The Significance of Consumers’ Perceived Authenticity to Engagement

- Explorative Research of Influencer Marketing in Instagram

Ida Martikainen
Anttonina Pitkänen

Supervisor: Hugo Guyader
English title:
The significance of consumers’ perceived authenticity to engagement – Explorative research of influencer marketing in Instagram

Authors:
Ida Martikainen and Anttonina Pitkänen

Advisor:
Hugo Guyader

Publication type:
Master’s Thesis in Business Administration
Strategy and Management in International Organizations
Advanced level, 30 credits
Spring semester 2019
ISRN-number: LIU-IEI-FIL-A--19/03141--SE

Linköping University
Department of Management and Engineering (IEI)
www.liu.se
Title  The Significance of Consumers’ Perceived Authenticity to Engagement
- Explorative Research of Influencer Marketing in Instagram

Authors  Ida Martikainen and Anttonina Pitkänen

Supervisor  Hugo Guyader

Date  May 23, 2019

Background  Consumers have created resistance towards marketing which can be seen for example as cynicism and criticism towards advertisements. Consequently, marketers do not achieve the aimed effect to consumers as easily as earlier. Authentic advertisement is said to be a tool to surpass the consumers’ resistance. Additionally, authenticity is argued to be the cornerstone of modern marketing and influencer marketing is said to be an appropriate channel fostering this.

Aim  With this thesis the aim is to research how this the perceived authenticity of consumers affect on the engagement in Instagram to influencer marketers’ postings. Also, to determine and identify the consumers’ perception of authenticity in influencer marketing, especially in Instagram postings. Additionally, the aim is to identify what is the significance of consumers’ perceived authenticity to engagement in influencer marketing postings in Instagram.

Methodology  A qualitative explorative research including an influencer interview, focus group interview with five Instagram users and observational study to three Instagram influencers.

Findings  Consumers’ perceived authenticity have a positive significance to engagement in influencer marketing in Instagram. However, causes of engagement are relatively ambiguous, and the engagement in influencers’ postings is influenced by other aspects as well than consumers’ perceived authenticity.

Keywords  Consumer resistance, authenticity, engagement, influencer marketing & social media marketing
First of all, we want to say greatest thanks for our thesis advisor Hugo Guyader, who has been guiding us throughout this process with great proficiency. He has been thoughtful and flexible with our ideas, and has provided us with constant support, which has allowed us to work with good motivation. Additionally, we want to thank our thesis group members for the educational discussions and their feedback, which has been constructive and valuable for this thesis.

Further, we want to express our gratefulness for the people who participated in our research and offered their valuable insights in interviews. Without you this thesis would not be in place, as it is now with your help.

Lastly, we want thank our families and friends for the amount of love and support they have provided us with throughout this thesis project. During this spring and with this thesis, we have faced many ups and downs, however with the joy and support received from friends and families we have reached this point, when our hard work has paid off.

We hope you enjoy reading this thesis.

Linköping 23rd of May 2019
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2  
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................... 3  
List of Figures and Tables .............................................................................................................. 7  
1. INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 8  
1.1 Research Question ..................................................................................................................... 10  
1.2. Contribution .............................................................................................................................. 11  
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .................................................................................................... 12  
2.1 CONSUMER RESISTANCE ........................................................................................................ 12  
2.1.1 Marketing Avoidance Strategies ............................................................................................ 14  
2.2 MARKETING AUTHENTICITY .................................................................................................... 15  
2.2.1 Subjectivity of Perceived Authenticity .................................................................................... 16  
2.2.2 Fostering Authenticity ............................................................................................................ 17  
2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING .................................................................................................... 18  
2.3.1 Interaction ............................................................................................................................... 18  
2.3.2 Information Diffusion .............................................................................................................. 19  
2.3.3 Instagram as a Social Media Platform ..................................................................................... 20  
2.4 INFLUENCER MARKETING ....................................................................................................... 21  
2.4.1 eWOM ................................................................................................................................... 22  
2.4.2 Size of the Influencer ............................................................................................................. 23  
2.4.3 Authentic Influencer Marketing ............................................................................................... 24  
2.4.4 Transparency of Paid Collaborations ...................................................................................... 25  
2.4.5 Downsides of Influencer Marketing ....................................................................................... 26  
2.5 ENGAGEMENT IN INFLUENCERS’ POSTINGS IN INSTAGRAM ............................................. 27  
2.5.1 Engagement Rate and Drivers for Engagement in Social Media ............................................ 28  
3. SUMMARY OF THEORY .............................................................................................................. 31  
4. METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................................... 34
APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Influencer Interview Questions .................................................................................. 97
Appendix 2. Focus Group Interview Questions .............................................................................. 97
Appendix 3. Screenshot of @mariannnan Instagram account ......................................................... 98
Appendix 4. Screenshot of @annikaollila Instagram account ......................................................... 99
Appendix 5. Screenshot of @kira_kosonen Instagram account ...................................................... 100
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1. Main literature concepts</td>
<td>p. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2. Theoretical framework and problematization</td>
<td>p. 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3. Organization of methodology</td>
<td>p. 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4. Example of posting (Influencer 1.)</td>
<td>p. 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5. Influencer 1. posting with the highest engagement rate</td>
<td>p. 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6. Influencer 1. posting with the lowest engagement rate</td>
<td>p. 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7. Influencer 2. posting with the highest engagement rate</td>
<td>p. 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8. Influencer 2. posting with the lowest engagement rate</td>
<td>p. 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9. Influencer 3. posting with the lowest engagement rate</td>
<td>p. 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10. Influencer 3. posting with the highest engagement rate</td>
<td>p. 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1. Overview of the focus group interview participants</td>
<td>p. 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2. Overview of the observed Influencers</td>
<td>p. 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3. Example table of observations</td>
<td>p. 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4. Summary of the focus group data</td>
<td>p. 50-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5. Observation notes. Related to Figure 4.</td>
<td>p. 59-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6. Summary of observational study results per influencer</td>
<td>p.63-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7. Comparison of three lowest and highest engagement rates of the influencers</td>
<td>p. 66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION

On daily basis, consumers face variety of advertisements, whether they are seeking for it or not. This constant flood of advertisements has led to a point, where consumers are more critical towards and increasingly aware of the marketers’ commercial aims. Consequently, consumers have created strategies to avoid excess advertisements. This movement of consumer behavior has been named as consumer resistance. As marketers are also aware of consumer resistance, they have realized that they need to respond to this issue. Further, it has been detected that creating authenticity in marketing can enable to pass the filters of consumers’ resistance, and thus make the aims of marketing succeed. Authenticity in marketing is characterized with features such as genuine, real and true (Beverland & Farrelly, 2009), which is also applying to consumers’ perceived authenticity. One of the rather current means of fostering authenticity in marketing is using influencers in social media to promote the company’s offering. Influencer in turn is determined as a person who has influence over other people’s perception and opinions, commonly referring to their followers. This field of marketing is named as influencer marketing which is in focus of our research.

Most commonly, influencer marketing is apparent in Instagram, where the influencers share visual content in order to engage with their followers (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017). Instagram has gained acknowledgement and popularity as a social media platform, and majority of users check the platform on daily basis (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Due to the effective accessibility to consumer base also marketers have realized the potential of Instagram as a marketing channel. Accordingly, most users of Instagram have probably been exposed to advertisement in Instagram either as a traditional advertisement or through influencer marketers promoting a product on their Instagram accounts. This has turned Instagram as a channel where consumers have no other option than to be exposed to continuous advertisements.
As mentioned, influencer marketing is a contemporary tool for companies to approach consumers with more authentic and trustworthy way. Yet, due to the current regulations, the paid collaborations must be disclosed in Instagram, and thus delivering authentic influencer marketing is challenging, as the marketing purpose behind the posting is clear for consumers. This draw our attention to study the phenomenon of consumers’ perceived authenticity in influencer marketing in Instagram further, and dig deeper the effectiveness of this phenomenon. Furthermore, we were eager to investigate can consumers see through the marketing purposes in Instagram postings, and if the desired perceived authenticity and consequently engagement is accomplished with influencer marketing. Engagement in turn is a way to measure the extent of interactions which consumers or followers have with the Instagram postings.

With this explorative research, the aim is to determine and identify the consumers’ perception of authenticity in influencer marketing, especially in Instagram postings. Additionally, the aim is to identify what is the significance of consumers’ perceived authenticity to engagement in influencer marketing postings in Instagram. To meet these aims, at first, we conducted an interview with a Finnish influencer to gain more understanding of the industry of influencer marketing. This provided us information of how companies approach influencers and how the collaborations are constructed. Secondly, we organized a focus group interview in order to determine which elements consumers consider authentic and in-authentic in influencer marketing in Instagram. Lastly, we examined these elements in context of three before-hand defined influencers. This refers to observing their Instagram feeds and their posting behavior in Instagram. Further, we utilized a grounded theory as an approach for our method as it allows simultaneous data collection and analysis and enables a discussion between the data set and theory.

Firstly, in this paper it is provided a literature review in which the main concepts and theories are summarized. In literature review, there is also provided a figure 2, combining all the main concepts and the closely related topics, in order to create a visual representation about how the main concepts are in relation with each other and to clarify the problematization for this research. Thereafter, it is followed by theoretical framework which discusses further about consumer
resistance and marketing authenticity, that has gained attention and acknowledgment as a response to consumer resistance. After this, theoretical framework proceeds with social media marketing, influencer marketing and engagement, respectively. After this, the methodology will be introduced; how the data was collected and what results were gathered. Then followed by data analysis and discussion. Finally, there will be provided a final part of conclusion.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

With our research, we hope to shed more light on the existence of consumers’ perceived authenticity in influencer marketing in Instagram. Moreover, we hope to find what kind of connection there exists between perceived authenticity and engagement as represented in figure 1.

Figure 1. Main literature concepts.

The above-mentioned motivation for research serves a basis for the formulation of research question. To summarize, authenticity is considered as a cornerstone of modern marketing and as response to consumers’ resistance to marketing. Influencers for one are regarded as a phenomenon to emphasize authenticity perceived by consumers in marketing. Through this engagement in turn
can be enhanced. As follows, we want to research the accuracy of these connections in practice through the following research question:

**What is the significance of consumers’ perceived authenticity to engagement in influencer marketing postings in Instagram?**

### 1.2. CONTRIBUTION

With our research, we aim to contribute for comprehensive insight of the perceived authenticity in influencer marketing in Instagram from the consumers perspective. In addition, we hope to provide understanding of what kind of influencer marketing activities the consumers’ have formed resistance to or have they done so at all. And finally, we hope to shed more light on what might work in influencers’ postings in Instagram from consumers’ perspective and what not and how engagement with the consumers could be increased.

These results can be useful for professionals in marketing and especially if they are planning to implement collaborations with influencers. Consequently, the results can be utilized when planning both the content of an influencer marketing campaign or to which kind of influencer to work with in the campaign.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section of the paper the purpose is to explain further the main theoretical concepts of influencer marketing, authenticity and engagement and to discuss about theories and concepts closely related to these, accordingly consumer resistance and social media marketing. Moreover, the aim is to provide an overview and comprehensive understanding for the reader about the existing theories in this field.

2.1 CONSUMER RESISTANCE

Consumer resistance as a topic is relevant for our research purpose, and it provides an essential basis for introducing our research problem in the field of marketing. Moreover, by firstly defining the meaning of consumer resistance we aim to clarify the need for creating authenticity in marketing.

In today’s society, the consumers are surrounded by advertisements from various channels. These marketing aims are essential for companies to get known and visible for the target audience. However, despite of these aspirations, the way the marketing practices are carried out are often emphasizing ways that are actually working against consumers’ interests. Moreover, existing research indicates that consumers are cynical about marketing and consider it as manipulative, misleading and dishonest. These factors have led to consumers’ everyday acts, such as consumption strategies that are aimed to resist marketing practices like advertisements. Valor, Díaz and Merino (2017) define the term “resistance” as human act of opposition which is a result of perception of conflicting elements which are generating negative feelings in the subject. This resistance of consumers is not always loud or visible, but it is affecting greatly in the ways consumers are reacting to marketing and relating towards companies and, especially, how the
consumers are experiencing such interactions (Heath, Cluley and O’Malley, 2017). Also, Minahan, Sands and Ferraro (2011) define the fact that consumer resistance is both an activity and attitude.

Minahan et al. (2011) have built up a model including five main elements in consumer resistance which are macro-level values and trends in society, internal motivations driving the individual, internal experience of the individual, conflict and consumer response. Further, macro-level trends provide the background to the ultimate drivers for consumer resistance. If there exists a conflict between the interlinked internal motivations and internal experience, there can appear consumer resistance. Examples of internal motivations are seeking for economic value, health or convenience. So as mentioned, if the internal motivations and internal experience of a consumer do not meet, there is a possibility for a conflict and resistant response (ibid.).

The amount of advertising messages can simply surpass the consumers’ information-processing abilities, so they need to filter out the excess marketing information. Despite the fact, that the services and consumer goods promoted can offer many kinds of conveniences and ways to self-expression, the exposure to all daily selling messages can lead to consumers creating cognitive defenses and even anger. As a result, postmodern consumers are often compelled to apply strategies to avoid advertisement so that they are not over-filled by advertisement and to keep some kind of sovereignty over their physic space. Also, increasing exposure to advertisement chaos can make the already skeptical consumers to feel made use of. Moreover, consumer resistance exists because the information overload and especially advertising clutter requires that a consumer needs to develop mechanisms to cope and avoid ads, that he/she does not end up being overwhelmed. Consequently, when consumer can filter out the unnecessary stimuli, he/she can focus for the messages that can penetrate his/her own personal screening criteria (Rumbo, 2002).

Nowadays, consumers are increasingly concerned about the environmental, social and sustainable issues when choosing a product for example. These changes in attitudes and consumer profiles have made companies to think about consumer resistance in different ways and to realize that
consumers who are resisting are still consumers but just that their needs and wants might be different than before (Nepomuceno et al. 2017). Also, it is said that modern consumers are redefining the producer and consumer roles by producing their own symbols and signs of consumption (Rumbo, 2002.)

2.1.1 MARKETING AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

Minahan et al. (2011) point out that consumers in fact have created ad-avoidance strategies by for example cutting down and filtering out the superfluous advertising clutter. Rumbo (2002) in turn, defines that ad-avoidance strategies are created because consumers want to protect their physic space by filtering out all the advertisement clutter. He states that the whole consumer resistance and ad-avoidance strategy conditions have been formed as a result of the influential effects of advertising and consumer culture in relation to the postmodern state of marketing, which is typically fast in speed, fragmented and decentered.

One form of consumer resistance is that consumers are trying to break down marketers’ dominance by finding social spaces in where they can produce their own culture which are away from those spaces that are created by the market. In addition, because consumers are increasingly aware and reflexive about the mechanisms of branding, the common techniques of branding formed within culture are losing their efficiency step by step. Because marketers are aware of the resistance and possible adverse attitudes consumers have towards marketing messages it has led to the point where marketers are trying to sell the object without actually seeming that they are doing so. This meaning, that marketers need to aim for goods and services that are in line with the cultural and ethical views of resistance activities in a way that they are not disturbing these settings with excess selling messages (Holt, 2002). One answer to pass the resistance of consumers is to create authentic ads, and thus reach consumers in new ways. This will be discussed further in the following section. Authenticity is also one of the main concepts used in our research.
2.2 MARKETING AUTHENTICITY

Literature provides many definitions for authenticity. Despite the fact that there exist multiple definitions, there is consistency in the literature that authenticity consists of characteristics such as genuine, real and true. Moreover, it has been highlighted, that consumers do not discover authenticity in the fake but rather they can see the elements of what is genuine or true in their experiences of consumption (Beverland & Farrelly, 2009). Wagner (2017) for one qualifies five genres of authenticity principles which are natural, original, exceptional, referential and influential authenticity. Whereas, characteristics regarded as inauthentic are mainstream, dominating, mass-market, commercial and powerful. While, features of authenticity are characteristics such as underdog, no-name, personal, good world and less known (Marks, & Prinsloo, 2015). According to Pine & Gilmore (2008) there can be found two standards of authenticity. Firstly, being true to own self and be the one you say you are to others. And secondly, provide a place for consumers where they can experience your offerings in a place and time that you are what you say you are (ibid.).

