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**Who you are: the result of influencers' instagramming –
a qualitative study of how consumers' offline identity is influenced by
influencers on Instagram**

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Abstract:
This study aims to explore how consumers' offline identity is influenced by influencers on Instagram i.e. how influencers on Instagram affect consumers' offline identity creation through consumption. Previous research has focused on influencers on Instagram from a marketing/company perspective, however this research will create an understanding from a consumer perspective. The analysis is based on the result conducted from two focus groups were three different themes were drafted: Regular consumers, the new influencers?, Instagram influence through communication online and offline, and identity creation through influencers on Instagram. Finally, the study indicates that it is the "everyday-influencer" who has the biggest influential power on consumers' offline identity. Consumers identify themselves with the "everyday-influencer" and consume product/services being displayed by them in order to express who they are in their offline life.

Keywords: Identity, Influencer, Instagram, Consumption

Introduction

In today's society, one's appearance is something that is considered highly important. People today are being judged by how they look, and photographs can tell a lot about your personality and lifestyle (Business Insider, 2015). Instagram is one social media platform where you can express your own identity and lifestyle, and be influenced by others, by posting pictures. Instagram can be seen as one of the most fast-growing social media platforms where users share images with each other (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). However, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) argue that the research is very limited regarding reasons behind the usage of Instagram. Instagram has over 800 million users who are sharing, liking and commenting pictures (Instagram, 2018a). If looking at Internet users, Instagram is the second most popular social media platform where 56% of the population use it on a daily basis (iis.se). Moreover, 81% of the Internet users in the age of 16-25 years are using Instagram (iis.se). Instagram is designed for consumers, so they can upload videos and pictures, and also write an associated text in order to share information or make a statement to other people (Tuten & Salomon, 2013). Today, consumers use and spend more time on Instagram than on any other social media platform, which means that it is an important area to do further research on according to Sheldon & Bryant (2016). Hence, from the above one can see that Instagram today is central in most consumers' lives, and therefore one can argue that it is very important to study.

When Instagram has been in the research light before it has been studied in relation to other topics than identity, such as photo sharing pattern (Silva et al, 2013), how Instagram photos with faces get more likes and comments (Bakhshi et al, 2014) and the interaction that occur between customers and brands on Instagram (Erkan 2015). Instagram has also been a central topic studied mostly from a company perspective or marketing perspective, hence on how brands use influencers, and the effects on revenues and buying behaviour that influencers have (Abidin, 2016; De Veirman et al., 2017). From this above, we can see that research on Instagram in relation to identity is limited. There exists limited knowledge about how users on Instagram are using Instagram as a part of their identity creation offline, and thereby are affected by what influencers are posting. Therefore, this research takes on a consumer perspective rather than a company perspective.

Instagram is today a platform where consumers can be informed about different products and services (Instagram, 2018b). The consumption of products and services can be seen as a tool that people further use to express who they are and who they want to be (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Products and services offer something significant beyond their functionality; a way to communicate to others in one's surrounding. Products have the ability to carry and communicate messages with cultural and social meaning (McCracken, 1986). People convey their own self and social belonging to their surrounding by using symbols and messages concealed within consumed products and services (Mortelmans, 2005; Kornberger, 2010). Symbols and meanings associated with products have great importance when it comes to expressing the own sense of self

since people are looking at social and commercial messages in order to make sense of others (McCracken, 1986). One can also be inspired by others that are expressing their lifestyle and identity, to consume a certain product or service. This in order to express one's own lifestyle and a social belonging to a particular group (Mortelmans, 2005) or express social status (Gabriel & Lang 2006; McCracken, 1986).

When looking at the ongoing identity creation of consumers, they are using products and services with a commercial or symbolic message to express their inner self (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). McCracken (1986) argues that the product value includes more than the utilitarian value and the value generated from the scope of use. Consumed products and services function as devices generating meaning and symbols that the consumer uses in order to communicate their own sense of self to the surrounding (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Hence, by consuming products and services consumers shape and convey their identity and lifestyle. Further, it is important to mention that researchers, such as Arnold & Thompson (2005), use the concept of both identity and lifestyle as related aspects. Lifestyle is a concept that may be easier to relate to, and to comprehend, than identity. However, to clarify, this study has the perspective that lifestyle is a result of one's identity. Identity is more explanative for one's personality, but also one's unaware and instinctive actions. The identity is a more nuanced concept than lifestyle that reflects how you are. Therefore, the term identity will mainly be used in this study.

According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), messages about identity, incorporated in products and services, can

be found in marketplaces where they are influencing consumers. Previous research shows that identity creation online within the social media scene has explored platforms such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter, YouTube and so forth (Zhao et al., 2008; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015). Hence, all these researchers have done research on identity creation and expression in an online context. Due to this, this study chooses to focus on the social media platform Instagram specifically instead of other social media platforms since identity is a rather unexplored subject regarding Instagram. However, this study explores the influence and impact occurrence in an online context that transforms to identity creation in an offline context. In order to research this further one can argue that it is important to know the distinction between offline and online identity. One simplified description of the offline identity is how we express consciously or unconsciously who we are, our opinions, cultural and social belonging, and our personality (Turner & Onorato, 1999). Moreover, the offline identity is based on the differences from others; our unique, special, and different combined traits are what constitute our identity (Turner & Onorato, 1999). Meanwhile, online identity is what we choose to present to the social media world and the online actors (Vogel & Rose, 2016).

Social media can be seen as different platforms that create the room for consumers to be influenced by various actors, displaying their lifestyle with products that conveys symbolic meaning with the purpose of mediating an idealistic self. Social media can also be viewed as different platforms where people have interpersonal relationships and are interacting with each other, which further is an important part of social media users everyday life (Frånberg et al., 2012). Consumers today use these various social media platforms to express their own identity and lifestyle, and to take part of others as well. One can argue that this has created new marketing channels where social media platforms are central, i.e. social media influencers. A social media influencer can be defined in various ways but one common definition is: *"people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them"* (De Veirman et al. 2017, p798). To choose a general definition of an influencer may be a disadvantage for this study since people have their own view of what an influencer is. By defining an influencer beforehand, the study perhaps will lose different perspectives of the phenomena. Due to this, an influencer will hereafter be referred to as a person that influences others on social media platforms. Using influencers have been proven to be an efficient way to make an impact on consumers through social media (Forbes, 2017). With the steps of changes in social media, consumers have also changed their behaviour and consumption patterns, and embraced this era of consumption through social media (Parrott et al., 2015). Studies have shown that social media actors have an impact on other users and their consumption patterns; consumers get inspiration from social media actors about products to buy (Instagram, 2018b).

