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Fighting for sustainability on Instagram

Uncovering who sustainability influencers are

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Abstract

Background: Social media has permeated practically every aspect of our everyday lives. One of these social media platforms is Instagram, which enables people to connect, communicate and share information with other users. The potential of these and social media influencers (SMI) to influence users' behaviours is considerable. However, sustainability influencers, an emerging type of SMIs, have gained little attention in the literature so far. **Objective:** The purpose of this thesis is three-fold: 1) to gain a deeper understanding of how sustainability is conceptualised by sustainability influencers, 2) to shed light on what it means, in practice, to be a sustainability influencer, and 3) to capture the prevalent discourses within the field. **Methods:** The thesis draws from 13 semi-structured interviews with Swedish sustainability influencers and uses Q methodology to capture the prevalent logics within the field. **Results:** The interviews identified two main conceptualizations of sustainability: inner-focused and outer-focused. Through Institutional Logics, the Q method captured four distinct discourses or perspectives in the field: bioenvironmentalists, protective liberals, critical thinkers, and institutionalists. **Conclusions:** The main conclusions of the thesis are: i) sustainability influencers are self-proclaimed SMIs who focus, at least partly, on topics related to sustainability, ii) there is a gender gap in the field of sustainability influencers in Sweden in favour of women, iii) there are two main conceptualizations of sustainability, which may impact the influencers' areas of focus, iv) there are four prevalent discourses within the field of sustainability influencers with very limited areas of consensus, and v) sustainability influencers' main challenges include stress, mental health, and financial issues. **Implications:** This thesis' main contribution lies in its novel description of sustainability influencers, their values and beliefs, and the way they operationalize these in their Instagram accounts.

Keywords: Sustainability influencers, Instagram, Institutional logics, Q Methodology, interviews

Executive Summary

Problem definition

Environmental issues including biodiversity loss, climate change, and growing volumes of waste represent an important part of current challenges faced by institutions, states, and people across the world. Actions to tackle these challenges are taking place at all scales, from multi-national agreements all the way down to individual actions, such as demanding the elimination of harmful chemicals from goods, reducing emissions from the transportation sector, a shift towards more circular lifestyles, and many more. Although there is much debate around the true effect of individual actions towards sustainability in contrast to more systemic changes, there is some agreement about the role of individuals in positions of leadership as change agents.

Such sustainability leaders have also been emerging in social media networks as Social Media Influencers (SMIs), where they promote a shift towards more sustainable lifestyles. Despite the ever-more prevalent and rapidly developing field of sustainability influencers, there is a huge lack of information in this field. Little is known about who sustainability influencers are, how they work, what their beliefs are, what they promote, and what challenges they face. This is problematic if one is to study how sustainability influencers lead to behaviour change, which sustainability influencers are most successful in promoting sustainability, and how collaborations between sustainability influencers and various sponsors (such as municipalities or non-profit organisations) can benefit all stakeholders. Then, as a very first step in understanding this field, it is necessary to delve into some basic questions like who these people are or what their understanding of sustainability is. This is crucial considering the impact they may have in tackling global sustainability issues by influencing the salience of trending sustainability topics.

Aim and research questions

This thesis aims to contribute to the field of social media influencers and specifically increase the current knowledge about sustainability influencers. In particular, this thesis will explore sustainability influencers' perceptions of sustainability and of the field of sustainability influencers, and their roles in influencing people's behaviours towards sustainability, as perceived by SMIs themselves.

To achieve this aim, the thesis is divided into the following guiding questions:

> *RQ1 (explorative): How do sustainability influencers conceptualize sustainability and sustainable lifestyles?*
>
> *RQ2 (descriptive): In practice, what does it mean to be a sustainability influencer, including motivations, challenges and barriers, conflicts, and focus.*
>
> *RQ3 (analytical): What Institutional Logics are prevalent in the field of sustainability influencers?*

Research design

An initial review of the literature was conducted to define the research questions and identify the most suitable frameworks for conducting the analysis. The Sustainability Framework (Whyte & Lamberton, 2020) was chosen as the guiding framework for exploring RQ 1, and

Insitutional Logics guided mainly RQ 3. To answer the RQs, the data collection included two distinct methodologies.

First, thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with Instagram sustainability influencers in Sweden, which focused on questions relating to RQ1 and RQ2. The data obtained from the interviews was further used for developing the statements used in the Q method. Then, Q methodology was used to capture the discourses within the field (i.e., RQ3), in which 19 sustainability influencers took part.

Findings

The data collected through the interviews and the Q method provided answers to the three research questions.

First, when it comes to conceptualizing sustainability, there are several understandings on its meaning and how it translates into sustainable lifestyles. However, two main trends are apparent: an inner-focused sustainability, which sees the concept as something intrinsically related to the individual, and outer-focused sustainability, which sees the concept as something external to the individual. Although differences of this understanding existed, the most controversial topic found between influencers was that of paid collaborations with brands. A group of influencers is strongly supportive of paid collaborations, arguing that social media work is work nonetheless, and should therefore be compensated or salaried. On the other hand, others feel strongly against such collaborations arguing that these are against the concept of sustainability itself, as they often promote consumption.

The results of the Q methodology were able to capture four distinct discourses, or logics, within the field of sustainability influencers. These were coined the bioenvironmentalists, the protective liberals, the critical thinkers, and the institutionalists. *Bioenvironmentalists* are mostly on the outer-focused sustainability spectrum, placing the environment above society and the economy. They stress the need for reducing consumption levels, and a top-down approach to sustainability. *Protective liberals* advocate for a free medium, where few or no rules guide influencers' work. They perceive money and collaborations in a positive way, and like the bioenvironmentalists, they see the role of government as crucial for achieving sustainability. *Critical thinkers* are the most inner-focused group, and they are mainly characterized by their perception of responsibility lying on individuals, i.e., a bottom-up approach. They are strongly critical of sustainability influencers, perceive money as mainly a negative thing, and prefer not to label themselves as influencers. *Institutionalists* are mainly characterized by a positive perception of money, by the environment not taking priority over other spheres (i.e., society and the economy), and by a top-down approach for achieving sustainability objectives. They see the sustainability social media institution as badly constructed, which leads to internal disagreement and conflict in the spread of sustainability messages.

Conclusions and recommendations

The main conclusions of the thesis are: i) sustainability influencers are self-proclaimed SMIs who focus, at least partly, on topics related to sustainability, ii) there is a gender gap in the field of sustainability influencers in Sweden in favour of women, iii) there are two main conceptualizations of sustainability, which may impact the influencers' areas of focus, iv) there are four prevalent discourses within the field of sustainability influencers with very limited areas of consensus, and v) sustainability influencers' main challenges include stress, mental health, and financial issues.

This thesis' main contribution lies in its novel description of sustainability influencers, their values and beliefs, and the way they operationalize these on their Instagram accounts. With the use of Q, further evidence has been provided to the usefulness of this methodology in capturing prevalent discourses or logics within a specific topic area.

Finally, although all the research questions were answered, this thesis has brought to light several questions that need to be addressed if we are to keep up with the rapidly evolving fields of social media and sustainability.

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Abbreviations

SMI	Social Media Influencer
IL	Institutional Logics
Q	Q-methodology and Q method
PCA	Principal Components Analysis
DMs	Direct Messages

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and problem definition

Environmental issues represent an important part of current challenges faced by institutions, states, and people across the world. These include problems of biodiversity loss, illegal wildlife trade, loss of ecosystem services, climate change, growing amounts of waste, increasing air pollution, loss of freshwater resources, etc. (European Commission, 2016; IPCC, 2014). Actions to tackle these challenges are taking place at all scales, from multi-national agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, all the way down to individual actions, such as small lifestyle changes. These individual actions include the push for eliminating harmful chemicals from goods, reducing emissions from transportation of goods and travelling, a shift towards more circular lifestyles, and many more (UNEP, 2016).

The bundle of these activities, which are together driven by sustainability values, can be said to represent a sustainable lifestyle, which has been defined as a way of living where the negative impacts of human activities on the environment and society are limited and mitigated as much as possible (Chwialkowska, 2019). Although there is much debate around the true effect of individual actions towards sustainability in contrast to more systemic changes (Dong, 2016; Mark, 2019), there is some agreement in the role of individuals in positions of leadership as change agents (Bansal, 2003; Visser & Crane, 2010).

This growing group of people advertising lifestyle changes and promoting the need for individual-scale actions are known as sustainability influencers. They are people taking positions of leadership in different spheres, including government, business and non-profit organizations, with the aim of creating change (Garren & Brinkmann, 2018). Some of these sustainability influencers have also been emerging in social media networks, where they promote a shift towards sustainable lifestyles through lifestyle changes, daily challenges, the use of alternative products, etc.

Social media influencers (SMIs) have been defined as "third-party actors who have established a significant number of relevant relationships […] and influence on organizational stakeholders through content production, content distribution, interaction, and personal appearance on the social web"(Enke & Borchers, 2019). That is, their presence in social networks plays a direct role in influencing users' attitudes and behaviours. Theoretically, sustainability influencers are a subset of SMIs whose focus lies on sustainability topics.

Despite the ever-more prevalent and rapidly developing field of sustainability influencers, there is a huge lack of information in this field. Little is published about who sustainability influencers are, how they work, what their beliefs are, what they promote, and what challenges they face. This is problematic if one is to study how sustainability influencers lead to behaviour change, which sustainability influencers are most successful in promoting sustainability, and how collaborations between sustainability influencers and various sponsors (such as municipalities or non-profit organisations) can benefit all stakeholders.

Thus, as a very first step in understanding this field, it is necessary to delve into some basic questions like who these people are and what their understanding of sustainability is. This is crucial considering the impact they can have in tackling the global sustainability issues mentioned above.

1.2 Aim and research questions

This thesis aims to contribute to the field of social media influencers and increase the current knowledge especially about sustainability influencers. More specifically, this thesis will explore how SMIs work, their perceptions of sustainability and the field of sustainability influencers, and their roles in influencing people's behaviours towards sustainability, as perceived by SMIs themselves.

To achieve this, the thesis aims to develop these questions by capturing the prevalent logics or viewpoints present in the field, each characterized by a set of distinct values and beliefs. Hence, the thesis is divided into the following guiding questions:

> *RQ1 (explorative): How do sustainability influencers conceptualize sustainability and sustainable lifestyles?*
>
> *RQ2 (descriptive): In practice, what does it mean to be a sustainability influencer, including motivations, challenges and barriers, conflicts, and focus.*
>
> *RQ3 (analytical): What Institutional Logics are prevalent within the field of sustainability influencers?*

Understanding how sustainability influencers conceptualise sustainability is important because they can potentially sway agendas through salience. Further, assuming they have a positive impact on sustainable behaviours, it is crucial to understand the challenges they face. Answering this question could help institutions interested in behaviour change to collaborate with influencers where needed.

The intended outcomes of this thesis are to 1) identify areas of agreement and contention within the field of sustainability influencers in Sweden; 2) contribute to the state of knowledge by providing a set of categories of sustainability influencers; and 3) identify the main challenges faced by influencers. In summary, the main contribution of the thesis lies in (i) the knowledge it will create to move the field forward, and (ii) new information for practitioners interested in working with sustainability influencers.

A representation of the research design, including its aim and research questions, is shown on Figure 1-1.

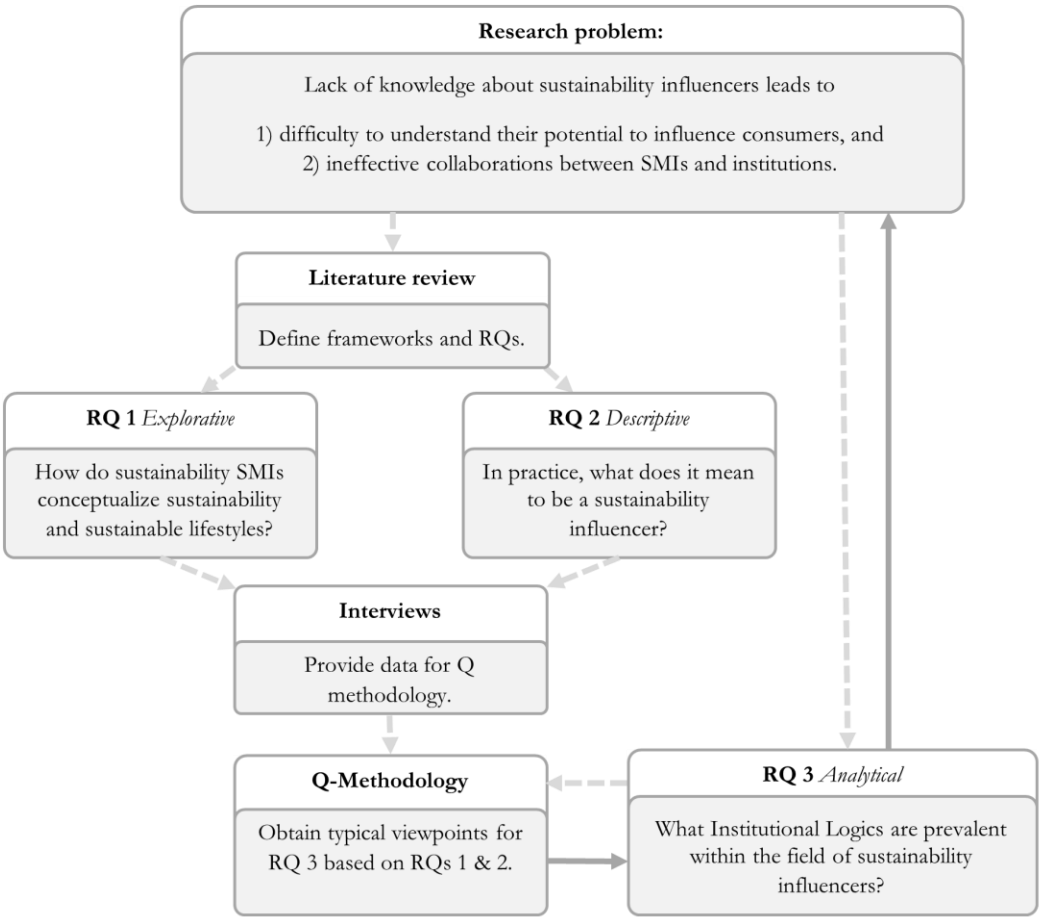

Figure 1-1 Representation of the research problem and questions.

Source: Own representation.

1.3 Scope and limitations

The focus of the thesis is on understanding sustainability influencers in Sweden. The choice to focus on Sweden was made partly due to the ease of access to influencers, and partly because municipalities already have a track-record of working with influencers.

The thesis deals exclusively with Instagram influencers due to the prominence of this social media platform, as well as its ease of access for research. Therefore, the empirical part of the thesis uses a subsample of sustainability influencers found through Instagram. The primary sources of information are semi-structured interviews with influencers, and Q sorts generated by a subsample of influencers.

Due to the lack of a standardized definition of sustainability influencers, mainly participants who self-define as sustainable were included in the thesis. Such self-defining descriptors included *hållbar* (sustainable), *hållbarhet* (sustainability), *miljö* (environmental), *miljövänlig* (environmentally friendly), *eko* (eco), and their derivative forms.

Due to the chosen snowball sampling method, it is possible that other pockets of sustainability influencers, of which the researcher is unaware of, were left out of the sample. Further, the use of semi-structured interviews as a qualitative method for data collection is inherently linked to some form of personal bias, which can influence the accuracy of information collected.

Further methodological limitations and reflections on the research process and the chosen methods, including on Q methodology, are discussed in sections 2.4.1 and 3.4, and in the Discussion (*Chapter 5.2.1*).

1.4 Ethical considerations

The main ethical consideration in this thesis lies in the input from participants (i.e., influencers), and the careful treatment of data obtained through interviews and the Q sorting exercices. Interviewees were contacted to participate in the research and were given information about the nature of the thesis, the implications of participation, and details related to anonymity and consent. In this manner, all interviewees were given the space to decide to participate freely and to refrain from answering any unwanted questions without external pressures. As part of the protocol, interviewees were asked to sign a consent form (*III. Appendix – Interview consent form*) highlighting their rights and the terms of use of collected information.

Due to the nature of the thesis, all data is treated anonymously. Collected data, including interview recordings and transcripts, contact information, and sensitive notes, has been stored and saved in a password-protected external hard-drive. To the best knowledge of the author, there is no reason to believe that participants will suffer any disadvantage or damage caused by participating in the research.

The research is independent of any funding by external organisations and no interested parties have influenced on the results and analysis of the thesis other than the author and her academic supervisor.

1.5 Audience

This thesis is to mainly benefit the scientific community by shining light on the rapidly evolving field of sustainability SMIs. It targets the academic community through its contribution to the debate around sustainability influencers in social media, which serves as a first step towards future research. This thesis may also be of use to institutions interested in, or already working with, sustainability influencers, both in the private sector and the public sector. Especially important may be the challenges and barriers faced by sustainability influencers, which may expose opportunities for win-win situations.

1.6 Disposition

The thesis begins with an introduction to the topic (*Chapter 1*) where the research problem and focus are described. This is followed by a literature review of the field (*Chapter 2*), where key concepts and definitions are explained. The analytical framworks used in the thesis are also presented in this chapter, including Institutional Logics and the Sustainability Framework (*Section 2.3*). The chapter also includes a section on Q methodology, its background, and critiques (*Section 2.4*).

Chapter 3 delves into the methodologies used in this thesis for data collection and analysis, and their corresponding strengths and limitations.

The results and analysis obtained through the interviews and Q methodology are presented in *Chaper 4*. These are then discussed in *Chapter 5*, which includes some reflections on the frameworks and methodologies used, as well as the generalizability of the results.

The thesis finishes with its main conclusions (*Chapter 6*), where recommendations for future research are addressed.

2 Literature review

The literature review is structured in four parts. The first focuses on the literature around the topics of sustainability and sustainable lifestyles. The second focuses on social media influencers, influencer marketing, and sustainability influencers. The third part delves into the analytical frameworks used to structure the research questions. Finally, the Q methodology is presented with information on its historical background and academic uses.

2.1 Sustainability

Sustainability is a very contested term encompassing different definitions, scopes and aims. The Merriam-Webster dictionary includes three main definitions for the term sustainable (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.):

"*capable of being sustained*"; "*of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged*"; and "*of or relating to a lifestyle involving the use of sustainable methods*"

The two main variables in these definitions are (i) time, with the implication of maintaining something over a long period of time, and (ii) use without harm, where reseources may be exploited so long they do not cause depletion or harm to others. These definitions, however, leave out any information as to what sustainability looks like, or how it translates into practice.

The concept of sustainability finds its roots in the environmental sciences, mostly associated with the concept of a system's ecological carrying capacity. In this sense, sustainability carries a positive connotation, where allowing renewable resources to renew themselves and preserve their long-term productivity enables their use within a limit beyond which collapse would occur (Beatley, 1995).

The consideration of time, both the long- and the short-term, is a fairly agreed upon variable in the scope of this concept. Despite this, sustainability is often used in business contexts where short-termism[1] is the rule (Siegrist et al., 2020; Wu & Pagell, 2011). Further, the descriptive "sustainable" is often used alongside other concepts, such as development or lifestyle, where an ambiguity in the conceptualization often leads to the pursue of private interests rather than the common good (Connelly, 2007; Luke, 2005).

The concept of sustainability was expanded in 1987 to include social and economic dimensions to the previous environmental dimension. This came about with the publication of *Our Common Future*, where sustainable development was newly defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987). Since then, much research and policies have used this definition to ground their work, granting it a now traditional multidisciplinary view. However, despite its multidisciplinarity, there is no consensus on the relative importance and the prioritization of each component (Whyte & Lamberton, 2020).

Recently, there has also been the emergence of "green-talk", which is often used synonymously to sustainability. People are encouraged to lead green lifestyles, consume green

[1] Short-termism may be defined as "decisions and outcomes that pursue a course of action that is best for the short term but suboptimal over the long run" (Laverty, 1996, p. 826).

products, support green projects, and travel green. The term "green", however, is even more ambiguous and lacking a conceptual definition than sustainability. Some authors point that whereas sustainability tends to include three layers (environment, social and economic) and is complex to achieve, green practices tend not to question the current economic system and corporate profit-making, making it mostly about the environment and thus easier to achieve (Yanarella et al., 2009).

In summary, sustainability serves as a flexible concept with interpretations that vary according to the context, granting it an elusive meaning (Garren & Brinkmann, 2018). This, in turn, has the potential to cause confusion, hinder constructive discussions and lead to lack of understanding between interest groups (Whyte & Lamberton, 2020).

2.1.1 Sustainable lifestyles

The concept of lifestyle refers to the "distinctive pattern of personal and social behaviour characteristic of an individual or a group" (Veal, 1993), where behaviours refer to relationships, consumption behaviours, leisure and work activities, etc. These array of behaviours and practices reflect the values, beliefs and attitudes of individuals (Gram-Hanssen, 2012). Sustainable lifestyles may thus be defined as the bundle of practices that are driven by attitudes related to sustainability (ibid.). They are inherently holistic, although often campaigns and influencers focus on only one or a couple of spheres related to sustainability (UNEP, 2016).

More specifically, sustainable lifestyles have been defined as living in a way where the negative impacts of human activities on the environment are effectively limited and mitigated as much as possible (Chwialkowska, 2019). Like the case of "sustainability", this leaves great scope for interpretations. Certain people may interpret it as choosing green and more sustainable alternatives[2], others may interpret it as refraining from behaviours like unnecessary consumption and traveling (Chwialkowska, 2019; Pagiaslis & Krontalis, 2014).

Definitions are essential tools for understanding the world around us, and they are key in the way we interpret observations and experiences (Enke & Borchers, 2019). A clearer understanding of what sustainability means, and how that translates into sustainable lifestyles for sustainability influencers, is of great importance considering their role in shaping followers' opinions and decision-making around sustainability.

2.2 The prominence of social media

Social media enables people to connect, communicate and share information with other users. This shared information is characterized by being user- or consumer-generated; that is, information is created by individual users who can freely decide what content they share and how they share it (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016). The platforms where these interactions occur are becoming increasingly important in people's everyday lives. Time spent on social media networks is increasing worldwide, reaching a daily average of 2 hours and 24 minutes in 2019 (We Are Social et al., 2020).

[2] This alternatives conundrum is contentious in itself: what is more sustainable, an organic cucumber wrapped in plastic, or a non-organic cucumber without packaging?

The potential of these platforms to influence users' behaviours has been receiving much attention in research. Social media has been reported to affect users' well-being and emotions (Kramer et al., 2014; Kross et al., 2013), users' political self-expresison and voting behaviour (Bond et al., 2012), internal migration decisions (Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2013), as well as being able to "profoundly affect how they [Generation Y users, those born after 1981] live and work" (Bolton et al., 2013).

Although much lower than the world average, time spent on social media in Sweden has also been increasing, amounting to a daily average of 1 hour and 49 minutes (We Are Social et al., 2019). But it is not just the time spent on these platforms that is growing, but also the number of people using them. Of 5,514 Swedish respondants, 89% used social media platforms in 2020 compared to a mere 53% in 2010 (Statista, 2020).

2.2.1 Social media influencers

One way in which users are influenced in these platforms is through so-called social media influencers (SMI). These are defined as "a new type of third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blog, tweets, and the use of other social media" (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). Importantly, SMIs fame is said to stem fully from their work in social media, in contrast to celebrities who use social media (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019). This fame is defined both in terms of reach, meaning the number of people they are able to reach through followers and secondary followers, and their impact, which refers to their capacity to influence their followers' behaviours (Hudders et al., 2020).

The strategic work of these entities is gaining momentum for their role in marketing, that is, influencer marketing, which is where most of the debate and research around SMIs has focused so far. Other sub-fields where the literature is growing include finding ways to define SMIs (Bakker, 2018; Sundermann & Raabe, 2019), identifying their roles and their power for changing consumers' behaviours (Chwialkowska, 2019), and their potential as marketing tools and in communication strategies (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019). However, when it comes to the topic of sustainability and its role in relation to SMIs, the published literature is extremely scarce.

2.2.1.1 Categorising SMIs

SMIs are commonly categorized based on their size, that is, on the number of people they are able to reach and whose behaviour they have the potential to influence. Some authors categorise them into five groups (celebrity and mega-influencers, macro-influencers, micro-influencers, and nano-influencers) (Campbell & Farrell, 2020), whilst others prefer four (mega-influencers, macro-influencers, micro-influencers and nano-influencers) (Ray Chaudhury et al., 2020). Regardless of the tiers used to classify them, there is no standardization on the number of followers determined by these categories.