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, consumers are increasingly aware of marketing techniques. So, this leads to the need for companies to create modern branding techniques, which they are chasing aggressively and taking risky gambits, so that they could create pursued authenticity in the eyes of consumers. Also, since competition is becoming more and more hard, also the level of what is actually perceived authentic is increasing (Holt, 2002). However, to perceive authenticity in the eyes of consumers is one way to compete and answer to the consumer resistance. As, it is stated that the attempt to create authenticity is one of the vital elements of contemporary marketing (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink 2008), and a tool to hinder the negative feelings attached to marketing such as manipulation and skepticism. In fact, creating authenticity in marketing is some sort of paradox itself, since if one tries to create authenticity it appears to become artificial and suspicion among consumer may come up (Marks & Prinsloo, 2015).
There are findings supporting the fact that authenticity has versatile meanings. Indexical authenticity includes characteristics such as authority, consistency, origin and heritage which are perceived as true. Whereas, iconic authenticity can be described with being fashionable, innovative and sustainable (Choi, Ko, Kim & Mattila, 2014). Earlier, these terms were more about to assure consumers about article’s genuineness. However, more recently the term authentic is associated with a product that has such values which can differentiate the product from brands which are more commercialized, and thus surpass the consumer resistance. So, authenticity is created in the end in the minds of consumers, and it is said to be one of the most important factors in modern marketing (Beverland et. al., 2008). At the same time, there exists a dilemma, since mass marketing tools are trusted to weaken these claims. It is identified that advertisement has a role in strengthening the images of authenticity. Further, it is vital to identify the connections between motives and responses of consumers to different advertisement cues (ibid.).

2.2.1 SUBJECTIVITY OF PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY

Perceived authenticity is likely to be based on value judgements which are depended on previous experiences of the subject and are intensely rooted in person’s cultural, value and belief system (Harris & Deacon, 2011.) In addition, it is suggested that consumers are likely to perceive authenticity when an identity is communicated clearly enough and, in a way, that is in line with the consumer’s experiential truth. Altogether, marketers need to keep in mind that the goal of marketing is that authenticity is experienced and identified by customers rather than just by firms. Therefore, to make holistic marketing successful it is about creating a balance between the indexical and iconic authenticity as it is recognized by existing customers (Choi et al., 2014). The ability to express oneself in a way that is true with inner thoughts and feelings, is considered as a defining factor for the development of authenticity. However, it is difficult to say or calibrate objectively how authentic something is, as authenticity is a subjective matter and not a fact. (Liedtka, 2008)
2.2.2 FOSTERING AUTHENTICITY

According to Beverland et al. (2008) as an example, an advertisement which is not “screaming too loudly” is more likely to be considered as authentic. In creation of natural authenticity by marketing there can be found some explicit actions to make it work. These are for example the use of appropriate words when describing the products while emphasizing their origin. Other fostering elements for creating real, honest and authentic offering is to make use of a place, person, object or an idea that is referred as authentic. Accordingly, if companies use influencers who are considered as being authentic in the eyes of their target group, they are also more likely to succeed in creating authentic marketing content. Also, when trying to create authenticity by marketing, it would be beneficial to keep in mind that the carrying out of actions need to be implemented in a slow and deliberate way (Harris & Deacon, 2011).

So, it becomes clear that marketers in all branches need to learn how to understand, manage and excel at contributing authenticity. Moreover, to find ways how to access authenticity, will come essential as authenticity is the emerging standard. Finally, to create authenticity in the eyes of consumers it is beneficial to create marketing experiences which consumers consider authentic because they happen within them (Pine & Gilmore, 2008).

In the following chapter, social media marketing and interaction and information diffusion related to it will be discussed. Further, Instagram as a social media platform will be introduced.
2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

The usage of social media platforms and web pages to promote a company’s offering, product or service, also determined as social media marketing (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu, 2018), is being recognized as a powerful and relevant marketing tool by the companies, regardless of the size of the company (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012) (Venciute, 2018). Among the main attributes, social media marketing permits to market the company’s products, build brand image and enhance customer loyalty (ibid.). Furthermore, social media has revolutionized the traditional marketing activities, since it allows companies to have both direct and indirect contact with existing as well as potential new customers in a global level, with relatively low cost and in highly effective manner (Venciute, 2018).

The social media marketing that company conducts, aims at connecting the consumers in online communities with the companies which obtain and share the equivalent values, needs and wants (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu, 2018). As the online communities are significant sources of new audiences, matching the marketing activities accordingly to the values, needs and wants of these is crucial for companies. This way, the companies can establish communication with individual consumers, and this personalization of interactions can create deeper engagement within existing and potential customers, and thus enhance customer loyalty (ibid.).

2.3.1 INTERACTION

Once the company has established these communications, the interaction with the customer can be noted as more personal in comparison to more traditional ways of conducting marketing and advertising (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu, 2018). As several companies are attracted to gain deeper customer insight in order to meet the customers’ preferences in today’s dynamic business environment, social media provides a convenient channel for companies to learn from customers
Due to interactions between the company and customer, as well as among customers in social media, broader access to customer information can be achieved (Venciute, 2018).

Once companies have gained understanding of their customers’ needs and wants through interactions in social media platforms, they are capable to target their product offerings to right customer groups with interests to the product or service (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012), based on for instance demographic and psychographic characteristics (Venciute, 2018). Nevertheless, the interactions in social media platforms go far beyond than just communication between company and the customer. Social media provides an environment, where also other organizations as well as individuals among each other can share their experiences and build relationships and interactive communities online (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu, 2018) (Venciute, 2018).

### 2.3.2 INFORMATION DIFFUSION

Given that in social media it is relatively easy for people to share, create and publish content (Venciute, 2018), spreading information is efficient. Social media has connected people with various interests, despite the geographical location and time differences (Holt, 2016), and has made communication effortless among the customers, both existing and potentially new customers, therefore enabling companies with creating buzz and diffusing information in a global level (Saravanakumar & SugathaLakshmi, 2012) (Venciute, 2018).

However, the easy diffusion of information has influenced on the companies’ caution in respect to advertising activities (Saravanakumar & SugathaLakshmi, 2018). As the information can be spread efficiently, the minimization of negative messages is desired, resulting as that companies intend to anticipate consumer responses to advertising and avoid unanticipated marketing blunders, and thus prevent the setbacks of information dissemination in social media (ibid.).
2.3.3 INSTAGRAM AS A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

In social media marketing, the brands are communicated through marketing and advertising activities in various social media platforms, of which the biggest are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Facebook is typically considered as a platform for everyone, whereas Twitter and Instagram are especially appealing to younger adults and urban population. Regardless of the general popularity of Facebook, Instagram has gained acknowledgment and popularity due to its visual content, and it obtains high levels of user engagement, meaning that majority of users check the platform on daily basis (Duggan & Smith, 2013).

The function of Instagram is based on sharing photos and videos, with inspiring captions and emojis, and the accounts where these are posted, can be followed (Marr, 2018). On the accounts the followers can like, comment, share and save the posts, which is referred as engagement in this context. Billiot (2015) discusses the value of the content of social media posts and denotes emotional and practical value of the content as drivers for engagement and sharing. Whenever the content evokes emotional aspects, it is more likely that the content is shared among the consumers. Yet, it is essential for consumers to find the content as practical as well, meaning that it is useful for the consumer itself, but also beneficial for others so that the content is likely to be shared. Additionally, the users can use hashtags in their posts, which can boost the reach of the posts depending on the popularity of the hashtag (ibid.).

Social media and the online environment it provides for users allow people to form rich communities around various type of entertainers, who interact directly with them by liking, commenting and sharing their posts (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu, 2018). This same phenomenon is applicable in influencer marketing, a further form of social media marketing which uses the same principles as social media marketing and utilizes individuals and their influence over follower base. This marketing practice is largely based on eWOM in order to diffuse information in reliable way and allow the followers to interact with brands and other people (Pophal, 2016).
Most commonly, influencer marketing is apparent in Instagram, where the influencers share visual content in order to engage with their followers (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017). In the following section, influencer marketing will be discussed more in detail.

### 2.4 INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing is based on the existing group of followers, also referred as network of followers (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders. 2017), who are exposed to and influenced by the messages, recommendations and opinions through the influencer. Influencers on Instagram post aspirational photos and use hashtags in order to gather visibility, and importantly, engage with their followers on the platform (Evans et.al., 2017). With usage of influencer marketing, companies can reach a large segment of consumers easily, within relatively short time period and with low cost when comparing to traditional marketing. Because of these reasons, influencer marketing has gained significant attention as a marketing tool for brands and companies to engage with consumers online (ibid.).

Along with providing great access to customer insight, Instagram is currently one of the most popular social media platforms for influencer marketing (Evans, Phua, Lim & Jun, 2017) (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017). Influencer marketing “is part of greater umbrella of marketing, which also includes advertising, digital advertising and content marketing” (Pophal, 2016, pp. 20). It uses the same principles as foundation as social media marketing – utilising social media platforms for promoting product or service online (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu, 2018). In fact, Pophal (2016) stated that influencer marketing is not fundamentally different from general marketing approaches which have been in use for year but the difference to traditional marketing is created with the means of connecting the influencers with their audience (Pophal, 2016).
Influencer marketing is largely based on word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing and when occurring online, this phenomenon is also referred as electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which tends to be experienced as more trustworthy by consumers than the traditional marketing activities (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu, 2018), as the opinions and recommendations are commonly received from friends. Also, this can serve an effective tool to decrease consumer resistance. In the following chapter, eWOM in influencer marketing will be discussed more in detail.

2.4.1 EWOM

One of the most apparent features of influencer marketing is diffusing information through eWOM, and social media platforms have allowed efficient spread of eWOM among the users through these platforms (Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010). Typically, eWOM is referred as either negative or positive, unpaid and organic communication which consumers do naturally due to their previous experiences with the brand or the company (Evans et.al., 2017). However, as influencers hold influence over their followers, existing and potential customers, influencer marketing provides an effective way to spread eWOM, since their opinions and recommendations matter to followers. Collaboration with influencer usually involves compensation in monetary terms or in form of free products, meaning that companies using influencers as part of their marketing activities actually utilize paid eWOM (ibid.), through which desired marketing messages can be communicated to consumers efficiently.

According to Kozinets et.al. (2010) WOM marketing is based on a process of transforming commercial information into stories which are meaningful to certain communities and groups of people. In context of influencer marketing, the influencer is the party sending and transforming the commercial information into stories, and the follower base online could be referred as the community or target group receiving the information.
2.4.2 SIZE OF THE INFLUENCER

Influencers can be categorized on the grounds of their size, which in turn is based on the number of followers. Zeman (2018) defines influencers with 10,000 to one million followers as micro influencers, and those with over one million followers as mega influencers. To put it in more assorted way, Conick (2018) has divided influencers on three different categories; micro, mid and macro influencers. Micro level influencers have between 50 and 25,000 followers, mid-level influencers 25,001 to 100,000 followers and macro level influencers more than 100,000 followers.

The number of followers indicates the size and possible extent of influencer’s network (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). A large follower base of an influencer refers to that many people are interested in the account and what is posted on it (ibid.) and often companies think that influencer with high number of followers must do something right (Conick, 2018). The extensive interest in the account often results as perception of popularity in consumers’ mind, and people form several socially acceptable characteristics around influencers with high number of followers, such as attractive, approachable and trustworthy. In accordance, this can result as higher likeability of the influencer (De Veirman et.al., 2017). Due to the likeability of the influencer, people are also more likely to follow and consider her/his opinions and recommendations with greater regard (Chialdini, 2016). When the follower base is big, it involves more people, and thus can be beneficial to augment the reach of the marketing messages posted by the influencer and eventually accelerate the spread of eWOM (De Veirman et.al., 2017).

Still, the large following base does not mean that the influencer is a good fit for promoting the brand (Conick, 2018), and is considered as believable (Moore, Yang & Kim, 2018). Even though far-reaching impact could be received through influencer with high number of followers, it does not guarantee that those followers are also engaged with the content the influencer creates (De Veirman et.al., 2017), with likes, comments and shares for instance. In fact, Conick (2018) argues that micro influencers engage their audience better in terms of like rates than macro influencers.
Also, Hall (2016) discusses the higher engagement of micro influencers over macro influencers, and how these smaller audiences of micro influencers in niche markets are engaged with brands. According to Hall (2016) eighty-two percent of people would follow the recommendation of micro influencers. This indicates that high number of followers does not ensure commitment to or interactions with the brand (ibid.), and the popularity based on number of followers does not guarantee that the influencer is considered as an opinion leader (De Veirman et.al., 2017), who actually has an impact on the consumer attitudes and behaviour.

2.4.3 AUTHENTIC INFLUENCER MARKETING

A successful influencer marketing and marketing messages they create are largely based on the importance of authenticity and relationships (Moore et.al., 2018). This in turn reflects to the purpose of influencer marketing – engaging, honest and authentic communication and connections with existing and potential new customers, and this is also acknowledged by the marketers (Conick, 2018). With influencer marketing, the products promoted are brought closer to customer through easily approachable, genuine communications, and thus brands are authentically connected to attracted customers. Therefore, finding influencers who have natural interest towards the brand and products is vital so that the collaboration and promotion can achieve high levels of realness and trust among consumers (Hall, 2016).

Further, trust plays a vital role in authentic influencer marketing. The audiences of influencer are seeking for opinions and recommendations they can trust in order to differentiate what is real and what is fake (Moore et.al., 2018). This in turn is determined by the trustworthiness of the influencer (ibid.). Given that influencers are communicating through the posts they share, the nature of content is essential in order to create credibility. Additionally, in order to create an efficient and influencing marketing message, appropriate limit of persuasiveness must be sustained, yet in an authentic way. So, that the content and thus the influencer to be perceived as trustworthy and honest, the values, attitudes and behaviour among the influencer and follower must encounter and
be consistent, as well as be communicated in a proper manner. Furthermore, the marketing messages should not be pushed or forced too hard to the consumers, and with reasonable frequency in order to maintain the authenticity over commercialism (Moore et.al., 2018). Importantly, the marketing messages should appear relevant and useful in terms of provided information, so that the followers would believe and engage with content created, for instance share it to their friends (Billiot, 2015).

The trust can also be built up through similarity and likeability, persuasion concepts originally introduced by Chialdini (2016). When the consumer experiences the influencer similar to them and easily relatable, they also appear more likeable, resulting as higher value and trust on the influencers’ opinions and recommendations (Moore et.al., 2018). Lastly, once the information provided by the influencer is based on real expertise or knowledge in certain field, as referred as authority (Chialdini, 2016), the consumers consider the influencer as more trustworthy (Moore et.al., 2018). On the other hand, it is relevant to keep in mind that authenticity in influencer marketing is more specifically perceived authenticity of the followers, and is based on the assessments people make of another’s authenticity (Moulard, Garrity & Rice, 2014), and thus it is largely subjective (Liedtka, 2008).

