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The Power of Influencer Marketing

A qualitative study on the reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers

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Acknowledgement

This thesis is the final submission to complete our studies at bachelor level. It was written in 2022 within the Department of Economics at Lunds University. This study aims to examine the driving forces behind users following influencers on social media.

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Abstract

Title of the thesis: The Power of Influencer Marketing - A qualitative study on the reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers.

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Five key words: Influencer Marketing, Followers, Social Influence Theory, Theory of Reasoned Action, Reasons Why.

Research question: Reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers?

Purpose: This study aims to examine the driving forces behind users following influencers on social media.

Method: The study was based on a qualitative research method in the form of interviews which, with other sources, aimed to create a deeper understanding of the reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers.

Theoretical perspectives: The study was based on the Theory of Reasoned Action and Social Influence Theory. By considering the different elements of both theories, we aimed to understand the reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers.

Results: People are often influenced by the opinions and behaviors of others in their social circle. People tend to follow and engage with influencers whose content align with their own values and beliefs. Being part of a group that follows a particular influencer can expose them to new perspectives and ideas. Whether we comply with an influencer's request or recommendations depends on their perceived authority or status.

Conclusion: In conclusion, social circles and influencers can strongly impact people's beliefs and behaviors. People tend to follow influencers who share their values, and being part of a group can expose them to new ideas. Compliance with an influencer's recommendations can depend on their perceived authority or status.

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1. Introduction

The introduction will provide the reader with a background of the subject, and why this subject is relevant to examine. Furthermore, a discussion of the problem will be given, as well as the study's purpose and research question. Lastly, the study's delimitations will be presented.

1.1 Background

Currently, traditional marketing includes print, broadcast, direct mail, and telephone advertising. Due to the costs of printing and prime-time advertising, traditional marketing can be very expensive. In addition, traditional marketing is difficult to track. Generally, larger companies are more likely to use this method because they can afford tracking. On the other hand small and medium sized enterprises (SME) lack the resources and instead choose to spend their money on modern types of marketing strategies.

The main marketing tool used by companies to reach their customers has always been television. However, in recent years, a progressive shift has occurred. Especially for younger people, TV is no longer the default entertainment option. Young people and young adults are starting to use the Internet more frequently to access the variety of entertainment and information that TV once offered (Johnsson, 2003). At the same time, mass marketing with its consistent advertisements aimed at thousands (and perhaps millions) of people, begins to play its role as outdated. We are facing a change in the marketing industry (Elkin, 2003).

1.2 Problem discussion

Digital marketing has emerged as the most effective form of marketing. Various digital platforms have changed how companies interact with their customers in today's era of marketing. As an increasingly important component of digital marketing strategy, this relatively new sector is becoming more established and obvious. Roughly 2.8 billion people are today active on at least one social media platform, representing approximately 37% of the world's population. Tiago and Veríssimo claim that "If most customers engage with social

media, firms should engage with social media as well” (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). In Sweden, the estimated revenue of influencer marketing will reach 1.5 billion SEK by 2022, which is a 20% increase compared to 2021. Over the past three years, the category has more than tripled in size (IAB 2022).

Marketing strategies are evolving in tandem with the rapid growth and evolution of influencer marketing. Today, social media platforms are saturated with ads, which are bombarding users with messages that all sound the same. Advertisement has proved to be less effective because of the rapidly growing advertising aversion among users. (Insider intelligence, 2022). To counteract the advertisement aversion in social media, companies have started to invest in influencer marketing. The influencers role is to drive the product or brand to their large group of followers via their social media channels. By recommending products and brands on channels such as Instagram, Youtube and Tiktok, influencers get compensated by the company. Marketers can through this type of marketing overcome the issue of obviously paid advertisements. By using influencers, the company can utilize their credibility and authentic image for delivering information to their social media followers. This can make the company more trustworthy. As a result, followers start to become familiar with the brand that the influencer is collaborating with. This gives an effect on the follower's perception of the brand's credibility. As a consequence of the evolution of social media advertisement and the rising usage of influencer marketing, companies have started to adapt their marketing strategies and focus more on influencer marketing (de Veirman et al., 2017). The platform pioneering this shift of influencer marketing is foremost Instagram, which is categorized as the biggest social media platform (Oberlo, 2022).

A lot has happened within the development of marketing strategies. Taking into account the ever-growing gap between old and new generation methods. The utilization of digital marketing strategies can be seen as a more effective tool in today's market compared to traditional marketing. Factors such as technological and societal advancements have significantly impacted marketing. These factors can help us understand why influencer marketing has grown so rapidly. This is especially true now, when mass marketing is no longer as effective at helping marketers reach their clients. It is crucial for businesses to

concentrate on marketing strategies and efforts that the consumers appreciate because of the ever growing media buzz and market rivalry. Marketers have realized that in order to successfully reach identified clients, they must utilize increasingly targeted messaging (Evans et al, 1995). The authors argue that there is no reason why the consumers should not receive offers that are specifically tailored to meet their personal needs.

Technological and societal advancements have had a huge impact on influencer marketing. However, there is a gap in the understanding of why people follow and take notice of Influencers. Bradley Hoos wrote in a Forbes article “Ten years ago, the term "influencer marketing" didn't exist. Today, the industry is booming, and big brands are paying attention. Still, most people don't understand the true mental underpinnings that make influencer marketing work so well”. Influencer marketing has become an integral part of modern-day marketing strategies as it provides a unique way to connect with consumers on a more personal level. Influencers, with their large and engaged followings, act as trusted advocates for brands and can drive significant results in terms of reach, engagement and conversions. Influencer marketing can be seen as word-of mouth at scale. Understanding the psychological factors that drive consumer behavior is key to unlocking the full potential of influencer marketing (Hoos, Bradley 2019).

In this thesis we intend to study followers and influencers behavior in the social media Instagram. Based on the Theory of reasoned action and the social influence theory, we aim to better understand why we follow and take notice of influencers.

1.3 Purpose

This study aims to examine the driving forces behind users following influencers on social media.

1.4 Research Questions

RQ: Reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers?

This takes the perspective of the followers and the reasons they follow and take notice of influencers.

1.5 Delimitations

We have decided to delimit the thesis to the social media platform Instagram. This is due to Instagram being the number one platform for influencer marketing. The target group for this essay is Swedish university students and Swedish mid-tier influencers.

2. Theory review

The theory section starts with a definition of the term Influencer marketing, as well as an explanation of Theory of Reasoned Action and the Social Influence Theory. The study's theoretical framework is presented.

2.1 Description of theory section

The theory chapter discusses the concept of influencer marketing and the ways in which influencers use social media to sway people's perceptions and influence their followers. The discussion includes a brief overview of Kelman's social influence theory, which proposes that individuals can be influenced by others in three distinct ways: internalization, identification, and compliance. The chapter also explores the Theory of Reasoned Action, which is used to understand the attitudes and behavior of followers on Instagram. The theory concludes that attitudes and subjective norms are two categories of factors that influence behavioral intentions. Overall, the theory chapter highlights the social and psychological factors at play in influencer marketing and provides insights into how influencers are able to capture and retain the attention of their followers.

2.2 Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing has evolved and become a part of people's daily life. An influencer is referred to a person with the ability to influence potential buyers by recommending a product or service on social media. Influencers might be someone you know, like friends and family, or they can be strangers, e.g. celebrities. One of the subjects of this thesis is social media influencers. By providing entertainment and guidance, influencers can sway people's perceptions and aid businesses in getting the word out about their goods and services. Influencers are viewed as an information source rather than a marketing approach by social media users (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Influencer marketing mixes traditional celebrity endorsement with contemporary content-focused marketing, making it a cross between old and new marketing techniques. These influencers can only be considered appropriate if they are successful in their goal of influencing their followers' purchasing decisions, by bringing

up the goods of the collaborating partner. This definition does a good job of capturing the primary goal of influencer marketing as it exists now, but it is not the only one. Influencer marketing can also be thought of as a social media approach that leverages users with a specific number of followers to promote products to a wider audience. The influencers discussed above, collaborate with various businesses and receive compensation from them. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs are the main influencer platforms (Tapinfluence, 2017).