Despite the lack of consensus in classification by number of followers, the size of the profile has been reported to greatly impact on the engagement rates of followers. Most sources agree that although smaller influencers reach less people overall, their engagement rates are higher (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020; Markerly Blog, n.d.), thus being able to create deeper ties with their followers (Yalcin et al., n.d.).

Some authors also distinguish SMIs based on the platform they use (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok), and on the level of influence they exert (Ray Chaudhury et al., 2020). Ogilvy Consulting has developed a 3-tiered system based on fame, engagement and audience,

where SMIs are classified within traditional mass awareness (including celebrities and media), digital influence and micro-influence (including bloggers and instagrammers), or consumer-driven brand advocacy (including brand fans and consumer advocates) (2017).

Regardless of which categorization frameworks are used, there is no current standardization for SMIs, let alone for sustainability influencers.

Other than the profiles' size effect on engagement rates and influencing power, there is growing research into the specific characteristics that drive an influencers' success in social media. This field of research has kicked off in the last four years[3] (Hudders et al., 2020), especially as a consequence of the economic drivers for understanding and enhancing their effectiveness in marketing. Matter-of-factly, marketers' spending on influencer campaigns were expected to reach 101 billion US dollars in 2020 (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020).

2.2.1.2 Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing refers to the posting of specific content by influencers on social media in exchange of a compensation to the influencer, which may come in the form of money or "in kind", such as free products, services, trips or experiences (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). This activity can range from more mainstream influencers, where private brand marketing is common, to more pro-social or sustainable lifestyle influencers, where socio-ecological marketing and campaigns may prevail.

Influencer marketing for social purposes has also been expanding steadily (Hudders et al., 2020). A field receiving much attention includes SMI's role on improving health conditions, for instance by improving vaccination rates among at-risk populations (Bonnevie et al., 2020). The role of social media in increasing acceptance for health campaigns has also been reported (Kostygina et al., 2020), although this has been contested as a double-edged sword achieving both positive and negative results (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). Another study area focusing on the positive use of influencers for public goods has been the project by Amnesty International working with micro-influencers to "educate Americans about family separation and detention" (Alampi, 2020).

Comparably, influencer marketing for sustainability objectives has so far received little attention. This may be perhaps due to the lack of consensus among SMIs on the meaning of sustainability (Feller, 2020), thus creating a space for disagreement. Indeed, sustainability has been proposed as a marketing strategy, whereby the term "sustainable" is used with the aim of outperforming conventional marketing (Yalcin et al., n.d.). Another reason may be the lack of economic incentives in sustainability influencers compared to more mainstream influencers business models (Chua, n.d.).

2.3 Analytical frameworks

This section covers the two main theoretical frameworks used to structure the thesis: Institutional Logics and the Sustainability Framework. Institutional Logics (IL) are used as a way of presenting the main findings from the thesis, mainly, what types of logics are prevalent

[3] See *I. Appendix – Literature review inventory of keywords* for a complete list of the search strings used and the oldest publications found.

within the field of sustainability influencers (see Figure 3-1 for a visual representation of the link between IL and the research). The Sustainability Framework is used to frame the interview questions related to sustainability and sustainable lifestyles. Both are described below.

2.3.1 Institutional Logics

The concept of Institutional logics was first introduced by Alford and Friedland in 1985 to portray the variances, often contradictory, in practices and beliefs within institutions in modern western societies (Alford & Friedland, 1985). Alford and Friedland's proposed logics, also known as orders, were introduced as a way of shaping individuals' engagement in political struggles as a result of variances in individuals' practices and beliefs. In its beginnings, society was considered to be represented by five core institutions: capitalist market, bureaucratic state, family, democracy, and religion (Friedland & Alford, 1991), each of which has its own core logic constraining and encouraging the ways and the aims behind individuals' behaviours (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). In other words, each logic is characterized by socially constructed rules, norms and beliefs that shape "field membership, role identities, and patterns of appropriate behaviour" (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011).

The concept of IL has developed to the idea that every institutional order (or societal sector), regardless of its dimension, shares a central logic, which provides organizing principles, and a sense of motive and identity to actors (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). However, multiple competing logics can also coexist within the same societal sector when key actors are sources of opposition and of resistance to opposing values (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007).

Since its beginnings, IL has been subject to differing interpretations; however, all approaches share a core theory. Mainly, to be able to understand individual and organizational behaviours, they require a social and institutional context, which "regularizes behaviour and provides opportunity for agency and change" (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). In order to identify, describe, and measure prevalent logics, research utilizes a process known as *capturing* logics (Reay & Jones, 2016). To capture these, researchers focus on sets of interrelated categories that together create an image of the individual. Reay and Jones (2016) have identified three ways in which logics can be captured: pattern deducing, pattern matching, and pattern inducing.

Pattern deducing refers to research that uses reason to identify patterns and arrive at conclusions about the logics in use. On the other hand, pattern matching refers to the practice by which researchers describe and evaluate logics based on the comparison between raw data and "ideal types". Lastly, the pattern inducing approach follows an interpretivist epistemology, where meaning is understood to be "tightly intertwined with context, and the only way [to] understand a particular social or cultural phenomenon is to look at it from the 'inside'" (Myers, 2013).

Due to the nature of this thesis, the pattern inducing methodology is used. An example of previous research utilizing this approach includes the research by Reay and Hinings (2005), who developed a theoretical model to understand competing institutional logics in public health care in Alberta, Canada. Qualitative data was obtained from official documents, press-news releases, and transcribed legislative debates. Utilizing a bottom-up approach, key categories were extracted through qualitative data analysis, and results were presented in tables with representative statements side by side their description of logics (Reay & Hinings, 2005). Another recent example is that by Smets et al. (2012), who developed a model for changing institutional logics within a global law firm. Unlike Reay and Hinings, Smets et al. used not

only archival materials, but also interviews and observations. Representative statements were also presented in tables, which served as an effective tool to convince readers on the reliability of their results (Reay & Jones, 2016).

Sustainability is also a growing concept within IL, and multiple researchers are focusing on developing a "logic of sustainability" that focuses on the well-being of workers, communities, and the environment (Haffar & Searcy, 2019; Mahmood & Uddin, 2020; Silva & Figueiredo, 2017). Sustainability concerns and profitability are often regarded as intrinsically intertwined concepts (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011). Therefore, how these are balanced in the field of sustainability influencers is an important aspect to consider when defining the prevalent logics within the field. Further, competing understandings on aspects of sustainability, the role of sustainability influencers, and the operationalization of sustainability values are all questions that can aid in capturing these logics.

2.3.1.1 The link between IL and SMI

IL at the level of individuals can help to understand how individuals behave and make decisions within organisations and within society in general, which are also influenced by other logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991). In this way, understanding individuals' values and assumptions can guide the understanding of peoples' everyday decisions due to their embeddedness in individuals' conceptualizations of 'who we are' (Harries, 2012).

This thesis aims to identify and capture the multiple competing logics within the social order of sustainability influencers in Sweden, capturing how each of these leads to different rationalities and actions.

There is increasing research on the link between influencers and behaviour change, how this influence occurs and their capacity for changing behaviours (Hudders et al., 2020). Making this research focus even more relevant, is the argument that a few of the "right people" can have profound effects on the spread of new patterns of behaviour (Zorell, 2020). This can be visualised as key people working as seeds in spreading new sustainability behaviours within social groups. SMIs can work as these seeds in spreading or changing established logics around sustainability. However, according to Centola, this alone is not enough to spread new behaviours, and rather, other forms of reinforcement from other people within the same institution are necessary (2018). Social media, a network where individuals with similar and competing messages cohabit, may be the perfect niche for these behavioural changes to occur.

2.3.2 The Sustainability Framework

The Sustainability Framework was recently proposed by Whyte and Lamberton (2020) as a way of developing conceptualizations for sustainability. It was created using mainly the current literature and conceptualizations in business, management, and education, which works well for the field of SMIs due to the parallelisms that can be drawn between SMIs, business and education. Due to the newness of the framework, no other research has used it yet for structuring sustainability conceptualizations in practice.

To the knowledge of the author, there is no other such framework for developing conceptualizations of sustainability. Further, the framework works at a macro-level, which is well suited to the present thesis by providing enough flexibility to adjust to the intricacies of the thesis. Here, the framework is used as a tool for structuring the concourse around sustainability and sustainable lifestyles.

The framework consists of a three-layered system presented on Figure 2-1. It distinguishes between three distinct layers that give meaning to the concept of sustainability, including the core objectives, the worldviews, and actions.

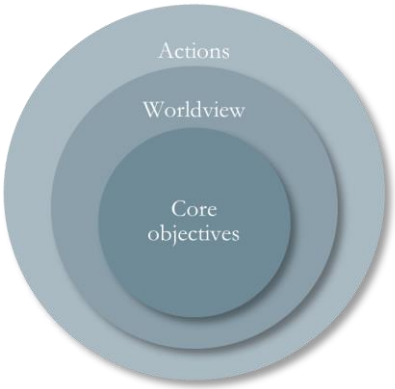

Figure 2-1 The Sustainability Framework.

Source: Own depiction of the Sustainability Framework (Whyte & Lamberton, 2020).

The Sustainability Framework was developed because of the multitude of distinct conceptualizations of sustainability. This was done with the aim of providing a reliable mechanism for developing context-specific definitions of sustainability. In this way, the framework consists of three layers with core objectives at the center, then worldviews, and finally actions. Each of these layers is interconnected with each other, meaning that aspects of each layer affect aspects of the other two. For this thesis, the focus of each layer serves as a guide for developing the questions in the interviews.

The core objectives refer to the main objectives that are to be achieved through sustainability. In other words, here we find the answers to the questions of *what* should be sustained, and for *how long*.

Whyte and Lamberton divide the second layer, i.e., worldviews, in three categories based on the respondent's knowledge, culture, views on social roles, life experiences, and ethical and philosophical values. These categories are anthropocentrism, ecocentrism and sustaincentrism[4]. For the present thesis, other questions are used to define SMI's worldviews, and they do not necessarily align to one of the three proposed worldviews.

The main difference of the third layer (actions) is that unlike the first two, which focus predominantly on theoretical aspects, this one focuses on the practical aspects of sustainability. In this layer, matters of education, policy and practice come into play.

In summary, the Sustainability Framework is adapted here to guide the interview questions necessary to capture how sustainability influencers in Sweden define or understand sustainability.

[4] Anthropocentrism (also referred to as technocentrism) holds continued growth and development at the core of sustainability. Ecocentrism holds natural systems at its core, regardless of humans. Sustaincentrism holds the preservation of nature *for the benefit of humans* at its core.

2.4 Q-methodology

This section includes an overview of the chosen methodology for extracting the main Institutional Logics in the field of sustainability influencers.

Q-methodology is a form of mixed-methods approach, which uses qualitative and quantitative methods to measure social perspectives around a specific topic, or concourse, in a replicable manner (Sneegas et al., 2021). Due to the nature of its working, Q has been described as a "qualiquantilogical" method, something that has led to confusion amongst researchers (Dziopa & Ahern, 2011).

However, Q-methodology is an established methodology that allows to gather the range of opinions surrounding a specific discourse and provides a way of comparing these (Steven R Brown, 1993). That is, this methodology allows to measure human subjectivity in a reliable scientific manner that combines qualitative and quantitative methods (Webler et al., 2009). One of the main strengths of this methodology is the minimization of research-bias by having respondents frame the issue at hand, rather than the researcher doing this (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

The Q method can be divided into four distinct phases: the creation of a Q-set, administering the Q-sorts, factor analysis of the data, and interpretation of the results (Corr, 2001). A graphic representation of the methodology is shown in Figure 2-2.

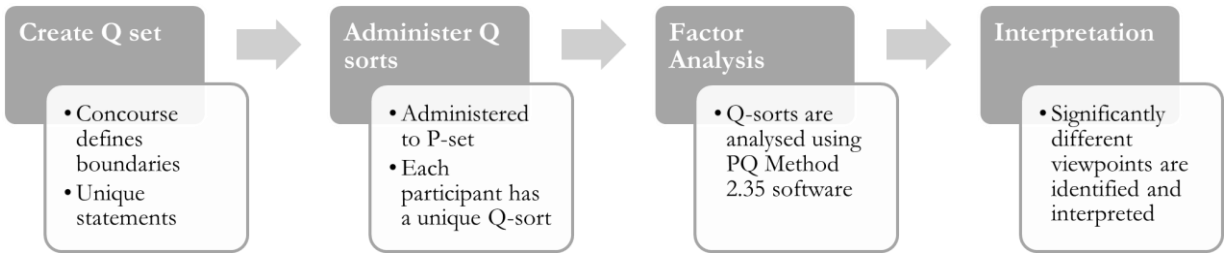

Figure 2-2 Step by step sequence used in Q-methodology.

Source: Own depiction after (Corr, 2001).

In short, after a topic of study is identified (i.e., the concourse), data is collected to gather the array of perspectives within that topic. Data may come from interviews, existing print media (e.g., public records and newspapers), videos, or any other source of opinions (Webler et al., 2009). A Q-set is then created being made up of unique statements that cover the extent of opinions within the topic. These are subsequently administered to a set of participants (i.e, the P-set), whose viewpoints we are interested in. Each participant sorts these statements from most agree with to most disagree with in a quasi-normal distribution (see example on Figure *3-3*), making up their unique Q-sort (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Following the collection of all Q-sorts, factor analysis is conducted to identify the typical social perspectives within the concourse (typically amounting to 2-5 unique viewpoints) (Webler et al., 2009). Lastly, the unique viewpoints identified are interpreted based on the statements that distinguish each perspective (i.e., the statements weighed most strongly, for example, at very strongly disagree with [weight -4] for one perspective vs. slightly agree with [weight +1] for another perspective) (Steven R Brown, 1993).

2.4.1 Background

Q method has been used widely to represent competing policy discourses (Focht, 2002; Kroesen & Bröer, 2009; Zeemering, 2009), perceptions on drug usage (Huang et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2014), perceptions around healthcare settings (Kenward, 2021), and more recently, perceptions on COVID-19 related matters (S. Lee et al., 2021; Ramlo, 2021). The use of Q for capturing viewpoints amongst stakeholders in the fields of sustainability and environmental conservation has also been prominent (see *I. Appendix – Literature review inventory of keywords*).

The use of Q has been criticized and praised on several aspects. Firstly, there has been a lot of debate on the appropriate number of participants that should make up the P-set. Opinions include whether the number of participants should always be greater than the number of statements, whether this choice should follow an R approach (such as Thompson *et al.*'s formula [number of statements/2)-1] (1983)), or whether a 1:1 ratio of participants to statements should be sought (Dziopa & Ahern, 2011). The aim of Q methodology, however, is not to produce generalizable data, and large P-sets are therefore not a requirement for robust analysis (S.R. Brown, 1980). Indeed, some authors believe that larger P-sets actually draw away from Q studies (Sneegas et al., 2021). In a similar line, in the highly cited book by Watts and Stenner[5], they recommend P-sets including fewer participants than Q-set items (2012).

The number of statements making up the Q-set has also received much attention. Some authors posit that a reliable Q-set should contain between 10 and 100 statements (Rogers, 1995), others propose a range between 60 and 140 (Kerlinger, 1977), and others believe this number should fall between 20 and 60 (Donner, 2001). Most importantly, the chosen statements, regardless of the final number, should ensure a representative coverage of the concourse (Sneegas et al., 2021).

Other critiques relate to the "forced" quasi-normal distribution of statements, where participants are forced to discriminate between statements that they otherwise may not have done (Dziopa & Ahern, 2011). However, in contrast to Likert scales where this obstacle does not apply, Q allows participants to express their level of agreement and disagreement to statements in relation to all the other statements (Corr, 2001). That is, Q allows to place specific statements within a context of viewpoints.

A further critique is that due to the non-randomness of the P-set, results cannot be generalized to whole populations, and it is difficult, if even possible, for the researcher to assure that all viewpoints have been covered (Dziopa & Ahern, 2011). Furthermore, even when Q captures all the unique viewpoints, it does not give information about the number of people sharing each of the identified viewpoints. That is, Q does not provide information about the share of the population aligning to each (Corr, 2001).

Finally, despite the many critiques that Q has received, it is a method that allows to obtain qualitative data but goes beyond other qualitative methods by allowing for a quantifiable analysis of that data (Corr, 2001).

[5] With 1,253 citations according to Google Scholar.

3 Methodology

This chapter presents the research design, the chosen methods for data collection and data analysis, the reasoning behind the choice of methods, and their limitations. This is with the purpose of ensuring the replicability of the thesis, a key characteristic that enhances reliability (Walliman, 2006).

3.1 Research design

Due to the nature of this thesis, the research is based on the paradigm of Critical Realism, which holds that our understanding of the world is constructed through our perspectives and experiences (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). In this understanding, the production of knowledge is never neutral (Hirtle, 1996), and follows the ontology that multiple truths exist (Reay & Jones, 2016). In Institutional Logics several logics can coexist (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007), and Q methodology can aid in capturing those multiple truths.

Figure 3-1 shows a representation of the research design applied here, where the research problem led to a qualitative analysis of the available literature, which allowed for the definition of specific research questions and frameworks through which to study them.

The interviews with the sustainability influencers were structured according to research questions 1 and 2. To answer RQ1, specific interview questions were developed as per the Sustainability Framework presented in the literature review, and they conformed Section 1 in the Interview guide (see *II. Appendix – Interview guide*). To answer RQ2, interview questions were divided into two sections: Section 2 (defining sustainability influencers) and Section 3 (their self-perceptions and experiences as sustainability influencers) in the Interview guide (see the *II. Appendix – Interview guide*).

Following the interviews, a qualitative content analysis was conducted to extract statements and categories that would structure the Q methodology.

Finally, after conducting the Q method, distinct viewpoints, or logics, prevalent in the field of sustainability influencers were captured. These logics expand the understanding of sustainability influencers, their values, beliefs, communication strategies, and perceived role of collaborations, amongst others.

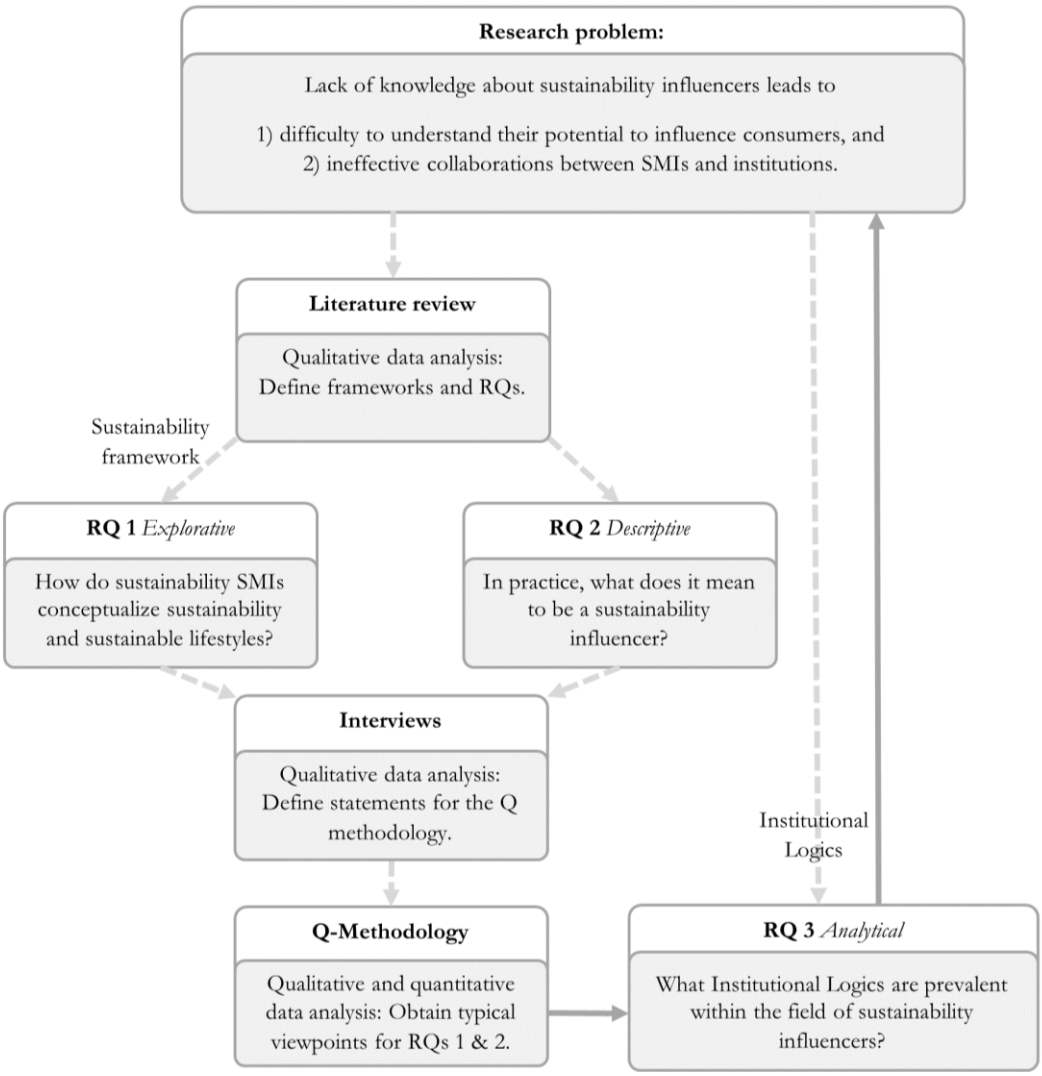

Figure 3-1 Representation of the research design and the link of each methodology to the research questions.

Source: Own representation.

3.1.1 Selection of media: Instagram

Instagram was chosen as the social media platform from which to study sustainability influencers in Sweden for three main reasons. Firstly, it prevails as one of the fastest growing platforms in social media with over 330 million active users every month globally (Modi & Zhao, 2020). In Sweden, based on a survey of 5,514 participants, the number of Instagram users grew from 16% in 2013 to 71% in 2020 (Statista, 2020). Further along this line, 78% of those Instagram users in 2020 used the platform every day.

Secondly, Instagram is becoming increasingly important among the younger generations (especially teenagers) and it provides a good range of content through the mixed use of photographs, video and text (Correia et al., 2016). In contrast to Twitter, for example, which is usually used for understanding the public opinion or discourse around a specific event, Instagram allows to understand in greater depth users' self-presentation and expression, as well as online communities, and users' daily lives shared through images (Laestadius, 2016).

In a review from 2016 on the use of Instagram in academic research, the author made a remark on the limited research that had so far used Instagram as a source of data (Laestadius, 2016). A search on Scopus shows that studies published until 2016 using the keyword *Instagram* amounted to 588 studies, whereas those published after 2016 amount to 3,595 (see *I. Appendix – Literature review inventory of keywords*). Regardless of the way Instagram relates to those studies, it is evident that its prevalence in research is growing, therefore making it a relevant platform to use here.

3.1.2 Defining the population

A preliminary scan of the field was conducted on Instagram using a snowball sampling technique. To do this, a private account was created (@mespom_gara), to find accounts and contact influencers. For the snowball sampling, the first node of the network was the Swedish account Sustainable Influencers (@sustainableinfluencers), along with the main accounts associated with it. Subsequent user-generated and Instagram-generated recommendations[6] were added to the database. A further search was conducted using the terms *hållbar* (sustainable), *hållbarhet* (sustainability), *miljö* (environmental), *miljövänlig* (environmentally friendly), and *eko* (eco) in the search tab on Instagram, and users using these terms were also added to the database.

Only non-private accounts based in Sweden and with a minimum of 1,000 followers were included in this initial compilation. No upper limit was set to the number of followers. The choice of Swedish sustainability influencers was based on 1) the expressed need for this type of research by Swedish municipalities[7], and 2) the ease of access to these influencers.

For the preliminary scan, data collected included number of followers and followees[8], domains of sustainability covered, non-sustainability-related topics covered, the type of content shared (selfies, videos, challenges, etc.), and the language used (Swedish, English or both).

