousel ads (customer sees 3-4 images promoting the same ad but on the same post) (Sherley, 2019).

1.3   Research Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to provide a prospect to how the increased exposure to advertising on Instagram influences consumer resistance. Put differently, the ambition of this research is to achieve an understanding of consumers' relationship to advertising on Instagram and to what extent advertising on Instagram may be connected to resistance. We further aim to provide useful insights to future marketers in how to proceed with social media marketing on Instagram. This research will be investigated from a consumer perspective, viewed through theoretical perspectives of consumer culture theory (CCT) such as consumer resistance (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). To understand the purpose of this study, the objective is to first provide a comprehensive overview of consumers' emotions and experiences with advertising on Instagram, followed by detecting how these emotions are influencing consumer resistance. We aim to contribute to the academic field of marketing with a theoretical model that we have developed after conducting the empirical material in our analysis. In addition, we seek to enrich the theoretical body of literature related to social media advertising and resistance by generating new insights and perspectives useful in contemporary consumer culture. Lastly, this research will be conducted in a qualitative manner to attain a rich and deep understanding of the research problem.

In line with this study's research problem and purpose, the aim is to investigate advertisements impact on Instagram from a consumer perspective, and therefore addresses the following research question:

RQ : How do the average Swedish Instagram user experience advertisements on the platform and how do their emotions influence tactics of resistance?

1.4   Outline of the Thesis

The outline of the thesis is visualized in Figure 1. Outline of the Thesis, where each chapter of this paper is briefly described.

1. Introduction
Introduces the general topic that the thesis is about and provides background information followed by a research problem. This section ends with one research question.

2. Literature Review
Presents the existing academic research about the topic in question and outlining gaps that this research aims to fill.

3. Theoretical Framework
This section begins with a summary and motivation behind chosen theories followed by a presentation of each theory for the analysis of the empirical material.

4. Methodology
Describes the methodological choices of this study and why these are essential. Chapters included in this section are for instance research philosophy and design, collection of empirical material and method of analysis.

5. Empirical Findings and Analysis
The empirical findings of the study are presented together with an analysis. The analysis is based on four themes derived from three subchapters.

7. Theoretical Contribution and Discussion
Our theoretical model is presented and explained and relevant discoveries in relation to the research question are discussed.

8. Conclusion
The key findings are summarized and conclusions are presented in relation to the research purpose and the research question.
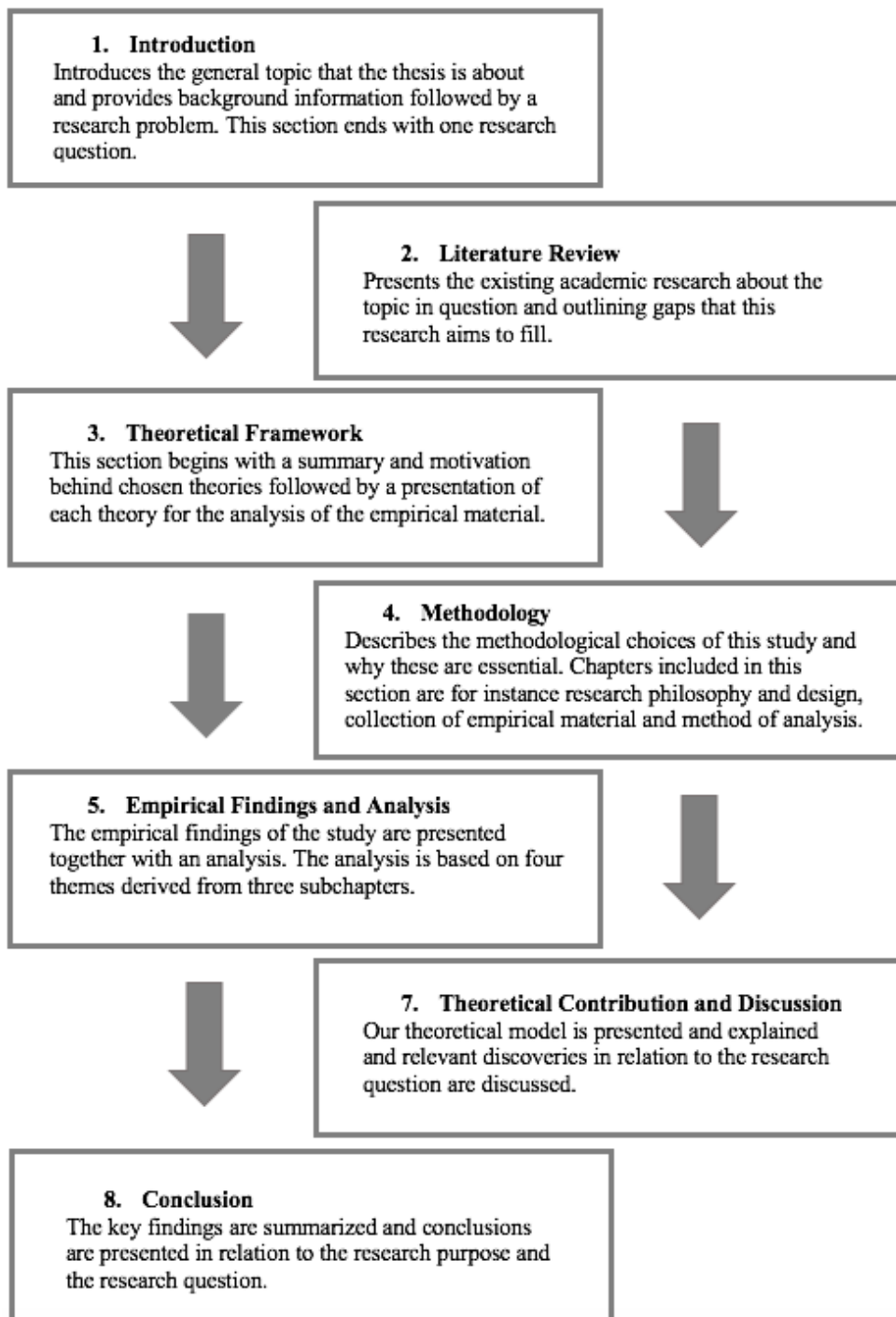
Figure 1. Outline of the Thesis

2 Literature Review

The literature review provides previous research of consumer resistance to advertising in general, as not much research on this exists in the context of social media platforms. The first subchapter touches on consumers' feelings towards forced exposure, advertising literacy, native advertising and personalized advertising. The second subchapter presents literature of consumer culture on social media, followed by consumer's risk, consumer resistance strategies and everyday resistance. The literature review will end with a brief and critical summary of the literature where identified gaps and implications for this study will be discussed.

2.1 Consumers Feelings Towards Advertising

2.1.1 Forced Exposure of Advertising

Previous research suggests that an escape from the market agencies' dominance is a 'romantic' idea and a consequence of commercial promises that still does not satisfy the consumers' needs (Arnould, 2007). Escaping the dominance from market structures is not entirely possible as it can only be achieved temporarily and locally (Kozinets, 2002). Rumbo (2002) states that consumer culture and advertising have become unavoidable parts of consumers' everyday life, as the discursive space (e.g., mass media with social and political debates) and the public space (e.g., sites of consumption) has become integrated. Thereby, contemporary consumers in the context of social media are constantly surrounded by advertising, whether they appreciate it or not.

Research in terms of forced exposure to advertising is thus divided. On one hand, research has shown that forced exposure will lead to negative associations with the advertiser (e.g., Li, Edwards & Lee, 2002), while others prove findings in which any exposure to advertising can be beneficial as brand awareness is produced (e.g., Skurnik, Yoon, Park & Schwarz, 2005). Coulter, Zaltman, and Coulter (2001) found in their study on broadcasted and printed ads (not internet) that the majority of the attitudes were negative when conceptual metaphors were associated with force. Here, 'force' was capturing the powerful presence of advertising in society. For instance, the participants in the study found advertising as the 'omnipresent being', as a result of advertisements prevalent and repetitive nature. The reactions included frustration, anger, and product boycotting as a consequence of these negative forces (Coulter, Zaltman & Coulter, 2001). In terms of advertising in a more online-based context, research has shown the similar, in which consumers perceive forced exposure of advertising as being intrusive (Hegner, Kusse & Pruyn, 2016). Although the intrusiveness may be perceived as weaker when an advertisement provides a positive emotional appeal to the consumer, Hegner, Kusse, and Pruyun (2016) mean that forced exposure still is perceived as intrusive. Further

implications are suggested towards consumer's actual responses to forced exposure (Fransen et al., 2015) making this phenomenon interesting for the context of our study.

2.1.2 Advertising Literacy

The concept of advertising literacy examines the knowledge and critical skills that consumers have about the techniques and persuasive intent used in advertising. Rozendaal, Lapierre, Reijmersdal, and Buijzen (2011) expressed three dimensions of the phenomena when investigating children's emotional judgment in regards to advertising literacy. These dimensions were referred to conceptual advertising literacy (recognition of advertising and understanding of its selling intent), advertising literacy performance (the actual use of the conceptual advertising knowledge), and attitudinal advertising literacy (low-effort, attitudinal mechanisms functioning as a defense during situations of low elaboration). Jans, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2018) used the latter dimension when examining the effect of advertising disclosure among young adolescents. The findings indicated that advertising disclosure enhanced moderate advertisement recognition but also an attitudinal advertising literacy for influencer's sponsored vlogs. The disclosure of advertising thereby demonstrated attitudes that negatively impacted both the influencer and the effects of the advertising. Thus, it should be noticed that this study did not measure critical reflection and other coping behaviors that may or may not influence the effects.

2.1.3 Native Advertising

Native marketing can be referred to as what Penaloza and Price (1993) describe to be "promotions camouflaged as news or programming and stereotypical", which from a consumer resistance perspective indicates the continuous denial of consumers (Penaloza & Price, 1993). Research regarding the impact and effectiveness of native formats of marketing seem to vary in their results. While much research suggests that native formats of marketing generally are more effective in producing desired persuasion outcomes compared to well-identified advertisements (e.g., Johnson, Potocki & Veldhuis, 2019), other scholars suggest that disclosure of advertising will lead to more credibility in the source which produces positive attitudes and influences purchase intention (e.g. Ananda & Wandebori, 2016). Jans, Cauberghe, and Hudder's study (2018) found an indirect path between advertising disclosure and purchase intention and highlighted how this is not fully researched when also measuring critical processing and coping strategies (Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018).

2.1.4 Personalized Advertising

From a management point of view, much research argues that relevant targeting techniques based on users' personal information are effective as it results in increased attention to advertisements while it also decreases advertising avoidance (Jung, 2017). However, somewhat inconsistent research occurs once the consumer perspective is taken into account. Penaloza and Price (1993) refer to this phenomenon to marketing agencies' "irresponsible or

unethical use and distribution of consumer information". Dehling, Zhang, and Sunyaev (2019) propose that consumer perceptions of online behavioral advertising (also called relevant advertising) are not stable as they constantly evolve and get triggered by confrontations. Here, Jung (2017) argues that consumers may develop ad avoidance due to privacy concerns when they become suspicious, which ultimately raises ad avoidance in social media. Although Dehling, Zhang, and Sunyaev (2019) support these findings to a certain extent, they further highlight that it is the amount, and the repetitiveness of online behavioral advertising that makes consumers irritated, with ad avoidance as a consequence. Whether the main issue is about privacy concerns or the amount of advertising portrayed to consumers, this stream of research indicates that social media users will use ad avoidance as a resistance tactic to these confrontations.

2.2   Consumer Resistance

2.2.1 The Consumer Culture on Social Media

The contemporary consumer culture is by many researchers explained as turbulent and complex (eg. Cova, 2013; Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017) which may be explained as the mixture of the discursive space and the public space has become more integrated (Rumbo, 2002). A physical or metaphorical space or community, in which a own culture has been developed, is referred to as a cultural space (Klein, 1999). In her book 'No Logo', Klein describes how corporate marketing can permeate previously uncommercialized domains. Scholars argue that this is the result of the corporate advantages of branding rather than production (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Consequently, the extension of one's brand has been the main corporate asset within postmodernity, resulting in massive branding investments into the cultural places of consumers (Klein, 1999).

As publicity and brand publics have grown in importance in the postmodern promotional culture (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015) the concept of personal branding is relevant. Whitmer (2019) observes how people no longer are just people, and products no longer are simply products, but how people see themselves as products to be marketed as a consequence of the unstable labor market. Supported by Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005), the concept of self-branding and self-packaging within the cultural spaces becomes evident for consumers to remain competitive not only in social contexts, but also in terms of success. Moreover, Belk's (1988) work of the extended self depicts how possessions are seen as a major contribution to the reflection of individuals' identities. As a continuation of his own work, Belk (2013) aims to explain how consumers perceive themselves in a digital environment. He proposes that the digital world opens a host of new means for self-extension, as consumers now are using many new consumption objects to reach a vastly broader audience (Belk, 2013).

The findings of Dehling, Zhang, and Sunyaev (2019) indicate that consumers can concurrently hold both negative and positive opinions about various aspects of advertising. Bertilsson's (2015) idea of cynical behavior could be related to these emotions, as he argues that morally conflicting demands are put on consumers in contemporary consumer culture. Cynicism could serve as an acceptable strategy for handling conflicting moral demands and be used as an explanation to how consumers consciously state one type of morality while acting out another (Bertilsson, 2015).

2.2.2 Consumer's Risk

The potential risks for consumers taking part in any form of resistance are investigated in Cambefort and Roux (2019) study 'A typology of the perceived risks in the context of consumer brand resistance'. Their findings indicate that the risks associated with resistance towards brands are performance risk, social issues, legal reasons, and physical considerations, and each resistance behavior can involve several types of risks (Cambefort & Roux, 2019). Hence, as consumer resistance varies in intensity, Cambefort and Roux (2019) have developed a Brand Resistance Intensity Continuum (BRIC), in which the perceived risks in a context of brand resistance arise along. Avoidance is the most silent type of resistance and does not really expose the individual to any type of risk. More extreme acts of activism can lead to, for example, legal and physical risks for the participant. As soon as the resistance becomes audible, through offline and online word-of-mouth, consumers are exposed to social and performance risk. When acts of boycotts and activism become evident, the consumer is further exposed to physical, aforementioned, and legal risks (Cambefort & Roux, 2019).

2.2.3 Consumer Resistance Strategies

Consumer criticism against marketing targets how consumption creates a structure of dominance (Penaloza & Price, 1993) and consumer resistance is commonly described as a means of power (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010). Previous research on consumer resistance towards advertising indicates that consumers, knowingly or unknowingly, conduct forms of action to resist brands or brand messages. As already mentioned, actions of resistance towards advertising represent a continuum of resistance intensity (Cambefort & Roux, 2019), varying from simple behaviors of avoidance to acts of boycott and activism.

