ARCADA

Consumer online shopping behavior affected by influencer marketing - with a focus on sustainability

Emilia Kaulbars-Staudinger

MASTER'S THESIS	
Arcada	
Degree Programme:	International Business Management
Identification number:	7262
Author:	Emilia Kaulbars-Staudinger
Title:	Consumer online shopping behavior affected by influencer marketing – with a focus on sustainability
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Commissioned by:	

Abstract:

The purpose of this case study is to gain knowledge about the clothing business online and how the influencer marketing affects consumers' online shopping behavior and purchase decisions. How the marketing methods that influencers use on social media channels are perceived, is interesting for this study, to be able to understand what responsibility and power the influencers possess and what responsibility lies on the consumers. How consumers are influenced on social media and how they think about the sustainability angle is the second research part of the study. Sustainable fashion and sustainable influencer marketing is the third research area of this study. There is a need to understand how consumers perceive their online shopping behavior due to influencer marketing, and how influencers can work in a more sustainable way when promoting clothes online and in their work overall to build a more sustainable future for the clothing business. Consumer shopping behavior online, influencer marketing, sustainable fashion and sustainable influencer marketing are referred to in the theoretical framework. A qualitative method is used to collect data through semi-structured focus group interviews with consumers of different ages between 16-31, and semi-structured interviews with two influencers in Finland, Alexa Aavarinne and Michelle Blomqvist. The study shows that consumers are affected by influencer marketing more strongly if they are younger, but all respondents are affected by influencer marketing in some way. They have, because of that, purchased many clothing products online. Sometimes these purchases have been impulse purchases and the consumers have frequently returned items that they have bought online. Many influencers tend to work in a real and trustworthy way to succeed, and they are focusing on giving a genuine picture of themselves and their thoughts and opinions about the products they represent and promote. Some influencers also work with and think about sustainability issues. There is a need for better transparency in the fashion business overall, and it's important to gain more knowledge about how much the consumer online shopping behavior affects the environment. Demanding more sustainably produced products is needed, but the study showed that the responsibility for this lies on the consumers.

Keywords:	Online shopping, consumer behavior, social media, influencer marketing, influencer, sustainability, sustainable fashion
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Sammanfattning:

Syftet med denna undersökning är att få information om klädbranschen på nätet och hur influencer marknadsföring påverkar konsumenter, med koppling till köpbeteende och köpbeslut. Hur konsumenter tolkar marknadsföringsmetoderna som används av influencers på sociala medier är intressant för denna studie. Den andra forskningsdelen i denna studie behandlar sociala mediers påverkan på konsumenter och hur konsumenter kunde tänka och agera mer hållbart. Hållbart mode och hållbar influencer marknadsföring är den tredje forskningsdelen. Det finns ett behov för att förstå hur konsumenter tolkar deras egna köpbeteende på nätet då de blir påverkade av influencers, och hur influencers kunde arbeta mer hållbart då de gör reklam för kläder på nätet och även i deras arbete på en allmän nivå, för att bygga en mer hållbar framtid inom klädbranschen. Den teoretiska referensramen för denna studie består av kundbeteende, influencer marknadsföring, hållbart mode och hållbar influencer marknadsföring. En kvalitativ undersökningsmetod används för att samla in data via semi-strukturerade fokusgruppintervjuer med konsumenter av olika åldrar mellan 16-31, samt semi-strukturerade intervjuer med två influencers från Finland, Alexa Aavarinne och Michelle Blomqvist. Studien visar att framförallt unga konsumenter blir starkt påverkade av influencers, men alla respondenter i undersökningen är på någon nivå påverkade av influencers och har på grund av det gjort fler köp på nätet, ibland även impulsköp och har ofta returnerat produkter som de köpt på nätet. Influencers försöker arbeta på ett genuint sätt för att lyckas i deras arbete, och de fokuserar på att ge en äkta bild av dem själva och deras tankar och åsikter om de produkter de representerar och marknadsför. Influencers arbetar med och tänker på hållbarhet. Det finns dock ett behov för transparens i modebranschen på en allmän nivå, och det är även viktigt att samla kunskap om hur mycket konsmentköpbeteendet på nätet påverkar miljön. Det finns också ett behov för att kräva mer hållbart producerade produkter, men studien visar att ansvaret för detta ligger hos konsumenterna.

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FOREWORD

1 INTRODUCTION

Online shopping has continued its popularity and is very common amongst consumers of all ages. Nowadays, almost any type of product can be purchased online and many brick and mortar stores are suffering from bankruptcy when online stores' market share gets much bigger all the time, and many different players online offer global shopping alternatives at any time of the day. Numerous varieties of payment methods, free shipping and returns and a very broad product supply have made it very easy to make the purchasing decision online.

Influencers, as the title suggests, have a massive impact on consumers' purchasing behavior online, through influencer marketing of different products. Mainly clothing, accessories and beauty products are included in influencer marketing. Social media, bloggers, influencers, brand ambassadors etc. have brought online shopping to another level and many businesses have taken advantage of the very efficient ways of advertising and analyzing big data to gain valuable information about the consumers and the consumer behavior online. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, bloggers, influencers and a mix of these marketing channels have a significant effect on how consumers' act online, before, at the time of the actual purchasing decision and also after the purchase.

Studies show that nearly 60% of all store purchases and 40% of all online purchases are unplanned purchases. Impulse buying online is happening all of the time. Everyone makes impulse purchase decisions every now and then. The spending decision is often influenced by social and cultural factors and most online shops, as well as retail stores, are designed to encourage impulse buying (Omnigraphics 2017 p. 187).

Few people think about sustainability when it comes to the clothing business online and the endless shipping and returning of products. Everything is so easy and comfortable online. This nonchalance mixed with consumers often making impulse purchases and the very efficient influencer marketing is important to gain knowledge about, to be able to understand what effect this business has on the environment. Transparency in influencer

marketing and in fashion industry is highly needed, so that the trust for the influencer stays strong, and so the followers can believe in the products promoted by influencers.

1.1 Background and need

Traditionally, consumers have had to go to physical clothing stores and buy things they want and need, influenced by magazines, advertisements and so on. Online shopping has grown a lot in the past years and is still growing. All kinds of products are available online, just by easily clicking your way through the web shops, from the comfort of your own home. Packages are delivered to the consumers and returned quite frequently, as the consumer also has the right to return almost all kind of products bought online, if they don't fit, if the consumer can't afford to keep the product and other reasons alike.

This builds a need for getting more knowledge about how the consumers are influenced by others when they make their purchase decisions online and what products the consumers really need, instead of what they want. This research is about influencer marketing on social media channels. Many consumers find their way to different products and web shops through blogs, Instagram photos or stories, YouTube videos and other channels. Due to the fact, that online shopping is so easy, it's also easy for consumers to be influenced by all the temptations in influencer marketing, even if they are not following influencers, but use social media channels.

As it is important to look at all perspectives regarding what has negative impact on the environment, there is also a need for understanding consumer thoughts, needs, want-to-haves regarding online shopping of clothing and the consumers' thoughts about sustainability in addition to that. As important it is to gain understanding for the influencer marketing work and how influencers work with sustainability in mind.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Online shoppers are influenced by different factors all the time, before they make their purchasing decisions. At the same time influencers are constantly working with marketing different products and there are thousands of beautiful fashion pictures and videos on, for

instance, Instagram and YouTube, to look at. Influencers are often perceived as celebrities of a kind. The influencers' effect on their followers is an interesting topic from many perspectives, for instance as the shipping and returning of products are increasing in numbers, which has a negative impact on the environment. This project is important as it's very topical at the moment to think about what people really need, what drives them to buy different clothing and how their behavior is affecting the environment. It's also important to gain knowledge about how influencers work, and what they think and believe is important when it comes to sustainability when doing collaborations with clothing brands and working with influencer marketing and fashion products. The responsibility issue is also important when it comes to the need and demand for sustainably produced clothes. It's important understand who's responsible for creating a more sustainable future for the clothing business.

1.3 Purpose of the study and research questions

The aim of this research is to find out how the consumer online shopping behavior is affected by influencer marketing on different social media channels. The research is also touching the sustainability angle regarding the clothing business online, so that the study gets a perspective on how the consumer online shopping behavior online is affecting this area. What consumers can do to change their shopping behavior towards a more sustainable way is also an interesting part of the research. The aim of this research is also to gain knowledge about the social media influencers' point of views on their marketing methods and the responsibility for being more sustainable, so that the research gets a broader picture of the whole scene, from the business perspective as well.

The two main research questions are:

1. How is consumers' online shopping behavior of clothing affected by influencer marketing and how do the consumers perceive the influencer marketing?

2. What can consumers do to change, or do they actually want and need to change, the way they perceive influencer marketing to get a more sustainable shopping behavior?

The secondary research question is:

3. How do influencers work with marketing on social media regarding clothing overall and in a sustainable way, who is responsible for creating a demand for sustainably produced clothes and how can influencers guide consumers to be more sustainable regarding fashion online?

1.4 Limitations

This is a case study and the research is limited to influencer marketing and influencers on social media channels and online shopping of clothing, focusing on female consumers in the age group 16-31 years, in the metropolitan area of Helsinki, Finland. The age limitation is made due to the fact that women that are following influencers on different social media channels and are shopping clothing online, are mainly teens and women up to their thirties. This age group is also the main target group for the biggest influencers in Finland. The research is not about celebrity influencers, brick and mortar stores, nor online shopping of other products than clothing marketed by influencers on social media.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this research consists of three parts; consumer behavior, influencer marketing and sustainable influencer marketing.

2.1 Consumer behavior

Leslie Zane, founder and president at Triggers Growth Strategy, states that changing consumer behavior is one of the biggest questions that companies need to find answers to. It's not as simple as using traditional methods as TV advertising, advertising and promotions, but it's something deeper. The place where instinctive, automatic decisions are made, needs to be influenced. Buyers today are very busy and they don't have time or energy to choose between numerous alternatives, weighing the merits of one item over another. Usually buyers grab or click on a favorite product, and move on. 90% of purchasing decisions are made on instinct, as an estimation. (Forbes 2018)

The definition of consumer behavior is, according to Kardes et al (2008 p.8), much broader than only how a consumer decides to buy a product. Consumer behavior includes everything that happens prior to the purchase, during purchase and after consumption of the product. The consumer's mental, emotional and behavioral responses to the different activities regarding a purchase, is an important part of the consumer behavior definition.

2.1.1 Consumer activities and responses
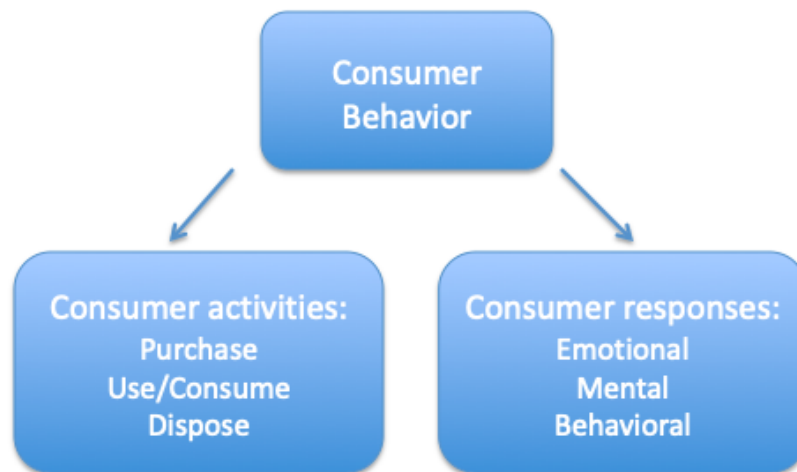
Figure 1. Definition of consumer behavior (Kardes et al 2008)

Individual consumers buy products and services to satisfy their own personal wants and needs or the wants and needs of people around them. As seen in figure 1, consumer behavior is broken down into three activities; the buying of the product or service, the using of the product or service and the disposal of the product or service. It's important to categorize the different types of consumer behavior because the consumer's response to stimuli can differ depending on if the consumer is buying, using or disposing the product. (Kardes et al p. 8-9)

An important part of the definition of consumer behavior is the consumers' mental, emotional and behavioral responses to products and the marketing, as seen in figure 1. Emotional responses describe a consumer's feelings, emotions and moods. When, for instance, buying the first car, the consumer probably feels both excitement and uncertainty. Mental responses are a consumer's though processes, beliefs, attitudes, opinions and intentions about products and services. For example, making a list of pros and cons of a product or how to finance it or imaging oneself driving the new car are mental responses. The behavioral responses include the consumer's actions and decisions during the purchase, use and disposal activities. For example, a consumer thinking about buying a car is paying attention to car advertisements, test driving cars before purchase and discussing the decision with family or friends. After purchase the consumer is regularly maintaining the car, such as changing the oil. These are all examples of behavioral responses. (Kardes et al. p.10-11)