2.4.4 TRANSPARENCY OF PAID COLLABORATIONS

Currently, the hidden advertisements, for example on Instagram are constrained with legal regulations (Pophal, 2016) and the content created in collaboration with a brand or a company which has benefitted the influencer in terms of money, products or otherwise, must be revealed (Conick, 2018), also known as disclosures (Evans et.al., 2017). The aim of these disclosures is to protect the consumer from misleading and confusing marketing messages, and clearly state the purpose and intention behind the advertisement or promotion of a product to the consumer (ibid.).
In context of Instagram, these clearly stated disclosures can lead to triggering certain forms of defensive coping mechanisms such as scepticism when the post is perceived as an advertisement. Eventually, this can result as negative impact on attitudes and behavioural outcomes, such as the intention to disseminate positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (ibid.). Yet, it is important to remember, that even though the collaboration is disclosed, it does not mean that the influencer is just after the money and could not really like the product promoted and be real with her/his endorsement (Hall, 2016).

Evans et.al. (2017) addresses also differences in the impact of language used in disclosures to the attitudes and behaviour of consumers. As an example, posts including distinct disclosure language such as “Paid Ad” or “Sponsored” are more likely perceived as advertisements which impact negatively on the attitudes and behavioural outcomes, whereas disclosures with ambiguous or unclear language, such as “SP”, or posts with no disclose at all are perceived not as much advertising and thus do not have that huge negative impact on consumers’ attitudes or behaviour (ibid.).

### 2.4.5 Downsides of Influencer Marketing

Even though influencer marketing has been acknowledged due to its many benefits, there are less beneficial aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Since consumers are seeking for authentic and real recommendations and opinions from influencers (Moore et.al., 2018), the fact that the paid nature of the collaboration must be transparent and disclosed might impact negatively on the authenticity of the perceived message. As an ultimate consequence, consumers can experience feeling of being manipulated, and formulate coping strategies, such as skepticism and resistance towards marketing aims (Evans et.al., 2017). In addition, if follower who have trusted on the influencer being authentic, and then realizes the paid nature of the endorsement, a risk of harming brand image, both of the company’s and influencer’s, is possible (Evans et.al., (2017) (Pophal, 2016).
Influencer marketing is only considered as efficient and influencing when it achieves high engagement from followers. Hence, engagement is an important factor determining the success of influencer marketing. Thus, engagement in context of Instagram and the different drivers for it deserve a deeper look and are addressed in the following chapter.

2.5 ENGAGEMENT IN INFLUENCERS’ POSTINGS IN INSTAGRAM

Harmeling, Moffett, Mark and Carlson (2017) argue over the importance of customer engagement marketing, defined as “firm’s deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure customer contributions to marketing functions” (pp.312), which aims at increasing customer’s voluntary contribution to company’s marketing activities, phenomenon known also as customer engagement (ibid.). Customer engagement in respect of a brand or a company can be expressed in several ways, typically as motivational behaviour, such as consumer following or liking the brand’s official page or account online (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018), that goes beyond purchase and consuming product or services ( Eigenraam, Eelen, Van Lin & Verlegh (2018) (Harmeling et.al., 2017).

According to Eigenraam et.al. (2018) this kind of behaviour that occurs online, can be defined as digital engagement. In the field of digital marketing, engagement is defined as any kind of activity or human reaction to a post online, including liking, commenting, sharing or saving for instance (Jaakonmäki, Müller & Vom Brocke, 2017) (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018) (Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga & Bronner, 2018), which also is the focus of this paper, more specifically in context on Instagram and influencers’ postings. According to Syrdal & Briggs (2018), visual content which is appealing to consumers is more engaging, comparing to content which does not include visual actors. Instagram serves as an evident platform for engaging with customers by visual content, as the content posted is largely aspirational photos and videos with captions (Marr, 2018). Engagement is important because it is a way of mirroring and measuring the success of marketing and more precisely consumers’ response to it. So, the higher the engagement is the better the marketers have succeeded in their work. Because, after all marketers are aiming to increase
customer’s contribution to the marketing acts. Further, in the case of influencer marketing the higher the engagement to a posting is the better the influencer has succeeded in his/her work. In the following, it is described how engagement is occurs in Instagram and how it can be enhanced.

### 2.5.1 Engagement Rate and Drivers for Engagement in Social Media

The extent of these engagement activities can be conceptualized by calculating an engagement rate, a percentage of people who react to the post somehow, which serves as a valuable indicator of the relation between interactions and responses that the content created generates from followers or users (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017) (Erkan, 2015). Some variety on how the engagement rate is calculated occurs across social media platforms, but the most commonly used way is to calculate number of likes and comments divided by the number of followers (ibid), for instance $\frac{1000+50}{25,000} = 4.2\%$. Additionally, this definition of engagement rate is relevant for the purpose of this paper in context of Instagram, as is serves as an indicator for perceived authenticity.

Customer engagement in social media platforms like Instagram can be affected by several aspects, such as posting types (Erkan, 2015). According to Erkan (2015) engagement with brands in social media, by liking, commenting or sharing the brands’ post for instance is visible to their friends, thus referring to eWOM. As an ideal, if eWOM is spread efficiently through engagement, brands would need less product-oriented posts in social media and thus they could adopt other concepts without direct intention of selling products. By gaining more engagement, marketers aim at creating more visibility among the existing and potential customers and eventually, more eWOM. (ibid.).

Jaakonmäki et.al. (2017) have divided the drives for engagement in social media into three different groups: creator, context and content. Firstly, the creator aspect refers to person who has created the post in social media, and the creator’s gender, age and number of followers for instance.
As mentioned in regard of influencer marketing, the number of followers have impact on the reach that the post achieves (De Veirman et.al., 2017) (Evans et.al., 2017), therefore the number of followers is also a significant factor impacting on the likelihood of sharing and liking the post (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017). Additionally, age and the experience gained through it has been proven to impact on engagement, as people who seem experienced in life, are also more believable, true and thus trustworthy and engaging. Interestingly, also the gender of the creator acts as a driver for engagement, and women have been discovered to be more engaging than men as content creators (ibid.).

Secondly, the time and place of post influences on the level of engagement to some extent, also called as the contextual driver for engagement. For example, Sunday has shown up to be an effective day for posting in terms of engagement. However, the engagement is not largely affected by time of the day the post is released (ibid.)

Lastly, the content of the post which can be divided into three sub-categories according to Jaakonmäki et.al., (2017), text, visual and audio content. To begin with, content which arouses emotions influences positively on engagement. Whereas content arousing more neutral emotions does not enhance the engagement, content that evokes more extreme emotions, such as awe or anger and anxiety, are more likely to increase engagement. Furthermore, content including persuasive messages is likely to be more engaging, whereas informative content is claimed to decrease it (ibid.). However, as the informativeness of the content is important for followers or users (Billiot, 2015), when it is combined with persuasive message or content, the engagement is increased (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017). Moreover, when the text is kept as simple and clear, short as well as relevant, the engagement with content is increased (ibid.). Whenever the content includes visual aspects, such as photos, it has positive impact on engaging the audience. Within visual content, posts with human, and specifically human face in them, are engaging users on a higher level. Interestingly, photos which have been edited, in terms of filters, lighting, shades and saturation for instance, appear more attractive for audience and thus increase the number of views and comments. (ibid.)
According to Syrdal & Briggs (2018) consumers like the content more easily than for instance comment or share it. The common reason for liking the post or content is to show support and commitment to their connections such as friends, brand or organization. Commenting and sharing go further as engaging practise and are more attached to the user and their reputation and image (ibid.). For instance, sharing of environmentally conscious content involves a possibility to enhance or maintain either one’s own or someone else’s image or values.

In addition, the study conducted by Valentini, Murtarelli & Pizzetti (2018), indicates that the image-based features of the content in Instagram, such as product salience or direct eye-contact increase the engagement. Furthermore, the direct eye-contact is perceived as features like trustworthy and attractive by consumers, and even has positive impact on the consumers’ purchase intention (ibid.). In addition, the product placement in Instagram, and specifically when using influencer marketing in Instagram makes a difference in the level of engagement. When product is placed foreground in the picture, the audience is more engaged, whereas when the product is on the background, less engagement occurs (ibid.). Furthermore, a content which includes humoristic features increases the engagement (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Yet, the relevance of the content is essential, and the content should be informative and newsworthy in order to engage the audience (ibid.).

Importantly, content which is perceived as authentic, referring to real and genuine instead of content created for selling products or services, is more engaging among consumers (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Companies and brands distribute content, which is aimed at selling goods, so when this message is too transparent or pushed to consumers, the likelihood that this content is not perceived as authentic by consumers increases. This also means that regardless the characteristics that the content has, whether it is humoristic, newsworthy or commercial for instance, the message in the post should be communicated in an authentic manner in order to engage it with consumers (ibid.). After providing this theoretical framework, the paper proceeds to methodology chapter.
3. SUMMARY OF THEORY

In the following, a theoretical framework and the main concepts for our research are summarized. The purpose of this summary is to combine the main concepts and theories used in this paper which serves as a basis for the theoretical framework and problematization, as it is also represented in the figure 2. below.

![Theoretical framework and problematization](image)

Figure 2. Theoretical framework and problematization

*Consumer resistance* is the starting point for our literature review. As, definition it is a certain kind of consumer behavior where consumers are consciously avoiding marketing content as they are aware of marketers’ aims to affect on their purchase behavior for instance and experience the marketing activities as manipulative or misleading. Further, this consumer behavior entails resistance to marketers’ power (Heath, Cluley and O’Malley, 2017) (Minahan, Sands and Ferraro, 2011) (Valor, Díaz and Merino, 2017). *Consumer resistance* appears when there is a conflict between consumers internal motivation and external experience, and it is both an attitude and activity (Minahan, Sands and Ferraro 2011.) This conflict of internal motivation and external experience then can lead to resistant response like cynicism and ad avoidance strategies. As it is
argued, if companies strive for minimizing consumers’ resistance, they could achieve this by creating authentic marketing content (Conick, 2018) (Moore et.al., 2018). Thus, **authenticity** is also argued to be one of the cornerstones of modern marketing since with it, a greater response from consumers is possible (Beverland et. al., 2008.) As seen in figure 2., **authenticity** is a way to response to consumer resistance. Literature provides many different definitions for **authenticity**. As one example, defined by Choi et al. (2014) indexical authenticity includes characteristics such as authority, consistency, origin and heritage which are perceived as true. Whereas, iconic authenticity means being fashionable, innovative and sustainable. Along with, it is important to take into consideration, that authenticity is a subjective matter, and people perceive it differently (Liedtka, 2008.) Therefore, authenticity in our research context is specified as perceived authenticity by consumers- Instagram users.

**Authenticity** leads us to the **influencer marketing** as it is the context of our study. **Influencer marketing** is one of the contemporary marketing means and it is said to be efficient to connect and create **authenticity** by **influencer marketing** (Shamsudeen & Ganeshbabu,2018) (Moore et.al., 2018.) As consumers are aware of marketing manipulation, they are seeking for products and services from transparent sources which has been also stated to be one of the qualities of **influencer marketing**. **Influencer marketing** is an appropriate channel fostering **authenticity** and transparency as it is greatly based on electronic word-of-mouth which is considered trustworthy and reliable source of information (Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010.) This is resting partly on the likeability of the influencer, meaning that people are more likely to follow and consider the influencer’s opinions and recommendations valuable when the influencer is likeable and experienced as similar to the followers (De Veirman et.al., 2017) (Chialdini, 2016.) Compared to traditional marketing, utilizing **influencer marketing** companies can reach a big segment of customers easier, within shorter time and lower costs (Evans et.al., 2017.) Furthermore, as presented in figure 2. **influencer marketing** is a hyponym of **social media marketing** and is largely based on the same principles as **social media marketing**. **Social media marketing** comprehends communication between a company and its customers, and this marketing can enhance customer loyalty, brand image and give important customer insights for the company. Lastly, **social media**
Marketing is effective because it is based on utilizing a powerful network of users (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012) (Venciute, 2018).

Connection between authenticity and influencer marketing leads to the final main concept of our paper: engagement. Engagement in our research means the followers’ engagement in Instagram. Accordingly, engagement can be conceptualized by engagement rate, which is calculated by the sum of likes and comments followers give to a certain post in Instagram, divided by the number of followers (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017) (Erkan, 2015.) Engagement in influencer marketing is important because it is defining the success of the entire practice. So, the higher the engagement rate the more efficient and influencing the influencer marketing is (Harmeling, Moffett, Mark and Carlson, 2017).

Theory claims that if authenticity can be created by marketing, also the engagement levels of consumers increase accordingly (Syrdal & Briggs, 2018) (Conick, 2018.) This is the relation we are investigating with our research. So as seen in figure 2., the thesis problem and question formulation lie between the connection of authenticity and engagement. We want to investigate how consumers are perceiving authenticity in influencer marketing, and how the perceived authenticity impacts on the engagement levels in the context of Instagram. It is important to study this phenomenon further, since Instagram has been said to be one of the most engaging social platforms because many of the users are checking the channel daily, but the field is still lacking the reasons behind consumers’ engagement.
4. METHODOLOGY

This methodology chapter aims at providing comprehensive image for the reader of the three stages this research process is consisting of, in order to collect data for further analysis, and eventually to answer the research question introduced earlier on this paper. Furthermore, in this chapter it is argued that what we did, and why these stages were relevant and useful in order to deepen our research. Respectively, influencer interview, focus group interview and observational study in our research context are explained and reasoned in detail. Our methodology is based on grounded theory which basically allows firstly the collection and analyzation of data and after this theory can be developed (Schroth, 2019). Further, in the analyzation and discussion part we are able to go back and forth with data and theory. The structure of methodology is offered in Figure 3. below.

As this research is explorative with its purpose, the usage of the three methods enabled a comprehensive data collection and broad access to information. More specifically, the influencer interview allowed us to deepen our understanding of the field and provided the influencer’s perspective on the researched topic. However, this method was used more to gain background information, and not utilized that extensively in data analysis. Focus group interview in turn provided the perspective of the consumers, which is the main interest in this research, and allowed greater generalizability of results. The observations again were done in order to have data to compare with the focus group interview data and to observe the context of our research, Instagram and influencer marketing, and the real behaviour of both consumers and influencers in that context. The comparison of the two data sets was done in order to see how the consumers’ perception of authenticity in Instagram exists in practise in the researched influencers’ postings. The comparison is based on coding and categorization on both data sets, which will be explained more in depth in the analyzation part. First, before analyzation all our three methods and their results are explained and described.
The early stages of the research involved an interview with one Finnish influencer, who has approximately 74,000 followers on Instagram. Influencer's name will not be given in this paper due to her request, and she is not any of the influencers observed in Instagram during our research. She is currently 24 years old and has been doing influencer work for four years now. Mostly, she is producing entertaining content to her Instagram account, such as sketches and humoristic comparison pictures with celebrities. This interview was done in order to understand better the influencer marketing as a phenomenon and as an industry, and also to gain insight on influencer’s Instagram behaviour and reasons behind it more in depth. Furthermore, the interview enabled to have more specific understanding of the influencer’s perspective and perception of authenticity, and what the influencer thinks are effective elements in posts in Instagram, in terms of engagement for instance. Lastly, by having the influencer’s perspective on authenticity, we could assess possible contradictions and similarities with consumers’ perspective.
The interview took place on Sunday 10\textsuperscript{th} of March and lasted approximately 40 minutes. The interview was consisting of eleven before-hand determined questions, structured in an easily adaptable way. This interview was semi-structured as it allowed new ideas to be brought up yet followed a framework of themes which were wanted to be discussed, such as authenticity in influencer marketing and engagement. The atmosphere during the interview was relatively informal which made the discussion easy-going and flowy, resulting as truthful and fruitful content. Also, as the discussion was open, it generated new directions for the interview and provided insights that were not previously taken into account. Yet, the interview was kept in track, and the structure of the interview questions was followed, however in a flexible manner. The entire interview was recorded, and later written into a transcription for further results listing. The interview questions used as an interview structure can be found as Appendix 1.

