DO CONSUMERS BELIEVE EACH OTHER ONLINE?

A STUDY OF HOW CONSUMERS ASSESS CREDIBILITY OF BRAND-RELATED UGC

Rebecca Ketola, Sandra Norrman

Department of Business Administration
Civilekonomprogrammet, International Business Program
Degree Project, 30 Credits, Spring 2019
Supervisor: Galina Biedenbach
ABSTRACT

With the gradual rise of Web-2.0 based platforms, Internet users were given the possibility to interact with each other in virtual communities. Originating from this development was the concept of user-generated content (UGC), which implies that people were able to enrich each other’s user-experiences by sharing creative efforts and communicating openly (O’Reilly, 2007).

As Web 2.0 features continued to grow, marketers became aware of the opportunities this new development online created and how they could use it to their advantage (De Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004). The development online however also faces companies with challenges, as consumers now are able to create and share opinions and thoughts about brands, which to an extent is uncontrollable by companies (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Just as marketer-controlled communication can create new brand associations in the minds of consumers, for better or worse - so can also externally-generated communication, such as brand-related UGC, do.

Knowing that consumers generally trust what other consumers say about products more than marketing communication (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Song & Yoo, 2016), and that there does not exist much research on how consumers perceive brand-related UGC, this is a considerably important topic to study. A classic way of studying communication effectiveness is through credibility, which is argued to be a major determinant of whether consumers accept and adopt what is communicated (e.g. Hovland et al., 1953). Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding of how consumers assess credibility of brand-related UGC and furthermore, what their consequent responses are.

A qualitative approach was taken as the purpose is to gain insight rather than proving a point. The interviews were semi-structured and formed around three Instagram posts relating to a specific brand, which were deliberately chosen based on the content of the theoretical framework developed. Through using these example cases, interviewees’ first reactions could be captured and their reasoning around credibility could be followed and discussed.

The results from this study indicate that there exists a certain level of irritation as well as a scepticism towards brand-related UGC. This seem to stem from a suspicion that most content that promotes products and brands is part of sponsored collaborations, into which consumers put noticeably much distrust. Beyond questioning sponsorship, it was also found that the source played a particularly important role when assessing credibility. When a source is familiar, it is easier to determine credibility of brand-related UGC, and credibility furthermore increases with perceived expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness. The channel through which a message is communicated also matters, as it is more difficult to be ingenuine through a video than an image or a text, which implicated that consumers may find videos more credible than other media formats. The message itself was also deemed to influence the credibility assessment, as the message was questioned both based upon common sense but also on knowledge and previous experience.

As for practical implications, this study indicates that encouraging or generating positive brand-related UGC through paid collaborations, is a balancing act, into which much consideration needs to be put. With the evident irritation that consumers feel when it comes to brand-related UGC, marketers should be careful to push too much positive brand communication onto the consumer, or it will turn negative. To come across as genuine, the “who”, ”what” and ”how” of communication should be carefully considered.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to begin by expressing our appreciation and thank our supervisor, Galina Biedenbach, for guiding us through the process of writing this thesis. Her extensive knowledge and encouragement have provided us with valuable insight as well as the confidence needed to finish our work.

We would also like to thank all participants who have taken the time to contribute by sharing their experiences and reflections. Without their help this study would not have been possible.

Umeå, May 20th, 2019

Rebecca Ketola                             Sandra Norrman
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................................................. 1  
   1.1 Problem Background ................................................................................................................................. 1  
   1.2 Theoretical Background ............................................................................................................................ 3  
   1.2.1 Brand Management ............................................................................................................................... 3  
   1.2.2 Consumer Empowerment and User-Generated Content ....................................................................... 4  
   1.3 Research Gap ............................................................................................................................................... 6  
   1.4 Research Question ...................................................................................................................................... 7  
   1.5 Thesis Purpose ........................................................................................................................................... 7  

2. **Theoretical Framework** ................................................................................................................................. 8  
   2.1 Brand Communication ............................................................................................................................... 8  
   2.2 Credibility of Brand-related UGC ........................................................................................................... 10  
   2.2.1 Credibility of Source ............................................................................................................................. 11  
   2.2.2 Credibility of Message .......................................................................................................................... 13  
   2.2.3 Credibility of Channel ........................................................................................................................... 14  
   2.2.4 Credibility of Sponsorship .................................................................................................................... 16  
   2.3 Attitude Towards Brand-related UGC and Brand .................................................................................... 18  
   2.4 Behavioural Response ............................................................................................................................... 19  
   2.5 Conceptual Framework .............................................................................................................................. 20  

3. **Scientific Methodology** ............................................................................................................................... 22  
   3.1 Pre-understandings .................................................................................................................................... 22  
   3.2 Ontological Assumptions ........................................................................................................................... 23  
   3.3 Epistemological Assumptions .................................................................................................................... 24  
   3.4 Research Approach .................................................................................................................................... 25  
   3.5 Research Design ........................................................................................................................................ 26  
   3.6 Literature Search and Choice of Theories ................................................................................................. 27  

4. **Practical Methodology** ................................................................................................................................. 29  
   4.1 Semi-structured Interviews ....................................................................................................................... 29  
   4.2 Sampling Method ....................................................................................................................................... 31  
   4.3 Interview Guide ......................................................................................................................................... 34  
   4.4 Conducting Interviews ............................................................................................................................... 38  
   4.5 Transcribing Data ....................................................................................................................................... 40  
   4.6 Data Analysis Method ............................................................................................................................... 40  
   4.7 Ethical Considerations ............................................................................................................................... 42  

5. **Empirical Results** ......................................................................................................................................... 45  
   5.1 Credibility of Brand-related UGC ........................................................................................................... 45  
   5.1.1 Case 1: Non-Sponsored Post by Non-Influencer ............................................................................... 45  
   5.1.2 Case 2: Non-Sponsored Post by Influencer ....................................................................................... 50  
   5.1.3 Case 3: Sponsored Post by Influencer ................................................................................................. 52  
   5.2 Attitude Towards Brand-related UGC ..................................................................................................... 55  
   5.3 Attitude Towards Brand ........................................................................................................................... 56
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Conceptual model of how consumers assess credibility of brand-related UGC and consequent responses. .................................................................................................................. 21
Figure 2. Non-sponsored post by a non-influencer. .................................................................................................................. 35
Figure 3. Non-sponsored post by an influencer. .................................................................................................................. 36
Figure 4. Sponsored post by an influencer. .................................................................................................................. 37
Table 1. Information about the interviews and participants. .................................................................................................. 39
1. INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter begins by providing the reader with a background describing the context of the problem that is to be addressed. The problem is looked at from a practical as well as a theoretical perspective, concluding with a research question. Finally, the purpose and reasoning behind the research is discussed.