Categories of influencers included in this thesis are nano-influencers (< 10k followers) and micro-influencers (10k to 100k followers), as per the categorisation by Campbell and Farrell (2020). The choice of nano- and micro-influencers was based on two factors: firstly, the ease of access to smaller accounts versus larger ones, and secondly, the research pointing that smaller accounts are better able to influence users compared to larger accounts.

Accounts were added to a database until a saturation point was reached (at 120 accounts). Saturation was considered when all Instagram-generated and user-generated recommendations were accounts that had already been recorded; that is, no new accounts were being suggested.

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[6] Instagram-generated recommendations refer to the tab "Accounts You May Like", where personalized recommendations are given based on interactions and accounts already followed by the user (Facebook, n.d.). User-generated recommendations refer to accounts suggested by influencers in their account (e.g., "follow *X* account, they have very interesting sustainability-related content").

[7] Expressed by Malmö municipality, who is a partner in Mistra Sustainable Consumption research program https://www.sustainableconsumption.se/en/start-eng/.

[8] Followees refers to the number of people the influencers themselves follow, a number usually much lower than their followers.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Literature review

To gain a preliminary view of the field, keywords including social media influencers, sustainability influencers, environmental influencers, eco-influencers and influencer marketing[9] were used in the search engines Scopus and Google Scholar. No publication time boundaries were set due to the limited material available.

For the specific chapters, further searches were conducted using terms relevant to the section. The scope of the review, however, may be limited by the keywords chosen for search (see *I. Appendix – Literature review inventory of keywords* for an inventory of keywords used).

Most of the literature used in the thesis comes from academic sources found on Scopus. Google Scholar was used as a supplementary tool. From every search, the titles of the studies were scanned, and where applicable, abstracts were skimmed. Papers deemed relevant were downloaded and skimmed, and important sections were read in depth. Significant quotes, details and conclusions were collected in synthesis matrices.

Due to the lack of data on sustainability influencers, the review was complemented with information from academic but non-peer-reviewed literature, such as master theses, and grey literature, such as blogs and consultancies. This inclusion of various sources allows to cover a wide range of disciplinary viewpoints; from peer-reviewed research to opinion articles to marketing consultancies.

3.2.2 Interviews

For the choice of interviewees, judgmental sampling (also known as purposive sampling) was used. Judgmental sampling is used as a method for selecting a set of cases of a particular type (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). In the present thesis, the aim was to include a sample as varied as possible, based on the following characteristics: topics covered by the accounts (both related and non-related to sustainability), number of followers, profile of the influencer (gender, age, and whether they have children), and collaborations (with brands, with NGOs, and or other SMIs). Based on these variables, the author made a judgement as to which influencers would be most appropriate to interview.

The sample was also affected by the response rate of participants; of 74 participants contacted, 31 replied, of which only 13 agreed to be interviewed. Participants were asked to read and sign a consent form prior to participation, found in *III. Appendix – Interview consent form*.

12 interviews were conducted over Zoom, lasting between 33 and 67 minutes and following a semi-structured format. One of the interviews included two interviewees, since they lead the account together, totaling 13 verbal datasets. One interview was conducted over email, in written form, due to a language barrier between the researcher and the respondent. The interview questionnaire can be found in *II. Appendix – Interview guide*.

The interviews were structured in three sections, based on the gaps identified in the literature review. Section 1 focused on questions related to sustainability (e.g., what does sustainability mean to you?). Section 2 focused on questions related to the role of sustainability influencers

[9] A complete inventory of the keywords used can be found in *I. Appendix – Literature review inventory of keywords*.

in driving change, and the community of SMIs (e.g., what is the most important objective of a sustainability influencer?). Finally, section 3 focused on the experiences of being a sustainability influencer, including challenges and motivations (e.g., what are the main challenges you face as a sustainability influencer?).

Questions from all sections relating to sustainability were structured using the Sustainability Framework, which includes core objectives, worldviews, and actions. Special attention was given to questions revealing individual differences in scale (from individual to global), in change processes (from elimininating the current system and creating a new one, to transforming the current system), in time (intergenerational aspects) and in spatial context (intragenerational aspects) (Whyte & Lamberton, 2020).

3.2.3 Q-methodology

To answer RQ3, Q methodology was used to capture the typical logics found within a subset of sustainability influencers in Sweden. 14 datasets were collected through semi-structured interviews, after which a qualitative content analysis was conducted with the aid of NVivo 12 software to extract relevant data. Statements corresponding to a set of relevant categories were chosen to capture the competing logics most effectively. These statements made up a unique Q-set based on the data collected from interviews.

3.2.3.1 Defining the concourse

A concourse refers to the communication and opinions that surround any topic within the daily life (Steven R Brown, 1993). In other words, it refers to the things that people have to say about a specific topic. The concourse here includes the array of beliefs, values and opinions, and the ways of operationalizing those, with relation to sustainability as seen by sustainability influencers. Within the concourse, Q allows to identify the prevalent competing logics within the field (as per IL presented in the literature review).

In IL, categories are used to compare logics in a structured way (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Hence, categories were also chosen in this thesis to structure the concourse and more effectively capture the prevalent logics within the field. These categories were determined using two methods (see Figure 3-2):

1) A review of similar studies was conducted, and re-occurring categories were noted for consideration.

2) Due to the qualitative nature of the thesis, which aims to follow a bottom-up, inductive approach, data from the interviews was analysed and categories were extracted.

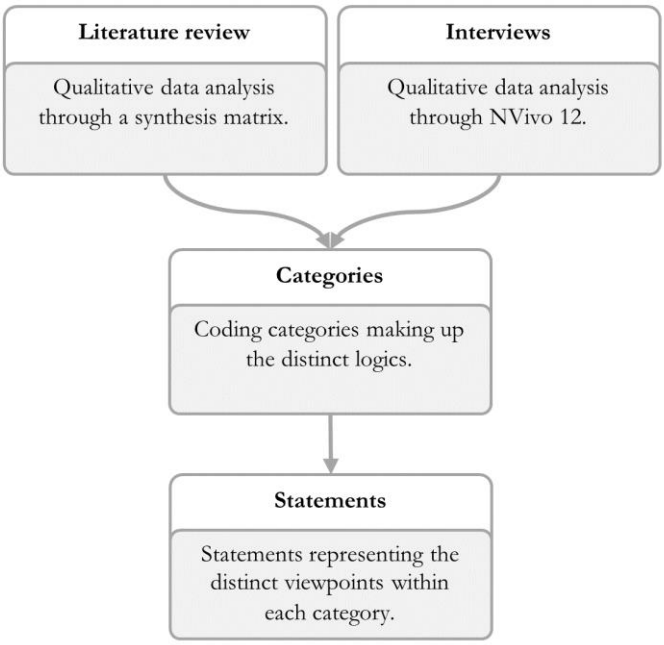

Figure 3-2 Methods used for the creation of statements representing the Q-set, to be sorted by participants into unique Q-sorts.

Source: Own representation.

The qualitative analysis of the literature and the interviews resulted in 13 final categories, which are presented in Table 3-1. For a detailed list of the statements within each category, and the associated interview quotes from which the statements were derived, see *IV. Appendix – Final Q set.*

Table 3-1 Coding categories and the sources

Coding categories (IL)	Source
Self-perception	Interviews & literature (Rao et al., 2003; Smets et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)
Communication strategy	Interviews & literature (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011; Haffar & Searcy, 2019; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)
Challenges	Interviews & literature (Haffar & Searcy, 2019)
The role of collaborations	Interviews
Perception of community of sustainability influencers	Mainly interviews, but similar categories in (Rao et al., 2003; Smets et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)
Perception of sustainability	Interviews & literature (Reay & Hinings, 2005)
The three pillars of sustainability	Interviews
Main problems of sustainability & meaningful actions	Interviews & literature (Reay & Hinings, 2005)
Perceptions of responsibility	Interviews & literature (Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Haffar & Searcy, 2019; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)
The role of influencers	Interviews & (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011; Haffar & Searcy, 2019; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)
Reliable sources of knowledge	Interviews & literature (Goodrick & Reay, 2011;

	Haffar & Searcy, 2019; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)
The role of money	Interviews
Motivation to start account	Interviews & literature (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011; Haffar & Searcy, 2019; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008)

Source: Own representation.

3.2.3.2 Developing the Q set

Quotes from the interviews representing unique viewpoints and opinions were extracted and assigned to one of the final 13 categories identified above. These quotes organised by category served as the basis for developing the final 42 statements. The choice of statements was partly based on viewpoints where there was most discrepancy between participants in each of the categories. For a list of the final statements and the quotes from which they were developed, see *IV. Appendix – Final Q set.*

3.2.3.3 Selecting the P set

The P-set consisted of 19 participants in Sweden who identify themselves as sustainability influencers on the social media platform of Instagram[10]. Due to the low response rate, as many influencers as possible were contacted through *Direct Messages* (DMs). DMs were mainly sent as responses to *stories* to avoid the messages being sent to "message requests" rather than the influencers' main inboxes. When possible, influencers were contacted by email instead. The final P-set includes a range of influencers focusing on different sustainability topics, representing different demographic groups, and having a diverse range of account-size (from nano-accounts to micro-accounts). Of the 19 participants, eight had been part of the initial interviews, and the remaining 11 only took part in the Q sorting exercise.

Although 19 participants may seem a small number, it is enough to provide statististical significance to the thesis. In fact, Barry and Proops state that as few as 12 participants can be enough to generate statistically meaningful results in Q methodology (1999).

3.2.3.4 Q sorting

Participants were asked to rank the 42 statements in a score sheet like the one shown on Figure *3-3*. Participants were given clear instructions to fill each statement only once, and to insert no more than one statement per box. The Q sorting exercise was done through Q-sorTouch (Pruneddu, 2016), where participants received a link where they organized the 42 statements and submitted their unique responses. In this software, statements appear one by one in a randomized order, and participants assign them to one of the categories from Figure *3-3*. At the end of the sorting, the software makes participants correct any errors (e.g., ensuring each category has the correct number of statements), and gives participants the opportunity to make any final changes to their sorting.

[10] Accounts considered to define themselves as sustainability influencers included any account in Sweden sharing content with the following terms: sustainable (*hållbar*), downshifting, activism, farming (*odling*), lokal, eco (*eko*), environment (*miljö*), no-buying (*köpstopp*), climate (*klimat*). Terms derived form these terms, such as sustainability or eco-friendly, and synonym terms, such as eco-gardening (*ekostädning*) and green consumption, were also considered in the study.

At the end of the Q-sorting exercise, participants were given the chance to share the reasoning behind their "most strongly" choices (most strongly agree with, +4, and most strongly disagree with, -4). Ten participants gave written feedback, yielding a total of 20 comments (see *V. Appendix – Participants' Q-sort comments*). The remaining nine participants did not leave any feedback or comments.

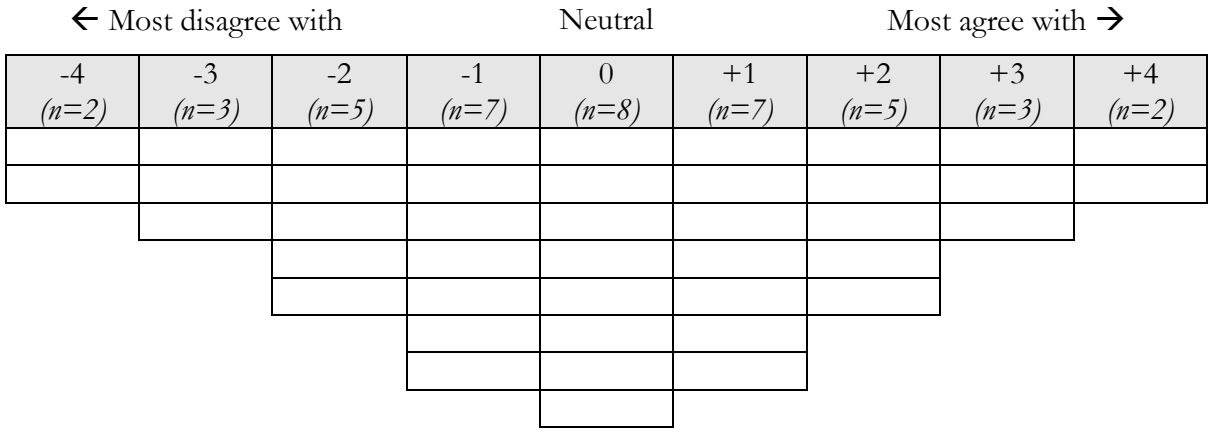

Figure 3-3 Score sheet for the Q sorting of 42 statements.

Source: Own representation.

3.3 Data analysis and interpretation

3.3.1 Literature review

The literature was analysed and synthesised using synthesis matrices, which allow to identify commonalities between sources and key recurring themes. For the initial literature review on SMIs, a section was included to demarcate whether the concepts "sustainab*(ility/ble)", "environment" or "green" were mentioned, and if so, in what context. Mainly, for the initial part of the review the following concepts were explored: SMIs, sustainability influencers, influencer marketing, and sustainable lifestyles.

Equivalent processes with synthesis matrices were followed for reviewing the literature on sustainability conceptualizations, Institutional Logics, and Q methodology.

The result of the initial literature review was the identification of a set of gaps in the literature of sustainability influencers, which allowed for the creation of interview questions to address the identified gaps. Further, it also resulted in the final choices of theoretical frameworks and appropriate methodologies.

3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews were fully transcribed using Trint (*Trint*, 2014), and analysed using NVivo 12 (*NVivo*, 2018), which allows for the extraction of concepts and themes. The qualitative content analysis followed a partly deductive and partly inductive approach. In the deductive approach, predefined categories (i.e., codes) were obtained from the IL literature to guide the researcher in the creation of codes. However, the final choice of codes followed an inductive

approach, where codes are created as the researcher goes along analysing the data. The final list of codes included categories similar to those identified in the literature, and codes obtained from the interviews (see Table 3-1).

The analysis to answer research question 1, that is, the conceptualization of sustainability and sustainable lifestyles, interviewees answers were coded according to the Sustainability Framework. This led to the identification of two main conceptualizations: inner-focused sustainability and outer-focused sustainability, which are presented in Chapter 4.

For research question 2, interview questions developed to break down what is means, in practice, to be a sustainability influencer derived into four main categories of analysis. These included motivations for becoming a sustainability influencer, the challenges and barriers associated with having such an account, the conflicts present in the community of sustainability influencers, and lastly, the focus of the influencers and their perceived role.

To answer research question 3, statements representative of each category (see Table 3-1) were collected and included in the Q-set, as per Section 3.2.3.2 *Developing the Q set*.

3.3.3 Q methodology

The last parts of the Q method involve analysing the Q-sorts through factor analysis and rotation, and ultimately, interpreting the final factor solutions. A background to these processes is given below.

3.3.3.1 Factor analysis and rotation

Factors refer to viewpoints or perspectives, and the extraction of factors can be understood as the practice of capturing viewpoints prevalent within a population or P-set (Webler et al., 2009). Each of these factors is characterized by a unique arrangement of the Q statements, or in other words, a unique Q-sort.

In a sample of 10 Q-sorts (coming from a P-set of 10 participants), one might choose to have a 10-factor solution. Each of those factors would represent each of the participant's Q-sort, thus making it an absurd factor solution by missing the point of the Q method. The researcher's aim is to find Q-sorts that are highly correlated between each other but different from the rest of the Q-sorts (Steven R Brown, 1993), and in this way choosing a small set of factors, e.g. two or three, that are representative of the population. The degree of similarity between participants' Q-sorts and a factor solution is represented by *factor loadings* (Webler et al., 2009). Participants with a high factor loading for one of the perspectives or viewpoints define that perspective.

To create a factor solution, researchers use factor analysis[11] followed by a factor "rotation" (Akhtar-Danesh, 2017). Although the rotation of factors changes their meanings, it provides a way of making them more meaningful (Webler et al., 2009). In its beginnings, the main way of analysing the correlations across participants was through centroid factor extraction, with data being rotated by hand (Ramlo, 2016). However, the development of Principal Components Analysis (PCA) and *Varimax* rotation, a computer-automated rotation, has led to increased

[11] Factor analysis involves the organisation of data into correlation matrices and results in the grouping of similar items (or viewpoints), allowing for the reduction of data (Ramlo, 2016). This reduction of data allows researchers to analyse and interpret data in a more effective way without losing any significant amount of information (Ramlo, 2016).

computing power, increased mathematical precision, and the minimization of judgement (Ramlo, 2016). The result of Varimax rotation is a factor solution that "maximizes the amount of variance explained on as few factors as possible" (Webler et al., 2009).

PCA and Varimax rotation have become the main strategies used in Q research. Therefore, in this thesis, it was deemed most appropriate to use PCA for extracting the most exact factor solution possible. For the rotation of factors, Varimax was used, as it is a most accepted strategy for determining the largest differences between factors.

How to know whether the factor solution is good?

Although there is no mathematical answer to whether the factor solution is good or not, there is some statistical guidance to guide the researcher (Webler et al., 2009). Commonly used criteria for factor extraction are shown in Table 3-2. However, the number and type of criteria used varies widely across studies (Sneegas et al., 2021). For the present thesis, all criteria mentioned in Table 3-2 were considered.

Table 3-2 Criteria commonly used in factor extraction.

Criteria
Humphrey's Rule I: Each factor has at least 2 significant loadings.
Humphrey's Rule II: Cross product of 2 highest loadings exceeds 2× the standard error.
Kaiser-Guttman criterion: Eigenvalue > 1.
Scree plot analysis: Eigenvalues plotted on line graph to identify where slope changes, indicating number of factors.
Subjective meaning: Perspective encompassed by factor is meaningful and theoretically important.
Variance: Solution counts for over 50% of total variance; each factor accounts for at least 10% of total variance.

Source: Own depiction after (Sneegas et al., 2021).

3.3.3.2 PCA and Varimax rotation

In this thesis, 20 Q-sorts were collected and 19 were analysed using PQ Method 2.35 software (Schmolck, 2014). Data from one participant was not included in the analysis because they did not fully complete the Q-sorting exercise[12].

PCA for factor analysis was conducted on the correlation matrix of the Q-sorts and was followed with a Varimax rotation to establish specific patterns of similarity between opinions. This Q analysis gave rise to a set of "factor arrays", which represented an idealised sort, corresponding to a hypothetical respondent giving a loading of 1 (i.e. being in perfect agreement) with that particular factor (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). Hence, individuals were represented by a specific factor when their Q-sort was most similar to that factor's ideal Q-sort and most dissimilar to the other factors' ideal sorts.

Respondent's loadings were statistically significant assuming an alpha level of 0.01, and only when they were high enough to accept a relationship between the respondent's sort and the

[12] This participant refused to sort the statements in the quasi-normal distribution asked by Q. Instead, they sorted their statements according to their own distribution (most strongly disagree with: 0, **strongly disagree with: 1**, **disagree with: 23**, slightly disagree with: 0, **neutral: 3**, **slightly agree with: 1**, **agree with: 13**, **strongly agree with: 1**, most strongly agree with: 0)

ideal factor. According to Brown (1980), the significance of factor loadings at the $P < 0.01$ level can be calculated using the following formula:

$$2.58 \times \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{N}}\right)$$

where *N* equals the total number of statements in the Q-set.

In this thesis, a significant factor loading was considered to be equal to or greater than $2.58 \times \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{42}}\right) = \pm 0.40$. In the initial PCA, the program returned seven factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, hence, a 7-factor solution was used (*Kaiser-Guttman criterion*, see Table 3-2). These seven factors were Varimax rotated and flagged for factor definition using the 'pre-flagging' tool in the PQ Method 2.35 software. Hereonwards, factor reductions were manually performed until all factors satisfied the assumptions considered here, that is:

1) *Humphrey's Rule I*: Each factor must be defined by at least two respondents that load significantly upon it (Stephenson, 1967). Each Q-sort must load significantly upon one factor alone to be considered a *pure loading* (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 81). See Table VI-1 for details.

2) *Humphrey's Rule II*: The product of the two highest loadings exceed 2× the standard error (Fruchter, 1954). Although Humphrey's Rule II was also considered, only three of the four factors adhered to this criterion (see Table 3-3). However, due to the small difference (0.092) and the adherence to all other criteria, a four-factor solution was accepted.

3) *Kaiser-Guttman criterion*: The final factor solution does not exceed the number of factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00 (four-factor solution did not exceed the seven factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00).

4) *Variance*: The factor solution accounts for over 50% of the total variance, and each factor accounts for at least 10% of the total variance (Sneegas et al., 2021). See Table VI-1 for details.

5) *Subjective meaning*: The perspective encompassed by the factor is meaningful (Sneegas et al., 2021).

In this manner, the PQ Method's pre-flagging suggestions were analysed and accepted for a 4-factor solution. These final factors represent "ideal Q-sorts" that allow to study patterns within and across individuals (Frantzi et al., 2009).

Table 3-3 Calculation of Humphrey's Rule II. Values complying with the criterion are demarcated with an (*).

	Factors			
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
Standard error (SE)	0.200	0.218	0.243	0.277
2x SE	0.400	0.436	0.486	0.554
Cross product of the two highest loadings	0.511*****	0.529*****	0.538*****	0.462

Source: Own representation.

Participants took between 05:57 minutes and 46:50 minutes to complete the Q-sorting exercise (median: 16:02, average: 26:42). One participant took 2 hours and 43 minutes to complete the sorting, which highly skewed the average time taken. Removing this outlier, participants took on average 19:07 minutes.

The correlation between the identified four factors was found to be weak, meaning that the four factors represent four significantly different viewpoints (see Table 3-4).

Table 3-4 Correlations between factors.

Factors	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
I	1.0000	0.1886	0.2762	0.1734
II	0.1886	1.0000	0.2275	0.1871
III	0.2762	0.2275	1.0000	0.1020
IV	0.1734	0.1871	0.1020	1.0000

Source: Own representation.

It is important to note that two of the comments left from the Q-sorting exercise pointed to their sorting not being a true representation of their beliefs due to the forced quasi-normal distribution. One participant shared that they *"didn't disagree [with any of the statements], just thought higher of the others"*. Another participant shared that *"many of my statements had to be moved from right to left. I had about 15 too many in "strongly agree" or "very strongly agree" so I would say that the distribution represented in the final sort doesn't very accurately reflect my positive leaning"*. However, this is what makes Q so unique, as it allows to rate statements compared to other statements, that is, placing them in a context.

3.4 Limitations

Limitations and criticisms specific to the use of Q method are portrayed in Section 2.4.1 *Background*. Specifically relevant to this thesis, during the Q-sorting exercise, the statements were presented to participants in a random sequence each time. The order in which statements appeared might have affected participants' choice of placement of the statement. Further, at least one participant expressed their need to move statements from right to left[13]. That is, they

[13] See *V. Appendix – Participants' Q-sort comments* for more details on participants' comments from the Q-sorting exercise.

had too many statements within the strongly agree categories and too few within the disagree categories. Hence, their final distribution may not accurately reflect their positive learning experience as sustainability influencers.

In a broader sense, there are certain limitations associated with the methodologies used here that must be acknowledged. Firstly, due to the nature of the inductive approach, the data gathered and results obtained are bound within a specific and restricted context, which obstaculizes the thesis' generalizability (Reay & Jones, 2016). Along the same line is the challenge of comparison: because the thesis is so context specific, it makes it difficult to compare across other similar studies. Perhaps most importantly is the choice of quotes, examples, and statements from the thesis. Inevitably, there is a degree of subjectivity in these choices, and convincing reviewers that the selection of quotes and statements are representative is a challenge.

Despite these limitations, inductive approaches in methodologies have their benefits, which in the present author's opinion, outweigh the limitations of the chosen methods. Foremost, the presentation of data retains its rich context, allowing to obtain more in-depth understanding, and capture the nuances of specific practices and behaviours (Goodrick & Reay, 2011). Further, in the specific context of Institutional Logics, an inductive approach is best able to capture participants' values and beliefs on the topic of research (Reay & Jones, 2016).

4 Results and analysis

The following chapter presents the findings of the thesis. The chapter begins by presenting some general data related to the background of sustainability influencers (*Section 4.1*), it continues with key findings to RQ 1 (*Section 4.2*) and RQ 2 (*Section 4.3*). Finally, it dives deeper into the results related to RQ3, that is, the prevalent logics obtained using Q (*Section 4.4*). All of these results are presented alongside analysis and comparisons to extant literature.

4.1 Background of respondents

This section presents an overview of the interviewees' backgrounds, including some demographic information, such as gender and educational background, and main sources of sustainability knowledge of the interviewees.