4.2 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

The focus group interview was conducted in order to gain the consumer perspective on the topic researched, the perceived authenticity in influencer marketing in Instagram and its’ influence on engagement. The focus group was consisting of five females, aged between 24 and 27. The reason for contacting only females was that females aged between 20 and 30 are the target group of our researched influencers which confirmed our focus group eligible. Additionally, all of the focus group members were following one or more of the influencers whom our observations concerned, which enabled us to reflect and compare the focus group’s thoughts directly to the behaviour of the influencers researched.

The semi-structured focus group interview followed the interview structure yet allowed open discussion among the participants. The discussion was flowy among the participants and gave an impression that the discussion generated and continued naturally. However, the discussion proceeded in the order with the interview questions, yet the questions were well blended in the discussion. Additionally, the atmosphere was relaxed, which allowed the participants to open up
and express their opinions freely. Therefore, we believe that the results are adequate and genuinely describing the thoughts of the focus group and can be reflected into broader audience. The interview was wholly recorded, and the moderator was taking notes at the same time, in order to ensure as comprehensive data collection as possible. The interview took place on Sunday 24th of March 2019 and composed of approximately one hour of intensive, dialogical interview time. The interview was later written into a transcription according to the recording and the main ideas were then summarized into a table. This summarization consists of main ideas and some direct quotes of the answers from the focus group participants, and can be found later in this paper. The interview questions used as an interview structure can be found as Appendix 2.

| 4.2.1 PARTICIPANTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW |

The focus group consisted of five participants, who were all Finnish by their nationality and following one or several or the influencers who were observed during the research. Additionally, the participants were all women, since females are the main target group of the studied influencers. To give an overview of the participants background, the information about the participants’ age and occupation are provided in the table 1 below. Additionally, information of whom of the observed influencers they are following is given. The influencers themselves will be introduced later in this paper, in Table 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Following</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Marketing Assistant</td>
<td>@mariannnan&lt;br&gt;@kira_kosonen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>IT Consultant</td>
<td>@annikaollila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>@mariannnan&lt;br&gt;@annikaollila&lt;br&gt;@kira_kosonen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Watch store sales representative</td>
<td>@kira_kosonen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Music Education Student</td>
<td>@annikaollila</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overview of the focus group interview participants

4.3 OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

Netnography as a method provides the basis for our observational study. Netnography as a method means online ethnography (Kozinets et al. 2010.) and this method is used especially when investigating some specific types of behavior and certain kinds of phenomena. This makes the method suitable for observing online behavior around influencers in Instagram. The method is more about quality than quantity and it has been respected and acknowledged as a useful method. Netnography as a method is useful since it can bring sensibility to the research. Also, as the method is about social listening it can provide a holistic consumer understanding. Even though, netnography is not the fastest method to implement it can gain deep understanding of nuances of consumer practices. (Kozinets et al., 2018). However, according to Kozinets et.al. (2018) netnography involves the active participation of the researches. As we did not participate actively on research, therefore this research is referred as observational study.
In our observational study, the starting point was to conduct an empirical research with explorative purpose, and the focus was in observing the behavior of predefined influencers and their ways of communicating with their followers. And equally, we wanted to observe how the followers were reacting or engaging by liking or commenting to these specific postings of the influencers. Further, we were purely observing the behavior of the selected influencers and their followers and we as researchers were not directly involved to the social media communication by commenting or liking the postings during the observation period.

In this step of our research, the online behaviour of the influencers was observed on a daily basis, through their Instagram accounts. The decision about to which influencers to follow was made based on their field of activity, and on their number followers. All the influencers are operating in the same field and are categorized as bloggers. This was decided in order to enable comparison between influencers later during the research process, and to exclude variation among different fields. In addition, the influencers selected for research purpose are all Finnish. This decision in turn was made to minimize the cultural differences among the researchers and influencers, and in order to attain as clear understanding of their postings and posting behaviour as possible. Also, the decision to choose influencers who are from the same country as the authors of this paper was made because it was thought to make it easier to understand the paid collaborations if the brands marketed happen to be Finnish. So, to obtain the opportunity to minimize possible misunderstandings and incorrect evaluations caused by cultural differences.

Furthermore, the influencers were selected with a note on the number of followers, as by selecting influencers from different levels regarding their follower bases, it is enabled to investigate the relation between the size of the influencer and engagement, in case needed. Based on the theory of different sizes of influencers (Zeman, 2018) (Conick, 2018), three influencers were selected. Even though the theories divided the sizes a bit differently, the selected followers align with both theories, as they can be divided either into two micro influencers and one macro influencer (Zeman, 2018) or into one micro, mid and macro influencer (Conick, 2018). In our research we decided to use the categorization of two levels; macro and micro, resulting as having two
influencers from micro category and one from macro. Table 2 below provides an overview of the three influencers in terms of their age, city of residence, size, number of followers and the topics of their Instagram posts. For visualizations, screenshots of @mariannnan, @annikaollila and @kira_kosonen’s Instagram accounts are provided in Appendix 3, Appendix 4 and Appendix 5, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencer</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>City of Residence</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Number of Followers</th>
<th>Topics of Instagram posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. @mariannnan</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>191 000</td>
<td>Fashion, Beauty, Lifestyle, Interior Design, Travelling, Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. @annikaollila</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>91 900</td>
<td>Lifestyle, Looks, Travelling, Her own thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instagram)</td>
<td>(Ollila, 2019)</td>
<td>(Zeman, 2018)</td>
<td>(Instagram)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. @kira_kosonen</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Helsinki/Lausanne</td>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>24 800</td>
<td>Fashion, Lifestyle, Home, Well-being, Travelling, Beauty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Overview of the observed influencers

Observational study as a research method is empirical research, and more precisely in our research, a qualitative research. The data with observational study method was collected for four weeks, from 12th of February to 10th of March 2019. The observations were done on a daily basis, always at the same time of the day at 9.00am, in order to guarantee a stable way for the data collection. So, this means that the posts observed are always from the previous day and this way, it is ensured
that there is some time for the followers to react on the posts. The data was collected manually, since the data based on observations is challenging to capture by automatized data collection method. Moreover, because Instagram is based on visual content like pictures and videos, a software could not understand the content in the same complex and holistic way that humans can. Also, a software could not completely analyse the deeper meaning of pictures and it might leave something out that is interesting and meaningful. (Kozinets et al., 2018).

The observational data was organized daily into an influencer specific word document including a screenshot of the picture posted and a table with elements under inspection. This ensured that same type of information and content was collected every day, yet not ignoring diversifying observations or information. The elements observed included the caption or the text posted with the picture, elements of the picture, likes the picture have gained, number and content of comments, hashtags, emojis and elements of the paid collaboration, if the posting is paid in its nature. The observation table is illustrated below in table 3. and can be found filled as table 5. later in this thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caption</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements of Picture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments (Number Total)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments (Content)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtags</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emojis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Collaboration (is yes, check if there is also Insta story)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Example table of observations
5. VALIDITY

Like it is typical for most researches there are also some limitations in our research. Moreover, these limitations are affecting to some extent to the validity of our research. Even though, by combining three different methods we were able to have plenty of data which can increase the validity. Furthermore, regarding all our three research methods we familiarized ourselves with literature about the methods and followed the suggestions for example in our design of the research and to affirm what is a sufficient sample size for each method. However, data collections with the observational method or interviews could not continue forever and consequently the research was affected and limited by the given time frame.

Additionally, all the methods used in our research and data collected are affected by both the participants’ and researchers’ subjectivity and personal standpoints. Also, as it was interviewed only five consumers of Instagram and as we had a limited one-month period for observing influencers in Instagram and their behavior there, the generalizability of our research can be questioned. As researchers we believe that with our research the results cannot be generalized to all Instagram influencers or that authenticity has the same kind of importance for all consumers and their engagement for instance. But we believe that with our research we were able to explore a bit further the field of influencer marketing and consumers’ perspective on authenticity and this way we hope to have shed light and maybe even inspire some future researchers in similar or related topics.

We believe we have described thoroughly the steps of our research design and results. Further, we trust to have well-reported processes we decided to take and detailed description about the data we collected. This way we wish to have provided a good understanding for the readers what was done, why and how. These factors and the theoretical framework are allowing us to move on to the next sections of our paper: analysis and discussion.
6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In the following section the data and results are reported which were gathered with the three different methods. Additionally, the results of focus group interview and observational study will be analysed after providing the results as these are the in the focus of this research. Yet, also the results of the influencer interview are described at first in the following chapter in order to provide the background information of influencer marketing field for the reader as well.

As mentioned earlier, this research is an empirical research with explorative purpose, and the data collected is qualitative in nature. Unlike traditionally, the hypotheses were not formed in the beginning of the research, and the process was started with collection of data in various forms, including influencer interview, focus group interview and observational study. Therefore, grounded theory as an approach for analysis was considered as adequate, as it allows the development of theory through firstly collecting and analyzing the data (Schroth, 2019).

By using grounded theory, the aim is to go back and forth between the data and analysis in order to explore and eventually, discover the theoretical framework in our research context. As Schroth (2019 p.2) state, one of the goals of grounded theory can be to “seek verification of hypotheses that are generated through the process of comparing conceptualized data at different levels of abstraction”. In case of this research, exploring whether and to what extent the theoretical framework introduced earlier, applies in the collected, qualitative data in context of authenticity in influencer marketing in Instagram. This procedure utilizes both inductive and deductive thinking (ibid.), thus ensures comprehensive and precise data analysis.
6.1 INFLUENCER INTERVIEW

The influencer’s stated her interest towards the topic of research:

“Well to me it feels like, that it is a topic that has gained attention recently, at least compared to earlier, which is a great thing to my mind. And also, in the audience people have started to pay attention on what is really authentic and not superimposed. This means that the influencers are not getting away with it easily.”

6.1.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF COLLABORATION

The results of the interview were informative and gave insight of influencer marketing as a field of business. To begin with, the collaboration between the influencer and a company can begin at least in three ways. Either the influencer contacts the company that she/he is eager to collaborate with and suggests a procedure, or alternatively, the company can contact the network or agency the influencer works for. In this case, the companies usually have a plan or an idea what they are after with the campaign and give requirements of what type of influencer they want to collaborate with, to which the network or agency aims at meeting as properly as possible. However, the companies can bypass these agencies and directly contact the influencer and establish a collaboration this way. This way of establishing a collaboration is more common especially when the company has collaborated with the influencer previously and is aware of the style of the influencer and the working policies in the industry. Lastly, media agencies can intermediate between the company and the influencer and help to establish a collaboration. Their aim is similar to the influencer agency, to find the most suitable influencer to meet the need of the company, and they can contact either the agency the influencer works for or directly the influencer.
The requests for collaborations vary on relatively large scale, and some collaborations are smaller and some bigger. The decision who to collaborate with is based on several aspects, of which this influencer determines the aligned values with the company the most essential, which need to be maintained. This would also include consistency in who to collaborate with. The influencer provides an example:

“Let's say that there is regular milk, and you are wholly vegan, meaning that you do not use these kinds of products, so then you seriously cannot do collaboration with that kind of companies”

Additionally, the responsibilities regarding environmental and societal issues are important and must be taken into consideration in order to create ethical and acceptable content which would be approved and used by the audience. Further, influencer marketing is a field of business after all and thus the influencer also states:

“Well erhm... of course, money counts. But I mean of course, the budget matters, since there is no point of doing work for free. But at least me, I have certain values which needs to be maintained, and of course all responsibilities which have been up in the headlines lately and which are also important to myself in my work. Those impact strongly on how the brand image is.”

The scale of instructions received for content creation varies largely and is dependent on the collaboration. Some companies request the influencer to create the whole concept, meaning that they have a product or service they want to market, but are lacking in ideas, where the influencer in turn comes into the picture and has relatively unlimited opportunities. On contrary, the company might have the entire idea which they are eager to use and are requesting the influencer to
implement it. When discussing the usage of specific slogans received from companies in influencer marketing, this influencer found it unnecessary and rather superimposed behavior and said:

“Eeerm, some companies do give those, but at least I rarely collaborate on those, because then it is not authentic to my mind and not honest in a way. Except of course if it is some kind of slogan which really is easily attachable as a part of the content. But if it is that kind of superimposed advertisement, then no.”

The network of influencers can be utilized in content creation. As most influencer have their own style, thus together with others, variety of ideas can be exchanged and discussed in order to produce creative content and to meet variety of company’s needs and wants. Importantly, the influencer mentions that she makes content that she finds nice to produce, however the target is to produce something people also want to watch. Hence, according to this influencer, the essence lies in sharing content that both the influencer and the audience believe in. According to her, the superimposed content is easily detected by the audience:

“And as it can be immediately seen, if the content is that kind of superimposed and if this person just... ehh you can see it immediately that this is not real and that person does not necessarily think like that what he/she just said and people can see whenever they are lied to.”

In general, the interviewed influencer sees content that reflects the creator as a vital factor in Instagram postings, and that the posting shows that the influencer trusts in what they do:

“Well to me the postings must look like myself, meaning that you do not try to deliver something that is not you, and trust on your own doing, because if you don’t like your own production, why would someone else...”

In paid collaborations, the regulations have directed the behavior, and these regulations are important to be followed and collaborations must be stated clearly. This influencer uses either the
Separate tool in Instagram for stating the paid collaborations or writes it in the caption. In context of paid collaborations, the superimposed content is again mentioned as non-functioning aspect, and specified that typical advertisements with big smiles and products can be seen on the streets. With influencer marketing more relatable and comprehensive marketing can be created, therefore the paid collaborations should show that the content has been produced with great effort, thought and creativity. According to this influencer, this type of content creation would also deliver authentic feeling to the audience. Furthermore, the influencer states, that perceived authenticity is increased when the content is kept real. For her this means, that for instance also the negative things are discussed, since life is not always as polished, flawless and as easy as it might seem in some influencers’ feeds. As she says:

“Hmm kind of roughness at least adds authenticity, like that both good and bad sides are brought up, and it is not like umm... because not everything is always positive and lovely and good.”

Therefore, she is also very open in her Instagram postings and story behavior and shares personal stories and emotions:

“And of course, when all Instagram stories etc. exist, I share almost everything, like sometimes I have a bad day, and I share it, sometimes good day and I share it as well. Kind of show things as they are.”

### 6.1.4 Influencer’s Perspective on Engagement

When it comes to engagement, for this influencer it indicates the interest to the content created, and whether the post is just passed or if it stops the viewer. Additionally, engagement tells a lot about the opinions of the audience and who the post reaches. When asked whether the influencer has noticed certain behavior patterns in terms of consumers’ engagement, she points out:

“If I do a sketch which reflects on a certain personality or human type, but this type exists a lot, then it is known that this type of posts gets a lot of reactions like “Hey here is you” and then it...”
spreads easily. And maybe a bit same with likes, when it touches a lot of people, then it creates a reaction like “Hey I know this personality type or myself in this” and then it gets likes easily.”