1.1 Problem Background

With the ever-increasing use of the Internet in all aspects of life, a simultaneous increase in consumer power has been observable (Labrecque et al., 2013, p. 257). This due to a creative freedom and ability to choose what information to consume, which is something that has not been possible in the past. The new development has faced companies with certain problems concerning brand management online – the power lies no longer in the hands of the managers, but in those of the consumers (De Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Christodoulides et al., 2011).

Bruce and Solomon (2014, pp. 307-308) express the current situation as a “media anarchy”, resulting in difficulty for companies to manage their corporate identities and brands, as consumers are increasingly influencing the messages other consumers receive about a product, service or value proposition. The Internet has increased the power of consumers, in particular through the possibility for one person to reach thousands of fellow consumers with limited effort and in a short amount of time (Mangold and Faulds, 2009, p. 361; Daugherty, et al., 2008, p. 16). Around the millennial shift the Internet went through major changes, which finally resulted in the new era of Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2007, p. 17). Web 2.0 can be described as a network of platforms where users contribute with data and services and enrich the user experience (O’Reilly, 2007, pp. 36-37). Platforms that are Web 2.0-based enable people to both create as well as consume content, and examples of such platforms are YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Blogger (Daugherty, 2008, p. 16). Cheong and Morrison (2008, p. 39) note that the difficulties connected to brand management online and consumers’ increased control, relate to the concept of user-generated content (UGC), which became relevant with the emergence of Web 2.0. As the Internet has facilitated user communication and the spread of information, UGC has become an everyday phenomenon, implying that Internet users themselves are creating content rather than only companies or publishers doing so (OECD, 2007, p. 8; Daugherty, 2008, p. 16).

This connectivity the world experiences today, also allows consumers to get in contact with a myriad of brands beyond the ones available locally (Edelman, 2010). According to Edelman (2010) the development online also changes how consumers behave in relation to brands. From a consumer point of view the development of Web 2.0 and UGC has enabled them to make better informed purchase decisions due to easier access to information (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006, p. 11). Consumers today tend to search the Internet and consult with social media when purchasing goods, putting their trust in what other consumers have said about a product, as well as looking to share their own experiences and opinions (Song & Yoo, 2016, p. 84; Khang et al., 2012, p. 280). It has furthermore been found that consumers put more trust into other consumers’ statements about a product than commercial messages made by the company behind the product (Cheong & Morrison, 2008, p. 43).
The surge of UGC and its evident power has opened marketing managers’ eyes to the importance of keeping track of and ultimately influencing what is said about their brands online (Christodoulides et al., 2011 p. 105; Christodoulides et al., 2012, p. 57). Marketers trying to control their brands through stimulating the generation of UGC has however at times, in practice, proven to be more of a balancing act than might initially have been expected. Cases in which this kind of encouragement has backfired and created the opposite effect are many, however, there might just be as many positive ones.

An industry that is very dependent upon and affected by the rise of Web 2.0-platforms is the cosmetics industry. There are plenty of stories of brands that have prospered, or conversely, been knocked over, because of consumers’ relentless engagement online. An example of a much-debated topic in beauty communities online is cosmetic brands’ inclusivity, in particular when it comes to shade ranges. In 2017, Fenty Beauty was launched by the artist Rihanna; a brand release that was very anticipated by the fans of the star as well as influencers (Burns, 2017). Statistics show that barely one month after the launch the brand had already amassed 3.2 million social media mentions, which can be considered as much attention, if compared to e.g. Kim Kardashian’s KKW Beauty launch that gathered 64 000 mentions (Burns, 2017). Much of the attention emerged as a result of the inclusive shade range the brand offered. As a measure of marketing success, Fenty Beauty furthermore noted $72.0 million in earned media value one month after the launch (Ilchi, 2017). The enormous engagement shown and the large amounts of Fenty-related UGC created by users on Web 2.0-based platforms, particularly on Instagram and YouTube, seem to have accelerated the brand substantially. Fenty Beauty has since been named one of 2018’s most genius companies by Time Magazine and announced a venture into the luxury fashion market with an extension of the Fenty brand in collaboration with the luxury goods conglomerate LVMH (Davies, 2019).

On the other side of the spectrum, the popular brand Tarte Cosmetics belong to those who has gotten a taste of what happens when consumers are dissatisfied with a brand’s conduct. In opposite to Fenty Beauty, Tarte Cosmetics decided to launch the awaited Shape Tape foundation, but only in 15 shades, with barely three of them suiting deeper skin tones (Wischhover, 2018). What the brand expected would be a successful launch, was instead met with backlash, as consumers online openly criticised the brand for its product and values (Baragona, 2018; Diaz, 2019). The brand was thus “forced” to withdraw the product and made a promise on their Instagram account to relaunch the product in 50 shades. These cases illustrate the power Web 2.0-platforms provide consumers with and how consumers consequently, to some extent, are able to influence which brands succeed and which ones do not.

The topic of this thesis is thus concerned with brand management and consumer behaviour in an online environment, as it is of importance to provide up to date insight into how the digital age influences the relationship between consumers and brands. Moreover, seeing that companies are no longer the sole players on the field, it is of interest to investigate how consumers perceive what other consumers say online about brands.
1.2 Theoretical Background

1.2.1 Brand Management

Keller’s (1993) conceptualisation of brand equity from the perspective of consumers - customer-based brand equity (CBBE) - describes the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumers’ responses to marketing activities relating to the brand. When a consumer is familiar with a brand and holds favourable, strong and unique brand associations in memory, that is when CBBE occurs (Keller, 1993). From a firm’s perspective, brand equity has potential to add value by generating marginal cash flow, meanwhile it from a customer point of view can help them to interpret, analyse and store information about a brand, as well as aid them in the purchase process (Aaker, 1996). To build brand equity is essentially every firm’s goal with their brands.

Keller (1993) refers to the associative network memory model, which states that knowledge is a set of nodes and links. The nodes consist of information that is stored by an individual and these are connected to each other by links of varying strength. What an individual retrieve from memory depends on an activation process. When external information is encoded or long-term memory information is retrieved a node becomes a source of activation for other nodes. The information stored in these nodes is recalled given that a threshold level of activation is reached and the strength of the links between the nodes determines the spread of activation, and thus also the information that can be recalled. Keller (1993) argues that brand knowledge similarly can be thought of as consisting of a brand node that is connected to a variety of associations. Developing an understanding of how brand knowledge is structured is important, as it affects what comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand, or for example, how a consumer responds when encountered with UGC concerning that particular brand.