Gender

The initial compilation of sustainability accounts on Instagram demonstrated an overrepresentation of female influencers compared to male influencers. Of the 120 accounts identified, only six clearly identified as male, six were managed by couples, nine were either collective accounts or did not identify any gender, and the remaining 99 identified as female (see Figure 4-1). Similar overrepresentation of women seems to be not only present in the account holders themselves, but among the followers as well. One of the interview questions specifically addressed this issue: *"what is the typical profile of your followers?"*. All interviewees pointed to having a majority of female followers, and all of those who provided percentages (three), had over 90 percent female followers.

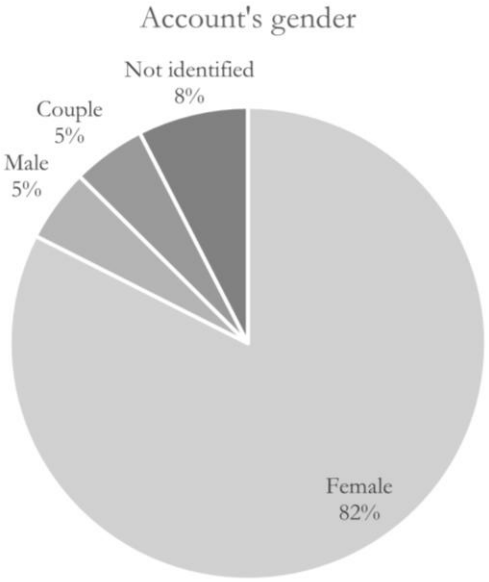

Figure 4-1 Gender distribution of Swedish sustainability influencers accounts on Instagram.

Source: Own representation.

This overrepresentation of female gender among sustainability influencers and their followers is similar to the evidence provided by several studies where men are less prone to adopt pro-

environmental behaviours and use eco-friendly products than their women counterparts (Brough et al., 2016; Zelezny et al., 2000). Extant research explains this reluctance to adopt such behaviours by men by a societal association between environmentalism, ethical consumption, and femininity (Borau et al., 2021; Pinna, 2020; Shang & Peloza, 2016; Swim et al., 2020).

The sustainability influencers interwiewed in this thesis were mostly comprised of people over 30, many of whom have children. Although there is a large community of younger sustainability influencers, like Greta Thunberg, which has been growing since 2018 (Han & Ahn, 2020), none of them agreed to be interviewed[14]. Of those interviewed, when asked about the profile of their followers, many identified them as people similar to themselves. Interestingly, for one of the interviewees it was the lack of diversity in this field that sparked her desire to become a role model that could represent a greater demographic diversity, as she quotes: *"all the people in the country life and planting and gardening, all of them were white, like all the big accounts. So I was like, "No, I'm not having it. Since I didn't find anyone, then I will be that person". So, then I wanted to really do it [become a sustainability influencer]. I wanted to represent so that it should be more not so white"*.

Employment

Of the 14 interviewees, six have their own business, five are employed, two are self-employed and one is a full-time student. Four participants were also studying at the time of the interview. That is, although several interviewees mentioned their desire to be financially independent from their work in social media, none of them were at a point where they had achieved this.

Education

Most interviewees (12) have degrees in higher education from University, but mostly were unrelated to sustainability studies, including Law, Marketing and Economy, Physics, and Business Communication.

The accounts

On average, interviewees have had their account for 3.3 years (median of 3 years), with the oldest account being 7 years old and the newest one being 1 year old. In terms of followers, the accounts had an average of 7,075 followers, with the largest account having 38,800 followers and the smallest having 1,000. Although these are large numbers, they remain relatively small when compared to larger environmental accounts, such as Greta Thunberg's account with 11.3 million followers, or Leonardo DiCaprio's with 48.3 million[15].

Over half of the interviewees see their account as a hobby; as something they do for fun. An interviewee shared that although the account is her life, she did not consider it her job: *"it's my life, it's sort of with me and there all the time. But it's not my job"*. Similarly, another interviewee said that the account *"isn't my primary goal in life. That's kind of nice to know. It's because it's fun and I don't need to get the money from it"*. However, several interviewees (at least three) did profess a desire to

[14] None of the younger influencers responded to the messages asking for an interview, and only one 18-year old agreed to complete the Q-sorting exercise.

[15] Numbers retrieved from Instagram.com in May 2021.

be able to live off their account. In a participant's words: *"I try to learn [how to better communicate] because I would like this to be my profession"*.

Seeing their accounts as a hobby reflects SMI's intrinsic motivation to create and share content of topics they feel passionate about. When money comes into the equation, and SMI's perception of their accounts becomes a job or profession, their authenticity may come into question due to a possibly extrinsic motivation (Audrezet et al., 2020). However, aiming to stay true to their beliefs through collabs that they feel are aligned with their values may be a way of staying authentic whilst avoiding brand encroachment (Audrezet et al., 2020).

Sustainability knowledge and expertise

Due to the unrelatedness of participants' studies to sustainability, an important question was where they mainly learn about sustainability. Many interviewees mentioned the general media as a source of reliable information. However, some interviewees professed their frustration for the media as a source of knowledge: *"the news and regular media is almost the worst place* [to get informed]*, and we've become very frustrated with news and what they choose to report about… And sensationalise all the time, which I think only really manages to scare people as opposed to inspire and inform"*. Social media was also mentioned as a reliable source of knowledge, with seven interviewees referring to social media as their main source of information and knowledge about sustainability, including Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube.

Other sources of information that influencers use to learn about sustainability and stay up to date included Swedish national organisations (such as *Bra miljöval* and *Svanen*), international non-governmental organizations (such as Greenpeace and WWF), Swedish authorities, MISTRA reports, Swedish laws, documentaries, and talking to experts.

Two comments should be made about the sources of information on sustainability. Firstly, some participants expressed often feeling confused when it comes to sustainability: *"I am seeking more and more information and try to learn. But then to know what's right and wrong, it's really difficult"*. This over-availability of often conflicting information may play a key role in the confusion of social media users and consumers (B.-K. Lee & Lee, 2004). The field of research on the effects of information overload is vast, and is especially relevant in the world of social media and User-Generated Content environments (Özkan & Tolon, 2015).

Secondly, and related to the first point, when knowledge gets passed from one person to another, as is often the case in social media, it inevitably changes, like in the Broken Telephone game (Lucas & Wigmore, 1989). This may facilitate the spread of fake news and information that is not backed up by scientific evidence. Indeed, one participant shared her worry for non-experts becoming sustainability influencers, sharing that those "non-experts" often do not have the correct information and share the wrong messages, which end up reaching thousands of people. In her words: *"And another thing is they don't have anything, no education, they just started and became like influencers. It's dangerous, very dangerous"*.

When it came to perceived expertise on sustainability topics, there were two main trends between the participants. One group considers themselves to be experts on the topic, e.g., *"So since I work with this, I have the insight, I have the true facts"*. The other group does not consider themselves to be experts, e.g., *"I am really not an expert since I'm not at scientist"*.

4.2 Conceptualising sustainability and sustainable lifestyles

In this section, relevant results are identified and discussed to answer research question 1, which set out to explore how sustainability influencers conceptualise sustainability and sustainable lifestyles. The first two sections present the two identified conceptualisations, which are followed by the sustainability issues perceived as most pressing.

When defining sustainability, several topics came up in the interviews, from which the most frequently used words are presented in Figure 4-2.

Figure 4-2 Word frequency for sustainability questions in the interviews.

Source: Own representation using NVivo 12 software.

The analysis of the interviews reveals a diversity of understandings about sustainability; however, there are two overriding perspectives of this concept: an inner-focused perspective, and an outer-focused perspective. These can mainly be differentiated by where the focus is placed. An inner focus refers here to seeing sustainability as something within the individual; whereas an outer focus refers to a concept of sustainability that lies outside of the individual. These are discussed below, and a summary is given in Table 4-1, which is structured according to the Sustainability Framework by Whyte & Lamberton (2020). The Sustainability Framework allowed to develop a set of conceptualizations of sustainability through its three-layered system, with the core objectives at the center, then worldviews, and finally actions. Each of these layers is interconnected with each other, meaning that aspects of each layer affect aspects of the other two.

A key take-away message is that these perspectives are not boxes in which every individual perfectly fits. Rather, they represent two main strains of understanding, and every individual may fall somewhere within or between these perspectives.

4.2.1 Inner-focused sustainability

Most importantly to the inner-focused perspective is achieving a place of inner sustainability, which is mostly characterized by the idea of *slowing down*. This was shared by several interviewees as searching for *"another lifestyle that is not so fast overall, because I think that if we slow down in anything […] we wouldn't have as much money to consume, and the desire to consume goes down if*

you do other things that are good for your soul". Sustainability is perceived as a holistic concept, which is intertwined with the environment, society, and the economy, but where an inner sense of sustainability takes priority. In other words, to achieve any meaningful change in the world, individuals must first ensure their personal well-being (*"if you don't feel good about yourself, how […] can you inspire other people to sustainable choices?"*). In this sense, sustainability starts within the individual, within each person, and from there a ripple effect is believed to occur. Because the focus resides on every individual, the concept becomes somewhat flexible, and that flexibility is not just acknowledged, but it represents a core belief of how it should be. A participant summarized this idea as *"reflection before perfection"*, where each person must *"evaluate what you're doing and then you can see if it's sustainable for you"*. Every individual has the right to cover their basic needs, but sufficiency is favoured over opulence (*"I mean, the more money you have, the more you spend"*). That is, a transition towards a simple, slow life is sought.

As a lifestyle, this might be characterized by a life where more time is spent with loved ones, and less time working for money (*"we should slow down and maybe spend more time at home, maybe spend more time with kids"*). A smaller remuneration is perceived positively due to the associated decrease in consumption, and the belief that money does not represent happiness or status. Every individual should re-evaluate what works for them, and how they can make their own contributions towards sustainability, whilst taking especial consideration for mental health. Individuals should seek responsibility, and to achieve this they need to stay educated on the complex topic of sustainability.

4.2.2 Outer-focused sustainability

In the outer-focused perspective, the overarching objective is to achieve a life where no harm is done to others (human and/ or non-human) (*"live a life that feels very rich and fulfilling and feel content without doing harm"*). Like the inner focus, sustainability here is also understood as a holistic concept, which encompasses the environment, society, and the economy. However, the environment here is at the core, based on the belief that the environment does not need an economy or a society. In an interviewee's words, *"if you take out environment, then there will be no society and definitely no economy"*. In this way, sustainability is not perceived as something within the individual but rather something exterior. Actions at the individual level are perceived positively, but they are viewed as insufficient. An interviewee argued that *"the power of social media can be used in a better way instead of showing the latest product, […] I think we should take action, that's number one, to go and vote"*. In this conceptualization, sustainability is not a flexible concept; it is definite, and it therefore can only be achieved and sought by more powerful institutions like governments. This does not only allow to achieve larger goals, but it may also create a base of *equal rules*, where everyone, regardless of who they are, complies with these regulations (*"I think that the politicians, they will make the foundation, they will set the rules. They will make it easy for us to make the right choices"*).

As a lifestyle, individuals may prefer actions including activism, voting, and getting involved in politics to achieve the larger systemic change they see necessary (*"we have some severe problems and maybe we need a change in the systems"*). That is, they may seek institutions to become more responsible, a crucial part of which is getting others to join the movement.

Table 4-1 Sustainability perspectives.

Sustainability Framework	Inner-focused sustainability	Outer-focused sustainability
Core objective	Slow down	Life without harm
Worldview	Flexible concept, relative	Inflexible concept, definite
	Holistic	Holistic
	Natural limits	Natural limits
	Equal rights	Equal rules
	Anthropocentric	Ecocentric
	Ripple effects from small actions	Large actions needed (legislation)
Actions	Change starts within	Change starts from above
	Responsible individuals	Responsible institutions
	Focus on consumption	Focus on activism
	Education/ inspiration	Persuasion
	Re-evaluation	Definite
	System transition	System change
	Health	Politics & voting

Source: Own representation.

Both perspectives accept that life takes place within natural limits, whose boundaries are set by the limited resources of the planet. Although sustainability is understood as a holistic and complex concept, the approach to that complexity differs. In fact, it is that complexity that provides a space for misuse, and people use it incorrectly to label themselves. An example of this misuse or misunderstanding of sustainability was mentioned by six interviewees who portrayed H&M as the face of "everything that is wrong with sustainability and greenwashing" in arguments about greenwashing and unsustainable brands.

In summary, many interviewees agreed on an understanding of sustainability that is hard to grasp due to its complexity and the many topics and aspects that come into it. There is a perception, however, that there is a correct or authentic interpretation of sustainability, and an incorrect or fake one. Finally, this complexity leads to the belief that to be truly sustainable today *"isn't an easy choice or maybe not even possible"*.

4.2.3 Most pressing issues

When it came to the sustainability issues perceived as most pressing or urgent, the issues most frequently mentioned were those related to food, climate change, and work (see Figure 4-3). The issue of food mostly came up associated with the following problems: excessive meat consumption, agricultural systems (associated with monoculture, intensification, and biodiversity loss), foods containing harmful chemicals to humans, and food waste. Some interviewees even shared that if the global food systems were changed, they would have the largest single positive effect on global sustainability.

The act of sharing food-related images and posts on Instagram has been found to be very relevant to Swedish teenage users, with 85.3% of the accounts actively sharing food-related content (Holmberg et al., 2016). Another study from 2014 found that food made up over 10% of the content shared on Instagram (Hu et al., 2014). Thus, sharing food-related content may

be driven by the desire to follow a trend, rather than the result of perceiving food-systems as a pressing issue.

Figure 4-3 Word frequency for the most pressing issues of sustainability from the interviews.

Source: Own representation using NVivo 12 software.

Not surprisingly, climate change was perceived as one of the most pressing issues in sustainability, a reflection of Sweden's stance on climate change (Sweden.se, 2021). Issues related to climate change were seen by many as the main priority for achieving sustainability, with the following ideas being shared: a need to stop global warming, a need to tackle the greenhouse effect and a need to deal with the climate crisis. These goals are all aligned with Sweden's long-term target of achieving climate-neutrality by 2045 (Allerup, 2020). Some interviewees mentioned an over-dependence on fossil fuels, which lead to excessive CO_2 emissions, as being at the core of everything people do. Individuals who touched on this issue referred to actions such as becoming politicaly active, voting, and actively demanding change as the most meaningful actions an individual can take.

The topic of work was perhaps the least expected, and it was mostly brought up in an intrinsic context of health, stress levels, and mental health. The concept of downshifting, i.e., "reducing work hours, thereby income, to increase leisure time" (Kennedy et al., 2013) has been suggested as a solution to work-related stress. Here, some interviewees referred to the idea that people work to live, and in doing that, *"they don't have time to live"*.

The idea of downshifting however, may not only enhance life satisfaction, but it is also believed to improve ecological sustainability and social equity, for example by increasing voluntary social engagement (Buhl & Acosta, 2016). Here, the topic of work was also brought up in that extrinsic context, where a large problem of sustainability was seen in the larger societal issues of people's working conditions of those *"growing our crops and making our clothes"*. This was interlinked with beliefs of excessive and unnecessary consumption, as well as waste. According to Knight *et al.*, working hours in high-income OECD countries are significantly associated with reduced environmental sustainability (2013). The desire to reduce working

hours is justified; in fact, reducing working hours seems imperative to halt increasing consumption patterns and to achieve sustainability objectives (Sanne, 2002; Schor, 2005).

Other pressing issues mentioned during the interviews were related to consumption (including a need for a circular economy and minimalism), lack of information and education, issues of waste, the need for a system change (where individuals are not the responsible ones), and sustainable development (where every country *"rises to the same level"*). On the topic of education, it is interesting to note the unequivocal gender gap in students' consciousness of sustainability in Sweden in favour of girls (Olsson & Gericke, 2017), which also relates to the gender bias seen in sustainability influencers and their followers.

4.3 What it means to be a sustainability influencer

In this section, relevant results are identified and discussed to answer research question 2, which aimed to describe what it means, in practice, to be a sustainability influencer. These included their motivations to start their accounts, the challenges and barriers associated with having such an account, conflicts within the community of sustainability influencers, their focus as sustainability influencers and their perceived role of sustainability influencers.

4.3.1 Motivations

When asked about their motivations for starting a social media account and becoming influencers, there were three overarching themes that came up during the interviews. The first and most mentioned (by eight interviewees), was to show people that it is possible to live a more sustainable life and inspire them to do so. As one participant shared: *"We can do things a different way, it doesn't need to be that hard to live a little bit more sustainable"*. Some interviewees referred to this motivation as a way of being a guideline or a role model, that is, an example to show followers what and how to be more sustainable. Within this argument, participants concluded that sustainability can be easy, and that perfection is not necessary to be sustainable (every action, no matter how small, counts). Further along this line, some participants put the focus on inspiring and bringing more people into the world of sustainability rather than representing role models, in a participant's words: *"I would say that [the main motivation was] to interact with everyone in a less serious way or more entertaining, so, if you can touch someone but without educating literally. And that's the best part of getting information through social media because it's entertaining without it feeling that you're being like "you have to do this"*.

The second most prevalent motivation, which is closely related to the first, was to share knowledge with followers. The way in which this motivation differs from the first, is that here interviewees focus on the information itself, rather than how that information translates into actions. For example, taking the problem of plastic, knowledge sharing may focus on the benefits and the problems associated with plastic, whereas the role model may focus on how to avoid or reduce one's plastic consumption. One participant further added that their motivation to spread information came from the desire to stay informed with the most up-to-date information.

The third overarching motivation to start their account is perhaps a more inner-focused or individualistic motivation. Two participants explicitly shared that their motivation to start the journey was a result of anxiety and frustration about the current sustainability issues around the world, and as a way of releasing those feelings. One interviewee shared that *"I am doing it for my own sake and not for everyone else's really. It's just that there were a lot of people thinking "this is something I want to talk about as well" that now follows me and that is a great honour. But really the account is for my own sake"*.

Lastly, as mentioned in Section 4.1, one interviewee shared that her main motivation for starting the account, was to be able to represent a demographic group that had no representation within the field of sustainability in Sweden.

Prior studies have identified similar intrinsic motivations as key drivers of social media usage and sharing, such as the desire for sharing what one loves or feels passionate about (Audrezet et al., 2020). Research on blogging has also pointed to motivations like the gratification of enlightening others, advertising and promotion (Sepp et al., 2011).

However, research on the motivations behind social media usage and SMIs has pointed to considerably different motivations as well. In a study focusing on university students, researchers found four key motivations for using Instagram: knowledge about others (i.e., to see what others are doing), documentation (i.e., to share and document life experiences and events), coolness or status seeking (i.e., to become popular or have fun), and creativity (i.e., to share skills and meet people) (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). A similar study on Instagram users found that potential influencers are particularly motivated by desires of self-presentation and status seeking, which were associated with personality traits like narcissism, extraversion, and self-monitoring[16] (Erz et al., 2018). None of these inward-looking drivers were found in this thesis, perhaps they go against the very ideas of sustainability, whether inner or outer focused.

4.3.1.1 Triggers towards sustainability

A question of interest in this thesis was whether any significant moment in the influencers' lives changed their understanding or approach towards sustainability. Literature suggests several personal and social influences that affect people's pro-environmental concern and behaviour, including personal experience and proximity to problematic sites (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). This research identified two events that influenced interest in sustainability by the influencers: personal exposure and parenthood. In both cases, sustainability stops being an external concept and becomes more directly embedded in their personal life; in other words, it hits home.

Personal exposure was brought up as experiences where individuals experienced first-hand the consequences of unsustainable behaviours. Examples of these consequences included the accumulation of rubbish and plastic in Swedish national parks, especially marine areas, and extreme weather events during Swedish summers. In the literature, personal exposure to climate change has been reported to influence people's beliefs, concerns, risk perceptions, and mitigation behaviours (Akerlof et al., 2013; Fownes & Allred, 2019; Reser et al., 2012).

Some interviewees pointed to the process of becoming parents as the main trigger for becoming more active in sustainability: *"when I became pregnant for the first time, that was when it all started"*, and *"when I had kids, I started to see things. So, I tried to get out of it, I just quit, and I moved to the countryside"*. This was often linked to a concern for their children's health and future. As part of the inner-focused approach, two interviewees mentioned that poisonous chemicals found in toys and clothes, and even transmitted through pregnancy, were important things they cared about. Evidence from the literature on the effects of parenthood on sustainability and pro-environmental behaviours is mixed. Some research has found no effect between becoming parents and adopting more pro-environmental behaviours (Milfont et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2018). Other research specifically focusing on Swedish citizens, as in this thesis,

[16] Self-monitoring has been defined as regulating one's self-presentation for the sake of desired public appearances (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000).

have found positive correlations between parenthood and adults' worries and behaviours for the next generations (Ekholm, 2020a, 2020b).

Further, it is not only the concern for their children's health and future that plays a role, but also the things that they, as parents, learn through their children as questions and school projects: *"[sustainability] it's in the curriculum for Swedish schools for the kids, in most of the subjects, actually. So, one part [of the learning] is there"*. In this way, children and young adults may act as "change agents" towards sustainability (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013).

Lastly, a turn towards sustainability might also be the result of a trend, as shared by an interviewee: *"in Sweden, it was called in 2014, like eco-boom, when people started to question more and want more organic food and products. And that's when my interest arose a bit more"*. Although only one participant mentioned this argument as a main trigger, several interviewees referred to other influencers who started focusing on sustainability as a way of following a trend. This is consistent with the need for maintaining the influencer's leadership in the community through identifying and incorporating the newest trends into their content (Ki & Kim, 2019).

4.3.2 Challenges

Some of the most mentioned challenges associated with having a relatively large sustainability account on Instagram included those associated to stress, communication strategies, criticism, money, and lack of time.

The challenge of stress refers mainly to the consequences of a) striving for perfection, and b) dealing with followers' criticisms for lack of perfection. These were said to have potential mental health consequences to the influencers. An interviewee who has been criticized for not being good enough or as sustainable as they say to be, shared that "*even though you are a sustainable influencer, you're also a human being that wants to have an easy life or you don't want to give up certain things. And I think that's important to link to the mental health as well"*. Several interviewees shared feeling remorse when taking unsustainable choices, such as consuming fast fashion or flying. Another interviewee adds that *"constantly thinking about these things can take a toll on us"*. However, many acknowledged that the supportive community is a way of coping with these stressors. Many of the comments related to stress were also related to the inner-focused sustainability, where each person must find what is sustainable for them.

A similar challenge related to stress is dealing with followers' messages of criticism[17] or harassment, which include larger societal issues like sexism and racism[18]. Although only a minority of interviewees reported such extreme cases (two participants), several participants referred to instances where messages of criticism affected their mental health and wellbeing. Some examples included being accused of spreading unequal rights and downplaying women's roles in society for wanting a slower simpler life (*"but it's so hard that everyone thinks that I am very like old school because I'm not, I just want to be free and have time"*) and feeling doubtful over what to share for fear of people's reactions, including unfollowing them. Another participant confided that *"social media is terrible, and we often say, we hate Instagram. Like, you can get so much positivity and then like one negative thing happens, one negative comment, or a few followers leave after one post and it like*

[17] Criticism is used here for lack of a better word. Some participants referred to hate messages, although most referred to such messages as being unwanted or badly worded criticisms rather than hate.

[18] Sexism was referred to as direct messages of harassment from male followers, which had nothing to do with the content of their accounts. Racism was referred to indirectly by an immigrant interviewee who confided feeling excluded by the community of sustainability influencers.

really affects you mentally. So, that aspect for us is really tough". Cyberbullying has become the focus of many studies due to the severe consequences it may lead to. For example, in a study from 2018, the authors found that SMIs often face cyberbullying behaviours like harassment, flaming, and catfishing[19] (Hassan et al., 2018).

The next challenge relates to the most effective communication strategies to gain, and keep, followers. In this sense, two participants shared their resistance to follow Instagram trends as a barrier for their accounts to grow. Such trends referred to the type of content shared, and the format in which it is shared, for example the type of photos. In an interviewee's words: *"I want to grow bigger; why doesn't it grow bigger? You know, I don't push people too hard, I think I do it in a quite enjoyable way. Most people would like to have me in their feed. But it's really slow. People want to follow shopping accounts instead"*. Creating content is hard work for most influencers, although there are some exceptions; "trouble is, not every influencer actually does work hard – there genuinely are some who have amassed huge followings purely because they're gorgeous and post a lot of bikini snaps" (Hosie, 2019).