Additionally, if the post is about something current, hot topic of the day, the engagement rate is higher when compared to usual posts. Interestingly, she mentions that if the picture posted is even a bit revealing, which it not her style at all, that posting achieves higher engagement. In paid collaborations such as lotteries, the audience is encouraged to engage in several ways, such as that the participation on the lottery is done by liking, commenting and sharing the content, which obviously has a positive impact on engagement, according to her.

This influencer’s policies with communicating with the audience were limited to some extent due to the large follower base that she has. She is eager to respond to all direct messages received and tries to do it as much as she can, but sometimes it is not possible as the number of messages is high:

“I had a policy like that for a long time, that I wanted to respond to everyone, but then at some point I had to drop it as there seriously was not time to respond to all. Yet, I still read all of them and then if there is something I want to grasp on and give an answer, then of course I will respond.”

Lastly, in the comment field, she usually scrolls them through, but she does not see a reason to respond to every comment, as the comments are largely people tagging each other. However, when she sees something noteworthy, relevant and catching in the comments, she reacts to it somehow to show that the comment has been taken into account.
Focus group interview was written into a transcript according to the tape recorded during the interview. The transcript was written after the following days of the interview which was helpful because then everything was still in clear memory of the interview moderator and this way the writing process proceeded rather fluently. The ready transcript was then summarized into a table format which makes it more convenient to grasp the main topics which came up during the discussion.

Further, in table 4. it is provided a summarization about the main points from the focus group discussion. These ideas are presented in the same order and by same topics in which the focus group discussion proceeded. So, each column in the table 4. presents one topic introduced by the moderator. Moreover, this discussion topic or question is the bolded title of each column and the bullet points in each column are the main ideas and answers given by the participants of the focus group discussion. These answers include both direct quotes and summarizations of the main ideas which arouse during each topic in the focus group discussion.
### Purposes for using Instagram (e.g. entertainment, information, discussion)
- Using it all most for everything: entertainment, communication & information
- If following for example some blogger then likely to also follow her in Instagram
- Looking for information: tips for traveling, looking for information about a company if applying for a job and information about restaurants
- Communication
- Ordering clothes
- Just browsing, for entertainment
- Companies (how they communicate about the firm in Instagram)
- Music artists: information about their concerts
- Politics and to see politicians’ opinions
- If there are big news about something, then checking how this appears in Instagram; how is it communicated etc.

### What kind of persons you follow on Instagram?
- More likely to follow a new friend in Instagram than in Facebook
- Bloggers, presenters, people who are visible in general like on TV, YouTube and radio
- Following accounts by interesting topics: like account focusing on sustainability
- Celebrities because want to know about what and who people are talking about, rumors
- Most interested in friends’ postings

### What following someone in Instagram means to you, do you actively interact in Instagram?
- If somebody follows me, I follow back: for being polite
- Do not want to follow anyone I do not know (even started to unfollow people she does not really know)
- First followed just friends, now wants to follow only interesting content and profiles: this goes both with friends and brands
- Lurking: sometimes doing this if not interested enough to follow an account but still from time to time wants to check how this specific person is doing; this is because of saving time and seeing only interesting content in the feed

### What aspects you consider important in Instagram post? (e.g. photo, caption, message)
- Instagram stories are more important than normal feed: there the visuality is not that important: “I want to see what the person is doing currently”
- Too perfect and everything matching in a picture is boring
- Something that is real, genuine and feels authentic is interesting
- I enjoy aesthetic pictures and captions: balance between these two is important
- Beautiful pictures are relaxing, and they do not necessarily have anything to do with real life
- Instagram is above all a picture service
- Something that feels forced does not work
- “Pictures are more important, and this is also the reason I follow influencers”
• “With influencers, the picture and caption are equally important, and they need to match with each other. If in a paid collaboration the connection of the picture and the collaboration is not genuine and smooth it feels just annoying. Just makes me wonder, have you really used your all creativity in this?”
• It is important that the post matches in the general feed of the influencer and is consistent

**What characteristics bring genuine and real feeling or image of the influencer?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not too set up and not too much modification or filters in a picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “This is a difficult question to answer. It is more a sum of many aspects”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The person or the influencer affects the most: “if an influencer who seems authentic posts something then I am more likely to consider the posting also genuine. “So, it is more about the source posting it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the connection between the influencer, picture and paid collaboration is not smooth it affects negatively to the image of the influencer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Writing about personal topics and not only about superficial things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the influencer shares something personal about her makes trust that the person is out there as herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There needs to be consistency in the postings to make it feel genuine and believable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “If there are a lot of paid collaborations it affects on the authenticity. If all postings are paid it is a red flag to me. It feels like the influencer does this only for money and takes everything she can”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If there are paid collaborations quite seldom in an influencer’s feed it makes them more trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “It is not authentic if the product influencer is advertising does not fit to her brand. It is difficult to trust that she believes it is a good product. So, there needs to be consistency.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What catches your eye on Instagram feed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There is so much content nowadays that attracting interest is difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If someone posts rarely then it catches my eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• With influencers: if there is an interesting product in the story it might attract interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A picture that is somehow a bit different, pops up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comparison pictures: for example, a bikini picture with a pose vs. normal bikini picture with bad posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nice colors in the picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Something that is relevant for me in my life: like decoration things if moving to a new apartment and traveling pictures if planning to travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What kind of characteristics would drive you to skip posts?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• If the caption is too long, I am too lazy to read it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the text seems bad or caption is too long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If it is marked as a paid collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “I am bored to the constant selfies and filming of selves.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Baby pictures
- Ad postings in Instagram story
- “Information needs to be there in the posting, no clicking forward to somewhere else.”
- “Visuality is so important that sometimes if something is too ugly, I skip it instantly.”
- Mutual agreement among the focus group that skipping postings in Instagram happens a lot

**What makes you to like/comment/share a post?**

- “I don’t ever comment on influencer’s postings, if it is really good, I might like it.”
- “I like the postings quite easily if it is even a bit entertaining.”
- More likely to send a personal message to an influencer as an answer to her story than comment on her picture
- “I could comment influencers posting if I am tagging my friend to the picture, if I believe it is entertaining to her.”
- It feels “easier” to comment on a smaller influencer’s posting than someone bigger
- "It is much easier to comment on stories and it feels really nice to get an answer from them (influencers)" This also increases the perceived authenticity of the influencer
- “If I see that there is put effort in the paid collaboration it is nice to give feedback and thank them by commenting or sending a message.”

**What do think about paid collaborations in Instagram? Do you consider for example influencer’s recommendations trustworthy?**

- “I don’t believe in the suggestions. I haven’t bought anything according to the collaborations or suggestions.”
- Considering paid collaborations with a different perspective, not really believe in the recommendations
- “If there is an influencer who I have followed longer, I consider her more trustworthy and might believe the recommendation.”
- It is part of their job and it is done either well or poorly
- Rather evaluating the influencer than the brand/product
- “Promotion codes of collaborations I might use, but I have never bought anything according to a suggestion of an influencer.”
- “I couldn’t trust the recommendations of paid collaborations.”
- Also, frequency matters: the more paid collaborations in the feed the more likely the quality of them is bad
- Context matters if it is believable or not
- All brands do not need to use influencers in their marketing
  - What added value the influencer can really bring? Companies need to consider when to use influencer in their marketing and when not
- Visibility is not always the correct solution
- Consumers see through the companies’ aims when using influencers

Table 4. Summary of the focus group data
6.3 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

As in grounded theory (Schroth, 2019), also in our research the data was firstly color coded in relatively open manner. The coding process begun with the focus group interview data. This process was done in order to identify similarities, links and congruences in the data and further sort out the data into more reasonable form. Additionally, this open coding allowed the possibility to identify consumers’ behavioural patterns and some explanations for these. After the codes were seen to be comprehensively thought through, the codes were categorized into six categories and eventually named as following:

1. Contextual premises
2. Post characteristics
3. Emotions
4. Interactions
5. Strategies
6. Actions

The names of these categories describe the broad groups of similar information gathered and classified from the data set. In the following paragraphs, the categories will be introduced and discussed more in detail, starting with contextual premises.

Specifically, contextual premises involve background information such as about the purpose for using Instagram, and general comments about the Instagram as a service: “Instagram is above all a picture service” and about influencer marketing - “What added value the influencer can really bring? Companies need to consider when to use influencer in their marketing and when not.”. Additionally, this category includes information about the reasoning of following certain people in Instagram. This section in the contextual premises indicated connections to interactions and actions, which will be discussed more detailed later in this paper.
Post characteristics as a category included all extracted data regarding pictures, captions, stories and comment fields. As an example: “Too perfect and all matching in a picture is boring.” and “Something that feels forced does not work.”. This category and the data in it in turn indicated strong ties to emotions, which are also discussed later in this paper.

Thirdly, emotions classified all the data that expressed some kind of feeling and sensation, such as “There needs to be consistency in the postings to make it feel genuine and believable” and “I am bored with the constant selfies and filming of selves”. From emotions, there was clearly identified connections to interactions and actions, which are also discussed later. In turn, interactions as a category consisted of data about intentions and possible interactions that the participants could commit either in general or with influencers, such as following, commenting, liking and sharing. However, the actions category, referring to data where interview participant referred to actually doing something, was also commonly interrelated with interactions. As an example: “If there is an influencer who I have followed longer, I consider her more trustworthy and might believe the recommendation” and “If somebody follows me, I follow back: for being polite.”

Lastly, strategies category included data about participants questioning the influencer marketing phenomena and strategies about avoiding it. In addition, this category included conclusions the participants formed about mistrust and skepticism, such as “Visibility is not always the correct solution.” and “Consumers see through the companies aims when using influencers.”.

When considering the contextual premises more in detail, it was clear that the purposes for using Instagram, for example for “Ordering clothes”, “Just browsing, entertainment”, “Looking for information” and “Communication” are well fitted under this category and they provide reasons for the use of Instagram. This topic in turn is not directly linked to authenticity in influencer marketing, and thus classified into contextual premises. Additionally, the clarified data about the persons the participants follow is largely categorized as contextual premises as it was considered
as background information. However, as the purposes of Instagram usage for instance involve much data about various interactions and actions, there is a clear connection from contextual premises to those categories as well. For instance, “If following for example some blogger, then likely to also follow her in Instagram” indicates, that the participant is interacting and committing an action with the blogger by following her, and also provides general background information about who she is following. Also, the data about followed people included relations to actions and interactions, since they largely discussed about actually following someone. For example, “If somebody follows me, I follow back to be polite”. As seen, the discussion about who to follow reflects directly to following as an action.

Post characteristics in turn included plenty of useful data for analyzing authenticity in the selected context. Interestingly, relatively much of negative emotions and feelings were related to post characteristics such as “too perfect and all matching”, “something that feels forced”, “if it is marked as paid collaboration” and “If the caption is too long”. Data reflecting this type of post characteristics was commonly related to emotions like boring, exhausting, not working. On contrary, post characteristics such as “aesthetic”, “visuality”, “real and genuine”, “consistency”, “somehow a bit different”, “nice colors” “writing about personal subjects and not just about superficial things” were related to more positive emotions and feelings like eye-catching, interesting, enjoyment, trustworthy and above all, to authenticity. One participant’s comment summarized the identified connection between post characteristics and emotions specifically well: “With influencers, the picture and caption are equally important, and they need to match with each other. If in a paid collaboration the link in the picture and the collaboration is not genuine and smooth it feels just annoying. Just makes me wonder, have you really used your all creativity in this?” Importantly, the theory in this thesis about the characteristics of authenticity and inauthenticity also support these findings.

Furthermore, these emotions and feelings were also interrelated to positive and negative interactions as well as actions such as liking a post and following a person, or skipping the post, respectively. For instance, participants stated: “Pictures are mostly important, and that is why I follow influencers”, whereas other participants stated: Visuality is so important that sometimes if
something is too ugly, I skip it instantly.” and “There is so much content nowadays that attracting interest is difficult”. These then generated emotions from post characteristics, reflected to interactions and actions can also be discussed through the theoretical framework of this thesis, which argues that perceived authenticity results as more likely and higher engagement. However, the focus group data also proves that consumers are having challenges in filtering what is relevant and interesting for them since there are so much content in Instagram, indicating that consumers have formed strategies to avoid content, such as skip or skim the content. This in turn shows a relation between the emotions and strategies as well. As one participant said: “If the caption is too long, I am too lazy to read it.”, indicating that the participant experienced the caption too demanding to read as it was long and included too much information, thus she rather skips it than pays the effort to read it. The theory argues that if informative messages are combined with persuasive messages, the engagement would be higher, but then again, if the message is too long for the followers in the first place, it is not likely that the persuasive message is delivered either. Additionally, the strategies category included data that represented clear questioning, criticism and avoidance strategies on influencer marketing, such as:

“Visibility is not always the correct solution”

“I couldn’t trust the recommendations of paid collaborations”

“If there are a lot of paid collaborations it affects on the authenticity. If all postings are paid it is a red flag to me. It feels like the influencer does this only for money and takes everything she can”

This in turn indicates, that currently the consumers are well –aware of the marketing aims behind influencer marketing and are evaluating and judging these marketing activities more precisely and critically. Additionally, it seems that superimposed, “easy-way-out" cliché posts and captions do not work anymore, and the audience requires more genuineness and effort from the influencers.

When considering the data of the extent of interactions in terms of engagement such as liking and commenting, it was relatively varying, and included following comments:
“I don’t ever comment on influencer’s posting, if it is really good, I might like it.”

“I like the postings quite easily if it is even a bit entertaining.”

“I could comment influencers posting if I am tagging my friend to the picture, if I believe it is entertaining to her.”

“It feels “easier” to comment on a smaller influencer’s posting than someone bigger”

“It is much easier to comment on stories and it feels really nice to get an answer from them (influencers)”

“If I see that there is effort in the paid collaboration it is nice to give feedback and thank them by commenting or sending a message.”

These comments above indicate that the consumers have very different approaches on engaging in Instagram, and especially with influencers. For some it is more personal interaction or action and happen rarely, whereas for some it seems to be part of the experience of using Instagram and happens relatively easily. Additionally, the results of this data analysis indicate that if the postings aroused some kind of emotion, for instance entertaining, or seem easily approachable, it impacts positively on engagement, meaning liking or commenting, which is an aspect also argued in theory.

To summarize the analysis, the categorization of focus group data clearly indicated interrelations between the different categories. Especially, post characteristics showed explicit connection to emotions, to both positive and negative emotions. Emotions in turn indicate clear connection to interactions such as liking, commenting and sharing, and to actions, which are referring to actually doing something, and not to intentional actions. Commonly, negative emotions were attached to negative behavior such as skipping the posting, and positive to positive actions such as following and liking the posting. Additionally, emotions and strategies were clearly interrelated as emotions led to certain negative, avoidance behavior such as skimming the content and to questioning influencer marketing practices. Lastly, even though the contextual premises were more about
background information, part of the data indicated connections to actions. Overall, strong connection between the different categories were identified, which indicates that the whole process of following a person or an influencer is not an explicit act or aspect and is rather a cluster of various acts and aspects, combined into a process with alternating variables.

### 6.4 Observational Study

In our observational study we decided to report all data which was posted by the three chosen influencers during the observation period from 12th of February to 10th of March 2019. However, the main focus of our investigation was to observe the paid collaborations. But we chose to observe and report about all postings so that we were able to see if there exist differences how the influencers do paid collaborations compared to their so-called normal postings. We realized already in the very beginning of the observations that we would not use any software or app to collect the data from Instagram. This decision was made because it was clear to us that there were so many unique and complex elements in all the postings that an automatized system could not do the data collection as thoroughly as two pair of human eyes could. This is up to the visual emphasis which is characteristic to Instagram. We believe that collecting and analyzing visual data with human touch is more detailed and explicit than done with an application for instance. Also, since we wanted to gather data about the captions and how they relate to the picture posted we believe that these kinds of connections were better found by ourselves. An example of the data collected can be seen in figure 4. and the notes about the observations in table 5. below.