2.3 Social Influence Theory

Social influence theory offers valuable insights into the mechanisms by which influencers are able to capture and retain the attention of their followers. By understanding the social and psychological factors that influence our decisions, we can better comprehend the power and impact of influencers. H.H. Kelman's social influence theory (1958) proposes that there are three distinct ways that people can be influenced by others known as *Kelman's three processes of influence*.

Internalization: This refers to the process by which an individual adopts the beliefs and values of a group as their own, and incorporates these into their self-concept. In the context of influencers, internalization may occur when followers adopt the values and opinions expressed by an influencer, and integrate them into their own beliefs and behaviors.

Identification: In this case an individual sees themselves as similar to a particular group or individual, and adopts the attitudes and behaviors associated with that group or individual. Influencers who share common interests or backgrounds with their followers may be particularly effective at fostering identification, as their followers may view them as relatable and aspirational role models.

Compliance: Specifically this is about how an individual changes their behavior in response to direct requests or demands from another person or group, without necessarily adopting their beliefs or values. In the context of following influencers, compliance may occur when

followers engage with an influencer's content simply because they feel pressure to conform to the behaviors of others in their social circle.

In conclusion, social influence theory provides a framework for understanding the ways in which influencers are able to influence their followers. These three processes of influence highlight the social and psychological mechanisms at play when individuals adopt the beliefs and behaviors of others. By comprehending these processes, we can better understand how influencers are able to capture and retain the attention of their followers, and the impact they can have on their beliefs and behaviors.

2.4 Theory of Reasoned Action

To understand the drives and behavior behind followers on Instagram, the *Theory of Reasoned Action* has been used. The theory constructed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) is widely used and helps in understanding attitudes and behavior. The human behavior is a complex area, especially since there could be several different factors that influence the human mind. This thesis is interested in the driving factors and therefore the behavioral intention. This theory concludes that the different factors that influence behavioral intentions can be divided into two categories: attitudes and subjective norms (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980).

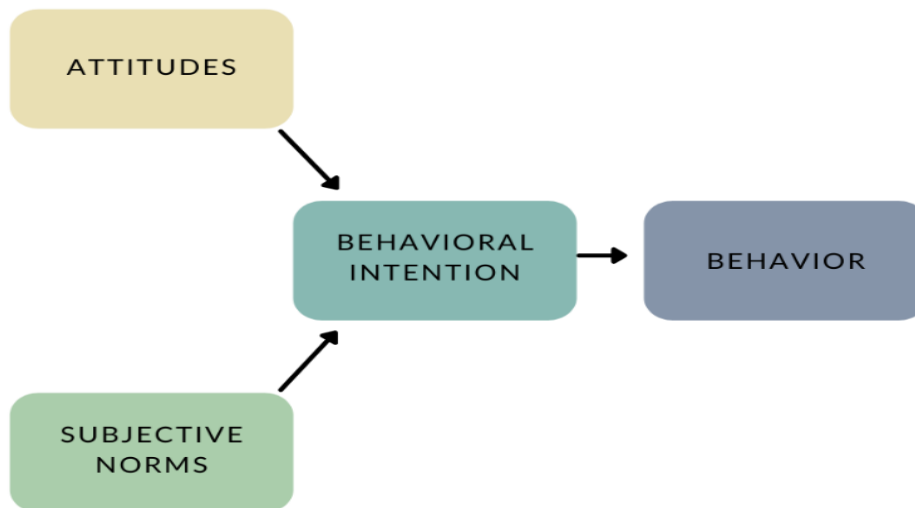


Figure 1: Theory of Reasoned Action Model

Source: Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior pg.9

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980)

2.4.1 Attitudes

The belief that a person holds about engaging in a specific conduct is heavily influenced by their attitudes. A favorable attitude and a successful outcome is often related, whilst a negative attitude could result in a failure. According to research, encounters as well as the knowledge acquired from these encounters frequently influence the attitudes, this is known as "the outcome from that attitude." Ajzen (1991) claims that attitudes are a component of social psychology. Goals, behaviors, intentions, and beliefs are all distinct aspects in social psychology. Since attitudes are a pattern that is both complex and challenging to comprehend, changing them can be problematic. Marketers have the chance to capitalize on attitudes that have already become mainstream among consumers (Parment, 2015).

Wang (2015) claims that prior interactions with vendors have an impact on the online purchasing process. The study discusses valuable information about smart phones and how to find the best or the most appropriate product. Because this process is influenced by previous experiences, buyers are more likely to purchase products from sellers with whom they already have a positive attitude. Additionally, if customers have a positive attitude toward the social media influencer, they will be more likely to buy products that they have

recommended. Moreover, the influencers have the additional advantage of having the ability to change people's attitudes and opinions (Veissi, 2017).

2.4.2 Subjective norms

Subjective norms are defined as the perceived social pressure to perform the normative behavior. Normative belief is defined as the perceived expectation of notable people around oneself. Positive subjective norms about a certain behavior increase the possibility that it will occur again or serve as a confirmation for similar behavior in the future. However, subjective norms are not the only source of this social pressure. Subjective norms are also significantly shaped by persons who share their thoughts and offer potential outcomes for consumers and others in their social environment (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Consumption and social connection are related in the way that consumers frequently share information about themselves with others. People strategically plan their spending and consume accordingly because they feel compelled to behave in a particular manner in order to participate in social groups and adhere to subjective norms. Langner, Hennigs, and Wiedmann (2013) suggests that identifying influential persons that are favored by social groupings could be advantageous within the marketing area. From a marketing standpoint the recommendation from influencers is highly appreciated inside social groups because they are seen as a reliable source, with skill and knowledge in the area. The influencer is then in a way marking the path of the normative behavior and this could then be a viable method to perform accordingly (Langner et al, 2013).

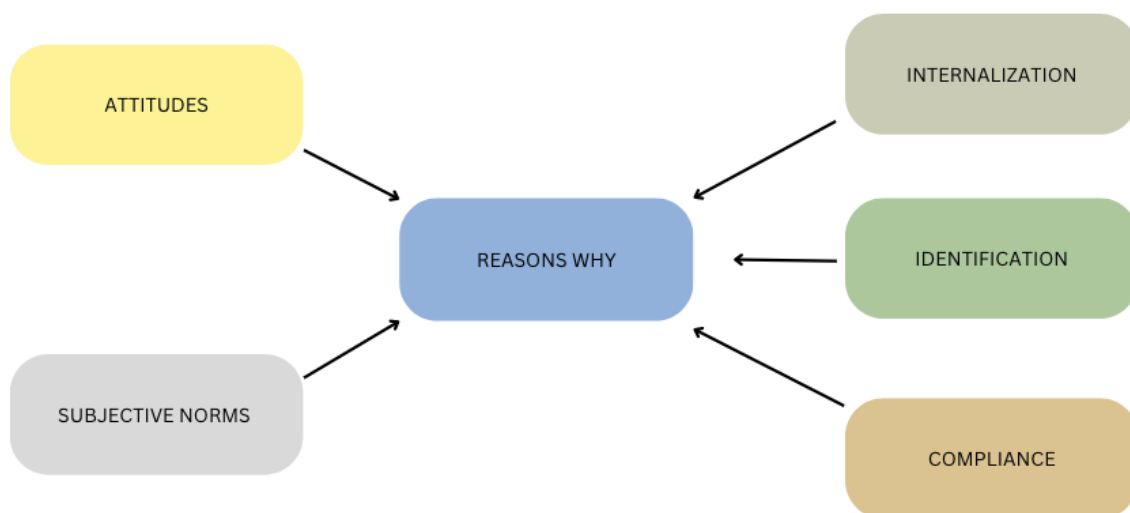
2.4.3 Intention

Behavioral intention is an important component of the theory of reasoned action. It is an indication that shows us to what extent a person is willing to keep trying and how big of an effort they are making to achieve an intention. In other words, it is about the motivational factors that influence a behavior. The stronger the intention is to behave in a specific way, the more likely it is to perform that behavior. According to Ajzen (1991), volitional control is an important factor that is linked with behavioral intention. Conforming to this theory, a person

will only perform a behavior if he or she has free will to do so (Ajzen 1991). Moreover, most behavioral performances are influenced by opportunities that we see as necessary and resources such as money, skills and time (Ajzen, 1991). These are factors that can control the actual behavior.