Ad Avoidance

Although there are many creative and distinct ways of consumer resistance to marketing, ad avoidance may be the most general and commonly used tactic among the wider population as it involves no personal risk (Cambefort & Roux, 2019). For a consumer to maintain some measure of sovereignty over his/her psychic space, Speck and Elliott (1997) argue that the contemporary postmodern consumer is often forced to employ 'ad avoidance' strategies in order to not be oversaturated by advertising messages. The study elaborates on advertising

avoidance of printed and broadcasted media, where ignorance, elimination, and flipping past ads were found to be common consumer resistance behaviors. Speck and Elliott (1997) describe ad avoidance as an act connected to cognitive, behavioral, and mechanical means. Physical ad avoidance is described as a set of consumer strategies aimed at not hearing or seeing the ad. Johnson (2013) depicts a more modern strategy of physical ad avoidance as for example usage of ad-blockers or filtering out emails with a commercial message. Mechanical ad avoidance is described as a way of zipping, zapping, or muting the television/radio when the commercial starts while cognitive ad avoidance occurs when consumers do not pay attention to specific advertisements (Speck & Elliott, 1997).

Negative Word-of-mouth

As soon as consumers openly state their negative opinions they conduct negative word-of-mouth. According to Cambefort and Roux (2019), this is an audible anti-brand behavior conducted by individuals, in which their negative opinions of a brand or its actions are stated and shared with others. This can be done through offline channels which are face-to-face communication, but also through online channels on the internet, such as in social networks.

Adbusting and Cultural Jamming

Adbusting is a way of creative resistance that lets consumers expand the discursive space of anti-branding ideas. Rumbo (2002) argues that this illustrates the obstacles inherent in launching challenges to consumerism, and uses it to explain the difficulty to resist consumerism given advertising's control over cultural spaces. Again, this refers back to the conclusion of Kozinets (2002), indicating that consumers can only escape the market locally and temporarily. Likewise, cultural jamming is a similar empowering consumer resistance strategy, where the individuals often have developed a level of resistance that plays out on a more emotional level. Carducci (2006) depicts the concept of cultural jamming as a consequence of consumer's misbelief in the authenticity of producers' claims. This concept is seen as a type of resistance, or manifestation, often taken by consumers on a collective level.

Boycotting and Activism

Consumer boycotts and other forms of activism resistance are often taken on a collective and organized level (Penaloza & Price, 1993). Penaloza and Price (1993) refer boycotts to actions directed at changing the marketing mix structure and composition, and as a weapon to resistance. When researching the motivations behind consumer boycott participation, Klein, Smith, and John (2004) found that the main factors behind participation in boycotts were "the desire to make a difference, the scope for self-enhancement, counterarguments that inhibit boycotting, and the cost to the boycotter of constrained consumption". Usually, a powerful predictor was the perceived egregiousness of the company being boycotted (Klein, Smith & John, 2004).

2.2.4 Everyday Resistance

Commonly among the above presented studies is that the resistance is demonstrated through physical means, which can be performed both implicit or explicit, such as ad-avoidance or adbusting as an eventual consequence. It is interesting whether these phenomena are enough to fully understand the underlying factors behind advertising resistance on social media. According to Heath, Cluley, and O'Malley (2017), contemporary consumers resist advertising in a more mundane, quiet, and emotionally-charged way. These are forms of consumer resistance strategies that occur on an everyday basis as a consequence of the market's dominance and power. Everyday resistance can often go unnoticed and be experienced only by the individual who is resisting (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). Cambefort and Roux (2019) state that ad avoidance is the only silent act of resistance where personal risk is very low. When linking this to the expectations of individuals' personal branding attempts (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005; Whitmer, 2019), it may be used as an explanation as to why consumers tend to take more silent actions to resistance as their personal risk may be challenged.

Heath, Cluley, and O'Malley (2017) conclude that the relationship between consumers and marketing is quite turbulent. The participants in their study seem to agree to the importance of a consumers-marketing relationship although they also are trying to reclaim the power through more or less invisible consumer resistance strategies. Heath, Cluley and O'Malley's (2017) proposal of quiet resistance aligns with Kozinets (2002) idea of describing consumer resistance as a way of taking back the power they feel has been taken from them. Kozinets states that this resistance does not need to be noisy, apparent, or collective. This raises the question of what consumer resistance to advertising is and means for marketers if it is performed as a quiet, invisible, and not apparent form of action.

2.3   Identified Gaps & Critique

Previous research has talked about different forms of resistance, performed on different levels and with different motives. Some forms of resistance are more ideologically conditional (such as resistance towards markets in general or towards global brands) and contain some type of social movement (see Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Klein 1999). Meanwhile, other forms of resistance are seen on an individual or micro level and performed on an everyday basis, such as word of mouth statements and ad avoidance towards campaigns aiming to persuade.

We argue that the understanding of previous literature is insufficient when put into the context of social media. In order for previous literature to not become ancient, it needs to be put into the context of the new era of a digitalized consumer culture where consumers

constantly feel supervised and overseen by others. A social media platform can be considered a metaphorical cultural space for consumers, and businesses invade these cultural spaces with forced exposure to commercialization and marketing (Klein, 1999). Based on an individual consumer's personal needs, interests, and habits, targeted and personalized advertisements are repeatedly portrayed to them in all aspects of social media. It seems to us that marketing agencies are not only invading the cultural space of consumers; they are now also invading personal space through the collection of personal data and personalized targeting techniques. As the context and practical implications of this phenomenon seem to differ from other dimensions of consumer culture, we suspect that the emotions and responses produced by consumers also differ. Further, much previous research has focused on attitudes and perceptions, but not fully taken consumers' underlying emotions and experiences into consideration.

With divided findings regarding consumers' perceptions and associations to forced exposure, and with scholars arguing for further research within the subject (Fransen et al., 2015), it becomes relevant yet significant to investigate these phenomena in the context of social media. Research has told us that consumers will not let marketing agencies govern them, but find new ways of resisting the current marketing paradigm (e.g., Holt, 2002). So what do the potential actions of mundane and invisible advertising resistance really mean for the future of social media marketing? We find it highly relevant to further investigate and take the consumer perspective into account when formulating an idea of the potential outcome risks, streaming from an increased presence of forced exposure to advertising in the context of social media.

3   Theoretical Framework

The following chapter will explain the chosen theories and analytical models that will be used for the analysis of the empirical material. The purpose of the selected literature is to create a theoretical contribution in order to understand consumers' feelings and experiences of advertising on Instagram, and to what extent this may cause resistance. Selected theories and analytical models should try to fulfill the purpose of this study.

3.1   Rationale Behind Chosen Theories

For this study, we have selected four specific theories that we argue are useful when analyzing the empirical material, and to be able to draw conclusions that answer our research question. The first theory presented is written by Douglas B. Holt (2002): 'Why do brands cause trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding'. This theory, we argue, is essential in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the continuous shifts in consumer culture and its occurring contradictions. Holt's macro perspective of the consumer culture can be used as an inspiration to understand the current shift in culture on Instagram. This theory is used to identify current contradictions occurring on the platform, and how these contradictions could affect the culture and advertising techniques on Instagram. The second theory is based on de Certeau's work of 'The Practice of Everyday Life', which was later translated from French to English by Rendall in 1984. This theoretical framework is used to analyze how microbe-like operations are being used by Instagram users on an individual level, and how this may slowly deflect the functions and power on the platform. To complete Holt's macro theory, we argue that the theory by de Certeau will help to provide a deeper understanding of how individual resistance tactics can collectively affect the structures of power on social media.

Leaving the 'macro' theories, we present two more 'micro' and hands-on theories that we argue is essential for this study. The ACE-typology of resistance strategies is written by Marieke L. Fransen, Peeter W.J Verlegh, Amna Kirmani, and Edith G-Smit (2015). This typology is useful when defining the resistance actions taken by our participants. As a contribution to Holt's occurring contradictions, we wonder if these resistance strategies potentially could lead to new or different findings when applied on the social media platform Instagram. Regardless of the result, this typology by Fransen et al. (2015) is beneficial for this study when answering our research question. Finally, 'The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How people cope with persuasion attempts' is another 'micro' theory written by Marian Friestad and Peter Wright (1994). Briefly described, this theory provides insight into how people's persuasion knowledge influences their reactions to persuasion attempts. We argue that this theory is a good complement to ACE-typology as the aim is to understand our participants' emotions and experiences behind their actions. How consumers cope with

marketers' persuasion attempts on Instagram could lead to interesting results when analyzing different resistance techniques.

In sum, we argue that each theory in itself is essential for this study, but it is the combination of them all - analyzing the empirical material from a macro and micro perspective - that leads to a nuanced analysis that is a good ground for the theoretical model we have developed.

3.2   A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding

As explained above, in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the continuous shift in consumer culture, the 'Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding' (Holt, 2002) is used to analyze the contradictions between consumer culture and the branding paradigm. The model explains how contemporary branding principles have evolved historically. According to Holt, "consumer culture is the ideological infrastructure that undergirds what and how people consume, and sets the ground rules for marketers branding activities". Marketing techniques are guided by the principles of the extant branding paradigm, and contradictions between the branding paradigm and the consumer culture thrive shifts in both. Inflation in value is created as consumers become more knowledgeable in enacting the culture, which produces consumer reflexivity. Based on this theory, the actions of the marketers become opposed once reflexivity among consumers is created.

Holt (2002) touches on two contributions that stand out as the most developed efforts to conceptualize consumer culture and how people might resist its normative pressures through their consumption - reflexive resistance and creative resistance. In both cases of resistance, the marketers are understood to dictate the meanings and experiences of those in its grasp (Holt, 2002). Reflexive resistance is based on Murray and Ozanne's (1991) article 'The critical imagination: Emancipatory Interests in Consumer Research' which analyzes reflexive resistance through critical theory, where contradictions provide stimuli for change (Murray & Ozanne, 1991). Holt refers to reflexive resistance to consumer's possibility of filtering out marketing's influence through critical reflexivity to defy the consumption code, which is organized by marketers. Creative resistance on the other hand, draws on Firat and Venkatesh's theoretical position of 'Liberatory postmodernism' (1995), which aim is to demonstrate postmodern developments and alternative visions of consumption processes (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). To illustrate creative resistance, Holt depicts consumers as cultural producers, as they are seeking out social spaces where they can produce their own culture, and develop their own identities without letting the market dictate them. By altering their sign value to signify opposing established values, the consumers can emancipate themselves from marketers' imposed codes. Both Murray and Ozanne's (1991) and Firat and Venkatesh's (1995) means that consumer resistance requires the critical ability to filter out market-imposed meanings and the creative ability to produce the self (Holt, 2002). Most consumers are without further reflection following the 'code' of this cultural organization which is dictated by the market. Once there is resistance towards the cultural authorities, Holt

states that a new consumer culture will be produced, where the identity projects are aligning with acts of consumer sovereignty.

Holt drew on five contradictions threatening postmodern consumer culture in 2002 - The first one is 'Ironic Distance Compressed'. Holt means that ironic distance before has been considered as a credible way of branding, but how consumers now have realized the commerce attempt after it has started to be used everywhere. Holt's second contradiction 'The Sponsored Society' touches on the similar, but in terms of the increase of brand agents and stealth attempts which has led to more critical consumers. The third contradiction of 'Authenticity Extinction' is referred to marketers' attempts to capture the last bits of cultural text in order to capture authenticity, thus the result of this is that texts perceived as authentic are becoming scarce in the eyes of consumers. The fourth contradiction, 'Peeling Away the Brand Veneer', is the most pressing for marketers as it exposes the politics of market players to the consumers. Today's consumers put pressure on brands to be transparent and take full responsibility for their actions in order to remain trusted. Finally, the fifth contradiction Holt refers to is 'Sovereignty Inflation'. Instead of being served by marketers, consumers will search for cultural resources themselves in order to build their identity construction.

Holt (2002) portrays the post-postmodern condition as 'Brands as Citizen Artists', where brands no longer will be able to hide their commercial motivation due to the reflexive consumers' identity projects. With the post-postmodern consumer culture referred to a time where consumers are cultivating self through brands and peeling away the brand veneer, Holt predicts that consumers will look for companies that act as "local merchants" visualized as a real citizen while treating people as people and not as consumers (Holt, 2002). Holt means that the experimentation within a culture ensures that these contradictions are being resolved which puts pressure on marketers to seek new ways and techniques of branding.

3.3   The Practice of Everyday Life

The theoretical framework 'The Practice of Everyday Life', was introduced by de Certeau in 1980, and later translated to English by Rendall in 1984. This theory indicates that the capitalist system reduces the individuals into mass-consumers and that individuals have been reduced to the generality of a mass. De Certeau means that the culture is not only made up of products and systems but also through ways users appropriate and interact with these. De Certeau further makes a distinction between the concepts of strategies and tactics. Strategies are referred to the overarching framework of the ruling institutions and structures of power in society, which he refers to as 'producers'. This is aligning with Holt's idea of principles of the existing branding paradigm that exercises power over consumers in contemporary society. Tactics, on the other hand, are referred to as the responses of marginal groups or individual consumers allowed by the framework of strategies. These marginal groups are the silent majority and the non-producers of the culture and cultural activity. Unlike strategies, tactics

do not seek profits and are not results of planning. Instead, freedom is limited due to the framework, and consumers' tactical actions depend on opportunities and situations. De Certeau means that the marginalized majority of people are exercising resistance through appropriating products, images, or spaces to their own interests. These minuscule and quotidian consumer tactics are taken in an invisible and clandestine form of action, while still operating within the framework laid by the producers. These ways of operating create microbe-like operations on an individual level, that spreads through the structures of the society and slowly deflecting the functions and power of the producers. Consumers, therefore, create a network of anti-discipline while tactically challenging the strategies of the dominating producers. However, de Certeau means that the awareness of resistance varies among people and groups. Some people may actively seek to resist the dominant ideology, whereas others may accept or unknowingly subvert their subordinated position in society. In sum, de Certeau outlines 'The Practice of Everyday Life' as a process of poaching on the territory of the structural powers that exist in society, which is performed by using the existing rules and products defined within the context.

3.4   ACE-model – Consumer Strategies for Resisting Advertising

To further create a rich understanding of consumer culture and modes of resistance in the post-postmodern era of social media usage, we have chosen to take use of the ACE-model demonstrated in the article 'A typology of consumer strategies for resisting advertising, and a review of mechanisms for countering them' written by Fransen et al. (2015), as an analytical tool. This typology demonstrates ways of consumer resistance to advertising – avoidance, contesting, and empowering resistance strategies. Firstly, advertising avoidance strategies are divided into physical-, mechanical-, and cognitive avoidance. Physical avoidance includes different strategies where the goal is to not see or hear the ad, such as leaving the room where the advertising is visualized. Mechanical avoidance could be exemplified by the actions of zapping, zipping, or muting the channel from where the commercials are being seen or heard. Cognitive avoidance simply means not paying attention to the particular advertisement, as consumers are more motivated to seek information that is consistent with their own beliefs and attitudes. Overall, consumers are less prone to avoid advertisements that are emotional and entertaining. The more informative an advertisement is the higher chance of avoidance strategies by consumers (Fransen et al., 2015).