Data collection was done together with the two authors of this paper in order to make sure all possible elements were reported and to gain more objectivity to the observations. In the end, after the four weeks of observations, we ended up having almost 80 pages of data. This rich data provides an extensive example aggregation about how today’s influencers use Instagram as their communication channel, what kind engagement it can arise among the followers, what kind of
collaborations there are and how the postings generally succeed in the terms of engaging the followers.

Figure 4. Example of posting (Influencer 1.)

<p>| <strong>Caption</strong> | The caption states that the influencer is having home office day, due to wisdom teeth removal and the smoothie bowl in the picture is her diet of the day. After that she refers to her blog post about three quick breakfast options, which all have been finished with @superlife.fi breakfast toppings. Lastly, the commercial collaboration with @superlife.fi is stated. |
| <strong>Elements of Picture</strong> | Smoothie bowl in the middle of the picture, in the influencer’s hand. On the table, there are also flowers, coffee cup, eye glasses, laptop and a wooden board. Additionally, influencer’s legs can be seen in the picture, and she is wearing outfit from her collection to @bubbleroom. The setting looks planned, and the photo seems very typical, sleeked blogger photo. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>3176</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments (Number Total)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments (Content)</td>
<td>Comments about the smoothie bowl and how it looks delicious, also some followers wishing the influencer gets better soon after the wisdom tooth removal. One follower, who claims to be in the industry, recommends her not to eat seeds as they can get stuck on the hole where the tooth was removed. No responses from the influencer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtags</td>
<td>#haveasuperlife #aamiaissekoitus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emojis</td>
<td>In caption: Smirk, strawberry and hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In comments: hearts, heart-eyed, thumb up, eye roll, tasty emoji, bling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Collaboration (is yes, check if there is also Insta story)</td>
<td>Yes, with @superlife_fi, mentioned in the caption. Posts also in IG story; Firstly, the influencer promotes her new blog post about three healthy breakfasts and has tagged the collaboration company in it. Also, mentions the commercial collaboration. Secondly, she pours the product on top of smoothie bowl and states that the flavor used is one of her favorites. Company also tagged. Lastly, post stating: more on the blog + lottery/giveaway. Commercial collaboration mentioned, but company not tagged. Before this, she also had pictures from the launch party of her collection for @bubbleroom, but those does not directly state the collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of collaboration</td>
<td>Promotion of healthy food/nutritional product, e.g. breakfast toppings. In her postings, she uses the product on top of her smoothie bowls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement rate</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Observation notes. Related to Figure 4.
6.4.1 INFLUENCERS’ POSTING CONTENT

It seems that among the three influencers of our research, sometimes it was used more effort and time to make the postings and sometimes it seems that the collaboration postings for example, were quite simple. This is up to the fact that some of the postings seemed more creative while others seem like they were made little hasty and with less effort. As an example, sometimes an influencer posted just a picture of the product and told about its basic qualities. This way of implementing the paid collaborations seems almost like a traditional advertisement. Further, in some of the paid collaborations, influencers were more creative. This could be seen in the pictures used for the collaborations and also in the captions used. Also, telling for example why the influencer herself likes the product made it seem that she has put more effort on this collaboration. It was also interesting to observe how versatile and different kinds of brands use influencers in their marketing. For example, during our observation period there were clothing, camera, food, mobile phone, beauty, wellbeing and exercise brands and a big department store using influencers in their marketing.

During the observation, the paid collaborations were easy to notice as the influencers mentioned “paid collaboration” almost in all cases as a part of the caption or in the picture. Paid collaborations during the observational period included lotteries, promotion codes and discounts and influencer telling about the product just by mentioning the product and its basic qualities or sharing personal experiences from using this product. If influencer was organizing a lottery about a product, followers could participate by commenting something on the comment section of the posting. For example, influencer 3. had a lottery about exercise program and followers could participate by tagging friends with whom they would want to share the prize. Also, it was interesting to see that couple of times during the observations, the influencers had a paid collaboration in their Instagram story but not on their feed.
On a general level, all the postings were made about positive subjects and it often seemed that influencers wanted to obtain a certain kind of polished image in Instagram. Often pictures felt very refined and perfect which can easily make followers to become numb for all the factitious visual content. We as researchers noted that if there was something a bit different in the postings it stood out easily. For example, once influencer 2. posted about having a little hard time mentally, it immediately stuck out from the general style of other postings. Consequently, this made us to think that if an influencer can produce personal content it can be the vital essence of standing out. Additionally, we observed that if the influencers were able to produce something humoristic it was more likely to gain higher level of engagement.

During our observational study, we also collected data about emojis, comments and hashtags which were used in the postings. Almost in all cases, influencers used emoji as a part of the caption. It was also noticed that often emojis were emphasizing the message of the posting or reflecting the feelings of the influencer. For example, @mariannnan was marketing the paid collaboration with a clothing site Bubbleroom and she was wearing a two-piece set with flower pattern in that posting. In the caption of this posting she wrote only “Floral” and three flower emojis, which are emphasizing the springy floral pattern on the clothes. Regarding hashtags, those were not used that much. Mainly, there were approximately two to none hashtags per posting. Hashtags were often used to indicate the brand of the paid collaboration or the location where the picture was taken at. For example, #mariannnanforbubbleroom, #teamgalaxy, #africa and #zimbabwe.

Considering the content of comments, those were mainly quite unilateral and did not really offer anything interesting to observe. Comments were mostly just embracing comments about the influencer’s look or clothes etc. Also, often followers commented just by emojis such as heart or different smiley emojis. Sometimes followers asked questions in the comment field about for example what kind of products influencer has used for her hair. According to our observations, smaller influencers were more likely to answer back to the comments than the macro influencer. Additionally, it was surprising to see that all the influencers posted more during the weekdays than
weekends. This was interesting, because according to Jaakonmäki et al. 2017, better engagement can be gained if the postings are shared during Sundays.

### 6.4.2 RESULTS PER INFLUENCER

In this following chapter, the results of observational study will be illustrated more precisely in table 6, which provides a summary of the results per influencer. Additionally, some quantitative data is provided in order to demonstrate the frequency of the postings during the observation period, and the division of paid collaborations and normal postings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencer</th>
<th>Total Number of Instagram Posts</th>
<th>Normal Posts/Paid Collaborations</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. @mariannnan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2/11</td>
<td>• High number of paid collaborations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Fashion and travelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Consistent style with general topics, little personal information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Polished posting style, well considered and structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Visually beautiful, elements in harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional as the account is used more for her job than personal purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Caption relatively unimaginative and vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. @annikaollila</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>• Least active of the observed influencers in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coherent general style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Some posts seem more set up, whereas some seem like snapshots from mobile phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Posts per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@kira_kosonen</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Posts presenting herself, boyfriend, outfits, her dog and nature
- Personal content and topics, such as mental health -> Openness -> Trust
- Visually content looks good and beautiful, yet not polished or glossy
- Captions written in an unformal, humoristic, friendly and approachable way

Most active of the observed influencers in general
- Stable and consistent style
- Rather polished with perfectly lighted and arrayed photos
- Does not transmit too inhuman image, rather relatable for followers
- Travelling, Work-out, outfits, well-being, food
- Herself mostly in the focus of the picture
- Professional account fostering her image with appropriate caption language and shared content
- Humoristic features increasing genuineness

Table 6. Summary of observational study results per influencer
In the following stage of the analysis, the results of focus group interview analysis were analyzed through the observational data collected. The aim of this stage was to identify how the focus group analysis results, including the categories and the connections between those appear in the observed data of the three influencers. By doing this, the congruences and similarities between the perceived authenticity of the consumers and the extent of the delivered authenticity by the influencers can be determined for further discussion through theory. The observational data in terms of focus group data analysis will be analyzed in sections, according to the three influencers, @mariannnan, @annikaollila and @kira_kosonen, respectively. Also, their behavior during the observation period is discussed in general manner, and characteristics of their usual postings are described.

In the beginning of the analysis, the observational data was also categorized according to the categories used in the focus group interview analysis. Post characteristics were analyzed based on the collected elements in the pictures, and additionally by analyzing the screenshots. Therefore, also screenshots and short analyses of the posts with highest and lowest engagement rates per influencer are provided. The interactions and actions were analyzed through the comment fields, in addition to the level of engagement, such as number of comments and likes. The emotions were identified mostly in the comment fields, where emotions were expressed verbally and with emojis. Additionally, some influencers’ emotions were transmitted through the post captions. In the observational data, the post characteristics, emotions, interactions and actions were more clearly appealing than the contextual premises and strategies. Therefore, the contextual premises and strategies were more challenging to analyze and could be identified only through few comments.

Additionally, connections between the post characteristics, emotions, interactions and actions were detected, however sometimes in a bit different manner than in the focus group data. For instance, the emotions detected in the data were mostly positive instead of negative, whereas the focus group data analysis discussed plenty about the negative emotions as well. Below in table 7., three lowest
and highest engagement rates of all three influencers are collected, in order to show the variance between them. Additionally, with the table 7, the aim is to show the relation of paid collaborations and so-called normal postings within these rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencer</th>
<th>Lowest Engagement Rate</th>
<th>Second Lowest Engagement Rate</th>
<th>Third Lowest Engagement Rate</th>
<th>Third Highest Engagement Rate</th>
<th>Second Highest Engagement Rate</th>
<th>Highest Engagement Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influencer 1. @mariannnan</strong></td>
<td>0.71% Paid</td>
<td>0.99% Normal</td>
<td>1.01% Paid</td>
<td>2.38% Paid</td>
<td>2.39% Paid</td>
<td>2.79% Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influencer 2. @annikaollila</strong></td>
<td>2.40% Normal</td>
<td>2.65% Normal</td>
<td>3.31% Normal</td>
<td>5.38% Paid</td>
<td>5.97% Normal</td>
<td>6.85% Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influencer 3. @kira_kosonen</strong></td>
<td>1.37% Paid</td>
<td>1.38% Paid</td>
<td>1.76% Paid</td>
<td>3.63% Normal</td>
<td>3.75% Normal</td>
<td>4.73% Normal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Comparison of three lowest and highest engagement rates of the influencers

6.5.1 @MARIANNNAN

To begin with, the elements of the pictures, categorized as post characteristics, revealed several things. Firstly, the overall behavior of @mariannnan was very consistent with the posting style, language and picture elements, which is claimed to increase the engagement (Choi et. al 2014.) Additionally, the posts included often nice, matching colors, yet the colors were usually natural and nothing shocking or distinct. Even though the post characteristics in general were nice, they were often also lame, and seemed very staged and planned. Everything was matching together in a sleeked, typical blogger way, and nothing really stood out and seemed more restrained than natural. According to the focus group interview analysis, these types of characteristics should result as more negative emotions, such as boring, irritating and in-authentic. However, when looking at the comment fields, where the emotions of the audience were identified, those indicated largely positive emotions, such as admiration, embracing, happiness, excitement and support. For
instance, great number of the comments were hearts and heart-eyed emojis, and included comments like “Gorgeous”, “Amazing! Love the color and the silky material” and “Pretty outfit”. This indicates some contradiction between the focus group and observational data. And as explanation to this, it is likely that the audience is reacting more positively in Instagram, as they do not want to comment with a negative tone online with their own accounts and names, where their comments for instance, would be attached to them directly. Therefore, it can be claimed that the discussion about the in-authentic, superimposed aspects is not directly seen in the observational data, which affirms that the decision to conduct a focus group interview in order to have the consumers’ honest perspective was valid and useful.

Interestingly, as the focus group interview analysis indicated clear connections from positive emotions to positive interactions and actions such as following and commenting, in the observational data of @mariannnan this was identified a bit differently. Sure, @mariannnan was the influencer with the highest number of followers, meaning that the post characteristics and positive emotions are likely interrelated to interactions such as following. Yet, the engagement levels in @mariannnan’s posts were the lowest of the observed influencers, referring to that the connections between the positive emotions and positive actions in this case were weaker than the focus group analysis indicated, and in fact relatively neutral. Furthermore, Jaakonmäki et.al., (2017) argued that if a posting manages to arouse emotions, it is likely to be more engaging. In @mariannnan’s case this could mean, that her posting behavior and the used post characteristics did not arouse much emotions, as the engagement levels were low.

Additionally, the focus group analysis argued, that authenticity is damaged due to large number of paid collaborations. @mariannnan was the influencer with the most paid collaborations, 11 out of 13 postings, and thus the most “commercial” influencer of the observed influencers. In addition, she also posted several times about the same collaborations, and it can be argued that maybe the followers’ interest was not that high anymore, when they were reading about the same collaborations again and again. As the focus group interview addressed: “If there are a lot of paid collaborations, it affects on the authenticity. If all postings are paid it is a red flag to me. It feels
like the influencer does this only for money and takes everything she can.”. Therefore, it can be claimed that also the engagement levels are damaged due to the lower perceived authenticity, about which the theory also argues. Furthermore, @mariannnan was not very active in responding to her followers, referring to low level interactions. As the focus group analysis also noted, the perceived authenticity is increased and creates good and positive emotions if a response from the influencer is received. Hence, also the low interactions can be connected to low level of engagement, referring to actual actions such as liking and commenting.

The strategies category was weakly represented in the observational data in case of @mariannnan. However, some data was categorized as strategies. For instance, in one paid collaboration with Samsung, @mariannnan was posing with the new Samsung phone, and using it in the picture. In the caption she referred herself as being part of Samsung family and that she has been using Samsung phones for years. One commenter stated in a negative tone: “Well then, there it is a free S10 for Marianna” indicating criticism and reprehension towards the influencer and the collaboration, through which she has received the phone. As an exception in terms of emotions, this comment also reflected negative emotions, which as well resulted as an action, indicating a connection between the emotion, strategy and action.

When it comes to contextual premises, the observational data of @mariannnan did not provide much background information for analysis. However, some characteristic of the purposes for following were identified, such as “I have followed you for a couple of years now and I am always so inspired by you and your taste in fashion and design!” which indicates that the influencer is followed in order to find inspiration. Additionally, this comment shows a connection to actions, as the follower follows @mariannnan due to her fashion sense.

The posting which got the highest rate (Figure 5.) was a normal posting and the one with lowest rate (Figure 6.) was a paid collaboration. The second and third engaging postings were paid collaborations where the influencer was in the main focus of the picture and in the caption, she
was promoting her design collaboration with a clothing brand. In turn, the second less engaging posting was a normal posting where influencer mentioned her new podcast and the third lowest engaging was a paid collaboration promoting the same clothing collaboration. The one with highest engagement was the most personal posting during the observation period. This posting gained 5296 likes and 28 comments. Most of the comments are just heart emojis or praises about her look. Interestingly, influencer is not answering to the comments rather she is often just liking them. In the posting which achieved the highest engagement level (Figure 5.) she told about spending a relaxing Sunday and she sat by the sea looking relaxed and happy. She is posing in the picture, but the smile and setting look quite genuine and not staged. She also reveals a more private side of herself since she tells something more personal about herself in the caption. “It was a good week but really needed a day of relaxing. Today did so good.” The caption indicates that she has probably had a busy and stressful week and a day off was really needed. This is something that many of the followers can probably relate to.