Brand knowledge is defined as consisting of two components, brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness relates to how easily consumers are able to identify a brand under different conditions, i.e. the strength of the brand node (Keller, 1993, p. 3). It on one hand consists of brand recognition, which is about whether a consumer is able to confirm previous exposure to the brand when coming in contact with the brand again. On the other hand, it is about brand recall, which relates to whether the consumer can recall the brand when encountered with its product category or another cue relating to its value or purpose. Keller (1993, p. 3) refers to classical sources such as Herzog (1963) and Newman (1957) when defining brand image as consumers’ perception of a brand as “reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory.” A brand image is formed when consumers interpret branded messages they are exposed to, e.g. through a company’s marketing communication (Kapferer, 2012, p. 151). These messages can be derived from signs such as brand name, visual symbols, products, advertisements and sponsoring (Kapferer, 2012, p. 151). In other words, for a brand image to be created, a brand node and connecting informational nodes relating to the brand must be established (Keller, 1993, p. 3). Companies strive to build brand images with “strong, favourable and unique brand associations” (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 10). Aaker (1996) state that brand associations can enhance customers’ user experience and satisfaction with a brand. These brand associations furthermore relate to attitudes. Attitudes are defined by Wilkie (1986, cited in Keller, 1993, p. 4) as the overall brand evaluation made by the consumer. According to Keller (1993), these attitudes are important since they lay the foundation for behavioural intentions.
According to Schultz et al. (1993) any experience that a consumer has with a brand, e.g. through marketer-controlled communication, WOM or using the product, has potential to influence the firm’s brand image. With the rise of Web 2.0-based platforms, which means that people can create content, including sharing thoughts and opinions about brands, consumers are essentially able to form other consumers’ perceptions of brands (Christodoulides et al. 2012; Cheong & Morrison, 2008). In other words, new brand associations can be created by externally-generated communication such as brand-related UGC, without involvement of the companies behind the brands. De Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) explain that the Internet has led brand value to become something that is co-created rather than brands being passively consumed by consumers. This further enhances the interest for studying the persuasive power of brand-related UGC, i.e. how consumers perceive and respond to brand-related UGC.

1.2.2 Consumer Empowerment and User-Generated Content

Chipp and Chakravorty (2016) recognise that consumers are more and more in control of their own consumption and rather than media producers pushing content onto the consumer, the consumer is pulling out the content they want themselves. The Internet offers consumers content at the time and place most convenient for them and the consumption is a deliberate activity during which content that fits internal motivations is chosen (Daugherty, 2008, p. 17). Highly personalised content is offered, which further manifest how consumers can choose what they are exposed to based on needs and desires (Liang et al., 2006, p. 46). It is thus understandable why mass media and traditional marketing practices are becoming increasingly less efficient in swaying consumers and influencing their behaviour (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, p. 240; p. 242). Traditional media producers have yet to realise and embrace this change, and it is argued that more customer-centric business models are required; as Chipp and Chakravorty (2016, p. 383) puts it: “consumers need to be partners; their creativity should be embraced.”

The content that Internet users choose to engage in is furthermore to a large extent generated by other Internet users rather than corporations (Christodoulides, 2012, p. 53). Social media is a way for consumers to express creativity and empowerment (Gillin, 2007, cited in Constantinides & Fountain, 2008, p. 238) and studies have been conducted on what motivates Internet users to create content online. Daugherty et al. (2008, p. 17-18) found that the most prominent motivational factors to creating content was (a) ego-defensive attitudes, i.e. to reduce self-doubt and feel a sense of belonging, and (b) social function, meaning a desire to interact with others or/and enhance one’s image in the eyes of others. Muñiz & Schau (2011, p. 211) state that consumers are motivated to create brand-related content because of personal attachment to a brand. This could be argued to be in lines with Daugherty et al.’s (2008, p. 23) conclusion that content in general often is created to achieve of a sense of belonging to social groups and to enhance of one’s image, since consumers’ attachment to brands is found to be motivated by similar factors (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012 p. 1183; Dolich, 1969, p. 84; Jamal & Goode, 2001, p. 490; Schmitt, 2012, p. 8-13). Daugherty et al. (2008, p. 18) moreover argue that the attitudes shown towards content created by other Internet users depend on the perceived value of the content and how it fits into the consumer’s personal framework of feelings and beliefs.
Content created by Internet users, as previously mentioned, falls under the concept and category of UGC. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007, p. 8) defines UGC as forms of media that is created by users on the Internet, and gives it three identification criteria: (1) publication requirement; meaning that the content has to be published somewhere publicly, thus UGC does not include bilateral communication, (2) creative effort; meaning that the user needs to put in certain effort into creating the content, and (3) creation outside of professional routines and practices. UGC is further defined as content that is produced by normal users on the Internet (Cheong and Marrison, 2008, p. 38; Daugherty, et al., 2008, p. 16), i.e. content made by companies or marketers is not UGC.

According to Cheong and Morrison (2008, p. 38) UGC is often confused with electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and meanwhile the concepts are interrelated, the difference lies in the way the content is communicated - eWOM is content conveyed to others, while UGC is content that is produced by users. It could be argued that brand-related UGC is eWOM, but that not all eWOM content can be considered UGC. eWOM is according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 38) “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.” A distinction between the concepts is that eWOM can be expressed in a private channel, e.g. a private message between two people, while UGC has a public audience. Brand-related UGC could furthermore also be referred to as consumer-generated content (CGC), which essentially is a synonym that also is frequently used in the academic literature. This study, however, adapts the term brand-related UGC, as UGC is a more commonly used term than CGC. This is evident by searching the terms on Google Scholar, where consumer-generated content shows 15 100 hits, while user-generated content shows 336 000 hits.

From a corporate perspective, using UGC in an online marketing strategy, would allow a company to use relatively inexpensive means to reach a large audience (Nutley, 2007, cited in Gamble, 2013, p. 1863). However, these costs vary depending on the context. Henderson (2017) provides some estimates on the costs of advertising on Instagram through influencers. The costs depend on the number of followers the poster has; 2000 to 10 000 Instagram followers equals $75-$250 per post, while posters with more than 500 000 followers are able to charge more than $3000 per post. As an example, Henderson (2017) notes that Selena Gomez receives about $550 000 per post, while having 122 million followers. To many companies, this is very expensive, and therefore micro influencers have become an area of interest. Hosie (2019) acknowledges that the definitions vary, but that micro-influencers can be defined as having 10,000 to 50,000 followers. Hosie (2019) further explain that companies' incentives to work with these micro influencers is due to these being perceived as trustworthy and relatable compared to other larger influencers. In conclusion, the costs of using influencer marketing as a strategy might vary, but the costs of incorporating brand-related UGC in the marketing campaign as a co-creation strategy, is relatively inexpensive.