2.5 Theoretical framework

This study will use a theoretical framework adapted from the *theory of reasoned action* and the *social influence theory*. The purpose of the study is to examine the driving force of followers. The adapted framework will help us fulfill this purpose and answer the research question: *Reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers?*



Figur 2: Theoretical framework

Adapted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and H.H. Kelman (1958).

Social Influence Theory offers insights into the mechanisms by which influencers capture and retain the attention of their followers. The three processes of influence proposed by Kelman, namely internalization, identification, and compliance, can be used to explain the various ways in which individuals are influenced by others.

The Theory of Reasoned Action highlights the importance of attitudes and subjective norms in shaping human behavior. By examining followers' attitudes towards influencers and the perceived social pressure to follow and take notice of them, this framework can help to better understand the factors that influence followers' behavioral intention to follow and take notice of influencers.

By combining these two theoretical frameworks, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers. We can examine the social and psychological factors that drive followers' adoption of influencers' beliefs and behaviors, as well as the attitudes and subjective norms that shape followers' decisions to follow and take notice of influencers.

3. Methodology

The methodology section presents the study's approach to answer the research question. The reader gets a presentation of how we selected the participants and how the formulation of questions were done. It also explains which types of sources that have been used and a discussion of the quality of the study.

3.1 Research approach

The purpose of this study can be described as exploratory, as it examines how influencers affect followers on instagram. The exploratory strategy is applied when the research results do not have a clear outcome (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

To conduct this study, a qualitative research methodology is being used. This includes undertaking in-depth individual interviews. According to Gerring (2017) qualitative data are more useful when the study is exploratory and focuses on a single instance or a small number of cases. As a result, this study will focus on a specific phenomenon with fewer participants in order to better understand each particular case and the respondents behavioral pattern.

The complexity of the thesis and the possibility of asking follow-up questions to the participants makes interviews suitable to this study. We decided that unstructured interviews with seven participants will best meet this study's needs. This is because we want a qualitative approach to be able to analyze the results in depth.

The qualitative method involves two main types of interviews: unstructured and semi-structured (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Unstructured interviews allow the informant to speak freely and the researcher uses loose notes to guide the questions, asking follow-up questions as needed (Bryman & Bell, 2014). In contrast, semi-structured interviews use a list of specific topics and the informant can freely respond, with the researcher able to ask follow-up questions beyond the list (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Our study chose to use semi-structured interviews as they offer space for elaboration and allow for relevant

follow-up questions. Depending on the way the discussions developed, interviews were estimated to take anywhere from 40 minutes up to an hour.

Furthermore, the study is based on an abductive approach. This means that the study fluctuates between theory and empiricism to gradually reach a conclusion (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

3.2 Literature research

In the opening stages the sources in this essay consist of secondary sources of various kinds to provide information about the subject. According to Hox and Boeije (2005), secondary data is data that has already been acquired for a different purpose and is now being used to answer another research topic. The usual problem with secondary sources is that there is a temptation to only take the information that is easily available and that the material can be of varying quality. Therefore, a major focus in the essay has been to counteract the negative aspects of secondary sources. It is the high quality of the material that has guided the essay, and not easy availability. Earthweb (2022) and Internetstiftelsen (2022), are two examples of secondary sources that have been used. Earthweb is an independent technology research outlet specialized in social media and marketing coverage. Internetstiftelsen is an institution that gathers and collects statistics and information about social media usage in Sweden. The site is often used in Swedish media.

3.3 Choice of platform - Instagram

There are several reasons why Instagram might be a good choice for a study on influencer marketing among 19-24 year olds in Sweden. Instagram has a very high popularity in this age group and is one of the most popular social media (Internetstiftelsen, 2022). This makes it an ideal platform for conducting a study on influencer marketing. Another reason is that Instagram is a visual platform that allows users to easily share photos and videos, and engage with others through likes, comments and other forms of interaction. This makes it an ideal platform for influencers to connect with their followers and to promote products and services.

Furthermore, Instagram offers a range of tools and features that can be used to track and measure the success of influencer marketing campaigns. The platform allows users to see how many people have liked and commented on their posts, as well as how many have seen the post (Instagram, 2022). This can provide valuable insights into why people choose to follow and take notice of influencers. Overall, Instagram is a popular and well suited platform for conducting a study on influencer marketing among 19-24 year olds in Sweden.

3.4 Participants Characteristics

The respondents consists of ten Swedish university students. These students have access to a smartphone, frequently use the app Instagram and follow influencers. This is essential for our study due to chosen delimitations. The seven participants are aged between 19-24 years old. A study from Internetstiftelsen shows that people born in the 90s and 00s use Instagram to the highest extent (Internetstiftelsen, 2022).

A table summarizing the respondents is presented below.

Table 4.2 - Interview samples

Interview nr.	Age (19-24)	Gender	Student	Daily user of Instagram	Smartphone user	Time
1	<i>23</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>46:19</i>
2	<i>21</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>42:40</i>
3	<i>22</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>46:52</i>
4	<i>20</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>53:19</i>
5	<i>22</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>48:33</i>
6	<i>19</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>47:50</i>
7	<i>24</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>51:22</i>
8	<i>22</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>54:26</i>
9	<i>21</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>49:34</i>
10	<i>22</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>55:15</i>

We selected an influencer from Sweden who is classified as a Mid-Tier influencer for this study. Influencers with 50,000 to 500,000 followers are considered mid-tier. This influencer

has around 100k followers and is popular among 18-45-year-olds. In comparison to micro and nano influencers, mid-tier influencers have a larger audience reach but are still more approachable than macro influencers. Interviewing a mid-tier Instagram influencer allows us to gain a deeper and balanced understanding of the influencer marketing industry (Earthweb, 2022).

3.5 Formulation of interview questions

There were a few key principles that guided the formulation of interview questions. The interview questions were structured in a way to be open-ended and non-leading. This to make sure that the participant provided their own opinions and experiences, rather than being guided by the researcher's assumptions. This is particularly important when conducting research meant to study the attitudes and driving factors (David & Sutton, 2016). We also decided to transcribe the interviews in order to have a more thorough and accurate record of the data (Harvard , 2021).

During the interviews, we focused on being knowledgeable, structured, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, and able to steer the conversation. We also used active listening techniques and established rapport with the respondent in order to create a comfortable and productive atmosphere. We avoided leading or bias in our questions, and we took care to document the interviews thoroughly (Harvard, 2021).

The interviews conducted with the followers are based on our adaptive framework which consists of theory of reasoned action and social influence theory. The questions asked to the influencer were mostly general questions with the ambition to get a better understanding of how they influence their followers.

Overall, we believe that we were able to conduct successful interviews that provided valuable data for the thesis. We are confident that this information will be useful in our analysis and interpretation of the results.

3.6 Influencers

In the beginning of the interviews the participants were shown pictures of three well-known Swedish influencers. The reason was to get a better understanding about their attitude and general opinion about influencers. The selection of shown influencers was determined through a brainstorming session in the group. Both genders were represented to address bias issues.

3.7 Setup and Execution of Interviews

The environment in which the interview was conducted is crucial to make the participant confident and feel comfortable (David & Sutton, 2016). Therefore the location for the interview was individually adapted according to the participants' needs. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in a number of different locations, including the researchers' homes, the participant's home and campus areas. Some were also conducted online since this was more convenient for the participant. Prior to the interview, all participants were asked for permission to record the session so that it could be transcribed later. Interviews with participants lasted between forty minutes and an hour. The interview with Therese Hellström was conducted by two team members who had no relation to her, resulting in unbiased questions and answers, presenting her in a professional manner to ensure the accuracy of the questions.

The interviews were conducted with a predetermined requirement that all respondents owned a smartphone, studied at a Swedish university and used social media on a daily basis. These requirements were validated before moving on to the core questions of the interviews. Instagram was the most commonly used social media platform by all respondents.