Figure 5. Influencer 1. posting with the highest engagement rate
Whereas, the posting with the lowest engagement (Figure 6.) was a paid collaboration where the influencer was advertising a collaboration which she had been telling many times before during our observation period. This posting got 1338 likes and 11 comments. Most of the comments are embracing the outfit and look of @mariannnan. The low engagement level could be because the followers were bored to hear again about the same paid collaboration. It was also observed that she really was not that creative with her postings about this specific collaboration. The caption in this picture is not very imaginative. This is interesting since using varying ways of telling about this collaboration could have increased the engagement rates. In the picture, she does not look into the camera so her face and impression cannot really be seen. Also, her posture and the whole setting in this picture seems a bit set and not so spontaneous. Additionally, atmosphere in this picture is not too cheery, rather it looks a bit restrained. All in all, the engagement rates in her Instagram feed did not achieve high levels compared to the other two influencers of our research and there was also quite a lot of variation in the engagement levels of her postings.

Figure 6. Influencer 1. posting with the lowest engagement rate
6.5.2 @ANNIKAOLLILA

Influencer 2. had consistency in the style and frequency of her postings during the time of observation. Generally, regarding the category of post characteristics with @annikaollila, her postings are filling many of the elements which were related to authenticity according to the focus group results. Further, her postings were not that polished and many of the pictures looked like they could be from her mobile phone images. So, her postings were not too elaborated and touched up. It was interesting to notice a one example of these “unprofessional pictures” which resulted as one follower to comment: “These pictures are so super nice!! Such a nice change to the all perfectly lighted Instagram pictures.” This example also is a good illustration about the interconnections between post characteristics, emotions and interactions. And worth of noticing is also that this is a comment in the only paid collaboration post @annikaollila had during the observation period. So, it seems that she was able to create authenticity and engagement in a paid collaboration by having a picture with positive atmosphere, consistent style and by posting something a “bit different”, which was noted to create authenticity among the focus group.

Influencer 2. mentioned about having some health issues, even though about this topic she wrote in her Instagram story. Further, it was mentioned in the focus group that “Writing about personal subjects and not just about superficial things” can be related to positive emotions and to increase authenticity. So, again there can be found a link between the post characteristics and emotions. Moreover, the openness in her postings can create a sense of trust because many of the postings seem quite genuine, open and not so polished, which in turn reflects to authenticity. Additionally, with @annikaollila, theory of authenticity’s connection to engagement is supporting our results, since her postings are filling the elements of authenticity and her engagement ratios were the highest among the influencers which we observed in the observational study. Further, post characteristics such as captions which were often written in a personal way, are connecting with the results of focus group. Focus group discussion results pointed out that if something personal is shared, it also seems more authentic. And especially with @annikaollila the authentic content resulted as higher engagement than with the other two influencers.
So, as stated earlier there can be found a strong connection in the post characteristics and emotions and further to interactions such as liking the posting or commenting on it. Moreover, these are valid also with @annikaollila. Her style in pictures and captions is often a bit silly and humoristic and even sarcastic. It can be also observed that in her case these positive emotions resulted as higher number of likes and comments or ‘interactions’. Even though, there is a slight difference compared to focus group results because participants did not mention humor to be directly a reason to engage with the posting. But, after all humor is a positive emotion which then can result as interaction, as it came up in the focus group results. Also, often the captions she used were well connected to the style of the picture. This is relevant as one participant’s in focus group commented about the connection between post characteristics and emotions: “With influencers, the picture and caption are equally important, and they need to match with each other.” Also, since @annikaollila had only one paid collaboration during the observational period it probably makes her seem more reliable in the eyes of her followers. As, one participant from focus group pointed out: “If there are paid collaborations quite seldom in an influencer’s feed it makes them more trustworthy.”

Regarding the category of interactions, the results from focus group are matching with @annikaollila’s observation data. As, one focus group member stated: “It feels “easier” to comment on a smaller influencer’s posting than someone bigger.” This is valid regarding the observation data we gathered, as we observed that for both micro influencers there were more comments than for macro influencer @mariannnan in relation to their whole follower base. Additionally, both micro influencers have higher engagement rates in general than macro influencer. @annikaollila had quite high level of interactions in general. As an example, one of her postings with ‘post characteristics’ such as positive caption connected with happy smiling picture of herself resulted as 24 followers to comment and wish her happy birthday. This is interesting, because according to our focus group results commenting to an influencer’s postings really requires something special. As, @annikaollila was also actively answering to many of the comments, it makes it feel like she is committed and also increases her authenticity as pointed out in the focus group discussion. Categories of actions, strategies and contextual premises were
challenging to identify from influencer 2. results. This is much up to the fact, that her posting style was quite sparse which offered less material to analyze and categorize.

Influencer 2. had quite high engagement rates in general. The highest engagement rate during our observation was 6.85 % (Figure 7.) and the lowest was 2.40 % (Figure 8.). Worth of noticing is that her posting with the lowest engagement 2.40% is quite close to @mariannnan’s best engaging posting which gained a 2.79 % engagement rate. Both of these postings were normal postings so not paid collaborations. What was interesting with the posting which gained the highest engagement, was that there were 92 comments which is a high number compared to her other postings and also compared to the macro influencer of our research. In the posting which gained the biggest engagement rate is representing a picture of the influencer where she is embracing her naturally curly hair (Figure 7.). She also mentions, that it is the first time in her life when she does this and does not use a hair straightener for instance. In the comment section, her followers seem to be excited about the naturality of the look and are asking tips from her how she has succeeded to complete this specific natural hairstyle. What is worth of mentioning is that the influencer is answering to many of the comments and questions of this specific posting which is presumably increasing the engagement of her followers even more. In general, her postings are filling quite many characteristics of authenticity.
The posting which got the lowest engagement rate included in total seven pictures from a trip she had done earlier. She had also posted quite some pictures of this same trip already before in her Instagram feed. There are pictures from buildings, food, scenery and of herself. Worth of noticing that the first picture of this posting is a bit blurry food picture (Figure 8,) which might have not encouraged the followers to swipe and see the rest of the pictures. The hashtags she is using #sorryforthespam and #notrealytho are adding a humoristic and a bit sarcastic touch to the posting. This post gained only three comments of which two are heart emojis and one of them is a comment written by the influencer herself.
The post characteristics in general signaled a controlled, thought through behavior in case of @kira_kosonen. Many postings involved peaceful, natural colors, especially in outfit postings in which also the background was always oddly matching with the outfit. Several postings included the influencer casually walking on the street but funnily, the postings certainly did not look that casual, and more like a staged photo session. Based on the focus group interview, this type of characteristics reflects to emotions like “boring”, “irritating” and “not authentic”, which are seemingly more negative. This could indicate, that also those negative emotions and low perceived authenticity would result as low engagement. Additionally, this should result as strategies like skipping or skimming the content. Yet, unfortunately strategies and contextual premises as categories were not clearly existing or identified in the data of @kira_kosonen and cannot thus be discussed further. Nevertheless, the focus group participants agreed that skipping happens a lot, even though it cannot be grasped in the influencers’ data that extensively. However,
@kira_kosonen’s posts included also characteristics, such as aesthetic, beautiful, consistent, and based on the focus group interview, these characteristics arouse emotions like “relaxation”, “enjoyment”, and “genuine and believable”, which in turn should impact positively on the perceived authenticity and thus to engagement.

At time to time, @kira_kosonen included some humoristic characteristics in her postings, usually in captions. For instance, when she posted a picture with light rays coming under her jacket, and joked about it as rainbow farts, the picture got higher engagement than normally. However, also this was posted in a way, that it was not embarrassing, and more turned into her favor with elegance; “I only fart rainbows and butterflies”. Additionally, humor was identified when she jokes about Matterhorn, and refers to it as a Toblerone mountain; “Recognize it not ha”. Humor in the data shows a bit different side of the influencer, and creates more relatable and approachable image, therefore can be claimed to create authenticity. In these types of postings, also engagement was higher than regularly, indicating that followers experienced the content positively. As the focus group interview data indicated - “Not writing about just superficial things” bring genuine and real feeling, and thus impact positively on perceived authenticity, as the theory also argues.

When considering the identified post characteristics, it can be claimed that her posting behavior is rather balanced in terms of post characteristics arousing positive and negative feelings and emotions. Yet again, only positive emotions can be identified from the data and therefore only a little variation in terms of identified emotions arose. Commonly, the identified emotions in the comment field were admiration, glory, happiness which were indicated with excited, heart, star-eyed and heart-eyed emojis and verbally, such as “elegant”, “beautiful”, “wow” and “gorgeous”.

As an interesting point, @kira_kosonen had clearly more personal comments on the comment field from her friends, compared to the two other observed influencers @mariannnan and @annikaollilia. As the influencer is travelling relatively much between Switzerland and Finland, a lot of the comments from friends were about missing her, and how nice it would be to see her soon.
To all this type of comments, she has responded either in writing, or at least with emojis, whereas to rest of the comments she has not responded that actively, referring to low level of interactions with the followers. The focus group interview analysis indicated, that the followers appreciate responses from the influencers “It is much easier to comment on stories and it feels really nice to get an answer from them (influencers). Getting an answer from influencer also increases the perceived authenticity”. This in turn indicates, that it would be beneficial for the influencer to actively respond also to the followers, and not just friends, and with this, impact positively on the perceived authenticity and thus to engagement. Yet, it is important to notify, that not all interactions can be seen in the data collected, and for instance, interaction between the follower and influencer can occur in direct messages.

The interactions were clearly reflected from the emotions, and as the identified emotions were positive, also the interactions identified were more positive than negative, for instance commenting positively like “Love the details”, giving feedback and indicating intentions such as “I am buying all these products based on the glow here in the picture”. This indicates also, that the posting behavior of @kira_kosonen is influential to some extent, as the follower states purchasing based on her posting and recommendation. This in turn shows connections to actions as well.

When it comes to paid collaborations, those were often rather stereotypical promotions, either where she uses the product, of the product is well positioned in the post. Interestingly, when the product is placed in the foreground, it is claimed to increase the engagement (Valentini et al. 2018.) Additionally, @kira_kosonen posted rather seldomly paid collaborations during the observation period, as 5 of 22 postings were paid collaborations, whereas for instance @mariannnan had 11 of 13 postings paid collaborations. However, @kira_kosonen posted paid collaborations more often than @annikaollila, as she posted paid collaboration only once. As mentioned earlier, based on the focus group interview “If there are paid collaborations quite seldomly in an influencer’s feed, it makes them more trustworthy”. Trustworthy in turn should impact positively on the perceived authenticity and thus to engagement. Yet, in case of @kira_kosonen, three posting with lowest engagement rates were all paid collaborations as can be seen in table 7.
The paid collaborations even enhanced the staged feeling, especially in the posting with lowest engagement, where the influencer is taking a bath, using the facial product and rose leaves are floating in the air. As the focus group interview showed “If in a paid collaboration the link in the picture and the collaboration is not genuine and smooth, it feels just irritating”. This in turn indicates that maybe she is indeed too stereotypical, and does not provide much interesting, creative and authentic content which would engage the audience more deeply, and rather creates negative feelings. However, the data analysis indicated, that the paid collaborations which included a lottery or giveaway, were more engaging in terms of comments than usual paid collaborations. As those postings were also very stereotypical, positioned promotions, this can indicate that even though the followers do not engage in terms of likes, maybe the products she promoted were interesting, and the followers think it is worth to participate with commenting. This in turn shows a connection to interactions and actions again, such as to engagement. Nevertheless, as the influencer interview also informed, these type of giveaway postings are a tool to engage the audience, as the participation usually happens by tagging a friend, thus increasing the engagement. This again questions the real reasons behind the engagement in giveaways postings, if it is about the interest towards the promoted product, or just about effectiveness of the tool used, and also shows some criticism to influencer marketing, thus referring in-directly to category of strategies.

The engagement rates were all under 5%, and in this case, varying on relatively large scale as the difference between the lowest and the highest engagement rate was 3,36%. Interestingly, the three lowest engagement rates were in postings which were all paid collaborations. This indicates that her marketing aims in postings are not as effective as they probably are desired to be, and arguably not perceived as authentic, and rather related to traditional, persuasive marketing activities. The posting with lowest engagement rate of 1,37% involved a skincare promotion, which can be seen in figure 9 below. Even though the posting had the influencer using the product, which should increase the trust in influencer, and thus the engagement, the posting achieved a low engagement. Maybe the fact, that the posting was related to Valentine’s day and then attached to the usage of the product in a rather poor way in the caption influenced on the perceived authenticity and genuineness of the message delivered, thus resulted as low engagement rate. Additionally, the
posting had rose leaves falling in the air, when the influencer was taking a bath and using the product, which enhanced the staged, in-authentic feeling.

In contrast, the three most engaging postings were about her ordinary life, about her outfits and a scenery from a travel destination. In these postings, the influencer shares something different from her life, whether it is a yearning that she has felt for Helsinki and how good it feels to be back or tells about clothing that she has inherited from her mother or shares a picture of one of her favorite spots on earth. This reveals more personal aspects about the influencer which has been likely to increase the perceived authenticity of these postings, and therefore also increased the engagement rates.

The highest engagement rate achieved a level of 4.73% and can be seen in figure 10. The photo itself is rather ordinary and matches well with typical posts of this influencer. As seen in figure 10, the influencer is just walking on the street, wearing fashionable, all matching clothes. Oddly, also the background fits well with the outfit, which in turn gives relatively staged feeling. Even the bike
on the side is same-colored as her outfit. However, the caption reveals something more, and is not just a polished, cool, mainstream caption. In this caption, the influencer provides something more relatable to her followers, and makes herself more approachable, even vulnerable. Furthermore, maybe her self-criticism in the caption has increased the engagement, since it sends a non-vain and even a bit humoristic message. As she says in the caption, the jacket she is wearing is her mother’s old. Since recycling is currently very topical and a lot discussed topic, the fact that the jacket is not brand new, can increase the respect among the audience. Also, this can impact on the perceived authenticity, as the jacket is inherited and not bought from any chain company around the corner, and thus increase the engagement.

Figure 10. Influencer 3. posting with the highest engagement rate
In order to be able to answer to our research question *What is the significance of consumers’ perceived authenticity to engagement in influencer marketing postings in Instagram?* in the following it is provided a discussion about the results we gathered with our research and how this is connected and is answering with the existing theory about authenticity, engagement and influencer marketing.

Firstly, with our results we can state that it is clear that consumer resistance is already existing in the field of influencer marketing. Further, we got clear evidence about this from the interviews but from the observational data this is more challenging to verify. This is up to the fact that the attitudes of the consumers are difficult to observe and because we believe that consumers do not want to show their negative attitudes by acting negatively by writing some unpleasant comments for instance with their own names. Minahan et al. (2011) argue that consumer resistance is both an activity and attitude but based on the focus group discussion it seems that consumer resistance is more indirect and more of an attitude than activity in our research context of Instagram.

Being able to point out that consumer resistance exists in influencer marketing is interesting, since as theory states that influencer marketing is a well working channel for creating authentic content and to pass consumer’s resistance (Conick, 2018) (Moor et.al., 2018). Despite, with both of the interview results with the Finnish influencer and with focus group it can be validated that followers or the “consumers” of Instagram are well aware of the marketing aims of the influencers’ paid collaborations and they have created strategies such as ignoring and skipping the content that is paid for. As one focus group participant said that she will instantly skip a posting “If it is marked as a paid collaboration”. Also, it can be addressed that focus group members have created some negative attitudes towards paid collaborations. It is a typical for consumer resistance to have for example cynicism towards the marketing content. This is well pointed out in these comments which came up during the focus group discussion: “I don’t believe in the suggestions. I haven’t
bought anything according to the collaborations or suggestions.” and “Considering paid collaborations with a different perspective, not really believe in the recommendations”. So according to our research, consumers have created consumer resistance towards influencer marketing and consumers are not automatically considering the content to be authentic. This is partly contradictory with the theory as, Shamsudeen Ibrahim & Ganeshbabu (2018) argue for the effectiveness of influencer marketing due to the trustworthiness achieved by electronic word-of-mouth.