Further on the topic of communication, another participant shared that being too hardcore about sustainability can lead to negative reactions from followers, including unfollowing them, because they either do not understand, or they feel it is too much. In their opinion, their communication strategy *"it's about finding a balance to also include those people who are less sustainable"*.

The challenge of money was mentioned from several angles; as an issue related to sexism, as an issue of self-value, and as an issue arising because of the novelty of this "trade". Two interviewees shared their belief that because it is women who started this trend, it will take time to get valued; *"it is like blogs, it took a long time before people really understood that they also are copyrighters, journalists, photographers, etc"*. The perspective of self-value was shared as a lack of criteria for how much their time is worth. A participant even mentioned how beneficial it could be to the field to have *"a union or something to regulate prices and things like that, because it is a little bit of a Wild West scenario where people charge things all over the place and there really isn't any standards"*. Money was also mentioned as a challenge for those who take a substantial part of their day to producing content for their account: *"I think it's crazy of people to expect people to work for free. And I think that's a gender issue too. Especially women that work with interior design or knitting, that we should just do it because it's fun. Well, I also have a kid and I rather put my money on her food than my hobby"*. Lastly, due to the novelty of this trade, influencers mention a lack of financial support from societies' institutions: *"I think the big problem for influencers is that, for example, you can't lend money at the bank being an influencer because you can't show salary you get, even though they can be some of the richest people in the country, I think the world isn't really catching up on what that means"*.

Literature looking into the challenges of being SMIs, as perceived by influencers themselves, is limited at best, especially when looking for research about Instagram. A recent study on blogging aimed to capture the poorly understood labour dynamics in this field, a gap which also exists on Instagram (Parry & Hracs, 2020). In their study, the authors categorised bloggers according to paid vs. unpaid labour, and formal (jobs) vs. informal (self-employment) labour to provide insights into a new "sociology of work". Instagram seems to be another example of these emerging forms of work, where research is strongly needed to stay up to date with the changes taking place. Remuneration for this type of work is still strongly contested, and research as well as societal institutions need to address this gap in knowledge (Agulleiro-Prats et al., 2020).

[19] Flaming: online fights where harsh comments or inappropriate images are exchanged.

Other challenges expressed in non-academic literature include the time it takes to create high quality content, which is identified as a precursor to gaining followers (Barker, 2019). This was also mentioned in several of the interviews, and is especially true for micro-influencers, who may find it particularly hard to get noticed and produce contracts with brands to gain some form of salary.

Other challenges mentioned during the interviews included the arising responsibilities with larger accounts (e.g., having to respond to greater numbers of people, and having greater reach when making a mistake), considering which companies are truly sustainable to do collabs, and Instagram's algorithms. Four interviewees mentioned Instagram's algorithms as a barrier to grow their accounts, whereby *"sustainability influencers are often activists in other areas [i.e., race and gender], and people sometimes mention that Instagram is shadow-blocking them because of that"*. However, Instagram's algorithms are a challenge to all types of social media influencers, and not only for sustainability focused ones. In fact, the so-called "engagement pods" have emerged in the community to bypass Instagram's rules or algorithms. These engagement pods refer to "grassroots communities that agree to mutually like, comment on, share, or otherwise engage with each other's posts, no matter the content" (O'Meara, 2019). One of the interviewees mentioned one such engagement pod where she was being invited but felt uncomfortable to joining *"they wanted us to share, "hey, check out this account". Or you have to follow trends, and you are being invited into a group chat and they say, "if you follow these accounts, they will call you back for more followers"*.

4.3.3 Conflicts

The largest conflict or polarization seen among influencers was around the topic of consumption and paid collaborations, that is, about what they should or should not promote. On one hand, a group of influencers believes that influencers should focus on spreading actions and behaviours rather than products ("*I think that the power of social media can be used in a better way instead, not, you know, not showing the latest product or the latest sustainable, you know, coffee filter or something like that. That's OK, too. But I think we should take action, that's number one, and go and vote"*). Some interviewees went as far as stating that many influencers are in the trade for the business, for the money and for the collaborations[20], in a way comparing certain sustainability accounts to greenwashing campaigns. But not all influencers see those "wrong" messages as purposeful actions. Rather, they believe that some influencers share the "wrong" messages because they lack information or knowledge. This problem was shared by an interviewee, *"But that is a big problem because people think that they are living in a sustainable way because they buy organic cotton, but they shouldn't buy anything at all, don't buy anything. They try to influence with just buying vintage clothes and vintage furniture and they go to auctions… but that is not sustainability at all. It's just a tiny bit better than buying everything new. But I do think that they think that they are sustainable. And that's why I don't want be part of that"*.

On the other hand, other interviewees either disagree that getting paid for promoting products is bad, or they are concerned with making a living from the time invested in their accounts, as stated in the previous section of Challenges. As a matter of fact, one interviewee shared that

[20] An interviewee shared about the community "Sustainable Influencers", who were contacted several times for interviews without success: *"I didn't want to continue because I felt that one of the founders and some of the other sustainable influencers… it was kind of a competition. Some sides of these people were very like other influencers that live on selling clothing and other things. So, I felt, what is the difference? And these people wanted companies to contact them for collaborations. They wanted us to share, "hey, check out this account". Or you have to follow trends, and you are being invited into a group chat and they say, "if you follow these accounts, they will call you back for more followers". So, I was like, what is the difference between us and other influencers? So, I stepped out from that group"*.

those accounts that focus on activism may even be less authentic, *"those who are more activists, they have to have a cause to fight for, and… I have experienced that they don't do a lot of research, they just go on the wave"*.

Although some interviewees felt neutral about this topic, the community is mostly very polarized around this issue of promoting products and doing collabs versus focusing on behaviours and activism.

The only other large conflict between influencers was the idea of exclusivity or fame. Most participants see the community of influencers as an open and supportive community. However, a small subset of interviewees (four) perceived the community as an exclusive one and felt that some influencers become engulfed in their fame, where *"a lot of these people think that they are big stars. Yeah, I don't get that at all. It's like just because you have a certain number of followers, it doesn't make you more important than anyone else"*.

4.3.4 Focus and role of influencers

The main subjects on which the interviewees focus are shown in Table 4-2. Most influencers said they touch on several of these issues rather than just focusing on one of them. Note that these focuses are based only on the answers given during the interviews, and not on a content analysis of the accounts themselves.

Table 4-2 Interviewees' topics of focus.

Topic of focus	Explanation	Interviewees
Health	Informing about the link between health and sustainability.	4
	Promoting a healthy life whilst creating a positive impact on sustainability.	
	Promoting "reflection before perfection", where you choose what works for you, and there is no pressure to be perfect or extreme.	
	"Some of the messages that I share is also that you should lead a life that keeps you sane, so to speak. I mean, that you don't work too much, that you are careful on how you lead your life, so that is more like a sustainable lifestyle with a focus on health".	
Crops	Promoting and sharing how to grow your own crops.	3
Food	Promoting more vegetarian and vegan diets through cooking tips and recipes.	5
	Promoting ecofriendly and organic products.	
Consumption	Promoting a slow fashion, either through second-hand items or upcycling.	9
	Promoting local consumption over imported goods.	
	Promoting a conscious consumption, including the reduction of consumed goods, slowing down, and choosing better when consuming is the only option (in other words, showing which brands are good or preferable).	
Women empowerment	Promoting the empowerment of women, feminism, and equal rights.	2
Waste	Informing and sharing tips about how to reduce your waste, including food waste.	3
	Dumpster diving: sharing tips and useful information about reducing food waste through the consumption of "waste foods".	
Chemicals	Informing and sharing tips about how to reduce and avoid your contact with harmful chemicals found in foods, textiles, and products.	3
Transport	Promoting local or no travel alternatives.	2
	Promoting no-flying or stay-on-the-ground behaviours.	

	Promoting the minimization of individual travel, such as the use of cars. Informing about transportation alternatives and their negative and positive impacts.	
Economy	Informing about the link between sustainability and economy, with tips on how to say money whilst having a positive impact on sustainability.	3
Information spreading	Informing about climate change, its impacts, and actions that can be done to avoid contributing to that change. Informing about sustainability in general, including definitions and news.	7
Closeness to nature	Promoting a life that brings people closer to nature. *"We want to bring people closer to nature because we believe that if you are closer with nature and you spend more time outdoors, you'll care for that environment. Whatever you feel close to, you care for automatically, whatever you feel disconnected to, you have an easier time mistreating".*	1
Law	Informing about what is legal and what is not, for example in the case of dumpster diving.	2
Activism	Promoting a life where people are more active politically, especially promoting voting and activism.	2
Others	Promoting anything you can do in your life, small or big, to be more sustainable.	11

Source: Own representation.

When it comes to the role of sustainability influencers in society, two trends were identified from the interviews. The first is to share information (*"I think influencers are almost sort of the new commercial, like billboards, almost like old-fashioned billboards, that's influencers right now, and they have a huge platform to show what's sustainable"*). The second is to trigger action (*"I think that the true sustainable influencer is like Greta Thunberg or someone that actually takes action"*).

Several participants confessed during the interviews that they do not consider themselves influencers. This was often related to the perception that influencers are associated with mainstream trends where products are promoted. These interviewees shared not wanting to be part of that group of individuals.

4.4 Capturing the prevalent discourses

This section presents the identified discourses within the field of sustainability influencers in Sweden obtained through the Q methodology. These discourses represent the distinct prevalent logics (see Section 2.3.1 *Institutional Logics*), which are supplemented with data from the interviews. Each of these discourses or logics are defined by one of the statistically extracted factors (Frantzi et al., 2009). In this thesis, the factor extraction resulted in a four-factor solution[21]. The final section in this chapter gives a brief analysis where the discourses are assigned to one of the sustainability conceptualizations mentioned in the previous section.

Most of the participants had a fairly strong match with at least one of the factors (16 participants), and three showed no significant alignment with any of the four factors (see Table VI-1 in the Appendix). The four discourses cumulatively explain 53% of the total variance.

[21] Factor solutions refer to the number of factors accepted by the researcher as a representation of the P-set.

In Table VI-2 (in the Appendix) the list of statements is shown with the corresponding column value for each of the four factors (from most strongly disagree with, -4, to most strongly agree with, +4, as per Figure *3-3*). It is important to note again that these factors are ideal factors, that is, they represent patterns, which very rarely match completely an individual's Q-sort or perspective (Webler et al., 2009).

The four final discourses are presented below. These have been termed as: the bioenvironmentalists, the protective liberals, the critical thinkers, and the institutionalists. For easier understanding, statistically significant statements for each factor, i.e., those presented in Table 4-3, Table 4-4, Table 4-5, Table 4-6, and Table 4-7, are referred to in the text in **bold**. Statements that are non-significant are referred to in *italics* and should be interpreted with caution.

4.4.1 Factor A: The bioenvironmentalists

At 17%, discourse A explains the highest of the total variance and is defined by six pure loadings. Distinguishing statements for this factor that are statistically significant are shown in Table 4-3, and are supplemented in the text below with other non-statistically significant statements from Table VI-2 (in the Appendix).

Table 4-3 Distinguishing statements for Factor A.

	Statements	Factor scores			
	Most agree with	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
6	It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	4	1	-3	3
30	The environment is the main priority of sustainability.	4*	1	0	-3
39	Sustainability is equally about the environment, society, and the economy.	3	3	1	-2
8	It is good when you can't afford everything, then you can understand what is actually important.	3	1	0	-3
	Most disagree with				
22	I find it challenging to deal with followers' messages of criticism and hostility.	-4*	-1	0	0
18	I do collabs with brands that I consider sustainable.	-3*	2	0	0
	Other distinguishing statements				
19	If everyone does only a little, we will only achieve a little.	1	-3	-3	0
2	In my account I like to show that I'm not perfect in sustainability.	1	3	3	2
42	The main responsibility to achieve sustainability is on individuals.	-1*	-2	3	-4
12	I started my account because I felt like I needed to make a change in the world.	-2*	3	2	0

Source: Own representation. Note: statistical significance is at the 0.05 level, and (*) indicate statistical significance at the 0.01 level.

For factor A, sustainability is equally comprised of the environment, society, and the economy (**St. 39**, +3), as someone shared: *"I believe that sustainability has several legs, sustainability for the environment, sustainability for society and relationships and sustainability for the economy (both private and government economies)"*. Despite the inclusion of these three dimensions, they believe that the environment is the element that takes priority over the others (**St. 30**, +4), with a participant arguing that *"without the environment we are nothing. The world will heal but humans won't. We need the environment to survive"*.

Like factor D, they see the responsibility of achieving sustainability as an external one, that is, on the government (**St. 6**, +4) rather than on individuals (*St. 42*, -1). As shared by a participant: *"I believe that governments are the ones responsible for how we build our societies. And sustainability can never be achieved by individual action only, the government needs to be active in, for example: banning fossil fuels, setting a price on carbon, etc. to drive change"*. This fits their reasons for starting their account: it was not a desire to make a change in the world (**St. 12**, -2), maybe they do not believe they have the capacity to make such a change. In fact, unlike other factors, when it comes to actions, they believe that little actions only lead to little change (**St. 19**, +1). Perhaps that is why governments should be the responsible institutions for taking those actions.

Most characteristic to factor A is their position on money and belongings. Contrary to the other discourses, they strongly agree with the premise that not being able to afford everything can be positive for understanding what is actually important in life (**St. 8**, +3). One can assume then, that generally, they have no negative feelings towards a lower income where not everything is at a hand's reach. This lack of a negative perception over having less, may also contribute to their stance against collaborations (**St. 18**, -3), and to the prioritisation of promoting actions and behaviour rather than products (*St. 12*, +2). One participant's comment is especially relevant here: *"I started the account as a fun thing and wanted to share with you how to live frugally. With a frugal life, one's life often becomes sustainable too"*.

During the interviews, three interviewees made an explicit mention to the topic of money and personal possessions or belongings. In their views, having less (money and belongings) is better for people and for the environment. That is, they advocate for a minimalist or frugal lifestyle. One participant from the Q-sorting shared that *"I believe that people with more money usually tend to spend more money on things they actually don't need. In comparison to poor people that just can spend money on things to make them survive. Therefore, rich people spend more of our world assets than people with just a little bit of money. Even though you buy green products they still use the worlds assets"*.

Further along this idea of frugality, factor A scores highest of all factors on both their belief that consumption should be a priority in achieving sustainability (*St. 29*, +2), and that activism is the only meaningful action to achieve sustainability (*St. 24*, +2). Another participant adds: *"the poorest people in the world live the most environmentally sustainable lives so, even if some "green" or "environmentally friendly" choices are most expensive in affluent countries, it is wealth that drives unsustainable behaviour in my opinion"*.

When it comes to dealing with followers' messages of criticism and hostility, factor A scores it the lowest of all (**St. 22**, -4), hinting that they see their Instagram world as a supportive place, something that was shared often during the interviews. This may be related to their strong disagreement about spending too much time on their social media accounts (*St. 16*, -3). Possibly, the perception of it being a supportive environment means they feel happy with the time spent on their accounts. Alternatively, it could be that they actually spend less time in their accounts than other factors, which could indicate a lesser emotional link to the accounts, thus being less affected by hostile messages.

Finally, although they do slightly agree with showing followers their imperfection in sustainability, all other factors felt more strongly about this point (**St. 2**, +1).

4.4.2 Factor B: The protective liberals

Discourse B explains 14% of the total variance and is defined by four pure loadings. The statistically significant statements for this factor are shown in Table 4-4, and are supplemented

in the text below with other non-statistically significant statements from Table VI-2 (in the Appendix).

Table 4-4 Distinguishing statements for Factor B.

	Statements	Factor scores			
	Most agree with	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
12	I started my account because I felt like I needed to make a change in the world.	-2	3	2	0
	Most disagree with				
4	Sustainability influencers should have a background in sustainability studies.	-1	-4*	-1	-2
34	A lot of sustainability influencers are just like regular influencers, they want money.	0	-4*	2	-1
	Other distinguishing statements				
18	I do collabs with brands that I consider sustainable.	-3	2*	0	0
23	I started my account as a way of releasing anxiety and frustration.	-4	2*	-4	-4
6	It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	4	1*	-3	3
13	Sustainability influencers should promote behaviours and actions, not products.	2	-1*	4	1
38	Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative.	3	-2*	1	4

Source: Own representation. Note: statistical significance is at the 0.05 level, and (*) indicate statistical significance at the 0.01 level.

In some ways, factor B sets the least rules about who sustainability influencers are and how they should work. This is reflected in their strong disagreement for sustainability influencers to have a background in sustainability studies (**St. 4**, -4). In a participant's words: *"because at the end of the day the power is in the hands of the politicians. They need to make the right decisions. I think experience, street knowledge and motivation take you a lot further than studies sometimes. We need both!"*. A lesser need for sustainability studies may be the result of a perceived confidence in the things they know. Indeed, they are the factor scoring highest in their perceived expertise on sustainability topics (*St. 40*, +1). In contrast to the other discourses, all of which perceive sustainability as a complex topic, difficult to grasp, and relative to a context, factor B disagrees with this statement (**St. 38**, -2). A greater confidence in the sustainability knowledge they have may lead to this perceived lesser need for studies.

Further, they are the only factor that disagrees that sustainability influencers should promote actions and behaviours rather than products (**St. 13**, -1). On the one hand, this could be related to the belief that consumption should not be a main priority for achieving sustainability (*St. 29*, 0). On the other, it could be related to how they can make a living from Instagram. As a matter of fact, they are the factor that most strongly believes that influencers should get paid for their work (*St. 11*, +4), and perhaps therefore they are the most positive about doing collabs with brands compared to the other discourses (**St. 18**, +2).

Also along this line of protection is the perception of sustainability influencers versus mainstream influencers. Despite being the factor that most strongly scores for getting paid (*St. 11*, +4), they are also the factor that most strongly disagrees with sustainability influencers being like regular influencers in their desire for money (**St. 34**, -4). Their disagreement with this statement may not stem from the belief that "most sustainability influencers do not want money, thus they are not like regular influencers". Rather, the disagreement may be in the statement itself: wanting money is not a defining characteristic to whether one is a

sustainability influencer or not. Getting paid is a right anyone has, regardless of the type of content being shared. As one of the interviewees put it: "[…] *like just because I work for positive change in the world, we should what, not value our time? Or do we not deserve to get paid? So, I think that's kind of frustrating, to be honest, because basically I think it leaves us feeling like we should want to do pro bono stuff because we work for positive change".*

For them, there is not one particular action that should be prioritised over others, such as activism (*St. 24*, -3; *"You can change you and your environment in other ways than activism"*), or changing our consumption patterns (*St. 29*, 0). Basically, every action, no matter how small, amounts to something larger (*St. 19*, -3).

They slightly agree that it is mainly the government's responsibility to achieve sustainability (**St. 6**, +1), and disagree to setting those responsibilities on individuals (*St. 42*, -2).

Most importantly, they started their accounts because they felt the need to make a change in the world (**St. 12**, +3), which they partly want to achieve through being a role model for their followers (*St. 28*, +4). Further, they also started their accounts as a way of releasing their anxiety and frustration (**St. 23**). Although not strongly, they are the factor rating it highest (+2) compared to all others (-4).

Although not statistically significant, it is important to note that B is the factor that gives most importance to making the link between their messages and sustainability as clear as possible (*St. 37*, +2). This practice could be the result of a need for making their belonging to this group of influencers as obvious as possible in an attempt to fulfil their needs for belonging and meaningful existence (Greitemeyer et al., 2014).

4.4.3 Factor C: The critical thinkers

Discourse C explains 12% of the total variance and like factor B, is also defined by four loadings. The statistically significant statements for this factor are shown in Table 4-5, and are supplemented in the text below with other non-statistically significant statements from Table VI-2 (in the Appendix).

Table 4-5 Distinguishing statements for Factor C.

	Statements	**Factor scores**			
	Most agree with	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
13	Sustainability influencers should promote behaviours and actions, not products.	2	-1	4	1
42	The main responsibility to achieve sustainability is on individuals.	-1	-2	3*	-4
	Most disagree with				
6	It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	4	1	-3*	3
	Other distinguishing statements				
34	A lot of sustainability influencers are just like regular influencers, they want money.	0	-4	2*	-1
14	It's hard to gain followers because people prefer the mainstream accounts and trends, not my content.	-1	0	2*	0
38	Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative.	3	-2	1*	4
15	The food industry is the single largest obstacle in achieving sustainability.	0	-1	1	-1
11	Influencers should get paid for their work.	1	4	-1*	2

Source: Own representation. Note: statistical significance is at the 0.05 level, and (*) indicate statistical significance at the 0.01 level.

Most importantly in this discourse is the role of individuals in achieving sustainability objectives (**St. 42**, +3) compared to externally focused responsibilities, such as those from the government (**St. 6**, -3). As shared by a participant on the role of individuals: *"Sustainability is not a choice we can make, it's one we have to make"*[22]. This focus on individuals aligns with their scoring of *St. 10*, that sustainability starts from within (+2). Further, perhaps because they see individuals as the main responsible actors, activism is not considered the most meaningful action to take, presumably this would mean that governments are the key responsible (*St. 24*, -4).

Factor C scores the self-perception of being just a regular person the highest of all factors (*St. 33*, +4; *"I see myself as a normal person who likes to live simply and frugally"*), which can lead to the conclusion that anyone can choose to lead a sustainable life, regardless of who they are and their socio-economic status (*St. 25*, -3; *"I think many sustainable choices do not cost money, it's a lot about reducing consumption, eating up all the food you buy and maybe change from eating expensive meat to cheap legumes"*). For them, every individual action counts, no matter how small (*St. 19*, -3). Compared to other discourses, they score their expertise in sustainability the lowest (*St. 40*, -1). This perception of being a regular person, aligns with their communication strategy to show others that they are not perfect in sustainability either (*St. 2*, +3).

They slightly agree that sustainability is a complex term, difficult to achieve, and relative to the context (**St. 38**, +1; *"Sustainability IS very complex. You often have to take many perspectives into consideration and there might be conflicts. For example: grass fed beef (naturbete) might be positive for biodiversity, but the climate impact is still very high compared to other protein sources"*). Perhaps it is this perception that leads to their belief that a key objective in achieving sustainability is getting better informed and sharing that knowledge (*St. 17*, +3).

Factor C has a critical perception of sustainability influencers. Firstly, they believe that a lot of sustainability influencers are like regular influencers in their main desire for money (**St. 34**, +2). This similarity between sustainability influencers and mainstream influencers may stem from the controversial topic of collaborations. Although it scores neutral on their perception of collabs (*St. 18*, 0), they are the discourse that rates lowest of all factors the belief that influencers should get paid for their work (**St. 11**, -1). It must be added that certain people felt very strongly about this topic during the interviews, stating that they did not want to get paid since this could compromise their freedom of speech. One of the interviewees shared *"I don't want any pay. […] And I want to be free. I want to be free one hundred percent. I don't want to do Reklam*[23] *for anybody because if I want to say sometimes that a plastic can be okay and sometimes not okay... I want to be free 100 percent"*.

Further along this line, they very strongly agree with the idea that sustainability influencers should focus on promoting behaviours and actions rather than products (**St. 13**, +4), a belief that many sustainability influencers do not share. They believe that mainstream accounts and trends gain more followers (**St. 14**, +2), which can lead to the following:

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[22] Although this comment was left for a strong disagreement to statements 10 *(Sustainability starts from within, with ourselves)* and 3 *(Most importantly, one needs to re-evaluate: is it sustainable for me? Or will I get burnt out?)*, it aligns with this perception that sustainability is not a choice or an option, but rather something larger that every individual must do.

[23] Reklam refers to paid collaborations.

i. Mainstream trends become a motivation for sustainability influencers to follow those trends. As an interviewee shared, *"not getting this type of pictures […] also doesn't help me, but I feel that's not exactly my thing… so, not following what it's a trend, or the style of most of the social media, it doesn't help me"*.

ii. Sustainability becomes a trend for everyone to follow, regardless of their actual identity. In an interviewee's words: *"[sustainability] It's really a little bit of a trend to be aware. And so, everyone wants to add this sustainability thinking just for being up to date. But they don't know that much, they just want to be in the trend, and that's a huge problem. I think everyone wants to be green"*.

Finally, it is perhaps due to this critical perception that they do not see themselves as influencers (*St. 1*, -2).

4.4.4 Factor D: The Institutionalists

Discourse D explains 10% of the total variance and is defined by two pure loadings. The statistically significant statements for this factor are shown in Table 4-6, and supplemented with other non-statistically significant statements from Table VI-2 (in the Appendix).

Like discourse A, factor D also strongly agrees with an external responsibility of achieving sustainability, where governments are most responsible (**St. 6**, +3), rather than individuals (*St. 42*, -4). As one of the participants notes: *"To put that responsibility on the everyday people isn't really fair when a big chunk is things that normal people can't affect. But, we like to do things easy therefore the governments need to make it hard to make bad sustainable decisions and easy to make good ones"*.

Table 4-6 Distinguishing statements for Factor D.

	Statements	**Factor scores**			
	Most agree with	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
6	It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	4	1	-3	3
	Most disagree with				
30	The environment is the main priority of sustainability.	4	1	0	-3*
8	It is good when you can't afford everything, then you can understand what is actually important.	3	1	0	-3*
	Other distinguishing statements				
9	A big incentive to stick to sustainability practices is what my followers will think of me if I don't.	-2	-1	-2	2*
41	I mostly learn about sustainability through social media.	-2	-1	0	1
5	Sustainability influencers are often elitist.	-1	-3	-2	1*
20	The community of sustainability influencers can feel exclusive.	-1	-1	-2	1
19	If everyone does only a little, we will only achieve a little.	1	-3	-3	0
17	Above all, we need to get better informed and share that knowledge.	2	2	3	0*
36	Climate change should be our main priority to achieve sustainability.	2	0	2	-1
39	Sustainability is equally about the environment, society, and the economy.	3	3	1	-2*

Source: Own representation. Note: statistical significance is at the 0.05 level, and (*) indicate statistical significance at the 0.01 level.

For factor D, perceptions of belongings, and others' opinions about them may play a significant role for their accounts. For instance, in contrast to all other factors, a big incentive for them to stick to their sustainability practices is the pressure of what others will think of them if they do not (**St. 9**, +2). Interestingly, their perceived pressure to be perfectly sustainable is low (*St. 31*, -2). Further, they strongly disagree with the belief that not being able to afford everything can be good to understand the important things in life (**St. 8**, -3).

Unlike all other factors, factor D sees the community of sustainability influencers through less supportive eyes. For instance, they slightly agree with the community of sustainability influencers at times feeling exclusive (**St. 20**, +1). This aligns with their agreement to sustainability influencers often being elitist (**St. 5**, +1).

They remain neutral about the statement that if everyone only does a little, only a little will be achieved (**St. 19**, 0). This may be as a result of the belief that individuals cannot do much, and it is governments that have the potential to effect change. It could also be that they agree with this statement but place it in neutral because everything else is "taken".

Unlike all other factors, they disagree with sustainability being equally about the environment, society, and the economy (**St. 39**, -2). Further along this line, they are also in disagreement to all other factors in the belief that the environment is not the main priority in sustainability (**St. 30**, -3). As one participant shares, *"It's our systems, our economies and out mindsets that need to change, we shouldn't focus on the environment because that's too vague and it will leave out minority groups"*.

They slightly disagree that climate change should be the main priority in achieving sustainability (**St. 36**, -1). Unlike all other factors (rating a minimum of +2), they remain neutral about getting better informed and sharing that knowledge (**St. 17**, 0). They rate learning from social media the highest of all factors (**St. 41**, +1).

4.4.5 Points of consensus

Despite the differences between factors, there are also statements where all factors scored the same, that is, their statistical significance refers to their similarity in score rather than their dissimilarity. Table 4-7 captures these consensus statements.

Table 4-7 Consensus statements.

Consensus statements		Factor scores			
		I	II	III	IV
7*	I don't show my unsustainable choices, otherwise I risk losing credibility.	-1	-1	-1	-1
10	Sustainability starts from within, with ourselves.	1	2	2	0
26*	The algorithms of Instagram tend to disadvantage sustainability influencers.	0	0	-1	-1
32	Organic, eco-friendly, and green, are synonyms of sustainability.	-2	-2	-2	-2
35	The sustainability influencers community is open and supportive.	1	1	0	2

Source: Own representation. Consensus statements refer to those that do not distinguish between any pair of factors. Note: all listed statements are significant at $P < 0.05$. Those marked with an (*) are non-significant at $P > 0.05$.

Although all factors agree that the community of sustainability influencers is open and supportive (St. 35), it is important to note that this was not always the case presented in the interviews. According to at least two interviewees, the community can be polarized in certain

beliefs of sustainability, such as the food sector. These polarizations or differences in beliefs can also lead to in-group/ out-group situations. As one of the interviewees shared, *"how do I put that in a nice way... sometimes they feel they are exclusive or that it's a closed group"*. Hence, although this is accepted here as a point of consensus, it must be taken with a pinch of salt.

A similar case is that of St. 32, that is, that organic, eco-friendly, and green are synonyms of sustainability. Although all factors disagree with this idea, not all participants disagreed in their Q-sorting (two people scored it +1, and one person scored it a +3). Further, a scan of some of the posts shared by influencers in their accounts gives the idea that those terms are in fact treated as synonyms of sustainability, regardless of the influencers' beliefs.

Interestingly, there was a consensus that the algorithms of Instagram do not necessarily put sustainability influencers at a disadvantage compared to more mainstream accounts (St. 26). This was the case not only for the four factors, but also for the participants' Q-sorts, the highest ranking being a +2 by two participants. This is a converse opinion compared to some of the views expressed in the interviews, where at least four people mentioned Instagram's algorithms as something they must work around, or they struggle with (see Section 4.3.2). One participant made an explicit statement that *"I hear a lot of people worrying that the algorithm doesn't like them, […], sustainability influencers are often activists in other areas [i.e., race and gender], and people sometimes mention that Instagram is shadow-blocking them because of that"*. Again, it might be that some participants do agree with this statement but preferred to prioritise other ones.

For St. 10, that sustainability starts from within, three people scored it a 4, and one person a 3. On the other hand, one person scored it -4 and one -3. Hence, even though they appear as a consensus statement, there is a degree of diversity in opinions.

For St. 7, "I don't show my unsustainable choices, otherwise I risk losing credibility", most people scored it negatively, with scores ranging between +2 and -3. This was considered important to include because of explicit mention to this point on the interviews. "*You don't have to show them [unsustainable choices] because then you lose credibility"*.

4.4.6 Analysis of discourses

This section gives a brief analysis of the four discourses, including a comparison of the discourses to the sustainability conceptualisations, and a discussion of the Q results against extant literature.

The two distinct conceptualisations of sustainability in this thesis are inner focused and outer focused sustainability. Figure 4-4 shows where each of the four factors could fall on a continuum between inner and outer focused conceptualisations. Due to the "idealistic" nature of the sustainability conceptualisations, as well as of the discourses, no factor matches 100 percent either of the conceptualizations.

Although categorising people according to worldviews is a relatively new field of research, the act of categorizing based on perceptions or beliefs is an old practice (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). The framework chosen in this thesis to guide the categorization of sustainability influencers was Institutional Logics, which allow to portray the variances, often contradictory, in practices and beliefs within institutions in modern western societies (Alford & Friedland, 1985). Each of these logics is characterized by socially constructed rules, norms and beliefs that shape "field membership, role identities, and patterns of appropriate behaviour" (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011).

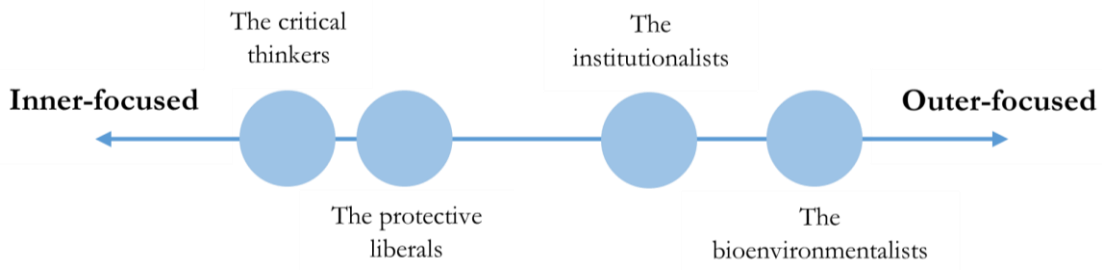

Figure 4-4 Sustainability focuses according to the four discourses.

Source: Own representation.

Societal sectors are believed to share a central logic that provides organizing principles and a sense of motive and identity to actors (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Nevertheless, multiple competing logics can also coexist when key actors are sources of opposition and of resistance to opposing values (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007). This seems to be the case within the social order of sustainability influencers in Sweden, where four distinct logics have been identified, each of which leads to different rationalities and actions. This categorization of people is useful for understanding how individuals perceive societal problems and their potential solutions (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012). Hedlund-de Witt also suggests that categorizing groups present a way of identifying the willingness of individuals to take part in those solutions, as well as individuals' potential support to address issues as a society (2012).

Although the questions addressed in this thesis are the first to do so, several previous studies have focused on categorizing individuals according to worldviews related to sustainability and environmental perceptions. Some of these are compared to this thesis' results in the following paragraphs, and parallelisms between discourses are presented in the final sub-sections.

In 2005 Clapp and Dauvergne identified four main worldviews based on data from political sciences, economics, development studies, environmental studies, political geography, and sociology (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005). Although very ideal and somewhat exaggerated categories, they provide a way of navigating through the conflicting worldviews on global environmental change. Their aim with these broad categorisations is to provide readers with an "understanding of the causes and consequences of global environmental change, as well as the controversies that surround it" (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005). Their worldviews include market liberals, institutionalists, bio-environmentalists, and social greens. In this thesis several parallelisms were found between their identified worldviews, and those captured here, hence the similarity of category labels.

An earlier categorization of sustainability discourses is that by Dryzek, who identified categories based on two dimensions: reformism vs. radical change, and prosaic vs. imaginative (Dryzek, 1997). Although Dryzek's categorisations have been widely cited[24], they are based on theoretical discussion rather than empirical analysis. Thus, they do not tackle questions like whether there are other discourses, whether those identified are actually used, and if so, who uses them and in which context. Dryzek identifies eight main discourses, which fall somewhere within his four categories of problem solving, survivalism, sustainability, and green radicalism. There is another discourse, labelled as prometheans, which is identified as the

[24] According to Google Scholar, *The politics of the earth: Environmental discourses* has been cited 5,773 times (May 2021).

opponent of survivalism. Despite the differences to this thesis, some parallelisms can also be drawn, for instance, in the role of agency (structures of responsibility) and their motives.

As a response to Dryzek's theoretical discussion, Barry and Proops went on to empirically identify sustainability discourses using Q methodology (Barry & Proops, 1999). In their study, 25 participants from the Local Employment and Trading Systems (LETS) in the UK were included in the P-set. In their research, they also identified four distinct discourses: techno-sceptical, non-green holism; anti-capitalist, techno-scepticism, non-green ecologism; political ecologism; and pro-technologism, acquisitiveness.

4.4.6.1 Bioenvironmentalists

Factor A in this thesis was coined as the bioenvironmentalists due to their resemblance to Clapp and Dauvergne's Bio-environmentalists (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005). Their bio-environmentalists see the Earth as a system with finite limits to its carrying capacity, and believe that humans are consuming far too much of the Earth's resources. This is also similar to Barry and Proops' discourse of techno-sceptical, non-green holism (Barry & Proops, 1999), which are characterized by a strong concern for the environment. All these discourses stress the central role of the environment in sustainability, stressing over-consumption as a key driver of today's environmental problems. Unlike the other discourses however, Clapp and Dauvergne's bio-environmentalists add problems of population growth to their key environmental stressors.

To all of them, system changes are considered to ideally have a top-down approach, where governments have a statutory responsibility. This may be partly, due to the dimension of the changes needed (e.g., curbing economic growth), which small individual actions are not capable of tackling. Finally, the three discourses see a reduction in consumption patterns as key necessities to achieve sustainability.

4.4.6.2 The protective liberals

Factor B was coined as protective *liberals* due to the similarities with Clapp and Dauvergne's market liberals (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005). Although with fewer similarities, they also share characteristics with Barry and Proops' pro-technologism, acquisitiveness discourse (Barry & Proops, 1999). Market liberals are mainly characterized by the belief that a free market will result in a sustainable future. In a similar way but at a different scale, the protective liberals here believe that there should be few, if any, rules guiding sustainability influencers' operationalisations. For them, money is perceived positively, and they defend the desire to get paid through collaborations with businesses. In this sense, market liberals also agree with a positive perception of money, arguing that a key driver of environmental destruction is in fact poverty, and a high per capita income is necessary for sustainable development. On a similar line, the pro-technologism, acquisitiveness group believes that big businesses are not the cause of current sustainability issues.

Both market liberals and the pro-technologism, acquisitiveness group see technology as progress and have faith in their role towards sustainability. Although questions of technology were not part of this thesis, protective liberals see sustainability as something easy to grasp and simple, which may align with the perception that straightforward technological or non-technological changes can tackle current sustainability issues. Finally, the three discourses see government as key players for achieving sustainability, although both the protective liberals and the pro-technologism, acquisitiveness group see a great value in individual actions.

4.4.6.3 The critical thinkers

Factor C, which were named the critical thinkers, shares some similarities with Clapp and Dauvergne's social greens (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005), and Barry and Proops' political ecologism discourse (Barry & Proops, 1999). There are three main themes that these discourses share. First is the perception that large-scale industrial life, including big businesses, money, and greed, are the main causes of environmental degradation. Specifically for the case of SMIs, the critical thinkers believe that influencers should not be driven by money or get paid. The second theme is the perceived responsibility of individuals; political ecologism argues that people must take things into their own hands, social greens believe that a move towards small local self-reliant communities where individuals have a stronger voice is imperative to achieve sustainability. The third and last theme is the connection between social and environmental problems, where an inner-focused sustainability conceptualization is prevalent. Enhancing people's quality of life and overcoming the distinctions between work and leisure are seen as key factors behind achieving sustainability.

Other commonalities between the groups, although not specific to only these three discourses, include the rejection of the current global economy, where mainstream trends are largely part of the problem, and the value put on societal issues in contrast to environmental or economic problems.

4.4.6.4 The institutionalists

Lastly, factor D was coined as the institutionalists due to the parallelisms seen to Clapp and Dauvergne's Institutionalists (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005). In the case of Barry and Proops' categorisations, for their last group, the anti-capitalist, techno-scepticism, non-green ecologism, no strong match was observed with any of the discourses captured here. Perhaps the only theme that all three discourses share is the role and responsibility of governments and institutions for achieving sustainability objectives. Barry and Proops' category sees the role of government mainly as keeping large businesses in check. Similarly, Clapp and Dauvergne's Institutionalists see stronger institutions and norms as key requirements to stop environmental degradation and achieve a sustainable world.

There are several other similarities seen between Clapp and Dauvergne's Institutionalists and factor D in this thesis. Firstly, is their perception towards money, which along with growth (for Clapp and Dauvergne's Institutionalists) is perceived as a positive driver of sustainability. Next, they do not see the environment as the main priority in sustainability; rather, it goes hand in hand with other issues such as the improvement of living standards. Lastly, they see badly constructed or functioning institutions as a main source of problems. In the case of Clapp and Dauvergne's Institutionalists, they are the source of global sustainability problems. In the case of this thesis' institutionalists, and at a completely different scale, a badly constructed sustainability social media institution is the source of disagreement and conflict in the spread of sustainability messages.

5 Discussion

In the presentation of the results some analysis was provided. This chapter aims to provide further discussion of those findings whilst addressing each of the research questions. This is followed by some reflections on the legitimacy and generalizability of the results of the thesis, and a reflection on the used methodologies. Finally, the relevance of the thesis and its contributions are discussed.

5.1 Addressing the research questions

In this section, relevant results are identified and discussed to answer each of the research questions identified in Chapter 1. To answer these, data from the interviews as well as the Q method were used. The section is structured in three sub-categories, each addressing one research question respectively.

5.1.1 Conceptualising sustainability

This section discusses the answers to the first research question, which was of an explorative nature.

RQ1: How do sustainability influencers conceptualize sustainability and sustainable lifestyles?

As seen by the results of this thesis, every person has a slightly different perception of the meaning of sustainability. Many see this concept as a complex one, and its complexity often results in the term being misused. Interestingly, despite the perceived complexity, influencers still believe that there exists an array of "correct" or authentic interpretations, and an array of "incorrect" or fake conceptualizations (see Figure 5-1).

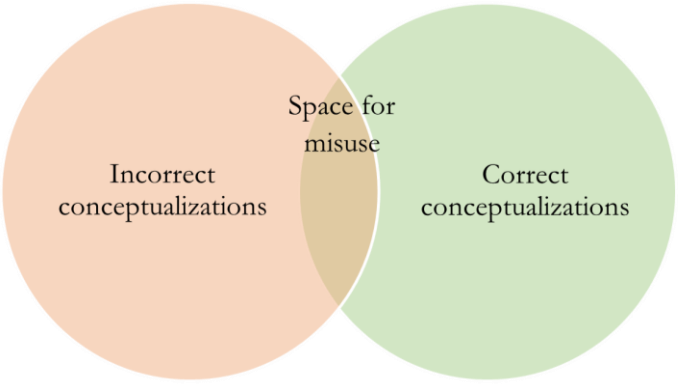

Figure 5-1 Array of sustainability conceptualizations and space for misuse.

Source: Own representation.

Most importantly, the results from this thesis point towards **two prevalent conceptualizations** of sustainability, structured through the Sustainability Framework. These conceptualizations were named inner-focused sustainability and outer-focused sustainability. Most of the interviewees with an inner focus agreed that outer sustainability cannot exist without first achieving inner sustainability, whilst acknowledging that no one is perfect, and individuals can only do so much. Further, many interviewees agreed that sustainability, at

either level, is difficult to grasp and achieve. Many even believe that it is not even possible to be truly sustainable today. However, despite this belief, most interviewees continue to work with their accounts whilst believing that in some way they are leading to change and inspiration in their followers' behaviour.

This inner-focused conceptualisation of sustainability is not new in the literature, and research looking into the connections between wellbeing, mindfulness, and health with sustainability has been growing (Helne, 2018; Helne & Hirvilammi, 2015; Wamsler & Brink, 2018). The evidence points in the same direction: there are strong links between psychological wellbeing and social engagement in sustainability initiatives (Mock et al., 2019). Another study looking into climate change and wellbeing, shows a connection between individual mindfulness and higher motivations to engage and support climate change action, as well as lesser fatalistic attitudes and greater acknowledgement of climate change and its associated risks (Wamsler & Brink, 2018).

Another interesting result relating to sustainability is the difference between the sustainability issues perceived as most pressing versus the **focuses of people's accounts** (as shared during the interviews). The issues most mentioned as the most pressing included global food systems, climate change, and work-related issues, like stress, mental health, and over-working. Interestingly, interviewees' responses to their topics of focus matched strongly the topics mentioned as most pressing issues. The topic of focus most mentioned was matters related to consumption, which included concepts of slowing down and reducing consumption, both of which indirectly relate to a decreased need for paid labour, i.e., a work-related topic. The next topic was information spreading, a lot of which involves information on climate change, then food-related content, and then health-related content, which (in)directly includes a strive for a balanced work-leisure life, i.e, another work-related topic (see Figure 5-2). From this thesis it cannot be said whether this strong match is the result of influencers focusing on the topics they consider most pressing, or whether it is simply a coincidence.

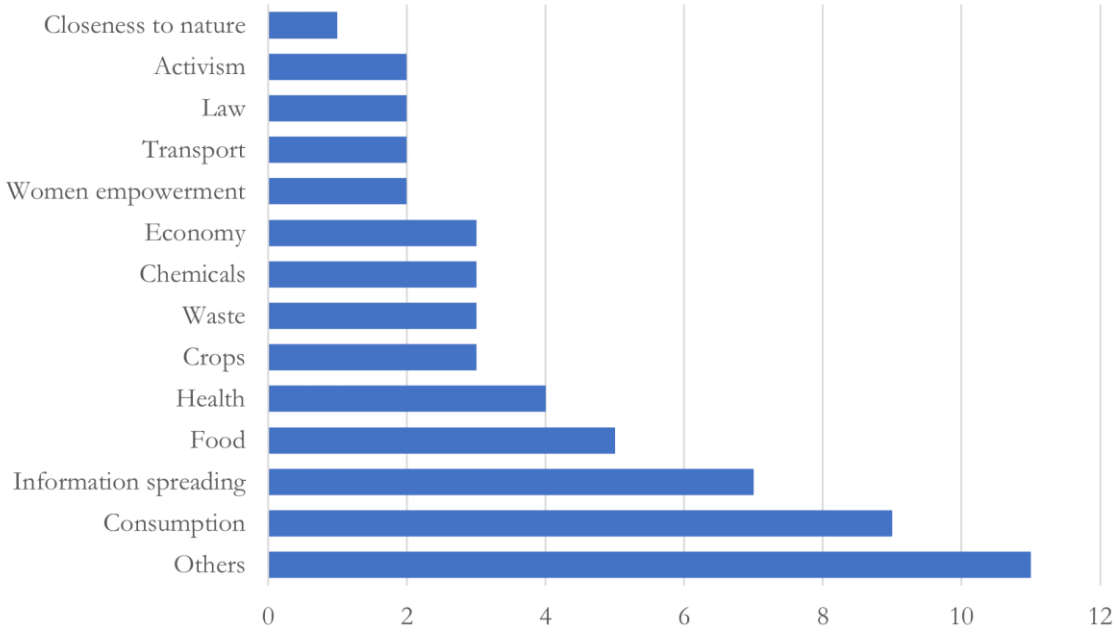

Figure 5-2 Most mentioned interviewees' topics of focus.

Source: Own representation based on Table 4-2.

5.1.2 Sustianability influencers

This section discusses the results and insights obtained for the second research question, which was of a more descriptive nature. Although focuses are part of RQ2, they have been discussed in Section 5.1.1.

> *RQ2: In practice, what does it mean to be a sustainability influencer, including motivations, challenges and barriers, conflicts, and focus.*

Although every influencer is different, with different motivations, perceptions, and focuses, they all share a set of characteristics which may help towards developing a definition of sustainability influencers. Inspired by Freberg *et al.*'s (2011, p. 90) definition of SMIs, sustainability influencers may be very broadly defined as "a new type of third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes *towards sustainability* through blog, tweets, and the use of other social media". Such a definition, however, provides little use due to its breadth and scope. Further sub-categories based on influencers' alignment to sustainability and the focuses of their accounts are needed.

Important points for understanding the results include, firstly, the **importance of trends** in social media. Some interviewees mentioned feeling pressured to follow certain trends in order to maintain their place in the field. Initially, some of them started adopting these trends, for instance by doing collaborations *("OK, so the next step for my account is to have collaborations" that was during this time where I thought I have to follow the trend of what everyone is doing"*) but later went back to following their own values and beliefs. Others never gave in to those trends and stood by their beliefs. However, according to some of the interviewees, resisting to the mainstream trends makes it harder for them to grow. Others, on the other hand, believe that this resistance is what makes them more authentic and closer to their followers. The literature on this topic points in both directions: influencers must identify and incorporate the newest trends into their content to maintain leadership in the community (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019), whilst at the same time being original, unique, and authentic (Audrezet et al., 2020; Casaló et al., 2020), a far from straightforward task. This perception towards trends also relates to the power relations observed in this study. As shared by interviewees, many feel doubtful over which content to share for fear of people's reactions, including messages of criticism and even unfollowing them. In this way, the equation of content shared may be the product of three elements: i) trends, ii) originality, uniqueness, and authenticity, and iii) followers' interests or demands.

Another point of relevance for interpreting the results is that of **gender**: as mentioned previously, the sustainability influencers' community is mainly represented by female influencers and followers. This thesis contributes to the evidence of the existing gender gap in attitudes observed towards sustainability and climate change. In a recent Swedish study, the authors concluded that regardless of the parenthood status of participants, women worried more about climate change than men did (Ekholm, 2020a). In another cross-cultural study, it was found that organisations appointing just one woman to the board of directors become significantly more proactive in environmental sustainability (Shoham et al., 2017). Instagram seems to be no exception to this gender bias towards sustainability, and greater efforts must be made to involve the remaining 50 percent of the population in sustainability work.