Even if this study takes on a consumer perspective, it is important to shed light on how common it is for companies to use influencers, and how they use influencers in their marketing efforts. The last couple of years influencer marketing has gained a central role in the marketing literature. Over

75% of companies have implemented it in their marketing strategy (Augure, 2015), which proves that it is an essential part of business today. The usage of social media influencers as a marketing channel is spreading worldwide. Through their posts on social media platforms, influencers may affect a large number of people both indirectly and directly (Gladwell, 2000). Directly through their followers, and indirectly via their followers that transfer the message further (Gladwell, 2000). When consumers are transferring a message to others on the Internet is referred to as eWOM, which according to Chu and Kim (2011) is a way for consumers to exchange information within an online context. In the context of Instagram, influencers may transfer a message further to their followers by posting pictures and captions. One can argue that the messages mediated by influencers often are linked to some sort of consumption, e.g. by presenting products or services through collaborations with brands, displaying outfits or hairdos, or posting pictures from a travel destination. In addition, consumers often react, and act, on these commercial messages. According to Instagram's own user survey, 60% of the users said that they discover new products or services through their Instagram, and 75% claimed that they take action after being inspired by a post, such as visiting websites or makes a purchase (Instagram, 2018b). Consumers tend to search for information from other consumers in order to be well informed about products' and services' characteristics and quality (Jolson & Bushman, 1978). However, messages transferred by influencers on Instagram may not only be informative, but may have a social value such as expression of lifestyle and identity. For example, the identity and lifestyle that are exposed in the Instagram

profile; the selected pictures and videos of one's life and lifestyle that one wants to share with the world (Vogel & Rose, 2016). This expression of identity is, as above mentioned, referred to as online identity, i.e. the identity one shows in an online context (Vogel & Rose, 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to increase the understanding of how consumers' offline identity is influenced by influencers on Instagram. The paper investigates the online influence on consumers' offline identity creation through consumption, i.e. how the consumers' offline identity creation, through consumption, is affected by influencers on Instagram. This by looking at consumers' perception of influencers that are mediating symbolic and cultural meanings through exposure of products and services, and how this affects the offline identity creation of the consumer. Furthermore, this study also sheds light on the consequences that follow this impact. There are various aspects that can be taken into consideration when looking at influencer's influence on consumers' identity creation in an offline context. There is a need to capture some of these aspects in order to reach a gradated description of this issue. Due to this, we have constructed three sub-questions, in addition to our main research question. The sub-questions aim to provide a nuanced answer to the main research question. By highlighting identity creation, this study is guided by the following research questions:

"How do influencers on Instagram influence consumers' offline identity?"

- What is an influencer?
- How do consumers communicate about influencers offline and online?
- How does symbolic meaning transfer from an online context to the consumer's offline identity?

Since Instagram is a fast growing social media platform that is used by a lot of consumers there is a need to investigate, from an academic perspective, how this platform and its users have an influence on consumers' offline identity creation. Hence, how the consumer's culture identity concept can be understood in relation to this new era of consumption related to social media. Furthermore, it is of relevance from a practical perspective to investigate what kind of influencer consumers sees as trustworthy and reliable. This can contribute to companies being aware of which kind of influencer to use in their marketing strategy.

In order to answers our research questions and to fulfil the aim, a theoretical framework presents an understanding of influencers on social media, WOM as well as eWOM, and lastly identity and consumption. Following this, the method chapter provides an insight to qualitative research and focus groups. In this research, two focus groups with four participants in each were conducted. After the method, the analysis is presented where the result from the focus groups will be discussed in light of theory. Lastly, a conclusion of the study will be presented together with theoretical/practical implications as well as future research.

Theoretical discussion

This study is focusing on how influencers on Instagram are influencing consumers' offline identity. Hence, how consumers are influenced to consume by influencers on Instagram, in order to create their offline identity. Identity is a very central concept within the marketing literature, and for a long time now researchers have been doing studies where identity is a central subject in combination with consumption (McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Due to this, identity creation will be the main theory that this study focuses on. In addition to identity creation, this study is also focusing on the concept of influencers, and also on how consumers communicate about influencers both online and offline. Hence, the themes that will be further discussed in this section are: using influencers through Instagram, communication and influence both online and offline, and lastly, identity creation online and offline.

Using influencers through Instagram

In previous research has influencers, such as celebrity endorsements, strong leaders and brand advocates been people on social media platforms that are sharing information, ideas and recommendations to other users. Influencers have in general been people doing collaborations with companies who tend to be trusted by others (Kiss & Bichler, 2008). Today, however, it is possible for everyone to take a step into the viral world and become a person that influences others just by being on social media (Kirby & Marsden, 2006; Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Influence marketing is a quite new marketing practice that stems from the influence theory, which mainly is about that a small group of key individuals can influence a large group of people (Woods, 2016). It exists several definitions of the concept influencer, which all are pretty similar. De Veirman et al. (2017, p.798) argues that a social media influencer

can be defined as *«people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them»*. However, an influencer can, according to Keller et al. (2003), be defined as an everyday customer who constantly searches for information and thereafter is sharing information, new ideas and recommendations on their social media platforms. Everyday people as influencers can also be described as social influencers who are affecting consumers' decision (Singh et al., 2012). According to Singh et al. (2012), anyone can be a social influencer and they are defining it as following: "a technique that employs social media (content created by everyday people using highly accessible and scalable technologies such as blogs, (...)) and social influencers (everyday people who have an outsized influence on their peers by virtue of how much content they share online) (..)." (Singh et al. 2012, p. 19).

When it comes to influencers on social media, Instagram is a big platform where the concept of influencer marketing is highly important. It can be argued that Instagram itself with its 800 million users (Instagram, 2018a), is built up in a suitable way for influencer marketing since products can be shared through images and described under the photo (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Communication and Influence both online and offline
Within previous marketing literature has recommendations and influence from others, and how it affects consumers, been discussed as WOM-marketing (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). WOM-marketing can be seen as informal communication people are sharing with others when they experience products and services (Westbrook, 1987). Kiss & Bichler (2008) argues that word-of-mouth communication always has had a challenge since it is hard to observe what is being said when people have an oral conversation. However, the digitalization and emerge of the Web 2.0 have been giving consumers new ways of exchange information with others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), and online conversations are opening up a new word-of-mouth communication where it is easier to do direct observations on online-platforms (Godes & Mayzlin 2004). This new word-of-mouth communication where customers are exchanging information online can be referred as eWOM (Electronic-word-of-mouth) (Chu & Kim, 2011). According to Rafaeli and Raban (2005); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); and Erkan (2015), an eWOM recommendation can be a negative, neutral or a positive statement about a brand's products/services which is posted by a customer on the internet. eWOM is moreover a more public and indirect type of communication and it is important to stress that there is often no relationship between the sender and the receiver (Godes & Mayzlin 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

One advantage of eWOM is that information that consumers obtain from sources that are interpersonal has a stronger effect when it comes to consumers' consumption pattern than the results companies gain from an advertising campaign (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). It is also argued by De Veirman et al., (2017) that information can be even more valuable when a message comes from another consumer if comparing from a classical advertiser. Other's opinions have always been taking into consideration by consumers and social media has made it possible to spread recommendations to a huge amount of consumers since social

media is built up in that way (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Further, eWOM has become an influential information source on Instagram since the whole concept of Instagram is about sharing (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). Instagram was also the first social media platform designed especially for smartphones (Miles, 2014), which makes it very easily accessible for users to share (Thoumungroje, 2014). Moreover, argues Thoumungroje (2014), and Wilcox and Stephen (2013) that opinions who are shared on Instagram can be interpreted to be very important to consumers that are having an Instagram account since seeing what others share is the main point of Instagram.