For marketers to create better products and services, promoting the products and services more efficiently, developing marketing plans and strategies that gives the marketer competitive and sustainable advantages, it's important to know the customers. By having a goal to understand the general dynamics of consumer behavior that remain constant regardless of trends, it can enable marketers to predict what it is that motivates consumers to buy and then deliver products that respond to these motivations. In this way marketers can successfully meet and exceed customer expectations. (Kardes et al p. 11)

Consumers get their products and services through the purchase activities. This includes also everything leading up to the purchase. Searching for information and evaluating the product or service or choosing where to buy the product or service also is a part of the purchase activities. Also factors unique to the situation are part of the purchase activities. These factors can be, for instance, the atmosphere of the store, the website design, the reason for the purchase and the amount of time that the consumer puts to the buying decision. (Kardes et al p. 9)

Where, when and how the consumption takes place belong to the use activities, also illustrated in figure 1. An example of this is if the consumer consumes the product

immediately after the purchase or if the consumer waits, such as when buying new clothing for a special occasion, or an airline ticket. A product can be consumed as part of a special event, such as attending a wedding or going on vacation or as part of a special occasion, such as a birthday. Some products are being used before disposal, such as movie tickets and some products are left unconsumed, such as ink remaining in a toner cartridge of a printer. (Kardes et al. p. 9-10)

2.1.2 Consumer decision making

Consumers go through a multifaceted process when they make decisions. The process ranges from automatic to structured problem solving. There are different types of consumer decisions; routine choices, intermediate problem solving and extensive problem solving. These are characterized by how much effort that is put into the decision-making. Two separate factors, processing effort and involvement, help to think about consumer decision making in a more complete way. Processing effort is a continuum from automatic to systematic processing. One extreme is that consumers don't process any information and respond intuitively. The other extreme is about consumers gathering and evaluating a lot of product information prior to choosing. (Kardes et al. p. 63-64)

Then there is another dimension, involvement, that represents a continuum ranging from low level consumer involvement decisions or personal relevance to high level interest and concern decisions. The processing effort is more cognitive or thinking-oriented and the involvement is more affective or feeling-oriented. If the decision-making is about personal relevance or importance of an issue or situation, the consumer is involved. High involvement decisions are about important things for the consumers. This is often associated with emotional outcomes. A high level of perceived risk in decision-making leads to consumers demonstrating higher levels of involvement because the possibility of negative outcomes is higher. Perceived risk can be divided in five forms: financial, performance, physical, psychological and social. These are explained more closely in Figure 2. (Kardes et al p. 64-65)

Risk type	Risk Capital	Perceived Consequenses	Risk Target	Examples
Financial	Time and money	The cost of the product or service will exceed the benefits	Consumers whose investment in time or money is large relative to their resources	1. Real estate 2. Automobile 3. Graduate school
Functional	Task performance	The product fails to provide the desired functional benefits	Consumers who are dependent on the product to do a job, especially technologically driven consumers	1. Laptop computer 2. Home security system 3. Automobile
Physical	Personal health and safety	Product failure causes physical harm	Unhealthy consumers or sensation-seeking	1. Pharmaceuticals 2. Food and beverages 3. Motorcycles
Psychologial	Self-concept	Product will be inconsistent with a consumer's sel-concept	Compulsive shoppers and consumers with low self-esteem	Privately consumed luxury items (e.g., HDTV)
Social	Self-esteem	Product will not meet the standars of the consumer's reference group	High self-monitors	Publicly consumed luxury items (e.g., fashion clothing)

Figure 2. Categories of perceived risk (Kardes et al 2008)

The traditional model of consumer decision-making has five steps: Problem recognition, Information search, Evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation. When there is a gap between what the consumers have and what they want, the problem recognition takes place. For a consumer this creates motivation that lead to information search that is linked to evaluation of alternatives. Eventually the consumers stop gathering information and comparing different alternatives and they make the purchase decision. A purchase decision is not always leading to an actual purchase, but it represents the consumer's intention to buy a certain brand. The post-purchase evaluation gives the consumer the opportunity to compare their perceptions of the brand with their own expectations. (Kardes et al. p.70-71)

2.1.3 Online consumer behavior

According to the research "The truth about online consumers", by KPMG, the comfort of being able to shop at any hour of the day is a highly ranked among consumers, as the main reason for shopping online. Other reasons for buying products online are often the low prices, affordable shipping costs and good return policies. Millennials (born between 1982-2011), Baby boomers (born between 1946-1965) and Generation X (born between 1966-1981) are all shopping online. The life situation, salary and family situation reflects on consumers' buying behavior. Generation X is the age group that made most purchases

in 2016, due to the fact that they are the ones making most money. Baby boomers made as much purchases as the Millenials, but the Millenials bought products for lower sums than the Baby boomers. (Dagens Analys 2017)

Traditionally, mass marketing was all about tools like television, radio, magazines and newspapers. The idea was to deliver a one-way message about the product benefits. Internet marketing is different when it's using interactive two-way communications between the marketers and the consumers. Both the consumers and the marketers get fast responses, which also depend on each other. They both help each other while getting the information they need and at the right time. (Kardes et al p. 335)

The high level of interactivity online enables electronic retailers (e-tailers) to provide correct information about products and services, the kind of information that the consumers wish to receive. It's also easy for the consumers to give information that the e-tailers want, for example credit card numbers, e-mail addresses etc. When the e-tailers have this information, they try to make repeat purchases easy. If a credit card number is saved in an online shop, it is easy for the consumer to return to the shop and pay with the same credit card number next time, without having to fill in the information again. This way shopping becomes easy and quick. In addition to easy, the web makes shopping fun for some consumers. Consumers can get into a state of flow and that means that the consumer experiences that they can perform an activity efficiently without much though or effort. If consumers are navigating through a well designed website, shopping can become effortless, fun and automatic. Website design also influences consumers in how likely they will reject product alternatives or not, depending on the product attributes. This behavior is called compensatory decision-making strategy and non-compensatory decision-making strategy. Consumers make better choices if they use a compensatory strategy and this happens usually when a web shop is organized by options rather than attributes. (Kardes et al p. 335-337)

Many different factors influence consumers' purchasing behavior. There are both internal and external factors. Motivation, learning, belief, personality, perception, values, age, stage in life occupation and the economic situation are examples of internal factors for purchasing behavior. External factors are present outside of the consumer and therefore

they can influence a consumer's buying behavior. External factors can be, for instance, consumer culture, roles, status, family and social factors. Culture and social class can be a major external factor that influences a consumer's buying behavior. The purchase of a product can depend on what social class the consumer belongs to. The social class is defined by income, education and occupation. (R. Kumra p. 13. 2006)

Need is another important factor that influences consumers' buying behavior. When it comes to clothing, which is consumed in the public view, everybody is thinking about how he or she is perceived by others. There are five different needs that the new media consumers have in common. These are important to meet if you want to connect with consumers. The five needs are; "Valuable content", "consistency", "conversation, connection and engagement", "part of the process" and "respect". With the right tools these needs can be met. Two of these tools are blogs and social networks. (Micek, J, & Micek, D, 2015 p.46-48 & 51, R. Kumra p. 53)

Impulse buying online depends on many psychological factors and is happening all of the time. Everyone makes impulse purchase decisions every now and then. This behavior is not always bad or dangerous but it can create problems if it gets out of hands. The spending decision is often influenced by social and cultural factors and most online shops, as well as retail stores, are designed to encourage impulse buying. Studies show that nearly 60% of all store purchases and 40% of all online purchases are unplanned purchases. (Omnigraphics 2017 p. 187)

2.1.4 Purchasing decision online affected by influencers on social media

According to the PING Metrics-research published in spring 2018, influencer marketing in the purchasing decision is especially enhanced amongst Finnish people under the age of 30 years. The study reveals that the influencers' personalities and how well the brand or product fits the influencers' own values is a very important aspect. A paid collaboration doesn't seem to reduce the reliability of the influencer, as long as the collaboration suits the influencer's set of values and does not seem to be fake and abnormal. (M&M 2018)

Iilari Viippola, who is the content manager at Dagmar, thinks that its easier for people to look for information that support their purchase decision on social media and online. The person is easier to believe and trust rather than traditional marketing. The persona of the influencer is what is trusted. A research conducted by the media office Dagmar and the influencer marketing expert company PING Helsinki in the spring 2018 showed that 49% of 15-69 year olds use Instagram. 1125 persons between the ages 15-65 years took part in the study. Young people don't want to be on Facebook anymore and that is shown by the 8% increase of Instagram followers. (M&M 2018)

2.2 Influencer marketing

An influencer is an individual who has power to affect purchase decisions of other people, or followers, because of his or hers authority, position, knowledge or relationship with his or her audience. Influencers are not only marketing tools, but also social relationship assets with which companies can collaborate to achieve successful marketing goals. People look up to influencers in social media to guide them with their decision-making. Influencers on social media are people who have, over time, built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a particular topic of which they regularly make posts about, via preferred social media channels. Through this, influencers generate large followings of enthusiastic and engaged people. A micro influencer is a normal, everyday person, who have become known for his or her knowledge about some specialist niche area. Micro influencers have usually gained a sizeable social media following amongst people who are devoted to that niche area. (Influencer MarketingHub 2019)

Ville Perttula (Kauppalehti 2019) defines influencer marketing as marketing made by a well-known person through social media. If a well-known person in social media channels makes a YouTube-video for a food manufacturer, and posts it in his or her own channels, its called influencer marketing. Joel Matthew (Forbes 2018) writes about influencer marketing being important for businesses. When television was the only mass media that consumers had access to virtually, and one of the main platforms marketing people used to make advertisement for the masses, it was quite easy for businesses to have control over how to reach the right target audiences. Matthew claims that

influencer marketing isn't anything new but it has become very popular and effective during the past few years. Technological tools have advanced and platforms like Instagram, YouTube and Facebook have therefore had an impact on influencer marketing, which has been a success, and companies are investing more time and effort using this marketing tactic than before. (Kauppalehti 2019 & Forbes 2018)

Consumers have unlimited choice over what they wish to see. This has made it harder for brands because when consumers spread over several forms of media, it becomes more difficult to reach them. Matthew explains that they are seeing their clients shift their focus to influencer marketing to urge their brand through social media channels. (Forbes 2018)

Micek & Micek (2015) also claim that over the past decade marketing has been made in a very different way than before. The online mindset on marketing is now very different from what it has been before. The traditional way of marketing online is about interruption, rather than influencing. Influence is what's needed to turn strangers into friends and friends into consumers. (Micek, J, & Micek, D, 2015 p.30)

The relationship between a brand and an influencer is called influencer marketing. Promoting a brand's products or services through different media channels such as Instagram and YouTube, is what the influencers work with. People should not mix up celebrity marketing with influencer marketing as the influencers must have trust from a niche community, and they must also have loyal followers. In addition to that, influencer marketing is also about having knowledge and experience about what is promoted. (Forbes 2018)

There are exceptions though, because it's common that for example a popular fitness vlogger on YouTube with good knowledge about a healthy lifestyle is asked to do marketing for a sportswear brand. In some cases the the vlogger may not have all the experience needed and relevant to the product but in this situation the vlogger can rely on the loyalty and trust they have built within her own community and with the help of this she is able to influence her followers. (Forbes 2018)

2.2.1 How influencers work on social media and make their income

Influencers work independently planning and creating their own content and when they do collaborations with brands they incorporate the company's marketing specifications into their own content. The influencers can choose themselves how to portray the brand message in their content. The influencer is independently in control of the brand message, which promotes authenticity and can help the influencer in reaching specific target audiences. (Forbes 2018)

The value of an influencer in monetary measures is commonly calculated by the size of their follower network and the platform they are using. On Instagram the monetary value can be around 1000 dollars per 100,000 followers. The price can change depending on the reach and the relevance of the influencer. On YouTube instead, the standard price point is 100 dollars per 1,000 views. Anyone can become an influencer and work with influencer marketing, and businesses have more than enough of influencers to choose from. This allows companies to reach substantial target audiences. (Forbes 2018)

2.2.2 Social media

David M. Scott defines social media in this way: "Social media provide the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differ from so-called mainstream media in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities." Social media gives you an advantage of using the different technologies and tools to allow you to communicate directly with the consumers in places they are gathered in. Blogs, video, photo sharing etc. are all included in social media. (Scott, D. 2013 p. 54 & 79)

Micek, J and Micek, D explain how the new media marketplace can be divided into two different types of consumers, the Sassy & Savvy and the Community Connectors. The Sassy and Savvy understand the new media, blogs and social networks. They know how to use search engines to find what they are looking for. The Community Connectors are being drawn into the marketplace by the convenience, interactivity or to fulfill psychological needs. This group doesn't always understand what tools they are using but they

enjoy them for the convenience and the connection they get through these online communities. (Micek, J, & Micek, D, 2015 p.40)

When someone who is ready to buy a product of some sort, asks a question on social media, this person is happy to receive a link to another website full of information about the product. The person who needs information doesn't care if the information doesn't come from valuable sources like real newspapers and magazines. The information is as useful to them if it's a blog post, for instance. Wherever it comes from, the person is happy to get an article that educates and entertains him or her. David M. Scott therefore argues that the bias needs to be eliminated. (Scott, D. 2013 p. 81)

Blogs multiply the world's oldest, most trusted and favorite form of sharing information – word of mouth. People love sharing their knowledge with like-minded readers, and blogs are providing a more reliable way of getting news and information free from the manipulation of mass media and interruption marketing. Blogs have changed from being a tool for publishing digital journals. Now blogs are used by millions of people. Consumers are more in control now as they control the conversations online and they want a more personal business experience where they can ask questions, offer feedback to other readers and have more facts before purchasing. Blogs help you to build relationships around a brand, a business, a product or a service. (Micek, J, & Micek, D, 2015 p.72-73)

Scott points out that you should not believe in everything you read on a blog. If you think of bloggers as individual citizen voices in a city you can go with the "don't trust strangers" mentality. But blogs and bloggers are important and valuable sources of information these days, just like your neighbor can be. You should take them with a grain of salt, David M. Scott enhances. (Scott D, 2013 p. 83)

2.2.3 Influencer marketing, paid collaborations, reliability and reputation

Satu Apukka, sales and marketing executive at Babler, believes that paid collaborations between influencers and companies or marketers at companies are very effective due to the friendly relationship between social media influencers and followers. These collaborations can be recommendations, products testing and collaborations that are directing the

consumer directly to buy. Babler did a research in 2017 (Bablerin lukijatutkimus 2017.), amongst their readers and followers. 55% of finnish blog readers had made a purchase decision based on influencer recommendations. (Babler 2018)

According to Elli Mäkilä (Kauppalehti 2019), who is the CEO of the marketing and communication office Storybound, the influencer marketing in Finland has quality and rather few mistakes happen and if they do happen, they are mostly unintentional. The most part of Finnish influencer marketing is respectful and classy towards the consumers. Even so, Mäkilä claims that there is room for small adjustments in how influencers mark their advertisements correctly as ads or paid collaborations with brands. One of the main faults in influencer marketing is the lack of collaboration ad marks. If there is no mentioning of a collaboration in a YouTube video that an influencer has posted, the brand and the influencer both take part in hidden advertisement. (Kauppalehti 2019)

Salla Erkkilä, strategist for the media office Dagmar, thinks that hidden advertisement has been under good control in Finland but all the new social media services are hard to figure out for the marketers. She says that new social media services are always like the Wild West in the beginning. A good example is the fairly new Instagram-stories service. Everyday Erkkilä sees influencer marketing going wrong. Nonetheless she likes to point out that the mistakes are often totally unintentional and there are many borderline cases. (Kauppalehti 2019)

Paula Paloranta, who is the head secretary at the ethical marketing council points out that hidden marketing is one of the main problems in social media marketing. These problems occur mostly amongst vloggers and bloggers, she continues. Paloranta encourages people to pay special attention to prevent hidden advertisement in the influencer marketing community. (M&M 2018)

Doing marketing content for underage persons demands sensitivity. The fact is, that mostly underage persons are followers to the main part of influencers on social media. Therefore marketers, influencers and companies need to be very precise. Erkkilä mentions that she and her colleagues are sometimes worried about if the influencers really understand what kind of responsibility they actually possess over they followers. You never

know how the follower is prepared when watching influencer content, although young-sters are nowadays very up-to-date in these marketing issues, sometimes more than older people. Marketers tend to send gifts to influencers, and according to Erkkilä this is not about planned or paid collaborations if there is no agreement made with the influencer in advance. Paid collaborations are often marked in the first or the last Instagram-story, but actually the advertisement mark, that is a text that shows the follower that the photo or video is a paid collaboration, should be visible in every single story that has to do with the collaboration. According to the Finnish consumer protection law, the consumer should easily be able to recognize a paid collaboration no matter how the collaboration is presented. (Kauppalehti 2019)

As recently as in February 2019, the interest group of online marketing IAB Finland pub-lished a handbook for influencer marketing. The handbook contains many practical ex-amples on how to make ad marks correctly and what to write in the ad mark so that the consumer understands that it is a paid collaboration. For example, if an influencer wants to direct a consumer to a web shop, through the influencer's Instagram profile, there has to be a mentioning of it being a paid collaboration before the consumer clicks the link on the Instagram profile. (Kauppalehti 2019)

In Finland in 2018, 421 million euro was spent on digital marketing, mostly on the digital marketing success companies such as Google and Facebook. The big international actors on the market covered 53,8% of the total digital marketing shares. Facebook's share was 19% and YouTube's share was 2,2%. In 2018 Finnish marketers used 136,7 million euro on search engine marketing and 118,7 million euro on display marketing on web pages. 89,7 million euro was invested in social media marketing. (Kauppalehti 2019)

The marketing content is the marketers' and the influencers' responsibility. Salla Erkkilä, strategist at Dagmar, points out that it's very important for influencers to take the trans-parency of paid collaborations seriously. It's easy to make fans and followers disap-pointed and angry, if the influencer deals with hidden advertisement in normal publica-tions. The credibility is an influencer's only currency, and therefore different kinds of influencers should be interested in the transparency of paid collaborations. If an influencer looses her face in front of her own followers, she has got nothing else left. Badly

performed collaborations can lead to bad reputation for a company and companies are taking this very seriously. (Kauppalehti 2019)

The PING Metrics – research conducted in the spring of 2018, shows that Finnish people especially under the age of 30 years think, in their turn, that influencers are good at pointing out paid collaborations in their content. The followers of influencers on social media channels hope that the influencers really use the product or service they are marketing though. The followers really trust in people more than in traditional marketing. (M&M 2018)

There is skepticism towards brands and their marketing tactics, so building trust is very important. Brands can now promote through an influencer, who has a niche community and engagement and trust amongst them on a daily basis. The consumers trust that if the influencers they're following, love the product and use it themselves, the followers will too, and they don't need to be skeptical towards a commercial or social media ad itself. (Forbes 2018)

Influencer marketing requires a high level of trust between the brand and a third party. Lawful contracts are often signed, but the brand's reputation is often essentially in the influencer's keeping. A brand must be certain about the influencer's content being aligned with the brand's image. If the influencers use offensive or strange content that might have negative consequences for the brand's reputation. Especially when working with young influencers, who may lack maturity and professionalism, this is important. Also fake followers should be watched out for. Some influencers purchase followers so that their fan base appears to be larger than it actually is. (Forbes 2018)

Daniel Newman writes about how influencer marketing can be difficult, where one wrong move might be detrimental to the reputation of both the influencer and the brand. Mark Schaefer writes in his blog about brands becoming too exposed with bloggers, and that both the bloggers and the brand will suffer from it because the credibility of the blogger is declining from that and therefore the effectiveness of their marketing is doomed. According to Newman, influencer marketing campaigns are successful only if it has honesty, unbiased views, and transparency as the key factors. (Forbes 2015)

2.2.4 Influencer or celebrity?

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, there are differences between influencer marketing and celebrity marketing. Influencers must have trust from a niche community, and they must also have loyal followers at all times. Influencers also have a totally different and deeper knowledge and experience about the products they are marketing. (Forbes 2018)

According to Satu Apukka, there is a difference between influencers on social media and celebrity influencers who also can be active on social media channels. Apukka works with YouTube-videos on a daily basis and have been working with influencer marketing for many years. Influencers are increasing in numbers all of the time, but the real influencers are the ones who get their followers going. Apukka sees the main difference between "normal" social media influencers and celebrity influencers in how they are followed and how they have gotten well known. (Babler 2018)

Influencer marketing collaborations between companies and social media influencers help marketers from different companies reach a very specific and small target group that is hard to reach in other ways. A new trend is the micro influencers who still have a smaller follower environment than the bigger influencers, but they have a very intense connection with the followers. Social media influencers have gotten well known from their own personality and sharing their own unique thoughts and ideas, which is easier to relate to than for example celebrities. Followers can relate to a social media influencer even as a friend sometimes. The day-to-day life of a social media influencer is often seen as similar to the followers' lives and the followers and influencers often share the same values. The interaction between a social media influencer and a follower is often a two-way communication and for the follower it may seem like a friendship of a kind. It's possible to send the influencer a personal message and in many cases the answer is received within a moment. (Babler 2018)

Celebrities in turn, are followed by admiration and it's interesting to know where the celebrity is shopping groceries, what kind of clothes she or he is wearing and where vacations are spent. The interaction is usually a one-way communication, where the followers look up to the celebrity as a fan. Influencer marketing collaborations done with

celebrities are often done to get a brand more known. The collaboration is about sponsored clothing, services or other products. Apukka adds that influencer marketing should be exploited according to what the marketing goals are and who the marketers want to reach out to. In the best-case scenario influencer marketing with social media personas or celebrities can be very effective and impressing if it's done correctly. (Babler 2018)

Heli Ruotsalainen, from Dentsu Aegis Networks, has seen a fight between famous celebrities like athletes, artists and tv-stars and people who have gotten famous on social media channels. In Dentsu Aegis Network's newssheet Ruotsalainen explains that internationally real social media influencers are used more frequently in campaigns, rather than famous celebrities like before. The real social media influencers are becoming more popular in this context. Usually long contracts are signed for collaborations between brands and social media influencers, such as YouTubers. According to Ruotsalainen, the megatrend is to not only focus on social media channels, but in addition to that also create visibility amongst events, product collaborations, print commercials etc. (M&M 2018)

Dentsu Aegis Networks did a research about how many people are following YouTubers in Finland. Of all Finns, one tenth of the Finnish people follow YouTube-stars and 39% of 15-24 year old's watches YouTubers online on a weekly basis. This research was conducted in 2018, and 5300 people answered took part of the study. The research represents Finnish 15-74 year olds. Many other kinds of influencers are followed in a wider range than YouTubers. Famous people are followed by 19% of the Finnish people and 17% are following fitness influencers or politicians. (M&M 2018)

2.3 Sustainable influencer marketing

The following chapter includes theoretical references regarding the topic sustainable influencer marketing. The two major subjects are sustainable shopping behavior and sustainable fashion.

2.3.1 Sustainable shopping behavior

There is a growing awareness of environmental and ethical concerns, and when people hear it and see it in the media, they feel that they should be making better choices. The truth is though, that only a minority of people buys things based on only ethics. The consumers aren't prepared to compromise product quality before saving the earth or support good causes. The commercial point of view is that businesses need mass markets and these mass markets buy on traditional values. (Arnold 2009 p. 86)

Arnold 2009 explains that consumers often make emotional decisions based on perception and are not having all the correct information and that leads to the consumer being badly informed. There is often conflicting messages when talking about the mass of product facts. The media is not helping, because they report issues poorly, by being "controlled" by lobbies and by generally confusing the readers. When a consumer buys a product, the purchase is made with feelings rather than with logic, as with most decision-making. When consumers don't know what is right or wrong, they follow their instincts. To make good marketing, especially in the field of ethics, it's important to understand the difference between rational and emotional buying decisions and mindsets.
 (Arnold p. 86-87)

Arnold presents the thoughts of Joel Makower, who is a green blogger, and who says that he has become immune to research about green buying habits in America, because consumer behavior patterns prove that what people say and do are usually the opposite. A consumer can't be trusted to tell the truth when asked about green habits. But as consumers say that they do something that they haven't done before, suggests that the green intent is there at least. Many consumers exaggerate when they claim that they are seriously concerned about the environment and consumers tend to trust product packaging and labels regarding green materials etc. Consumers also think that greener products are too expensive and not as good as the normal products. (Arnold p. 108)

Despite that a lot of money has been spent on campaigns for acting together and thinking greener, no greater effect has been noticed. The intent is good, but the action is needed. The recession has made a difference in people driving less, wasting less and buying less

and recycling more, all just to save money. The main reason hasn't been green thinking. (C. Arnold p. 117)

Ethics, design and price are some of the factors that a consumer is torn between. Many fashion brands that make cheap clothes are going to continue to do so, as it's the brands way of doing business. Ethical fashion brands can't compete against low prices, but they can compete on quality and design and those lead to value. Ethical fashion has been boring in design, but the new generation of brands and designers are changing that. (Arnold p. 227)

The consumer disposal activities that Kardes et al. presents are activities that include the ways that consumers get rid of products and packaging after consumption. Discarding, recycling, reusing and reselling the product are examples of the disposal activities. For example, giving outgrown clothing to charity is an example of reuse behaviors. (Kardes et al p.10)

2.3.2 Sustainable fashion

Sustainability is, as defined by Brundtland World Commission on Environment and Development (United Nations 1987), development that meets the needs of the present without compromising those of the future. According to Henninger et al. fashion is a polluting and resource-intensive industry, even if its future success is depending on reducing environmental and social imprint regarding the entire life cycle of production of garments. Reducing the impact associated with producing and cultivating textile fibres and establishing a foundation of good practices is what's needed. Also focusing on new alternate fibre types with low-resource intensity instead of only cotton, polyester or a blend of them is crucial. Cotton is a fibre, which has the greatest negative environmental impact. One reason for this is that it usually takes more than 20,000 litres of water to produce 1 kg of cotton, which is equivalent to one T-shirt and a pair of jeans. Polyester production again doesn't demand that much water, but it takes up to three times the energy of cotton production. There is a lack of sustainability inherent for the production of these two fibers and therefore there is a worldwide demand for it. Also nylon and wool are fibers that have a negative environmental impact. (Henninger et al. 2017 p. 31-32)

Deb Landau writes about how growing awareness of climate change has transformed the way people buy and wear clothes. Consumers now value that clothes are recycled and they demand sustainability from the clothing brands. As a consumer the simplest way to support sustainable fashion is to maximize the lifecycle of clothes. Buying clothes that last and reusing garments instead of throwing them away are two ways of maximizing the lifecycle of clothes. Second-hand fashion is now a big business and in the U.S digital second-hand retailers are booming. For example a mixture of eBay and Instagram called Poshmark is a place where buyers and sellers of clothing meet. Users can follow sellers based on their style and create a network with other "Poshers". (Forbes 2019)

As a fashion company example, one of H&M Group's greatest missions is to use their influence to bring systematic change to the fashion industry. This means that they are for instance improving the livelihood of the people working in their supplier's factories and encouraging their customers to recycle their clothes through H&M Group's garment recycling scheme. H&M Group enhances that they want their customer's to feel great about what they are wearing, due to the act that the clothes are not only good looking and nice to wear but also because how the clothes have been made and the garments' environmental and social impact. (H&M 2019)

2.3.3 Influencer marketing – sustainability and transparency

Millennials are becoming more cautious and they favor brands that focus on sustainable manufacturing, ethical business practices and pro-social messaging. Many consumers stated that they want companies to stand for social issues, in the Brands & Stands study. Authenticity, organic and engagement are words for influencer marketing and these words' meanings are shifting online. If someone tells you how great a product is, that is not authenticity because authenticity is genuine. Not all brands care about its social impact and influencers are often interested in only the money, but those brands and influencer who really genuinely care about environmental impact and social change will sustain, grow and prosper. (IVVI 2019)

More brands focus on sustainability by developing products that give back to the planet and the people and more influencers shift their views on partnerships to be sure that their personal opinions and goals aligns with more than just a paid collaboration, but also with the brands' goals. Influencers know that they have power and many influencers use their voices to promote change or encourage people to learn more about environmental issues for instance. Developing environmentally conscious products is becoming more important to influencers and their followers. Many influencers have created their own brands, and by knowing where and how their products are made show the audiences that the influencers care for the planet. (IVVI 2019)

Didem Özgun, a Finnish fashion blogger for ELLE Finland and influencer on social media, is up front about sustainable thinking and transparency in the fashion business. She writes in her blog, that even if she is in the business and making money out of influencer marketing she thinks that everyone should be more responsible regarding fashion and making it more sustainable. She believes that people are buying more and more recycled clothing and that is good, but she enhances that people should also choose wisely amongst brands and be eager to get more information about the brands, products and materials used. She is nowadays very well informed about good clothing materials and focuses on using sustainable materials. She also informs her followers about good materials and quality brands. In Özgun's own words: " I have talked with a lot of young people and they seem to know more about responsibility and consumption than before. Fast fashion is less popular than before for young people. We live in a time of change. More clothing collections are made out of recycled materials in order to reach responsibility goals." Özgun also wants to point out that even if H&M is known as a fast fashion company, they recently announced in their responsibility report that 57% of all clothing materials are recycled or responsibly produced materials. H&M wants to be part of promoting fashion's closed cycle, which means that no new materials are used for new clothes and instead recycled fabrics are reclaimed and used. Özgun also mentions that for example H&M are focusing on using responsible produced cotton in the future, but the fact is that as much water is consumed when producing ecological cotton. To be able to shop more responsibly people should favor quality and timeless clothing and buy and sell clothes at flea markets. (ELLE by Didem 2019)

Michelle Blomqvist is a micro influencer but one of the few sustainable fashion influencers in Finland. She writes in her blog about sustainability in social media, and that suddenly almost every influencer is talking about sustainable fashion nowadays. She means that the sustainable fashion is a trending topic and that businesses are taking advantage of it. Many companies don't have fair working conditions and don't pay fair wages to their employees but still label themselves as sustainable only because they use less water than before, when creating clothes. Blomqvist points out that the term "sustainable" means so many different things, for instance; ecological, fair, ethical, slow fashion etc. At the same time Blomqvist thinks that there is much company-shaming going on regarding sustainable fashion and that it is not that easy, yet, to be 100% sustainable in the world we're living in now. (Lasting Closet 2019)

3   METHODOLODGY

A qualitative research method was chosen for the empirical part of this study. Qualitative methodology refers to research that produces descriptive data, as peoples' own words and observable behavior. Qualitative methodology is a way of approaching the empirical world. Central to qualitative research is to understand people from their own experiences and frames of reference and how they experience reality. Qualitative research is inductive and qualitative researchers develop concepts, understandings and insights from the data patterns instead of collecting data do assess preconceived hypotheses, models or theories. (Taylor et al. 2016 p. 17-18)

The four traditions of qualitative research are naturalism, ethnomethodology, emotionalism and postmodernism. Naturalism means that you are seeking to understand social reality in its own terms. This provides good descriptions of people and interaction in natural settings. Ethnomethodology seeks to understand how social order is created, through talking and interacting with people. This tradition has a naturalistic orientation. Emotionalism shows a concern with subjectivity and gaining access to people's "inside" experiences. Postmodernism emphasizes "method talk" and is sensitive to the different ways social reality is constructed. (Bryman & Bell, 2011 p.383)

The qualitative research method was chosen for this study because the main aim is to get important and in-depth knowledge about how the consumers, who are following influencers online, perceive the influencers' role in affecting their followers' online shopping behavior and purchasing decisions. It's important to get in-depth answers to really understand why the consumers' behave in a certain way online. The qualitative approach was also used to get vital information from the influencers' point of view and how they work with fashion online and how they perceive sustainable fashion and the sustainability angle in their work.

To be able to gather this important information the researcher decided to conduct interviews with consumers, who are also followers of influencers online as well as interviews with influencers as experts from that other point of view, who had in-depth knowledge about the online fashion business and influencer marketing that they are working with. A semi-structured focus group interview model was chosen for the consumers, and a structured e-mail interview was chosen for the influencers, because they were too busy to meet up for a face-to-face interview.

3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The researcher chose the semi-structured interview method for the focus group interviews as well as for the interviews with the influencers. The interviews with the influencers were both e-mail interviews with open questions. This interview method was chosen because it was the most accurate for this type of research, where it was important for the interviewer to be able to keep the interviewee to the subject, but at the same time allowing the interviewee to speak freely about the themes and letting the interviewee give in-depth knowledge about the issues discussed. Also, for the focus group interviews, it was important for the researcher to be able to ask follow-up questions depending on the answers to the pre-structured questions in the interview guide, to get a deeper and better understanding for the answers given.

A structured interview is useful for some purposes but the fact is that there isn't anything like a totally structured interview, and not a totally unstructured interview either, as the interviewees always say things that go beyond the planned structure. These things are

often important for the final result and they can help the interviewer understand the interviewees' answers to the planned and pre-structured questions. Even if an interview is unstructured, the interviewer always has some thoughts in advance, about what's going to be included in the conversation. It's impossible to avoid structure, but it's possible to create a structure that is flexible enough for interviewees to ask questions and share their thoughts about the themes in the interview, and for interviewers allowing them to create dialogues depending on the angles that are important for the interviewee. (Brinkmann 2013, p. 18-21)

One definition of the semi-structured qualitative research is: "It is defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena". (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Semi-structured interview formats and qualitative interviewing go hand in hand, and this interview format is the most common one used in the human and social sciences and in qualitative research as such. If structured and semi-structured interviews are compared, the semi-structured interview format can gain better results from the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues. Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer to get a better chance of becoming visible as a participant who produces knowledge in the process itself, instead of hiding behind a totally preset interview guide. Compared to the unstructured interview format, the semi-structured interview format allows the interviewer to have a greater saying in focusing on the issues in the interview that are vital and important for the research project. (Brinkmann 2013, p.21)

3.1.1 Focus group interviews

Focus group research is one of the most widely used research tools in the social sciences. In the past focus group research was regarded as the predominant form of qualitative research. The simultaneous involvement of a number of respondents in the research process, to generate data, is the main characteristic of focus group research. Focus groups are also one of the few research methods in which respondents are encouraged to interact. Focus group can also be described as a research method that collects data through group interaction on a topic. This definition is broad, but it addresses three key elements of focus groups. The primary purpose is to collect data, it encompasses the notion of group

interaction and it incorporates the active role of the researcher as a catalyst in addressing the research problem. (Carson et al. 2001 p. 113-114)

Focus groups that produce new results that would otherwise not be possible to produce with other methods, are especially useful. The strength of focus group interviews is not limited to listening to what people are saying, but in generating insights into the sources of complex motivations and behaviors. The difference between focus groups and other qualitative methodologies is that they bring a group of individuals, heterogeneous or homogeneous, in an interaction of views that together aim to achieve meaningful information and opinions. Focus group interviews will generate more depth of information on issues than generally with single opinions taken from a survey. Another strenght of focus group research is its emphasis on the respondents' own comparisons between variables and ideas, rather than the catalyst's speculations about comparisons. The most important feature of focus group interviews is how they can reveal complex behaviors and motivations. This is a direct result of interaction within a focus group. (Carson et al. 2001 p. 116)

Focus group methodology benefit from a rigorous framework and planning. Quality is affected when the purpose of a focus group is not clear. The understanding of the problem or issue and to express it as a concise question for discussion is the first step in preparing for a focus group. The next first steps are establishing the groups and planning for the sessions, determining the number of groups, determining the number of participants in each group, deciding on the length of the session, selecting the site, deciding on the timing of sessions and recruiting participants. The moderator, or the focus group researcher, should not be an interviewer but rather a catalyst for discussion. This means that the focus group researcher should introduce a topic in a way that participants are stimulated to respond. Many different personalities show in focus group interviews and it's a skill to manage the balance of opinions and controlling extrovert/dominant personalities. (Carson et al. 2001 p. 117-120)

The research consists of two focus group interviews. One focus group was a group of five women between the ages of 24-31, all working in the Helsinki area. The other focus group was a group of five teenage girls from high school in Kauniainen, near Helsinki, between the ages of 16-17.

In appendix 1 you can see the interview guide for the semi-structured focus group inter-view. The interview guide consists of three parts that are derived from my theoretical framework:

- PART 1: Consumer shopping behavior online
- PART 2: Influencer marketing's effect on the shopping behavior online
- PART 3: Sustainable influencer marketing

For achieving a good and credible result and outcome and to get comfortable with the focus groups, the interview started with easier background questions about the consumer shopping behavior online. In the second part of the interview the researcher moved on to how and why influencers and social media possibly are affecting the buying behavior online. The third part covered the thoughts about sustainability regarding shopping online and responsibility issues in influencer marketing. By letting the respondents discuss openly about the topics in focus group interviews, the reliability and validity was en-hanced.

3.1.2 Interviews with influencers

Two Finnish influencers were interviewed about how they work with sustainability re-garding their way of marketing products and influencing people to make certain purchase decisions. One of the influencers are one of Finland's top influencers with 43,000 follow-ers on Instagram, Alexa Aavarinne, whose brand is called Alexa Dagmar, and the other influencer is a micro influencer with 5,400 followers on Instagram, whose name is Michelle Blomqvist and she stands behind the brand Lasting Closet. The influencers wanted to take part of the study, because they feel the topic is important, but due to time-schedule difficulties neither of the influencers had the time to meet for a normal interview. The reliability and validity is in place, thought, because of the honest and open answers in the e-mail interview and follow-up questions were answered too.

In appendix 2 you can see the interview guide for the semi-structured e-mail interviews with open questions for the influencers. The interview guide consists of three parts:

- PART 1: Background questions about the influencer marketing work
- PART 2: Consumer shopping behavior affected by influencer marketing
- PART 3: Sustainable influencer marketing

The interview started with background questions about how the influencers work and what is important to think about when closing deals and working with clothing brands. In the second part of the interview, consumer behavior and purchasing behavior affected by the influencers online, was discussed. Lastly the interview touched the sustainability aspect regarding sustainable fashion and influencer marketing as well as the responsibility angle.

3.2 Data collection

In order to answer the research questions, the qualitative method followed by semi-structured interviews, was chosen for the data collection. Data collection started in March 2019, when the researcher finished the theoretical part of the study and got in touch with the focus group interviewees and the influencers. The sample choosing of the focus group interviewees was straight forward, as the researcher needed normal consumers in a certain age group, who follow influencers on social media and who shop clothing online, to get in-depth and truthful answers from. The researcher selected and contacted ten Finnish women of different ages between 16-30, who were familiar with online shopping and influencers, and invited them to take part in this study. Women from both the researcher's professional network and personal life were utilized for this study. All focus group-interviewees are living in Helsinki's metropolitan area.

The researcher divided the focus group interviewees into two different groups, based on the ages and life situations, so that it would be easier for the interviewees to discuss the issues with likeminded people in the same age group and at the same time be comfortable with expressing real and personal thoughts and opinions. Also, in this way the researcher was able to clearly focus on the correct and most important questions at the right time of the interview. This division of the focus groups also made it easier for the researcher to

compare the answers, results and conclusions from the interviews, by looking at the differences in the answers due to the different interviewee ages and behaviors.

By collecting data from two different focus groups of different ages, through in-depth interviews, it was possible to get a wider base for the results and conclusions. The interviews gave a good insight and understanding of the consumer behavior and purchasing decision factors online and on social media. Also by collection data from professional influencers the researcher was able to get important and useful information from the influencers' point of view regarding influencer marketing of clothing and the sustainability angle as well, which gave the researcher important knowledge and understanding of the influencer marketing business.

4   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following two chapters (4 & 5) present the results of the conducted qualitative research, which is also discussed. Conclusions for this study and recommendations for further research are presented as well, in the end of this thesis in chapter 5. The results will be presented and discussed in the following sections, based on the research questions and in which order these themes are presented in the theoretical part of the study as well as in the interview guides:

- Consumer online shopping behavior affected by influencer marketing
- Sustainable shopping behavior online
- Responsibility and sustainable influencer marketing of fashion products

Focus group responses, which represent the consumer responses, and influencer responses are presented and discussed side by side in the results, so that the reader is up-to-date, at all times, with the results gathered. Both focus groups respondents had good online shopping experience, and the influencers were also professionals when it comes to influencer marketing experience. This consumer experience combined with the professionalism and expertise of the influencers gave this research relevance and validity of the findings. In the result part of this study, focus group respondents' opinions and answers are referred to as focus group A and focus group B answers. Focus group A stands for the

respondents between the ages 24-31 years, and focus group B stands for the younger respondents between ages 16-17 years.

4.1 Consumer online shopping behavior affected by influencer marketing

According to Kardes et al. (2008 p.8-11), the consumer's mental, emotional and behavioral responses to the different activities regarding a purchase, is an important part of the consumer behavior definition. An important part is also the consumers' mental, emotional and behavioral responses to products and their marketing. Consumers buy products and services to satisfy their own personal wants and needs or the wants and needs of people around them. Kumra (2006 p.13) explains that there are both internal and external factors that influences purchase decisions. External factors are present outside of the consumer and therefore they can influence a consumer's buying behavior. External factors are, for instance, consumer culture, roles, status, family and social factors. Focus group A and B discussed that the need to buy a new piece of clothing starts from season changes or trends and also what clothes friends are wearing. The respondents in focus group B all agreed that one major reason for making certain purchase decisions is that when influencers and friends have these cool clothes, they get inspiration from both those friends and the influencers at the same time. Friends often get inspired by influencers, and word-of-mouth inspire other friends to follow these same influencers. The respondents in both focus group A and B agreed that they get inspiration through influencer marketing as well. Need isn't always created by just influencer marketing, but in combination with season changes and other factors according to focus group A.

Trends were discussed in the interview with focus group A. The need to buy products is often created from trends. The main part of focus group A respondents usually don't think that much about this trend issue, they just go on buying things they like whenever they like. But at the same time they agreed that it's very interesting to think about the influencer marketing and trend effect on the shopping behavior overall because it's getting more systematic. From the influencer success point of view this can be explained according to Kardes et al. theory (2008 p. 8-11), that by having a goal to understand the general dynamics of consumer behavior that remain constant regardless of trends, it can enable

marketers to predict what it is that motivates consumers to buy and then deliver products that respond to these motivations. In this way marketers can successfully meet and exceed customer expectations. This means that influencers should really know their followers and know how they react to their influencer marketing and what motivates the followers, to be able to constantly get followers responding to the influencer marketing tactics.

The reasons for following influencers are different when comparing focus A and B responses. The respondents in focus group A follow influencers on social media channels, mostly because of the influencers' personalities, not because they are influencers per se. The respondents in focus group A aren't following influencers on social media channels if they only post nice pictures of their outfits, but have no actual smart and concrete content in their channels. Focus group B respondents follow influencers mostly because of nice pictures and videos, not always for the actual content or texts. According to Micek & Micek 2015 there are five needs that the new media consumers have in common and these needs are important to meet if you want to connect with consumers. The five needs are; "Valuable content", "consistency", "conversation, connection and engagement", "part of the process" and "respect". With the right tools these needs can be met. (Micek, J, & Micek, D, 2015 p.46-48)

Dentsu Aegis Networks research showed that one tenth of the Finnish people follow YouTube-stars and 39% of 15-24 year old people watch YouTubers online on a weekly basis (M&M 2018). The focus group B respondents said that they all follow influencers on different social media channels, mostly on Youtube and Instagram, very intensively. According to the PING Metrics-research published in spring 2018, influencer marketing in the purchasing decision is especially enhanced amongst Finnish people under the age of 30 years (M&M 2018). Clothing and styling ideas are the often the main point for following an influencer on social media, according to focus group B respondents. When they want new clothes, they go to a favorite web shop, often via influencer marketing or they watch Youtube videos made by vloggers who do these so called "clothing hauls", which are videos where video bloggers try on new clothes and show different outfits, and often give offer codes to the watchers. Focus group A and B respondents discussed that also Instagram stories are popular when it comes to clothing ideas and inspiration. (M&M 2018)

Arnold (2009 p. 86-87) explains that consumers often make emotional purchase decisions based on perception and feelings, and not on logical thoughts, and that the consumer is sometimes badly informed. There are often conflicting messages when talking about product facts and the media is not always helping. To make good marketing, especially in the field of ethics, it's important to understand the difference between rational and emotional buying decisions and mindsets. There were different opinions regarding whether influencer marketing on social media channels has a big affect on the respondents or not. Focus group B respondents all said that influencer marketing definitely affect them a lot. One respondent from focus group A said that she rarely gets affected in the buying decision, but unconsciously she might get some inspiration from influencers that some-times may lead to a purchase. Other respondents from focus group A get very inspired by influencers' clothing styles and they said that influencers help them dare to try something new. Alexa Aavarinne, fashion influencer behind the brand Alexa Dagmar, said that her followers appreciate her styling ideas and the inspiration they get from her posts and she knows that many followers end up buying products that she promotes, and she believes it's a good thing because then she can prevent these followers from buying something that isn't good. An important thing that the respondents in focus group A pointed out, was that it's hard to believe in everything that influencers market on social media, because they market so many products and points out that all products are the best. One respondent in focus group A said that she doesn't believe that if a piece of clothing fits perfectly on the influencer, it will fit perfectly on herself too, but she admits that she thought differ-ently when she was younger. Back then she bought almost everything that others told her was good or nice.

Self-confidence and own personal styles were other aspects discussed in focus group A interview. The respondents all know better now when they are older, and they fall just for a few influencer advertisements now and then. All respondents in focus group A agreed that a few years back they would have had a totally different shopping behavior and they are thankful that there weren't influencers and social media back then. They believe that social media channels would have ruined their economies back then, because they would have believed in every advertisement and bought a lot of unnecessary products online. The respondents are smarter now due to their age, and they have learned from their

mistakes when they were younger. When comparing the answers to focus group B, the answers about focus group A respondents' behavior when they were younger can be applicable to focus group B respondents answers now. The affect seems to be very much bigger on younger women than on women, who are in their twenties and thirties.

Kardes et al. (2008 p. 335-337) explain that the high level of interactivity online enables e-tailers to provide correct information about products and services. Two respondents in focus group A like YouTubers and follow them on Instagram as well. Especially YouTubers who make these "clothing haul"- videos are interesting for these respondents and focus group B respondents all announced that they follow influencers on Youtube quite frequently. Video blogs, mainly known as Vlogs, are usually created by old bloggers, who are starting working with a new channel beside their old channels, and the respondents follow these new channels as well.

If brands become too exposed with influencers both the influencers and the brand will suffer from it because the credibility of the blogger is declining from that and therefore the effectiveness of their marketing is doomed (Forbes 2015). One respondent in focus group A said that she is very critical about many people wearing the same clothes due to influencer marketing. She gets suspicious if many influencers, who are all promoting the same brand and products at the same time, really like and wear the products themselves or are they only doing it to get paid because it's their job. This has led to an opposite reaction and she doesn't want to buy or wear these same clothes. Some other respondents agreed to this fact too. According to the article in Forbes, there is skepticism towards brands and their marketing tactics, so building trust is very important. The consumers trust that if the influencers they're following, love the product and use it themselves, the followers will too, and they don't need to be skeptical towards a commercial or social media ad itself (Forbes 2018).

According to the PING Metrics-research influencers' personalities and how well the brand or product fits the influencers' own values are very important aspects when following and trusting influencers. Paid collaborations don't reduce the reliability of the influencer, as long as the collaborations go hand-in-hand with the influencers' personal values (M&M 2018). Michelle Blomqvist, influencer behind the brand Lasting Closet, had

answers that agreed with these theories. She believes that trustworthiness and honesty are the most important aspects on influencer marketing and she doesn't like to see posts that are unreal and fake, amongst the influencers she is following herself. The marketing content is the influencers' responsibility according to Salla Erkkilä who pointed out that it's very important for influencers to take the transparency of paid collaborations seriously (Kauppalehti 2019).

Aavarinne, said that she works only together with brands that suit her own brand and which she believes in. She also pointed out that it's important for her to advertise clothing that she really uses herself and that the brand should be a brand that she likes and that stands for the same values that she stands for. It's also OK for Aavarinne to choose to collaborate with a brand that gives her clothes that she will or can wear in the future. It's important that the followers like the products as well, Aavarinne added. Blomqvist thinks it's very important for her to show and promote clothes that are genuine and real to her and the followers. If she chooses to collaborate with a brand it's extremely important that she likes and uses the products herself and that she can stand behind the brand's values.

Iilari Viippola said that it's easier for people to look for information that support their purchase decision on social media. An influencer is easier to believe and trust rather than traditional marketing (M&M 2018). Focus group B respondents agreed that they rather get inspiration from an influencer than from traditional marketing or advertisements because they feel there is closer contact with the influencer, who is a person with opinions, values and interesting personal style. Trust is therefore very important when it comes to influencer marketing and it would be interesting to make a research on how consumers gain that trust so fast. Friends are easy to trust, but influencers seem to build quite the same kind of trust with their followers. Joel Matthew (Forbes 2018) explained that a popular vlogger on YouTube might be asked to do a paid collaboration with a brand that is quite similar to the vloggers own field, but the vlogger may not have all the experience and information about the product. It is common that influencers in these cases can rely on the loyalty and trust they have built within their own communities and therefore they are able to influence their followers either way (Forbes 2018). This is where too much trust for an influencer can be an issue sometimes, because the followers

seem to believe and trust the influencers a 100%, and that gives the influencers the power.