Interview with influencer Thérèse Hellström was conducted with two predetermined requirements. Firstly, Instagram needed to be her active platform since the study is delimited to Instagram. Secondly, she needed to be classified as a Mid-Tier influencer.

3.8 Data analysis

The analysis of the interview data for this study was conducted using a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it is well-suited to exploring the subjective experiences and perspectives of the participants.

The first step in the analysis process was the transcription of the interviews. This involved reading through the transcripts and identifying recurrent ideas, emotions, and behaviors expressed by the participants. The identified themes were then grouped and labeled, and the data was re-examined to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the content of the transcripts.

Overall, the analysis approach used in this study was designed to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

3.9 Transparency

Adhering to transparency during the process of data collecting is an essential aspect of establishing a qualitative research paper. Transparency ensures that the research is trustworthy and credible (Moravcsik, 2014).

Transparency in data collecting means that the authors are open and honest about their methods and techniques. This includes sharing details about how the data was collected, the context in which it was collected, and any biases or limitations that may have influenced the results. By providing this information it allows others to evaluate the quality and reliability of this work (Moravcsik, 2014).

Transparency is particularly important in qualitative research since it allows the reader to understand the perspectives and experiences of the participants. It ensures that the research is not withholding or manipulating data to support their own agenda. By being transparent the

research commits to conducting the research in a responsible and ethical manner (Moravcsik, 2014).

3.10 Trustworthiness

The study's quality criteria can be controlled by managing the study's trustworthiness and authenticity. The trustworthiness of this paper was determined using two criteria: trustworthiness and authenticity. These criteria can be further broken down into four sub-criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Credibility refers to the extent to which the results of the study accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Bryman & Bell, 2017). To enhance the credibility of the selected material, all interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and with the assurance that the recordings would only be used for research purposes (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Respondent validation was also employed, where interviewees were given the opportunity to review the transcriptions, ensuring the accuracy of the information and giving them the power to influence what would be included in the final research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Bryman & Bell (2017) suggest that it can be challenging to determine the applicability of qualitative study findings to different contexts or even to the same context at a later time. The transferability of the interview results is heightened by narrowing the target group to young adults who are active users of the social media platform instagram. In spite of this, considering the size and breadth of the sample, generalizations are difficult. It is possible the results would have been different had the focus been on a different age group or just one gender. We are also aware that the results could have been different if the intention to follow influencers had been investigated in a specific city or district.

Trust is achieved through careful and systematic review by the researchers of every phase of the study, including problem formulation, choice of participants, and data analysis (Bryman

& Bell, 2017). The study's dependability has been strengthened through continuous supervision and accurate reporting of the various stages of the research process. We took care to cover all relevant areas in our interview guide, ensuring that data was collected and analyzed consistently from all participants.

In order to avoid biasing the results based on personal perceptions or values, confirmation has been used throughout the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings can be independently verified by other researchers. It is also important in establishing the reliability and validity of the research findings and helps to build trust in the research (Bryman & Bell, 2017). By using multiple interviews, the study achieves confirmability.

3.11 Authenticity

Authenticity was considered in the study, with a focus on fair representation of the participants' opinions and values regarding influencer marketing. The interview contributed to the participants' understanding of their social environment by analyzing their own thoughts and opinions about influencer marketing and the credibility of social media influencers. This helped to create more critical thinking about the topic, indicating that the sub-criterion of ontological authenticity was met (Bryman & Bell, 2017). A credible conclusion was reached after carefully analyzing the primary data.

3.12 Ethics

As researchers, it is our ethical responsibility to ensure the quality and integrity of our work (Adams, Raeside & Khan, 2014). This means avoiding practices such as fraud, fabrication, forgery, plagiarism, and manipulation of data. When conducting research with human participants, we must also respect their confidentiality, anonymity, and integrity (David & Sutton, 2016). To prevent plagiarism, we followed the APA guidelines and properly credited sources. Furthermore, protecting the anonymity and integrity of our participants is an ethical approach that can help us uphold the standards of our research.

4. Empirical Data

The following part consists of a presentation of primary data. The reader is given key points of the conducted interviews based on the theory of reasoned action and the social influence theory.

4.1 Description of empirical section

Our research framework was based on two theories: the theory of reasoned action and social influence theory. By incorporating these two theories into our empirical data and analysis, we obtained a more comprehensive insight into the diverse factors that make us follow and take notice of influencers.

4.2 Followers' Attitudes

After the opening questions, the participants' attitudes were discussed. Three questions were asked in accordance with the theory of reasoned action. These three questions indicated that the session was moving on to the more in-depth part of the interview.

At first, the participants were shown pictures of three famous Swedish influencers. The ambition of showing the pictures was to get an initial response of their attitude towards these influencers. At least two of three influencers were recognized by all the participants and one recognized all of them. The common attitude towards the influencers was neutral. The majority of the participants did not express any direct attitudes. However, three participants expressed diverging attitudes. Two of these diverging attitudes consisted of followers losing interests in influencer content due to a high frequency of posts. In spite of this, they still followed influencers and paid attention to a limited extent.

“It is something you see every time you use Instagram. Most of the time I rarely give attention to it since it so often pops up. I just get tired of it”¹ - Interview 4.

¹ Interview 4: Det är något du ser varje gång du använder Instagram. Oftast så kollar jag inte så noga på det, eftersom det poppar upp så ofta. Jag blir trött på det.

*“Becomes a bit too much. You see her paid collaborations all the time, everywhere”*² -

Interview 1.

On the contrary, the participant from the second interview expressed a strong feeling of trust and perceived their content as inspiring. This could be explained by an overall interest in the influencer’s business.

*“She posts good pictures that inspire me. I think her pictures reflect her success. I’m also a fan of her business, which perhaps explains my positive interest”*³ - Interview 2.

In order to eliminate the potential for bias or other variables, the researchers took steps to control the influence of the pictures shown of the influencers. These pictures were set aside and not shown to the participants for the rest of the study. As we move on, upcoming questions will focus on influencer marketing in a broader perspective. The participants were asked about their general thoughts on influencer marketing. The majority responded that influencer marketing is a positive influence, expressing their belief that influencer marketing can be an effective way for brands to reach and engage with a target audience.

*“I kind of prefer influencers to companies when I’m on instagram, I don’t want a lot of company posts in my feed. I also think influencer marketing is easier to avoid than regular advertising, you can choose which influencers you want to see and so on”*⁴ - Interview 6.

² Interview 1: Det blir lite för mycket. Man ser hennes betalda samarbeten hela tiden, överallt.

³ Interview 2: Hon lägger upp bra bilder som inspirerar mig. Jag tror att hennes bilder speglar hennes framgång. Jag är också ett fan av hennes verksamhet, vilket kanske förklarar mitt positiva intresse.

⁴ Interview 6: Jag föredrar typ influencers framför företag när jag är på instagram, jag vill inte ha en massa företagsinlägg i mitt flöde. Tycker också influencer marketing är lättare att undvika än vanlig reklam, du kan välja vilka influencers du vill se och så.

However, not all thoughts were positive. A minority expressed negative feelings towards influencers, believing that they would be marketing products that they do not really seem to care about. One participant meant that this would question the authenticity of the influencer.

*“Sometimes I can feel that many posts are just about money for them. If an influencer, for example, promotes just a pair of jeans and then you see another video where the same influencer tells you that she has two hundred jeans. I mean does she even use the pair she promoted?”*⁵ - Interview 4.

The researchers can state that there are different opinions about influencer marketing among the participants. To look more deeply, we asked the participants about their learned attitude and how that might affect their point of view.

*“I think that I have long “looked up” to influencers and other celebrities since I was little, so that I still follow celebrities and influencers comes naturally from that”*⁶ - Interview 2.

*“I think it affects a lot depending on what kind of learned attitude you have. For example, if you are from a big city or small town and the environment you are used to”*⁷ - Interview 1.

Six out of seven responded with a clear opinion about this and one participant did not know how to answer it. The most common interpretation we could make was that their upbringing has a profound effect on them.