Identity creation online and offline

Consumer identity research is overall discussing the understanding of how consumers' identity creation process is influenced by cultural and social aspects associated with consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Within the contemporary consumer culture research it is known that the use of consumer products is a central aspect of the concept of identity creation (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988). Belk (1988) argues that the possessions we have, the things that we call ours, can be regarded as an extension of ourselves. Our possessions are what compose us, and we are the sum of these possessions (Belk, 1988). The market-generated products enable the consumer to communicate the self-sense in a nonverbal way; the products may function as an aid to convey one's identity and culture belonging in a material way (McCracken, 1986). However, in today's society it is not only products that are used to express one's lifestyle and identity, services do also have this feature.

One can also argue that where we choose to travel or which hairdresser we go to also can show others our identity and sense of self.

Consumer products can be considered as carriers of meanings and symbolism; the products can be seen as a tool or an instrument to produce meaning to consumers (Mortelmans, 2005). Consumers use the meaning produced in order to communicate the sense of self to others. Gabriel and Lang (2006) explains that consumers, by using symbols and messages included in purchased products, may express themselves and communicate their identity to their surroundings. Consumers may express social differences, personal meanings and attitudes by using consumer goods (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Furthermore, Cherrieri and Murray (2004) argue that the symbolic meaning associated with consumer products is an important aspect in order to understand the consumption patterns on the contemporary marketplace. Consumers buy products and servicers that they identify themselves with. Research shows that consumers convey and determines their social and personal prominences, and also their identity, through revising and convert symbolic meanings in for example: advertisements, brands, retail settings, and products (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Ritson & Elliott, 1999; Holt, 2002; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). These resources, loaded with symbolic meanings, compose the marketplace providing consumers with a platform to obtain and construct both their personal and collective identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The concept of consumer identity creation views the consumers as identity seekers, and the projects to be goal driven (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). However, the process is acknowledged to

involve moments of conflict and doubt, internal inconsistencies, and ambivalence (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Thompson, 1996; Otnes et al., 1997; Mick & Fournier, 1998).

But how does this meaning occur in the first place, and how is it transferred on to the consumer? McCracken (1986) talks about how cultural meaning moves between different locations. McCracken explains that the meaning is drawn from the culturally constituted world and then moves to consumer goods, which further moves from these goods to the individual consumer. The constituted world is described as the world of everyday experiences for the consumer. The world is constituted by the beliefs and assumptions of the consumer's culture, i.e. the culture is the lens, which the consumer sees and interprets the world through (McCracken, 1986). McCracken (1986) explains that it is the culture that constitutes this world, by supplying it with meaning. The consumer goods can be seen as a intermediary between the cultural constituted world and the individual consumer, i.e. the carrier of the cultural meaning that the consumer may use to express the own self (McCracken, 1986). This aligns with Mortelman's (2005) statement of consumer products to be carriers of meaning and symbolism. There are numerous aspects behind the movement of cultural meaning such as advertising, fashion system and consumption rituals; these phenomenons are the instrument aiding the meaning (McCracken, 1986). McCracken (1986) calls this the traditional or usual trajectory, i.e. when the cultural meaning is drawn from the constituted world to the consumer goods, and later to the individual consumer. However, consumer goods, charged with cultural meaning, are also what make up the constituted world. Cultural meaning is what organizes the phenomena world, but also the efforts to manipulate this world (McCracken, 1986). Due to this, consumer goods are both the results of this constituted world, but also what creates the culturally constituted world. According to McCracken (1986), culture can be described as a lens, which the consumer sees and interprets the world through, and one aspect that may have its impact on this is social groups, and the social belonging that the consumer identifies herself or himself with. Social groups may play its part when people are constructing their identity, and symbolic meaning connected to products can be used in order to express one's own social belonging. By committing to a subculture or a social group's beliefs and values, one develops a sense of identification with the subculture (Green, 2001). One can argue that the symbolic meaning, that aligns with the group's norms and beliefs, can be seen as one aspect of the cultural meaning in the cultural meaning movement explained by McCracken (1986). Consumers buy products that will aid them to shape their lifestyle and identity and sometimes in order to socially belong to a certain group, hence in order with their culturally constituted world.

Moreover, since this research particularly is looking at the online social media platform Instagram, online identity creation in relation to social media is important to understand. Ever since different social media platforms emerged has identity been important and people tend to focus on presenting themselves in a positive way on social media platforms (Vogel & Rose, 2016) e.g. people on Facebook usually emphasize positive things in their lives (Vogel & Rose, 2016). However, this can

have a negative outcomes to people's lives since people are influenced by others to a large extent on social media (Vogel & Rose, 2016). When people focus on others' pictures on social media, it can have a negative impact about their own well-being (Vogel & Rose, 2016). Hence, people focusing on other people's unrealistic online identity can affect what people feel about themselves in a negative way (Vogel & Rose, 2016). Hernwall and Siibak (2012) argue that the presentation of oneself online is really important for people, and this can be seen as an ongoing identity project. The core communicative activity on social media platform is the presentation of oneself argues Hernwall and Siibak (2012).

Social media users can also focus on how other people present themselves online. People tend to compare themselves to others and they are trying to live their lives in accordance to how others present themselves on social media. (Chou & Edge, 2012; Vogel et al., 2014). According to Vogel and Rose (2016), a big focus on others positive self-presentation on Facebook can have a negative outcome if looking at social comparison. This due to that people often compare themselves to others for different reasons but mainly for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954) and for self-improvement (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). As this is happening in an offline context, one can believe that this also happening in an online context. However, when people's focus is on themselves, they can also be reminded of all positive aspect of their own lives (Toma & Hancock, 2013).

Methodology
Research approach
To answer our research question *"How do influencers on Instagram influence consumers' offline lifestyle?"*, this study takes a qualitative focus in order to meet the research objectives. The field around Instagram influencers and identity in an offline context is rather unexplored, which makes a qualitative approach suitable since Gill et. al. (2008) argues that it is suitable to use when there is a gap within the subject. The research around influencers' influence on consumers' offline identity is modest. Further, it can also be quite hard to capture participants' view of their own identity since the own identity is a complex issue that can be difficult to describe. Since the research is an explorative study that investigates a relatively unexplored subject, a qualitative research is suitable (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Identity and consumption are subjects that can be difficult to measure, which means that qualitative research with its explorative view is more suitable than quantitative research in order to get a more in-depth understanding of consumers' experiences.