Perhaps the most controversial topic found in this thesis is that of **collaborations** and getting paid for work related to social media. In this regard, all the interviewees that supported doing collaborations with brands strongly believed that the brands they collaborate with are sustainable. Even when the brand was not explicitly identifying itself as sustainable, the influencers found arguments aligning with their own values for how that brand makes a

positive impact towards sustainability. However, many influencers were also dubious about the brands that other influencers choose to collaborate with. It appears that many influencers are doubtful of others' choices of collaborations whilst at the same time being certain that their own choices of collaborations are correct and sustainable. One way of going about this problem would be for influencers to be more transparent about their evaluation of companies' sustainability efforts and clarifying why they deem a company sustainable when the company's reports point otherwise. Perhaps even better would be if a system of external auditors provided influencers with companies' ratings in their sustainability practices.

When it comes to paid work, it can be argued that jobs and the labour market, especially related to social media, are changing (Parry & Hracs, 2020). Thus, it is imperative that societies update how they understand "work" and include emerging types of labour into the paid labour market. In support of this argument, several interviewees shared their hope to be able to live off their account, that is, they long for the professionalisation of the sector. This, however, may come at the cost of authenticity (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021). Notably, these accounts are driven by the influencers themselves (unpaid labour), while accounts with millions of followers are often driven by hired experts (paid labour).

When it came to the **role of influencers** in changing their followers' behaviours towards sustainability, there were two main trends. One group sees their potential mainly as a source of information and inspiration for followers. Another sees their role as a more active one, where their perceived impact on followers is triggering them to action.

Finally, the concept of "sustainability influencer" itself is a highly contested one. Some people, including some of the interviewees here, believe that to be a sustainability influencer is a flawed concept, a paradox of sorts, due to the concepts associated with "influencers" and their incompatibility with sustainability (Chua, n.d.; Feller, 2020; Wicker, 2017). Some interviewees associated the term influencer with mainstream trends where products are promoted; something that they see as opposing to sustainability. On the other hand, others are firm believers of the work they do in social media and their roles in influencing people towards more sustainable lifestyles.

5.1.3 Interpretation of the identified discourses

The last question identified in this thesis focused on analysing the prevalent Institutional Logics within the field of sustainability influencers. To answer this question, Q methodology was used, which allowed to capture four significantly different discourses in the field: the bioenvironmentalists, the protective liberals, the critical thinkers, and the institutionalists. In this way, the third research question combines data from the first two research questions to capture actual discourses (i.e., it puts the different fndings together, rather than just presenting them separately).

RQ3: What Institutional Logics are prevalent within the field of sustainability influencers?

The results provide evidence to the belief that multiple competing logics can coexist within the same societal sector when key actors are sources of opposition and of resistance to opposing values (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007). In this case, four significantly different logics or discourses seem to coexist within the field of sustainability influencers. To what degree each of those discourses is shared or supported by other members, and whether a prevalent discourse has the potential to displace the others, are questions that remain unanswered.

The four logics captured in this thesis include bioenvironmentalists, protective liberals, critical thinkers, and institutionalists. The labels of some of these groups were inspired by previous literature, mainly Clapp and Dauvergne (2005). *Bioenvironmentalists* are mostly on the outer-focused sustainability spectrum, placing the environment above society and the economy. They stress the need to reduce consumption levels, and a top-down approach to sustainability. *Protective liberals* advocate for a free medium, where few or no rules guide influencers' work. They perceive money and collaborations in a positive way, and like the bioenvironmentalists, they see the role of government as crucial for achieving sustainability. *Critical thinkers* are the most inner-focused group, and they are mainly characterized by their perception of responsibility lying on individuals, i.e., a bottom-up approach. They are strongly critical of sustainability influencers, perceive money as mainly a negative thing, and prefer not to label themselves as influencers. *Institutionalists* are mainly characterized by a positive perception of money, by the environment not taking priority over other spheres (i.e., society and the economy), and by a top-down approach for achieving sustainability objectives. They see the sustainability social media institution as badly constructed, which leads to internal disagreement and conflict in the spread of sustainability messages.

One way to map out these discourses is through a two-dimensional matrix with sustainability conceptualizations on the x-axis, and perception of collaborations on the y-axis (see Figure 5-3). The choice of sustainability conceptualization is self-explanatory; however, the choice for the y-axis demands some explanation. Noticeably, influencers' perceptions on money and collaborations were the most divisive topics among interviewees. Other themes touched upon in this thesis gave rise to a plethora of opinions and perceptions, but the topic of collaborations was strongly polarized. Further, the topic of collaborations is also linked to other topics, such as financial challenges and the focuses of the interviewees, i.e., the content they like to share. It therefore seems a relevant variable to map the discourses.

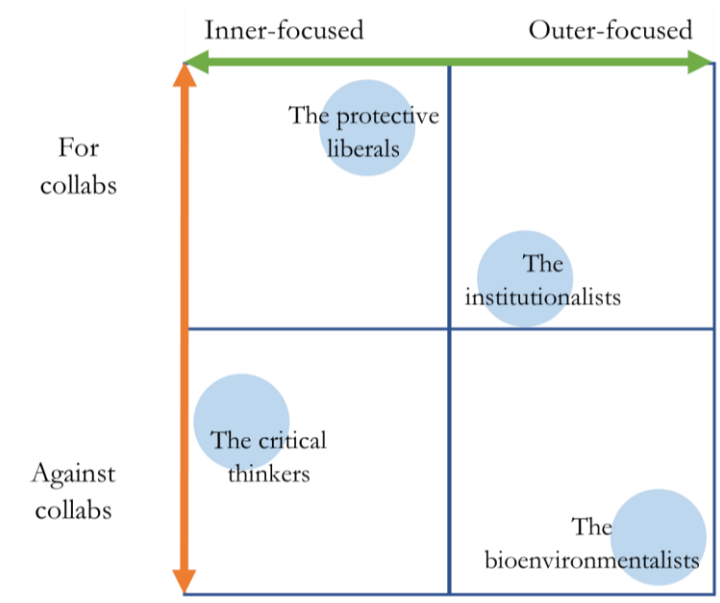

Figure 5-3 Alignment of discourses based on their sustainability conceptualization and the most conflictive topic: collaborations.

Source: Own representation.

In Intitutional Logics, sustainability concerns and profitability are often seen as intrinsically intertwined concepts (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011). Although usually referring to businesses, the same seems to be true in the field of sustainability influencers. Each of the identified logics balances these concepts in slightly different ways, resulting in even contradictory discourses, for example that of bioenvironmentalists versus protective liberals. Despite the lack of consensus seen in the relationship between profit and sustainability awareness, it is undeniable that the field of sustainability influencers is becoming institutionalised and professionalised. To avoid people being taken advantage of for unpaid labour and to be able to better control the types of collaborations taking place, it could be useful to have a union that sets standards or codes of practice, at least for those using social media professionally.

5.2 Reflection on the results of the thesis

To the author's knowledge, this is the first research of its kind using Q methodology to capture the prevalent discourses within sustainability influencers. As shown in the analysis, the results obtained to all research questions present several similarities as well as some new insights to previous research on conceptualisations, questions regarding SMIs, and the discourses around sustainability.

5.2.1 Discussion on methodology and methods

Relying on different sources of data, i.e., interviews and Q method, provided a way of comparing the results obtained. Although the results from the interviews mostly matched those found through the Q method, there were a handful of topics where the results from the different methodologies diverged. Mainly, several of the consensus statements identified in Q were sources of dispute in the interviews. Hence, based on the results found here, it is recommended to use supplementing methods, such as interviews, when using Q to avoid erroneous conclusions.

Limitations in the use of Q specific to this thesis, other than those mentioned in sections *2.4* and *3.4*, include the following. Firstly, it is possible that participants did not fully understand how the Q method works, and therefore completed the Q-sorting in the wrong way. In normal circumstances[25], it is best to talk with the P-set whilst they do the Q-sorting, which allows for the researcher to answer any questions and clarify how the methodology works. Further this would allow to have a deeper understanding on the participants reasons behind each of the placed statements. With regards to the factor-solution, some authors recommend having at least five Q-sorts representing each of the identified factors (McKeown & Thomas, 1988), which could be achieved by increasing the number of participants. However, a maximum ratio of participants to statements has been suggested at 2:1 (that is, for 42 statements, 21 participants) (Webler et al., 2009), which was closely followed in this thesis (with 19 participants). Finally, most of the participants were non-English speakers, which may have been a barrier in understanding the exact meaning of each of the statements.

The research design and methodologies used here were deemed most appropriate for answering the research questions in the timeframe given. However, there are other theories and methods that could have been used instead, although with slightly different focuses. Firstly, to understand the influencers' values and beliefs, and their operationalization of these, the thesis could have used a theory of behaviour to guide the structure and results. Examples

[25] Normal circumstances are referred to as non-Covid-19 circumstances.

of such theories include the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Attitude-Behaviour-Context Theory and the Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour. Importantly, the focus here was on general perceptions, whereas most of these behaviour theories focus on individuals' intentions towards a specific behaviour (Jackson, 2005).

Next, the choice of framework for this thesis was the Sustainability Framework (Whyte & Lamberton, 2020) due to its macro-level approach. Another way of framing sustainability influencers' alignment to sustainability objectives could be using specific indicators, such as those used for evaluating business performance on a scale of sustainability indices, like the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (S&P Global, n.d.). Mapping influencers along a continuum of sustainability leadership could also provide some guidance to influencers, consumers, and institutions interested in collaborations. Such a continuum could follow a scale like Orsato's corporate environmental leadership scale (Orsato, 2009). A major drawback from such indexing approaches, however, includes the choice of indicators to be representative of sustainability performance in the field of sustainability influencers.

5.2.2 Legitimacy

As presented in the literature review, there is a clear gap in the knowledge available on sustainability influencers. However, there is considerable evidence supporting their influencing capacity on followers' behaviours, including in public health campaigns (Gough et al., 2017), in travel destinations (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017), and consumer's purchase decisions (Chávez Zirena et al., 2020; Vrontis et al., 2021). The answers to questions like "what is sustainability to SMIs?" or "what should be prioritized to achieve a sustainable future?" are key for understanding this field and the implications they have on their followers' behaviours.

The research undertaken in this thesis was able to answer all the research questions identified in the beginning. Importantly, data obtained from the interviews and the Q method supplemented each other and did not lead to significantly different results. However, due to the nature of the research, several new questions arose during this thesis, including some of the following.

An important part of the data supporting this thesis is the believed impact of SMIs in changing followers' behaviours and attitudes. However, a gap remains about the actual effectiveness of sustainability influencers in influencing followers. Further, a comparison between the effectiveness of mainstream influencers versus sustainability focused ones could provide insights for streamlining communication strategies.

The aim of this thesis was to understand influencers' perceptions, i.e., it only considered their perceptions. Therefore, questions arise about the match between their perceptions and data obtained through other methods like social media content analysis, and between influencers' perceptions and followers' perceptions. For instance, what are the actual messages that are being shared on sustainability influencers' accounts? In this thesis the answer to this question was based purely on interviewees' answers, whereas a content analysis of their accounts would provide useful triangulation to support results. Further on this topic of perceptions, it would be interesting to know how much time sustainability influencers actually spend on their accounts. Understanding these data could provide useful insights for comparing the time spent maintaining the accounts between influencers who want to get paid and those who do not.

This thesis has also shone light on power structures, showing that influencers are not the only ones with influencing power. In fact, followers' reactions to influencers' content, for example

through messages, likes, and shares, also have an effect on influencers. As shown by some of the quotes in the previous chapter, followers' reactions incluence the influencers' communication strategies, the framing of messages, and even the content they decide to share and not.

This thesis focused solely on the social media platform Instagram. However, influencers often use different platforms for sharing content and communicating with their followers, such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. During the interviews, two participants mentioned their activities on Facebook as being far more important to the work they do than those from Instagram. An interesting question may be how sustainability messages on different platforms differ, or which platforms are most adequate for influencing users. Interestingly, some studies have found that the best platforms for sharing climate-change related content should favour platforms using video content, such as YouTube or TikTok, which further supports the need for research in this field (Hodson et al., 2020).

5.2.3 Generalizability

This thesis is based on the paradigm of Critical Realism, which holds that our understanding of the world is constructed through our perspectives and experiences (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). In this sense, the results of this thesis cannot be generalized to different contexts. However, several aspects of the results obtained here, such as influencers' motivations and challenges, were similar to results of other studies, as presented in the analysis. Hence, a degree of parallelisms might be expected between the results of this thesis and similar studies focusing on sustainability influencers in other geographic regions, other social media platforms, and other types of incluencers whose focus is not sustainability.

In terms of the discourses identified, they are in theory specific to the study-group, a group consisting of Swedish individuals already sensitive to sustainability topics to at least some degree. They therefore do not represent the opinions of a wider Swedish population, nor sustainability influencers from other regions or of other sizes, and should not be interpreted as generally applicable.

That said, several similarities were found between the discourses identified in this thesis and other categorisations around sustainability from the literature. This was the case for discourses identified by Clapp and Dauvergne (2005), whose literature does not identify a particular geographic region, and those identified by Barry and Proops (1999), whose research was based on British participants. Again, although not generalizable, it might be expected to find similar results if other regions or sectors are considered.

5.3 Relevance and thesis' contributions

This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the field of Instagram sustainability influencers in Sweden. Its main academic contribution lies in its novel description of sustainability influencers, their values and beliefs, and the way they operationalize these. To the author's knowledge, this is the first research of its kind, and shines light on several questions that should be further explored (see Section 6.1 *Future research*).

5.3.1 Broader practical implications

Social media platforms are becoming increasingly important across the world, with users' numbers on the rise (Statista, 2020). Indeed, over 95% of Swedish teenagers (between 13 and

18 years old) use social media, with Snapchat and Instagram being by far the most used social media platforms (Swedish Media Council, 2019).

Topics of sustainability are inevitably part of the discourses taking place in social media. However, this is a place where everyone and anyone can share what they like, the only jury of people's messages being followers themselves. Influencers are reaching thousands, sometimes even millions, of followers daily. Understanding who they are, what their motivations are, and how they perceive sustainability, is crucial for anyone wanting to collaborate in the field, and to better understand the sustainability-related messages being shared among a country's inhabitants.

In Sweden, local municipalities, such as Malmö Stad, have already a track record working with influencers. This thesis can serve as a guidance for institutions interested in enhancing the effectiveness of their collaborations, especially with sustainability influencers. For instance, by understanding the challenges that these influencers face, institutions can provide the right support to those who need it. Specifically, institutions should focus on eradicating the sexual harassment experienced by influencers, or possibly introducing legal consequences for such behaviour.

Important to note for these institutions is the gender gap seen in this field in favour of women. In Sweden, larger proportions of girls of all ages use social media compared to boys, a trend in opposition to that seen in the gaming world (Swedish Media Council, 2019). In the case of sustainability influencers and their followers, this trend may be even more skewed towards women. If one wishes to reach a wider sector of the population, perhaps other mediums may be more effective.

6 Conclusions

This thesis set out to investigate who sustainability influencers are, to identify areas of contention and agreement, to provide some categories of influencers, and to identify key challenges faced by sustainability influencers in Sweden. Capturing who sustainability influencers are and their perceptions of sustainability, are the first steps in understanding this growing field whose potential in changing behaviours is still poorly understood. To explore these questions, the thesis was divided into the following guiding questions:

> *RQ1: How do sustainability influencers conceptualize sustainability and sustainable lifestyles?*
>
> *RQ2: In practice, what does it mean to be a sustainability influencer, including motivations, challenges and barriers, conflicts, and focus.*
>
> *RQ3: What Institutional Logics are prevalent within the field of sustainability influencers?*

To answer these questions, the thesis drew from three sources of data: first, a literature review was conducted to identify the gaps in the literature and to structure the interviews. Next, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted to answer *RQ1* and *RQ2*. Content analysis was done with NVivo 12 software, and key themes and statements were extracted to guide the final part, that is, the Q methodology. *RQ3* drew from data from 19 participants who completed the Q-sorting, which allowed to identify four distinct logics within the field of sustainability influencers. Based on the results and analysis of this thesis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1) *Sustainability influencers are self-proclaimed SMIs who focus, at least partly, on topics related to sustainability.*

Due to the nature of social media platforms, there are little constraints on the information users can share. When it comes to sustainability, there are no standards or regulations guiding either influencers or followers. It is the consumers' and followers' responsibility to critically assess whether the messages being shared are legitimate or not. Although one may assume that larger accounts will have more validity, this can not be taken as a fact, because many of the larger accounts tend to follow mainstream strends, which often are not accepted as sustainable by other influencers.

2) *There is a gender gap in the field of sustainability influencers in Sweden.*

Data from this thesis has contributed to the body of evidence of the existing gender gap in sustainability, specifically in sustainability on Instagram. Over 80 percent of the accounts considered in this thesis were female-led, and all interviewees mentioned having a considerable majority of female followers. Whether this gap is caused by a lower percentage of male Instagram users, or other reasons, is a matter for further research.

3) *There are two main conceptualizations of sustainability, which may impact the influencers' areas of focus.*

Two main understandings of sustainability are apparent in this field: inner-focused and outer-focused sustainability. A priori, the way in which influencers conceptualise this term seems to be correlated with the sustainability issues perceived as most pressing, and the areas they focus

on. However, further research is needed to understand these correlations, or whether they are the result of causation.

4) *There are four prevalent discourses within the field of sustainability influencers.*

The main area of consensus of all discourses is the pressing need for society to change the status quo. Sustainability is seen as something to strive towards by all; however, what the necessary changes look like and which outcomes should be sought remain to be areas of broad disagreement. Everything else that was considered in this thesis gave rise to disagreement between Q method participants and interviewees, with the topics revealing most disagreement being those related to money, collaborations, responsibility, areas of prioritization, and the role of sustainability influencers. Importantly, this thesis has contributed to the understanding of Institutional Logics within the field of sustainability influencers, providing practical information about how sustainability is understood and operationalised.

5) *Sustainability influencers' main challenges include stress, mental health, and money.*

Assuming that sustainability influencers have a positive impact on sustainable behaviours, it is crucial to understand the challenges they face. Issues related to stress and mental health include dealing with messages of criticism, their acquired responsibilities as public personas, striving for perfection, as well as gaining and keeping followers. The challenge of money is most strongly associated with the amount of time spent in a type of mostly unpaid labour. Dealing with trends is also an important challenge, where influencers must seek to be unique and original whilst following the trends that followers want to see. Institutions interested in behaviour change must be aware of these challenges if they are to collaborate efficiently with influencers.

The discussion and conclusions above are critically reflective of the thesis process (including choices related to methodology and outcomes of the research process) and discuss the implications that this has for the generalizability and reliability of the findings and the conclusions drawn.

6.1 Future research

While this thesis has brought some insights into the field of sustainability influencers in Sweden, it has also provided some questions for further research.

The methodological limitations of this thesis were mentioned in the discussion section, with specific recommendations for avoiding them in future research. It must be added that this thesis focused solely on the perspectives and beliefs of sustainability influencers in Sweden. If one was to study the generalizability or reliability of the results, a triangulation approach should be sought, where data does not only come from interviews, but also from a content analysis of the accounts themselves. That is, including information on the type of content shared by influencers, the communication strategies used, the framing of the messages, the success rate of different types of posts, etc. Such an approach would also provide insights into the possible inconsistencies between what influencers *believe*, and what they *do*, or in other words, between their *intentions* and their *actions*.

Research in this area could also benefit from including the followers of sustainability accounts. This would allow to gain a deeper understanding of the influencers' influencing power. For example, do followers change their behaviours as a result of the content shared by influencers? Or do they follow these accounts mainly for entertainment? In this way, questions about the

influencing power or repercussions of influencers' actions may be explored for the context of Swedish sustainability influencers. Similarly, approaching this field through a communications lense could prove extremely useful to understand how different communication approaches differ in their effectiveness at engaging and gaining followers, and driving (self-perceived) change among their followers.

Lastly, perhaps one of the most important questions to address looking forward is why the male counterparts are not part of this field of sustainability influencers and their followers. Considering that they make up half of the population, it seems crucial to understand the reasons behind this gender gap, and how they can be more readily included in sustainability work.

To conclude, the fields of social media, SMIs and sustainability, as well as the interrelations between these, are increasingly important areas of research. If social media is to be used for achieving sustainability objectives, there is a long road ahead of knowledge gaps that must be addressed. The author of this thesis hopes that this thesis serves as an entry point into this increasingly relevant field.

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I. Appendix – *Literature review inventory of keywords*

Table I-1 Complete inventory of keywords used in Scopus. The oldest publications are shown in brackets next to Total publications and Secondary documents.

Search string	Total publications	Secondary documents
ALL ("sustainability influencers")	2	1
ALL ("eco influencer")[26]	0	0
ALL ("green influencer")	0	0
TITLE-ABS-KEY ("social media influencers")	213 (2011)	166 (2009)
TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainability AND "social media influencers")	3	0
TITLE-ABS-KEY (environment AND "social media influencer")[27]	16	1
TITLE-ABS-KEY (green AND "social media influencer")	1	0
TITLE-ABS-KEY ("influencer marketing")	162 (2008)	443 (2005)
(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("influencer marketing") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainability))	2	0
(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("influencer marketing") AND ALL (sustainability))	10	0
TITLE-ABS-KEY (conceptualization AND "social media influencer")	2	0
TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainability AND "social media")	820	98
TITLE-ABS-KEY (instagram)	4,183 (2010)	5,290 (2003)
(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("q methodology") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainability))	92 (1999)	6 (2000)
(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("q methodology") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (conservation))	100	0

Source: Own representation.

[26] Included "eco-influencer" and "ecoinfluencer".

[27] Articles mostly referred to environment in the context of "the social media environment", rather than the natural environment.

II. Appendix – *Interview guide*

Table II-1 Questions guiding the interviews along with the rationale for the chosen sections.

Questions	Rationale
Demographic questions	
1. How old are you? 2. What is your educational background? 3. Are you currently employed?	Gain some general background knowledge about interviewees.
Section 1: Defining sustainability	
1. What does sustainability mean to you? a. Have there been any significant moments in your life that changed your understanding of sustainability? 2. What do you think are the (2 to 3) most pressing issues that sustainability should tackle? a. Which of those do you feel you are more able to influence? 3. According to some people, sustainability encompasses the environment, the economy and society. Do you agree with the inclusion of these 3 pillars? And if so, do you believe any of them should be prioritized? 4. Which aspects of sustainability do you focus on your account? And why those? 5. What 3 things should everyone do to lead a sustainable lifestyle? 6. Where do you mainly learn about sustainability issues/ solutions? a. School, TV, family, friends, online, in daycare, other influencers, newspapers, blogs. 7. Mainly, whose responsibility is it to achieve sustainability goals? Individuals? Companies? Government? Others?	Gain an understanding on the way different influencers define and conceptualize sustainability. Does sustainability mean environmental sustainability? Or does it include other domains, like society and economy? Is sustainability a static concept, or can it change over time?
Section 2: Defining sustainability influencers	
1. What is the most important objective of a sustainability influencer? 2. There is some debate about the ethicality/ morality of collaborations between SMIs and brands/ NGOs or government. What do you think about this? 3. Is there a community of SMIs? Are you engaged with it? Do you communicate with each other? How, and why? a. Do you support each other or compete? Does it depend on the context? b. Are there any conflicting views towards sustainability (differences in values? How SMIs work? Something	Gain an understanding about how SMIs perceive sustainability influencers. Which topics are most important? Are they aware of contradictions in messages between and within accounts? What do they perceive their role to be in creating meaningful change?

else?) Please give an example. 4. Are there any activities promoted by sustainability influencers in general that you think go against sustainability? What is the reason behind it? 5. Who are you mostly influenced by (with regards to your account)?	
Section 3: Self-perceptions and experience as sustainability influencers	
1. When did you become an influencer (or start your account)? Why (what was the trigger)? Was it a spontaneous decision? 2. What are the main challenges you face through being a sustainability influencer? (e.g., time you need to invest in it, financial, anything that obstaculizes your mission) 3. Are there any external factors that obstruct your work? (within and outside of Instagram)? a. From companies? From authorities or government? Any others? 4. Do you intend or aspire to create change among your followers? In what way? How? 5. Has the way in which you communicate with followers changed over time? How and why? 6. Has the profile of your followers changed over time? What is their "typical" profile? 7. Do you ever face decisions which go against your sustainability values? Or experience any problems in maintaining those values? (e.g., promoting products of companies – are they sustainable companies? Are they sustainable products?) a. Do you see any conflict in promoting purchase of even sustainable products? b. Have you ever been in a situation when you questioned the sustainability of the products or company but could not refuse? c. Have you signed any contracts with a company (or NGO/ municipality) obliging you to sell something or share a specific type of message? i. If so, do you get commission for products/ experiences sold?	Acquire more specific information about *being* a sustainability influencer. Their motivations, their perceptions, and experience. Potential challenges they face and how they overcome them (if relevant). Are there any conflicts in the lifestyles they promote vs. following those *ideal* lifestyles?
End	
Is there anything else you would like to add or ask?	