4.3 Followers’ Subjective Norms

The third part of the interview focused on the participants’ subjective norms, which is the second component of the *Theory of Reasoned Action*. This involved asking the participants

⁵ Interview 4: Ibland kan jag känna att många inlägg bara handlar om pengar för dem. Om någon influencer exempelvis marknadsför ett bara jeans, och så ser man någon annan video där samma influencer berättar att hon har tvåhundra jeans. Jag menar använder hon ens de paret hon marknadsförde.

⁶ Interview 2: Jag tror att jag länge “sett upp” till influencers och andra kändisar sen jag var liten, så att jag fortfarande följer kändisar och influencers kommer väl naturligt från det.

⁷ Interview 1: Jag tror det påverkar väldigt mycket beroende på vad man har för lärd attityd. Om man till exempel är från storstad eller liten stad och miljön man är van vid.

three questions about their social environment, which then could be connected to their subjective norms.

Almost all of the participants stated that their social environment affected them to some degree. However, this varied from person to person. Often this was about what fashion trends you should follow and the intention to try new products or attend events. The participants also indicated that it is common to look at their social environment for approval or confirmation, which is an underlying pressure.

*“I believe it happens to many people in the upcoming generation but I do not personally feel that pressure from my social group. The only pressure I feel is when all my surrounding friends are talking about an influencer, and I can't relate.”*⁸ - Interview 7.

*“There can be pressure that you should know certain influencers who are famous and that can leave people in surprise.”*⁹ - Interview 1.

The researchers then asked the first interviewee a follow-up question on how the pressure to know certain influencers can affect him.

*“The pressure has made me follow numerous influencers that my friends deem relevant and talk about”*¹⁰ - Interview 1.

As a result, the participant started following certain influencers in order to feel included and perform the normative behavior.

⁸ Interview 7: Jag tror att det händer många människor i den kommande generationen men jag känner inte personligen det trycket från min sociala grupp. Den enda press jag känner är när alla mina omgivande vänner pratar om en influencer och jag kan inte relatera.

⁹ Interview 1: Kan finnas en press på att man bör känna till vissa influencers som är så pass kända och att folk reagera förvånat.

¹⁰ Interview 1: Pressen har gjort att jag följt flera influencers som mina vänner tycker är relevanta och som dem pratar om.

It is clear that influencers have an impact on social groups and their social environment. The researchers asked if the participants are more impacted by influencers or by the social environment and their friends. The most common answer from the participants was that friends have a greater impact than influencers. However, influencers still affect people.

*“Friends have a great impact on me personally. Influencers have a similar effect, and depending on how much time I spend consuming their content, the more affected I get.”*¹¹ -

Interview 5.

One participant made the direct connection between their social environment and influencers. Talking about how they follow and discuss something with their friends that they are interested in, which the influencers are a part of. The participant explained it is ordinary to follow the same influencers as his like-minded peers. The researchers categorized this as a subjective norm.

*“I think it kind of goes hand in hand, my friends follow fashion trends that the rest of the influencer world follows as they work with it. But sometimes it happens that you discuss a store or influencers etc. and then I trust my friends more than the influencer.”*¹² - Interview 2.

4.4 Followers’ Intentions

The third and last component from the *Theory of reasoned action* was discussed in the fourth section. Three questions were asked to better understand the intention to follow influencers.

The researchers started by asking the participants about how much faith they have in influencers. Since almost everyone responded in the last section that their friends have greater

¹¹ Interview 5: Vänner har en stor inverkan för mig personligen. Influencers har en liknande effekt, och beroende på hur mycket tid jag lägger på att konsumera deras innehåll desto mer påverkas jag.

¹² Interview 2: Jag tror att det går lite hand i hand, mina vänner följer modetrender som resten av influencer världen följer liksom. Men ibland händer det ju att man diskuterar en butik eller influencers etc och då litar jag ju mer på mina kompisar än influencern.

impact than influencers, the researchers were wondering how much confidence the participants have in influencers. A participant describes how the trust in influencers is a question about to what extent one follows them.

*“Depends on how invested I am in their content and for how long I have been following them”*¹³ - Interview 3.

Four participants stated that their faith in influencers depends on different things, whilst the other three responded that it varies depending on which influencer it is. However, one of these three also gave an expression on influencers in contradiction to companies.

*“It depends a lot on which influencer we are talking about.
If we compare with companies I generally have more trust in influencers than companies.
However, there are some companies that have a "green" profile that is more trusting”*¹⁴ -
Interview 2.

Secondly, the participants were asked if they have ever made an intention because of an influencer. Five out of seven responded that they have made an intention because of an influencer. The other two had no memory of an intention. The third participant responded that it probably won't be the last time it happens.

*“Yes, I have made an intention because of an influencer. I can't come up with an example, but it has happened and will probably continue to happen”*¹⁵ - Interview 3.

Another participant talked about how it can differ depending on the importance of the product and that minor decisions can take place because of an influencer.

¹³ Interview 3: Beror på hur investerad jag är i deras innehåll och hur länge jag har följt dem.

¹⁴ Interview 2: Det beror mycket på vilken influencer vi pratar om. Om vi jämför med företag så har jag dock generellt sett större tillit till influencers än företag. Det finns dock vissa företag som har en “grön” profil som är mer tillitsfull.

¹⁵ Interview 3: Ja, jag har gjort en avsikt på grund av en influencer. Jag kan inte komma med ett exempel, men det har hänt och kommer förmodligen att fortsätta hända.

*“No big decisions are made based on what an influencer has said. Smaller decisions can occur when looking for something and seeing it promoted by someone you follow”*¹⁶ -

Interview 1.

A third perspective about intentions was discussed in the second interview. The participant responded that intentions regularly happen because of influencers. However, this did not have to mean an outright purchase.

*“It happens often. If I see a nice piece of clothing and influencers have said where the outfit is from in the description, it happens that I either add it to notes or to the shopping cart. However, it is less often that I actually buy something, but it happens”*¹⁷ - Interview 2.

As a last question, the participants were asked what the most important factors are affecting their intentions. The aim was to better understand how these factors can affect their intention to follow influencers. The participant from the third interview responded with three factors.

*“Credibility, relativity, and genuinity”*¹⁸ - Interview 3.

This led to a further discussion with the participant regarding his motivational factors and creating an intention. According to the participant, credibility and genuinity increased his trust in the influencer, which makes it easier for him to realize whom to follow and take notice of. Furthermore, the participant states that relativity makes the influencer more relatable and further strengthens the belief that the influencer acts in good faith.

¹⁶ Interview 7: Inga stora beslut sker efter vad en influencer har sagt. Mindre beslut kan förekomma när man letar efter något och ser det marknadsföras av någon man följer.

¹⁷ Interview 2: Det händer ofta. Ser jag ett snyggt plagg och så har influencers sagt var outfiten kommer ifrån i descriptionen, då händer det att jag antingen lägger till det i anteckningar eller varukorg. Det är dock mer sällan jag faktiskt köper något, men det händer absolut.

¹⁸ Interview 3: Trovärdighet, relativitet och äkthet.

4.5 Changing beliefs and attitudes - Internalization in social context

In the fourth part of the interview, we explored internalization in social context and how beliefs and attitudes can be changed. The participants were asked to describe a time when they changed their beliefs or attitudes as a result of being exposed to new information or viewpoints. The question seeks to understand the reasons behind the change and how the social context influenced the change.

“I can recall a time when I changed my beliefs after being exposed to new information. I used to think that mental health was not as important as physical health, and people who suffered from mental illness were just "weak" or "not trying hard enough." However, after reading about the research on the brain and how it affects mental health, I realized how wrong my previous beliefs were. I changed my beliefs because I wanted to be more understanding and empathetic to others' struggles, and because I recognized the importance of prioritizing mental health. The social context of talking to friends and hearing their experiences also influenced my change in beliefs”¹⁹ - Interview 9.

The participant mentioned that their beliefs were influenced by the social context of talking to friends and hearing their experiences. This demonstrates how social influence can impact an individual's internalization of new beliefs and values. By being exposed to the experiences and perspectives of others, individuals may be more likely to internalize new beliefs and values that they may not have otherwise considered. Additionally, the fact that the participant took the time to reflect on their own beliefs and values shows a level of critical thinking and self-awareness, which can be important in determining which social norms and expectations are worth internalizing and following. Another participant stated directly that social influence affected their attitude toward purchasing sportswear.

¹⁹ Interview 9: Jag kan minnas ett tillfälle då jag ändrade mina åsikter efter att ha blivit utsatt för ny information. Jag brukade tro att psykisk hälsa inte var lika viktig som fysisk hälsa och att människor som led av psykisk sjukdom bara var "svaga" eller "inte försökte tillräckligt hårt". Efter att ha läst om forskningen om hjärnan och hur den påverkar den psykiska hälsan insåg jag dock hur fel mina tidigare uppfattningar var. Jag ändrade mina uppfattningar eftersom jag ville vara mer förstående och empatisk inför andras problem och eftersom jag insåg vikten av att prioritera psykisk hälsa. Den sociala kontexten av att prata med vänner och höra deras erfarenheter påverkade också min förändring av mina uppfattningar.

*“I used to frequently buy sportswears without thinking about where they came from or how they were made. But then I started learning more about the manufacturing process through social influence and how it negatively affects the environment and creates sweatshops. This changed my attitude and beliefs towards buying sportswears”*²⁰ - Interview 1.

The participant's statement demonstrates social influence because the individual's behavior and beliefs were influenced by the information they received from their social environment. This highlights the role that social factors can play in shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviors.

The researchers continued with asking the participants how they determine which social norms and expectations are worth internalizing and following. One participant emphasized the importance of aligning these norms and expectations with their personal values and beliefs.

*“For me, I determine which social norms and expectations are worth internalizing and following by considering how they align with my personal values and beliefs. For example, I choose to internalize the norm of treating others with kindness and respect, because I believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and compassion. Additionally, I consider the potential consequences of not following certain norms, such as breaking the law or violating someone's trust”*²¹ - Interview 4.

The participant mentioned that they choose to internalize the norm of treating others with kindness and respect because they believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity

²⁰ Interview 1: Jag brukade köpa sportkläder ofta utan att tänka på var de kom ifrån eller hur de tillverkades. Men sedan började jag lära mig mer om tillverkningsprocessen genom socialt inflytande och hur det påverkar miljön negativt och skapar sweatshops.

²¹ Interview 4: För mig handlar det om att avgöra vilka sociala normer och förväntningar som är värda att internalisera och följa beroende på hur de stämmer överens med mina personliga värderingar och övertygelser. Till exempel väljer jag att internalisera normen att behandla andra med vänlighet och respekt, eftersom jag anser att alla förtjänar att bli behandlade med värdighet och medkänsla. Dessutom överväger jag de potentiella konsekvenserna av att inte följa vissa normer, som att bryta mot lagen eller att kränka någons förtroende.

and compassion. This suggests that the participant internalizes social norms and expectations that are consistent with their own values and beliefs. The participant also mentioned that they consider the potential consequences of not following certain norms. They gave an example of breaking the law or violating someone's trust. This suggests that the participant internalizes social norms and expectations that have clear and tangible consequences for not following them.

The interview with the influencer allowed us to get another perspective of how beliefs and attitudes can be formed in social context. Interacting with followers is an important factor in order to enable internalization. Therefore, we asked the influencer how she interact with her followers. This was something she considered important.

“I try to reply to all comments, have a dialogue with the followers and share my posts also in a story where more people see”²² - Interview Influencer.

Having a dialogue with followers can help to facilitate internalization. By encouraging engagement and creating a space for followers to ask questions and share their thoughts, influencers can create a sense of community around their beliefs and attitudes. This can help followers to feel more invested in these values and beliefs and make it more likely that they will internalize them. Additionally, by engaging in dialogue with followers, influencers can address any concerns or questions that followers may have, which can help to overcome any potential barriers to internalization.

4.6 Adopting behaviors or beliefs - Identification in social context

The fifth part of the interview discussed identification in social context and how followers can be affected by others groups or individuals. The participants were asked to describe a time when they adopted the behavior or beliefs of a group they identified themselves with.

²² Interview Influencer: Jag försöker att svara på alla kommentarer, ha en dialog med följarna och dela mina postinlägg även i story där fler ser.

“I remember when I started hanging out with a new group of friends who had a certain fashion style. The more I spent time with them, the more I started to adopt their style. It was a gradual process, but I found myself buying clothes that were similar to what they were wearing and new makeup looks that they were into. I think one factor that influenced my decision to adopt these behaviors was wanting to fit in with the group” ²³ - Interview 10.

The participant’s actions demonstrate how groups or individuals can affect behaviors. By spending time with a new group of friends who had a particular fashion style, the participant was influenced to conform to the group's behavior and thinking. Over time, the participant adopted the group's fashion style by buying clothes and trying new makeup looks. The desire to fit in with the group was a key factor in the participant's decision to conform to the group's behavior and thinking.

Another participant answered the question above in a similar way but from a male's perspective. His newfound passion for bodybuilding aligns with previous statements of a need to conform to a social group.

“I adopted the beliefs and behaviors of a group of guys who were passionate about bodybuilding and fitness. I started going to the gym with them regularly, following their workout routines, and paying attention to my diet. The factors that influenced my decision were social - I wanted to fit in with the group and admired their dedication. Over time, bodybuilding and fitness became a part of my own identity” ²⁴ - Interview 6.

²³ Interview 10: Jag minns när jag började umgås med ett nytt kompisgäng som hade en viss modestil. Ju mer tid jag spenderade med dem, desto mer började jag anpassa min stil efter deras stil. Det var en gradvis process, men jag började själv att köpa kläder som liknade vad de hade på sig och nytt smink som de var intresserade av. Jag tror att en faktor som påverkade mitt beslut att efterlikna dessa beteenden var att jag ville passa in i gruppen.

²⁴ Interview 6: Jag tog till mig en grupp killars övertygelser och beteenden som brinner för bodybuilding och fitness. Jag började gå till gymmet med dem regelbundet, följde deras träningsrutiner och uppmärksammade min kost. Faktorerna som påverkade mitt beslut var sociala – jag ville passa in i gruppen och beundrade deras engagemang. Med tiden blev bodybuilding och fitness en del av min egen identitet.

The desire to fit in with the group and admiration for their dedication were key factors in the person's identification with the group. Over time, bodybuilding and fitness became a part of the person's own identity.

After asking the participants about adopting a behavior or belief, the researchers took the next step to understand the tension between maintaining your own identity and aligning yourself with a group. The participants were asked how they reconcile the tension and if they could give an example.

*“Reconciling the tension between maintaining your own identity and aligning yourself with a group is all about finding a group that embraces your individuality and makes you feel comfortable being yourself. As I said before, I adopted much of my friends' fashion style, but I still maintained my own personal touch”*²⁵ - Interview 10.

In this example/context, social influence can be seen as a reciprocal process in which individuals both shape and are shaped by the groups they belong to, and where the process of identification involves both conforming to group norms and expressing one's own unique identity. Another participant gave a more general answer to the question.

*“I think one way to reconcile the tension is to recognize that it's possible to have multiple identities. You don't have to choose between being part of a group and maintaining your individual identity. You can be a member of a group while also maintaining your unique identity, interests and values”*²⁶ - Interview 3.

²⁵ Interview 10: Att förena spänningen mellan att behålla din egen identitet och att anpassa dig till en grupp handlar om att hitta en grupp som omfamnar din individualitet och får dig att känna dig bekväm med att vara dig själv. Som jag sa tidigare tog jag till mig mycket av mina vänners modestil, men jag behöll fortfarande min egen personliga touch.

²⁶ Interview 3: Jag tror att ett sätt att förena spänningen är att inse att det är möjligt att ha flera identiteter. Du behöver inte välja mellan att vara en del av en grupp och att behålla din individuella identitet. Du kan vara medlem i en grupp samtidigt som du behåller din unika identitet, intressen och värderingar.

According to the participant, it is possible to have multiple identities which makes it possible to belong to multiple social groups. Maintaining individual identity while aligning with a group is possible by recognizing that one's social identity can coexist with their personal identity. One can be part of a group that shares similar values, beliefs, and interests while still maintaining their unique individual identity, interests, and values.

The interview with the influencer gave us another perspective of how attitudes and behaviors can be adopted by followers and how identification can be fostered. The influencer was asked why she thinks people follow her on Instagram.

*“Probably because I share inspiring and exciting content from my life”*²⁷ - Interview Influencer.

The researchers continued the interview by looking into how the influencer creates posts that inspire her followers. The goal was to understand her process and what factors contribute to the success of her content.

*“I think my niche in fashion is what captures the kind of followers that I have. I also focus on high-quality images that inspire”*²⁸ - Interview influencer.

The inspiring and exciting content shared by the influencer can help their followers to feel inspired, motivated, or encouraged, which can create positive emotions and associations with the influencer. This can lead to followers feeling a sense of connection or kinship with the influencer, increasing their identification with them.

²⁷ Interview Influencer: Förmodligen för att jag delar inspirerande och spännande innehåll från mitt liv.

²⁸ Interview Influencer: Jag tror att min nisch i mode är det som fångat den typ av följare som jag har. Jag satsar också på högkvalitativa bilder som inspirerar.

4.7 Complying to requests or demands - Compliance in social context

This chapter presents the part of the interview about compliance and the factors that influence people's willingness to comply with requests or demands from others. Compliance refers to the act of agreeing to a request or demand from someone, even if it is not in one's best interest. The chapter will start by discussing a participant's experience of complying with a request even though they did not want to.

“One time I was at a party with some friends, and we were all taking shots and having a good time. I had already had a few drinks, and I was starting to feel pretty tipsy. But then, one of my friends kept pressuring me to take another shot with her. At first, I tried to refuse, because I didn't want to get too drunk but I gave in and took another shot. In the moment, I felt like I was in a social situation where I had to go along with what everyone else was doing, even if it wasn't what I really wanted”²⁹ - Interview 8.

This example highlights how social pressure can influence an individual's willingness to comply with a request or demand from others. The desire to fit in with a group can sometimes override an individual's personal boundaries or desires.

The interviewer then asked the participants about the key factors that influence their willingness to comply with requests or demands from others.

“I think social norms and expectations can play a huge role. Like, if you're hanging out with a certain group of people who all have a certain way of doing things, you might feel like you need to do things their way to fit in. So if someone in the group asks you to do something,

²⁹ Interview 8: En gång var jag på en fest med några vänner, och vi tog shots och hade det trevligt. Jag hade redan druckit några drinkar och jag började känna mig ganska full. Men sedan fortsatte en av mina vänner att pressa mig att ta en ny shot med henne. Först vägrade jag, för jag ville inte bli för full men jag gav upp och tog en till shot. För tillfället kände jag att jag var i en social situation där jag var tvungen att följa med vad alla andra gjorde, även om det inte var vad jag verkligen ville.

even if you don't really want to, you might feel like you have to say yes to maintain your status in the group.” - Interview

In this case, the individual feels pressure to comply with the group's expectations and norms in order to fit in and maintain their status in the group. This pressure to conform can result in the individual complying with requests or behaviors they may not agree with or feel comfortable with, simply to avoid social disapproval or rejection. Thus, this statement demonstrates how compliance can be a powerful driver of social influence in group contexts.

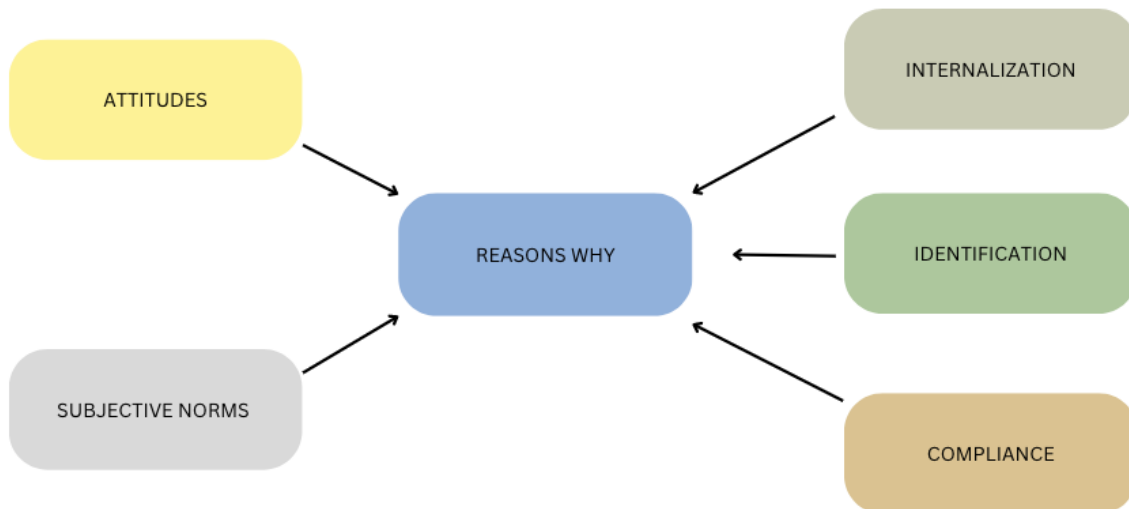
The participants were then asked what they think are the key factors that influence people's willingness to comply with requests or demands from others.

“Trust is a major factor because people are more likely to comply with requests from someone they trust. For example, if a close friend asks me to help them move, I am more likely to agree because I trust them and value our friendship. However, authority plays a role too, I may be more likely to comply with requests from those I perceive to have higher authority or status. For example, if a police officer asks me to move my car, I am more likely to comply because I respect their authority and role in society” - Interview 8

This answer demonstrates that trust and authority are key factors that influence people's willingness to comply with requests or demands from others. People are more likely to comply with requests from someone they trust, such as a close friend, due to the value they place on the relationship. On the other hand, people may comply with requests from those they perceive to have higher authority or status, such as a police officer, because they respect their role and position in society. These factors play a significant role in how individuals respond to social influence and conform to the expectations of others.

5. Data analysis

Based on the theoretical framework, we will begin the data analysis identifying attitudes and subjective norms, followed by internalization, identification and compliance. The reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers will be analyzed.



Figur 2: Theoretical framework

Adapted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and H.H. Kelman (1958).

Research question: *Reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers?*

5.1 Attitudes & Subjective norms

Diverging attitudes have been identified in the interviews. High frequency of posts from influencers has been expressed as something that can become too much from the followers point of view. A higher frequency of posting leads to less attention from the follower. Too broad exposure can lead to dissatisfaction among the followers. On the contrary, influencer content has the ability to create inspiration. Solid pictures also play a significant role in

increasing interest in influencer content and shaping the followers' attitudes towards the influencer.

Positive attitudes were expressed towards influencer marketing, citing their belief that it can be an effective way for brands to reach and engage with their target audience. Although, negative views were also identified, such as an expressed concern about the authenticity of influencers promoting products that they do not genuinely care about.

One subjective norm has been identified in the interviews. The subjective norm was the need to follow the same influencers as your peers. This was described as a type of pressure to perform according to the normative behavior. This subjective norm can have a significant impact on an individual's behavioral intention. If an individual perceives that their peers expect them to follow certain influencers, they may be more likely to intend to do so in order to conform to the group's norms.

5.2 Internalization, Identification & Compliance

The social context of talking to friends and hearing their experiences can influence a person's change in beliefs or attitudes. There can also be a social context of participating in a group and adopting their behaviors or beliefs. In addition, people can comply with requests or demands, even if it is not in one's best interest.

When someone we trust recommends an influencer, it can have a significant impact on how we perceive that influencer. We assume that the person making the recommendation has evaluated the influencer's content and found it to be valuable, which makes us more likely to view the influencer as credible and trustworthy.

When we consider how social norms and expectations align with our personal values and beliefs, we are better equipped to make decisions about which influencers to follow and take notice of. By doing so, we're more likely to engage with influencers whose content aligns with our own beliefs, making it more likely that we'll trust and be influenced by them. For

example, if an influencer shares content that aligns with our personal values, such as environmental sustainability, then we're more likely to trust that influencer and engage with their content. Conversely, if an influencer shares content that goes against our personal values, we're less likely to trust them and may choose not to follow or engage with them.