Gray (2007, p. 23, cited in Gamble, 2013, p. 1863) names development of consumer-relationship as one of the benefits of UGC, as some marketers have created “an online presence in UGC spaces” in order to connect with consumers. Furthermore, being present in an UGC environment allows the company to track and review the content related to their brand, and react accordingly with regulatory action (Nutley, 2007, cited in Gamble, 2013, p. 1863). One of the challenges that companies are faced with is the one of how to
incorporate offerings to fit the content created by consumers, as many consumers are diverting their attention from traditional media (Daugherty et al., 2008, p. 16). The fact that consumers are becoming the ones that shape the brand image (Christodoulides, 2012, p. 53), proves it difficult for marketing managers to control the consumer perception of their brands.

A common conclusion made among researchers on the topic is that UGC has changed the field of marketing, and that this change is characterised by an increase in consumer power (Labrecque, et al., 2013; Pitt et al., 2002). The development of Web 2.0 technologies, and thus UGC, has made the traditional border between producers and consumers more blurred. Consumers today play a more active role than ever before in marketing practices, through the process of value co-creation (Cova et al., 2011, p. 237-238; Füller et al., 2009, p. 93), a fact which for marketers equals both challenges as well as opportunities.

1.3 Research Gap

As information technology is continuing to transform society it is essential to learn about UGC. Daugherty (2008) state that the amount of UGC is likely to increase dramatically during the decades to come, as gradually more people will move towards consuming and creating UGC. Marketers should take advantage of this opportunity and use UGC to communicate and get through to target audiences (Daugherty, 2008). Academicians have until now focused much attention on comparing user-generated content with firm-created content, which provides implications of differences in persuasive power (e.g. Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Few however studied brand-related UGC in isolation and looked deeper into its impact on consumers.

Christodoulides et al. (2012) suggest that a better understanding of consumer empowerment in the context of brand-related UGC could be gained through qualitative research. The same authors furthermore state that a distinction between incentive and non-incentive UGC might provide new insights. Kim and Song (2017) similarly request that sponsorship should be considered in research to come, as it is likely to have implications on the persuasion process of brand-related UGC. Future research should moreover be directed at the individuals who are encountered with brand-related UGC, i.e. consumers of brand-related UGC, to explore how this kind of exposure result in changes in customer-based brand equity (Christodoulides et al., 2012). An understanding of how UGC is consumed is needed to be able to create and deliver promotional messages with maximum impact (Daugherty, 2008).

As there exists multiple Web 2.0-based platforms that are widely used, it is of value to investigate the influence different platforms have on the persuasion process of brand-related UGC (Kim & Song, 2017). Kim and Song (2017), who studied brand-related UGC on Twitter, recognise the need for studies on other platforms, e.g. on video- and/or image-sharing platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. It is also argued that future research needs to look into how various characteristics of platforms relate and lead to communication effectiveness (Kim & Song, 2017). Kim and Song (2017) furthermore state that different sources are going to have different information-spreading power and perceived credibility, and that this also would be an interesting point to examine further.

Kim and Johnson (2016) studied responses consumers show to brand-related UGC on Facebook, but state that further research is needed in relation to other platforms,
additional product categories and other potential responses. Cheong and Morrison (2008) suggest that more research specifically is needed when it comes to the consumer response that is purchase intention. As the purpose of using brand-related UGC as part of a communication strategy, essentially is to draw out beneficial responses from consumers, the impact of brand-related UGC on consumers’ attitudes and behavioural intentions is an important area of the topic to look further into.

Communication has historically often been studied from the perspective of credibility, which has proven to be an accurate determinant for communication effectiveness (e.g. Hovland, 1953; Metzger et al., 2003). To current time, there does not seem to exist any studies which has investigated effectiveness of brand-related UGC through examining perceived credibility. As this is a classical approach, it seems that it would be an appropriate and insightful way to study how consumers perceive and respond to brand-related UGC.

### 1.4 Research Question

*How do consumers assess credibility when encountered with brand-related UGC online, and how do consumers’ attitudes and behavioural intentions vary accordingly?*

### 1.5 Thesis Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how consumers assess credibility of brand-related UGC that they encounter on Web 2.0-based platforms. It is important to gain up to date insight into the matter, as this kind of externally generated brand communication spawn new brand associations in the minds of consumers and in doing so, also influence brand image. Furthermore, it is of interest to look into how consumers respond to brand-related UGC, depending on the credibility they attach to it. The aim is thus to gain insight into the way brand-related UGC induce responses, in terms of forming attitudes and/or generating behavioural intentions that, whether positive or negative, might have implications for a brand.

The primary aim of this study is thus to provide a deeper understanding of how a consumer reason and respond when faced with brand-related UGC and the question of how credible it is. Beyond the scientific contribution, this study aspires to give practical implications in regard to what should be kept in mind when considering taking advantage of brand-related UGC from a corporate point of view, e.g. by encouraging or sponsoring consumers to create brand-related UGC.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature. Brand management acts as the point of departure for investigating how brand-related UGC, as a phenomenon outside firms’ control, influences consumers’ attitudes and behavioural intentions. Credibility is examined in relation to communication process components and acts as a guide for explaining how consumers assess brand-related UGC. The key components are brought together in a model, which further clarifies connections and facilitates the data collection process.

2.1 Brand Communication

Firms realise that brands are some of their most valuable intangible assets and branding has thus become a priority for managers (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 740). Brands are not only built based upon the product itself and the experience of using it, but also by the accompanying marketing activities (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 740). Branding and marketing activities are used to achieve a desired brand positioning and to build brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2011, p. 276). How these efforts work together is what determines whether the outcomes are successful or not (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 743). How consumers perceive brands is however not solely influenced by company actions, but also brand messages that lie out of firms’ control. This kind of externally-driven marketing communication, a category into which brand-related UGC falls, thus also affects brands.

Corcoran (2009) has developed a suiting framework for explaining different mediums for marketing communication. The model contains three components: (1) owned media, (2) paid media, and (3) earned media. Owned media refers to content that is produced and controlled by a company, e.g. a company’s website (Corcoran, 2009). Paid media refers to situations that a company is able to control through payment, e.g. sponsorships (Corcoran, 2009). Earned media is independent and cannot be controlled by a company, e.g. viral content or word-of-mouth (Corcoran, 2009). As the aim of this study is to explore how brand-related UGC influences brand attitudes and behavioural intentions, it is earned media which is of primary interest. Furthermore, marketers today are to a larger degree than ever before taking alternative approaches to building and maintaining brands (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The Internet is increasingly used for marketing purposes (Jothi et al., 2011, p. 234) and the aim with the online strategies that marketers nowadays are employing is usually to generate buzz among consumers and to create beneficial consumer communities (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 744). A powerful tool of persuasion is someone else’s advocacy (Edelman, 2010, p. 3), which is increasingly realised by marketers, evident by the sponsored posts visible online on Web 2.0 based platforms. This is why content produced through paid media is included alongside earned media in the investigation.

No matter whether a message is marketer-controlled or externally-driven, communication is a transaction between two or more parties, by which meaning is exchanged through the use of symbols (Engel et al., 1994). The traditional communication models, often used in e.g. advertising effectiveness research, can similarly when it comes to brand-related communication through UGC be used to explain how a message is transmitted from a sender, through a channel, to a recipient. One of these models is the SMCR model of communication developed by Berlo (1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31), which is a linear
model that contains the components of source, message, channel and receiver. The model explains how a message originates from a source, who creates and encodes a message that is to be sent to a receiver. Lasswell’s (1948, cited in Duncan & Moriarty, 1998, p. 2) communication model is another classic study that similarly to Berlo (1960), consists of a source encoding a message, a channel through which the message is sent, noise interfering the communication, a recipient of the message, and finally feedback, which is sent back to the source. However, as for this study, the communicative components used in the conceptual framework will be restricted to source, message and channel, as these are more relevant for online communication.

There are a number of attributes and characteristics that the sender possesses, which also affect how the receiver is going to interpret the message. Berlo (1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31) recognises these factors to be the communication skills, attitude, knowledge, social systems and culture of the sender. The message sent is a bundle of information, which can take various forms, and what determines this is the content, elements, treatment, structure and code of the message (Berlo, 1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31). Content relates to what is communicated and elements regards the nonverbal cues which influences the interpretation of the message, e.g. gestures and signs (Berlo, 1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31). Treatment is in which way the message is sent or packaged, and structure refers to how the message is organised and code acknowledges the form, i.e. if the message is sent through text, video, speech or another medium (Berlo, 1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31). The message travels through a channel, which is the medium (Lasswell, 1948, cited in by Duncan & Moriarty, 1998, p. 2). The medium allows the receiver to pick up the message by his or her sensory system, i.e. through vision, sound, smell, taste and/or touch (Berlo, 1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31). Lastly, in a linear model like this one, the message reaches the receiver, and for the message to be correctly decoded, the sender and receiver according to Berlo (1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31) need to have similar thinking patterns. The sender decodes the message individually and attach their own meaning to it.

The model by Berlo (1960) has been criticised for being linear and it has been further developed (e.g. Schramm, 1955) to take account of the interactivity usually existent in the communication process. As the topic of this study relates to brand-related UGC, we argue that a linear model is suitable, because the interest lies in how a receiver perceives and reacts to a message posted online through a medium suited for the Internet, e.g. sound, video, imagery or text. Thus, these messages are not transmitted live and, in that sense, not an interactive process, wherein the recipient can interfere and affect the message encoded and sent by the sender. Berlo (1960, cited in Narula, 2006) however bring up the point conceptualised as noise. Noise refers to the interruptions that can take place when a message is sent through a channel. In the case of brand-related UGC a practical example is comments on a social media post. One of the requirements for allowing online content to be called UGC, is that it must be publically available - meaning that in the communication process the receivers are more than one person (OECD, 2007, p. 8), possibly millions. Under the circumstance that there is an open comment section, the reflections generated by early receivers will potentially affect of how later receivers are going to interpret the message.

How brand-related communication through UGC will be interpreted depends on whether the receiving consumer is aware of the brand from before, and in that case also what kind of brand associations the individual currently holds relating to the brand (Keller, 1993),
i.e. the differential effect that the existent brand knowledge has. Exposure to brand-related communication will however also result in new brand associations - or new “nodes” (Keller, 1993), as described by the associative network memory model. One of the main determinants of how effective communication is, i.e. how well a recipient is going to take in a message at a specific touch point, has from previous research found to be perceived credibility (e.g. MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). As the purpose of this study is to explore how consumers are persuaded and adopt what is communicated through brand-related UGC, in terms of attitude formation and behavioural intent, perceived credibility is chosen as an instrument for investigation.

2.2 Credibility of Brand-related UGC

Ever since Aristotle’s observation of speakers’ persuasive abilities, a considerable amount of research has been conducted in relation to a variety of fields when it comes to the issue of credibility (Rieh & Danielson, 2007, p. 307). As the use of the Internet has increased, the academic interest in credibility has yet again been awoken (Metzger et al., 2003, p. 293). The new form of information consumption, online, resulted in a larger responsibility for consumers to assess the credibility of content themselves, in contrast to earlier when information outlets were limited and had control mechanisms to validate what was let through (Metzger et al., 2003, p. 294). The credibility of the key components of the traditional communication process model, i.e. source, message and media channel, have historically been questioned and investigated repeatedly. The digital development has however resulted in a demand for a reexamination of these traditional concepts (Rieh & Danielson, 2007, p. 308).

An area of study that still is relatively unexplored is the one relating to the credibility that consumers attach to brand-related UGC. Ad credibility is however a matter into which researchers have put a great deal of effort (e.g. MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Meanwhile, these two forms of communication cannot be argued to be the same as one is marketer-controlled and the other externally-driven, findings in the domain of advertising credibility can provide valuable insight into how credibility of brand-related UGC can be investigated.

Recognising the existence of a relationship between the attitudes shown towards an ad and the effects advertising has on brand attitude and purchase intention, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) were among the first to study the underlying determinants of “a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion” (Lutz, 1985, cited in MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989, p. 48). One of the five first-order determinants investigated is ad credibility, which is a fraction that since then has been further investigated by an array of authors (e.g. Yoon et al., 1998; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Bae et al., 2001). MacKenzie and Lutz (1989, p. 51) define ad credibility as one of the perceptual responses consumers demonstrate when exposed to a commercial stimulus, and more specifically, the degree to which a consumer believes and trusts the claims made about a brand in an ad. Ad credibility is further divided into three underlying dimensions: perceived ad claim discrepancy - whether the message is coherent and fits into the context, advertiser credibility - if the sponsor is believable and trustworthy, and advertising credibility - referring to consumers general opinions about ads (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989, p. 51). Rather than advertising credibility being a direct determinant of ad credibility, advertiser credibility was in the results found to be a mediating component between these the two of these (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989,
Moreover, findings show that a relationship between ad credibility and attitude towards both the ad itself as well as the brand does exist (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989, p. 62). Bae et al. (2001) base their research on these findings when they set out to give a broadened perspective through adding an additional dimension - media credibility - to the explanatory framework of ad credibility. The reasoning behind this extension is based on the common conceptualisation often referred to as the communication process, as previously explained, including the main components of source, message, channel and receiver.

An assumption made, is that when it comes to credibility, brand-related UGC can resemble an ad. This in the sense that a consumer in the same way interpret contextual cues, such as the source, message and channel, which influences how the consumer perceives the credibility of the communication. The credibility attached to the communication affects the consumer’s attitude toward the content itself as well as the brand that it relates to and consequent behavioural intentions. An important point of difference is that the source behind the message in marketer-controller marketing communication, e.g. an ad, obviously is the company behind the brand, meanwhile in externally-generated communication, such as brand-related UGC, the content can be made selflessly or on incentive by the company, and thus also paid or unpaid. Accordingly, sponsorship is a factor, which consumers take into consideration when making credibility judgements (Lu et al., 2014), and is therefore relevant to include in this study. The concept of credibility will in the following be discussed in relation to the traditional communication factors, with the addition of sponsorship.

2.2.1 Credibility of Source

Consumers tend to associate product information found in UGC with trustworthiness, and there is no differentiation between positive or negative content, meaning the level of trust towards the brand-related UGC seem to remain even (Cheong & Morrison, 2008, p. 45). This association is mainly dependent upon the creator behind the content - i.e. another consumer. Thus, the reason why consumers often seek out UGC rather than producer-generated content (PGC) when looking to buy a product, is that they perceive content based on personal experience as being in position of a higher degree of credibility. This is in line with the timeless statement of Hovland et al. (1953, p. 19), that “the effectiveness of a communication is commonly assumed to depend to a considerable extent upon who delivers it”, which further underlines the importance of the source of a message.

The term source credibility is used to express positive qualities of a communicator, which influences how, or whether, a receiver will accept a message (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). The early research around source credibility has been characterised by an inconsistency among authors when it comes to how many and which dimensions it is that source credibility in fact consists of (Ohanian, 1990, p. 40), which to a large extent is attributed to a lack of reliability in the research instruments used. A more trusted conceptualisation of source credibility, frequently used in more recent research, is Ohanian’s (1990) three determinant qualities of a credible spokesperson: (1) attractiveness, (2) trustworthiness, and (3) expertness. The characteristics in this construct have been found to and have persuasive power and establish both immediate and delayed changes in attitudes. Hovland et al. (1953) make conclusions which state that expertise and trustworthiness are the two main factors affecting source credibility, meanwhile the attractiveness dimension is derived from McGuire’s (1985) source valence model.
These qualities, and perhaps most notably attractiveness, are often found in people identified as opinion leaders. An opinion leader could essentially be described as a consumer who is somewhat more influential than others. Opinion leaders are furthermore described as “people who are interested in new issues and tend to diffuse their opinions about them” (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948, cited in Cheong & Morrison, 2008, p. 40). Content creators are continuously establishing influential positions on social media, sometimes with more followers than a brand could dream of reaching with a TV ad for example, it would thus be irrational to expect this kind of opinion leaders to have no effect on how consumers perceive and react to a product they are talking about. At times these opinion leaders might themselves even have stronger personal brands, than the actual brand of the product they are including in their content. This makes opinion leaders a very important factor for companies to take into consideration when forming their online marketing strategies. Ding et al. (2014, p. 1785-1786) talk about the forming of communities and social groups on social media, with consumers reaching out to others with similar interests and experiences, and how these are seen as an upside of UGC. The credibility of a source might be strengthened by the communities that are connected to the source, e.g. if there is a large fan following the source it could for a recipient indicate acknowledgement of the source’s expertise in the topic they discuss.

De Veirman et al. (2017, p. 812) explain how marketing through influencers is becoming more important, with the continuing growth of social media and consumers’ increased use of ad-blocking software. Through the use of influential online personas, brands can get their messages across without pushing out traditional ads. Since one of the main points with influencer marketing is to create a sense of authenticity, the process of choosing the right influencer to work with is critical. When it comes to new products, with sparse brand knowledge among consumers, it is found that choosing an influencer with a high rather than moderate number of followers may result in a loss of product uniqueness, since consumers will assume it is generic, as many others also are interested (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 813-814). Influencers with high numbers of followers are moreover not necessarily always perceived as being opinion leaders (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 814).

With the empowered status of UGC, consumer-generated advertising is currently an expanding trend (Hansen et al., 2014, p. 254). Consumer responses to this kind of advertising has been studied in light of source credibility and how it influences attitudes and behaviours. Results produced by Hansen, et al. (2014, p. 261) show that video ads found online, labelled as consumer-generated advertising, influence consumers’ perceptions of source credibility positively; after a single exposure to a 32-second video ad, participants who were under the impression that the ad was consumer-generated showed better attitudes than the participants who had been told it was created by an advertising agency. Meanwhile it affected the perception of the ad, it could not be deemed to influence the attitudes towards the brand as a whole. This is assumed to result from the fact that consumers rarely are affected by just one exposure and that the study intentionally had selected a brand with low recognition among participants to prevent the information processing from biases.

Moreover, the study also found that consumer-generated advertising also increased interactions in the form of commenting, rating and search for related videos. Source credibility was however not high enough to make consumers pass along messages to peers. Not knowing much about the person who made the video (Cheung et al., 2008, p.
242) and the motivations behind it (Ertimur and Gilly, 2012, p. 126; Thompson and Malaviya, 2013, p. 44) might have lessened credibility. Selecting a fitting spokesperson, who is attractive, trustworthy and an expert, to communicate a product or service message is therefore an important, but difficult, task.

2.2.2 Credibility of Message

It must be noted that when assessing credibility of the different communication model parts, these are not separable, but intertwined and overlapping. In the research of message credibility, many articles found that characteristics of a message has an effect on the channel or source credibility, e.g. Metzger et al. (2003, p. 305) noted that channel characteristics are hard to separate from message structure, wherefore it is important to note that it is difficult to separate these concepts. Previous studies have shown that there are many factors contributing to credibility, and in cases where e.g. a source is anonymous, the evaluator need to assess other aspects in order to determine how trustworthy and credible the source they examine is (e.g. Petty & Cacioppo, 1988, cited in Metzger et al., 2003, p. 302), for example characteristics of a message. However, since credibility of source, message and channel are overlapping concepts, evaluators tend to examine all of the mentioned simultaneously.

Metzger et al. (2003, p. 305) noted that there has been little research concerning message credibility online, but that the general research of message credibility is present and could most likely be applied in other contexts and other types of media. The structure, content and delivery of a message are said to be components of relevance in new media as well as traditional media. Message accuracy, comprehensiveness, currency, reliability and validity are named as important factors in the credibility assessment process, and these are likely to be important factors when examining online content as well (Metzger et al., 2003, p. 305).

Message credibility examines how characteristics of a message influence the believability of what is communicated (Metzger et al., 2003, p. 302). According to Appelman and Sundar (2016), there is a lack of research regarding measuring message credibility, wherefore the authors aim to develop a message credibility scale. The authors hypothesise that credibility perception of a message could affect the way people judge. The focus of analysis in the study is the individual, hence message credibility has been defined as “an individual’s judgment of the veracity of the content of communication” (Appelman & Sundar, 2016, p. 63). The conclusion of the study was that message credibility can be measured by asking participants how the perceived accuracy, perceived authenticity and believability can describe the message (Appelman & Sundar, 2016, p. 73). Furthermore, the authors found that there are additional adjectives that describe message credibility and it was noted that these also relate to source credibility. These adjectives were; authoritative, reliable, reputable and trustworthy.

Message structure, message content and message delivery are dimensions identified in previous research, under which message credibility can be categorised (Metzger et al., 302, p. 302). Other researchers have been able to find that well-organised messages are perceived as more credible than unorganised messages, when it comes to message structure (Gass & Seiter, 1999, cited in Metzger et al., 2003, p. 302). As for the message content, it has been proved that there are several factors such as language intensity and information quality influencing the credibility of a message (Hamilton, 1998, p. 135).
Further, Hamilton (1998) found that when the quality of the information or the evidence provided in the content was high, the message was deemed more credible. However, when the language used was more opinionated or intensive, it was deemed less credible. Therefore, the language used is also of importance. It was especially noted that “language intensity had a more positive effect on ratings of source competence and trustworthiness as the quality of the arguments in the message increased.” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 137). Metzger et al. (2003, p. 304) note that another message characteristic that impact the credibility is message delivery, i.e. the way a message is delivered to recipients, for example in terms of articulation, speed, communication style.

Al Mansour et al. (2014) examine information credibility in the context of UGC, and the study reviews different models used to assess information credibility. Further, based on previous research Al Mansour et al. (2014, p. 1) identify three main components affecting UGC information credibility perception; (1) contexts, e.g. topic and situation, (2) features of the UGC platform, (3) evaluator traits, e.g. topic knowledge. It is noted that evaluators’ traits have not been deemed relevant in previous research in terms of information credibility perception (Al Mansour et al., 2014, p. 4). The authors concluded that the two components evaluator and context need further research to confirm their reliability, the discussion this study produces however still provide insight into how information credibility can be assessed. The authors believe that people who have knowledge in the topic and are without prejudice are likely to “exhibit a superior credibility judgment” (Al Mansour et al., 2014, p. 4).

Based on these studies, one could say that to examine the credibility of a message is very ambiguous. There are many different components that are part of the process of message credibility assessment, while there also are factors outside of the message itself that affects the judgment, and it might be hard to distinguish from where the credibility of the message stems from. In this study, the credibility of message will be mainly based on Appelman and Sundar’s (2016) measurement, and the suggested considerations by Metzger et al. (2003), while the discussion by Al Mansour et al. (2014) will be taken in consideration when analysing the results.

2.2.3 Credibility of Channel

It has long been known that the channel through which a message is communicated is of high importance (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 19). As Berlo explained (1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31), the channel is a medium, which allows the receiver to consume a message through the sensory system. As this study is concerned with brand-related UGC, the senses of relevance can only be vision and hearing, as of now it is impossible to taste, smell or touch brand-related UGC. The available channels through which brand-related UGC is communicated is through audio, picture and video, which means these are the channels through which content is communicated to a recipient, according to Berlo’s communication model (1960, cited in Narula, 2006, p. 31).

The literature review has shown that a factor that affect consumer behavior when viewing brand-related UGC is the platform on which it was published and viewed, and there to exist a difference in the brand-related UGC created across different platforms (Smith et al., 2012). Media is a concept that includes many different forms of communication and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2019) as “the main means of mass
communication”. As for this thesis, as the topic of interest is brand-related UGC, the credibility of media is specified as Web 2.0 platforms.

Flanagin and Metzger (2007, p. 320) study the role of site features when assessing the credibility of web-based information and express the need to investigate different types of websites and information in terms of credibility. Flanagin and Metzger (2007, p. 332) found in the study that there are differences in the perceived credibility across different types of websites. It was noted that the users’ experience had an impact on the credibility assessments, wherefore it can be stated that the perceived credibility of a channel differs greatly among individuals. Furthermore, Flanagin and Metzger (2007, p. 333) explain that different website genres corresponds to differences in website attributes, and that these attributes may also be of importance in the credibility assessment.

Other researchers have also been able to note the importance of website attributes and that some of these Internet media channels have similar characteristics and features and can therefore be categorised to some degree. For example, when it comes to user testimonial ads on websites, it has been found that websites containing audio and/or video testimonials are viewed more favourably than sites without these contents, i.e. only text and/or picture testimonials or no testimonials, and the product was also viewed more favourably due to this (Appiah, 2012, p. 83). This further proves the fact that the form or the channel through which a message is communicated, be it UGC or otherwise brand-related, has an impact on consumer behavior.

The impact of UGC quality on credibility perception and behavioural intention has been studied by Hautz et al. (2014), concerning user-generated videos (UGV) rather than text- or picture-based content. Quality in this context refers to technical quality, e.g. video resolution, sharpness of the picture. The study was concerned with the credibility of source, rather than the actual channel, but the findings showed that there were certain differences in relation to the video quality. When the technical quality is low, UGV is deemed much more trustworthy than agency-generated videos (AGV), while when the technical quality is high, they are deemed as equal or there is no impact on trustworthiness (Hautz et al., 2014, p. 9-10). In conclusion, the authors argue, that the generally accepted view that UGC is superior to firm-generated content is challenged by these results, and that further investigation is needed regarding specific conditions and attributes of UGC and agency generated content when considering credibility and the impact on consumer behavior (Hautz et al., 2014, p. 10).

In another study that focus on attitudes towards eWOM communication and the differences across channels, Gvili and Levy (2016, p. 1031) acknowledge that different Internet channels function in different ways with different characteristics and features, and thus influence consumers in various ways. Dao et al. (2014) has suggested that across different channels, the effects of informativeness and entertainment of an advertisement has on advertising’s perceived value is varying. Therefore, Gvili and Levy (2016, p. 1035) argue that the attitude consumers has toward eWOM can in a similar fashion vary between different channels, wherefore the study examines the effect of different communication channels relating to eWOM.

The results from Gvili and Levy’s (2016, p. 1040) study show that the attitude toward eWOM communication is varying between the different communication channels, with online comment boards showing low consumer attitude and SNS/blogs showing high
consumer attitude. Online comments were perceived as unentertaining, spontaneous, low informativeness, and can thus be seen as being of low channel value, while SNS platforms with media richness are perceived as highly entertaining and having high channel value, and finally web forums were perceived as highly informative but low entertaining, and thus perceived as of high channel value (Gvili & Levy, 2016, p. 1040) Therefore, it is argued that the value of eWOM can only be increased by the communication channel’s informativeness and entertainment if they are viewed as credible (Gvili & Levy, 2016, p. 1041), while irritating eWOM messages can affect the attitude toward a channel’s eWOM messages (Gvili & Levy, 2016, p. 1041-1042). Gvili and Levy (2016, p. 1043) conclude the study with stating that the outcome of consumers’ evaluation of channels’ informativeness, entertainment and irritation affect the perceived credibility of a channel, and it is emphasised that enhanced informativeness would increase credibility (Gvili & Levy, 2016, p. 1042).