Identity is often created in a social context (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), which makes focus groups relevant to use since the social interaction with other people may help the interviewer to apprehend and interpret the participants' different identities. This because the unique identities supposedly will distinguish when in contrast to others'. Further, this paper is investigating how consumers are being influenced on Instagram and how this influences their offline identity. During a focus group, people tend to share and compare more since they are talking to others if comparing to a personal interview (Morgan, 1996).

Therefore, it is possible in a focus group to see how the participants share and compare their own experiences of Instagram influencers with each other, in order to generate an understanding of the subject. Moreover, do Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) argue that focus groups can generate a more critical aspect than if comparing with a personal interview, which in our case is relevant since we also aim to shed light on the negative impact influencers has on consumers offline identity. According to Puchta & Potter (2004), focus groups are also a helpful method when looking into actions that comes from consumers, which in this research is when consumers are communicating with other consumers about Instagram both in an offline and in an online context.

The focus group Interviews
The central aspect of focus group research is conversation and interaction between participants; the group participants should be encouraged and facilitated to communicate and answer each other's questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Focus group discussions explore the construction of standpoints and perspectives, and how they are uttered (Puchta & Potter, 2004).

In this study, we did two focus groups, which consisted of four participants in each. The number aligns with Eriksson and Kovalainen's (2008) discussion about a typical focus group research, and that it should preferably consist of groups of about four to eight participants. Moreover, we choose to do two focus groups since it was enough to identify the themes and also to give a broad enough knowledge of the subject.

When recruiting to the focus groups we had three different criteria that the participants had to qualify for. The participants should be females in the age around 16-25 and daily users of Instagram. This criterion is based on that women uses Instagram more than men (Pew Research Center, 2015) within the age of 16-25 (iis.se). However, it was hard to find participants between this age group, but we manage to find participants from 22-25, which we argue still are within the criteria. Furthermore, we defined a daily user of Instagram as a user who is following 100+ account in order to ensure that they are exposed to a certain amount of posts every day. We also assume that a daily user of Instagram has deep knowledge of Instagram and will, therefore, be able to share their experiences with others. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) state that the participants should have knowledge and an understanding of the discussion subject in order to be able to generate significant insights. Our selection process can be explained as purposive sampling, which according to Miles & Huberman (1994) are based on that the researchers choose participants that they think will fit within the selection criteria. Furthermore, the major part of participants was found by the snowball sampling technique since the participants of the study were found by recommendations from other participants selected. This due to that it is a very effective way to find suitable participants that share the same interest of Instagram.

The first focus group consisted of four females from age 24-25. All four participants had an Instagram account and looked at themselves as very active users of Instagram because they were "scrolling" on Instagram at least every other hour. Every

one of them had heard the concept of an influencer before and all four were very active during the focus group. The second focus group consisted of four females from 22-25 years. All four participants had an Instagram where 2/4 were very active users of Instagram and 2/4 active users, which means that they are on Instagram at least once a day. Lastly, all four had heard of an "influencer" before and all four were active during the discussion.

Table 1: *Overview of focus groups participants*

Focus group	Name	Age	Instagram usage
Group 1	Kajsa	25	Very active user
Group 1	Sofia	25	Very active user
Group 1	Linnea	24	Very active user
Group 1	Emilia	25	Very active user
Group 2	Louise	25	Very active user
Group 2	Elvira	25	Very active user
Group 2	Caroline	24	Active user
Group 2	Lisa	22	Active user

Before both focus groups were conducted were topics and guiding questions designed in order to be able to guide the discussion for the participants. The interview guide developed for this study follows Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) guidelines regarding questions for focus groups, where the questions should give the researchers answers to what the attitudes, needs, perceptions, experiences, beliefs, priorities, or choices of the focus group are. Since this study's aim is to increase the understanding of how consumers' offline identity is influenced by influencers on Instagram,

were the focus groups focusing on generating an understanding of the participant's beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about this subject. In this study's interview guide, three themes were created based on the research question and the purpose of the study; the questions created were based on the aspects of what the study aims to investigate. Each theme had 2-4 main broad questions to capture the essence of the themes and to guide the discussion without affecting the participants with leading questions. In addition to the main questions, there were a number of sub-questions to the different themes. These sub-questions were created in order to support the moderator during the focus group discussion; to be used when the discussion needed a guided direction. Through the focus groups discussion, the intention is also to understand the group participant's norms, values and cultural understandings. These above-mentioned aspects can be analysed when the participants interact with each other during the focus group session (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Both focus groups were held in Gothenburg at The school of business, economic and laws student library in a small group room. These rooms were not only chosen due to easy accessibility but also since they are located in a neutral environment if looking from the participants' point of view. To ensure this as a neutral environment we asked all participants in beforehand for approval of the place. The advantage of having the focus groups in a neutral environment is that it can make the participants feel more comfortable and in this way, it is easier for them to give open and honest answers (Greenbaum, 1988). Moreover, we served something to drink and some snacks to the participants since

Puchta & Potter (2004) argues that it is very natural to eat during conversations in natural settings. In order to caption all that was said during the focus groups, we chose to record both with a mobile phone and a computer. We did also take notes during both focus groups to capture the overall environment and the actions taken by the participants. Both focus groups were conducted in Swedish due to it is the native language to all the participants, and therefore it was more natural to have the discussion in Swedish. The coding and analysis were conducted in Swedish. However, the quotes used in the study were translated into English before used in the analysis.

Both focus groups started with the following question: "When you think about Instagram, what is the first thing that comes to mind?"; a very open and easy questions for the participants to start the conversation on and in this way were further dialogue very natural. In addition to the group participants, a moderator guided the discussion and the interaction between these participants, which is in line with previous research within focus group research field (Morgan 1996; Puchta & Potter, 2004; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). A couple of times during both focus groups where the discussions out of frame from the subject, which allowed the moderators to guide the participants back. However, something positive did also come out from this since we got an overall picture of their mind patterns. After approximately 45 minutes in focus group 1, and 50 minutes in focus group 2 the moderator decided to end the focus groups since all topics and questions had been filled. The moderators could further see after two focus groups that the groups had been given broad answers of the subject and therefore where no more focus groups

conducted, which further is in line with Crang and Cook (2007) guidelines.