As discussed before, paid collaborations between influencers and companies are very effective due to the friendly relationship between social media influencers and followers. These collaborations can be recommendations, products testing and collaborations that are directing the consumer directly to buy (Babler 2018). Aavarinne mentioned that she makes sure that she agrees with the brands values and that she knows what product she is promoting and give her face to. She also said that she sometimes posts YouTube-videos about products she didn't like or products that were totally unnecessary. The respondents in focus group A and B are very used to "swipe up" when they see a paid collaboration in an influencer's Instagram-story, where the influencer shows off nice outfits and tells the followers to "swipe-up" to directly go to the web shop and buy the products. The respondents in focus group A "swipe-up" only if the content of the collaboration seems good and trustworthy. One respondent in focus group A said that she never use the "swipe-up" -method on Instagram. This shows that women past their teenage years think a little deeper about the influencer marketing, before believing in everything and being affected by it. According to Kardes et al. (2008 p. 335-337), web shops makes shopping fun for some consumers. If a consumer feels that the activity is effortless and fun, the consumer can get into a state of flow when not much effort is needed. Two respondents in focus group A mostly find interesting clothing products online by going straight to their favorite web shops. The respondents agree that it always depends on what you are looking for. Sometimes they know exactly where to look for a nice party dress without any influencer marketing needed, and sometimes they get some information through influencer marketing.

A phenomenon that is seen in influencer marketing is personal offer codes given to the followers. Personal offer codes mean, that the influencer's name together with the offer percentage creates the offer code. Aavarinne said that she very seldom gives out offer codes but she doesn't think it's a negative thing to do at all. Blomqvist stated that she doesn't do collaborations that include offer codes. She believes offer codes are both good and bad. Bad because they attract people to make impulse purchases and good because they can, if done correctly, give people the chance to buy a sustainable product that they

otherwise could not afford, instead of buying a cheaper alternative that isn't sustainable. These offer codes provided by influencers are mainly disturbing according to all respondents excluding one in focus group A. One of the respondents thinks that these offer codes are great. She admitted that offer codes might be a way for herself to motivate and create a need, but she often use offer codes when she really needs something. The other respondents in focus group A agreed that an offer code given by an influencer is a good thing, if there is a real need to buy a certain product, before knowing about the offer code. These same respondents think, nonetheless, that influencers, who constantly add offer codes in their influencer marketing, are disturbing and pushy and that makes the marketing fake. The respondents mentioned Daniel Wellington, the watch brand, as being very disturbing because almost every single influencer in the Nordic countries is marketing the same products with the same personal offer codes. The respondents elaborated that it's disturbing due to the fact, that the products don't seem special anymore and that the watches' real prices get totally forgotten and they are not real anymore because there is always an offer code found somewhere on social media.

Nonetheless, all respondents in focus group B agreed that they always use these offer codes given by social media influencers, and one of the main reasons to watch a video blog or an influencer's Instagram-story is that there is almost always an offer code given to the followers who watch the content. The shopping behavior is totally different from focus group A shopping behavior, in this case. The need is often created by an offer code, for the respondents in focus group B, and if the clothes are nice enough, the respondents are willing to buy them straight away. One respondent mentioned that if an influencer gives an offer code for 50% off, the respondent spends a lot of time scrolling through all clothes in that particular web shop, and wanting to buy everything she think looks nice. She admitted that she even buys clothes that she knows she might never wear, but she just thinks they look good on the influencers and she wants to have the same clothes. All respondents in focus group B, agreed that the main reason for being influenced so strongly by influencers, are these offer codes and nice pictures.

Impulse purchases affected by influencer marketing seemed to be a common issue among the respondents in both focus groups. According to Omnigraphics (2017, p. 187) impulse buying online depends on many psychological factors. The spending decision is often

influenced by social and cultural factors and most online shops are designed to encourage impulse buying. All respondents said that they have made impulse purchases, both based on purchase decision that happened only based on a web shop, but also when they have been inspired or affected by influencer marketing. Focus group A respondents wouldn't say that the reason was 100% due to influencer marketing in these situations. One respondent in focus group A said that impulse purchases happens more often in regular clothing stores, but that influencers can affect shopping in regular stores as well. The clothes purchased are always wanted and needed in the purchase situation, according to focus group A respondents, but sometimes the purchase end up being an impulse purchase because of false marketing, bad influencer marketing or wrong information about the size etc. The respondents in focus group B all said that they have made many impulse purchases due to influencer marketing, and very often the purchased item was not what they expected. Very often the respondents in focus group B have forgotten to return the purchased products in time, so that clothes that didn't fit or were too expensive ended up being unused and money was spent in vain. One reason for not returning clothes bought online is the fact that some web shops have expensive return fees according to focus group B respondents. These respondents also think that influencers could be more precise about product information and web shop return systems etc.

4.2 Sustainable shopping behavior online

Some respondents from focus group A, think that it's great to be able to buy a lot of products at once online, and then return the pieces that didn't fit or that they could not afford. It's easy to fill the shopping cart in an online store, and just order everything you like, due to the easy payment methods provided and the free return options. Focus group B did said that they order just a few items at a time, never too much at once.

Arnold (2009 p. 86 &108), explains that consumers can't be trusted to tell the truth when asked about green habits. But he suggests that the green intent is there for many consumers. Many consumers exaggerate about their concern for the environment. Consumers also think that greener products are too expensive and not as good as the normal products. It's very convenient to return clothes for free, according to focus group A respondents, but when asked about the sustainability perspective they said that they know it's not that

smart and sustainable to buy clothes online and return them regularly. When the respondents were younger and did not think about the sustainable shopping angle at all, they made many bad and unnecessary choices. One respondent from focus group A, says that she often thinks about and feels bad about the return package being shipped to another country or another continent, but the economical aspect weighs more at this point. She can't keep a pricy product that doesn't fit. According to Arnold (2009 p. 86 &108), there is a growing awareness of environmental and ethical concerns, and when people hear it and see it in the media, they feel that they should be making better choices, but only a minority of people buys things based on only ethics. The consumers aren't prepared to compromise product quality before saving the earth or support good causes. Respondents in both focus group said that they would love to buy sustainably produced products but there aren't so many sustainably produced products in their favorite web shops. Influencers who respondents in focus group B are following, aren't promoting these kinds of products at all, they said.

The right moment to think about sustainable shopping and purchase decision is before the purchase decision, according to one respondent in focus group A. After the purchase decision is made, it's too late to change anything by thinking about the sustainability angle of the purchase. The consumer responsibility takes place before the purchase decision. One respondent in focus group A said that she never orders anything that she can't afford and everything she orders she really wants to keep. But if the clothes don't fit, then it's necessary to return them. Another respondent in focus group A said that she thinks a lot about all the returns from a sustainability angle. She wants to be sure to order the right size, or if she knows that a regular store that sells the same product is somewhere nearby, she wants to go to the store and buy the product there instead. Some products can be picked up from and returned straight to the store, even if the product is bought online. This is a good thing, all the respondents in both focus groups agreed. The consumer disposal activities that Kardes et al. (2008 p. 10) presents are activities that include the ways that consumers get rid of products and packaging after consumption. Recycling, reusing and reselling the product are examples of the disposal activities. All respondents in focus group B think it's a big hassle to return clothes they have shopped online. They almost always try to sell these clothes to a friend, rather than pack the items in the return package and walk to the postal office. Deb Landau (Forbes 2019) writes about how growing

awareness of climate change has transformed the way people buy and wear clothes. Consumers now value that clothes are recycled, and they demand sustainability from the clothing brands. Some respondents in both focus groups commented that they try to think smarter when they're finished using their clothes. If the piece of clothing is reusable, they try to give it to a friend or sell it.

The respondents in focus group B often forget to return clothes that are bought online, in time. These respondents don't use cars that much, and don't seem to care that much about the return, as long as their parents paid for the clothes. This might change when they start paying for all clothes themselves. According to Kardes et al. (2008 p. 70-71) a purchase decision is not always leading to an actual purchase, but it represents the consumer's intention to buy a certain brand. The post-purchase evaluation gives the consumer the opportunity to compare their perceptions of the brand with their own expectations of the products. The respondents in focus group B discussed the fact that they sometimes don't intend to buy a product, but that it's just nice to order it anyway, try it on and see if it has any potential.

The respondents in both focus group A and B think that it's important to get free deliveries and returns online and that influencer should be clearer about the return policies amongst the brands and web shops they're promoting. The respondents know that many online shops have return fees, but these are not marketed that clearly and sometimes the return fee has been quite expensive. In this case the purchase was totally unnecessary because the respondents would never have ordered the product if they would have known about the return fee. One respondent in focus group A believes that delivery and return fees are OK, because they make people think more about what they are buying online and why. She also discussed the fact that a smaller delivery or return fee can be cheaper than running around town searching for clothes all day. All respondents in focus group A agreed that it seems wrong that companies have free deliveries if you order clothes for over 50 euro. This direct people to buying even more, sometimes products they don't actually need, and returns are often made due to this fact. It seems to be an evil circle, all respondents agreed. Influencers could have a bigger responsibility in this area and also promote how to shop smart, the respondents in focus group A pointed out.

Blomqvist stated that, as a consumer, it's very important to be critical towards your own needs. She meant that a consumer should be able to figure out if the purchase is really needed or if it's just an impulse that makes the consumer buy something. This is important not only when talking about influencer marketing but for all sources of information online. Social media is Blomqvist's biggest source for information about sustainable fashion, and without Instagram she would never have started to post 10 x 10 challenges, which are challenges where she creates different outfit-combinations from her already existing wardrobe, and inspires her followers to do the same instead of buying new clothing. Blomqvist also explained, that consumers need to find sources of inspiration on social media, that doesn't have negative effect on the consumer own shopping behavior. A consumer can choose to avoid social media channels that affect a consumer negatively, she stated.

H&M Group's greatest mission is to use their influence to bring systematic change to the fashion industry. This means that they are for instance improving the livelihood of the people working in their supplier's factories and encouraging their customers to recycle their clothes through H&M Group's garment recycling scheme. One respondent in focus group A pointed out that she shops 90% of her clothes in the same web shop, H&M, and therefore knows exactly where to go when she needs something new. She thinks that it's very easy for her and at the same time she knows that the company cares about the environment and that it makes her feel good about her purchases.

4.3 Responsibility and sustainable influencer marketing of fashion products

Influencers know that they have power and many influencers use their voices to promote change or encourage people to learn more about environmental issues for instance (IVVI 2019). Blomqvist thinks that sustainable fashion is very important and therefore she has chosen to share inspiration about sustainable development and sustainable fashion on her social media channels. She believes that it's important that people aren't so judging against each other on social media and that people instead should encourage each other to make sustainable choices. She advocates a personal and lasting closet where a consumer builds a lasting and sustainable closet that fit the consumer's own style, body and

lifestyle. If a company isn't actively working with sustainable choices and towards sustainable fashion, she doesn't do collaborations with that company. It's valuable for Blomqvist to do a paid collaboration with a brand that somehow works with sustainable choices regarding producing, transporting, marketing and the sales of products. She added that it's hard for companies to be 100% sustainable due to so many dimensions of the sustainability definition.

The influencers must have trust from a niche community and loyal followers. Influencer marketing is also about having knowledge and experience about the products that are marketed (Forbes 2018). Didem Özgun writes a blog for ELLE Finland about that she as an influencer is up front about sustainable thinking and transparency in the fashion business. Even if she is in the business and making money out of influencer marketing she thinks that everyone should be more responsible regarding fashion and making it more sustainable. She enhances that people should choose wisely amongst brands and be eager to get more information about the brands, products and materials used. She is well informed about good clothing materials and she also informs her followers about good materials and quality brands (ELLE by Didem).

The respondents in focus group A pointed out that social media influencers get a lot of products for free, which Aavarinne agreed is true, and the respondents believe it must be time-consuming for the influencers to pick out products that they don't like because they are so busy promoting products that they do like. Aavarinne explained that she gets clothes sent home for free very often and she either returns them straight away or after her job is done, or sell them forward which she believes is more sustainable than other alternatives. Aavarinne doesn't buy much clothing or cosmetics herself, and that is how she compensates for the amounts of products she gets sent for free. Aavarinne also tells some brands to not send her monthly parcels with free clothing and she doesn't attend PR-events that are held abroad and lasts only for one day.

The respondents believe that if an influencer doesn't get paid for marketing a "bad" product that she has gotten for free, it's understandable why the negative feedback of products is sometimes left out. But the respondents would appreciate if the influencers had time to tell about both positive and negative experiences about clothing products and brands as

well as give out information about sustainable materials used etc. The respondents believe that it's very valuable if an influencer gives bad feedback about some products if she or he really is disappointed. If an influencer gets paid to do a collaboration with a brand and she has both positive and negative opinions about the products after she has tested them, she should emphasize all opinions in the same way and not only enhance the positive feedback. This shows the followers that the influencer is real and can be trusted according to her own values and opinions, and this might lead to success in influencer marketing. The respondents believe that this way of working would also benefit the brands, in their development of the products, and it would be transparent both to the consumers and the brand.

Aavarinne emphasized, that it's important for her to stand behind the brand values when she is doing influencer marketing, but it's not the most important factor when it comes to closing deals with companies. She added that she always says no thanks to a brand that she doesn't believe in and she advertises products only if she gets paid for it. Blomqvist thinks that honesty is the most important thing in influencer marketing. She would never promote a product for a certain brand if she did not genuinely like it. When she starts collaborations with companies she goes through everything thoroughly with the company. Telling someone how great a product is, is not authenticity because authenticity is genuine. Not all brands care about its social impact and influencers are often interested in only the money, but those brands and influencers who genuinely care about environmental impact and social change will sustain, grow and prosper (IVVI 2019). The respondents in both focus group A and B all agreed that influencers, who aren't trustworthy, won't sustain. More brands focus on sustainability and more influencers shift their views on partnerships to be sure that their personal opinions and goals aligns with more than just a paid collaboration, but also with the brands' goals (IVVI 2019).

Focus group A and B discussed that many influencers seem to wear certain clothes just for a commercial picture, and not in real life. These influencers then talk very nicely about the products in the picture. This doesn't seem real, and the respondents in both focus group A and B don't like influencers who are faking and lying about their real opinions. All respondents in focus group A agreed that if the influencer marketing is done in a nice manner, the reaction to it might be the total opposite, even if a lot of influencers are

marketing and wearing the same piece of clothing. It depends on the influencer, and also on the occasion, if an influencer feels unreal or in contrary very truthful and trustworthy. Sometimes influencers with certain values and certain personalities start to market products that don't fit with their real values. Followers notice this according to focus group A. The opposite is when a follower sees the same piece of clothing on the same influencer, in many different occasions and photos. This makes the influencer seem more real and trustworthy. All respondents in focus group A and B agree that best source for trustworthy clothing marketing by influencers is if the influencer have paid for a product herself, and like it so much that she chooses to market it on their social media channels. This isn't working from a business point of view but as earlier mentioned in this thesis, if paid collaborations are done in a good manner, they truly are successful and they don't ruin the credibility of the influencer.

Responsibility was also discussed in both focus group interviews. The moderator asked the respondents about who they think are responsible for the marketing of fashion online, how the consumers are affected and how they're interpreting the communication. The question was also about who is responsible for the sustainable development regarding clothing online. Aavarinne pointed out that she knows that she has got a big role when it comes to communicating and advertising on her channels. Her followers believe in her opinions about products and therefore she thinks that it's very important that she carefully considers what she promotes. Blomqvist stated, that she doesn't see herself as a role model, but she knows that many people gets inspired by her posts and what she promotes, and therefore she is very humble. She also pointed out that it's important to learn from one another and she gets influenced herself by many other sustainable fashion influencers. That is why she gains good and interesting knowledge that she then sums up and chooses to share with her own followers. One conclusion in focus group A was that in what a consumer interprets influencer marketing depends very much on which type of consumer who is interpreting the influencer marketing. Some people might be very easily affected by marketing and that responsibility lies on the consumer, but the respondents added that it's very important for influencers to promote products clearly and in a good manner. Another point said was that the main responsibility lies on the influencers and brands behind the products, because they are the ones earning big money from the influencer marketing on social media. The responsibility lies on how influencers present the

products, not on how a consumer might interpret the advertisement, because there are so many different people who are affected differently by different things.

Aavarinne thinks that everyone is responsible for consumption of products and for their own purchasing decisions. She believes that her job is about inspiring people, and letting her followers know what different brands are offering at the moment. She also explained that she does good research about all clothing brands and especially those she promotes. She wants to know how and where the clothes are made so she can give her real opinions about the product and the brand to her followers. Mäkilä (Kauppalehti 2019) described that the influencer marketing in Finland has quality and rather few mistakes happen and if they do happen, they are mostly unintentional. The most part of Finnish influencer marketing is respectful and classy towards the consumers but Mäkilä claimed that there is room for small adjustments in how influencers mark their advertisements correctly (Kauppalehti 2019). All respondents in focus group A agree that Finnish influencers are good at influencer marketing and that they do paid collaborations with brands in a good manner. One common opinion was that it's important to stand behind the own values and opinions if you are an influencer, because you are your own brand and that brand can get a bad reputation if you don't stand behind everything you do. Credibility is very important for an influencer and therefore influencers should be very interested in the transparency of paid collaborations because badly performed collaborations can lead to bad reputation for a company and companies are taking this very seriously (Kauppalehti 2019).

Blomqvist enhances that she wants to share great tips and ideas about sustainable fashion. "Thrifting hauls" is when she shows second hand outfits and that is something that she shares to inspire her followers to buy second hand clothes and to be able to share insights and problems that she notices on her way own journey towards a more sustainable closet. She also likes to share ideas about how to take good care about clothes so that they last longer. Deb Landau (Forbes 2019), writes about how growing awareness of climate change has changed the way people buy and wear clothes. Consumers value clothes, that are recycled, and they demand sustainability from the clothing brands. As a consumer the easiest way to support sustainable fashion is to maximize the lifecycle of clothes.

Doing marketing content for underage persons demands sensitivity and mostly underage persons are followers to the main part of influencers on social media. Erkkilä (Kauppalehti 2019) mentions that she is worried about if the influencers really understand what kind of responsibility they actually possess over they followers. In focus group B interview, the respondents discussed that influencers with more followers have more trust than those with fewer followers, and they can see it directly by comparing the different paid collaborations between these influencers. Focus group B respondents discussed about that those with fewer followers often do paid collaborations with brands that represent very cheap clothes of not that good quality, and it's a pity to be disappointed when you really believed the influencer marketing. Followers should not be underestimated, because the influencers live on how the followers perceive them. For many followers it is important that the influencers think about sustainability and transparency in their marketing. One respondent in focus group B pointed out that it can't be good for the environment that influencers gets packages with free clothes from all over the world, on a weekly basis. It would be better that influencers thought about this more seriously, because they are not using all the products they get, and many products are sent to them in vain. When digitalization is automatically involved in so many processes nowadays, it's interesting to think about why the brands aren't letting the influencer's choose the products being sent to them in advance and online, instead of sending them free clothes that they don't now if the influencers will like.

The respondents in focus group B discussed that it is very valuable for the followers if the influencers, who have got huge power, uses it correctly by for instance telling the followers about brands that are ethical, sustainable and good and why they the influencers working with certain brands. One respondent in focus group A pointed out that she never buys anything from Zalando, even though influencers are promoting that brand quite a lot, because she has heard so many negative things about what that company does with the clothes that are returned. She heard that they are throwing away most part of the returned clothes instead of selling them to other consumers. The other respondents agree on that this is chocking, because they thought that returns are re-packed and sold to another customer instead. This is interesting, regardless of it is true or not, because numerous influencers promote Zalando's products, but at the same time many of them announce

that they have green values and that they must be able stand behind the brand's values if they do paid collaborations with the brand.

The respondents in both focus group A and B agreed, though, that everyone; consumers, brands and influencers share the responsibility when it comes to sustainability overall. If consumers were better informed and briefed about how the clothing business and online shopping of clothes is affecting the manufacturers, the nature or the climate in different ways, there would be less people buying products from companies that are not following nor working towards a more sustainable future. One opinion amongst the respondents in focus group B was, that until then, these companies won't have enough pressure on them to do things better, because they still get money from their business. An idea was, in focus group A interview, to get companies and influencers to inform consumers about what happens to the clothes after they are returned, or how the clothes are packed and how the total value chain looks like. If companies would be more open about their production, logistics and value chains, and influencers based on that could be more informative about the brands and products towards the followers, the consumers would be very well-informed through influencer marketing and could easily make decisions based on their own values. But for this to become a reality, a trend must be born, according to focus group A, so that the norm is to include these factors in the marketing instead of hiding information from the consumers. A need for it must be created, and the consumers are responsible for creating a need and demanding it, the respondents in focus group A discussed eagerly. According to Özgun, for ELLE by Didem, it's very important that both influencers and followers know that they all have responsibility, and should all think about these issues, and she as an influencer is informative about sustainable brands and materials. Respondents in focus group B explained that it feels so hard to make a change or demand as a consumer or a group of consumers, because the big companies and influencers have so much power over people overall. When there is supply, people will buy and not think about anything else when everything is so easy. Respondents in focus group B discussed about that it would be very good that a certain amount of the delivery and return cost would be donated to sustainability work and the environment, to balance the wear of nature out a bit.

The respondents think that it's very interesting that influencers, who are just doing their job, at the same time, have so much responsibility towards their followers, because the consumers are demanding it and the influencers are right between the company and the consumers. The final conclusion, in focus group A, was that influencers truly bear a great power if they use it correctly. Blomqvist said, that it's very important for influencers to tell their followers about brands that work with sustainable development, but she also likes to enhance that it's not only the fashion companies' fault what the fashion industry looks like today, and that the consumers have got the real power to demand change. Without any demand no clothes, which aren't sustainably produced, are sold.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was conducted as a case study, where the researcher's own interests along with topical issues about consumer behavior affected by influencer marketing was the main object. The purpose of this study was to find out how consumers, women between the ages 16-31 years living in the metropolitan area of Helsinki, are affected by influencer marketing in their online shopping behavior of clothing, and how the consumers perceive the influencer marketing. Furthermore, the research was also about getting answers to what consumers can do to change, or if they really need to change the way they perceive influencer marketing, to get a more sustainable shopping behavior. The secondary research question was how influencers work with influencer marketing of clothing products overall, how they do it in a sustainable way and how they can guide consumers to be more sustainable regarding shopping of clothes. All interview insights and results could be utilized both for people working with influencer marketing and for consumers who wish to know more about influencer marketing and the effect it has or might have on them. This study also gives insights to sustainable fashion and how consumer's can be more sustainable in their own simple ways. The discussion is presented according to the research questions, and recommendations for future research are included in the end of this chapter.

How is consumers' shopping behavior of clothing affected by influencer marketing and how do the consumers perceive the influencer marketing?

The conducted qualitative research showed that in Helsinki's metropolitan area, mainly younger women are affected by influencer marketing, and these women speak about it openly and with excitement. There seems to be no shame in following influencers, nor being affected by their marketing. The girls see nice clothes and outfits on different social media channels and are "easy victims" for "swiping-up" on a paid collaboration post or using offer codes given by the influencers. Young women also get inspiration from friends' outfits. These friends have often been inspired by influencers, and word-of-mouth get the shopping wheel spinning and the friends of friends also start following the same influencers. Also, women in their twenties and thirties, who live in the Helsinki metropolitan area, are affected by influencer marketing but in a more controlled way and sometimes even unconsciously. They have learned from their shopping mistakes when they were younger, and they know better know. This fact is interesting when comparing shopping behaviors with the younger women. There is clearly a similar behavior between how the older women shopped when they were younger and how younger women shop now and this shopping behavior is negatively perceived by older women past twenty years. These women value influencers because of their personalities and valuable content. The influencer impact on the purchase behavior is often combined with trends and seasons. There is more often a real need that directs the shopping behavior for these women compared to the younger women. The younger women see paid commercials and they are given offer codes, and a need is often created from that phenomenon instead of the other way around, where a need is created when the consumer really needs something and are happy if they notice a offer code available for what they need. Impulse purchases happen more often when young women are affected by influencer marketing, and the responsibility should carefully be considered when promoting products to these consumers. Women in their twenties and thirties, follow influencers for real content rather than for nice pictures, advertisements and offer codes. These women understand how influencers work, and accept the fact that advertisements are shown quite often, but they value interesting information on topics they are interested in. This is important because it shows how both influencers and consumers are well-informed about the influencer marketing's effect on the shopping behavior and what the consumers think about the influencer

marketing content. By sharing information, inspiration and ideas to one another both influencers and consumers can work together. Women in their twenties and thirties, also value influencers that are trustworthy and that personal views and ideas can be seen also in the advertisements, if the influencers do their job correctly. These kinds of paid collaboration can often lead to a purchase because the consumers really believe and trust the influencer who is promoting. There are, nonetheless, many disturbing factors about influencer marketing that lead to negative impact on consumer behavior. Women in their twenties and thirties, don't like too pushy advertisements and too many offer codes all over social media. If an influencer is not perceived as trustworthy and genuine, the impact is negative. The followers also don't like the fact that many influencers promote the exact same products simultaneously. This is very important for brands and influencers to think about because if a brand gets too promoted, it can easily affect both the brand and the influencers negatively. Younger women are affected by quite differently by influencer marketing. They like nice pictures and videos and don't care that much about valuable content. They don't get disturbed by the fact that many influencers promote the same clothes at the same time. Sometimes the younger women even hunt for offer codes, both if they need to buy clothes and sometimes just for fun. A need is in this case often created from the influencer marketing and YouTube vloggers as well as fashion influencers on Instagram have a big impact on the consumer behavior in these cases. YouTube vlogs are great sources for getting fashion inspiration, and the study showed that young women mainly get affected by this social media channel. These consumers know that offer codes are given through this channel and it's easy to find a product by searching on YouTube for a certain piece of clothing or a brand. This enables influencers to use this channel more efficiently and professional influencers also use YouTube videos for telling about products or brands that they aren't satisfied with. The influencers inform the followers about the reasons for not liking a specific product. This is very useful for consumers, as they get valuable this kind of product information before the purchase decision. Also, for the brands themselves, this information can be extremely valuable to enable their development of products and to enable them to do better in the future. This can also be very brutal for brands sales, which could be affected negatively based on influencers' negative feedback. However, some influencers aren't well-informed of the products they promote, and the consumers might suffer from this.

If influencers have loyal followers and build trust amongst the followers, they are perceived as genuine and real, and that leads to a bigger impact on consumers' purchasing behavior directly affected by the influencer marketing. Consumers find it easier to trust an actual human being with own personality and opinions rather than traditional marketing. This means that influencer marketing is very effective if it's done correctly, and influencers have a great power over consumers' purchasing behavior and the consumers also know this. Professional influencers, in turn, know what power they possess, and they are very careful when choosing which companies to work with. The influencers own values must often match with the brands' values, but to know everything about a product, isn't always necessary for the influencer to be able to promote it. This means that consumers can't always be a 100% sure that the influencer gives valuable and true information about a product, even if the influencer likes the brand and the product.

The influencer power is very interesting, and it seems that influencers will develop their marketing methods even more in the future and that brands will systematically use the influencer's services to promote their products. Influencers are already creating their own brands, and this phenomenon might be even bigger in the future. The influencers' power should not be underestimated. But only the influencers that are truly genuine and dare to show their own personalities and opinions are the ones that will manage to sustain in the business. People will follow these real influencers based on their valuable content that can include everything between nice pictures to detailed information about products and experiences.

Followers on social media channels appreciate styling ideas and outfit inspiration that influencers provide them with. There is clearly a positive aspect of influencer marketing but, as long as the need isn't created from the influencer marketing but from true needs, there will be followers buying products that they really don't need, but rather just want. This will have an impact on the sustainable shopping and sustainable fashion angle that is discussed next.

What can consumers do to change, or do they actually want and need to change the way they perceive influencer marketing, to get a more sustainable shopping behavior?

For women who are in their twenties and thirties, personal style and good self-confidence as well as a strong self-discipline are ingredients for not having to make big changes in how these consumers perceive influencer marketing, because it seems like these women aren't influenced too strongly, and don't make too many mistakes while shopping online. Nonetheless, there are things to be done for these consumers to shop in a more sustainable way. Women in their twenties and thirties want to change how they sometimes buy too much online at once, because they get excited. To know what a real need is, compared to a need that is created by influencers, is important if consumers want to think about sustainability. Teenage girls, who shop online, are very easily affected by influencer marketing. They think that when a piece of clothing looks nice, they want the same one too. Friends are also big influencers for these young women, and it's important to have what friends have and what's cool right now. Trends are strongly affecting younger women, but also women in their twenties and thirties are affected. There are differences in how trends are perceived, between different age groups.

Changing how consumers perceive influencer marketing includes many different aspects. It's not only about the purchase decision itself, it's also about thinking in advance about how to be more sustainable overall, because sustainability regarding fashion, in turn, is also divided in many different parts. Young women often get disappointed about the poor material and wrong sizes of clothing bought online, and they want a change in how information is presented online, and they want to become naturally more interested in reading about the products in advance and don't get fooled by influencer marketing, as they sometimes are now. Companies are struggling to meet the demands of the consumers, but in today's world it's hard or even impossible to be 100% sustainable in everything the companies do.

It's too late to think about if the purchase was smart or not, if the purchase has already been made. Consumers think that the thinking process should be done in advance. This is not always easy, as the "want-to-have"-feelings are sometimes too strong and as

consumers like to try out clothes at home before making the actual purchase decision. Therefore, the self-discipline should be stronger, to be able to shop in a more sustainable way. Products are frequently returned, sometimes due to the fact, that the thinking process wasn't proper enough. External impulses are often too strong. Younger women don't see a need to change their shopping behavior per se, but there is interest and willingness to buy products that are made of good quality materials and there is a demand for better information regarding sustainable fashion amongst this age group. There is a need for change in the returning of clothes bought online, as that seems to be a struggle for younger women. The understanding for the economical impact on leaving unwanted clothes un-returned, should be enhanced.

How do influencers work with marketing on social media regarding clothing overall and in a sustainable way, who is responsible for creating a need and demand for sustainably produced clothes and how can influencers guide consumers to be more sustainable regarding fashion online?

Influencers know that they have great power when it comes to influencer marketing and it's impact on consumers' shopping behavior. Working with influencer marketing demands trustworthiness, genuine and honest opinions and personal values shown, which are all shown on different social media channels. Working one's way up to the top takes time but when an influencer is finally there, they are able to choose whom they collaborate with. Choosing paid collaboration partners isn't always easy, and influencers are often very careful when picking out partners to work with. The reason for this is that influencer's need to work with brands and products that they believe in and want to use themselves, to be able to be successful influencers and gain loyal followers. Also company values must meet with the influencer's values so that the followers can see the transparency in the content. There can't be conflicts between influencer values and company values. Influencers take their time to do proper background work about brands they tend to work with, before they make a deal with the brand. Issues that are important for influencers are often that the companies' production is clean, and that the materials of the clothes are of good quality. However, some influencers aren't as picky with brands, and promotes products if they get paid for it, as simply as that. But the followers do notice this, and the influencers trustworthiness suffer from this.

Some influencers think about sustainability in their personal lives as well as in their working lives. Many packages with free clothes are sent to influencers on a weekly basis from different brands, but if influencers want to be sustainable, they contact the brands and tell them to send packages more rarely or not at all, or then the influencers get rid of clothes they don't use by selling them, recycling them or returning them to the company. Influencers get so many free products that they don't need to buy much clothes themselves and this is how they can compensate sustainably, by not shopping themselves.

For some influencers, who are focusing on sustainable fashion, the issues that are important when choosing collaboration partners, are the companies they work with and how they must work with sustainable fashion in the different areas of the whole value chain from production to marketing. Otherwise the influencer doesn't get any value from doing collaborations, because the main point in all influencer marketing is sharing tips and ideas and inspiring people do be more sustainable regarding fashion online. Influencers like to guide their followers and give value through different type of content and influencers believe that the way consumers get affected by influencer marketing is the consumer's responsibility. Peoples' own consumption and purchasing decisions aren't influencers nor companies' responsibility. The influencers can just be honest and real, and the rest is up to the consumer. Sustainable fashion is interesting, and influencers who work with that are great inspiration sources for consumers who are willing to change their shopping behavior, and who understand how the fashion industry can have negative impacts on the environment. Also, influencers can give great styling ideas and tips about how to take care of the clothes so that they last longer.

Influencers believe that even if they have power over their followers, the consumers also possess a great power over what the fashion industry will look like in the future. No demand of clothes creates no clothing sales, and if companies want to succeed, they must meet the needs of the consumers. If more consumers demand sustainably produced clothing, and if companies start marketing how their whole value chains look like and start being more transparent regarding their products, the change will happen. Fast fashion is less popular nowadays and it will lose popularity amongst young people if the demand is to produce sustainably by using recycled materials and new environmental-friendly

fabrics and materials. Also influencers will follow the same path, if the companies change their ways of working.

5.1 Recommendations and limitations for future research

Only Finnish women between the ages 16-31 years, from the Helsinki metropolitan area, were included in this research as consumers and followers of influencers, and only one professional influencer and one micro influencer, who is specialized in sustainable fashion, were interviewed regarding influencer marketing and sustainable fashion. Therefore, the results may not be applicable for the rest of Finland and for all influencers working with fashion on social media channels. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to get in-depth answers from consumers and influencers. Future research around the same topic could be conducted using a quantitative method with the respondents being teenage women up to women at the age of 40, to get a wider perspective on how strongly consumers are affected by influencer marketing based on different demographics and other factors as well. Based on the results of this study, future research could be conducted through social media channels, where most part of the consumers spend a lot of time and where they easily can be found. A research could also be conducted in collaboration with interested influencers, and via their channels reach out to numerous amounts of people. People could be eager to answer questions about shopping behavior if influencers were the ones promoting the questionnaire through their channels. Social media channels could enable a quantitative study without lots of effort, and it could be interesting to get big amounts of data from these sources. Also, by conducting a study using this quantitative method in this way, the geographic limitation would naturally be extended and therefore the researcher could get valuable answers and opinions from respondents all over Finland.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview guide (Focus groups)

Consumer online shopping behavior affected by influencer marketing – with a focus on sustainability

Persons interviewed: Anonymous focus group respondents

Date of interview: 28.3.2019 (Focus group A) and 6.4.2019 (Focus group B)

Student conducting the interview: Emilia Kaulbars-Staudinger

Part 1: Consumer shopping behavior online

1. What do you buy online and why?
2. How do you get information in advance, about the clothes you buy online?
3. Which external factors affect or control your shopping behavior online?

Part 2: Influencer marketing's effect on the shopping behavior online

1. Do you follow influencers on social media channels? Why?
2. In what way do you think you get affected or inspired by influencers when they promote clothes?
3. Do you believe that influencers can help you find your own clothing style and give you valuable information about clothing products before the purchase decision?
4. Do you perceive influencer marketing on social media channels as controlling of your shopping behavior?
5. Have you ever made an impulse purchase online and then returned the product because it didn't fit, it was too expensive etc.? Has this happened when you've been inspired or affected by influencer marketing? Why did it happen?
6. Do you believe that own personality, self-discipline and age have an impact on how you get or not get affected by influencer marketing of clothing?

7. What kind of responsibility do influencers have when it comes to their marketing and how their followers purchase behavior is affected by it?

Part 3: Sustainable influencer marketing

1. Do you feel bad about returning clothes that you've bought online? Is this something you think about more deeply or do you shop and think everything is so easy and simple?
2. Is it important for you that online stores have free returns? Why?
3. Sustainable development and online shopping: Who is responsible for the sustainable development? The brands, the influencers or the consumers?

   Is there something else that you would like to add to this interview that you feel is important for the study, but wasn't discussed before?

Thank You!

APPENDIX 2: Interview guide (influencers)

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Consumer online shopping behavior affected by influencer marketing – with a focus on sustainability

Persons interviewed: Alexa Aavarinne (Alexa Dagmar) and Michelle Blomqvist (Lasting Closet)

Date of interview: 16.4.2019 (Alexa Aavarinne) and 20.4.2019 (Michelle Blomqvist)

Student conducting the interview: Emilia Kaulbars-Staudinger

Part 1: Background questions about the influencer marketing work

1. In what way do you work with marketing of different products? What is important to think about when choosing which brand to work with etc.?
2. Is it important for you to think about sustainable development when closing deals with different brands or if you are about to become an ambassador for a brand?
3. In which cases do you say no thanks to collaborations with brands, and why?

Part 2: Consumer shopping behavior affected by influencers marketing

4. What role do you as an influencer have when consumers interpret your communication and marketing?
5. Do you think that you are responsible for the actions that some followers/consumers take, when they make their purchasing decisions online, maybe sometimes too fast so that the purchased item end up being returned because it didn't fit, it was too expensive, the consumer did not actually need it etc.?
6. In what way do you think you give your followers value, for instance in styling ideas, offers, personal thoughts about fashion, Q&A's etc.?
7. Do you see yourself as a role model and in what way do you focus on giving your followers valuable information that they can count and rely on?

8. What is your view on giving your followers offers online with a personal "offer code" of yours?

9. Is it important for you to show the real you, and your real thoughts in your channels? Why?

10. If you were your own follower, in what way would you see yourself, from an outsider/follower perspective, regarding your work with fashion online?

Part 3: Sustainable influencer marketing

1. Do you do good research about clothing brands and how the products are manufactured, and the possible risk of for example child labor involved etc.?

2. What does sustainability mean to you and is it important for you to think about sustainability around shopping online, returns etc.?

3. In what way do you personally work with sustainable thinking in your working life and personal life?

Is there something else that you would like to add to this interview that you feel is important for the study, but wasn't discussed before?

Thank You!