In addition, by aligning our personal values and beliefs with the influencers we follow, we can also use our social media presence to express and reinforce our values to others. When we share content from influencers whose messages align with our values, we signal to our friends and followers that those values are important to us. This can create a ripple effect, influencing others to also follow and take notice of those influencers.

When influencers respond to comments and engage in dialogue with followers, they create a more personal connection with their audience. Sharing posts on stories can help build a sense of community between influencers and their followers. By doing so, influencers create a space for followers to connect and engage with each other, fostering a sense of belonging and connection that can lead to greater internalization with the influencer and with other influencers.

In addition to our personal beliefs, we adapt the beliefs and behaviors of groups. The desire to fit in with the group is a key factor in the participant's decision to conform to the group's behavior and thinking. Being a part of a group that frequently discusses and engages with a particular influencer, will make it more likely that we follow and take notice of that influencer. Participating in a group can expose us to new perspectives and ideas, which can lead us to seek out influencers that align with these perspectives and ideas.

When followers perceive an influencer as an authoritative figure, they may be more likely to comply with their requests or suggestions, as they believe that the influencer has the knowledge, expertise, and experience to provide valuable insights.

For instance, if an influencer is an expert in a particular field or niche, their followers may perceive them as having higher authority or status. In this case, the influencer's recommendations or suggestions may carry more weight with their followers, who may be more likely to comply with their requests or follow their lead.

Similarly, if an influencer has a significant number of followers, a high engagement rate, or is popular among their followers' social circle, they may also be perceived as having higher status or authority. This perception can lead to increased compliance with their requests or recommendations, as followers may feel that the influencer's behaviors or beliefs are the right ones to follow.

5.3 Reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers

Childhood background, experiences and interactions create attitudes. The environment we are used to shape our attitudes. We are more likely to follow an influencer today if we followed them when we were young. When following a specific influencer, our hobbies and interests are often similar to what the influencer promotes. The content is therefore interesting to the follower. Followers pay more attention to content when it is inspiring and relatable. Influencer Thérèse Hellström stated in her interview that people probably follow her because she shares inspiring and exciting content from her life. When influencers' actions align with followers' attitudes, they are more likely to follow and take notice of them.

Our beliefs and attitudes are greatly influenced by the social context in which we live, as we often look to our social environment for approval and confirmation. When our friends recommend an influencer, we tend to regard them as more credible and trustworthy, which can influence our perceptions and choices. Additionally, we are naturally drawn to influencers whose content resonates with our personal values and beliefs, as this helps us reinforce our own convictions and communicate to others what matters to us.

Moreover, being part of a group that frequently engages with a particular influencer can broaden our perspectives and introduce us to new ideas, prompting us to seek out influencers who align with those viewpoints. This creates a sense of community and shared identity that we find appealing and reinforcing. There can be an underlying pressure that you should know certain influencers, and if you do not, it can leave people in surprise. It is therefore ordinary to act according to the subjective norm and follow the same influencers as your peers.

Intentions are being made because of influencers. This depends on which influencer it is. Intentions to follow influencers can be affected by several different factors. Credibility and genuinity are expressed as factors that increase the trust in the influencer, and therefore can lead to an intention to follow. Additionally, relativity makes the influencer more relatable and further strengthens the belief that the influencer acts in good faith.

6. Findings and Conclusion

The final section intends to clarify the findings of the study. The purpose and research question will be answered. Proposals for further research opportunities are presented and the study's findings are explained in practice. Lastly, limitations will be discussed.

6.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the driving forces behind users following influencers on social media platform Instagram. The analysis of interviews allowed us to draw firm conclusions about the research question.

Reasons why we follow and take notice of influencers?

People are often influenced by the opinions and behaviors of others in their social circle, and recommendations from friends can be particularly powerful in shaping our perceptions of others. This can be especially true when it comes to influencers, as many people view them as friends or trusted advisors, even though they may not have any direct relationship with them.

People tend to follow and engage with influencers whose content align with their own values and beliefs. Followers are more likely to trust and engage with others who share their values and beliefs. Influencers who are seen as authentic are often more successful in building a loyal following.

Being part of a group that follows a particular influencer can expose them to new perspectives and ideas. People often conform to the norms and behaviors of their social groups. In addition, exposure to a variety of perspectives can broaden our outlook and lead to finding new influencers.

The perceived authority or status of an influencer can influence our compliance with their requests or recommendations. People are more likely to follow individuals who have built up a strong reputation, following, and seen as leaders in their respective fields.

Research on social influence and behavior has been conducted in the past, and the findings mentioned in the statement are not necessarily new. However, the specific application of these findings to the context of social media influencers is relatively unexplored, as the rise of social media has created a new platform for influencers to reach and influence their audience. Therefore, while the general principles of social influence and behavior have been studied for many years, their application to social media influencers is a more recent field of study.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

Conducting research in different contexts can provide further insights. For example, replicating this study with a larger and more diverse population of students from multiple universities in Sweden could validate the findings. It may be interesting to compare the attitudes and subjective norms of highly educated versus less educated individuals. Given the possibility that highly educated people may not be as influenced by influencers, this comparison could yield interesting results.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is an interesting topic that could be further explored in future research. When followers share positive or negative reviews about an influencer online, other followers' attitudes can be affected. Future studies could examine how eWOM affects followers' attitudes and subjective norms towards influencers (De Valck & Rosario, 2020).

6.3 Limitations

In this study, the behavior stage in the Theory of Reasoned Action was not considered. The study focuses on the followers' attitudes and subjective norms, to explain the reasons why we

follow and take notice of influencers. This led to the behavior stage being substituted with “reasons why”.

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Appendix A - Interview guide

Warm-up Questions

- What age are you? (19-24)
- What gender do you identify as?
- Are you currently a student?
- Are you a daily user of Instagram?
- Do you use a smartphone?

- Initial response to three pictures of influencers?
Therese Hellström, Bianca Ingrosso, Jon Olsson.
- Thoughts on influencer marketing overall?
- How do you think your learned attitudes affect your attitudes towards an influencer in a specific category?

- To what degree are you influenced by your social environment?
- Influencers impact compared to the social environments, mainly your friends' words compared to influencers.
- Do you think there could be some kind of social pressure to follow influencers? That you are odd if you do not?

- How much faith do you have in influencers?
- Have you ever made an intention because of an influencer?
- What would you say are the most important factors affecting your intention?

Appendix B - Interview guide

- Can you describe a time when you changed your beliefs or attitudes after being exposed to new information or viewpoints? Why did you change your beliefs, and how did the social context influence this change?
- How do you determine which social norms and expectations are worth internalizing and following? Can you give an example?
- Can you describe a time when you adopted the behavior or beliefs of a group you identified with? How did this process work, and what factors influenced your decision to adopt those behaviors or beliefs?
- How do you reconcile the tension between maintaining your own identity and aligning yourself with a group? Can you give an example?
- Can you describe a time when you complied with a request or demand from someone, even though you didn't want to or it wasn't in your best interest? What factors influenced your decision to comply?
- In your opinion, what are the key factors that influence people's willingness to comply with requests or demands from others? Can you give an example?
- How do you balance the desire to maintain positive social relationships with the pressure to conform or comply with group norms or expectations? How has this affected your behavior in the past?

Appendix C - Interview guide Influencer Swedish

- Varför/hur blev du influencer?
- Varför tror du att influencer marketing är eftertraktat?
- Vad får dig att fånga konsumenterna?
- Varför tror du konsumenter följer dig?
- Vad är det som gör ett inlägg attraktivt/framgångsrikt? (stories & inlägg)
- Hur många av dina följare är aktiva?
- Hur ökar du interaktiviteten med dina följare?
- Tar du inspiration från andra influencers?
- Vilken målgrupp riktar du din content mot?
- Vad är skillnaden mellan sponsrade och icke sponsrade inlägg?
- Hur mycket styrs dina sponsrade inlägg av företagen?
- Vilka är dina drivkrafter inom influencer marketing?
- Hur fungerar kommunikationen/feedback mellan dig och konsumenterna?