Coding & Analysis
The transcribing took place right after both focus groups were conducted. Since both focus groups were conducted in the same week, both transcripts were analysed and coded at the same time. This due to that Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) argues that it is important to do the transcribing as fast as possible in order to still capture everything that was said by the participants when the moderators still are having a fresh memory. To analyse and code both focus groups at the same time also gives the researcher an insight to see if more than one group share or repeat the same things or makes similar statements (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The first thing done during the coding was to read through and listen to the material several times in order to pick up all common and exceptional statements as well as how the interaction was during both focus groups in order to see if there exist any common pattern or themes that helps giving answers to the research questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This way of analysing is called content analysis, which is focusing on finding different themes or patterns. According to (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) themes or patterns can be derived from either data or theory. In this research, it was discovered three categories/themes when coding the material, which means that they came from data instead of theory. The three themes discovered was: *Regular consumers, the new influencers?*, *Instagram influence through communication online and offline*, *and identity creation through influencers on Instagram,* which will be presented and discussed later in the analysis.

Quality & ethical discussion
Ethic is something that is important to take into consideration when doing research since it is important that the moderators give informed consent to the participants such as the purpose of the study and the use of data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). When conducting a focus group, its important the moderators are being clear with the participants that their statements are going to be shared with the other participants (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Before doing our focus groups, we told all the participants about the topic, that we were going to record the whole session and we also informed that it was possible to remain anonymous in the report afterwards. All participants approved the recording and everyone also approved to be mentioned by their real name in the report.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is also important to ensure the overall quality of the research when following a qualitative approach. There are four important aspects to take into consideration in order to ensure the quality of the research. The four different aspects are *credibility, confirmability, dependability* and *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Credibility* was in this paper achieved by doing two different focus groups where 8 people shared their thoughts on the subject. The participants were carefully selected due to specific criteria in order to achieve credibility of the research. Moreover, it was given an explanation of the subject to the participants in beforehand in order to make the respondent consistent and also to give the participants space to reflect on their own. Hence, it can be argued that we in our research has presented and interpreted material so it is easy to understand by the

reader, which is important to Lincoln and Guba (1985). Further, was *dependability* achieved by that it was given an in-depth explanation of how the focus groups were carried out in this methodology chapter. Hence, how long each focus group lasted, what tools were used and how the material was analysed afterwards. Since dependability is about to give the reader in-depth information about the process of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the above description shows that dependability was achieved in this research paper. *Confirmability* was achieved by that the researchers have not mixed their own opinions and personal values into the research. Even though it was hard to be objective the whole time, the researchers have focused on the findings without bringing personal opinions or thoughts into the subject. Moreover, during the focus groups the participants were also able to speak freely and were hence not pushed to give certain answers to the questions. Lastly *transferability* was achieved by giving the readers knowledge of how influencers on Instagram influence consumers' offline identity. In order to have a high standard of transferability in this research different decisions has been taken, and the assumptions made have been well explained. Moreover, can the reader find information of what this study contributes to also linked to other already existing studies, which strengthen transferability further according to Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Analysis
From our two conducted focus groups interviews, we have identified three comprehensive themes of how to understand how influencers on Instagram influence

consumers' offline Identity. The three different themes captures: *Regular consumers, the new influencers?*, *Instagram influence through communication online and offline, and identity creation through influencers on Instagram*. Since we did not choose to look at some specific influencers it is essential to first define what an influencer is, and who the influencer, consumers really trust in, is. This we argue is important in order to see which influencer having an impact on consumers' offline identity. Moreover, it is also important to see how consumers are communicating with and about these influencers. Hence, it is important to see how influencers' messages about consumption and lifestyle are reaching the consumers as well. These, above mentioned essential aspects are covered in the two first themes presented below. Further, the third theme explores how these messages, communicated by influencers, create a meaning that the consumer takes on in their offline identity. The themes overlap each other sometimes, which show the complexity of the subject. However, in order to be able to answer the research questions, one can argue that it is essential to discuss some of the same subjects within the different themes and therefore is this overlapping needed.

Regular consumers, the new influencers?

Instagram can be seen as one of the fast growing social media platform aimed for sharing/liking and commenting pictures and videos (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). One can argue that the way Instagram is structured makes it the perfect place for an influencer to act on, since it is easy to reach a substantial crowd of consumers. But in today's emerging market of influencers, who is really the influencer we trust in? In research today there exist several definitions

of the concept "influencers", and De Veirman et al., (2017) argues that an influencer on Social media platforms can be defined as *"people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them"*.

Even though all participants have different views and perspectives of what an influencer is, they show an understanding of that there exist many different perspective and definitions of an influencer. It is important to understand that it was not an easy task for the participants to describe and define an influencer, and what one person perceived as an influencer might not be the case for another person. The participants shared different meaning on the influencer concept:

"For me, a person becomes an influencer when the person gets to me; when I decide to buy something or act on something that this person posted. When this person makes me perform an act or to think in a certain way. Then he or she becomes an influencer".
- Kajsa

"An influencer is someone with a bunch of followers, and he or she is promoting products in order to get people to buy them"
- Caroline

"For me, an influencer is all about style. I am only following influencers that I get inspired by, someone who has a cool style, travelling to places I want to travel to, and most important feel genuine and real"
- Sofia

One definition of an influencer that also was touched upon during the focus group was the concept of the "everyday-influencer". The "everyday-influencer" can be seen as a regular consumer who is just sharing

information, recommendations and ideas without getting something in return from a company (Keller et al., 2013). Even though the participants did not have knowledge of the concept and the term "everyday-influencer" from before, they did describe influencers in such way, clarifying, that they believed that an influencer can be someone that does not get any economic benefit for their Instagram posts. Furthermore, the participants believed that "everyday-influencers" content can be valuable and is something that they can be influenced by. The respondent refers to this in several ways:

"I can be influenced by all different types of people, like friends' friends. But if I know that someone gets paid for promoting a product, then I will not be interested in buying the product since I perceive that the recommendation of the product is not that credible." - Emilia

"It depends on how a product is promoted and also who is promoting it. If for example someone who can be seen as a influencer (not one with a major number of followers) are promoting a product and saying that 'this is not a collaboration, I just like the product and therefore want to promote it', I believe it to be a real deal. But if it is a influencer who is doing different collaborations for companies all the time it is getting untrustworthy." - Linnea.

"I also think it depends on who is promoting a product. If for example Julia Bergman, the one in the television show "Unga-mammor", are promoting kids-smoothies and showing that her kid is eating it, it becomes trustworthy (...) If a influencer are showing off something in their posts that seems to be unrealistic it only becomes fake.

You know that it is not their real-life, it is seems to be too good. I do not follow that kind of influencers." - Elvira

Several of the other participants did also share similar meanings, which can indicate that an "everyday-influencer" can be seen as a more credible influencer than an influencer hired to promote a product or service by a company. Since an "everyday-influencer" can be defined as a regular consumer as discussed in the theoretical framework, this is following with De Veirman et al., (2017) statement about that a message can be more valuable when it comes from another regular consumer than from an advertiser. One can therefore also question Kiss & Bichler (2008) statement about that influencers in collaboration with a company often is trusted by others. This because it became evident that it is depending on what kind of product an influencer is promoting. Further, also which influencer who is promoting the product, i.e. if it is clear that the product can be connected to the influencer's interests, and that he or she believes in the product for real.

Kirby and Marsen (2006), and Brown and Firolla, (2013) argues that everyone can enter the viral world and thereby influence others by just being on social media. One can argue, if looking at "everyday-influencers" as regular consumers, that Instagram makes it possible for everyone to influence other people just by having an Instagram account. All participants in the focus groups talked about how easy it is to reach out to several people at the same time, and how easy it has become today to spread messages through content and images on Instagram. Therefore, it can be argued that Instagram is a great social media platform

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for consumers to use when it comes to consumption. Many of the participants mention that they use Instagram as some kind of platform for finding inspiration for consumption. The inspiration came from all types of influencers but mainly from someone the participants could relate to or wanted to be like. As explained by Elvira:

"The coolest person I know on Instagram is Jenny Hammar. She feels really genuine and real and has a great style. (..) She lives a nice life and I get a lot of inspiration from her"

However, it was also evident that the hunt for inspiration could have some kind of negative impact on the participants as well. Since paid influencers often are presenting a very positive picture of themselves online it can have some consequences for consumers. This aligns with Vogel and Rose (2016) statement about people today being influenced to a large extent by others on Instagram, and therefore it also has a big impact on consumers' well-being in a negative way. Almost all participants expressed that they could feel insufficient in some cases because they know that they will never be able to buy a special product or achieve a certain lifestyle.

What also was apparent was that the participants often has some kind of goals when they are looking to find inspiration on Instagram, and that their mood rule this. For example Louise said that she is following different account depending on how she is feeling. She described that if she wanted to buy a new couch for her living room, she started to follow interior influencers. However, if she changes her mind about buying a couch, maybe because it is too expensive or if she already found one, she

unfollowed the person/persons. Louise example shows that Instagram is a part of her ongoing identity creation, since it can be goal driven as explained by Arnould & Thompson (2005) and also creates conflict and some doubts along the way (Hirschman 1992).

Instagram influence through communication online and offline

It can be argued that Instagram has created a need itself for consumers so they can stay updated about what is happening in their social life. It was evident during the focus groups that keeping up with what friends are saying, posting and liking has become an essential part of everyday life for consumers, which makes Instagram a perfect platform where word of mouth takes place both in an offline and online context. The participants often repeatedly came back to the fact that they talk a lot about Instagram and its influence in both an online and offline context. As said by Lisa:

"I am scrolling on Instagram several times a day to see all the updates and what my friends likes. My friends and me are also talking sometimes about Instagram when we meet up. This happens especially if someone has posted something cool or weird."

Hence, they are sharing information about products and services seen on Instagram with friends offline, which can be seen as a kind of word-of-mouth communication. All participants shared the meaning that Instagram can be seen as a conversation topic in an offline context since Instagram is so much more than just sharing pictures. As emphasised by Caroline:

"If some of my friends see a post with something they know I am interested in then

I often hear: I saw someone post a picture of the jeans you like with a discount code, so you should definitely check it out".

Caroline's statement above shows that consumers also can see Instagram as a platform where consumers can get inspired to consume, and also that eWOM gets transferred to WOM. Hence, consumers see what others share/post/like online which can be seen as eWOM. Further, they tell friends in real life which then can be seen as WOM communication. However, even if WOM and eWOM often can be seen as some kind of informal communication from a marketing perspective. Hence, about experience around product and services as explained by Westbrook (1987), it can be argued that Instagram and the world of social media take WOM and eWOM to a different level, where people also communicate and share experiences not just about products/services but also about lifestyle. As explained by Lisa:

"When I talk about Instagram with friends, we can sometimes talk about certain influencers and also recommend influencers to each other (..) you often want to follow and find people on Instagram that can bring something positive to your life, people who has similar lifestyle as yourself"

Another aspect discussed during the focus groups interviews was how the participants were affected on Instagram from an eWOM point of view. Hence, to which degree the participants are influenced by the information that is exchanged on Instagram, and not the information that is exchanged face-to-face. Overall, all the participants had a critical attitude toward this since they perceived influencers post, the one who gets paid, to be something negative. This was

mostly connected with trust; they did not know the real intention behind the posts, as explained under the previous theme. This can be connected to that it is harder to create trustworthiness online since the readers do not know the intentions behind the post, and it is harder to trust strangers reviews and opinions, as discussed by Lee & Youn (2009). This problem was not evident when it came to regular WOM since a recommendation from friends was directly defined as something truthful, as discussed by Lee & Youn (2009).

To what degree a consumer trust an influencer is also depending on which kind of influencer who is sharing a post. Among the participants is an "everyday-influencer" more likely to be perceived as a trustworthy source than an influencer having a lot of different collaborations. The participants explained that this is due to that a lot of influencers are creating a picture of themselves that are "too good", it does not tally with the reality. However, "everyday-influencers" and friends display a more realized version of themselves, which makes their content more credible. This can be connected to that a lot of influencers on social media are displaying a picture of themselves that is "too good" on Instagram which further will be discussed under next theme.

Identity creation through influencers on Instagram

One topic that emerged during both focus groups was the difference between offline and online identity. The topic was not discussed directly since identity is an issue that can be difficult to express in words. However, during the interviews, it was evident that the participants distinguished offline identity from online identity. Hence,

how people create another image of themselves online if compared with how they are in "real life". The participants shared the meaning that people often have a completely different identity on Instagram if comparing with "real life".

"I think that people only shows a positive side of themselves on Instagram (...) it's never anyone who shows or write something negative (...) it's only positives aspect that are being highlighted in their everyday lives (...) this is me, everything is positive". - *Elvira*

" I only use Instagram when I have done something I feel good about. When I know that it is something I want to show to others, something positive (...) In daily life I show all different sides of my personality, everything doesn't have to be that good".
- Louise

From the statements above, one can argue that the difference that can be found between consumers offline identity and online identity can follow Vogel and Rose (2016) statement about that one often presents a more positive view of one's own life and being, in an online context. One's online identity is oftentimes distorted in favour for one's image, while one's offline identity may have more transparency. The offline identity consists of more perspectives and aspects than the online identity that takes place on one's social media profile.

Moreover, even if not loudly uttered or spelt out in words, during both focus groups, a sense of importance of products' meaning and what they symbolize was uncovered along the interviews. It was evident during the discussion in both focus groups that the

participants could identify themselves with others on Instagram, such as influencers, and that this identification had an effect on their consumption. During the interviews, the participants discussed their interests and what they like to do in their spare time. They gave examples of what they get inspired by, such as interior decorating, training, cooking, and baking. The way that the participant talks about and describes these hobbies and interests creates an image that these interests make a part of their lifestyle, and therefore also their identity. As said by Kajsa:

"As I look around for inspiration for my tattoos, I have come across accounts that also inspired me for other stuff. I have been inspired by e.g. what clothes or shoes this person has, and thought that I would like to have that too."

From Kajsa's statement, one can interpret that she has been inspired by people whom she can identify herself with, that is, people with tattoos. The tattoos are their common denominator. Based on this, she has also been inspired to want to change or add something in her style of clothing; you can say that she wants to construct her lifestyle by purchasing a similar product as someone she identifies with on social media. Hence, it becomes clear that she is seeking for inspiration from influencers on Instagram in order to create her offline identity.

Another example of this is Linnea who said that she is looking a lot at painting techniques since she wants to paint her own pictures, which relates to her interest in interior decorating. The purpose is to add the self-painted paintings in her home decor style. Other users on Instagram who also are interested in home decorations, and that

paint their own pictures have influenced her. One can then interpret that Linnea identifies herself with home decorators that she follows, and further is inspired to be a creative person. In order to be this creative person, she needs to acquire material and tools, and this through consumption. Another example of identification that leads to consumption is Louise, who expresses an interest in baking. Louise said:

"*I follow a lot of baking accounts with pictures of cakes and pastries, and occasionally I get inspired and want to bake (...) if I see someone using a special tool when baking, I can be inspired to buy it in order to develop my baking skills*".

This shows that the participants find inspiration from people with the same interest and lifestyle as themselves and then brings this inspiration into their own lifestyle, and further, their identity creation. This construction and the change of one's identity take place through consumption. In order to bring these parts in to one's lifestyle that is pictured in these three examples, some form of consumption will occur. This aligns with Chou and Edge (2012), and Vogel et al. (2014) statements, that consumers often compare themselves and their lifestyles to others and how other present themselves on social media. Hence, they are trying to live their lives in accordance with others' lives since they identify themselves with these people, and this includes lifestyle consumption.

According to Mortelmans (2005), social groups are using products associated with symbolic meaning in order to express the group norm and group approach. The group can therefore be seen as the constituted world that McCracken (1986) is talking

about, where the group's norms and approach construct the cultural meaning. The meaning is later on transferred onto the products that the members of the group uses in order to express their social belonging to the particular group. Social groups that consumers feel a belonging to can be found on social media. This becomes evident in the focus groups where the participants expressed that they identifies themselves with influencers through their lifestyles, e.g. Louise with her baking, Linnea with the home decor, and Kajsa with her tattoos. Further, one can argue that this can be connected to McCracken's (1986) meaning movement. Instagram can be seen as the constituted world along with social groups, where cultural and symbolic meaning can be transferred through consumer goods, displayed on Instagram, to the individual consumer. However, the symbolic value of a product may be accepted within one group, but refused to be accepted by another, hence differences between groups creates differences in cultural and symbolic meaning of a product.

Consumers may feel an social and cultural belonging to certain influencers, or social groups on Instagram, and because of this wanting to express one's identity in accordance to these peoples' lifestyles.. However, this is not always in a positive way where the consumers gets influenced to express their own identity, but negative consequences can also be found. Emilia said:

"*I sometimes get anxiety when I look at Instagram, and often it is about money. For example, home decor accounts can give me anxiety if I feel that I want to buy a lot of stuff for my home but can not afford it.*"

Moreover, Sofia adds:

"When people are posting pictures on for example home decor, I think it is a lot of fun to follow it, but at the same time you feel like there are things you may want but do not have, and then you may feel bad about it."

This shows that the comparison with other people, and especially influencers, is easily accessed. Further, with this comparison anxiety and stress occurs, and since the online identity of influencers often shows of an idealistic image it can be difficult to measure and compare oneself to this identity. Consumers that identify themselves with various influencers can be affected by the social value communicated, since they would feel the need to imitate the influencer because of the social belonging. Due to this, influencers have the upper hand and the power to affect Instagram users' lifestyle and consumption patterns by communicating their lifestyle and online identity. However, as shown above this is not always in a positive way.

Discussion

It is evident that everyone can enter the world of social media and thereby influence a lot of people (Kirby and Marsen, 2006; Brown and Firolla, 2013), just by having an Instagram account. It can be argued that Instagram has created a need itself for consumers so they easily can stay up to date with what is happening in their social life at any time. Instagram is also one of the biggest social media platforms when looking at numbers of users and therefore also ideal for influencers to act on since they can reach out to a substantial crowd of consumers. This study shows that the first

association with an influencer was in line with De Veirman et al., (2017) definition: "people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them". However, when looking closer into the influencer concept, and which influencer consumers think are the most trustful ones, it became evident that the influencers who can be referred as "everyday-influencers" can be seen as the most trustworthy among consumers. Hence, everyday-influencers who are regular consumers just sharing information, recommendations and ideas without getting paid from a company as discussed by Keller et al., (2013). This was connected with if the influencer is getting paid or not. Hence, consumers do not know the reason behind when paid influencers are promoting a product. Are these influencers only doing it because they want to get paid or do they actually really like the product? However, it was evident that the products/services "everyday-influencers" promote clearly can be connected to their interest, and it is also visible if he or she believes in the product/service for real, which in turn create trustworthiness. Therefore, one can question Kiss & Bichler's (2008) statement about influencers who are doing a collaboration with companies are trusted by others.

Looking further at the strong influence influencers has over consumers; it was evident that their influential power also can have some negative consequences on consumers' well-being. One can argue that this is a problem due to the popularity of Instagram, but also due to the fact that consumers are being influenced to a large extent by others on Instagram and that this, in turn, affects their well-being as discussed by Vogel and Rose (2016). The reason behind this negative impact comes from that

influencers are doing collaborations with companies but it can also be connected to the difference between online and offline identity. For example, can influencers' Instagram profile be referred to as their online identity (Vogel & Rose, 2016). What is interesting is that paid Influencers tend to only show a positive picture of themselves online that looks "too good", and it becomes hard for consumers to have this good life as well since they cannot match the online identity influencers are painting up of themselves. However, this was mainly connected with paid influencers since they can get a lot of products/services for free that consumers will rarely have the chance to buy.

Moreover, Instagram can be seen as the perfect platform where eWOM takes place, and thereby also a platform where influencers can communicate to others since consumers all the time want to keep up with what others are saying, posting and liking. Consumers are not only getting influenced directly by influencers on Instagram, they are also affected through friends in an offline context, friends who have been affected by influencers directly on Instagram. It is evident that Web 2.0 gives consumers new communication opportunities and the ways consumers are communicating are changing (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Hence, one can argue that social media and especially Instagram take WOM and eWOM to another level, since eWOM get transferred to WOM and vice versa. i.e. people are being influenced online and then talks about it in an offline context. Moreover, has eWOM and WOM almost only been discussed from a marketing perspective (Westbrook, 1987), where the communication between consumers mainly is about product and services. However, people on Instagram do not only communicate about products and services anymore, people also communicate and share their experiences about lifestyle. Therefore, one can argue that eWOM and WOM connected with Instagram can be both from a consumer perspective and a marketing perspective.