The second form of resistance is the contesting strategies which involve actively refuting the ad by challenging and questioning the content, the source, and the persuasive. This includes consumers who counter-argue, closely examine the arguments presented, and later try to develop reasons to refute them. Contesting the source of the message which is called source derogation, appears when consumers are dismissing the validity of the source. This could be, for instance, questioning the expertise, trustworthiness, or motives and as a result the message will lose credibility. The persuasive tactics behind an advertisement can also be contested by the consumer. If a consumer develops skepticism towards an advertiser's manipulative intent,

the consequence is resistance towards the message of the advertisement (Fransen et al., 2015). This particular contesting strategy is further elaborated upon in the next subchapter 'The Persuasion Knowledge Model' by Friestad and Wright (1994).

Empowering strategies involves reassuring the self or one's existing attitude. Here, three types are analyzed - attitude bolstering, social validation, and self-assertion. Consumers who engage in attitude bolstering concentrates on defending their existing attitudes and behaviors instead of contradicting or challenging the message behind the advertising. Social validation involves validating one's attitude with others. Consumers who are using this type of strategy search for other people who have common beliefs as they do, only to reassure their current attitudes and behaviors. When consumers utilize self-assertion, they remind themselves that they are certain about their attitudes and behaviors and nothing can be done to affect these. Self-assertion, therefore, functions as a boost to one's self-esteem (Fransen et al., 2015).

3.5   The Persuasion Knowledge Model

As time goes, consumers learn to make sense of and manage marketers' persuasive tactics which helps them to identify how, when, and why marketers try to affect them. This helps consumers to adjust their responses to the persuasion attempts in order to achieve their own goals (Friestad & Wright, 1994). 'The Persuasion Knowledge Model' is a model developed by Friestad and Wright (1994) with the aim of presenting how people's persuasion knowledge influences their reactions to persuasion attempts. The model assumes that consumers' persuasion knowledge is developmentally contingent as this knowledge continues to evolve as the years go by. People learn about persuasion in various ways, for instance through firsthand experiences in social interactions, from monitoring marketers and other persuasion agents, and from observing these persuasion attempts in the news media. As a result, consumers will, over time, learn how to respond to these because consumer persuasion knowledge forms how they respond as targets.

Friestad and Wright (1994) refers to 'Targets' to those who the persuasion attempts are aimed at (often the consumers), while the term 'Agent' are those responsible for the persuasion attempt (e.g. the company running the advertising campaign). The 'Persuasion Attempt' describes a target's perception of an agent's strategy to persuade. This strategy by the agent is not limited to just the advertising message itself, but also includes the perceptions of how and why the agent has designed, established, and delivered the message(s). From the perspective of the consumer, the examined part of an agent's strategy is labeled 'Persuasion Episode'; consumers can perceive a persuasive attempt as involving any and all messages and it can include one single ad but also numerous episodes in an organized sequence. Lastly, 'Persuasion Coping Behaviors' encompasses the target's response to the persuasion attempts, and this includes not only their cognitive and physical actions but also any thinking they do about an agent's persuasion tactics before the attempt is conducted, as well as between and after episodes in a campaign.

4   Methodology[3]

This chapter includes all the methodological choices selected for this thesis, as well as why they are chosen and how they are useful. The subchapters consist of research philosophy, research design, collection of empirical material, method of analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and lastly Instagram definitions.

4.1   Research Philosophy

This subchapter explains our perspective and perception of research philosophy and how the philosophy influences this study. It starts with the ontological reflection, followed by an epistemological one. Pre-knowledge about the subject in question and a reflection upon choices of theories will further be presented.

4.1.1 Ontological Reflection

According to Easterby-Smith, Jackson and Thorpe (2018), ontology is philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality and can be divided into three different positions along a continuum. Philosophers of natural science have been discussing the three positions of realism, relativism and internal realism. While realism assumes that both the physical and social worlds remain independent of any perceptions made about them, relativism argues that the phenomena depends on the perspectives from which we perceive them. Internal realism is instead a position which assumes that reality is independent of the viewer, but the reality can only be accessed indirectly. Compared to philosophers of natural science who are interested in objects, philosophers of social sciences are interested in the behavior of people (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). According to philosophers of social sciences, the debate has instead been between the three positions of internal realism, relativism and nominalism. Nominalism is a view that sees the objects in our surroundings created by the language used and the names we give to the phenomena (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). Due to what is stated above, we argue that this study applies to social science. Additionally, due to the fact that this study rests upon different perspectives presented by consumers, the nature of this study can be assumed to belong to the relativist position.

4.1.2 Epistemological Reflection

Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge and ways of exploring the physical and social world. Within epistemology, there are two contrasting views – positivism and social constructionism. The main idea with positivism is that the social world remains externally and that its possessions should be measured through objective methods. On the contrary, the

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[3] Parts of the Methodology were also used in BUSR31, 2020.

idea of social constructionism is that 'reality' is determined by people rather than objective and external factors (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). Generalization within positivism is made through statistical probability, whilst it within social constructionism is made through theoretical abstraction. Sampling required within positivism is made through large numbers selected randomly, while small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons are sampled within social constructionism (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018).

The link between epistemology and ontology is evidenced through the connection between positivism and realist ontologies, and social constructionism with nominalism. The condition of positivism as well as constructionism is further connected to the ontological positions called internal realism and relativism. The aspects of strong positivism and strong constructionism are instead connected to the ontological positions called realist and nominalist (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). Briefly explained, it is assumed that within the strong positivist position, the reality exists independently of the observer, and through experiments, it is the observer's job so make sure that laws and theories are found to explain the reality. On the contrary, less strong aspects of positivism obtain that reality cannot be approached directly. This means that this research would need to interpret the nature of this reality indirectly through surveys of large samples. On the other hand, we have the constructionist positions, with the less strong ones assuming that many different realities exist, and hence the researcher needs to collect several perspectives through a mix between qualitative and quantitative methods. Lastly, the stronger perspectives of social constructionism are different in that it presumes there is no pre-existing reality. The aim is to understand how people create structures to help them understand what is going on around them (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018).

With the above being said, we argue that this study applies to the social constructionist view rather than the positivistic one, due to it concerning experiences, emotions, as well as different views connected to different experiences. Additionally, the sampling size in this study is not made of large numbers selected randomly which is connected to positivism and quantitative studies. Instead, we use small sample sizes chosen for specific reasons which are connected to the social constructionism view and qualitative studies. Lastly, this study fits the stronger version of the social constructionist perspective due to the qualitative and reflexive approach of collecting and analyzing empirical material.

4.1.3 Pre-knowledge

Both of us have an interest in the topic presented in this study, and we have both been active users of the platform Instagram since it first launched. Due to this, we have been able to observe the transformation that Instagram has gone through. Before conducting this study, we have discussed the current trend of more advertising and influencers with each other and others. Both of us have purchased products portrayed to us on the platform, and we have both expressed our concern towards advertisements being displayed in such a high intensity. Minor actions which could be considered as resistance have been taken by us in the form of

unfollowing influencers. We have felt that these influencers promoted and posted advertising which increased the feeling of stress inside us. Besides being a user of Instagram and acknowledging the increase of advertisements, both of us have a genuine interest in consumer culture theory, consumer resistance, and social media marketing. The importance of the subject both for academics as well as marketers also drove us to write about this topic. Within the academic field, one of us has written an academic blog post about influencer marketing on Instagram and has therefore gained some additional pre-knowledge about the industry of influencer marketing and its future on Instagram, however, no pre-knowledge about advertisements presence on Instagram and its connections to resistance exists.

We argue that our pre-knowledge about the topic contributed to interesting findings that could potentially otherwise not be noticed. However, there is a clear connection between pre-knowledge and subjectivity that we have been aware of. We have taken this into careful consideration in order to not let the subjectivity affect our analysis and conclusions. However, the subjectivity was used as a tool for understanding the chosen theories better, but also to make it easier for us to see the connections and deviations in the analysis. Lastly, the subjectivity helped us when putting ourselves in the situation of our participants in the focus groups, and to see the world from their perspective.

4.1.4 Reflection Upon Choices of Theory

According to Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2018), peer-reviewed journal articles are considered most essential when it comes to sources of information. Peer-reviewed articles have higher quality and relevance due to it being processed through peer-review, which is why the majority of this study is based on such articles. This study is based on a consumer perspective which led us to specifically include journals within the field of consumer research. The nature of this study's topic has therefore been derived from a variety of journals, for instance Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing Management, and Journal of Consumer Culture. Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2018) further explains that academic books are another important source of information; such books have also been used in this study. Moreover, due to the topic being about advertising on Instagram, it was required to include other sources of information such as statistics and news articles. These non-academic sources are labeled 'grey' literature and have been useful and necessary for this study to get a comprehensive overview. No matter what source of information that we have encountered and used in this study, the purpose, authorship, credibility, accuracy, and timeliness (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018) are criteria we have considered when evaluating the source, all to ensure that this study is based on reliability and quality.

4.2 Research Design

Saharan and Bougie (2016) view the research design section of the study as a blueprint. The research design aims to show and explain for the reader the plan behind the empirical material that is essential for the study. This subchapter involves all the choices connected to the empirical material of the research; what has been observed and how, but also from where this empirical material has been gathered. Areas discussed in this subchapter are research approach, exploratory studies, qualitative method, sampling strategies and selection of participants.

4.2.1 Research Approach

The research approach shows and guides the researcher on how to include and make use of theory in the study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). An abductive research approach combines a deductive research approach with an inductive research approach, which often makes it beneficial to use due to its flexible character (Patel & Davidsson, 2011; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The advantage of using a combination of these is that generation or modification of the theory is allowed throughout the research process. This study is about gaining an understanding of the consumers' feelings and experiences with advertisements on Instagram, and their possible actions of resistance towards it which is analyzed and understood through the usage of theories. Therefore, this paper has been guided through an abductive approach, as it allowed us to work alternately with empirical material and theoretical material (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The empirical material was collected through interviews with focus groups, and the questions asked were written in a topic guide which was built from theory. The empirical material collected can be used to explore the phenomenon, identify new themes, and locate these in conceptual frameworks. It also allows us to generalize from the interactions between the general and the specific which is of advantage in the method of focus groups (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

4.2.2 Exploratory

This study is exploratory in its nature. An exploratory study is, according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), a valuable way of asking more open questions to find out what is happening and attain an understanding of the topic of the study. The questions asked in an exploratory study are characterized as more open, often beginning with 'What' or 'How', which we have emphasized in the formulation of our questions. Exploratory studies have the advantage of being flexible and adaptable to adjustments which means that they can change direction if the information derived from the empirical material leads to new insights. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) further explain that there are several ways of conducting an exploratory study; search of the literature, interviewing 'experts', in-depth individual interviews or focus group interviews. Because of its exploratory nature, we have in this study conducted data through focus groups and relied on the quality of the answers given

by our participants. Therefore, we argue that the research problem benefits from being approached with an exploratory study's flexibility and reflexivity, all to increase the understanding of the topic of resistance and the circumstances related.

4.2.3 Qualitative Method

A qualitative methodology is used in this study to grasp a comprehensive understanding of consumers underlying emotions and experiences of advertising on social media. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2018), qualitative research is a creative process to understand the sense, in terms of meanings, symbols, and metaphors that participants make of their world. Thus, it is a scientific method of observation to gather non-numerical data. Further, qualitative material is part of the information collected in a non-numeric form. This material can be identified either through its form or/and by the interactive and interpretative process in which it is conceived. A quantitative study would be useful if the aim was to generalize a certain type of behavior of a wider population (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018), however, it does not allow to gain a deep understanding of consumer's meanings, experiences and emotions towards a specific topic which is the aim of this study.

Focus Groups

As this research is concentrating on the critical aspect in terms of consumer resistance, the method of focus groups has been evaluated to best suit the aim of this research. According to Carson, Gilmore, Perry, and Gronhaug (2001), the main characteristic of focus groups is the involvement of participants in the research to conduct the empirical material. This type of method is one out of few techniques in which the participants are encouraged to interact with each other and be involved in the process. The use of focus groups can be advocated through four main points: a collection of information, depth of understanding, flexibility, and group interaction. All these points are essential for our study to understand and answer our research question. Compared to ordinary groups, a focus group represents a situation where a group of, either heterogeneous or homogeneous individuals, are brought together and where the interaction, discussions and different views can be used to collect meaningful information and opinions of the research problem (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001).

Focus groups are useful when exploring a wider scope of opinions and experiences as well as group dynamics, relationships, and collective decision-making progress (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). Group dynamics can be helpful when identifying trends and exploring conflicting opinions of a certain subject. With this research relying on a perspective of CCT, the group dynamics and its discussions are of great value for the analysis of this study. The topic of advertising on Instagram is not generalized to be sensitive for the individual participant, making the method of focus groups more effective compared to an individual interview where a question with sensitive characteristics may have been more suitable. Compared to individual interviews, a focus group makes it easier for the participants to engage in the research progress and might initiate a more critical, and as such more

revealing discussion (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). Moreover, focus groups offer the opportunity of granting the participants to probe each other for holding a specific view; if one participant answers in one way, he or she may want to modify their view of the problem or question after listening to others' answers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). These possibilities have been beneficial for the empirical collection of our study as we have been able to collect a variety of different emotions and experiences. These have helped us to understand why the participants feel in certain ways, and to grasp a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

However, there are limitations with focus groups that we have taken into account. As Carson, Gilmore, Perry, and Gronhaug (2001) explain, limitations can be process issues connected to accomplishing focused interactions in the group, or it can be the effects and role of the interviewer. For example, one participant can be affected negatively if someone else is dominating the conversation. The possibility of discomfort among the participants is also a limitation that could occur. The participants can for instance disagree with each other which could harm the rest of the focus group interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We were well aware of these limitations and situations that could occur and had prepared ourselves to eventually take action in those situations. For instance, we were giving the word to someone else if it became clear that someone started to dominate the discussion.

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016) highlight the importance of using pilot studies to try the topic guide and to see if it all went smoothly. This is also wise to do if the interviewers want to gain a feeling of the empirical material collected. The pilot study is beneficial and useful when the aim is to find out if the participants think some questions are hard to understand or if other misunderstandings occur. Due to this, one pilot study was conducted for this research. We approached the participants of this pilot study in the same way as we approached the latter three ones. The pilot study interview was held in the same apartment, with the same instructions and with the same topic for this research. The questions asked were close to being the same ones that we used for the latter three focus group sessions. The pilot study went through successfully, therefore, it could be used in the analysis and conclusions.