Source: Own representation.

III. Appendix – *Interview consent form*

Participants were asked to read and sign the following form:

CONSENT FORM

This form is to ensure that you have been given information about the research project and to give you the opportunity to confirm that you are willing to take part in this research.

As a research participant;

- I am aware of my right to withdraw from participation at any time, and/or refrain from answering any of the questions asked;
- I am aware that my personal identifying data (name and Instagram account name) will remain anonymous to everyone except the researcher;
- I give my consent that the content of my interview can be transcribed, analysed, and published in research outputs of this project;
- I give my consent that the interview can be audio-recorded;
- I give my consent that an audio-record of my interview can be safely stored until the end of this research (June 1, 2021), after which the audio-record will be deleted.

Note: Your participation is voluntary. As an interviewee, you reserve the right to refuse or cease participation in the interview process without stating your reason and may request to keep certain materials or data confidential. At any stage of the research (until June 1, 2021), you have a right as a research participant to have access to your personal data, request its correction or deletion, or request the limitation of data processing. You also have the right to file a complaint about how your personal data is used.

To consent with these, please sign below:

Date:

Name:

Signature:

IV. Appendix – *Final Q set*

The following table presents the final list of statements included in the Q sort, according to final coding categories, and illustrative quotes from which the statements were derived.

Table IV-1 Final Q set.

Coding category (IL)	Statement for Q set	Illustrative quotes from interviews
Self-perception	I am just a regular person.	"It's also important to show that I am an individual, as anyone else."; "I don't try to say or pass as something that I'm not because I still consume that kind of fast fashion."
	I am an expert in the topic of sustainability.	"I have the insights; I have the true facts."
	I consider myself an influencer.	"I don't identify myself as a influencer, it has become like a really bad word or it sounds like you are very shallow."; "it also is important that even if people are seeing me as a sustainable influencer and I use it, too, I don't want to say only influencers because that's feels like I'm promoting. So that's why I also said a lot, that's a sustainable influencer."
Communication	I don't show my unsustainable choices, otherwise I risk losing credibility.	"You don't have to show them [unsustainable choices] because then you lose credibility."; "Obviously you cannot always do it [be sustainable], but then maybe when the time comes when you don't do it, maybe don't show it."; "But I'm not perfect. And I think that's very important also to show people that even though you are a sustainable influencer, you're also a human being that wants to have an easy life or you don't want to give up certain things."
	In my account I like to show that I'm not perfect in sustainability.	
	I try to be as obvious as possible about the link of my messages to sustainability.	"I personally was very afraid than even just mentioning things about sustainability or climate would turn people off. But now that's changed. So we do have a little bit more focus on actually directly talking about sustainability issues"
	A big incentive to stick to sustainability practices is what my followers will think of me if I don't.	"Being honest with you, of course it's realted to ethical and moral matters, but also it's like a if I do that, I'm not being honest with you, with everyone."; "I didn't want to wear that on my Instagram, because […] someone will ask me where did I get it? And I don't want to say H&M, when I kind of at the same time write about how maybe you should try to make your own clothes or buy from small companies."
Challenges	Influencers should get paid for their work on social media.	"I believe that influencers should get more paid because they do so much work"; "when it comes to having an income, that's absolutely a barrier."; "I think it's crazy of people to expect people to work for free. And I think that's a gender issue too."; "you can't lend money at the bank being an influencer because you can't show salary you get, even though they can be some of the richest

		people in the country."
	It's hard to gain followers because people prefer the mainstream accounts and trends, not my content.	"I want to grow bigger; why doesn't it grow bigger? You know, I don't push people too hard, I think I do it in a quite enjoyable way. People want shopping accounts instead"; "*"look, my papaya" "look, my boobs where I'm showing this sustainable brand"*. So, I think not getting this type of pictures or this type of way also doesn't help me"
	I find it challenging to deal with followers' messages of criticism and/ or hostility.	"But you don't dare to speak your mind because they will jump onto you or they will unfollow"; "Our emotional well-being. Social media is terrible, and we, like we often say *"we hate Instagram"*. Like you can get so much positivity and then like one negative thing happens, one negative comment, or a few followers leave after one post and it like really affects you mentally."
	I feel pressure to be perfectly sustainable.	"I feel bad when I visit a shopping mall. So, every time I'm there, I feel like, "OK, someone here maybe follows me and they recognise me and they're going to think, what is she doing here? Isn't she only buying second hand?"
	My Instagram account takes too much of my time.	"My goal is to share a post every day, but it is not always enough time for it"; "I am juggling my studies and the account and now the politics, so and two small children, so it's the time, frankly"
	The algorithms of Instagram tend to disadvantage sustainability influencers.	Instagram's algorithms, it's very complicated, so you need to have the time to interact very much with others because that's Instagram's algorithm
Collaborations	I do collabs with brands that I consider sustainable.	"Collabs are a bit of a thin line; they can be good, but they can be very bad."; "For me to say yes to a collaboration I need to know that the company is doing something right"; "I do collaborations myself, but only with brands that I use for myself and also small companies that I want to help. I don't ask for money from them."
	The promotion of green products through collabs is a way of incentivizing unnecessary consumption.	"I don't do any collaborations. I believe that there could be another way of being a sustainable influencer. If you want to work as a sustainable influencer, you might find other ways to make a salary. I'm not so much into the buying stuff."
Perception of community	The community of sustainability influencers can feel exclusive.	"[sustainable living] still feels like something a bit elitist, something that regular people can't touch, as if for something that is expensive or exclusive"; "how do I put that in a nice way... sometimes they feel they are exclusive or that it's a closed group."
	Sustainability influencers are often elitist.	"A lot of these people think that they are big stars. Yeah, I don't get that at all. It's like just because you have a certain amount of followers, it doesn't make you more important than anyone else."
	A lot of sustainability influencers are just like regular influencers, they just want money.	"Because people think that they are living in a sustainable way because they buy organic cotton, but they shouldn't buy anything at all, don't buy anything."; "it was kind of a competition. Some sides of these people were very like other influencers that live on selling clothing and other things. So, I felt, what is the difference?"; "It's kind of a very supportive community. But yes, there are people that also want to use it like regular influencers."

	The sustainability influencers community is open and supportive.	"As long as I have experienced, just, been very supportive, cheering each other"; "The sustainability community is fantastic because we teach each other, and we inspire each other."; "I feel sometimes, you know, there's a lot of them, but I feel like I'm alone."
	Sustainability influencers should have a background in sustainability studies.	"A lot of sustainable influencers they didn't study the environment. They cannot think about the environment and then start in this domain just for money. So many of them, it's a business."
Sustainability	Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative.	"It is hard to find the facts [about sustainability]"; "it's a very wide concept. And I think that's why people can misuse it also label themselves"; "to be sustainable today isn't an easy choice or maybe not even possible."; "There is nothing that's 100 percent sustainable, […] so even my sustainability, it's kind of relative."
	Sustainability starts from within, with ourselves.	"I think that we have to start with ourselves and really feel good and be kind to ourselves"; "But the first thing you can do is start with yourself"; "Sustainability means that you take care of both yourself and the outside world"; "So you have to kind of have a sustainable like not just in the context of how it is for the planet, but also how it is for yourself"
	Organic, eco-friendly, and green, are synonyms of sustainability.	"You know, a lot of products, they are eco-friendly, but is that sustainable? Eco friendly is something, and it's something totally different. Not sustainable"; "Being sustainable means the whole, you cannot just have, like, organic ingredients."
Three pillars of sustainability	The environment is the main priority of sustainability.	"I think that everything it's connected and we should not focus on exactly one, but how we could move or make better to one influence another. So I would not pick one"; "If you take out environment, then there will be no society and definitely no economy. If you take out society, there will be no economy. The environment can still live without a society. So in my opinion, the one that is in a way the most importnat, would be environment."
	Sustinability is equally about the environment, society, and the economy.	"It's always been both about the environment and the climate, but also the people, even from the mental health and how you like it to like equal pay, equal rights."; "Sustainability means for me, it's not just environment, it's more than environment, like also how we live and economy part, the social issue, all of that in the same time."
Main problems of sustainability & meaningful actions	Climate change should be our main priority to achieve sustainability.	"Stopping the global warming because without the planet, we don't have anything. So that is always number one"; "CO2 emissions, but they kind of follow everything that we do."
	Consumption should be our main priority to achieve sustainability.	"I'd say, just how we consume. It's the biggest question, like an umbrella over all the other questions"; "consume what's already in the in the system."; "Use what we have, like buying second hand and circulating things"; "First, stop over consumption. We buy a lot of stuff."
	The food industry is the single largest obstacle in achieving sustainability.	"How we grow our food and biodiversity and monoculture"; "the food industry, and that's one of the biggest I think things that we can as a global population change and would make a big difference."; "eating less meat, eating more organic."
	Above all, we need to get better informed and	"We don't have enough information about sustainability. This is the main mistake."; "I would say

	share that knowledge.	get educated."
	The largest obstacle to achieve sustainability is the problem of waste.	"It's the question about the waste, because every human are producing waste."
	Activism is the only meaningful action to drive change towards sustainability.	"Using your right to vote and voting for a party you think is pursuing these issues. You can also get involved politically; "But I think we should take action, that's number one, and go and vote"
	Most importantly, people need to re-evaluate: "is it sustainable for me? Or will I get burnt out?"	"Always re-evaluate, like is this, is it sustainable for me? Will I get burnt out if I do all things or what can I change?"; "Reflection before perfection."
	If everyone does only a little, we will only achieve a little.	Focus on general life tips: "I do have some content about chemicals, like the impact of chemicals."; "Things that you could change in your daily lives, and that could be anything within the sustainability area."; "I cover a lot like growing my own vegetables and also making food of the vegetables."; "A lot of second hand buying and flea markets."; "I focus on sustainable fashion."
Responsibility	It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	"I think we need something from above, like we need laws because a lot of people want it to be the same for everyone, like if I don't travel, my neighbours don't get to travel by aeroplane. So we need something that makes it equal"; "I think the government, because they have to implement everything and make sure that it actually works"; "it should be easy to make good choices and green choices. And that's where the government plays a really big role, because otherwise people won't do it, not because they don't want to, but maybe because they don't have the ability or the economy."; "They [individuals] are getting very confused. So, I would say the corporations and the governments need to make it more easier and more achievable for the individuals to live more sustainable"
	The main responsibility to achieve sustainability is on individuals.	"We as a consumer, yes, we have a big power because it's like about the demand. If we demand so we consume more sustainable products, the brands are going to focus on that more"; "it's everyone. But you as a private citizen, or people, you can do so much. Like where you spend your money"
Influencers' objective	I want to be a role model for my followers.	"I want to be a guideline for others to follow"; "to show that you can live a life that feels very rich and fulfilling and feel content without doing harm."; "Get the inspiration to other people that they can do a little bit at a time. You know, it's not that hard."
	Sustainability influencers should promote behaviours and actions, not products.	"I actually think to inform. To get the masses to realise the challenges that we're facing"; "Just give the right information. Yeah, nothing else"; "I think that the power of social media can be used in a better way instead, not not, you know, not showing the latest product or the latest sustainable, you know, coffee filter or something like that. That's OK, too. But I think we should take action, that's number one, and go and vote."; "I think influencers are almost sort of the new commercial, like like billboards, almost like old-fashioned billboards."
Reliable sources of	I mostly learn about sustainability through	"I always been interested and followed the media"; "I'd say Instagram, LinkedIn or just news in general, and I follow scientists and interesting people"; "I also find some YouTube channels.";

knowledge	social media.	"Mainly it's from my work or other influencers or other like, the waste management biggest organisation in Sweden."; "From the bigger environmental organisations here in Sweden. And then WWF Sweden, a little bit of Greenpeace. But primarily social media and then also watching documentaries."
The role of money	For people with more money, it is easier to be sustainable.	"When you have less money, it's easier to make the usually harder choices, like to fix broken things."; "That's the problem with people not having that much money [buying the cheap rather than the good], but I don't think they are the big problem because they don't waste food, they don't buy stuff."; "I am broke and so we can't consume from the real sustainable brands. So we have to figure out other ways that we can do something."
	It is good when you can't afford everything, then you can understand what is actually important.	"Good to have that perspective that we we can't afford everything, because then you need to figure out what's important"; "Why should we be looking at money as happiness and status? That's just the wrong measurement. If we stop that, we can open our eyes to a new world"
Motivation to start account	I started my account as a way of releasing anxiety and frustration.	"Because I was really upset that it was so slow, the change, that nothing happened. And I had actually quite a lot of anxiety and I felt that if I do something, maybe the anxiety goes away."; "I was very frustrated at systems and I wanted to just share that also in an anonymous way. I am doing it for my own sake and not for everyone else's really."
	I started my account because I felt like I needed to make a change in the world.	"I felt like our information is that important, that it needs to reach out more than to these municipalities."; "My goal in starting the account has always been to inspire those who follow me to a more sustainable life with small, simple means."; "Everyone was white. And I just felt like it is so boring because also not just for me, but for all of the other younger people who want to see someone who looks like them."

Source: Own representation.

V. Appendix – *Participants' Q-sort comments*

Participants' comments on their "most strongly" choices are presented here.

Table V-1 Participants' comments on their "most strongly" choices.

Most strongly disagree with

Statement	Comments on chosen statements
27 The promotion of green products through collabs is a way of incentivizing unnecessary consumption. **40** I am an expert in the topic of sustainability.	We can not consume ourselves to sustainability, we should buy only what we really need and the from secondhand. I am really not an expert since I'm not at scientist.
42 The main responsibility to achieve sustainability is on individuals. **25** For people with more money, it is easier to be sustainable.	The poorest people in the world live the most environmentally sustainable lives so, even if some "green" or "environmentally friendly" choices are most expensive in affluent countries, it is wealth that drives unsustainable behaviour in my opinion.
30 The environment is the main priority of sustainability. **23** I started my account as a way of releasing anxiety and frustration.	It's our systems, our economies and our mindsets that need to change, we shouldn't focus on the environment because that's too vague and it will leave out minority groups. And I started my account as a ways of documenting my outfits, to further define my style and happened to roll into the sustainability stuff!
23 I started my account as a way of releasing anxiety and frustration. **25** For people with more money, it is easier to be sustainable.	I believe that people with more money usually tend to spend more money on things they actually don't need. I comparison to poor people that just can spend money on things to make them survive. Therefore rich people spend more of our world assets than people with just a little bit of money. Even though you buy green products they still uses the worlds assets.
24 Activism is the only meaningful action to drive change towards sustainability. **25** For people with more money, it is easier to be sustainable.	You can change you and tour enviorment in other ways then activism and you cant shop your Way to sustainability
1 I consider myself an influencer. **16** My Instagram account takes too much of my time.	I don't consider myself as an influencer, my account doesn't have that much followers. I dont do any collabs.
4 Sustainability influencers should have a background in sustainability studies. **42** The main responsibility to achieve sustainability is on individuals.	Because at the end of the day the power is in the hands of the politicians. They need to make the right decisions. I think experience, street knowledge and motivation takes you a lot further than studies sometimes. We need both!
21 The largest obstacle to achieve sustainability is the problem of waste. **15** The food industry is the single largest obstacle in achieving sustainability.	There are far larger obstacles to sustainability than only waste. Such as: climate, biodiversity, deforestation etc. That also goes for the food industry. The fossil fuel industry is a far larger obstacle even if there are large challanges within the food industry.
3 Most importantly, one needs to re-evaluate: is it sustainable for me? Or will I get burnt out?	Sustainability is not a choice we can make, it's one we have to make.

10 Sustainability starts from within, with ourselves.	
23 I started my account as a way of releasing anxiety and frustration. **25** For people with more money, it is easier to be sustainable.	I started the account as a fun thing and wanted to share with you how to live frugally. With a frugal life, one's life often becomes sustainable too :) I think many sustainable choices do not cost money, it's a lot about reducing consumption, eating up all the food you buy and maybe eating change from eating expensive meat to cheap legumes :) (translated from Swedish).

Most strongly agree with

Statement	Comments on chosen statements
38 Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative. **39** Sustainability is equally about the environment, society, and the economy.	Sustainability should include all 3 dimensions (environment, society, and the economy.) Sustainability is complex and demands a lot of knowledge.
38 Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative. **6** It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	Many of my statements had to be moved from right to left. I had about 15 too many in "strongly agree" or "very strongly agree" so I would say that the distribution represented in the final sort doesn't very accurately reflect my positive leaning.
38 Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative. **33** I am just a regular person.	Sustainability is not just 1 word, it cannot be seen separate from our systems, economics and cultural practices. "Doing green" is a conscious weighing practice of the pros and cons (as far as they are known to you - which is also constantly evolving). As a regular person, I find it my duty to try and keep informed and act upon it, but also in such a way that I can actually keep up doing it that way! For some that's veganism, for others it's secondhand first, or no planes/cars, etc
30 The environment is the main priority of sustainability. **6** It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	Without the environment we are nothing. The world will heal but humans won't. We need the environment to survive. To put that responsibility on the everyday people isn't really fair when a big chunk is things that normal people can't affect. But, we like to do things easy therefore the governments need to make it hard to make bad sustainable decisions and easy to make good ones.
33 I am just a regular person. **13** Sustainability influencers should promote behaviours and actions, not products.	Cus thats true
25 For people with more money, it is easier to be sustainable. **6** It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	At the moment its usually more expensive to make sustainable choices like for e.g. food, and thatÂ´s why i think the government should do more by taxes for e.g. to make it easier for people to make/take the "best" or most sustainable choice when they buy something
6 It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals. **36** Climate change should be our main priority to achieve sustainability.	Like i said before. The politicians have the power. And the climate change is what's going to destroy us if we don't do something. That should be motivation enough.
33 I am just a regular person. **39** Sustainability is equally about the environment, society, and the economy.	I see myself as a normal person who likes to live simply and frugally. I believe that sustainability has several legs, sustainability for the environment, sustainability for society and relationships and

	sustainability for the economy (both private and government economies) (translated from Swedish).
6 It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals. **38** Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative.	I believe that governments are the ones responsible for how we build our societes. And sustainability can never be achieved by individual action only, the government need to be active in for example: banning fossil fuels, set a price on carbon etc to drive change. Sustainability IS very complex. You often have to take many perspectives into considerations and there might be conflicts. For an exemple: grass fed beef (naturbete) might be positive for biodiversity, but the climate impact is still very high compared to other protein sources.
42 The main responsibility to achieve sustainability is on individuals. **17** Above all, we need to get better informed and share that knowledge.	Don't disagree just thought higher of the others.

Source: Own representation.

VI. Appendix – *Q method results*

Tables presenting the detailed Q-method results are presented here.

Table VI-1 Participants' loadings on factors after conducting Varimax rotation. Gray areas denote pure loadings, i.e., they load significantly for one of the factors only.

	Factors			
Respondent	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
Participant 1	0.1620	0.6069	-0.3135	0.0863
Participant 2	0.5942	0.0307	0.2003	0.0333
Participant 3	0.4826	0.1094	-0.0131	0.6391
Participant 4	0.1048	0.0048	0.4882	-0.0474
Participant 5	0.0053	0.6891	0.3119	0.0693
Participant 6	0.4564	0.3189	0.3093	-0.0229
Participant 7	0.1179	0.0492	0.2628	0.7981
Participant 8	0.8026	-0.0895	0.2138	0.0653
Participant 9	-0.3035	0.6652	0.0367	0.2799
Participant 10	0.3442	0.1236	0.6625	0.0096
Participant 11	0.6032	0.3014	0.1292	-0.1965
Participant 12	0.0752	0.7672	0.2111	-0.0858
Participant 13	-0.1118	0.0135	0.8120	-0.0556
Participant 14	0.5156	-0.0799	0.0202	-0.3826
Participant 15	0.4743	0.6418	0.0456	-0.0264
Participant 16	0.1620	0.2230	0.4808	0.1456
Participant 17	0.4388	0.3703	0.4260	0.1985
Participant 18	0.2462	-0.0267	0.2891	-0.5795
Participant 19	0.6369	0.0636	-0.0919	0.2626
Total pure loadings	**6**	**4**	**4**	**2**
Explained variance (%)	**17**	**14**	**12**	**10**

Source: Own representation.

Table VI-2 Factor Q-sort values for each statement.

	Statements	**Factor scores**			
		A	**B**	**C**	**D**
1	I consider myself an influencer.	-2	1	-2	1
2	In my account I like to show that I'm not perfect in sustainability.	1	3	3	2
3	Most importantly, one needs to re-evaluate: is it sustainable for me? Or will I get burnt out?	0	0	1	3
4	Sustainability influencers should have a background in sustainability studies.	-1	-4	-1	-2
5	Sustainability influencers are often elitist.	-1	-3	-2	1
6	It is the governments' responsibility to achieve sustainability goals.	4	1	-3	3

7	I don't show my unsustainable choices, otherwise I risk losing credibility.	-1	-1	-1	-1
8	It is good when you can't afford everything, then you can understand what is actually important.	3	1	0	-3
9	A big incentive to stick to sustainability practices is what my followers will think of me if I don't.	-2	-1	-2	2
10	Sustainability starts from within, with ourselves.	1	2	2	0
11	Influencers should get paid for their work.	1	4	-1	2
12	I started my account because I felt like I needed to make a change in the world.	-2	3	2	0
13	Sustainability influencers should promote behaviours and actions, not products.	2	-1	4	1
14	It's hard to gain followers because people prefer the mainstream accounts and trends, not my content.	-1	0	2	0
15	The food industry is the single largest obstacle in achieving sustainability.	0	-1	1	-1
16	My Instagram account takes too much of my time.	-3	-2	0	1
17	Above all, we need to get better informed and share that knowledge.	2	2	3	0
18	I do collabs with brands that I consider sustainable.	-3	2	0	0
19	If everyone does only a little, we will only achieve a little.	1	-3	-3	0
20	The community of sustainability influencers can feel exclusive.	-1	-1	-2	1
21	The largest obstacle to achieve sustainability is the problem of waste.	-1	0	-1	1
22	I find it challenging to deal with followers' messages of criticism and hostility.	-4	-1	0	0
23	I started my account as a way of releasing anxiety and frustration.	-4	2	-4	-4
24	Activism is the only meaningful action to drive change towards sustainability.	2	-3	-4	1
25	For people with more money, it is easier to be sustainable.	-3	-2	-3	-3
26	The algorithms of Instagram tend to disadvantage sustainability influencers.	0	0	-1	-1
27	The promotion of green products through collabs is a way of incentivizing unnecessary consumption.	0	0	1	-1
28	I want to be a role model for my followers.	1	4	0	4
29	Consumption should be our main priority to achieve sustainability.	2	0	1	-2
30	The environment is the main priority of sustainability.	4	1	0	-3
31	I feel pressure to be perfectly sustainable.	0	0	-1	-2
32	Organic, eco-friendly, and green, are synonyms of sustainability.	-2	-2	-2	-2
33	I am just a regular person.	1	1	4	3
34	A lot of sustainability influencers are just like regular influencers, they want money.	0	-4	2	-1
35	The sustainability influencers community is open and supportive.	1	1	0	2
36	Climate change should be our main priority to achieve sustainability.	2	0	2	-1
37	I try to be as obvious as possible about the link of my messages to sustainability.	0	2	1	-1
38	Sustainability is complex, difficult, and relative.	3	-2	1	4
39	Sustainability is equally about the environment, society, and the economy.	3	3	1	-2
40	I am an expert in the topic of sustainability.	0	1	-1	0
41	I mostly learn about sustainability through social media.	-2	-1	0	1
42	The main responsibility to achieve sustainability is on individuals.	-1	-2	3	-4

Source: Own representation.