Lastly, it can be discussed that there is a new way of the phenomenon McCracken (1986) explains as "trajectory of cultural meaning". McCracken (1986) explains that there is a cultural meaning that is moving between different states in a social world. It appeared that this meaning now could be found on social media, and thereby on Instagram, and further also on the identity creation of the consumer. Hence, the meaning is moving from different states on Instagram and then lastly over to the individual consumer's identity creation process. McCracken (1986) explains that the constituted world, where the meaning exists can be described as the world of everyday experiences for the consumer. Therefore, one can argue that Instagram can be seen as a constituted world since consumers are experiencing new daily things on Instagram. What is interesting is that the meaning now exists in an online context, by that influencers online identity creates this meaning in the consumer's mind. The products and services influencers use and displays on their Instagram carries this meaning to the individual consumer that brings these further on to their consumption in order to express themselves in an offline context. The meaning moves from an online context into the context of the consumer's offline identity intermediated by products/services displayed on Instagram. One can argue that influencers can be seen as the instrument responsible for the

movement of cultural meaning between different states, such as the instruments that McCracken (1986) talks about. However, in addition, it is important to point out that "everyday-influencers" also can be seen as the individual consumer in McCracken's trajectory, this because the "everyday-influencer" is a regular consumer without any association to a company. Due to this, one can argue the "everyday-influencer" can hold two positions in the trajectory: as an instrument guiding the meaning and as the individual consumer.

Conclusion

With the purpose of increasing knowledge of how consumers' offline identity is influenced by influencers on Instagram, the main research question was to uncover *"how influencers on Instagram influence consumers' offline identity"*. To answer this research question three sub-questions were created in order to fully understand the whole process.

The first sub-question was *"what is an influencer?"*. The study shows that practically everyone on Instagram can be seen as an influencer just by having an Instagram account. It emerged that the paid influencer is not the most trustful influencer because a regular consumer is often viewed as more valuable from a consumer point of view. This is due to that consumers do not fully know if paid influencers are promoting product/services because they just want to get paid or if they actually like the product/service they promote. Hence, it is hard for influencers doing collaborations with companies to be authentic since consumers do not fully know the reason behind the collaboration. However, when a regular consumer, now referred to as

"everyday-influencer" is promoting a service/product it becomes trustable since it is not in a collaborating with a company. This due to that consumers know directly that influencers who are featuring a product/service and do not get paid actually like the product/service for real. This above confirms earlier studies, which has found that a regular consumer can be seen as trustworthy and has a lot of influential power (Singh et. al., 2012) and the result further contributes to the field of influencer marketing.

The second sub-question was *"How do consumers communicate about influencers offline and online?"*. The study shows that Instagram in relation to influencers is opening up new ways of both WOM and eWOM. These two communication strategies can often be seen from a marketing perspective where people are communicating to others about product and services. However, consumers on Instagram do not only communicate about products and services anymore, consumers also communicate and share experiences about lifestyle. Therefore, one can argue that this study provides new insights of WOM and eWOM from a consumer perspective rather than from a marketing perspective, which mainly has been in the research light before (Westbrook, 1987; Raban 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; and Erkan, 2015)

The third sub-question was *"How does symbolic meaning transfer from an online context to the consumer's offline identity?"*. The study finds that the symbolic meaning now occurs in an online context from the beginning and hence on the platform Instagram. The symbolic meaning is moving from different stages on Instagram, starting from that influencers online identity creates

this meaning by displaying pictures of different products/services. When then consumers are using Instagram and looking at all these pictures, consumers are being influenced to consume different product/services that carries this symbolic meaning, which they further use when they are expressing their identity in an offline context. Therefore, one can argue that this study expand McCracken's (1986) phenomenon that he call "trajectory of cultural meaning". This by that the cultural meaning is taking a different way and are moving between an online and offline context.

Going back to the main research question *"How do influencers on Instagram influence consumers' offline identity?"*. The study shows clearly that consumers on Instagram are being influenced by "everyday-influencers" rather than paid influencers. Consumers are identifying themselves with the "everyday-influencer" and consume product/services being displayed by them in order to express who they are in their offline life. The reason behind this is mainly connected with that consumers want to express some sort of belonging and also want to identify themselves with these "everyday-influencers". Since Instagram is such a big social media platform today, consumers do also communicate about the pictures and videos they see on Instagram to their friends. The main influence comes from influencers, however, this influence is not always direct, and consumers can be influenced through friends in an offline context, friends who have been influenced by influencers directly on Instagram. Moreover, have influencers a big influential power on consumers' offline identity by that they transfer some kind of symbolic meaning through the pictures with

product/services they display. Consumers are being influenced to consume by this symbolic meaning and are further using it to shape their identity in an offline context.

Practical Implications
As a result of this research, there are several practical implications for companies to have in mind when they do collaborations with influencers. Firstly, it's important that companies become aware of that consumers are quite sceptical against paid influencers and the impact influencers have on consumers' lifestyle and further their identity. Companies should be aware of the negative impact some influencers could have on consumers well-being and take into consideration to use "everyday-influencers" when they are choosing which influencer to use. Hence, they should choose influencers where their product/service can fit in easily into the influencers lifestyle or that the influencers Instagram already reflects the product/service. This is important since this study shows that influencers who have the same interest as the product/service they promote are being looked at as more real and therefore also more trustworthy.

Limitations and future research
There exist some limitations for the findings, which are mainly connected with the generalizability of the population. This research has only explored how influencers on Instagram are influencing the offline identity of 22-25-year-old Swedish woman. However, since previous research shows that woman between 16-25 is the group that is using Instagram the most, one can argue that this group can represent the whole population. However, there are other age-groups using Instagram a lot, so it would be interesting to see if influencers have an impact on them as well and to which degree.

Moreover, it is also important to have in mind that identity creation offline is very indirect, which can be seen as a limitation. Hence, it can be hard to apprehend and interpret participants' different identities when doing focus groups. Therefore, we suggest that it could be relevant in the future to look closer into how consumers offline identity are being affected during a longer period.

Moreover, is the field around the connection between social media and offline identity opening up different possibilities for future research. Although this thesis provides more knowledge in the academic field of Identity through consumption on Instagram by looking at influencers, there is still a need for more research, since it is a rather complex and unexplored subject. Future research within this field could be done by using nethnographic as a method in order to see the communication (sharing, liking, and commenting) directly on Instagram.

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