Regarding the elements and definitions of authenticity, there seems to be a connection between the results we gathered and the theory for the most part. According to the interview with the influencer it came out that she understands the importance of creating authentic content and it seems that it is actually one of the determinant principles of her work as an influencer. She mentioned for example that she aims to collaborate with companies that have shared and aligned values with her own values. She also wants to have consistency whom to have collaborations with. Moreover, she rarely wants to work with companies who gives her ready framed statements or slogans because she thinks it is not authentic and not honest. Also, she stated that the content needs to be believable because she thinks audience will know if the content is fake. She believes that “real” is the thing nowadays which means posting sometimes also about not so perfect things. All these factors are in line with the theory as it states authentic to be for example, real, consistent and not fake (Beverland & Farrelly, 2009) (Moore et.al., 2018.). For her it also seems important to be herself which is also likely to increase authenticity according to previous literature (Moore et.al., 2018). However, worth of noticing is that she mentioned that there are still many influencers who are making it just for the money. Consequently, their content is less likely to be authentic.

Interestingly, among focus group interview participants the request for authentic content came out clearly and also the fact that consumers really are after authentic content in Instagram. Further, they saw that it is important that the content created in Instagram is authentic and real. If these are achieved the content, then feels more interesting and appealing. One participant mentioned that if all postings are paid collaborations it affects on the authenticity negatively and other participant
said that if something feels forced it does not work. Accordingly, there exists connection to literature about authenticity with the perspectives of our focus group results. As for example, (Evans et al., 2017) argue that if a posting is marked as “paid” or “sponsored” it is more likely to impact negatively on the attitudes and behavioural outcomes of the consumers. However, as our results from both interviews revealed that there is a need and understanding about the meaning and relevance of authenticity on both sides: consumer and an influencer, in practice it is not obvious that all the influencers are creating authentic content. According to our results from observational study some influencers were probably more aware about this matter and also trying to create authentic and genuine content. Whereas, especially macro influencer’s paid collaborations were created more or less like traditional advertisement and at least during the observation period her Instagram account was used mainly for paid collaborations. These facts resulting as not very authentic and creative content which also resulted as lowest engagement levels in the observational data.

Additionally, the existence of word-of-mouth in influencer marketing can be questioned according to the results we got from the focus group interview. As word-of-mouth or in the context of our research, electronic word-of-mouth, is according to theory considered as trustworthy and reliable source of information (Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010.) But on the contrary, in the focus group discussion there appeared even quite strong statements against this. One participant commented for example, that she never would buy anything according to a recommendation given by influencer because she knows that this “recommendation” is paid for and that way she considers to be unreliable. Also, among the focus group couple other participants agreed that they never had bought anything according to a recommendation of any influencer. Consequently, this makes us wonder how well influencer marketing actually works and if it is able to affect on consumer behavior in the desired way.

Interestingly, in the focus group interview it came up that collaborations which are somehow poorly executed are more harmful for the influencer than for the brand or company itself. So, it seems that it is the influencers who have to be more careful about what kind of collaborations they
make than the companies. Moreover, from consumer perspective it seems like it is the influencer’s reputation in stake more than the company’s reputation when implementing paid collaborations.

Most importantly, to answer to the thesis problem about the connection between authenticity and engagement we received interesting results. More specifically, with this research we were able to identify both similarities and congruencies between the theory and the analyzed data. Firstly, engagement was discussed based on the size of the influencer, in terms of followers. The observational data analysis indicated that in practice, the macro influencer had the lowest engagement rates in general. As a possible reason for this can be the frequency of paid collaborations which were relatively high in her case during the observation period. This reason was considered as one of the decreasing factors of authenticity and thus engagement among the focus group participants, and as they also said, they are more likely to engage with so-called normal postings than paid collaborations. This aligns with theory (De Veirman et.al., 2017), as it argues that the large followers base does not guarantee high engagement, and rather with it, far-reach of marketing messages can be achieved.

On contrary, the micro influencers received higher engagement levels, and were also considered as more authentic since they were more open, humoristic, real and sharing personal things, which are aspects impacting positively on perceived authenticity. In fact, Hall (2016) also claims that the smaller audiences of micro influencers in niche markets are more engaged which is also proven by our research. Therefore, it can be claimed as well, that the number of followers does not impact directly on engagement, and rather that the likelihood of engagement is depended on the content created, thus referring to audience’s request for authenticity.

As stated in by Jaakonmäki et.al., (2017) if the post can arouse emotions, it impacts positively on engagement, and the more extreme emotions such as love, or hate are more engaging than neutral emotions. Interestingly, some congruences between the identified post characteristics and the resulted emotions with respect to engagement were identified in our data set. According to
observational data analysis, several posts with in-authentic features aroused positive emotions in the comments, such as embracement and happiness and thus had led to engagement, even though according to the focus group interview these in-authentic features such as staged, not creative and mainstream should arouse feelings like boring and irritating, and thus lead to avoidance strategies like skipping the post. This in turn can be discussed through the subjectivity of authenticity (Liedtka, 2008), and as people perceive authenticity differently, the outcome in terms of engaging can be varying, and thus authenticity as a driver for engagement can be questioned to some extent.

Therefore, it can be argued as well, that authenticity is not the only reason why followers engage with the content, and the means to engage with influencer marketing has various reasons. An example from our data set, the paid collaborations with giveaways had higher engagement when comparing to regular paid collaborations. This can be a result of followers’ high interest towards the give-away product, or then a result of influencer using tagging as a tool to enhance the engagement. This however indicates that the influencer is aware how to impact on engagement and utilize the follower base in order to gain appearance. In those give-away collaborations, the content was very typical, well-positioned promotion as well which according to the focus group participants is experienced as in-authentic. Thus, it is also contradicting with the theory (Marks, & Prinsloo, 2015) arguing over the connection between authenticity and engagement.

Yet, it is noteworthy to point out, that the negative emotions were hardly identified in the collected data. This can indicate that the audience does not want to express the negative emotions aroused from in-authentic posts under their own user names, and that the negative emotions are outcomes, that become more apparent outside the online behavior and do not have that appealing influence on the engagement in the end.

Furthermore, a connection between perceived authenticity and engagement was detected in the posting captions. In theory (Jaakonmäki et.al., 2017), simple and clear caption were discussed to impact positively on engagement. However, theory (ibid.) also argued that the captions must be informative for followers, or otherwise the posting does not engage the audience. Therefore, for instance postings which had caption with only hashtags, were not very informative nor creative,
thus those postings had lower engagement. On contrary, when the caption indicated authentic features such as humor, creativity or relatability, the posting had higher engagement. As pointed out by the focus group participants, whenever the influencer shares more deeper thoughts or revealed something more personal about themselves, it enhances the perceived authenticity. This was also proven in this research, as in posts with these features, a positive influence on engagement was identified.

7.1 LIMITATIONS

To conclude the chapter of discussion here it will be mentioned the limitations of our research which might be helpful to consider for possible future research in the same field. To start with, marketing authenticity is subjective, and it is always a personal perception of an individual that is influenced for example by his/her previous experiences, opinions and knowledge about the topic in question. So, it needs to be acknowledged that this makes authenticity as a topic challenging to research. The subjectivity is inevitably considering also the authors of this paper. This limited rationality is tried to handle by including the focus group interview which was done in order to minimize the subjectivity and include several perspectives about the topics of influencer marketing, perceived authenticity and engagement researched. Also, by combining three different methods: influencer interview, focus group interview and observational study we aimed at to increase the generalizability of our research.

Some limitations regarding the observational study are also good to consider. This resulting that the exact same research done by us same researchers will be different if written one year later. Also, because observations are about human experience, it is also limited in the scope of the participants who were present in Instagram and following the influencers who were the target of our observational study. This resulting that, online engagement is very much about existence in here at the very moment (Kozinets et al., 2018). Additionally, it is relevant to point out, that the observational study is limited due to the three influencers we observed. Therefore, also the results
could be different in case other type of influencers would be observed. Further, as the research was conducted in Finland, the results are also limited by the cultural background. Thus, the results could vary if the research would have been done in another country. Additionally, in the data collected with observational study, only a little criticism and critique from the consumers’ perspective were identified in terms of authenticity. Therefore, the focus group interview was an adequate method, as it provided a truthful and honest perspective of consumers of the topic and provided the lacking information.
8. CONCLUSION

This paper started with reviewing existing literature about influencer marketing, authenticity, engagement and phenomena closely connected with them. Then it continued with providing a theoretical framework and method section. Further, combining three methods of influencer interview, focus group interview and observational study, we believe we have provided an interesting review around current topic of influencer marketing in Instagram and its connection to consumers’ perceived authenticity and further to engagement. We believe our research to be relevant, as authenticity in marketing is expected to impact on engagement, and authenticity is essential attribute for companies marketing strategies, it is relevant for them to recognize impactful means of engagement in influence marketing.

8.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTION

With our research, we wanted to study if perceived authenticity is achieved with influencer marketing and how it affects on the engagement of consumers in Instagram. With the theoretical framework, provided in the beginning of this paper, the aim was to give a comprehensive overview about the existing literature about influencer marketing, authenticity, engagement and closely related topics of consumer resistance and social media marketing. With the extensive qualitative data collected with three research methods; influencer interview, focus group interview and observational study, and later analyzed, the purpose of this research was to provide an insight of what consumers perceive authentic in influencer marketing in Instagram and how this impacts on the engagement achieved with influencer marketing postings. Thus, also how successfully influencer marketing is considered as authentic and whether consumer resistance exists in the field.

To meet the purpose of the research, the following research question was formed: What is the significance of consumers’ perceived authenticity to engagement in influencer marketing postings in Instagram?
According to this research, consumers’ perceived authenticity has a positive influence on the means to engage with influencer marketing activities, such as paid collaboration postings. Whenever authentic features, according to the focus group interview results and researchers’ perception, were perceived in the posting behavior of influencers in Instagram, clear enhancement on the achieved engagement levels were identified. Yet, this research also proved a difference in terms of engagement between normal postings and paid collaborations, as normal postings achieved higher engagement among the observed influencers. Furthermore, according to our research the micro influencers were able to create more engaging collaborations in general than the macro influencer. In this research it was evident, that content which can be determined as authentic such as personal, creative and somehow different from the mass pops up for the audience and is engaging.

However, also the posts in which authentic characteristics were not identified, achieved engagement to some extent, yet not as high as when authentic features were involved. Therefore, as this research also attests, authenticity alone is not the only aspect impacting on the engagement and thus on the success of influencer marketing. Other aspects included the following; humor, entertainment, effort behind the posting, visuality of the posting and the influencer herself. Also, from the results gathered, it can be stated that postings which are perceived as superficial or somehow stereotypical are not engaging consumers in Instagram. This is in line with theory as it argues that elements that are considered fake are perceived as inauthentic and consequently not engaging. Moreover, influencer marketing and its effectiveness is originally said to be based on word-of-mouth communication. However, with our research this can be questioned since our results prove that consumers of Instagram have certainly created consumer resistance towards influencer marketing since, they are for example, considering influencers’ recommendations in paid collaborations quite critically. And further, with the research we also were able to identify that there in fact are, other elements influencing on engagement in addition to authenticity.
To conclude, consumers’ perceived authenticity has a positive significance to engagement in influencer marketing in Instagram. However, these causes of engagement are relatively ambiguous, and the engagement in influencers’ postings is influenced by other aspects as well than consumers’ perceived authenticity.

8.3 CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Referring to the previously mentioned result, that authenticity is not the only aspect influencing on engagement, this is also an interesting area for further research, as the consumers’ reasons behind engaging are not that obvious. Additionally, this indicates, and proves correct, that authenticity is a subjective manner, and people perceive authenticity differently. As the perceived authenticity in this research is restricted by the researchers’ and the focus group participants perception and understanding, thus with different participants, the results could vary largely. Therefore, future research with other type of influencers than bloggers, and thus with different follower representatives could produce interesting outcomes in the field of marketing.

If consumers can perceive influencer marketing authentic, it can help to create and keep a long-term relationship between a brand and consumers. That it is why, marketers need to put strategic emphasis on the management of authenticity in influencer marketing and consider it as relevant source of value within marketing approaches. So, it becomes clear that brand managers for example, need to concentrate on the authenticity of brand (Choi et al., 2014) and consequently foster the creation of authentic influencer marketing. Moreover, as pointed out before consumers are well aware about marketing manipulation, which has led people to search for products and services from sources that are transparent (Wagner, 2017.)

As said, influencer marketing is a part of many companies marketing mix nowadays and a part of the brand building, the authenticity in that context should be emphasized and managed with regard
of the matter. Even more, with our research we were able to point out that there seems to be strong request for authentic content in influencer marketing. Further, according to our interviews both influencer and focus group saw authentic content as an essential part of influencer marketing. Consequently, marketing professionals could request more effort from the influencers they do collaborations with and critically evaluate how the influencer is achieving the targets of the paid collaboration in terms of consumer engagement.

With our research, we hope to contribute for encompassing insight for the social media marketing professionals about the achieved level of authenticity of influencer marketing from consumers’ perspective. In addition, we were able to provide understanding of what kind of influencer marketing activities the consumers’ have formed resistance to. And finally, we hope to have shed more light on what might work in influencers’ postings in Instagram from consumers’ perspective and what not and how engagement with the consumers could be enhanced.


APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. INFLUENCER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How the collaboration is usually established or begun?
2. How do you decide with who to collaborate or not?
3. To what extent you receive instructions from the company what to deliver?
4. What do you aim to deliver to your followers with your postings?
5. Do you consider creating authentic content essential to your audience?
6. What do you consider as important aspects or features to take into consideration in Instagram postings in general (which impact on your own Instagram posting behaviour)?
7. What aspects you consider positive or functioning in Instagram postings?
8. What aspects you consider negative or not functioning in Instagram postings?
9. What characteristics you think bring genuine and real feeling or image of the influencer?
10. What engagement in your postings indicate to you?
11. What things you think impact on the number of likes or comments in postings?
12. Have you noticed if certain type of posts receives certain kind of (or more) response from followers?
13. What are your policies with communicating with followers? Do you respond to many or selectively to some?

APPENDIX 2. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. For what purpose you use Instagram (e.g. entertainment, information, discussion)?
2. What kind of persons you follow on Instagram?
   a. What following someone in Instagram means to you, do you actively interact in Instagram?
   b. Why you follow these people?
3. What are aspects you consider important in Instagram post (e.g. photo, caption, message)?
4. What characteristics bring genuine and real feeling or image of the influencer?
5. What actually catches your eye on Instagram feed?
6. Are there certain characteristics that catches your attention more than others?
7. What kind of characteristics would drive you to skip posts?
   a. Does this happen a lot?
8. What makes you to like/comment/share a post?
   a. Are there different levels of engagement in your Instagram behaviour? For instance, that you always comment on your friends’ posts, but only like influencers’ posts...
b. Why?
9. What do you think about paid collaborations in Instagram? Do you consider for example influence’s recommendations trustworthy?
10. Have you purchased anything based on a recommendation from an influencer?
APPENDIX 4. SCREENSHOT OF @ANNIKAOOLLILA INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT
APPENDIX 5. SCREENSHOT OF @KIRA_KOSONEN INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT