German student perception of social media influencers and the relevance of ethical aspects

Graduation thesis towards the degree Bachelor of Science

In the study programme International Business at Reutlingen University

Presented by:

Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

312142

Presented to:

Prof. Dr. Julia Hormuth

Dr. Kevin Gore

Hamburg, 15 June 2021

Abstract

Social media influencers have been an emerging topic in recent years, however the ethical relevance have been little explored. For this reason, the following research paper aims to further investigate German students' perceptions of social media influencers and what role ethical aspects play in their perceptions as well as in the perceptions of social media influencers by conducting 8 semi-structured interviews. After conducting this study, the research findings demonstrated a negative trend regarding the trust level of social media influencers. It can be concluded that German students perceive social media influencers as promoting unethical behaviour and unreliable and wishes social media influencers to put more initative in researching the product or service they choose to promote.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Media Influencers, Ethics, Influencer Marketing

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

GS1.. ....German Student 1
GS2.. ....German Student 2
GS3.. ....German Student 3
GS4.. ....German Student 4
GS5.. ....German Student 5
SMI1.. ....Social media influencer 1
SMI2.. ....Social media influencer 2
SMI3.. ....Social media influencer 3

List of Tables

1   Introduction

The global population of active social media users worldwide has surpassed the 4 billion mark (Johnson, 2021), with more consumers being reachable online, it is not a surprise that companies are increasingly taking advantage of social media as a marketing tool, mainly through a new marketing method called influencer marketing.

Influencer marketing was reported to be an effective marketing method with 89% of marketers reporting influencer marketing to have a comparable or better return on investment than other marketing channels (Mediakix, n.d.). Including, over 25% of companies reported investing over 40% of their marketing budget on influencer marketing in 2019 (Mediakix, n.d.). However, at what cost for the consumer? Despite the effective method, it has left many questioning whether it has regarded any ethical implications. According to Evans et al "There exists criticism that much of the practice's success is not because the content is inherently better but because consumers do not understand that what they are seeing is advertising." (2017, p. 146). Due to the nature of how the sponsored content is presented, it may be giving false perceptions to the consumers as they are unknowingly consuming advertising. Many of which fall into the trap of purchasing products or services they may not need.

As more companies invest in influencer marketing, the number of social media influencers grew and ethical implications begun to surface. According to a study where 4 000 consumers were surveyed in Europe, the study demonstrated that 54% of respondents said influencers are misrepresenting real life (Bazaarvoice, 2018). Including consumers in Germany who had the harshest condemnation as 34% stated that influencers do not promote ethical behaviour (Bazaarvoice, 2018).

Since there has been little research on the topic of how consumers perceive social media influencers and their ethical relevance, the objective of this research paper is to dive deep into the perception German students have of social media influencers including social media influencers' perception in order to further understand how influencer marketing operates. This research paper will also be exploring what ethical implications social media influencers may have regarded, to further understand the impact influencer marketing have on consumers. This study consequently functions as a valuable resource when considering the introduction of influencer marketing as a user, company and social media influencer.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social media use

More than half of the global population actively uses social media, and that number is predicted to grow to 4.41 billion by 2025 (Tankovska, 2021). A report published by Royal Society of Public Health demonstrated that 91% of 16-24 year olds currently use social media, making them the most active age group of users (Royal Society of Public Health, 2017). The result of the ever-growing social media usage is primarily due to social media has not only become a possibility through which users can share their content but now a place where users receive a vast amount of information regarding the world around them on a daily basis. To describe social media in a more practical sense, it is a group of software-based digital technologies that presents itself in the form of applications and websites (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Within these applications and websites, it provides digital environments for users to send and receive digital content or information to and from other users through an online social media channel, which is now referred to as social media (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

2.2 Defining social media

Many scholars have created their own definitions of social media in recent years. Howard & Parks had defined social media as consisting of three parts: "(a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and (c) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content." (2012, p. 4). The definition, which at first seems to be inclusive enough, nevertheless fails to mention several important aspects of how social media operates today. As social media has evolved over the past years, a more appropiate definition has been created by Carr & Hayes, who define social media as "Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and *selectively self-present*, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others." (2015, p. 50). Carra & Hayes discussed that social media are online tools operating through internet-based channels, not web-based channels. Further clarifying that one of the most important features of social media is that regardless of whether a user is online or not, messages can still be *created*, *transmitted*, and *consumed* (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Another important aspect that stood out was the perception of interaction

with others. Further on describing that social interactions within these channels do not necessarily have to be interpersonal in nature, as long as the user receives a sense of interactive engagement with other users (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

2.3 Social media marketing

Social media is no longer a platform for pure entertainment purposes, however, it is increasingly used for business purposes. An increasing number of businesses nowadays take advantage of the fact that potential customers in form of users are easily reachable to consume and transmit their messages. Therefore, the lines between interpersonal and masspersonal communication across social media are crossed and diminish more and more (Carr & Hayes, 2015). To take specify: In the business world, social media has become an online tool for digital marketers to connect and communicate with their customers by creating and publishing online various forms of advertisements disguised as digital content. As we see social media shift towards a tool for marketers, online messages will be increasingly designed for mass audiences, taking advantage of social media's main purpose of connecting with a large pool of users globally within seconds (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Professionally, this approach is referred to as social media marketing. Social media marketing is a non-traditional marketing method that has become prominent through the popularity of social media use changing the way marketing is done today (Kaushik, 2012). It is defined by Tuten as "the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders." (2021, p. 19). The goal of social media marketing is to drive consumers to purchase a product or service through the content produced and/or advertised on social media.

2.4 Rise of influencer marketing

Consumers are not only spending more time online, they are also becoming increasingly better at blocking out clearly noticeable advertisements by using programs such as Adblock. Adblock is a browser extension plugin that users can install and apply to block almost all forms of advertising on a website when browsing through the internet (AdblockPlus, 2021). This is a growing concern to many marketers, as the number of Adblock users worldwide was at 763.5 million users in 2019, which is a large population of people whom marketers are not able to directly reach (Statista Research Department, 2021). Aware of the fact that social media users continues to grow, companies are forced to find alternative so-

lutions to market their products or services to potential new customers in their target audience. An alternative method used by companies, and is considered to be the most effective method of marketing is a term called "Influencer Marketing". According to a study, 84% of marketers planned to use influencer marketing in 2015 (Launchmetrics, 2015). This way, marketers can reach new customers directly through social media influencers. However, there appear to be problems in the method due to its ability to trick consumers into thinking that sponsored content is normal content. Social media influencers are masters at disguising sponsoreds post into appearing as normal posts, which has made it more difficult for users to distinguish (Evans et al., 2017). This will be discussed further in this chapter.

Influencer marketing is still relatively new, which is why there is no proper academic definition for the term. However, many companies have come up with their own definition. Tapinfluence, one of the world's leading influencer marketing companies, defines influencer marketing as a "type of marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive your brand's message to the larger market" (2015). Influencer marketing has also been described as another form of word of mouth to put it in more traditional terms. Joe Rohrlich, who is General Manager of EMEA at Bazaarvoice, commented, "At the core, Influencer Marketing is really intended to be about word-of-mouth, a timeless tradition of sharing our latest discoveries and preferences." (Bazaarvoice, 2018).

When discussing influencer and social media marketing, Instagram is the main social media channel where influencer marketing can be found. Based on a 2019 survey conducted by Mediakix, a well-known influencer marketing agency, Instagram was ranked as the most important channel for influencer marketing (Mediakix, n.d.). Instagram is a social networking application that allows users to share photos and videos through their smartphones and is now owned by Facebook (Facebookbrand, 2021). Furthermore, Instagram has been seeing a rapid increase in the number of monthly active users. The latest data shows that the number of monthly active users was one billion in June 2018, up from 130 million active users in June 2013 (Tankovska, 2021). As it appears that Instagram can be considered as the most important social media tool for online marketing, the following research will be focussed around Instagram only.

2.5 Social media influencers

Social media influencers are individuals who have built up a certain number of followers on their social media profile and are often referred to as "digital opinion leaders". Social

media influencers can also be viewed as assisting in closing the communication gap between brands and consumers in order to spread the brand's message. As Joe Rohlrich mentioned regarding influencer marketing intended to be about word-of-mouth, consumers often search for reviews before deciding to purchase a particular product or service (Bazaarvoice, 2018). However, social media influencers' opinions on a product or service are trusted to a higher degree. A 2016 study by Berger and the Keller Fay group, demonstrated that 82% of consumers were more likely to take an influencer's advice regarding products or services (Berger, 2019). However, as years progressed a 2018 study conducted by Bazaarvoice documented the consumer frustration in the European region towards social media influencers due to the repetitive nature of the content (Bazaarvoice, 2018). As more companies decide to shift their focus to non-traditional methods of marketing, companies will increasingly focus their efforts on influencers to endorse their product or service to their followers in exchange for monetary rewards.

2.6 Ethical implications

Due to social media and influencer marketing being a new marketing method, there is still much to explore. Ethical implications have been emerging on a regular as companies continue implementing influencer marketing. One of the examples of unethical behavior was an incident in 2015 when celebrity influencer Kim Kardashian West promoted drug "Diclegis" for morning sickness on her Instagram profile. The Food and Drug Association later stated how she had failed to mention the side effects and risks of the drug (Lewis, 2015). This resulted in users who are witnessing the promotion on their social media profiles being influenced to purchase and use a product that could potentially be harmful to themselves without their full knowledge. After this incident, experts stated that Kim Kardashian West should not be allowed to use her influence to promote a medical product as such, as Kim is not a medical professional.

As previously mentioned, 4 000 consumers were surveyed in a study in Europe that demonstrated that 54% of respondents believe influencers take advantage of users by misrepresenting real life and being materialistic. According to Royal Society of Public Health, anxiety and depression rates among young people have also risen 70% in the last 25 years (Royal Society of Public Health, 2017). The fact that social media influencers and regular users promote only the positive moments of their lives on social media can cause individuals to develop psychological distress from the feeling of missing out or watching others enjoy life (Royal Society of Public Health, 2017). Users have also begun comparing images

they have seen on social media with themselves, not fully knowing that the images may have been photoshopped and edited to enhance their appearance. However, of all consumers in Europe, Germany had the harshest condemnation, with 34% stating that influencers do not promote ethical behavior (Bazaarvoice, 2018). Consumers are searching for authenticity and believe that it is time to embed stricter rules for content produced by social media influencers. Furthermore, influencers are not the only ones to be held accountable, but also the increasing pressure from advertisers on influencers to reach more users at a higher frequency (Bazaarvoice, 2018).

As can be seen in the above findings, social media can have an impact on users in several various ways. However, the potential to understand how social media influencers affect users is great as more and more users are found online with rapid development of digitalization.

3 Research Method

8 semi-structured interviews were conducted towards two different sample populations. 5 German students and 3 social media influencers were interviewed throughout a 2-week period in May 2021 through an online zoom meeting software in order to investigate how German students perceive social media influencers and what role ethical aspects play in their perceptions as well as in the perceptions of social media influencers. Each interview lasted a duration of approximately 10 minutes up to 30 minutes, depending on the response of the respective interviewee, which can be seen in brief detail in Table 1.

The chosen approach that this study will follow is qualitative research by following the semi-structured interview method. The decision to use semi-structured interviews was based on the following characteristics:

1. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enables interviewees to openly discuss new ideas and perspectives (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004).
2. Semi-structured interviews enable us to explore German students' perceptions of social media influencers as well as the influencers perception through open-ended questions, as to our knowledge the topic of social media influencers and their ethical relevance has not been investigated as much by researchers.
3. Including, the results of interviews based on an interview guideline are already semi-structured, and therefore easier to analyze.

The sample population was split in two in order to be able to compare the two responses when analyzing the data: German students and social media influencers. Both sample groups are essential for this research to explore the topic to its full potential. German students were chosen as the primary sample group as they are the influenced, additionally due to the consideration of previous literature that demonstrated Germans to have the harshest condemnation rate of all other nationalities in Europe. The reason why students were chosen is due to the fact that 91% of 16-24 year olds are found on social media and at this age the majority of them are likely to be studying (Royal Society of Public Health, 2017). The sample population for the German students was defined according to the following two criteria: First, the individual had to be registered as a student, second, the individual is a registered German citizen. The sample population for the social media influencers was defined according to the following two criteria: The individual has a minimum of 10,000 social followers on one of their social media accounts, second, the individual receives monetary compensation for promoting products or services on their social media accounts.

Country of origin was not defined as a selection criterion for social media influencers, however, all the social media influencers in this study are German. Furthermore, gender was excluded as a selection criterion for a more general analysis. None of the aforementioned aspects should influence the outcome of this study, due to social media influencers conduct the same behaviour despite their country of origin and gender.

Interviewee ID	Interview conduct	Duration
German student 1	Online Zoom meeting	20 min
German student 2	Online Zoom meeting	10 min
German student 3	Online Zoom meeting	10 min
German student 4	Online Zoom meeting	15 min
German student 5	Online Zoom meeting	27 min
Social Media Influencer 1	Online Zoom meeting	21 min
Social Media Influencer 2	Online Zoom meeting	20 min
Social Media Influencer 3	Online Zoom meeting	24 min

Table 1. Summary details of the sample interviewed

All German students and social media influencers were approached and contacted via email and Instagram and were given a brief introduction to the research and topic. Once the interviewees agreed to be interviewed, the date and time were discussed and set. Prior to conducting the interviews, the interview guidelines were pilot-tested by two individuals who were registered as students and were Finnish citizens. The questions were then modified accordingly.

All interviewees agreed to the interview being recorded, therefore the interview was recorded directly in the online Zoom meeting software and the audio file was later transcribed into a transcription software, as can be seen in the transcripts (Appendix B).

Following the guidelines of a semi-structured interview method, interviewees were encouraged to openly speak. The Pre-formulated opening questions regarding their social media activities are supposed to open the interview process and make them feel comfortable to share their experiences. The interview guidelines for German students and social media influencers did not differ much and had a number of similar questions in order to be able to compare responses. Both guidelines covered general questions regarding social media activities and influencers, as well as open-ended questions where they were encouraged to comment further on their response. The final questions that were asked of both sample groups were ad-hoc questions to ensure that no topic or question was left unanswered.

With consideration of the research question and previous literature, the German students were asked 19 questions developed to capture their perceptions of social media influencers as seen in the interview questions (Appendix A.1). The social media influencers were asked 20 questions similar to those asked of the German students as seen in the interview questions (Appendix A.2). The interviewees were then thanked for their participation and the interview was concluded. Once all interviews had been conducted, the audio file was transcribed and prepared for analysis.

4   Analysis and Research Findings

In this chapter, the result of the interviews will be discussed by comparing the responses of the two sample groups in order to gain both perspectives on the topic. In creating the two interview guides, 5 themes were identified to provide a clearer structure and understanding. The 5 themes include *social media activities, social media influencers and trust, sponsored posts, ethical issues* and *future perspectives*. In this section, German student 1 will be referred to as GS1 (Appendix B.1), German student 2 will be referred to as GS2 (Appendix B.2), German student 3 will be referred to as GS3 (Appendix B.3), German student 4 will be referred to as GS4 (Appendix B.4), German student 5 will be referred to as GS5 (Appendix B.5), social media influencer 1 will be referred to as SMI1 (Appendix B.6), social media influencer 2 will be referred to as SMI2 (Appendix B.7) and social media influencer 3 will be referred to as SMI3 (Appendix B.8) for easier readability.

4.1 Social media activities

The first theme illustrates the social media activities of both the German students and the social media influencers to understand their social media habits. When the German students were asked whether they are currently on any social media platforms, all 5 interviewees answered yes. However, this question was not asked to the social media influencers as it is naturally given that they are found on social media. All 8 interviewees responded that they use Instagram and Facebook, proving to be the most popular social media channel among all interviewees. Whereas Pinterest, Twitter and Clubhouse were the least used social media among the interviewees. Next, both sample groups were asked how long they have been on social media. The German students are estimated to have been on social media for 6 to 13 years, whereas the social media influencers have been on social media for a longer period of 11 to 15 years. However, when the social media influencers were asked how long they have been social media influencers, the duration ranged from 4 to 6 years. This demonstrates that all interviewees are experienced in how social media operates.

4.2 Social media influencers

The next theme is centered around the perception of social media influencers among both sample groups. All German students followed at least one social media influencer with more than 10 000 followers, meaning all interviewees should already be familiar with the term social media influencer. When both sample groups were asked what their definition of a social media influencer was, GS1 defined it as someone who communicates current

trends and important ongoing events, whereas the rest of the 4 German students expressed their definition of social media influencers as closely related to individuals who promote products online for a living and have a certain following on their social media accounts. Additionally, GS5 mentioned the fact that social media influencers are an idealized version of someone's life, resulting in the possibility of misrepresentation of real life due to the knowledge gap between influencers and influenced due to a lack of transparency.

When the social media influencers were asked to define a social media influencer, two social media influencers immediately responded that they did not like the term "influencer". SMI1 responded that being a social media influencer for her is "inspiring and not influencing because I think influencing has like this negative touch." SMI2 had a similar response to SMI1, responding that the word influencer "sounds like an illness" to her and prefers to be called an inspirer by sharing what she thinks could help people. None of the three social media influencers mentioned that the number of followers was a factor, compared to 4 out of 5 German students who said the number of followers was what defined a social media influencer. SMI3 put it very well in her own words that "a social media influencer is someone who doesn't need to have thousands of followers but a good quality of followers", discussing that the number of followers is no longer important, but the engagement that a social media influencer has. Only GS5 and SMI3 mentioned the fact that social media influencers not only promote products but can also promote a lifestyle. However, all interviewees expressed concerns with the fact that social media influencers being able to make money quickly and easily through sponsored posts, although GS5 found the profession to be "a cool alternative way to make money". The topic of money was brought up often, demonstrating that interviewees have have an issue surrounding the amount of money social media influencers receive per post, categorizing them in the entertainment industry. GS5 mentioned, "They get paid so much per post like way more than say like a doctor or a teacher. That's a little bit mixed. But then again you also look at actors and I would say it's in the same line of work. You know entertainment." However, if a social media influencer's motivation is to make money, they would be a better fit in a different line of work, GS4 responding: "when the cause is only to make money and it's just people promoting any product, not researching maybe what the brand that they're promoting stands for, then I feel so often that these influencers should maybe have chosen a different job and they should maybe just work in sales."

In the social media influencers defense due to the fact that brands are more than willing to invest money in influencer marketing, it became easier to gain collaborations and earn a

living from them, which may also describe the growing trend of social media influencers to create unreliable social media influencers. SMI1 responded, "it's kind of was the time where you can get collaborations like sand on the ocean and everybody would pay for it, it was really an easy way to get around with taxes and to have a really good life and you can earn a lot of money with not so much effort." However, in terms of sustainability, SMI2 saw social media influencers as a positive change to assist sustainable companies spread the word and get people to act more sustainably.

Interestingly, when asked what their motivation was to become a social media influencer, all three social media influencers responded that they had no intention of becoming social media influencers when they started social media and it happened naturally. SMI3 responded, "I wouldn't say I really was motivated in any way, it just happened." Although all of the social media influencers stated that if you want to inspire people, you should do it without caring about the monetary compensation, however, none of them had the desire to do so in the first place.

4.3 Sponsored posts and trust

The next theme was based on investigating the interviewee's perspective on sponsored posts and their trust in social media influencers. German students were asked how often they encounter sponsored posts when scrolling through their feed. The claims varied from 2 to 20 times a day to every 4th to 30th post. However, GS5 mentioned that the majority of sponsored ads are encountered in stories, and not posts, "I would say stories, for the most part, majority of stories are, you know, sponsored Ads. So, I would say relatively often." This proves that sponsored posts in the feed are not the only issue, however, now sponsored ads are also seen in stories.

To understand how effective sponsored posts are, German students were asked whether they purchased anything through the influence of sponsored posts. Two German students responded to not have purchased anything through the influence of sponsored posts. GS5's reason for not having purchased anything was lack of trust in sponsored posts. The remaining three German students responded to have purchased a product at least once through the influence of sponsored posts. However, GS1 had their own criteria for purchasing products through sponsored posts, "for me, what's important? If I look at ads or if I want to buy something I want to see it as a tangible products" explaining that skincare and hair products are the type of products she would never buy, responding, "They don't do it for me because I don't believe what I see." Although the majority responded that they had purchased

a product through the influence of sponsored posts, they still expressed a certain level of distrust. When asked whether the German students had anything against social media influencers, the majority responded that it depended greatly on how the sponsored post was presented. Most of the interviewees had nothing against social media influencers doing sponsored posts as long as it is clear to users that it is a sponsored post and including the frequency of sponsored posts is kept to a minimum. GS5 mentioned that there needs to be a balance between regular posts and sponsored posts, "I think that the problem becomes for the influencer when they do it too often, because that's how they lose followers".

Next, both sample groups were asked how trustworthy social media influencers are on a scale of 1 to 10. Here, 1 stands for not trustworthy and 10 for very trustworthy. On average, German students rated social media influencers an overall 4 out of 10. Surprisingly, including the social media influencers rated the social media influencers an average of 4 out of 10. This proves social media influencers are not seen in a high regard of trust. GS1 discussed that gender is a factor in trust. If the user can relate to the social media influencer being the same gender, the trust level is higher. The rest of the German students do not trust social media influencers as they receive the perception that social media influencers do not care what is presented to users as long as there is some sort of monetary compensation behind it. GS5, who rated social media influencers the lowest of all interviewees, responded, "I very much do not trust them. it's Entertainment's, it's money, It's an ad. They get paid millions of euros to do that". Even though German students shared their distrust of social media influencers, the majority still purchased a product through the influence of sponsored posts. However, social media influencers understand where the negative perception of social media influencers comes from. SMI1 discusses that there are many untrustworthy influencers whose main purpose is to make money, referring to them as "black sheep"and further on to explain that while the situation is improving, "we're not at that point yet." Including the direct impact is has on young consumers as they do not know any better: "I think this is especially the problem with younger people that don't have so much knowledge and they just get influenced because they get influence and then they get tempted to buy stuff that is just way too expensive and not worth it." SMI3 responded that time is a factor in measuring trust level, explaining, "I think the one thing that is very trustworthy is the amount of time that you spend with that person," the longer a user follows a social media influencer, the greater the trust level becomes as time goes on.

In previous literature, one of the issues was that consumers were unable to differentiate between sponsored content and normal content. All German students responded that they are

able to easily identify sponsored content due to the fact that social media influencers are now required to mention in their posts whether it is sponsored content. GS4 discussed that a key indicator to know whether it is sponsored content is the tone of voice and writing style, responding, "it's recognisable immediately because the tone of voice or the style of writing when somebody even in the caption writes about a sponsored product, it changes completely." SM1 also mentioned how her followers immediately know whether a product or service is being promoted due to the way she presents herself on camera. The issue with sponsored posts, however, is when social media influencers promote their own brands, as that is when it becomes most difficult for users to differentiate discussed by GS1.

To explore what requirements need to be fulfilled when working with a social media influencer, the social media influencers were next asked to discuss how they choose the brands they work with and what requirements need to be met. The responses from all three social media influencers varied. SMI1's main requirement was that she had to be able to identify with the product or service she chooses to promote and agrees with the companies' vision and goals. SMI2 put the emphasis on money and responded "there is also the discussion about money because since I'm not so big and also, I'm breaking the sustainability field, you don't make much money there." SMI3 chooses to promote smaller brands that do not have the resources to invest in social media, including having a conversation with the person behind the brand when possible. As can be seen here, social media influencer requirements are based on individual needs.

4.4 Ethical implications

The next theme revolves around possible ethical implications that social media influencers have on users. All interviewees responded yes to the question of whether they consider the ethical aspects of a product or service being promoted on social media. However, GS5 expressed a high level of distrust of anything she sees on social media responding, "I'm very much in the stance that I don't believe anything." SMI3 admits, "I have not always, um, I'm going to be honest." and continues, "When I started it, it was actually all about money."

All interviewees agreed that social media influencers promote unethical behaviour. However, SMI1 responded that social media influencers cannot be generalised. Many mentioned the issue of social media influencers promoting unrealistic body standards and lifestyles, GS4 responded, "Even somebody like Kylie Jenner, their whole thing or their whole striking thing is being perfect and promoting everything is perfect and flawless and not

having any problems." SMI3 goes on to discuss the issue of social media influencers creating potential insecurities for young users, "For young girls and growing up, you are so insecure, and you have these influencers, which are basically your stars and your celebrities." Many young users perceive what they see on social media as the truth and are unaware that the images may have been manipulated. GS5 commented that as a social media influencer, "*You have to kind of figure out if you care more about money or your own integrity*." Continuing, "this has been the dilemma for our whole existence as humans. You know what side we've always chosen? *We've chosen the money side*."

The next ethical implication raised by the German students was the possibility of spreading false information. GS1 expressed that social media influencers are expected to respond to current issues, and continued "many influencers don't do so and that's where I think it could get heated for them to maybe be unethical." However, GS5 took a different approach to GS1 and responded that social media influencers should not post if they are not informed about the topic as they have a huge influence on their audience, "I think that posting about things that are happening socially, you should only be posting if you are educated, but that goes to every single person." GS3 mentioned the example of the terrorist group ISIS, which used social media to spread misinformation that eventually led to harmful actions. SMI2 mentioned the fact of how social media influencers promote consumerism, as we are already in a global crisis, how it has a great impact on the environment. The profession of being a social media influencer revolves around influencing others to want what they have, as nothing is ever enough.

The two main themes mentioned by interviewees when asked what they considered an ethical product or service were strongly linked to sustainability and products or services needing to be able to prove their claims. GS5 responded, "If they are taking care of the environment, taking care of their employees, and are still able to make a profit, that's great." Interviewees also raised the issue of products or services making false claims, GS4 responded "often products I think make up this whole thing about them being life changing, and even that already, in my opinion, is unethical." However, this is a common trick in advertising that is not unique to social media.

In terms of ethical sponsored posts, the German students defined an ethical sponsored post as one where the individual promoting it clearly stands behind the values of the product or service itself, fits the demographics of the users, the integrity of the individual promoting it, and the post is clearly labelled as sponsored. However, the boundaries that the social media influencers set for themselves when asked were limiting the number of sponsored

posts per week to one, the product or service should match their content, labelling the post as ethically produced if it is an ethical product or service being promoted, and cultivating long term partnerships. None of the social media influencers considered their followers, whereas one of the criteria for the German students was that the content must fit the demographics of the users.

The obstacles faced by social media influencers when attempting to be more ethical were said to be difficult due to the issue of money and a small number of ethical brands to promote. All three social media influencers agreed that it is not always possible to be ethical as a social media influencer full time. The number of ethical brands is limited, resulting in low income. SMI3 responded "if you only support ethical products and brands, you don't earn a lot of money," and further discussed, "I think the barriers are that there are not as many ethical brands out there that you can promote." Another obstacle for social media influencers was that ethical sponsored posts require a lot of research and are therefore time consuming. SMI3 responded, "we are all human and we're all lazy. We don't read all the instructions and we don't dig into website, into their details and everything." Social media influencers are still human at the end of the day and they make mistakes. The fact that not everything is on the internet and companies will not promote any negativity about themselves on their websites can easily put social media influencers at risk of unethical behaviour. However, GS4 mentions that users who grew up with social media were more influenced by social media influencers compared to today (2021), responding, **"**The first people who grew up with that were influenced more strongly by it because we didn't realise from the beginning what Photoshop can do or how some things like nice marketing can influence your perception of influencers themselves."

However, SMI2 and SMI3 addressed companies that should be held accountable when discussing the ethics of social media influencers, with SMI3 responding, "I wish there wouldn't be as many products or as many companies that pay as much money as they do right now."

4.5 Future perspectives and improvements

The next theme revolves around a discussion of future perspectives and improvements that can help social media influencers be more ethical and less harmful to users when it comes to sponsored posts. The majority of German students said that a separate feed just for sponsored posts within social media platforms would help users better differentiate between sponsored content and normal content. The separate feed would allow users to voluntarily

view sponsored content. GS1 responded that "to me personally the line is super blurry right now. It's all in one place. It's like a big teapot where everything comes together." As a user, it can be overwhelming to scroll through social media right now. Further, GS1 expressed her frustration due to the current pandemic where she felt she was being taken advantage of by the constant advertisementing, responding "I feel like I can't get a free minute to just be online." Another improvement raised by the German students was a guideline for sponsored posts and how social media influencers should present themselves when promoting products so that it is clear to all users, as currently the sponsored tag can be easily overlooked. SMI1 agreed "to be honest nobody knows if it's paid advertisement or not." SMI1's recommendation was to include more tagging options, as there is currently only one option. Different options for different types of collaborations, for example, a tag for product promotion with no monetary compensation behind it. Another recommendation that came from GS5 was that social media influencers should back up their claims, "For their best Interest, for their followers and for their reputation, they should back up what they are saying." Discussed by SMI2 was the improvement that social media influencers should do more research on the product or service they are promoting and minimizing campaigns. GS5 pointed out how big of an issue online sponsored posts have become for users, as they can be influenced within minutes: "It's so easy to just click on it and buy what that product is, and a lot of the times we don't even realise we're doing it. it's definitely, *a lot of it is subconscious and that becomes the scary part*". further on mentioning that there needs to be responsibility taken from the individual governments to regulate social media.

5   Limitations

This research paper contains certain limitations creating constraints that could not be addressed in this study. The sample size on the basis of which the findings of the analysis were developed is relatively small, with a total of 8 interviewees. This means that the evaluations are limited in their interpretation as the sample size was not large enough to serve as a representative of a general attitude towards the topics discussed. A larger sample size would assist to create more credible generalizations. Additionally, the language barrier played a role as all interviews were conducted in English, although all interviewees were native German speakers.

6 Conclusion

The research findings in this paper provided interesting insights into the topic of social media influencers when ethical implications were introduced. The findings, demonstrates significant distrust of social media influencers due to the monetary compensation they receive. However, one important aspect should not be ignored: Despite the distrust of social media influencers, German students were still influenced to purchase the product or service. This means that the marketing method is still effective. German students, including social media influencers themselves, perceive social media influencers as unreliable and promoters of unrealistic standards that can negatively affect users' self-perceptions, especially among younger demographics. The monetary compensation that social media influencers receive was also perceived by German students as too high and unfair compared to other professions. However, the social media influencers interviewed found it difficult to behave ethically due to the lack of funding opportunities in this field. There seems to be an apparent gap in knowledge about how money is perceived among social media influencers. Furthermore, it can be observed that social media influencers still prioritize money over ethical behaviour. If money was not a discussion, social media influencers would find an easier time behaving ethically. Interviewees also emphasised that companies should be held responsibile for investing much of their marketing budget in social media influencers. The findings also demonstrates that German students are able to differentiate between normal content and sponsored content, however, the sponsored aspect requiring more visibility and transparency. According to the findings, there are policies in Germany to provide more transparency for sponsored content, however it has not minimised these ethical implications. Overall, German students wishes social media influencers to take more initiative in researching before promoting a product or service.

List of References

AdblockPlus. (2021). Adblock Plus | The world's #1 free ad blocker. Adblockplus.org. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://adblockplus.org/

Bazaarvoice. (2018). Content called out; 47% of consumers fatigues by repetitive influencers. Bazaarvoice. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.bazaarvoice.com/press/content-called-out-47-of-consumers-fatigued-by-repetitive-influencers/.

Berger, J. (2019). Research Shows Micro-influencers Drive Consumer Behavior at Much Higher rates Than Previously Thought. ExpertVoice. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.expertvoice.com/new-research-shows-micro-influencers-drive-consumer-buying-behavior-much-higher-rates-previously-thought/

Carr, C., & Hayes, R. (2015). Social Media: Defining, Developing and Diving. *Atlantic Journal Of Communication, 23*(1), 46-65. https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2015.972282

deMarrais, K., & Lapan, S. (2004). Foundations for Research Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences, (pp. 1-22). *LAWRENCE ERLLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS.*

Evans, N., Phua, J., Lim, J., & Jun, H. (2017). Disclosing Instagram Influencer Advertising: The Effects of Disclosure Language on Advertising Recognition, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intent*. Journal Of Interactive Advertising*, *17*(2), 138-149. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2017.1366885

Facebookbrand. (2021). Our Trademarks. Facebookbrand. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://en.facebookbrand.com/trademarks

Howard, P., & Parks, M. (2012). Social Media and Political Change: Capacity, Constraint and Consequence. Journal Of Communication, 62(2), 359-362. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01626.x

Launchmetrics. (2015). States of Influencer Engagement 2015. Media.launchmetrics.com. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://media.launchmetrics.com/resources/ebook/2015/influencer_report/Influencer_Marketing_Report_2015_en.pdf?utm_campaign=15-wp-soim_en&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=82152386&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_8-6nQBAxT3Cj6IIi7za2Gp9bFMZF4X76oBKgeB7c837BGaxuiDg8VNxww9r-x5mHY5LAvbBURM3FnkPKyQ8ivctgY0ODTCbyiU__-z2HDwXiUqIo&utm_content=82152386&utm_source=hs_automation

Lewis, T. (2015). The FDA just ordered a company to take down Kim Kardashian's Instagram post. Business Insider. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.businessinsider.com/fda-orders-removal-of-kim-kardashian-instagram-2015-8

Mediakix. (n.d.). Influencer Marketing Survey Results: 2019 Industry Benchmarks. Mediakix. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://mediakix.com/influencer-marketing-resources/influencer-marketing-industry-statistics-survey-benchmarks/

Johnson, J. (2021). Internet users in the world 2021. Statista. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide

Kaushik, R. (2012). Impact of Social Media on Marketing. ljcem.org. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://ijcem.org/papers032012/ijcem_032012_18.pdf

Marwick, A., & boyd, d. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately; Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Meida & Society, 13*(1), 114-133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313

Royal Society of Public Health. (2017). Status of Mind: Social media and young people's mental health. Rsph.org.uk. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.rsph.org.uk/static/uploaded/d125b27c-0b62-41c5-a2c0155a8887cd01.pdf

Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as Qualitative Research (3rd ed.). *Teachers College Press*.

Statista Research Department. (2021). Number of adblock users worldwide from 2013 to 2019. Statista. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/435252/adblock-users-worldwide/

TapInfluence. (2015). Influencer Marketing. TapInfluence. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.tapinfluence.com/blog-what-is-influencer-marketing/

Tankovska, H. (2021). Number of social media users 2025. Statista. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/.

Tankovska, H. (2021). Number of monthly active Instagram users from January 2013 to June 2018. Statista. Retrieved 13 June 2021, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/

Tuten, T. (2021). Social Media Marketing (4th ed., p.19). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Appendix A   List of Interview Questions

A.1 Interview Questions asked to German Students

1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself, where are you from and what is your occupation?

2. Are you currently on any social media platforms? If yes, which ones?

3. How long have you been on social media for?

4. Could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

5. Are you currently following any social media influencers with more than 10 000 followers?

6. What is your definition of a social media influencer?

7. How do you decide on the social media influencers you follow?

8. What do you think of social media influencers as a profession?

9. On average how often do you see sponsored posts when you are scrolling through your feed?

10. Have you ever bought anything through the influence of sponsored posts? If yes, what?

11. Do you have anything against social media influencers doing sponsored posts? Please comment on your answer.

12. On a scale of 1-10 how trustworthy are social media influencers? Please comment on your answer.

13. Are you able to differentiate between normal content and sponsored content seen on social media? If yes, what are the key indicators?

14. Do you think influencers promote unethical behaviour? If yes, how? If no, why?

15. Do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you see being promoted on social media?

16. What do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

17. What do you define as an ethical sponsored post?

18. What is something you would change or could be improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored posts?

19. Are there any other aspects that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

A.2 Interview Questions asked to Social Media Influencers

1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself, where are you from and what is your occupation?

2. What is your highest academic qualification?

3. Which social media platforms are you on?

4. How long have you been on social media for?

5. How long have you been a social media influencer for?

6. What is your definition of a social media influencer?

7. What has motivated you to become a social media influencer?

8. How do you view social media influencers as a profession?

9. Could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

10. On a scale of 1 – 10 how trustworthy are social media influencers? Please comment on your answer.

11. How dou choose the brands you decide to work with? What are some of your requirements?

12. Do you agree that influencers promote unethical behaviour? If yes, how? If no, why?

13. Do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you promote?

14. What do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

15. What boundaries do you set for yourself in terms of ethical sponsored posts?

16. Are you always fully aware of all the apsects of a product or service you choose to promote?

17. Is it always possible to ethical when you are doing sponsored posts? If no, what kind of barriers do you face?

18. Do you collaborate with other social media influencers?

19. Is there something you wish could be done differently or improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored posts?

20. Are there any other aspects that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

Appendix B Transcript of Interviews

B.1 Transcript of German Student 1

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 10th of May 2021

Time: 16:00 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:01] Interviewer: Okay, could you please briefly introduce yourself? Where are you from and what's your occupation?

[00:00:09] German Student 1: Hi, I am from Germany. I grew up in Hohenroth in Bavaria and I'm 24 years old and I'm currently still a student within the IB programme at ESB.

[00:00:31] Interviewer: And are you currently on any social media platform? If yes, which ones?

[00:00:35] German student 1: Yes, I use LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook daily, I would say. Other than that, I do not use TikTok. That's pretty much it, I think. Anything else. I'm maybe just logged in, but don't really use it. WhatsApp is social media too, I guess. So also, WhatsApp.

[00:01:02] Interviewer: And how long have you been on social media for?

[00:01:06] German student 1: Facebook ever since it was founded, so I used that platform since I'm 13 or 12 and then Instagram and WhatsApp and Instagram and WhatsApp since I'm I would say fifteen or sixteen. Then LinkedIn, only since I started as a student because I thought it's important to do business, so that would be since 2018.

[00:01:42] Interviewer: Could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

[00:01:51] German Student 1: According to my phone, which is a pop up that I get every day, it's around four and a half hours. It depends on my daily tasks though. If I work a lot I don't have as much time, but if I have a lot of free time or it's covid times, I do have more hours, so it ranges between 4 to 6 hours.

[00:02:13] Interviewer: Alright, and are you currently following any social media influencers with more than 10,000 followers?

[00:02:21] German Student 1: Yes, I follow… Okay, that's kind of tough to remember. I follow a couple which are all active in the surfing sports because I like to surf. So, I like to follow influencers. Such as a Leonard Blanchard really big surfers that I can watch surf because it's nice to do so specifically because I'm not able to live by the ocean right now, but other than that which is not really related to my hobbies and just really about products and so on and so forth. I do follow a couple others that are just more into lifestyle, couple from Germany, a couple from the US, mainly all in English cause I like it better if it's an international setting. So, in total maybe 30 or 40 influencers.

[00:03:17] Interviewer: Alright, and what is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:03:21] German student 1: Um, I would say it is someone who follows the ongoing trends and communicates important ongoing events or also let's say, clothing trends or just topics that are hot topics. Topics that are important to our younger generations. Because I believe that only younger people use social media platforms daily. Okay, well there are older ones, but for us ranging between 20 to 30 years old, I would say that influencers are usually tackling topics that are important for that age group. So, for me that would be finding someone you want to grow old with, getting married, getting pregnant one day and then having a great career. Travelling is a lot of these things that are relevant to our age group, so I think that's what their main task is to communicate these topics.

[00:04:19] Interviewer: How do you decide on the social media influencers you follow?

[00:04:25] German student 1: I would look for something that I connect with. So, as I said, for instance, hobbies such as surfing, hiking, travelling, dancing. So, I like to follow athletes or also more creative people that do acting, or they sing. Or yeah, they travel and

like to draw or putting videos together because I like to see what I would personally want to do as well, which I can't at the moment. For instance, that's when I spend the most time to be impressed or to get creative in my head watching them. So that's the content I look for.

[00:05:10] Interviewer: Alright, and what do you think of social media influences as a profession?

[00:05:17] German student 1: Um, I think it's difficult because to me having it having something as a profession is always... Yeah, it has to go hand in hand with you wanting to make profit. On the one hand, on the other hand, you want to be authentic so its authenticity, I think is key on social media platforms. That's how you connect with people. That's how you get followers. And I think both of it can be really tough at times because a lot of people maybe unfollow influencers if there's too much advertisement. If it's too much about profit and I want to make money and you have the discount code and follow me. And you know, go on this link and then you can get 10% off to buy clothes or to go travel. It can be nice, but too much of it I think can be difficult. So, I think a fine line between promoting stuff and working with brands, but also having a personal attachment, maybe discussing difficult topics or talking about issues can be good for influencers to connect with their audience and also make sure that they feel like they are all in the same boat and that influencers are not above their audience. If that makes sense.

[00:06:28] Interviewer: Yeah. On average, how often do you see sponsored posts when you're scrolling through your feed?

[00:06:35] German student 1: On average, I think every time I open Instagram, for instance, if I use that platform which is my main go to, I would say every time I open it, I see at least 20 Ads that are either popping up immediately because of my feed and they are connected to the profiles. Or they even recommend me to go on it or it's directly in the stories. So, most of the time it's if I scroll through the stories, I see at least 10 to 20 ads.

[00:07:06] Interviewer: Alright, and have you ever bought anything through the influence of sponsored post? If yes, what?

[00:07:12] German student 1: I think let me think yes, jewellery. That was the only thing I kind of thought. So, for me, what's important? If I look at ads or if I want to buy something I want to see it as a tangible product. That means that I want to make sure it's really, you know good enough for me to buy it because I can't see it in real life. So, products such as skin care products or hair products, they don't do it for me because I don't believe what I see. But if it's jewellery or clothes yes however clothes are also tough because everyone has a different size, so jewellery is kind of like a one size thing and that's what I bought. A brand that was the Hawaiian brand. Let me look it up if you want to know. I don't remember what they're called. Purelei, it's like a really big German brand and I found it through Instagram for sure. Yeah.

[00:08:10] Interviewer: Alright.

[00:08:11] German student 1: Another family member was kind of triggered to maybe consider buying from new in fashion if you know them. They're from Berlin, but they're kind of more International now and they're into sustainable shopping, sustainable product, sustainable manufacturing. And there's one influencer who wears it all the time. And I thought of getting that, yeah.

[00:08:30] Interviewer: Alright, and do you have anything against social media influencers doing sponsored post? Please comment on your answer.

[00:08:37] German student 1: Yeah, well, I think I would consider myself being a more critical Instagram user or social media user. I would say I'm not easily impressed. I'm also not easily convinced I have to go through it 10,000 times but at the same time I'm known to like to unfollow all the time. I do like to keep watching it, so yeah, that's kind of. I don't know. Kind of yeah, tough thing for me. I'm like torn in between. I like it. I also hate it. So, it depends on my mood, for sure.

[00:09:13] Interviewer: On a scale of 1 to 10, how trustworthy are social media influencers? And please comment on your answer.

[00:09:23] German Student 1: Um, I would say... Because I only follow female influencers too, I do have an easier time connecting with them. So, I would say they are more

trustworthy because they understand the topics that are important to females more, so I would say maybe a 7 However male influencers to me, I don't know. I don't trust them to promote me products that I can wear that they don't or whatever else. So that's when I think I'm all biased when it comes to that, but yeah, I would say a 6 to 7.

For topics that are easily relatable, such as you know if someone is pregnant for nine months and takes you along to like really understand that, let's take that as an example. I would trust it. However, if it's more of like a general thing saying, yeah, you can travel to South America, but she's never been to South America, then I don't. So that's it. Depends on the person. So that's where I would say it's more a middle number.

[00:10:28] Interviewer: Okay, and are you able to differentiate between normal content and sponsored content seen on social media? If yes, what are the key indicators?

[00:10:38] German student 1: Yes, because whenever or, at least for the influencers I've seen, whenever it is sponsored, they link it with a little remark that says this is advertised or in German "Werbung" if it's a German influencer or they also put it in their description below, and then I see oh this is an ad and this is nothing that they actually post like this. Sometimes though, it can get tricky if influencers have their own brands, which happens more often, I think when they built their own company, their own brand, their own clothing line and they don't really market because it's just them. And that's when it's hard to differentiate.

[00:11:21] Interviewer: Okay, and do you think influences promote unethical behaviour?

[00:11:27] German student 1: Um, I think it's that's a tough question because I have not really followed anyone where there was a big outburst afterwards, but it could get unethical if there are topics that are maybe brought up, but in the wrong context and that the audience can feel, yeah, left out or discriminated and I think the entire movement last year with Black Lives Matter. I felt like was a really tough topic where I could see that many influencers. Yeah, got into just discussions online. Also, with their comments and so on and so forth when they weren't able to really tackle issues in the public eye that were relevant, but they maybe weren't relevant to them or whatever. They thought you know they were privileged to like not bring it up and so on and so forth. I think that the audience in general really expects every influencer to respond to ongoing topics and difficulties and

many influencers don't do so and that's where I think it could get heated for them to maybe be unethical or also just don't self-reflect really and don't really promote values that are important to the audience.

[00:12:46] Interviewer: And do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you seen being promoted on social media?

[00:12:55] German student 1: Um, yes. For instance, with the new in fashion line, I would say that's a very transparent brand because they show that it's sustainable and how they really want to make sure that their company is not hierarchical and that everyone is included, and that the customer feels elevated and all of these points. It depends on the brand though. With other ones I would say it can get tough. Or it's not as transparent, but from my personal opinion I would say so yes, at least for now the trend is going more and more and towards the direction of customers wanting to see you know the key indicators of the product that they buy and that influencers clearly have to mark them too because it's like an expectation.

[00:13:46] Interviewer: Alright, and what do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:13:52] German student 1: I would consider an ethical product to clearly show me every single step along the manufacturing process and distribution process until it gets delivered to my doorstep, pretty much. So whatever product it is. I believe for me as a customer it's important to see that the work that was put in was ethical, so for instance no child Labour, that the manufacturing processes were sustainable, that the company promotes values that are important to me, such as making sure that diversity is given that the product line is not only tackling one specific target group. I like it to be more broad and really having this inclusivity aspect that is also promoted in their feed because the number one thing I would do when I find a brand online or that is promoted to me through an influencer is to click on their feed and to check it out. And I want to see that you know, they make sure that values are promoted that are important to protect certain groups or also as society to promote inclusivity and unity. And that's what I would look at.

[00:15:04] Interviewer: What do you define as an ethical sponsored post?

[00:15:10] German student 1: As an ethical sponsored post, I would say, um, that the person who sponsors it or who promotes it clearly stands for these values themselves. Let's say you take a product such as a T shirt or pants or whatever is being promoted as sustainable. I wouldn't believe it if the person who promotes it is actually, I don't know eating junk food every day and doesn't really care about any of the things important to the product itself or to the company that is producing their products. So, I would say this has to go hand in hand and it has to clearly be communicated and indicated in the post. If that's a story, if that's just a photo with the description. Yeah, just seeing that this goes hand in hand. I have an example. For instance, there is a girl called or her name is Jana and she for instance I think branded or she connected with new in fashion that she is sustainable, and she really cares about that aspect, and she wants to have a clothing line with them. So, she developed one that is her own one within the company and she also has stories everyday where she shows that she's trying to reduce weight. She's trying to really make sure that she only uses these products or Ingredients or whatever it is that are sustainable in her private life and that to me shows that it's true and honest and that the product is ethically promoted.

[00:16:48] Interviewer: And what is something you would change or could be improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored post?

[00:16:56] German student 1: Um, I think it would be nice to have an extra point in any social media platform, if that's LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook where there are only advertised or promoted posts and there's a feed that you can find that is only about products that you can buy and so on and so forth where all the influencers can also hop on and show the product. But then there's also one certain platform within the platform where there is only a normal feed, let's say a feed where you can just exchange information, talk about certain topics, maybe just see normal photos and share life events instead of combining both, because to me personally the line is super blurry right now. It's all in one place. It's like a big teapot where everything comes together, and it can be super overwhelming for the audience or for me as a user to be on the platform and just scroll through it and see everything at once. Stuff to be promoted, stuff not promoted and it's tough also for me to then post something and feel like I used the platform in the right way because I'm not promoting anything. I'm not an influencer so it would be nice to have two separate areas if that makes sense.

[00:18:26] Interviewer: Are there any other aspect that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

[00:18:35] German student 1: Um, as for now, I don't really think that any other aspect has to be covered. I would just generally say that I think given Covid, and given our ongoing times relating it to 2020-2021, things are clearly changing compared to the past, because just from observation and my personal usage, I spend way more time on social media platforms and on my phone because I can't go out as much and I feel like I'm being taken advantage of because people know that many people are using so much time online and I feel like I can't get a free minute to just be online and it's all about, you know, trying to connect that way because you can't go to the store and click and collect right now in shopping stores are only possible if you have a negative covid test so it's easier to get everything online and that moving forward I could see could be something that has an impact on users to either leave the platforms or just unfollow because it can be too much. So I think really what we said before with this. These two areas that could be important. I think that's a necessary step. If Covid is a longer period than we think, yeah.

[00:19:55] Interviewer: Alright, thank you so much for your answers and participation.

B.2 Transcript of German Student 2

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 12th of May 2021

Time: 18:30 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:00] Interviewer: Could you please briefly introduce yourself? Where are you from and what is your occupation?

[00:00:08] German student 2: So, I'm XX, 23 years old. I'm a student in Masters in renewable energies.

[00:00:17] Interviewer: Alright, and are you currently on any social media platforms? If yes, which ones?

[00:00:24] German student 2: Yes, I am on Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat. I think that's it. WhatsApp but WhatsApp is not social media I guess.

[00:00:34] Interviewer: And how long have you been on social media for?

[00:00:39] German student 2: That's a very good question. I think the first social media was when I was 14, so 6-7 years.

[00:00:48] Interviewer: Could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

[00:00:57] German student 2: Honest answer is between one and two hours a day. Something like this one and a half hours to one hour.

[00:01:04] Interviewer: Are you currently following any social media influencers with more than 10,000 followers?

[00:01:11] German student 2: Yes, I am.

[00:01:13] Interviewer: What is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:01:17] German student 2: Someone with a lot of followers. Who tries to do content for his followers and maybe promote some products as well?

[00:01:30] Interviewer: Alright, and how do you decide on the social media influencers you follow?

[00:01:39] German student 2: I try not to follow someone who is a sell-out. So, who's promoting products every day and is super annoying about it and nothing with like lifestyle or fashion. I don't know. Maybe if they're funny I like good memes, so I follow funny people.

[00:02:01] Interviewer: What do you think of social media influencers as a profession?

[00:02:07] German student 2: That is super hard. Like at one, sometimes I think it's a very underrated job, so there's a lot of like psychological stress to always look good and to do good pictures and provide content and do it like on a daily basis, so you don't have like weekends and the last time I had this conversation with my flat mates. And it's not like you can go out drinking on a Saturday. Get completely wasted lying somewhere in the streets if you are just a normal person like us. Yeah, so you know your life is always on camera, so that could be pretty stressful, but apart from that I think a lot of people earn easy and good money.

[00:02:49] Interviewer: Alright, and on average, how often do you see sponsored posts when you are scrolling through your feed?

[00:02:57] German student 2: Actually, I don't follow them that much people that advertise stuff. Maybe like every 30th post or something.

[00:03:17] Interviewer: And have you ever bought anything through the influence of sponsored post?

[00:03:27] German student 2: Maybe one time, yes.

[00:03:31] Interviewer: What did you buy?

[00:03:33] German student 2: I think it was a tee shirt actually. Like very so, only one time. It was a tee shirt, I think yes.

[00:03:42] Interviewer: Okay, and do you have anything against social media influencers doing sponsored post? Please comment on your answer.

[00:03:51] German student 2: In general, no, just if it's really… If I have the feeling that they don't stand behind their product. So if it's just a sell out and they just want to do it to get quick money and trick their followers into something they're not… They would normally not be willing to buy or if it's something with gambling. Or yeah, especially if the followers are 12 or between 12 and 17 years old, could be pretty difficult.

[00:04:26] Interviewer: Alright, and on a scale of 1 to 10, how trustworthy would you say social media influencers are? And please comment on your answer.

[00:04:37] German student 2: On average, I would say… it always depends. I would say a solid 4 out of 10. I often get the feeling that they just like as I said, just want to sell products and don't really care about where they come from and don't use them in their daily life. So yeah.

[00:05:10] Interviewer: Okay, and are you able to differentiate between normal content and sponsored content seen on social media? If yes, what are the key indicators?

[00:05:25] German student 2: Normally yes, because since the people I follow don't do that much advertising. It's really obvious if they just hold a product right Infront of the camera and most of the time, good influencers do some kind of advertisement banner or somewhere in the picture or do it in the description of the post creation.

[00:05:53] Interviewer: And do you think influencers promote unethical behaviour?

[00:05:59] German student 2: Not always, but sometimes I would say yes.

[00:06:03] Interviewer: How?

[00:06:03] German student 2: For example, if you have some beauty standards, you really want to pursue or the product says, okay, we got that and that beauty standard, which needs to be promoted, but it's not corresponding to current time or current body standards. It's just the opinion of 1 brand, so that's not really ethical. I would say.

[00:06:27] Interviewer: Do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you see being promoted on social media?

[00:06:35] German student 2: I would say if I'm not willing to buy it, yes. If I consider buying it then less.

[00:06:45] Interviewer: What do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:06:51] German student 2: You can do promotion for donating money. That could be an ethical thing if the organisation you are donating the money is a good one. It could be ethical products, I don't know. Shampoo can be an ethical product as well, so pretty much every product if It's a, yeah, it's just not a sell out, I would say.

[00:07:22] Interviewer: What do you define as an ethical sponsored post?

[00:07:27] German student 2: Ethical sponsored post? That is a good question. It should be fitting to current standards of living and considering the people who read the tweet or who read the posts. So, if you do advertisement for gin or gambling or a Rolex and your followers are between 12 and 17 years old, that would be pretty bad. It should be clearly indicated it's an advertisement and should fit the demographics of the follower.

[00:08:04] Interviewer: What is something you would change or could be improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored posts?

[00:08:13] German student 2: When I think of sponsored posts I always think about Instagram, so maybe there could be a highlight or a different frame for the posts that you directly see that it's a sponsored post? Because it's the best way of marketing if you just do

some concealed advertisement. So that you don't really realise that it's a sponsored post, but you really have to look for it.

Maybe also some guidelines that sponsored post has to look in a kind of way that you see, okay, this is a company standing behind it. Maybe also the profit margin of the influencer.

[00:09:10] Interviewer: Are there any other aspect that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

[00:09:21] German student 2: Nothing more to add actually.

[00:09:33] Interviewer: Thank you for your answers.

[00:09:37] German student 2: You're welcome.

B.3 Transcript of German Student 3

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 12th of May 2021

Time: 18:00 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:01] Interviewer: Could you please briefly introduce yourself, where are you from and what is your occupation?

[00:00:08] German student 3: I'm XX, I'm from Rosenheim in Germany and I'm a student and I'm studying distributed energy systems and energy efficiency in Reutlingen.

[00:00:19] Interviewer: Are you currently on any social media platforms? If yes, which ones?

[00:00:26] German student 3: Yes, of course. I'm on Instagram. I'm on Tinder. I guess that is kind of social media. I'm on Facebook, and yeah, messengers, I'm not sure if that's a part of it.

[00:00:43] Interviewer: And how long have you been on social media for?

[00:00:48] German student 3: Since I'm 13 maybe, so like 13-14 years.

[00:00:55] Interviewer: Okay, and could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

[00:01:02] German student 3: One hour.

[00:01:04] Interviewer: And are you currently following any social media influencers with more than 10,000 followers?

[00:01:10] German student 3: Yes.

[00:01:12] Interviewer: And what is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:01:19] German student 3: Somebody who actively tries to influence the followers buy the stuff they're posting. So, like they have the intention.

[00:01:28] Interviewer: Okay, how do you decide on the social media influencers you follow?

[00:01:35] German student 3: If they post stuff that's interesting for me, I follow them, or if I know them personally.

[00:01:41] Interviewer: Alright, and what do you think of social media influencers as a profession?

[00:01:49] German student 3: Yeah, I mean it's like a marketing job basically. It's a very basic marketing job in the end. So yeah, if people want to do that, they can do it. I would hate it.

[00:02:10] Interviewer: On average, how? How often do you see sponsored posts when you're scrolling through your feed?

[00:02:10] German student 3: On Instagram a lot actually. So, when I go from story to story like after two stories, there's one advertisement thing like sponsored, and posts on every 4th or 5th post, maybe, like a lot. It got more.

[00:02:39] Interviewer: And have you ever bought anything through the influence of sponsor posts?

[00:02:42] German student 3: No.

[00:02:46] Interviewer: Do you have anything against social media influencers doing sponsored post? Please comment on your answer.

[00:02:55] German student 3: I have nothing against it as long as they market like as long as they mark it. As long as they say, this is advertisement. I got paid for it then it's totally fine.

[00:03:04] Interviewer: Okay, and on a scale of 1 to 10. How trustworthy are social media influencers? And please comment on your answer.

[00:03:18] German student 3: I would take 5 because it's the middle. Because I think on one hand, yeah you can trust them when they are big influencers because they have a lot of followers and they don't want to mess it up, you know? And on the other side everybody can post everything there and yeah, so it's hard. Very hard to say.

[00:03:43] Interviewer: Are you able to differentiate between normal content and sponsored content seen on social media? If yes, what are the key indicators?

[00:03:54] German student 3: I think so, yes. So, the key indicators are sometimes as we know, it just says sponsored or I think actually maybe they have to write on the text below that it's sponsored, by now I see that sometimes. And when I see a post and there's a person holding a product into the camera or something like this, it's kind of obvious. Okay, he wants to make advertisement for that product.

[00:04:17] Interviewer: Okay, and do you think influencers promote unethical behaviour? If yes, how? If no, why?

[00:04:27] German student 3: Some do, yes, for sure. For example, there's like people from the terrorist ISIS group. They also had like social medias and their spreading information, or misinformation or whatever there. So that's in my eyes, very unethical.

[00:05:28] Interviewer: Alright, and do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you see being promoted on social media?

[00:05:39] German student 3: In general, yes. For example, when there's a product and it's super organic and fair trade and whatever, then I think like yeah, it's nice ethical behaviour that they are showing, and I would like. Then there would be a reason to buy it for me. But,

also to be fair, the products that I have in my advertisement on Instagram, Instagram knows that I'm one of these people who likes sustainability, and they actually make active advertisement with that. That it's like ethically correct. So, in these kinds of posts, yeah, I do, but normal posts, no, I don't think about it. I don't care.

[00:06:56] Interviewer: What do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:07:02] German student 3: If no person or animal has been harmed. If they don't pollute our environment or to do something, you know to make it good again. Yeah, to translate, all the workers get paid in a fair way like fair trade. That's it.

[00:07:28] Interviewer: What do you define as an ethical sponsored post?

[00:07:35] German student 3: Yeah, if they show it to the right target group, not like to children for example like don't show children inappropriate things or something like that. Yeah, then just tell people that it's actually advertisement. And yeah, just don't put fake news on there, you know. Like just put facts on there that you can actually prove. Don't just say something to make it sound super fancy and cool, but it's actually not true. That's very unethical.

[00:08:34] Interviewer: And what is something you would change or could be improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored posts?

[00:08:43] German student 3: I don't have anything in mind because as I said, I'm not sure, but I think Germany it's actually they have to market when they are going to get paid for it, they have to put like a mark. So I think that ix the only thing I don't know what else.

[00:09:08] Interviewer: Okay. Are there any other aspects that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

[00:09:25] German student 3: I don't have anything in mind right now.

[00:09:28] Interviewer: Okay, thank you for your participation.

B.4 Transcript of German Student 4

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 14th of May 2021

Time: 15:00 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:00] Interviewer: Could you please briefly introduce yourself, where are you from and what's your occupation?

[00:00:12] German student 4: My name is XX. I'm from northern Germany and my occupation is I'm a student, but I'm also working in an internship right now in marketing.

[00:00:25] Interviewer: Are you currently on any social media platforms? If yes, which ones?

[00:00:31] German student 4: Yes, I am on many different social media platforms. I'm on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and I think that's it.

[00:00:44] Interviewer: Okay And, how long have you been on social media for?

[00:00:49] German student 4: For roughly. Wait give me one second. Seven years I guess, so I think I first got Instagram when I was 15 So yeah, seven around seven years.

[00:01:03] Interviewer: Alright, and could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

[00:01:10] German student 4: Too many, probably around maybe two to three. Sometimes. Like yeah, I think 2 hours and on average.

[00:01:20] Interviewer: Are you currently following any social media influencers with more than 10,000 followers?

[00:01:27] German student 4: Yes, I do.

[00:01:29] Interviewer: And what is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:01:35] German student 4: Oh, that is a good question. I guess any person that has a certain following, given on either their profession or the way they express themselves via social media and then that allows them to collaborate with brands or companies to promote certain products. And as soon as they start promoting certain products, they become an influencer in my opinion.

[00:02:05] Interviewer: Okay, how do you decide on the social media influencers you follow?

[00:02:12] German student 4: I think it's based on whether I enjoy what they're doing, so either if they are for example artists and I enjoy the art, then I follow them, and if they are YouTubers who I like then I will also follow them. I'm not following them based on for example product or only how they show themselves on social media like not only if the Instagram is pretty but based on what kind of person they are and what they do.

[00:02:48] Interviewer: Okay, and what do you think of social media influencers as a profession?

[00:02:53] German student 4: I have really mixed feelings about that because I think of course, if you have good intentions behind what you're doing. For example, you will promote sustainable products, or you are sometimes even also travel agents as such. Of course, for them it has just become normal to also work on social media and so becoming a social media influencer. It's good in my opinion from that side. But when the cause is only to make money and it's I don't know just people promoting any product, not researching maybe what the brand that they're promoting stands for or whatever, then I feel so often that these influencers should maybe have chosen a different job and they should maybe just work in sales or something.

[00:03:46] Interviewer: Alright, and on average how often do you see sponsored posts when you were scrolling through your feed?

[00:03:53] German student 4: Oh um. That's hard to tell because there's also probably like paid ads on Instagram. Okay, um. I'd say maybe, two to three times a day.

[00:04:14] Interviewer: And have you ever bought anything through the influence of sponsored posts? If yes, what?

[00:04:21] German student 4: I think I actually did. it just arrived today. So, I saw a YouTuber promoting Inc books and for the first time ever I wanted to try it because they had a sponsored post with them and so then I bought it, but I knew the product before, and I knew that it had good reviews. But the influencer then just brought my attention back to the brand that's why I purchased it.

[00:04:51] Interviewer: Okay, and do you have anything against social media influencers doing sponsored post?

[00:04:59] German student 4: Um again, it depends. If you know the brand or you know that the brand works and it's a good brand or the product are working well, are high quality and for example they are promoting let's say ethical values and something like that or they care about resources, then I think it's good. But then again, could also be bad if people again just promote whatever without actually knowing what they're promoting, or if they are also showing it in a way that is false advertising.

[00:05:33] Interviewer: On a scale of 1 to 10 how trustworthy are social media influencers? Please comment on your answer.

[00:05:42] German student 4: I would say five or four, in between. Maybe 4.5 because I think I see more influencers sponsoring posts that I don't think as highly of. Then I see people or influencers promoting products that they actually researched on or that they personally like and so I think overall in the whole world of Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, whatever. I think it's not that many that are really trustworthy.

[00:06:29] Interviewer: Okay, and are you able to differentiate between normal content and sponsored content seen on social media? If yes, what are the key indicators?

[00:06:39] German student 4: I think it's recognisable immediately because the tone of voice or the style of writing when somebody even in the caption writes about a sponsored product, it changes completely. I don't know why it's so recognisable, but when people talk about products and promoting them actively, you realise that really easily from when they just talk about something that they used before. So yeah, I personally recognise it really easily.

[00:07:13] Interviewer: And do you think influencers promote unethical behaviour? If yes, how? If no, why?

[00:07:21] German student 4: I think they do. Not everybody, but many do, because if you have to define ethical behaviour, it's kind of difficult to say okay and in what terms? ethical in terms of purchasing behaviour , ethical in terms of for example sustainability, ethical in terms of just in general, how they promote or they show themselves versus how things really are. And in most of the cases, I think they are not promoting ethical behaviour, especially because Instagram influencers really the really famous one. Even somebody like Kylie Jenner, their whole thing or their whole striking thing is being perfect and promoting everything is perfect and flawless and not having any problems or something like that or having a perfect body without having ever to work for it or without getting surgery. God forbid it's not true, and so that is really unethical in my personal opinion because it gives others a false opinion about themselves and their lives and yeah, so I think it's really unethical for most influencers.

[00:08:53] Interviewer: Alright, and do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you see being promoted on social media?

[00:09:02] German student 4: Yes, I do. For example, I personally decided not to follow people who show themselves as really perfect. Perfect bodies or something like that. I chose to follow influencers who promote the complete opposite. Showing maybe what society would maybe define as flawed bodies or showing something that digs deeper into certain topics or issues in some way. So, I see that, but I also realise when I get a paid ad or something or just advertisement or scroll through the feed which is not people that I just follow then I realise of course that if people have sponsored posts, they are often more unethical.

[00:10:07] Interviewer: What do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:10:12] German student 4: Just the product or service. Um, unethical would mean to me that it promises something that it does not do or does not deliver. Also, if it, for example, claims to be sustainable and it's not, or if it claims that they pay their workers fairly and they do not do that. Or yeah, often products I think make up this whole thing about them being life changing and even that already in my opinion is unethical even though I guess it's normal in advertising.

[00:10:52] Interviewer: What do you define as an ethical sponsored post?

[00:10:58] German student 4: I would define an ethical sponsored post as a post that would really only state what it is. It's not using any green washing, it doesn't use any false promises, it doesn't try to cover up or hide up some not so nice things that may be happening within the company or in general or with life in general. And of course, if a company just wants to promote their service and they're really standing behind what they're doing behind the product. But they keep on repeatedly just promoting the same thing. Then I guess it may also become more trustworthy if there isn't any difference in between one post from a year ago and a post from I don't know, an hour ago.

[00:11:50] Interviewer: And what is something you would change or could be improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored posts?

[00:12:00] German student 4: I feel like there should be more guidelines regarding how they are allowed to present themselves when it's a sponsored post. I mean, of course there was this change that they by law that they have to claim, oh this is a sponsored post, this is paint advertisement, but it often still doesn't come across like that. Or they write it in a story or in a post and make it super small or just write it at the end when you've already like read a lot about it and they already convinced somebody that this product is great and everything. And then at the end you only read, oh, it was a sponsored post.
So, I guess it's important to bring more transparency regarding how this work. These kinds of sponsored posts and like collaborations, but also it would help to have some guidelines

regarding what the limits of products and services are and how our influencers are allowed to present themselves within that.

[00:12:59] Interviewer: Alright, and are there any other aspects that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

[00:13:10] German student 4: In general, I feel that through the whole influencer thing that has risen a couple years ago, the first people who grew up with that were influenced more strongly by it because we didn't realise from the beginning what Photoshop can do or how some things like nice marketing can influence your perception of influencers themselves and so you, for example, follow people who made use of their perfect life to promote a lot of products and you've composed yourself a lot with it. And then you felt like crap and then only a couple years later it changed that people realise hey, people can just make up false appearances on Instagram. They can make up false appearances on product on brands, on companies and so I guess it's good that, that changes, but I feel like it's not changing fast enough so it still more or less unethical the way that the whole scene works, because of course it all is quite superficial and it's all about appearance.

[00:14:24] Interviewer: Alright, thank you.

[00:14:27] German student 4: You're welcome.

B.5 Transcript of German Student 5

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 14th of May 2021

Time: 16:00 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:00] Interviewer: Could you please briefly introduce yourself where are you from and what's your occupation?

[00:00:07] German student 5: My name is XX I'm from Hamburg, Germany and I'm a student.

[00:00:14] Interviewer: Are you currently on any social media platforms? If yes, which ones?

[00:00:19] German student 5: Yes, I'm on. I'm on them all. I'm on Snapchat, Instagram, you know Facebook. You know, bumble. Yeah, all of them.

[00:00:36] Interviewer: How long have you been on social media for?

[00:00:39] German student 5: Probably since I was like in 7th grade. So, I would like probably around I don't know 12. Honestly, probably in 6th grade, so probably 11-12 years.

[00:00:55] Interviewer: And could you please give me an estimation of how many hours you use social media?

[00:01:02] German student 5: Well, I try to limit it, but probably like just social media, right? Not just the phone. Probably like an hour and a half hour. Honestly, probably only like an hour right now because I have 30-minute limits.

[00:01:22] Interviewer: And are you currently following any social media influencers with more than 10,000 followers?

[00:01:28] German student 5: Yeah, I am.

[00:01:29] Interviewer: And what is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:01:38] German student 5: Um social media influencers they are just you know, people who for living post online and they make a lot of money. Making ad posts and they do have a lot of influence on like trends or what's popular at the moment, et cetera. Yeah, it's kind of like the idealised version of someone's life, right? So, it's like them on vacation them like in their bathing suits et cetera.

[00:02:16] Interviewer: And how do you decide on the social media influencers we follow?

[00:02:21] German student 5: I usually, because I watch YouTube, I usually just like follow the ones that I've seen on YouTube, I guess. Other than that, I don't really follow any that I just like randomly happened upon, but you know if their feed is cute. Oh, I follow. I follow this cute little family and because their kids are so cute. I found them on the explore page. I was like "Oh my God, I want these children for myself.", so I guess it also I do follow, you know social media influencers that I find just like on the app that I like their you know their pictures or feeds.

[00:03:09] Interviewer: Alright, and what do you think of social media influencer as a profession?

[00:03:16] German student 5: I think that. You know it's like a cool alternative to way to make money. Um, I'm not one of those people where I think that it's not a job because it is a job and I know that it actually takes a lot of work to gain followers. It takes a lot of work to maintain followers. You know the disproportionate pay that they get, like they get paid so much per post like way more than say like a doctor or a teacher. That's a little bit mixed. But then again you also look at actors and I would say it's in the same line of work. You know entertainment, and we pay actors a lot of money too. So, I don't know. What was the original question?

[00:04:04] Interviewer: What do you think of social media influencers as a profession?

[00:04:08] German student 5: Yeah, um. If people who want to advertise, you know, are willing to pay that much whatever, so be it. Good for the social media person and good for the advertisers because you know it is an effective way of advertising. Right now, I think it is the most effective way of advertising.

[00:04:29] Interviewer: And on average, how often do you see sponsored posts when you're scrolling through your feed?

[00:04:34] German student 5: Wait hold on, I didn't hear that. What did you say?

[00:04:36] Interviewer: On average how often do you see sponsored post when you're scrolling through your feed?

[00:04:42] German student 5: Um, yeah, I would say close to, I would say like for social media influencers what like maybe every other post is a sponsored ad. Maybe you know every few posts. Proportionally I don't follow too many really because I think that my majority of my feed is really like just people I know. I mean, but that's the thing too. It's like the difference between stories and posts, right? Because I would say stories for the most part, majority of stories are, you know, sponsored Ads. So, I would say relatively often.

[00:05:41] Interviewer: Okay, and have you ever bought anything through the influence of sponsored post? If yes, what?

[00:05:49] German student 5: I have not. I know that when I was little, but I would say this. I know when I was little whenever they would advertise a game, I would be downloading that stuff. Now that I've gotten older. You know, I've realised that they're like sponsoring something and I'm like, yeah, it's probably crap anyways. You know, like I'm not. But I think when you're younger you know I mean in the same way when we were watching TV and there would be ads for toys, and you're just like "Mom can I get it?". I think that when you get older you can kind of regulate yourself a little bit more, but not

saying that you it's not effective cause I know a lot of people like my roommate, for instance, who buys stuff from Instagram and what.

[00:06:37] Interviewer: Alright, and do you have anything against social media influencers doing sponsored posts?

[00:06:46] German student 5: No, because they have to make money somehow. And before that they could do, they could do it without saying that it was sponsored. Without saying, hashtag ad, so now it's not a mystery that they are sponsoring something. I think before people were like oh you guys are being dubious; you're saying that you like this product even though you're being sponsored. But nowadays it's so clear that they were being sponsored and you can choose to buy it if you want to. I think that the problem becomes for the influencer when they do it too often, because that's how they lose followers and then got to find a good balance of still having your regular posts but also having the other ones like mixed in between.

[00:07:38] Interviewer: Alright, and on a scale of 1 to 10 how trustworthy are social media influencers?

[00:07:44] German student 5: One. Yeah no, um, no. I very much do not trust them. it's Entertainment's, it's money, It's an ad. They get paid millions of euros to do that. Yeah, no I do not.

[00:08:13] Interviewer: Okay, and are you able to differentiate between normal content sponsored content seen on social media? If yes, what are the key indicators?

[00:08:23] German student 5: Yeah, I mean so there was a law passed where they have to indicate that it's an ad. On YouTube as well. Um, so I think nowadays it's very clear. I think before like literally 3-4 years ago, it was very not clear. You know, they would say, oh look, what I got in the mail, and they would just talk about it. But now you have to be very explicit, or you get in trouble.

[00:08:48] Interviewer: And do you think influencers promote unethical behaviour? If yes, how? If no, why?

[00:08:58] German student 5: I think it very much depends on the influencer but it's also hard for the influencer to have this much power really, you know? And I think that you do when you have a following you have to be conscious of what you're posting and knowing what you're posting. If you're posting stuff about the Israeli Arab War, and you know nothing about it, do not post about it. Because you have a lot of influence, you know. I think that posting about things that are happening socially, you should only be posting if you are educated, but that goes to every single person.

I mean as for promoting something that they don't like or they don't know, that's really up to the individual because I think that it is unethical to be like oh this is my favourite product ever and you never use it. But also, I realise that it's a job, so you really think as the individual like as a social media influencer, you have to kind of figure out if you care more about money or your own integrity.

And as the user you have to realise that this is a gut job. And I think it gets really tricky because you have Kylie Jenner being like, "I love these sugar gummies, they make my hair grow so long". No girl, you have the extensions that's what makes your hair grow long. I think that in that sense it is very unethical because there are a lot of young people. Who are taking all this information and taking it all in as facts, as truth, "Oh, Kylie Jenner says sugar gummies are good for me, I will buy sugar, gummies" or whatever they are called. Sugar Bear, I don't know what they're called, but like I said before, too, when I was younger, I would be buying these games. Oh my gosh they say they love it. I should probably love.

So, to that question, whether it's unethical? I think it gets really tricky because then you also everything for money can be considered unethical like you know so I think it's tricky.

[00:11:44] Interviewer: Do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you see being promoted on social media?

[00:11:58] German student 5: Yeah, I mean yeah. I don't really have a specific instance, but I'm not very. I mean I'm not prone. I'm very much in the stance that I don't believe anything. You know what I mean? Or I don't trust anything.

So, it is always on my mind if this is a product that says like we will cure everything or cure acne 100% like I'm very not trusting because I know marketing. I know advertisement you know what I mean? Like I was in an internship for marketing, I know how they do it. So, I do consider it, maybe just subconscious because I am very aware of the fact that

nothing is as they say it is. But this is like I'm the minority. I think that people see things as truth like advertisement. Marketing as well, as the truth and they just believe it. I mean yeah, but I think it also becomes hard because you don't know what the company is doing. You don't know if they have sweatshops or know enough or do unethical behaviour. So, I think it becomes tricky knowing. Put it that way.

[00:13:33] Interviewer: And what do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:13:39] German student 5: It does, what they say it does. And behind the scenes the triple bottom line, right? So, people, profit and the environment. So, if they are taking care of the environment, taking care of their employees, and are still able to make a profit, that's great. I think that that's what every company should kind of be like in the ideal world. Every company should be trying to do that because in business right now our society is very much for those things, for the environment and for like social aspects. I think if a company were to encompass them. It's better for their product. It's good advertisement. So, I think if a product like in the ideal world. If it's sustainable and like environmentally and you know they source well and they treat their employees well. But it's so hard, you don't know. The thing is, they can say they do, and they don't. So, it's so tricky.

[00:14:59] Interviewer: And what do you define as an ethical sponsored post?

[00:15:04] German student 5: You know, I think if the social media influencers actually have tried it and they actually like it and they actually want to show it to their followers. I think that the integrity of themselves and you know that is ethical behaviour. Because also you have these fans, impressionable fans. Don't, you want to give them something cool? I think if it's just for money that's not very ethical. And also do some information like background research on the product that you are promoting because if this product is like "oh we hate black people", why do you want to be promoting it on your social media? I think that they have the responsibility even if they're being paid millions of euros, to look at it and be like hmm do I want to be associated with this? Okay that is very extreme, but you know what I mean.

[00:16:05] Interviewer: And what is something you would change or could be improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored post?

[00:16:14] German student 5: I mean, what's great now I think is that they are required to say that it's sponsored. I think that maybe there should be a disclaimer. I don't know like it's hard. A disclaimer maybe, saying I like this product. I don't know if they should be doing that, I don't know. Um, let me think about that for a second.

For their best Interest, for their followers and for their reputation, they should back up what they are saying. If they say that they use it every single day. Okay, then you use every single day. You don't need to say that, you know what I mean? I think that they should just be weary of what they're saying in a sense that it might come back to them later, I don't know. Maybe a disclaimer saying this is not the truth. It's just hard because what level are we putting it in? Because you know how with every ad on TV, they have a disclaimer at the end being like this is not like. So, I don't know if we should be requiring that. Because I also don't even know if people are going to be reading that? Especially young people so I think it's very, It's a tough situation. Because you have one hand, people trying to make money. But you also have the other hand, their immense following, their immense influence on people so I think they have to be cautious of that. But then you have the users, and the user should be educated enough to realise, oh maybe this isn't the truth, but then you have the young people that are getting influence, so it's like. I don't know. I don't know how to fix that.

[00:18:25] Interviewer: Alright, are there any other aspect that you think needs to be covered but hasn't been covered with these questions?

[00:18:38] German student 5: I think especially now, because we are all at home and we are forced to be at home it's hard. It's tricky because our lives are all in social media. Our lives are on the computer, so being completely bombarded with ads from social media influencers from the algorithm from everything. It's kind of frying our brains a little bit because we're so like and it's so easy to just click on it and buy what that product is, and a lot of the times we don't even realise we're doing it. it's definitely, a lot of it is subconscious and that becomes the scary part. It becomes the scary part because it becomes like an addiction, you know, and you know it's already a fact that social media is an addiction. It's like we have the same wavelength that happens when people do drugs and it's just as addicting. So, I think that people are taking advantage of that. I think companies are taking advantage of that. I think social media influencers are taking advantage of that. I think everyone is taking advantage of the user and you know the user are just normal

people. His children too. So, it's like, okay, at what point do we set the boundary there of being, you know? There is some responsibility of I don't know the social media companies, of the brands who are advertising, the social media people who are taking the money to advertise, the government, at what point do we stop taking advantage of just normal humans, normal people. But, also on the flipside, a lot of people say, oh, I like these ads because they know what I want. So, it's tricky, I mean I keep saying it's tricky, but it is tricky because there's so many different aspects of it. There's no clear answer of what we should be doing. You know, we should definitely be more responsible. I think that everyone needs to be responsible on their own part. Social media influencers need to be responsible with what they are advertising because if you never advertise these unethical companies then these unethical companies are not going to be doing well. So, I think there is a sense of responsibility for them to research what they're advertising, and I think that it's in their best interest, especially now it's cancel culture. Do you really want to be associated with the brand? I think that they should be taking responsibility in that aspect. I think that companies, okay companies are always terrible. They always just want to make money. But ideally, they should be taking responsibility of what they're selling to people too. You know that's in the ideal world. I don't know how plausible that is, but then again, like I was saying with the triple bottom line. It's honestly in the best interests of the companies to be promoting social stuff, environmental stuff, because that's what the consumer wants right now, at least on the surface. I think that's the trend right now, is to get companies or to buy from companies that are more sustainable, to buy from companies that treat their employees well. So, I think that's in the best interests of the companies as well to be more ethical. I think for social media too, for the social media companies, like Instagram and what not. Yeah, that there needs to be some responsibility for them because they are taking advantage of people and they're doing it so willingly, like I don't know if you've seen the Netflix documentary, The social dilemma?

[00:22:58] Interviewer: Yeah, I have.

[00:22:59] German student 5: Yeah, so they're playing on, you know, psychology in the subconscious and they're taking advantage of that. Like how is that okay? But it's also a company, so it's like it's hard. You got to find that balance and there needs to be responsibility and you know what they're not going to do it themselves. They're not going to be like you know what, you're right. I do not want to make money, so I think it's also the

countries or the individual government to kind of regulate it more and I think that's in the best interests of their country and in the best interests of their citizens. I don't know if it's in the best interest of the economy though, and I really don't know in that aspect, because it works. It works. Their products are being bought through social media; it works so well actually. So, it's like for the economy, it's kind of good. So, it's like what do you want to emphasise? Do you want to emphasise profit or do you want to emphasise individual people, and you know this has been the dilemma for our whole existence as humans. You know what side we've always chosen? We've chosen the money side. Yeah, and it's sad to see.

I'm an adult, I can make my own decisions. I can be like you know what? They're just doing this for money. This isn't real, but these children who are staying at home on a computer forced to stay at home because of the pandemic. They don't know what's real or not. They are children and I think that for children there is a responsibility that we need to take because they can't make these decisions on their own because they are children. For adults, okay, adults can make their decision if they want to buy this product or not, but I think for kids it's just it's sad to see.

It's a form of like a gambling addiction almost. I mean you see it with like Fortnite, and these games and these loot boxes. But you also see it with them and influencers and in them wanting what they want. So, I think it's hard, especially with TikTok now. I think TikTok is the greatest form of advertising. But the thing about TikTok is they don't necessarily need, they need to say if it's an ad or not, but not really. Because like with certain trends or something, they could just be wearing it and then they might have been paid to wear it. Maybe not. I think that right now it's very unregulated everywhere, in everything because it's new, any social media isn't it. I mean, it's been around for what, say 10-15 years. Okay, but advertising the way we advertise, that's new. So, I think that there needs to be, you know, some background let's put it that way.

[00:26:37] Interviewer: Alright, thank you.

B.6 Transcript of Social Media Influencer 1

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 12th of May 2021

Time: 12:45 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:01] Interviewer: Okay, could you please briefly introduce yourself? Where are you from and what is your occupation?

[00:00:08] Social Media Influencer 1: I am from Germany. Hi, my name is XX, I'm from Germany. I'm 26, almost 27 years old and I'm currently working as a business development manager in a travel start-up based in Hamburg.

[00:00:23] Interviewer: And what is your highest academic qualification?

[00:00:27] Social Media Influencer 1: Bachelor of Arts.

[00:00:28] Interviewer: And which social media platforms are you on?

[00:00:32] Social Media Influencer 1: Yeah, I'm on… I mean my biggest platform is definitely Instagram. But I also have Facebook and I do have a Pinterest account. I assume Club house is as well and I think also Twitter and LinkedIn.

[00:00:47] Interviewer: How long have you been a social media influencer for?

[00:00:51] Social Media Influencer 1: I don't have a specific date, but I remember it was July 2017 when I basically renamed my normal account to TravelBuddyAnna before I just had a random name, and that's when I also started my blog so then bells came together. And yeah, I would say this was when I started becoming a let's call it, I don't like the word influencer, but yeah.

[00:01:23] Interviewer: And what is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:01:27] Social Media Influencer 1: Um, I think yeah, a social media influencer is a person that shares a lot of parts of his or her life in order to… I mean, I always say for me it's inspiring and not influencing because I think influencing has like this negative touch. To inspire other people and to do certain things or to buy certain product or to do it to make other people's life better, but I think every person has his or her own definition. But for me if it's a good influencer, it's a person that inspires other people to have a better life or to make their life more easy or more colourful or better or yeah with a smile on their face.

[00:02:10] Interviewer: What has motivated you to become a social media influencer?

[00:02:16] Social Media Influencer 1: To be honest, it was the fact that I was sick of my friends always asking me for my travel tips and I always would have to send them on WhatsApp. It was like, ok I'm just going to write them down somewhere so every time somebody ask me, I can send them the link of the blog and then because I knew that my friend has been doing that for a long time. So, she was one of the not first ones, but she started in 2015 and she basically got me a bit hooked with it because she told me, like Anna, you have so many amazing pictures. You have so many amazing tips, why don't you share them with the world? So, what inspired me actually was the fact that I travelled a lot and the fact that I do have some secret tips and places to share that I wanted to share with not only my friends but with more people.

[00:03:03] Interviewer: Okay, and how do you view social media influencer as a profession?

[00:03:10] Social Media Influencer 1: Good question, so I think I mean, it can be a profession in terms of like if you do it. I wish I would have more time to do it. The problem is there are two types of influencers. I would say the one type that is just doing it because now you can easily earn money and it's kind of was the time where you can get collaborations like sand on the ocean and everybody would pay for it, it was really an easy way to get around with taxes and to have a really good life and you can earn a lot of money with not so much effort. Then there are the influencers that do the same, but they do it in a

smart way so they use all the knowledge that they gained through all the collaborations and all the knowledge about Instagram, about social media, about what works, what doesn't work in order to either work also as a content creator for other companies or to offer their services to other companies and basically use that knowledge for others through their own online shops or create events and then get commission for getting other influencers to join. I think these are the smart one's that are to be honest just doing it really really smart and they made a business out of it and then there are the ones that quit their studies and don't really think about the future and just do it because this came into their lives. In my opinion this is kind of a bit dangerous. These types of influencers will come the point where this whole influencing thing is not a thing anymore and then they don't have anything. So, I think that's different, you have different types of influencers.

[00:04:49] Interviewer: Okay, and could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

[00:04:56] Social Media Influencer 1: Um, I mean, I have a blocker on Instagram, because otherwise I would spend more. If it's a normal working day, maximum one hour. On the weekends, because if I do have collaborations that I have to shoot or that I have to film or something, it can also be one or two if I do a throwback or if I plan some posts. But on my personal, yeah, maximum one hour on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn together.

[00:05:22] Interviewer: On a scale of 1 to 10 how trustworthy are social media influencers? Please comment on your answer.

[00:05:33] Social Media Influencer 1: Wow, if 10 is like super trustworthy and one is not trustworthy? I would say 4 if not a three, why? Because there are so many, let's call them black sheep among them. But the thing is, I know how the business works, so I know what kind of money people get for things. I know what kind of companies give you a lot of money. I know what kind of commission they also get for selling certain products. Or this whole super influencing brands that are basically selling some product that is worth 4 Euro for 50 or something. They are doing it really smart as it's working, but for me that's something I would never ever promote because I just think that it's Incredible how they are basically Kings of cheating on people, with their business and with their marketing. But I mean, this is what marketing is all about. So, this is kind of like this, but I think there are

just so many influencers that are just doing it for the money and not thinking about the values behind this company, the working condition of the company, they're just doing it because it gives them good money. And I think this is wrong, and I think the majority of influencers that are out there are the ones that are not really thinking about it. It's getting more and more that people are picking the collaborations a bit more specific and actually thinking about it. But we're not at that point yet. So, there are many more not thinking about it.

This is why I always try to delete the people that I see they are just not promoting stuff that I don't think is something they should promote. So, I only follow people that really inspire me and that I can take something out from. But I think this is especially the problem with younger people that don't have so much knowledge and they just get influenced because they get influence and then they get tempted to buy stuff that is just way too expensive and not worth it.

[00:07:56] Interviewer: And how do you choose the brands you decide to work with? What are some of your requirements?

[00:08:04] Social Media Influencer 1: It's not my main job because I just don't have time to do it, so that's why I don't have so many collaborations, but I only choose brands that I can identify with and that have something to do with the content I put on my Blog. Okay, let's put an example I, I mean, my Instagram is all about travelling at the moment. I'm shifting a bit more into that life goals, personal relationships, like tricking your mind and stuff, a bit more into self-development, so I would never do a collaboration with some makeup brands or something because that just not me, I take 2 minutes in the bathroom in the morning, so I don't really care. So, This is why I wouldn't feel good if I promote this. So, I only pick brands that match the content on my blog and then also if I can support what they're doing, so if it's a brand that I know they're having really bad conditions with working and it's just a bad product that are not even vegan friendly or something. And if I don't like the vision of the company, then I didn't do it, so it's mostly to be honest, smaller start-ups that I just get like PR sample from them and I want to support them because I like them and then I just do it for free.

And then of course also hotels, but I would never go into a hotel chain. I would always pick smaller hotels that are like family run businesses because that's what I just prefer when travelling.

[00:09:44] Interviewer: Do you agree that influencers promote unethical behaviour? If yes, how? If no, why?

[00:10:00] Social Media Influencer 1: Um, think it's really, I think you can't put all the influencers in one bag, so some of them are doing that. I'm sure some of them are not. I think the amount of people not doing it is getting bigger and bigger. But in general, yeah, I think that there are definitely a lot that are doing it, but I think it really depends on the influencer and it's really hard to kind of like put them all in one.

[00:10:29] Interviewer: And do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you promote?

[00:10:37] Social Media Influencer 1: Yeah, always. I would never promote something that I don't 100 percent agree with and that I can't identify myself with.

[00:10:45] Interviewer: Okay, and what do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:10:53] Social Media Influencer 1: Um, I consider an ethical product, I think I already mentioned it that, I know that it's a product that comes from the heart. I like the vision. I like the mission. I can support what they're doing, it doesn't like working conditions and all that kind of stuff, It's all good. It doesn't have to be 100% super environmentally friendly, but I just want that it's actually harming the environment at one point, and this is what I consider as an ethical product. Like if it's just, if I can say okay, I have a good feeling when somebody is buying this or booking this and knowing that this tip came from my blog or my Instagram.

[00:11:36] Interviewer: What boundaries do you set for yourself in terms of ethical sponsored post?

[00:11:46] Social Media Influencer 1: For example, for me, I mean it has to fit to my content. It has to be, the payment has to make sense kind of so I would never do… I know, for example, for me a post is worth like 150 to 200 hundred euros for a feed post. And then if you include stories or something yeah, it's about… I will take like 300 or 400 euros. So,

if I let's say get sponsored 3 hotel nights and I know that this average sums up to be the sum of what I usually take, then I calculate it a bit like this so that the work that I put in there and the outcome that I have needs to make sense for me because I know that sometimes it's hard to understand. To be honest all the content production and hosting the stories and all that kind of stuff it takes more time than a lot of people think, because of course it's also like I mean I don't post any picture, right? It needs to fit into my storyline into my style and stuff, so it's not like I just take a random picture and post it. I also have some expectations that I put on myself and all my content so it just needs to make sense for me in terms of the compensation because otherwise I wouldn't do it. But on the other hand, if I for example know that this company is a small start-up that are really doing a lot of hard work into their product and It's a really good thing that they do, and I know that they are really doing it from their heart then I'm fine with spending some hours in producing the content and supporting them if I know that I can make them happy if I do it, and I know that when people then buy it because I inspired them, they are also happy. Then this also is kind of like a good salary for me. If I can make people happy for it or with it.

[00:13:36] Interviewer: Are you always fully aware of all the aspects of a product or service you choose to promote?

[00:13:52] Social Media Influencer 1: I mean define everything. I think there's always something you won't know, but everything that I want to know and that for me is important to know. I always make sure that I know everything about that if I decide to do a collaboration or not.

[00:14:08] Interviewer: Is it always possible to be ethical when you're doing sponsored post? If no, what kind of barriers do you face?

[00:14:21] Social Media Influencer 1: Yeah, to be honest, sometimes it's hard, because sometimes you do have a collaboration and you need to post it, but you're not 100% convinced. I think this is sometimes a bit hard.
I think every influencer solves that issue on his or her own. What I usually do is, let's say for example I have a collaboration with the hotel, and I think okay. From what I saw on TripAdvisor and on Google reviews and on the website, it seems like a really good hotel, but then I was there for two nights and compared to all the other collaborations I had

before, it was definitely not the same. So, people that know me and that have followed me for a longer time will see in the way I do my stories and the amount and the face that I do when I talk about this. They will notice that it's not 100% recommended. Usually, funny what you do is you agree on a certain amount of stories, a certain amount of post and a certain amount of like content pieces. So, let's say if it's a good collaboration and all my everything is matching and stuff. I always post way more. But if it's nothing that I'm 100% convinced of, I just post really the minimum that I have to just to make sure that I'm fulfilling the part of my contract. But then by just using certain wordings and certain things that I do. I know my followers know that it's not 100% recommended.

[00:15:56] Interviewer: Okay, and do you collaborate with other social media influencers?

[00:16:02] Social Media Influencer 1: Yes sometimes. So, for example, this is what I was talking about in the beginning. Some smart influencers are building their own brands and using their reach to sell their own products and using the fact that they also know other influences to sell their product. For example, one of my friends, she has a brand for jewellery and of course I always, you know help her if she needs some support with like whatever or any other person. For example, my other friend, he has a brand for clothing, and I know that at the moment he is having a bad time so I just you know, he sent me some stuff and I just do all the content for him.
So yes, I do, but mostly it's like if they have their own businesses or their own brands, but what I also do is for example if we go on longer trips or something. I just do a collaboration with the hotel together. I did that in Buenos Aires with another Blogger we just did the collaboration together and we split the amount of posts between the two of us and also the stories and this way it worked really well.

[00:16:59] Interviewer: Okay, and is there something you wish could be done differently or improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored post?

[00:17:11] Social Media Influencer 1: Yeah, I think I mean this is an issue that the German government is always trying to solve and what they do now is that you have to tag everything as advertisements. But to be honest nobody knows if it's paid advertisement or not. So, I think what we would actually need is some kind of like a more general way of tagging specific collaboration. So, let's say I have a PR sample, so I get this thing for free,

but I don't get paid. Then I have something that I just bought myself, but I promoted because I like it and then something that I got for free, and I actually get paid money for it. So, I personally do that with my own wordings but there is no general. I know that there's no general wording among the influencers. I think the German government decided something, but to be honest Germany is so small and around the world there are so many other influencers I know that influencers from other countries don't care about tagging something as an advertisement. So I think what needs to be done is a general way, maybe even from Instagram to tag certain collaborations more visibly as okay guys, I'm promoting this tea not because it's absolutely incredible, amazing, I'm promoting it because I get paid for it. Especially for the younger generation as I already mentioned before, they don't have so much knowledge about how all this Instagram thing is working. They won't know if it says like advertising somewhere. But if it's a bit more visible, like people are a bit more aware of it like hey guys, this next post is sponsored, I think this would help just to avoid the fact that people are buying products that are just not good quality, but they are buying them because everybody has them, and because this influencer promoted them, and she promoted them or he because he gets a lot of Commission for it. So, I think in the communication and the presentation and the tagging of advertising, there needs to be a general way.

[00:19:12] Interviewer: Okay, and are there any other aspect that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

[00:19:21] Social Media Influencer 1: No, I think I mean in general it's what actually annoys me, the whole topic is that the wording influencer has such a bad connotation and that there are these… Let's say a bad influencers that are really just, you know, making money with it, and they don't really give a lot about, if somebody is buying it and then having bad experiences, but on the other hand this kind of like also puts a bad picture on all the good influencers that are really doing it because they have a passion and they want to grow their businesses and they're doing it with so much heart and so much effort. That being an influencer is really hard. If you really are a good influencer then you have a very hard time to defend yourself because it's always like Oh yeah, so you, you're a travel influencer, so you know. And this is something that I really don't like.
When I get to know somebody, for example, I almost never tell them or like at one point after few days because I don't like to be to get that stamp of ohh yeah, she's an influencer.

So she's this or that because there are so many stereotypes that are around there in the world which I can understand because there are so many influencers meeting those stereotypes. But then it puts a bad light on all the good ones that can actually inspire your life and make your life better. And by yeah sharing their travel tips by sharing their tips on how they manage their lives, their stress, their relationships, how they cook like all that kind of stuff.

[00:20:56] Interviewer: Okay, that was it. Thank you.

B.7 Transcript of Social Media Influencer 2

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 14th of May 2021

Time: 13:00 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:00] Interviewer: Could you please briefly introduce yourself? Where are you from and what is your occupation?

[00:00:08] Social Media Influencer 2: Yes, so my name is XX. I am 32 years old, and I live close to Hamburg. I used to love live quite a while abroad in Barcelona and also, I studied in New York. But now I've been back living here for the past three years back home where I'm from. And yeah, I work in different… like I'm a freelancer for almost five years, and I work as an influencer like in the sustainability area and like a green influencer you can also say and I'm also a travel vlogger and mainly when you are able to travel, I also take videos of my trips. I publish them on YouTube and then also due to covid I got back to my profession which I was doing before I became a travel Blogger. And yeah, like a digital nomad and everything I've been doing before, I was a social media manager, so I was employed as a social media manager and due to covid I got back to like… Yeah to this working for clients and this is what I've been doing so far.

[00:01:29] Interviewer: Alright, and what is your highest academic qualification?

[00:01:33] Social Media Influencer 2: I have a Bachelor of Arts.

[00:01:35] Interviewer: Okay, and which social media platforms are you on?

[00:01:40] Social Media Influencer 2: I'm on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, my blog. I think that's it.

[00:01:53] Interviewer: Okay, and how long have you been on social media for?

[00:01:58] Social Media Influencer 2: In general, for like forever. So, I started working as a social media manager until 2012 and I guess like couple of years before like so, Facebook was also there when I studied abroad, I guess like 2010 and 2009 or something like that.

[00:02:27] Interviewer: How long have you been a social media influencer for?

[00:02:32] Social Media Influencer 2: Well, I have my blog since 2013 so when like there was not even Instagram. So as soon as Instagram popped up, I went on there, but I didn't really use it as to influence people or to like actually help people with their sustainability or something like this. So that started in more or less in 2015.

[00:02:55] Interviewer: And what is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:03:01] Social Media Influencer 2: Yeah, well, I actually. I don't like the word influencer itself, so that it sounds like an illness or something. But yeah, so I think like what I try is to inspire people more. So, like an inspirer and so I just share what I think could help people. What helped me in the first place, would help me to be a little bit more sustainable or travel tips or something like this. So, what I think, I would like to see from other people or what I think could be important for other people, I share. And yeah, that's like and then people get inspired by it and they do the same. Or they do something similar and it just yeah, this is what I think an influencer is doing. And then like of course there's also the selling part to it. So then in the end, if people like what I'm showing, they are willing to buy or invest in this as well.

[00:04:19] Interviewer: Okay, and what has motivated you to become an influencer?

[00:04:23] Social Media Influencer 2: Yeah, it just happened basically so I have been like just sharing whatever first, like travel tips and now since you cannot travel at all so also other tips and also daily life and funny things and stuff.
And then yeah, at some point there were some companies coming to me and writing like hey, we have this product and when I like the product, I did like the little introduction of the product, or I presented it mainly on Instagram. And then yeah, people bought it, or they did not. I mean habits as well. And then, um, yeah, just basically happened.

[00:05:11] Interviewer: How do you view social media influencers as a profession?

[00:05:16] Social Media Influencer 2: Well, this depends in like which branch you are. In terms of sustainability, I see this positive because there are little companies and start-ups that have like really great products, and they really make a difference. For example, in the fashion industry and then through the influencer, they actually get the exposure they need to be a little bit more successful because otherwise people would not pay attention to them. And yeah, and be like the influencer, what is like the if you say it on the street and you say, you're an influencer, you directly have a bad reputation and people don't want to talk to you anymore. This is just due to like many people they are using just the shift or in the movement that is going on right now and they just promote whatever like they don't even pay attention to the products they support. Huge companies that are really not good for the planet, for example. They also just sell stuff. I mean, they say the product is doing this and this and, in the end, it's not even doing that so. Yeah, so I see it like this and this I know.

[00:06:57] Interviewer: And then my next question is could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

[00:07:05] Social Media Influencer 2: Right now, since I work for clients as a social media manager, I am more offline, I would say because I'm planning on creating stuff, but before like one month before because now I'm with a bigger client I was I don't know like, I do 12 hours like a lot of time because then there are a lot of messages and I'm not even a big one. I just have like almost 11 K, so yeah, it's just a lot of work and creating the content as well. It's just so much.

[00:07:43] Interviewer: Okay, and then on a scale of 1 to 10 how trustworthy are social media influencers? And please comment on your answer.

[00:07:59] Social Media Influencer 2: 3. Yeah, maybe like 3. It really depends on who you follow and what branches. As I said before. But if we take it in general, I think there is a lot of not so trustworthy people. And they are getting more and more. So yeah, that's it.

[00:08:28] Interviewer: How do you choose the brands you decide to work with? What are some of your requirements?

[00:08:36] Social Media Influencer 2: I choose them really wisely, like I also get even if I'm smaller. I get like per day let's say 3 to 8 messages like mails with requests and 80% ideally directly. I don't even reply because it's either like this is also a big thing, I'm talking about on my channels from time to time. It's either rude how they treat you because there are so many influencers and I think companies don't even think, I'll just write this to everyone. They don't even know your name and stuff like this. Then I delete it directly. Then if I like the product like from reading what they're telling me, then I go to the website I check like also another website on the Web what people are saying about it. I dive like really deep into the subjects while I don't know much about it and then yeah, and then if I decide to promote this product. First, I let them send this product to me so I can test it as well. So, this is important and if I really like it, yeah then I promote it also then there is also the discussion about money, because since I'm not so big and also, I'm breaking the sustainability field, you don't make much money there, like it's not like the bigger ones that are promoting just whatever. There it's just you have to. You have to really discuss about every sentence. Sometimes it's very exhausting and yeah, and then I promote it if we come together so it's a whole process and it takes also a lot of time.

[00:10:37] Interviewer: Alright, and do you agree that influencers promote unethical behaviour?

[00:10:43] Social Media Influencer 2: Yeah, for sure.

[00:10:44] Interviewer: How?

[00:10:46] Social Media Influencer 2: So yeah, that definitely which is also why I try for myself to not promote like... there were weeks and months where I was promoting one product per week and there was really a lot for me. So now I'm just like coming down and I said like if I do advertisement then maybe once every two or every three weeks because they're like I don't know. There's a council that do like 3 campaigns per day. This is um, I mean, of course this makes people buy more and make them also think I really need this because they didn't know about this product but then someone told them and then they already needed it, and then they buy it of course. And this yeah, this needs to come like very big consumerism for short and also if then people buy these products and then they don't work for them then they throw them away. Then there's a lot of trash. Also, the

packaging like the sending the mailing and everything is huge. It has a huge impact on the environment. So yeah, definitely.

[00:11:42] Interviewer: Do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you promote?

[00:11:51] Social Media Influencer 2: Yeah, well, as I said before, I really choose first wisely and then I try to also have long term partners which I didn't say before so if I work with the brand I try to like go on a long term contract so then I can also say like go in detail in my stories about this product and why I like it so much and the company and people then build trust and it just over long term, it makes way more sense for the company and for me and for the people as well. But yeah, I try to not do more than advertisement maximum once per week.

[00:12:47] Interviewer: What do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:12:56] Social Media Influencer 2: Umm, an ethical product or service I would say is something that has been sustainably produced in all aspects.

[00:13:32] Interviewer: Okay, and what boundaries do you set for yourself in terms of ethical sponsored post?

[00:13:44] Social Media Influencer 2: All I'm thinking of is like this posting once a week.

[00:13:59] Interviewer: Are you always fully aware of all of the aspects of a product or service you choose to promote?

[00:14:08] Social Media Influencer 2: No, actually I had this before like I was doing so much research and then well, I did not work with them, but I got a request and then. But everyone was working with them and then I didn't want to work with them at some point I don't know, but I could have and then later turns out they are not as clean as they are. So, it was kind of like greenwashing and then in the end, of course I was happy because all the ones that they were working with them um, they kind of got a little **** storm as well. But yeah, I mean it is a lot of investigation and research and this. But you can miss stuff

because not everything is on the Internet and the company for sure they will not tell you if they are greenwashing or if there's something bad about them. I mean, lately I had it that there were a company and they contacted me, and I knew the same thing. I knew that there were people working with them that I'm also friends with now and then I researched and already on the website it was that they have some mineral oils in the product itself. And that they were also producing in China. But it was saying that they are completely sustainable, and they pay a lot of attention to that. And I was like once you think fix this, I'm happy to work with you like this now and everybody was surprised.

[00:16:29] Interviewer: Alright, and is it always possible to be ethical when you are doing sponsored posts? If no, what kind of barriers do you face?

[00:16:46] Social Media Influencer 2: I mean, it is possible you just have to work a lot for that. And then of course you don't make so much money with it because if you are just like if you think Instagram is your job and you're just like profit. But if you just see the profit then you cannot be ethical. I don't think so. I mean you have to be really big, but in my area, unless you hit the 30k, I don't think you can because people will not be into you too much. Um, but me like for myself, I can, but I also have different jobs too. So yeah, you just need like really good long-term partners if you want to.

[00:17:34] Interviewer: Okay, and do you collaborate with other social media influencers?

[00:17:40] Social Media Influencer 2: Yeah, I do. From time to time. I mean maybe not obviously too much. Sometimes I participated in campaigns where we hold like signs and not like the typical Instagram thingy, but not too much because it's bothering me like to see it in my feed all the time. It's annoying, I just choose wisely with whom and also what but yeah, now I lost the question… oh yeah! Behind the cameras I'm already like friends with people as well and I had groups where we were discussing if this partner is good to work with or not and inform the prices and so there is definitely communication.

[00:18:25] Interviewer: And is there something you wish could be done differently or improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored post?

[00:18:35] Social Media Influencer 2: Yeah, I just wish people would do research and not sell every crap. Like, yeah, I mean there's so many. There are so many things that are out there where I'm thinking like why though? So, they should do a lot of more research. And also, yeah, don't do too many campaigns and just calm down a little.

[00:19:05] Interviewer: Are there any other aspects that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

[00:19:18] Social Media Influencer 2: I mean, you're just talking about like influencers all the time, but is there a way to also include the companies? Because they are also a big part in this.

[00:19:32] Interviewer: Yeah, for sure.

[00:19:32] Social Media Influencer 2: So yeah, because I mean if companies would not take influencers and throw out their stuff like this. I mean it's a give and take all the time and it would be better for all so. And the way they're talking to us, of course, because it's just I don't know. Really. Not understandable sometimes.

[00:20:01] Interviewer: Thank you.

B.8 Transcript of Social Media Influencer 3

Interviewee: Anonymous

Interviewer: Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava

Date of Interview: 20th of May 2021

Time: 15:00 Central European Time (CET)

Location of Interview: Online via Zoom

[00:00:00] Interviewer: Could you please briefly introduce yourself, where are you from and what is your occupation?

[00:00:14] Social Media Influencer 3: Yes, of course. So, I'm from Bonn in Germany and I am well, my main job is head of marketing at an exchange organisation. So, I'm also in the travel industry. And we exchange students all over the world. Also, volunteers. And yeah, all kinds of short stay programmes as well. And this is my main job. I do this for 40 hours a week. Yeah, I have a team consisting of three people. And then I also have another job that is mainly my, well, it was my hobby before, but now I also earn some money with it and that is blogging and influencing as you would call it via Instagram. And I also teach social media workshops and give well yeah, give social media workshops for companies and that kind of stuff.

[00:01:24] Interviewer: Alright, and what is your highest academic qualification?

[00:01:28] Social Media Influencer 3: I have a master's degree, a Master of Business Administration. MBA that's mine.

[00:01:35] Interviewer: And which social media platforms are you on?

[00:01:40] Social Media Influencer 3: Um, I am on Instagram, obviously. That's my number one favourite social media. And then I still have Facebook. I need to think about that. Yeah, I do. I still have Facebook, yes but I'm not really using it. Well, I do have a YouTube account, but just for my private use I don't do any videos and I do have a TikTok channel but also just in private. I'm not using it really and that's it. I'm not on Twitter

anymore. I have been, but I'm not anymore. So yeah, I think that's all. LinkedIn maybe, I don't know if you would consider it a social media, but then yeah.

[00:02:26] Interviewer: How long have you been on social media for?

[00:02:33] Social Media Influencer 3: Um, I would say probably 10 years, um. I mean, if you consider Myspace as social media, then actually I have been on it for a longer time. I was an exchange student in 2005, 2006 in the U.S. and Myspace was actually the first social media I ever used, first contact I ever had with social media. Then very shortly after Facebook started and all of my American friends were on Facebook. Whereas my German friends didn't know Facebook at all, and they were all on studiVZ. So roughly I have been using social media about 15 years I would say. Yeah, 15 years.

[00:03:26] Interviewer: And how long would you say you've been a social media influencer for?

[00:03:31] Social Media Influencer 3: Um, well, an influencer. Probably not that long. Maybe like six years, five years, yeah, five years. But I have been on Instagram for a longer time for maybe like eight years.

[00:03:47] Interviewer: Alright, and what is your definition of a social media influencer?

[00:03:54] Social Media Influencer 3: Well to me, um it kind of depends, I think. The definition before like in 2012, 2013, 2014 when Instagram and all that kind of stuff started, and a social media influencer was definitely somebody who had lots of followers and who was very prominent on social media or on Instagram. And then nowadays like today I would say a social media influencer is somebody who doesn't need to have thousands of followers but a good quality of followers. Followers who really do interact and who comment on pictures and on stories and stuff like that. So, a social media influencer is somebody who influences others by showing whatever that may be, may be a product which is obvious, but it can also be a way, a lifestyle, a way of life. I don't know, like vegan nutrition maybe so, um yeah. Somebody who is very in his own niche who's working just with the number of followers maybe.

[00:05:18] Interviewer: Alright, and what has motivated you to become a social media influencer?

[00:05:26] Social Media Influencer 3: Well, I wouldn't say I really was motivated in any way, it just happened. I was on Instagram way before everybody else was. So, the number of followers I have today is a result of the early ages of Instagram. So, in the early ages of Instagram, you could always win followers and they would stick with you. Nowadays this is really hard and probably not even possible for new influencers to start. Well, after a while I realised that a lot of people were actually liking my photos or commenting on them and asking me stuff. I was very popular for Bonn, for the city I live in, for restaurants, cafes and there were people that asked me "okay, I really want to go for brunch, which would be the best restaurant to recommend?" and so I answered them and I told them which was my favourite restaurant and they came back to me and they said oh wow, I was there at the weekend. It was really nice. Thank you so much for your recommendation. And then it started that it motivated me that other people had a benefit from what I gave them like the recommendation I gave them, so that's probably my motivation now to be an influencer. I never really wanted to become one in the first place.

[00:07:07] Interviewer: How do you view social media influencers as a profession?

[00:07:18] Social Media Influencer 3: Well, that's difficult for me because on one hand we have social media influencers like me who don't have a whole lot of followers. I have like 12 K on Instagram. It's not that much of a deal, but who do have people who follow them and who really care about the opinion of my opinion so that's nice and that is something I think is a good thing and it's a good social media influencing. Then there are people on social media that you never really understood why they even got those followers, and some of them may be even bored and you think okay, they do have a lot of followers, but a lot of them are dead followers. They're not really real, and then well I don't agree with them influencing since they, I don't know. They really don't have their own opinion, I think in some ways. They present a product and then the next day they present another product which is maybe even just the same from a different company and that is something I could not agree with, because if you really want to influence then you should influence with things that you really use and that you really care about and not getting the most money.

[00:09:05] Interviewer: Alright, and could you please give me an estimation of how many hours a day you use social media?

[00:09:14] Social Media Influencer 3: Um, about three hours. Two to Three hours.

[00:09:21] Interviewer: And on a scale of 1 to 10 how trustworthy are social media influencers? Please comment on your answer.

[00:09:39] Social Media Influencer 3: Well, it also depends. The big social influencers like the ones, 100K and upward, I wouldn't trust them as much. I think I wouldn't. I would give them maybe like a 4. Then there are others that don't have a whole lot of followers, but they feel more trustworthy. They feel like an 8 or 9 even. But then it doesn't always apply to the followers like there are some influencers out there who I think are very trustworthy, even though they have, I don't know 300K because I have been following them for a long time and they came like from the bottom and I have been watching them for a long time, so I think actually I think the one thing that is very trustworthy is the amount of time that you spend with that person. If you've known a person like a social media person and influencer for a while, like for years, and you have been following them along growing and you know living their life, and you know this person has been promoting products that they are also promoting it now. Then you, well, you know that they're trustworthy and they're worth of your trust so it's not that easy. I think time is a very, very good KPI if you want to make it a factor of trustworthiness.

[00:11:32] Interviewer: Okay, and how do you choose the brands you decide to work with? What are some of your requirements?

[00:11:40] Social Media Influencer 3: For me, I have committed myself to not promoting things like the usual brands. I think you know, the secret Smile or La Lun leggings and I don't know what else there is… oceans apart and all that kind of stuff that is everywhere. I have committed that I don't want to push products that are already out there so much, and I want to work with brands, maybe even small brands who don't have the money to invest in whole social media and advertisement. I think one of the factors why I work with brands is when I speak to them and well I always try to speak with a person behind the brand and I want to know more about it and if they trust me and you know they're like you can try this

product, but you don't have to post about it if you don't like it then it shows me that they don't want to force me into something. So that is also a very big part of my cooperations and of course just the product itself. If there's something I really like, and even if it's not a cooperation, of course I recommend it.

[00:13:28] Interviewer: Okay, and do you agree that influencers promote unethical behaviour? If yes, how?

[00:13:37] Social Media Influencer 3: Yes, yes, I do. I mean, if you just, let's just stay with the example of secret smile which is a bleaching thing for teeth, bleaching material. It does promote beauty surgery or doing something with your body that is in my opinion, not necessary, but I know that there's people out there who do beauty surgeries and all that kind of stuff and that's okay for them. But I think you shouldn't promote. You shouldn't be like you need to have this. You can have it and if you want to have white teeth, then maybe you can use it, but they shouldn't promote it as something you need to have. For young girls and growing up, you are so insecure, and you have these influencers, which are basically your stars and your celebrities, and you follow them, and they shouldn't promote things that are unethical in my opinion.

[00:15:00] Interviewer: Alright, and do you consider the ethical aspects of the product or service you promote?

[00:15:07] Social Media Influencer 3: I have not always, um, I'm going to be honest. When I started it, it was actually all about money. It was like, okay, they're giving me a €200 voucher for their shop, wow. I've never had somebody giving me 200 euro's voucher for clothes. And after time I slowly started learning about ethical fashion brands. I use natural cosmetics only now, but I haven't always and so now yes, I would say I do consider the ethical background in anyway, but I have not always, no.

[00:15:55] Interviewer: Okay, and what do you consider to be an ethical product or service?

[00:16:02] Social Media Influencer 3: Mostly if it has been produced in an ethical way, but also like I mean whatever product or service it is it should be ethical in some way. I know

there are some products out there which just don't happen to be. I don't know. They need plastic because it's just the way it is made, then I can live with it. But if there is a chance that something can actually be better by making it more sustainable maybe, then that should be reconsidered and there was a thought, but I lost it. Well, maybe I get back to it later. I lost it.

[00:16:53] Interviewer: And what boundaries do you set for yourself in terms of ethical sponsored post?

[00:17:03] Social Media Influencer 3: Well, not very obvious I'd say, um, I do add a sentence of saying you know this is produced sustainably, or this is an ethical fashion, or whatever. I do that, but it's not like I always have this sentence that I always add to every ethical cooperation, no.

[00:18:07] Interviewer: Okay. Do you think it's possible to always be ethical when you are doing sponsored posts? If no, what kind of barriers do you face?

[00:18:21] Social Media Influencer 3: Yeah, it's probably not that easy. And actually, I think if you only support ethical products and brands, you don't earn a lot of money. I mean that is something a big fashion influencer doesn't maybe need to care about, but as a small influencer and you want to earn money with that whole social media thing then you of course cannot only post ethical brands. I mean you can, but then you just have to look at the other side and you're going to miss out on other products and other things that you can post. Of course, you're losing money. I mean, we all want to be ethical, of course, and we want to be sustainable, and we want to take care of the climate and the whole society and everything, which is a great thing, but also isn't that good to do your own little things at a time and not trying to save the world? I'm thinking a barrier could be that there are not as many ethical brands out there as non-ethical brands so you just need to look at the whole picture and see if there's a product which is in your eyes not very ethical. You need to reconsider if there is, maybe, they do have a charity that they work with or they have a very local production. There's a brand I work with which is not ethical, but they only produce in one small city in Germany, which makes it for me more sustainable, maybe more worth to promote, although it's not ethical. I think the barriers are that there are not as many ethical brands out there that you can promote maybe.

[00:20:54] Interviewer: Okay, thank you and are you always fully aware of all the aspects of a product or service you choose to promote?

[00:21:02] Social Media Influencer 3: Definitely not. I know about that whole oceans apart dilemma and they never reached out to me and I'm glad about that. I wouldn't have promoted them anyways, but if you think about it, of course we are all human and we're all lazy. We don't read all the instructions and we don't dig into website, into their details and everything. Of course, there's also a lot of things you don't know about. I mean, let's stay with the example of oceans apart. They're not going to promote on their website. By the way, did you know that we don't use ethical material? they are not going to promote that. So of course, it's good to read and to know about background of a product. But let's be honest, you can't know it all, it's not possible, I think.

[00:22:08] Interviewer: Do you collaborate with other social media influencers?

[00:22:15] Social Media Influencer 3: No, not really. I have been collaborating on doing some giveaways some other influencers, but not many actually, no, not really, no.

[00:22:29] Interviewer: Okay, and is there something you wish could be done differently or improved when it comes to social media influencers doing sponsored posts?

[00:22:44] Social Media Influencer 3: Well, I wish there wouldn't be as many products or as many companies that pay as much money as they do right now because some of them are just unreal and well, they are not worth what the influencers are showing, so that's one thing. I don't know, what else would I change? Maybe I would love to have like some institution, like an ethical panel that take a look at Instagram more closely. But then again, I mean how many million users are in there, that's probably a utopia that you can't really do that in real life, but that would be something cool, and you know somebody looking after all the polls and yeah.

[00:23:50] Interviewer: And are there any other aspect that you think needs to be covered that hasn't been covered by these questions?

[00:24:01] Social Media Influencer 3: No, can't think of any.

[00:24:03] Interviewer: Okay, then that was actually it. Thank you.

[00:24:06] Social Media Influencer 3: Thanks.

Declaration of authorship of an academic paper with a partner university

I hereby declare that I have written this paper myself and used no other sources or resources than those indicated, have clearly marked verbatim quotations as such, and clearly indicated the source of all paraphrased references, and have observed the General Study and Examination Regulations of Reutlingen University for bachelor and master programmes, the specific regulations for study and examinations of my study programme, and the Regulations for Ensuring Good Academic Practice of Reutlingen University.

This paper is also being presented, in accordance with the study and examination regulations of the study programme International Business to Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. Furthermore, neither this paper nor any part of this paper is a part of any other material presented for examination at this or any other institution.

Hamburg, 15.6.2021

Sasithorn Jasmine Jalava