4.2.4 Sampling Strategy and Selection of Participants

All participants in our focus groups carried the potential to come up with knowledge and insights of relevance for the aim of this study. As this study focuses on the average user of Instagram in Sweden, all participants are classified within this framework. As many studies state that more females use Instagram in comparison to men (Tankovska, 2019a; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016); all participants are female. Studies also show that the social networking platform is heavily used by people between 16-25 years old (Tankovska, 2019b; Chen, 2017; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016). Therefore, we have limited the framework to Swedish women between the age of 16-25. According to Easterby-Smith and Thorpe and Jackson (2018), it can be difficult to moderate a discussion if the participants of a group do

not share an experience or point of reference. We therefore only looked for participants who have been exposed to and taken part in the Swedish social media culture. On the contrary, the consequences of this are that the result may not apply to other countries and cultures. By limiting the research to only females could also harm the result as valuable meanings and emotions from men are missing out. However, since the statistics revealed that the average user of Instagram in Sweden is female and between the ages of 16-25, we chose to stick with these criteria and restrictions as the inclusion of anyone would have been too broad to analyze for the size of this research. Furthermore, the participants had to be accountable for an Instagram account for at least five years, as the study moderately evaluates the feelings and experiences of Instagram over time.

Based on these requirements, the sampling has been made in a deliberate nature. The sampling was made on the basis that the participants would meet the set of criteria, as well as their likelihood of acting as a fair representation of the target group. Thereby, a purposive sampling strategy (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018) was used. This type of sampling strategy gave us the possibility to actively select appropriate participants that are meeting the criteria settled for the research. A simple random sampling strategy was not used as every entity in the population did not have an equal chance of being included. When conducting the sample strategy, we used Instagram's 'story' function which offers the possibility of uploading photos or videos, asking questions or voting in polls. We used this function to ask the question of whether people have ever temporarily chosen to leave Instagram, and the options to reply were either yes or no. The reason for asking this question was mainly to capture active users as participants. After having received more than 250 replies, we reached out to the same number of yes-sayers as no-sayers to get participants from various perspectives. All participants met the criteria for this research study and were asked to take part in a focus group discussion. We aimed to include participants with different interests or came from somewhat different areas to capture heterogeneity. To prevent bias, we did not reveal too much information about the purpose of our study when approaching the participants. Therefore, we explained that the study was about Instagram and that the person in question was very suitable for the study.

In addition to a purposive sampling strategy, a snowball sampling strategy has also been used to some extent. Some of the chosen participants recommended other participants who also were eligible for the criteria of this study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). After four focus group interviews, we had reached what Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2018) called saturation which is achieved when no more interesting and significant empirical material is considered revealed to the study. Information about the participants and the interviews are summarized in the tables below. The names in this table are pseudonyms to not reveal the identities of the participants.

Table 1 – Participants' Profile Focus Group 1 (Pilot Study)

Name	Age	Occupation	Date	Duration
Emma	24	Marketing student	11/2 - 2020	63 min
Johanna	22	Teacher student	11/2 - 2020	63 min
Hedvig	23	Hairdresser	11/2 - 2020	63 min
Cassandra	22	Architecture student	11/2 - 2020	63 min

Table 2 – Participants' Profile Focus Group 2

Name	Age	Occupation	Date	Duration
Anna	20	PR and communication	5/4 - 2020	59 min
Tina	22	Law student	5/4 - 2020	59 min
Anita	23	Office recruiter	5/4 - 2020	59 min
Sara	20	Sociology student	5/4 - 2020	59 min

Table 3 – Participants' Profile Focus Group 3

Name	Age	Occupation	Date	Duration
Ronja	24	HR consultant	5/4 - 2020	54 min
Hilda	22	Business student	5/4 - 2020	54 min
Ella	22	Sales representative	5/4 - 2020	54 min
Fanny	19	Grocery store worker	5/4 - 2020	54 min

Table 4 – Participants' Profile Focus Group 4

Name	Age	Occupation	Date	Duration
Alma	24	Grocery store worker	7/5 - 2020	45 min
Moa	22	Grocery store worker	7/5 - 2020	45 min
Ebba	23	Nurse student	7/5 - 2020	45 min
Martina	22	Clothing store employee	7/5 - 2020	45 min

4.3   Collection of Empirical Material

This subchapter depicts how our empirical material has been gathered. This can be from, for example, document studies, interviews, or observations (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). For instance, the use of interviews, as well as observations, increases the likelihood of the researcher assembling a large scope of different types of information from the participants (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this subchapter, the following areas will be covered: semi-structured interviews, topic guides, and transcription.

4.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

We have chosen to mainly base our study on primary data. Primary data can lead to new insights about the topic the researchers are aiming to investigate. In this study, we collected the primary data as our participants shared their experiences and emotions about the subject. The behaviors and actions taken by our participants were also observed and discussed to help understand the underlying relationship between emotions and behavior. To understand the social context of the study, the social interactions that took place during the focus group were also taken into consideration in the interpretation of the empirical material. Furthermore, the participants are informed and aware of the possibility of shaping potential outcomes through their statements and actions.

According to Easterby-Smith, Jackson, and Thorpe (2018), interviews can be semi-structured. In this matter, the questions asked are still based on a determined structure but can be asked in a more flexible way (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). Bryman and Bell (2011) state that semi-structured interviews encourage more open answers around the topic. Although the interviewer uses a topic guide with set questions, the interview does not strictly have to follow this order. As a result, the participants can answer the questions more freely and broadly, leading to a nuanced result. Due to these advantages, the chosen interview type for this study has been semi-structured interviews. It was beneficial for us to proceed with semi-structured interviews as we could ask the same main questions to all participants, but at the same time allow for new questions to enter the discussions. During all four focus group interviews, both of us were observing and asking questions. To create a fluent discussion among the participants, as well as minimizing confusion over who is supposed to ask the next question, we determined what sections were going to be guided by who before the interviews.

When establishing interviews, some conditions need to be acknowledged. For example, the atmosphere can affect how the participants feel and answer questions. To increase reliability, face-to-face interviews are preferred. By using face-to-face interviews, the interviewers can more easily build trust with the participants that could otherwise potentially not be reached to the same extent if doing the interviews remotely (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2018). The location of each of the focus group interviews was in Lund in one of our apartments. The reason for our choice of place was to increase the feeling of neutrality and security one can get in a person's home, but also to be able to exclude risks such as being interrupted or

disturbed by noise from the outside. When reaching out to our participants, we offered coffee, tea, and pastries in exchange for their time. Additionally, to exemplify what we referred to, we showed pictures of different types of advertisements that exist on Instagram. The first picture was a sponsored advertisement from Chiquelle (*see Appendix B - Chiquelle*) to show sponsored advertisements that could appear on the story function. The second picture was a sponsored advertisement from Åhlens (see *Appendix D - Åhlens*) to show sponsored advertisements that could appear in the feed. Lastly, we showed an advertisement from Nelly (*see Appendix C - Nelly*) to show non-sponsored advertisements that could appear in the feed and/or on the story function. We believe this made it easier for the participants to remember their experiences and emotions towards these types of advertisements. To make sure that essential bits of the interviews were saved properly, all four focus group interviews were audio-recorded. This also made it easier for us to get access to the material easily afterward.

4.3.2 Topic Guide

To conduct our four semi-structured focus group interviews, a topic guide was shaped in preparation for these interviews, see *Appendix A – Topic Guide.* The topic guide started with two general questions; the participants' names, age, and occupation and how long they have had Instagram. These questions helped us, as well as the other participants, to formulate a moderate feeling and impression of the participants in the focus group. Further, we aimed to begin the interview in this way to create a relaxed atmosphere. The following questions in the topic guide were developed within a structure of five blocks, corresponding to the main areas of this research. This structural logic helped us to clarify the purpose of the interview. By following this logical order, we ensured that the questions started broad and became more specific after time. After the passage of the five main blocks, the final part of the topic guide allowed the participants to add anything that had not been touched throughout the focus group session. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2018), it is important to not include theoretical concepts in the topic guide since this can come off as leading or biased. Therefore, our questions did not include complicated words, theory concepts, or marketing jargon. When creating the topic guide, we also made sure that the questions promoted open-ended pieces of information to decrease the chance of coming off as too leading (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). In some cases, follow-up questions were asked to ensure the participants gave detailed and descriptive answers. This was made to fully understand the consumer perspective of the phenomena we were aiming to investigate.

The technique of laddering up is a technique used to retrieve more information about a certain question or topic (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). When conducting the interviews, we made sure to not interrupt the participants while speaking. However, when we felt that something could be clarified or elaborated upon, we used the laddering up technique to ask questions of 'Why' when necessary. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2018) also highlight the advantages of using open questions, especially when the aim is to avoid bias. However, sometimes these open questions are not the best way of obtaining the information needed. Sometimes the researchers of a study want or need to extract responses to specific

alternatives, which is referred to as probing. Probing is useful when answers from the participants are unclear and needs clarification so that biases do not occur. When these situations occurred in this study, we used probing to improve or sharpen up the participants' responses. The techniques of laddering up and probing were highly essential and beneficial to use to avoid biases and increase the depth of the discussions.

4.3.3 Transcription

The interviews were audio-recorded to not lose valuable information but also to access the empirical material easily. By audio-recording the interviews, we found room to observe other potential behavior or facial expressions that could be important for the analysis. All four focus group interviews were transcribed the same week that they were being held to capture the sense of the interview while it was still fresh in mind. All four focus group interviews resulted in 60 pages of transcribed material in total. When conducting a focus group interview, it is evident to capture not only what is being said, but also how the participants are saying it (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Audio-recording and transcribing the interviews was of favor for this study as it allowed us to carefully go through the interviews several times. We chose to transcribe every word that the participants said to make sure to not lose any valuable information. We found this approach to be convenient when analyzing the empirical material and make use of extract quotes from the participants. As with most strategies, there are disadvantages to transcribing as well. For example, Bryman and Bell (2011) explain that the participants of a study may not give honest and interesting answers to the questions being asked if they know they are being audio-recorded. To avoid this, we informed the participants before starting the interviews that we would use pseudonyms when referring to their statements in the analysis.

Moreover, since one of our criteria was that the participants needed to be Swedish, we chose to conduct all focus group interviews in the Swedish language. Further, we wanted our participants to feel comfortable while speaking, to provide us with describing and rich answers. Therefore, we let them speak in their native language. We transcribed the interviews in Swedish and chose to translate the specific quotes that we wanted to use for the analysis. It should be acknowledged that concepts for which specific culturally-bound words were used could be difficult to translate. By simply translating these concepts, the risk is that the meaning of the concept is misinterpreted. Adding words to the original quote could also be problematic as this is changing the voice of the participant (Draper, 2008). However, we attempted our very best to interpret and grasp the true and valid translation of each word and sentence said. By carefully listening, observing, and also transcribing the interview word by word, we argue that the translation of quotes is considered trustworthy.

4.4 Method of Analysis

In this subchapter, the approach for the analysis of the collected empirical material is presented, as well as in what way it was accommodated and made use of. Before analyzing the material, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2018) highlight the importance of organizing the empirical material that has been conducted. The collected material should be given a label in a systematic way to aid the aspect of harvesting different pieces of the empirical material. Our primary goal when analyzing the empirical material was to get a comprehensive overview of all the material and at the same time be able to see parts of the material that could be interesting for the analysis. In this study, a reflexive approach is used to ensure that the analysis is nuanced and not angled in any way. Utilizing a reflexive approach is also considered beneficial when analyzing empirical material as it is challenging the text at the same time as producing interpretations about it (Alvesson, 2003). Another characteristic of a reflexive approach is being able to acknowledge the ambiguity in the research.

When diving into the empirical material, we used colors and comments to sort out what could be useful and not, and in what way the useful parts could be applicable. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) define this concept as coding and categorization. By using the concept of coding, the process of being able to make conclusions from the empirical material gathered is facilitated. The parts being coded can at a later stage be formed into different categories which we found useful when writing our analysis. After categorizing the empirical material, we began to see patterns of which parts were most recurring and representative for this study. These parts were later organized into different themes to make the structure of the analysis fluent and engaging to read.

4.4.1 Grounded Analysis

When approaching our analysis, the philosophy of hermeneutics was used. Hermeneutics emphasizes that textual materials should be made sense of in the context within which they are written (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). Hermeneutics is used in combination with a grounded analysis which is described as more open to qualitative material compared to content analysis. The aim of the grounded analysis is to identify supporting literature through the 'grounded' material. A grounded analysis is therefore perceived as more holistic, as it does not frame the empirical material given a pre-existing theory. Moreover, this analysis seeks to understand the essence of the material collected, in its particular situation in which it was created (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). We argue that our paper and research question were benefiting from going back and forth between theory and the empirical material, to abstract from the empirical categories. In this way, we were able to achieve a nuanced and bulletproofed analysis.

4.5   Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1982) introduce quality concepts and refer to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The quality concept of credibility explains how naturalists have to study more than one reality, as each individual perceives the reality differently. When asking the questions to our participants, we were aiming to capture the reality of each of the participants. We paid close attention to not guide the participants in any direction, but let them discuss freely around a question or topic. With 16 different people and perspectives stemming from four different focus groups, we argue that several 'realities' have been captured. Furthermore, the constellations of people with different ages and backgrounds have also contributed to strengthen the credibility of our presented findings. Our supervisor has been present throughout the procedure of this thesis and has guided us when examining, exploring, and challenging how the data analysis and interpretation occurred. We thereby also argue that this has helped us confirm the accuracy and strengthen the credibility.

Transferability is the concept of being able to transfer, or generalize, the findings of a study to a wider population (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This study has utilized a purposive sampling strategy, which means we did not use a random selection of the population. As a result of this, we cannot argue that the findings can be generalized to a wider population. However, due to the level of heterogeneity among our participants, and because of the criteria for the selection of participants being general in accordance with the topic and research problem, we argue that valuable insights can be captured from this study. Moreover, our theoretical model, which is presented further down, can be transferred to other contexts and not only to social media platforms.

The dependability refers to the extent to which the empirical collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings (Bryan & Bell, 2011). Dependability can also be explained as the state of being able to replicate a study through the substitute of a location or place of time but through situations that are interchangeable (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). To achieve this, Bryan and Bell (2011) suggest to hold on to elements of how the problem was constructed, the notes taken throughout the procedure, the transcripts concerning the interviews, and the conduction of the analysis. To avoid issues regarding the conduction of focus group discussions, we conducted a structure of questions and replicated these in a standardized manner. The audio-recording and transcription of all our focus group sessions have formulated the basis for our categorization of the empirical data, and thus analysis. Other tools that have enabled us to look back at the process of collecting the empirical material is the notes taken throughout the focus group sessions. We argue that, in another setting, the techniques would remain consistent and be expected to generate answers in the same format.

Finally, the fourth concept is confirmability which goes hand in hand with objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This means not to let the subjectivity affect the results and findings in the research. Subjectivity is something we have been aware of throughout the research process to

make sure that no biases would occur and affect the findings. For example, this has been achieved by staying close to the topic guide when interviewing the focus groups, being transparent with the management of empirical material collected, and acknowledging the ethical considerations. All these actions contribute to an increased level of confirmability.

4.6   Ethical Considerations

Bryman and Bell (2011) identified ethical principles that are essential when conducting research. While some of the principles were protecting the interests of the participants taking part in the study, other principles were aimed at protecting the integrity of the research society. The latter is done by constantly making sure accuracy is being achieved and that biases are avoided. To protect the interests of the participants in the study, different activities can be taken into account. These could for instance be securing that no harm comes to participants, protecting the participants' anonymity, establishing fully informed and consented participants, and assuring confidentiality of the research material (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this study, we made sure that the participants felt safe from the very beginning. When first approaching our participants, we explained briefly what the study was about and in what way it would be used, meanwhile not revealing too much information to avoid biases. By approaching our participants in this way, we established a sense of honesty and security. Before we started to audio-record the interviews, we made sure that each and every one consented to this. To increase the feeling of safety and ensure that the answers from the participants would be qualitative and honest, we also revealed that the participants' real names would not be used, but instead adopted pseudonyms. Moreover, we informed the participants that the audio-recorded material would only be listened to by us and potentially our supervisor or examiner. Lastly, to respect our participants' dignity and will, we did not force them to answer any question they did not want to answer.

4.7   Instagram Definitions

Instagram is a free application that is being used for sharing photos and videos. This application is accessible on Apple iOS, Android, and Windows Phone. Users of Instagram can upload photos or videos and share these with their followers or a selected group of friends. Moreover, users of Instagram can show, comment, and like posts that their friends have shared on Instagram. Anyone who is thirteen years of age or older can create an account simply by registering their email address and selecting a username (Instagram, 2020a). Below are definitions of common concepts associated with Instagram that the participants of our focus groups used.

Feed	A place on Instagram where you can upload pictures and videos, and connect with other accounts. Suggested accounts that are relevant to you and your interests may also appear in the feed (Instagram, 2020b).
Story	A way of sharing photos and videos with your followers. Stories last for 24 hours before they disappear (Instagram, 2020c).
Swipe	An act of moving one's finger across a touchscreen to move onto the next page or see something else (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020a).
Scroll	An action to move text or pictures on a screen in order to see something else (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020b).
Influencer	A person who is paid by a company to promote their products or services on social media (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020c).
Follow	Refer to the list of users that you follow on Instagram; these accounts appear in your feed and you have the ability to view their profile whenever you want to (Social Buddy, 2020a).
Unfollow	Actively choosing to not see an account in your feed any longer (Social Buddy, 2020a).
Direct messaging	A private message sent on a social media website. This message can only be seen by the person who it is sent to (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020d).

5 Empirical Findings & Analysis

This chapter will present the empirical findings of the collected material from the four focus groups, and will mainly be analyzed with pre-existing theories that were presented in the theoretical chapter. The themes that emerged from the empirical material have been summarized into three different subchapters throughout the analysis. These subchapters are experiences and emotions, mundane and silent resistance tactics, and social loss. The themes identified within these subchapters are commerzilation and (in)authenticity (in experiences and emotions), reflexive resistance (in mundane and silent resistance tactics), and fear of social loss (in social loss).

5.1 Experiences and Emotions

During the focus group interviews, it became evident that our participants shared negative emotions and experiences towards the increased presence of advertising on Instagram. Feelings such as anxiety, fear, irritation, and tediousness are a few to mention. However, we also identified some ambivalent emotions to this same matter. Two occurring themes associated with these negative and ambivalent feelings and experiences are commercialization and (in)authenticity. Below we will present those themes in an analysis built on our collection of empirical material and theories.

5.1.1 Commerzilation

A shift in the culture on Instagram seems to have occurred; from a platform with the main focus on social relationships to a platform for inspiration and business integration. This is something that is acknowledged by our participants in all our focus groups, and the thoughts and feelings about this shift seem to be hostile. Holt (2002) describes the continuous shift in consumer culture as an ideological infrastructure that undergirds what and how people consume, which sets the ground rules for marketers' branding paradigm. However, marketers and businesses have become increasingly aggressive in searching out cultural texts (Holt, 2002) on Instagram, which ironically seem to have been the main contribution to the platform's shift in culture. The commercialization of Instagram could be seen as bedraggling what previously was considered an original and authentic cultural space, where the main focus was the maintenance of social relations. This becomes evident when asking our participants about what they experience is the biggest difference with Instagram today compared to five years ago:

Advertising and influencers! It is a profession today which it wasn't really five years ago in the same way. And yeah, that leads to influencers posting so much advertising because they are making a living out of it, and now they have taken over the whole Instagram platform when it previously was for friends and fun, so yeah now it's much more focused on like, aahh are you following that one that one that one [...] I think it's dull. Actually.
(Johanna, F1)

Johanna has acknowledged the shift in culture and means that influencers and advertising have "taken over" what was originally shaped for "friends and fun stuff". Johanna expresses negative emotions to this shift by finishing the statement by describing it as "dull". The statement further indicates that Johanna has identified the quantity and aggressiveness of marketers' increased use of influencers on Instagram. This can be connected to one of Holt's (2002) five contradictions he states are threatening the postmodern consumer culture. 'The Sponsored Society', is the first of five identified contradictions in this analysis. Holt (2002) refers to this contradiction to how "market competition is driving inflation in the quantity and aggressiveness of stealth attempts". It becomes obvious how marketers now flock to stealth branding in terms of influencers instead of direct branding efforts. Sponsored advertising by influencers is, in Johanna's opinion, now dominating the platform and has changed the whole initial culture. This demonstrates Johanna's awareness and persuasion knowledge to the persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994), which also is well-identified among many of our participants. In the following statement, Cassandra expresses how her personal usage of Instagram has been influenced due to the increased presence of advertisements on the platform:

I don't think that much interesting stuff pops up in my feed usually. It's more like, yeah, like more advertising than pictures from people I know, or like funny pictures. I can't stand it kinda. So then I stop looking through the feed and start looking at my own pictures instead kind of, and then I watch some stories again.
(Cassandra, F1)

Again, this statement confirms Holt's (2002) contradiction of 'The Sponsored Society'. Cassandra experiences that her feed is full of more advertising than pictures from people she knows. As she expresses feelings of irritation and anger of how she cannot "stand it" any longer, her response and resistance tactic to this becomes evident as she avoids the adverts by looking elsewhere where commercial is not as present, such as in her own feed of pictures. This can be drawn to Klein's (1999) theory of how brands now invade every space in society, including personal space. Cassandra expresses her frustration and anger towards the advertising, as she experiences that there no longer is any space free of commercial presence. Other resistance actions were further identified in similar situations where the increased presence of advertising was the reason behind. Anna is one of many participants who have started to actively unfollow influencers when they start to post too many collaborations:

I have also unfollowed very many and I think it's because, specifically with influencers, I tend to start following them when they are a little smaller but as soon as they become big and start to post more collaborations than fun posts I stop following them. But it's probably the greatest reason I feel, that the reason why I stop following influencers is because it starts to become more of a marketing-platform.
(Anna, F2)

Due to the increased presence of advertising and collaboration attempts on Instagram, Anna finishes a rather negative statement by referring to how Instagram starts to become more of a "marketing platform". Our participants seem to have a more positive feeling towards influencers when they are at the beginning of their careers. However, as soon as these influencers become popular and post more collaborations, they are being polluted by the masses and the market and are considered less interesting and unique in the eyes of the consumers. Just as the increased use of stealth branding and use of influencers is leading to an inflation of the concept, the second presented contradiction of Holt's (2002), namely 'Ironic Distance Compressed', is working likewise. Holt means that the ironic distance has changed from dependable and anti-commercial to an 'ad world'. Likewise, while some brands and influencers continue attempting to distance themselves from other brands and influencers, it becomes evident that all branding attempts are somewhat the same. These attempts of distancing are identified by attentive consumers who realize that irony, as well as any other attempts of distancing oneself from commerce, is after all still commerce.

Due to the increase of advertising on Instagram, our participants seem to have started to acknowledge the topic of integrity, which is stemming from personal advertising and data collection. Feelings such as fear and irritation of being monitored and followed were evident in our focus groups when discussing this phenomenon. The following statements clearly exemplify this:

That is the most irritating thing when you have googled for something and bought something and then it is going to follow you for months after that. You're just like but I have already bought these shoes but thank you for showing me constantly. That I can get super frustrated about.
(Hilda, F3)

Hilda expresses her annoyance and frustration when an advertisement appears repeatedly for a time after an initial search on Google. The feeling of being monitored with repeated advertising that is following them for a time seems to be a common concern among the participants. When the discussion about targeted marketing on Instagram appears, Martina (F4) says: *Scary! It is scary. Yuk.* Martina later shared an experience she had with 'Snus' which is smokeless tobacco that is commonly used in Sweden:

When I stopped smoking in August I wanted to start using snus instead so I talked to my friends about it and like what brand I was going to try [...] then all of the sudden I had so freaking many commercials about snus everywhere on Instagram and I hadn't even been searching for it. I had just been talking about it and never gotten adverts about snus before.
(Martina, F4)

As Martina had verbally been discussing the opportunity of starting using snus instead of cigarettes with her friends, she did not physically search for anything. However, sponsored advertising of Snus did find its way into her Instagram feed anyway. The feeling of being followed or even stalked by the advertisement is evident in this case, and Martina expresses emotions of being scared. Likewise, Sara and Ebba expresses their feelings in regards to the topic:

I believe that such things are scary. That if they can get hold of that information about me when I am searching for something I start to think of all the photos, like google photos and such. It feels like they are in safe hands but what if it gets out. It's private.
(Sara, F2)

Yeah such things get me wanting to leave the phone outside the room kind of. That you don't have it close because you really are feeling monitored.
(Ebba, F4)

Feeling dominated by marketing techniques is again confirmed to lead to negative emotions. These feelings of being stalked and monitored could be seen as consequences of marketers' attempt to persuade and attract consumers (Friestad & Wright, 1994). However, what becomes evident in Ebba's statement is how this strategy of targeted marketing eventually could lead to a backlash in terms of resistance towards the app. Ebba explains how emotions of being monitored are making her consider leaving her phone in another room while having discussions with others. Certeau makes a distinction between the concepts of strategies and tactics (Certeau & Rendall, 1984) where strategies are referred to as structures of powers in society, while tactics are referred to as the responses of marginal groups or individual consumers. Individual consumer's backlashes can be seen as microbe-like operations and consumer tactics which may start deflecting the functions and powers on Instagram as it spreads through the structures of the strategies. Thereby, this behavior of consumers could be drawn to de Certeau's theory of 'The Practice of Everyday Life' where everyday resistance becomes more and more evident in society.

Ambivalence

Although emotions of fear, irritation, and feelings of being stalked became evident among our participants, somewhat conflicting emotions to the topic were identified. As our participants expressed skepticism towards the marketer's targeting techniques, they sometimes seemed to appreciate advertisements that generated products and information aligning with their personal interests. We explain this by presenting a third contradiction of Holt (2002) with regards to 'The Sovereignty Inflation'. As Holt explains, "consumers want

to author their lives but they are increasingly looking for ghostwriters to help them out". The contemporary consumer culture offers an ever-expanding supply of resources, resulting in widespread inflation in the symbolic work that the contemporary consumer needs to feel sovereign (Holt, 2002). However, due to the current labor market, social pressure, and a tremendous number of consumption choices, consumers simply do not have time to fully invest in their sovereign identity project. Targeted and personalized advertising can, therefore, be considered a way for consumers to seek guidance in their identity construction. Anita clearly illustrates these ambivalent emotions when she rises both sides in the following statements:

> *[...] they are taking part of the data I am using on other platforms and I think that is uncomfortable because they are selling that is data to others, but on the other hand could it be relevant and fun because if I am interested of buying dresses, I'd rather see H&M showing me dresses than, like fridges [...] but as I say, it is a bit scary that they can take part of my data.*
> ---
> *[...] and then this new GDPR law has come in place so there are restrictions in how much data they can sell and therefore I am not super super afraid of it, but I think it is scary that we have come so far, but I still trust people saying that it cannot go further than so.*
> (Anita, F2)

Here, Anita is debating back and forth between her thoughts and emotions. On one hand, she does feel uncomfortable knowing that companies are using and selling her personal data, but on the other hand she does also appreciate the benefits of ad relevance she sees on Instagram which is stemming from this procedure. These debating emotions between the marketers' strategies, the ethical considerations, and personal benefits can also be explained through the 'The Persuasion Knowledge Model'. Anita is aware of the marketers' tactics and the effectiveness and appropriateness of these as she through her statement demonstrates an awareness of the relation between the actions of the agent, the psychological effects in the target (herself), and the subsequent behavioral outcome. Further, when Anita is referring to the restrictions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), she demonstrates topic knowledge within the area of data collection. According to Friestad and Wright (1994), topic knowledge facilitates the comprehension of the message content and can be useful in examining claims made by the agent. Anita's topic knowledge could in this case be used to explain Anita's doubtful acceptance to this the marketing agencies' dominance and power of her as an Instagram user and consumer. Consequently, Anita has no other choice than to accept and partly filter out the marketer's influence. However, due to the conflicting and ambivalent emotions, it seems to us that social media users seem to conduct a pragmatic approach to this phenomenon.

5.1.2 (In)authenticity

Through our collection of the empirical material, we have noticed how many negative experiences and emotions associated with the increased presence of advertising often were linked to the trustworthiness of the commercial or influencer promoting it. Therefore, our second occurring theme is termed (in)authenticity. While our participants are becoming more exposed to advertisements on the platform, our empirical material indicates how a distrust in the authenticity of advertisements has increased. For instance, Johanna explains:

> *I always question the advertisement. I could trust the advertisement more before, but since the presence of advertisement is so high now, I am more critical.*
> (Johanna, F1)

Johanna demonstrates how the increased presence of advertising has influenced her critical mindset towards advertisements on the platform. Here, a fourth of Holt's contradictions, 'Authenticity Extinction', becomes useful to further analyze the threat of the postmodern consumer culture. The appearance of this contradiction, Holt argues, is a result of a society where marketing agencies have invaded the cultural spaces of consumers, meaning what is perceived as authentic is becoming scarce. Brands' marketing techniques of utilizing influencers and taste-makers to sponsor their products will, according to Holt (2002) be exploited to an extent that consumers will be able to see through. Cassandra's comment exemplifies how the validity of the source and the trustworthiness of influencers is jeopardized:

> *If an influencer posts an advertisement about something, then I don't believe it is as good as they are saying [...] I think they just do it to earn money.*
> Cassandra (F1)

If a consumer develops skepticism towards the advertiser's manipulative intent, it tends to cause resistance towards the message of the advertisement (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This is evident in Cassandra's case as she refers to how influencers "just do it to earn money". Our participants often dismiss the validity of the source when it comes from influencers. When the message loses its credibility, the persuasive tactics also get damaged, and the impact of the persuasion attempt decreases (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The following quotations from Hedvig and Hilda highlight an increased resistance to the phenomena of repeated advertising from Influencers:

> *If there is someone that always posts about beauty products, I believe in it less because they always post about it.*
> (Hedvig, F1)

> *[...] and then I also unfollow influencers who have started to do a lot of sponsored posts which the first week say like "best cream ever" and then the next week there is another cream which is "the best cream ever". Then I just feel like no, this is not authentic. So then I have unfollowed.*
> (Hilda, F3)

Hedvig distrusts the influencers if they repeatedly post about "beauty products" while Hilda's statement indicates distrust when a lot of similar posts are posted by the same influencer. As a result of influencers' frequency in presenting collaborations about products, they have both increased their persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994), which is making them more resistant to the message of the ad. Friestad and Wright (1994) describe through their 'Persuasion Knowledge Model' how consumers learn to make sense of and manage marketers' persuasive strategies as time goes by. This helps the consumers to adjust their responses in order to not to fall for any persuasive attempts. By questioning the authenticity, our participants demonstrate how they over time have learned how to cope with different marketing attempts aimed at persuading them. Furthermore, as Hedvig and Hilda are dismissing the validity of the source by questioning its motives, it becomes evident how they are contesting the source of the ad. This is referred to as source derogation (Fransen et al., 2015) and is often used by consumers when the source can be construed as biased. In the following quotation, Ebba expresses her critical thoughts towards influencers in an ironical tone of voice:

But also bigger influencers. What are they really making commercials for? Clothes? Is that actually something good? Or do you genuinely care about this product you are promoting? Is that really the best thing that has happened in your life? Do you need to mediate how important it is to have this product? It is so hollow because you really get that it is all about money in the end, although the actual product may not be directly provoking. But they don't care about that.
(Ebba, F4)

By stating how she thinks it is "hollow" and how "you get that it is all about money in the end", she is dismissing the validity of the source by questioning the motives behind the advert (Fransen et al., 2015). Ebba shows her skepticism towards the advertiser's manipulative intent by ironically asking whether the products promoted is "the best thing that has happened in your life?". It could be assumed that marketers now find it difficult to find cultural expressions, as the trustworthiness of the authentic cultural spaces become more scarce (Holt, 2002). Further, Ebba also demonstrates a high level of persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) as she sees through these persuasive tactics immediately. Anna's statement indicates similar emotions of irritation in relation to influencer marketing:

Those kinds of things I can get irritated about, or if a shit-company you know is not good makes commercial. Why are influencers making collaborations with them? It is only to earn money, and then I get irritated and unfollow them.
(Anna, F2)

In the cases of Ebba and Anna, the fifth and final contradiction of Holt's (2002) becomes applicable, which is named 'Peeling Away the Brand Veneer'. Consumers are no longer just accepting whatever they see; now they feel that they are granted the authority to criticize what is actually happening backstage. Likewise, Tina (F2) states: *Some commercials… I think it is good, but if I know that the company is bad I won't buy from them.* This further applies to

Holt's contradiction, as Tina is making sure that the company behind the advert is "good" meaning acting correctly and ethically. As a response to this phenomena, Anita explains that for her to make a purchase, she wants to know more and read about the company behind the advertising to see if it's genuine:

[...] I would never click and buy just because it says so in the advert, I would click me through to see if I can read about the company to see how genuine they are… look at reviews and google the homepage kind of [...].
(Anita, F2)

Anita's agent knowledge, consisting of beliefs about the traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent (Friestad & Wright, 1994), makes her question whether the quality of the products promoted are as good as the influencer says. This indicates how today's consumer culture has granted customers the ability to criticize in a way that gives authenticity a heavy role in society. This further depicts the contemporary consumer as a critical individual, who by time have learned not to fall immediately for marketing agencies' persuasive attempts on Instagram.

Ambivalence

Similar to the theme of commercialization, conflicting and ambivalent emotions arose around the theme of (in)authenticity as well. In the discussion regarding disclosure of adverts, ambivalence and inconsistency were found around the topics of inspiration and trust of influencers. Emma first states how the disclosure of influencer's collaborations and her increased awareness has made her start questioning the quality of the products promoted:

Previously, I got stuck if Kenza [Swedish influencer] for example, posted that she is using this oil, then I just assumed that she had such nice skin because she was using that oil. Now if she posts it and says that it is a collaboration, I find it easier to overlook because I know that it really is not her own opinion because she has gotten paid for it. You don't trust it fully.
(Emma, F1)

The statement indicates how the disclosure of ads helps to boost Emma's critical mindset towards influencer marketing. The disclosure of the collaboration has made her more suspicious of the manipulative intent of the advertising message. By referring to the influencer's financial outcome of the collaboration, she is contesting the motive behind the message, but also the persuasive tactics behind the advertiser (in this case the influencer Kenza) (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Emma's agent knowledge, consisting of beliefs about the traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent (Friestad & Wright, 1994), makes her question whether the quality of the products promoted are as good as the influencer says. However, in another sequence of the interview, Emma's emotions and actions are shown to differ, which is illustrated in the following quote:

But there are many products I have seen through influencers on Instagram that I have now just because I have seen it there.
(Emma, F1)

The first quotation indicates that Emma is critical toward products that are promoted by influencers, and does "not trust it fully", however, in the second quote she states that she still does end up buying many of the products, indicating that she still finds it inspirational. Although she is questioning the quality of the products when promoted by influencers, she seems to display a different experience when the products are offered by other sources. This behavior could be seen as cynical and be drawn to the paradox of enlightened false consciousness (Bertilsson, 2015), as Emma first enlightened distance toward advertising, but still conducts action to it. Emma's cynical behavior indicates how morally conflicting demands are put on consumers in contemporary consumer culture. In order to handle these conflicting demands, Emma states one thing while acting out another. Again, Holt's contradiction of 'The Sovereignty Inflation' can be used to further explain how the social pressure and number of consumption choices put pressure on consumers to invest in their sovereign identity project. Therefore, consumers seek guidance from influencers in their identity construction, although they are critical towards the risk of being persuaded.

5.2   Mundane and Silent Resistance Tactics

The experiences of advertisements on Instagram among our participants were various and mostly negative. We have identified how these negative, but somewhat ambivalent emotions have influenced different tactics of resistance on different levels. These different consumer resistance tactics are shown to mainly be performed in a reflexive manner which is of crucial value for our findings. We argue that a consumer has developed reflexivity in situations where something occurs quickly, unconsciously, or without further reflection. We will in the following subchapter introduce some interesting examples and analysis of the reflexive resistance identified.

5.2.1 Reflexive Resistance

Consumer resistance tactics on Instagram tend to be a common phenomenon. Holt (2002) refers reflexive resistance to when consumers can filter out marketing's influence. Through this critical reflexivity, consumers are defying the consumption code which is arranged by marketers. To clearly illustrate the reflexive resistance tactics, it is important to acknowledge our consumers' awareness of the advertisements portrayed to them. Our participants find it easy to distinguish regular posts from sponsored posts which Cassandra's (F1) comment clearly illustrates: *Usually you can see it straight away if there's a lot of text within one of that parenthesis or the picture is cut to show a shirt or cut in another way.* This indicates Cassandra's awareness of the advertisements portrayed to her on the platformCassandra continues by stating:

It feels like the eyes have been so used to seeing what advertising looks like that you hardly need to even look close before you realize.
(Cassandra, F1)

Cassandra's statement supports the idea that reflexivity is being produced as consumers become more aware and attain more knowledge about marketers' branding techniques (Holt, 2002). As Holt (2002) would describe it, Cassandra is filtering out marketers' attempts to influence. Marketers are organizing the code, and consumers have no choice but to participate (Holt, 2002). The only way to avoid sponsored advertising is to develop a reflexive distance from it. The phenomenon of reflexive resistance indicates how everyday resistance often can go unnoticed and be experienced only by the individual who is resisting (Heath, Cluley & O'Malley, 2017). Fanny and Hilda have also learnt how to overlook advertising reflexively:

I don't see it either, I'm just scrolling past it but I think it is annoying anyway [...] but you have learnt how to not pay attention to it. You don't see it.
(Fanny, F3)

But I kinda have turned off this whole commercial thing, like if it pops up something, I have started to just click past it without reflecting I think. I go to the next post and don't think more about it kind of. I have almost gotten used to it.
(Hilda, F3)

As stated above, Fanny and Hilda have learnt how to "not pay attention to" and "turn off" the commercial portrayed to them. Hence, they have developed a habit of scrolling and clicking past it without further reflection. The initial attempt by marketers to form effective advertising is thereby not seen nor recognized as it seems that consumers have developed a form of immunity towards the advertising. The resistance action of swiping, clicking, or scrolling past sponsored advertising is shown to be very common among our participants in all focus groups and can be explained by the ACE-typology's mechanical avoidance strategy. Fransen et al. (2015) describe the mechanical avoidance strategy as a way of zipping, zapping, or muting a TV-channel from where the advertising is being seen or heard. By applying this mechanical avoidance strategy into the context of Instagram, our participants are using it when swiping, scrolling, or clicking past advertisements portrayed on the platform. The reason for this may be explained in the following quotations:

I usually just swipe away companies. [...] I am using Instagram because of my friends. I am not on Instagram because of all advertising or companies.
(Emma, F1)

I am scrolling past the advertising as fast as I can as soon as I see it. I am not that interested in internet-shopping, and there is a lot of it on such adverts, so that's why I don't click on it either.
(Cassandra, F1)

The lack of interest may be a reason for these mechanical strategies of avoidance, as the comments above exemplify. The advertising on Instagram is perceived as saturated and consumers have learned to overlook it within a second. These tactics of resistance could further be connected to de Certeau's (1984) work of 'The Practice of Everyday Life'. According to de Certeau, consumer tactics are minuscule and quotidian, and are seen as a response to the power exercised by producers (in this case marketers) (Certeau & Rendall, 1984). As scrolling, clicking or swiping past posts are small and quotidian actions, this theory is useful in explaining the specific resistance behavior.

As mentioned previously in our analysis, marketers are utilizing strategies such as using influencers and data collection to present effective advertising on Instagram. However, these actions can be associated with power and dominance as the marketing invades the social and cultural space on Instagram. Consumers understand the relationship between marketing (as a perceived power) and themselves (as resistant to that power), and exercise various forms of consumer resistance based on this. Alma is one of many who have taken action to physically avoid advertisements:

Like Annica Englund [Swedish influencer] for instance, she makes so freaking much collaborations, it is the only thing she does it feels like sometimes, and then I can unfollow her because of that.
(Alma, F4)

Ironically, to decrease the feeling of being hunted by marketers, consumers stop hunting influencers and brands themselves as they unfollow certain brands or influencers. In the ACE-typology, Fransen et al. (2015) describe physical avoidance as a way for customers to not see or hear the ad. Put into the context of Instagram, physical action to the increased presence of advertising could be to actively unfollow an influencer or a business page. Anita continues to elaborate on influencers and advertising and states the following:

Yeah you can get away from advertising if you just follow your 30 closest friends. But you will still see other forms of commercial, like sponsored ads… But you will see it everywhere anyway… and if you don't want it you'll throw away your phone or something.
(Anita, F2)

Anita first states that she will be able to escape from advertising by just following her closest friends, but realizes in the same sentence that sponsored ads from other sources than influencers still will be portrayed to her. This indicates the intrusiveness of marketers, and how she experiences the dominance stemming from the advertisements. Anita states that the only way to escape the sponsored advertising is to throw away her phone, which she through her tone of voice expresses her unwillingness to. This supports Arnould's (2007) conclusion that an escape from the dominance of market structures is not entirely possible. Thereby, this statement further indicates how Anita instead chooses to pragmatically accept the advertising portrayed to her.

5.3 Social Loss

Forms of resistance, such as ad avoidance and negative-word-of-mouth, have been identified in relation to negative emotions and experiences. However, what is interesting is why consumers seem to not respond to these emotions with more radical means such as adbusting, cultural jamming, boycotting or activism. We have identified a fear which we assume is strengthening the desire to stay in the cultural space of Instagram, namely the fear of losing the social aspects. Consumers have spent years on Instagram and have during this time developed relationships, created memories, and built a social life with their followers. The fear of losing these social parts is a crucial reason for continuing to operate on the platform.

5.3.1 Fear of Social Loss

With Instagram's intentional purpose of strengthening and maintaining social relations, it becomes obvious that more radical resistance tactics such as boycotting the platform due to social media advertising, are not commonly happening. Our participants demonstrate a form of addiction to the platform and their usage, which Belk (2013) mentions is a consequence of the digital relationships that those participating in the digital world are facing. Tina (F2) states the following: *I am constantly waiting for someone to write or that something will happen*. It becomes clear that Instagram provides its users with social benefits, and a forced acceptance to the increasing presence of businesses and advertisements is being developed. The forced acceptance can be explained as a fear of risking less communication with family and friends. This supports what Belk (2013) discusses, namely that virtual groups online make it possible for users to sustain an accumulated sense of self with a larger group of others. When the question of whether our participants have had intentions of leaving the platform, the fear of social loss quickly enters the conversation. This is exemplified in Anita's statement:

I wouldn't dare to… or maybe not dare to but I am more afraid that people who are contacting me on direct messaging on Instagram wouldn't contact me if I deleted or took a break from Instagram. That is the problem I have, that I am afraid that people would stop seeing me and reach out to me if I delete Instagram.
(Anita, F2)

As many of the participants' friends and old friends tend to be operating on the same platform, our empirical material indicates that, despite negative emotions towards social media advertising, the fear of losing social relations is of more importance. However, the action of taking temporary breaks from the platform is identified among some of our participants. These express experiences and emotions of relief and freedom of taking a break while also experiencing a consistent and stressing feeling of missing out while being off the platform. This is exemplified in Emma's statement:

A part of me thought that it was very nice while another part of me missed knowing what everybody was doing and that I did not keep up in the world of social media [...] that's probably why the short duration.
(Emma, F1)

Instagram has developed to be so much more than just a social platform as a result of the commercialization and companies' increased presence. Emma (F1) continues: *It is more of a news feed now as well [...] you can find out about everything through Instagram today.* The balance between commercialization and the social sphere supports its complexity, and information is rapidly being spread through the unique culture of Instagram. What was previously private has, due to the development of the digital world, integrated into becoming more public (Belk, 2013). This transformation on social media has contributed to how users feel more vulnerable which could explain why they constantly and compulsively are checking their feeds as well as adding posts to appear active and interesting. These circumstances are called fear of missing out (FOMO) (Grohol 2011 referenced in Belk 2013). Interestingly, the conversation lifted another concern where the social benefit and possibility of displaying oneself to others would disappear if abandoning the platform. Cassandra's comment exemplifies how people are using Instagram as a way of promoting themselves:

I, as a single person, feel that I want to have pretty pictures on my feed so that guys will be able to see my best side if they go in to look. Maybe they will reach out if I have a pretty picture...
(Cassandra, F1)

For consumers to remain competitive not only in social contexts but also in terms of success, the concept of self-branding within the cultural spaces becomes evident (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). Cassandra's comment indicates Instagram as a tool of self-branding as she exemplifies how she uses Instagram to brand her-single-self to boys. By abandoning the platform, she fears losing this social benefit. This further supports Whitmer's (2019) observation on how postmodern consumers want to brand themselves to the market. In contrast, one of our respondents, Ronja, did stop using the Instagram platform and other social media channels to get the distance between what she refers to as the "real life" and the "life on social media". Ronja is the only one out of our participants that permanently has left social media and makes the following comment about the situation of Instagram:

It's just that, it feels like we all are living in a sort of social media paralysis. It becomes a sort of common agreement that this is how it is supposed to be [...] it has become a social agreement to have Instagram and communicate through social media...
(Ronja, F3)

Ronja refers to Instagram and social media as a "social agreement" meaning that everyone now is expected to communicate and take part in the social sphere of Instagram. This is interesting, as it may be used to explain why consumers are not taking on more radical resistance tactics towards the advertising on the platform. Although Ronja's main reason for

leaving was not motivated by the presence of advertising, her perspective indicates that this social agreement makes it hard for people to leave Instagram, regardless the reason.

Belk (1988) argued that objects are seen as a part of the self once people can exercise power and control over these objects. A person's Instagram-account could be seen as a 'possession' that has evolved into a part of the self due to the possibility of controlling the usage of it. Leaving this 'possession' may be hard as this would mean leaving a part of the self. This could further be connected to our participants' unwillingness of leaving historical memories behind, which are experienced to be stored in the photos posted but also in comments and interactions from people they have met in the past. These photos, comments, and interactions are cues that link us to memories that, according to Belk (2013), create this sense of history, which is why these 'possessions' are so highly worshiped. The following statements are examples that indicate the fear of losing these possessions if abandoning the platform:

It is kind of the only thing that I believe is a little fun is for example now when I have been on an exchange year I have taken a lot of pretty pictures and posted those I liked the most, and that is very fun to go through for myself.
(Hilda, F3)

I would partly feel that I would have lost contact with old friends who won't be able to follow me any longer, and also being sad about losing all my old pictures that I believe are pretty.
(Cassandra, F1)

I just would have felt anxiety for the disappearance of all my followers that I have worked for, and all pictures that will be lost, because although I may have those pictures stored somewhere else, all those pretty pictures are there in one and the same place, all the memories and comments. I would have panicked.
(Emma, F1)

While Hilda refers to flashbacks and emotions of happiness stored in her pictures, Cassandra expresses the similar but adds that she fears losing contact with people that will not be able to follow her any longer. Likewise, Emma expresses emotions of anxiety and panic only by thinking of abandoning her pictures and followers. Simply put, these statements indicate how Instagram is a platform where social contacts and personal memories have been collected and stored for several years. It could be seen as a personal and social diary where the people in one's network are seen as a long-time collection and investment of social relationships and personal memories. Due to the social establishment of Instagram, the users have for many years shaped the platform into a cultural space. What becomes evident is the fear of social loss if abandoning this social-cultural space, thus the invasion of marketers.

6 Theoretical Contribution & Discussion

In this chapter we will present our theoretical model and how this model applies to our study. We will also present relevant discoveries from the analysis and put these in relation to previous research. Furthermore, the importance of our discoveries as well as the new insights that we gained from this study is discussed.

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

Our analysis identified all five of Holt's contradictions that he states are threatening the current branding paradigm. However, consumers are still operating on the platform thus negative emotions of fear and irritation after being monitored and stalked by marketers. Although ambivalence occurs in some instances, negative emotions towards the phenomena are shown to dominate. As the cultural space of Instagram provides users with social tools and advantages, the negative emotions and experiences towards the increased presence of advertising become tenues. It is therefore evident that the fear of missing out from the social benefits on Instagram is a tremendous reason for not leaving the platform. Aligning with 'The Persuasion Knowledge Model' (Friestad & Wright, 1994), the negative emotions and experiences of being stalked and monitored become vague as consumers learn how to encounter and tackle their attempts of persuasion. Our findings provide an explanation of how consumers, through mechanically or physically reflexive resistance tactics develop a form of immunity which can be seen as a shelter from marketers' aggression. While immunity is being produced, consumers unconsciously learn how to handle their negative emotions and adapt to the current situation. We argue that this is a mundane form of everyday resistance to the advertising and the marketer's invasion of the social platform and cultural space of Instagram. In sum, the combination of the development of immunity towards advertising, and the fear of social loss leads to a common but pragmatic acceptance of the advertising portrayed.

Through working closely with the empirical material and analysis, we have identified four themes deriving from the three subchapters presented in the analysis and developed a theoretical model that we argue represents the findings of this study. This theoretical model is shown below in *Figure 2. The Glass Cube*, and demonstrates how consumers are experiencing and coping with advertising on Instagram. The white zone in the middle of our model represents the social platform and the cultural space found on Instagram. The blue layer surrounding the cultural space is the area of 'Social Loss', representing the fear of losing the social benefits invested and captured within the space. The dotted line within demonstrates a layer of glass, which consumers could break out from. If doing so, the consumer is taking a radical form of resistance action as it encompasses the individual risk of

social exclusion by leaving the cultural space and ending up in the area of social loss. Inside the square are three boxes with arrows circling. The box 'Advertising on Instagram' represents the increased exposure of advertising on the platform. The arrow on the right-hand side of this box illustrates how the phenomena automatically produces experiences and emotions among the users on the platform; leading to the box's 'Experiences and Emotions". As defined in our analysis, these emotions were mostly negative although some ambivalence did occur. Nevertheless, the negative fractions of these emotions explain the arrow pointing towards the box of 'Mundane and Silent Resistance'. The mundane and silent resistance is, as contended in the analysis, embodied in reflexive resistance tactics. As the advertising and marketing techniques are being updated, the arrow continually goes back to the box representing the presence of advertising. This creates an ongoing circle between the boxes, which by time produces immunity towards the phenomena.
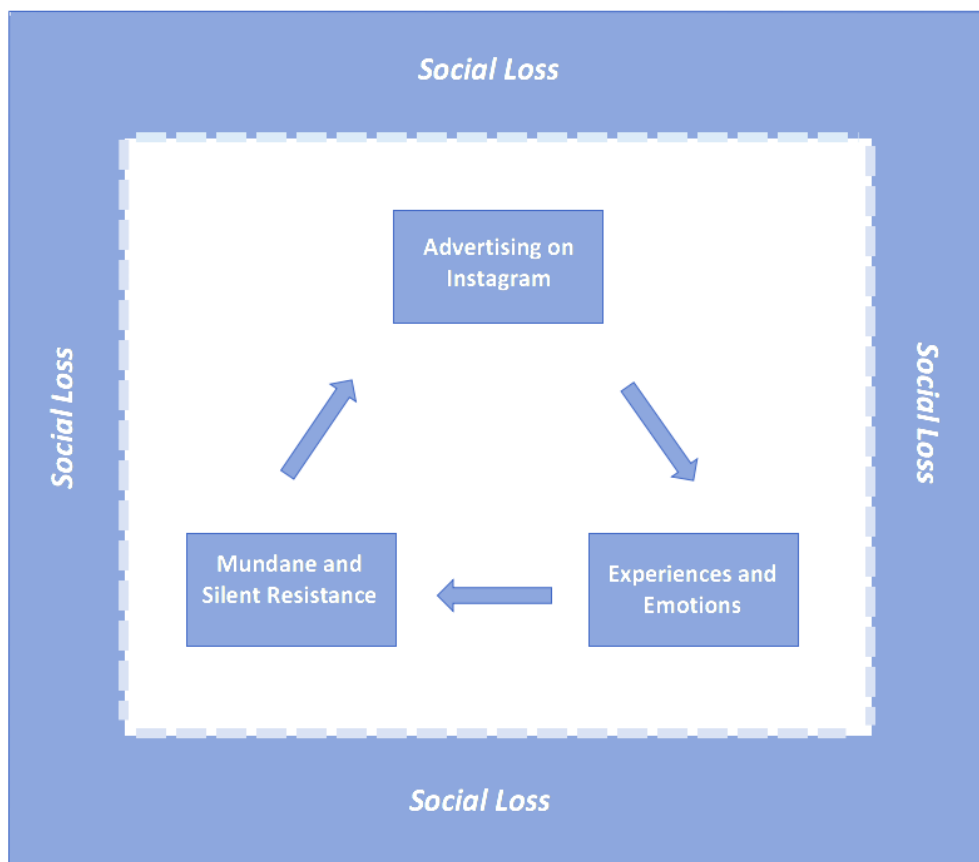
Figure 2. The Glass Cube

Our model could be applicable in other contexts as it comprehensively captures how consumers generally feel and experience negative emotions for an increased amount of advertising in a specific forum. For instance, our model could be applied to other social media platforms where social and personal interests have been invested throughout a longer period of time. Additionally, our model could be used in contexts of different communities or tribes where social bonds often play a crucial role and are the key driver for continual usage. Fundamentally, our model could be used in any context where consumers have created a social relationship and where this relationship has been compromised with advertising. It is also worth mentioning that the inner part of our model, the part within the dotted line, could be applied to other settings where the social aspect is not taken into account. For instance, the inner part is applicable to channels such as television or radio commercials, as the resistance in these cases could be performed likewise. Consumers may not take radical actions in such settings, which is why mundane and silent actions would be a more reasonable explanation to the developed immunity against the advertising on these channels.

6.2   Discussion

The empirical material collected through this study has generated findings confirming previous research, however, contradictory findings were also identified which our model provides an explanation to. Our first finding suggests that the commercialization of Instagram is seen as bedraggling the cultural space that previously was considered as original and authentic. This was identified within topics of authenticity as the increased presence and repetition of sponsored ads and influencer collaborations were shown to harm the credibility of the source. We identified that consumers have a critical mindset towards conventional influencers' attempts of marketing as they are being polluted by the masses and the market. In relation to this, we could identify a desire for more authentic and unique characters of influencers who stand out from this mass. The commercialization of Instagram confirms Klein's (1999) idea of how corporate marketing has invaded previously uncommercialized domains, which has resulted in massive branding investments into the cultural spaces of consumers. Instagram is a good example where the discursive space and the public space has become integrated, which also support Rumbo's (2002) statement of how advertising has become an unavoidable part in consumer's everyday life.

The findings stemming from our empirical material is somewhat contradicting Jung's (2017) argument that ad avoidance is developed due to privacy concerns when becoming suspicious. A second finding indicates that consumers are reflecting and sharing ambivalent emotions upon this phenomenon. The increased presence of advertising raised questions of integrity where negative emotions and experiences were expressed in terms of data collection and sense of being stalked, while positive emotions were expressed in terms of personal benefits such as ad relevance. The ambivalent emotions can be used to explain the contemporary consumer as an ambivalent but critical individual, supporting Rumbo's (2002) as well as Firat and Venkatesh's (1995) description of the postmodern consumer as fragmented and wary.

Further, the identified ambivalence and cynical behavior aligns with Bertilsson's (2013) idea of how cynicism in some cases serves as an acceptable and a reasonable strategy for handling conflicting demands. The findings of the ambivalent consumer support previous research stating that consumers can hold both negative and positive opinions about various aspects of advertising (Dehling, Zhang & Sunyaev, 2019), which makes the relationship between consumers and marketers very turbulent.

As a result of the notion of the ambivalent but critical postmodern consumer, one interesting finding confirms and contributes to previous findings regarding self-branding and self-packaging (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). With the increased importance of publicity and brand publics (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015), our findings indicate that people constantly carry the feeling of being seen or supervised by others; not only by brands and marketers but also from other individuals. This puts pressure and expectations of successful self-branding. As Whitmer (2019) observes, people no longer are people, and products are no longer simply products; now people see themselves as products to be marketed. The concept of self-branding becomes evident in order for consumers to remain competitive as a worker or for social benefits. Instagram, and other social forums, offers people a unique place for self-branding, which may be a social benefit that users do not want to risk to lose.

Our empirical material indicated that forced exposure to advertising, especially if repeated often, was confirmed to be experienced as intrusive (Hegner, Kusse & Pruyn, 2016) and lead to negative emotions and associations to the influencer or brand responsible for the exposure. However, forced exposure to advertising has in previous research indicated more radical reactions such as boycotting (e.g. Coulter, Zaltman & Coulter, 2001). Our next finding contradicts this previous research, as it indicates that radical resistance strategy does not apply to social forums and platforms on social media. The layer of glass, as presented in our model 'The Glass Cube', rather provides a theory to how consumers react in terms of reflexive ad avoidance as they are risking social loss and other social benefits if taking on more radical forms of resistance. This is supported by the Brand Resistance Intensity Continuum (BRIC), which indicates how ad avoidance generally does not expose the individual for any type of risk, while more radical resistance tactics may result in social and performance risks (Cambefort & Roux, 2019).

In connection to our first finding, our research contributes to strengthening previous research indicating that an escape from the marketers' dominance is not that simple (e.g. Arnould, 2007; Kozinets, 2002). We find that this phenomenon is working likewise when being applied into online contexts, specifically on a social media forum. The usage of social media is deeply rooted in the nature of contemporary consumers, which indicates that radical actions of permanently leaving social media due to advertising may not be considered an option. Due to the possibility of controlling and possessing power over a personal Instagram-account, a valid reason for not leaving the platform would be that this 'possession' has evolved into a part of the self (Belk, 1988). A radical action such as leaving this 'possession' behind, would mean losing a part of 'the self' which further strengthens the need to remain as a user on the platform. Furthermore, the cultural space of Instagram now is intertwined with the

commercialization. Our empirical material led us to the finding of how consumers are committed to an invisible social agreement on social media. To not feel excluded and missing out on the social, consumers see no way to escape the advertising without losing the social parts. An escape from the market structures would therefore only be working temporarily and locally (Kozines, 2002) as users soon would return or collectively migrate to another platform where the same dominance would occur. Therefore, Arnould's (2007) and Kozines (2002) conclusions of how an escape is not fully possible are now shown to be applicable in the context of social media.

In sum, consumers are critical towards the phenomena of increased exposure of advertising but still continues to be ruled by the marketers. People have realized that increased critique does not have any substantial effect on the market system (Bertilsson, 2015). Instead, the critical and reflexive consumer will through their way of mundanely resisting the marketers' messages develop immunity as a way to wield the persuasion attempts. This can be connected to previous research that indicates how forms of consumer resistance eventually lead to the reproduction of the market (Bertilsson, 2015; Kozines, 2002; Holt, 2002). Just as the criticism against capitalism contributes to the reproduction of it, consumer resistance on a social media forum is working likewise. As consumers continually develop immunity, they will remain as users on the platform while challenging the marketers. Therefore, it is now the marketers' task to identify and take action to successfully continue to attract consumers. As de Certeau (1994) provides with his theory of 'The Practice of Everyday Life', it could be assumed that marketers have taken the power of consumers, but the power may shift back to the consumers when they learn how to cope with the persuasive tactics behind the advertising. Ironically, consumer resistance thereby leads to a reproduction of the market, possibly in a new and creative form.

7 Conclusion

In this final chapter, the conclusion will be presented with the main results of the study. The conclusion is based on the empirical material and analysis and will answer the purpose and research question of this study. Finally, managerial implications with the study are presented as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

7.1 Conclusion

The main purpose of this study has been to provide a prospect of how an increased exposure of advertising on Instagram influences consumer resistance tactics. The findings generated are enriching the literature around social media marketing and resistance as it provides marketers with useful insights within the framework of CCT. This study has utilized a qualitative methodology and contributes new insights deriving from the underlying emotions and experiences of the average Instagram user. This has been conducted by using theoretical viewpoints consisting of various perspectives of consumer resistance. To answer our research question, our analysis has been presented in three subchapters supported by empirical material acquired from four semi-structured focus group interviews. As a contribution to previous literature, we present our theoretical model "The Glass Cube" which depicts how consumers experience and react to the increased exposure of advertising on the social media forum Instagram.

To answer our research question: *How do the average Swedish Instagram user experience advertisements on the platform and how do their emotions influence tactics of resistance?*, we presented our theoretical model 'The Glass Cube'. As the majority of the experiences and emotions towards advertising on Instagram were negative, our theoretical model provides an explanation of how consumers through reflexive resistance tactics, learn how to encounter and tackle marketing strategies. We found that consumers by time develop a common immunity towards the advertising portrayed to them on the platform. The immunity could be seen as self-defense from the marketers' attacks of advertising. Our findings suggest that radical resistance actions, such as leaving the social forum, are not generally taken by consumers due to the fear of social loss.

The findings deriving in this study indicates many valuable insights useful in several areas of marketing research. Our findings indicate that the contemporary consumer culture on Instagram consists of critical but ambivalent consumers who express mainly negative emotions towards the increased exposure of advertising. We have further acknowledged how the commercialization of Instagram is harming the authenticity of brands and influencers. However, no radical resistance tactics towards advertising were identified. We conclude that an escape from markers' dominance is not that simple and that the response of mundane

resistance tactics instead leads to a reproduction of the market structures on the platform. Moreover, our research contributes to previous resistance literature as it demonstrates its applicability and validity in the online context of social media.

As the impact of influencers has exceeded in today's contemporary culture, our study depicts the growing importance of transparency and a sense of activism or niche among Swedish influencers. Likewise, our study contributes to the ethical debates regarding personal integrity and data collection. This study implies how consumers become resistant if advertising comes too close to their personal space, while they also perceive tailored advertising as something good when they benefit from it. Moreover, as the consumer culture moves into an online context, our study indicates that social media usage has become deeply rooted like contemporary consumer culture. It can be concluded that consumers have unconsciously committed themselves to an invisible social agreement on social media which is making it hard to completely bypass the advertising without losing the social parts.

While the radical resistance tactics are being left in the dark, this study demonstrates how consumers instead perform mundane and silent forms of everyday resistance. We argue that this phenomenon puts pressure on marketers to constantly adapt to these changes to continue reaching out to the rapidly evolving consumer culture of social media. We want to highlight how the microbe-like operations in terms of different avoidance strategies may lead to a deflection of the functions and power of advertisers' dominance on Instagram. Although immunity may seem to be a passive act of resistance, one should not forget that consumers who mundanely resist these structures of power also are obeying and becoming a part of the structures that are created.

7.2 Managerial Implications

This thesis contributes to various aspects of social media marketing that could be used as inspiration for future marketers. As this thesis has adopted a qualitative method from a consumer perspective, a contribution relevant for managers is the profound understanding of how consumers behave, think, and feel which is the foundation for successful marketing. Our findings indicate how the authenticity in advertising is being more harmed due to the commercialization of Instagram. It could be essential to understand how consumers evaluate different influencers, as consumers seem to have developed a critical mindset towards conventional influencers' attempts of marketing. Our study suggests that managers should pay attention to consumers' desire of uniqueness as opposed to mainstream, as our participants put light on authentic characters who are willing to actively take a stand out from the mass. We suggest that marketers should focus and strengthen their own authenticity, building loyal and authentic relationships with the consumers, and reaching out to smaller yet unique influencers who still have their authentic aura intact. Moreover, the increased presence and repetitive manner of advertising were found to irritate consumers, as much of this advertising

was experienced to be of the same format. We therefore suggest that managers intensively look for new methods in situations where immunity is not yet established.

The motives provided in this paper will help companies to develop offerings that appeal to their target segments and thereby serve their needs. An example of such need is the desire to see humor and comic in their feed. Through the discussion with our participants of this study, we acknowledged that this type of advertising was experienced as fun and engaging. However, companies need to be aware that what could be perceived as a good marketing strategy, could lead to backlash if contradictory publicity goes viral. Due to the internet and social media, things can be shared within seconds, meaning that managers need to be cautious with their marketing strategies on Instagram, and social media overall. With a comprehensive aim of broadening the scope of how companies can produce more efficient marketing strategies, a general implication for managers is to be ready to change direction and mindset, and adjust their in-house strategies as trends come and go. If new platforms enter the market, companies need to be ready in how to approach and market themselves in the best way possible.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

The purpose of this study has been to investigate how social media users experience an increased amount of advertising on Instagram and how they react upon it. However, limitations in the approach of semi-structured focus group sessions lead to questions regarding the generalizability of the findings. Our study focused on the average Instagram user in Sweden, which is female in the age of 16-25 years. Therefore, this study provides no insight into how consumers not fitting into these criteria would interpret the topic presented. Also, as all our participants came from Sweden the findings are limited to contexts similar to the Swedish culture. Moreover, qualitative research tends to be more subjective due to the interpretative aspect of the research. Therefore, there could be a risk of socially desirable answers given by our participants. To migrate from this limitation, a combination of a netnographic research strategy (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016) could have been helping us to avoid this, however, the scarcity of time and resources did not allow us to add this approach.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no prior research within the field of marketing on the consumer perspective of the phenomena of increased advertising on Instagram. Therefore, we claim that further research is needed due to the limited existing research on this relatively new phenomenon. As mentioned above, a netnographic of the phenomena may have led to more sufficient data which should be taken into consideration for further research. It would also be interesting to investigate the experiences and emotions gathered from men, and how their resistance tactics might differ. Likewise, it would be beneficial for further research to apply the structure of this study on people from other age groups and cultures. An interesting aspect to investigate further is if people above or below the age span of this study share the

same thoughts about social loss, or if they would be more prone to take radical resistance tactics.

Lastly, as we in this study have focused on consumer resistance, we believe that the topic regarding consumer's ambivalent emotions needs further investigation. Our findings indicate how consumers experience positive emotions when they are gaining a clear personal benefit from it. Thus, these emotions are not consistent with their actions and seem to depend on the situation. In regards to the area of consumer resistance and social media advertising, this phenomenon would be interesting to further investigate and get an understanding of the rationales and motives behind.

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Appendices

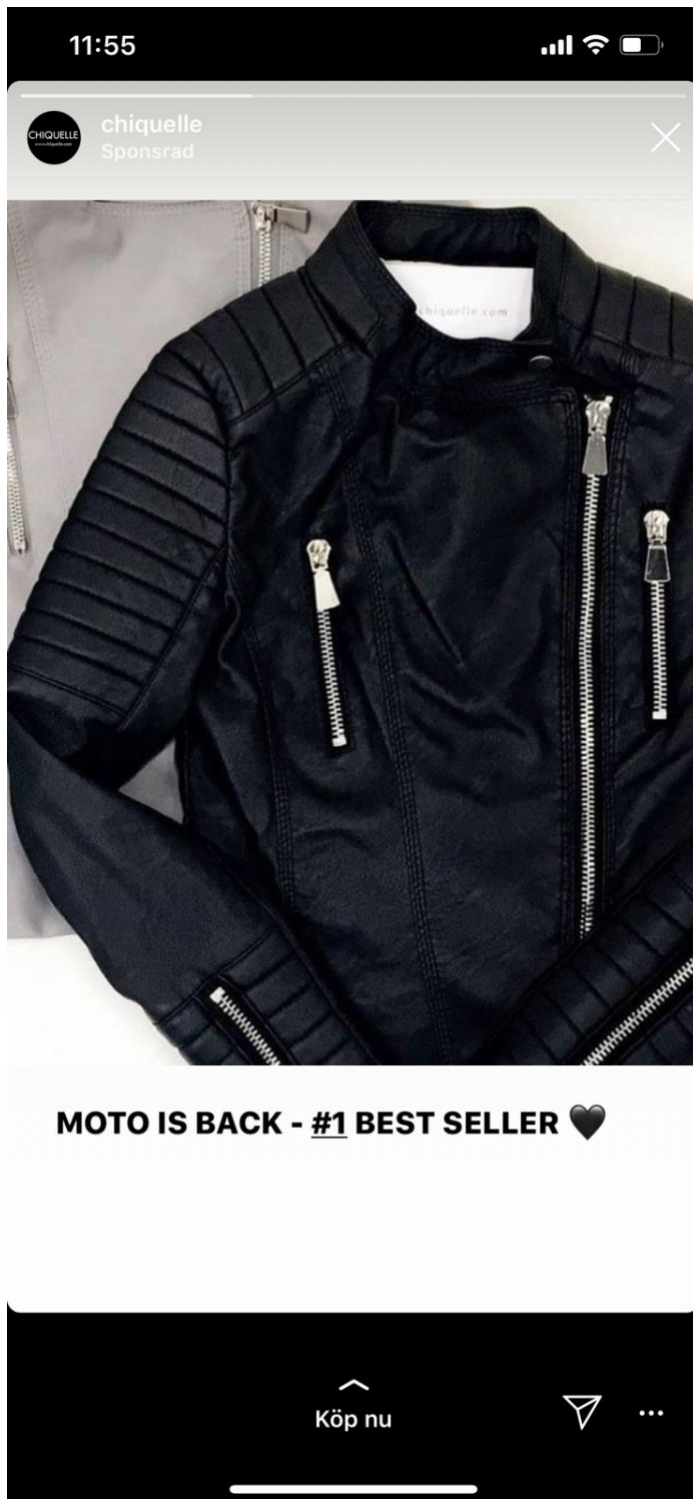## Appendix A - Topic Guide

Theme	Questions	Analytical purpose
Background	● Name, age and occupation (student/working/other)? ● For how long have you had an Instagram account?	To get an overall impression of the participants

Instagram	● How would you describe the culture on Instagram when you first got it, and what emotions towards the application did you experience back then?
	
	 ● Why do you have an Instagram-account today?
	
	 ● How would you describe the culture on Instagram today and what emotions and experiences do you have towards the application today?
	   - *How may this differ from earlier?*
	
	 ● How do you reflect upon your own usage today? What factors make you want to use the application?
	
	 ● Can you explain what you see if you scroll through your Instagram feed and stories?
	   - *What emotions do you experience?*
	   - *Example: If you would see Instagram as a partner, how would you describe this relationship?*
		Consumer Culture and Branding Paradigm

Advertising	● What do you feel about advertising generally?
	
	 ● ** Showing pictures on advertising on Instagram **
	   - *What do you feel when you see these pictures?*
	
	 ● How often do you experience advertising on Instagram? Do you consider this positive or negative? Why?
	
	 ● What do you think about repetitive advertising?
	   - *Do you experience that it comes too close to your*
		Consumer Culture and Branding Paradigm

	personal space? In such instances, why?
	
	● What kind of advertising do you consider as good and what do you consider as bad? Discuss.
	  - *What makes you pay attention to an advert or take action?*
	  - *What makes you scroll past it?*
	
	● Have you ever been emotionally attached or affected by an advertisement on Instagram? It can be positive or negative. Please describe this commercial and how this made you feel.
	
	● Have you ever questioned any advertisement on Instagram? Why?
	
	● Are you following any Influencers on Instagram? Motivate why.
	
	● How has your view on influencers developed throughout the last couple of years?
	  - *Do you feel that these have affected your habits of consumption?*
	  - *Do you feel that these have affected your habits of usage?*
	
	● Are you following any business pages on Instagram? Why?
	
	● Do you think you are integrating mostly with businesses or friends on Instagram today? Please elaborate.	

Data collection and advertising	● Imagine yourself searching for a cute purple dress on Google. The next day, your Instagram feed portrays multiple purple dresses. How does this make you feel? ● What are your emotions regarding data collection and targeted advertising? How does this make you feel? ● Have you ever been avoiding or thinking about avoiding googling something due to this? If yes, please share your experience and emotions. ● How do you experience the advertising on Instagram? Is it	Practice of Everyday Life

	simple or hard to avoid? Why? ● Would you consider paying money in order to not get advertising portrayed to you? (Example Spotify) - *How much? What do you think about this? Would it work practically?*	
Identification of advertising	● Are you usually clicking or are tempted to click on sponsored ads? What makes you do it? What makes you not do it? ● Are you sometimes reflecting upon the motive behind an advert on Instagram? In such instances, what are you feeling and experiencing in those situations? *(aim could be: money, social relations, brand awareness)* ● What are your experiences and emotions of the new click-in-app purchase function on Instagram? How has this affected you and what emotions do you feel? ● How do you differ between 'regular posts' and advertisements on Instagram? What makes you realize that it is advertising and not a regular post? ● Are you ever reflecting upon whether the advertising is there to help you or to persuade you? What comes to your mind?	Persuasion Knowledge Model
Actions taken and resistance	● What do you consider is the most irritating thing on Instagram right now? ● How are you reacting and being influenced by advertising that are popping up in between posts in your feed? *(Sponsored ads - showing a picture)* ● Have you conducted any actions because of the advertising on Instagram? In such instances, what and why? How did this make you feel? ● Have you ever deleted or considered to delete the Instagram application? How did it make you feel? - *For how long have you been off the Instagram platform in total and how did it make you feel?*	The ACE-typology and the Practice of Everyday life

	● Have you, or people in your environment started to avoid social media? What do you think are the reasons for this? - *What role does advertising play in these circumstances?*	
Finalization	● What do you think Instagram will look like in a couple of years? How do you feel about it? Positive/Negative? Motivate. ● What could Instagam do in order to improve your consumer experience? ● Do you want to add anything that has not been said to the discussion?	We aim to end the conversation with a nice atmosphere and thank the participants for their time. By asking an open question in the end, we participants have the opportunity to freely share their opinions and thoughts. This will also be recorded in order to not miss out any important information.

Appendix B - Chiquelle

MOTO IS BACK - #1 BEST SELLER 🖤

Appendix C - Nelly

Appendix D - Åhlens