2.2.4 Credibility of Sponsorship

There have been some recent studies about how the effectiveness of brand-related UGC differs depending on whether the content is sponsored or not. Lu et al. (2014) have made a study on consumer attitudes and purchase intention when sponsored bloggers recommend products or services. To encourage bloggers and influencers to produce posts about the brand, they receive either direct monetary compensation or indirect compensation in the form of free products (Lu et al., 2014, p. 260). The study showed that the purchase intention of the recommended product was positive when the consumers believed the post and the attitude toward the blogger was positive. If the post was viewed as credible, it affected the purchase intention of consumers (Lu et al., 2014, p. 263-264). Furthermore, it was shown that when a connection between a blogger and a sponsor is revealed by the blogger, consumers were unaffected. Lu et al. (2014, p. 263) theorise that this would be due to the consumers feeling as if the blogger is not trying to cheat the readers or mislead them in any way. The openness of the blogger further increased the credibility of the posts (Lu et al., 2014, p. 264). Another conclusion that could be drawn by the study was that the consumers’ brand awareness had an effect on the attitude toward the sponsored post. It was proved that consumers with high brand awareness held positive attitudes toward the post, and therefore it could be claimed that having high brand awareness would mean that consumers are more likely to find a post credible (Lu et al., 2014, p. 263).

The effectiveness of brand-related UGC on social media has been examined, and recent research showed that non-sponsored content had more favourable responses than content that was sponsored and induced “fewer inferences of manipulative intent” (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 118). Opinion leaders can sometimes be paid by companies to promote their product or service, i.e. paid media, which has become increasingly popular among companies (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 105). The difference is not always known to the beholder, but unsponsored messages are viewed more favourably than a sponsored message (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 118), and in the case that the paid media reveals the fact that the message is sponsored, the readers find the source credible compared to as if this fact had been concealed from the readers (Lu, et al., 2014).

Carr and Hayes (2014, p. 46) showed in their study that the perception of a blogger’s credibility changes depending on the degree of disclosure of sponsorship, and more specifically the blogger was viewed as more credible when it was revealed that the post
was sponsored and that the blogger is influenced by a third-party, than when it was only vaguely implied that there was a sponsorship involved in the post. The researchers further speculated that explicit disclosure of sponsorship could have an endorsement effect, in the sense that the blogger is viewed as more credible if the endorsement connection between the blogger and the company is clear (Carr & Hayes, 2014, p. 46). Furthermore, it was revealed in the study that there was no significant difference between “the perceived credibility of a blogger who indicates no outside influence on a product review and a blogger who does not make any mention of the potential for outside influence” (Carr & Hayes, 2014, p. 46), which according to the authors implies that Internet users tend to assume that the content they encounter on social media, blogs and websites is impartial. According to Hwang and Jeong (2016, p. 528) bloggers sometimes write in sponsored posts “all opinions are my own, although this is a sponsored post” as a way to disclose the fact that the post is sponsored, but also as an attempt to lessen the negative impact that is connected with letting readers know that the content is sponsored. Hwang and Jeong (2016, p. 533) found that posts with simple sponsorship disclosure were viewed as less credible, but by telling the readers that the opinions expressed is one’s own, the content of the post is still viewed as honest.

When sponsored creators, or influencers, are making posts, it is important to consider the laws regarding this type of marketing. As for Sweden, 9 § in the Law of Marketing (Sw.: Marknadsföringslag)(SFS: 2008:486) state that all types of marketing practices should be made and presented in a way that makes it clear for the consumer that what they are reading, viewing or experiencing is in fact marketing. The same paragraph in the law also state that it is required that it is clear who is the one responsible for the marketing practice. In other words, when bloggers make sponsored posts, they are required by the law to state that the post is sponsored and by whom. This is to make sure that the consumer is not misled by the advertisement, and that there is a transparency in the marketing practice.

There has been research showing that bloggers and influencers do not always follow the laws concerning sponsorship disclosure. According to Walden et al. (2015, p. 263) less than 15% of American bloggers are following the Federal Trade Commission’s guidelines regarding endorsements, and this despite the fact that many are aware of the regulations that exist and agree with them. The cultural differences between the US and Sweden might have an impact on this percentage, but there have been several cases where the Swedish organisation Reklamombudsmannens opinionsnämnd (RON) have found influencers to be guilty of sponsored content without disclosure (Frick, 2017; Törner, 2018; Wallenberg, 2018). Therefore, it might be difficult for consumers to examine the credibility of content online, especially in cases where a product or service is recommended. In these cases, consumers need to assess the credibility of the content by themselves.

To summarise, there have been many studies indicating that the sponsorship factor is of great importance when it comes to consumer perception of brands, content and influencer. By scrutinizing previous literature, we have been able to find these sources that establishes the connection between credibility and sponsorship of user-generated content, the source of the message, the message content, and finally, the channel that is used to express the opinions of the messenger.
2.3 Attitude Towards Brand-related UGC and Brand

Attitude is defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, cited in Mir & Rehman, 2013, p. 643) as “an individual’s favourable or unfavourable feelings and evaluations about performing a particular behaviour.” Another definition of attitude would be a summary of evaluations of an attitude object, which is something in a person’s mind (Bohner & Wänke, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, an attitude object can be concrete, abstract, people or things, and attitudes include affective, behavioural and cognitive responses (Bohner & Wänke, 2014, p. 5). The authors explain how attitude is connected with behaviour, in the sense that persuasion can lead to behavioural changes (Bohner & Wänke, 2014, p. 165), while a change in behaviour could lead to attitude changes (Bohner & Wänke, 2014, p. 184).

Hovland et al. (1953, p. 7) have also discussed attitude; the difference between “attitude” and “opinion” is in the way the two are used. The terms relate to implicit responses, but opinion is used for describing expectations, while attitude is used “for those implicit responses which are oriented toward approaching or avoiding a given object, person, group, or symbol” (Hovland et al, 1953, p. 7). Another point of difference in the verbalisation of the two concepts; attitude is an unconscious process and therefore sometimes unverbalisable, while opinions are verbalisable (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 7). Further, Hovland et al. (1953, p. 7) have argued that the attitude change is dependent on how recipients understand information and their attention to the information, but also their willingness to accept and learn the information. Hovland et al. (1953, p. 7) summarise by stating; “This process is affected by source, message, recipient, and channel factors.”

There have been plenty of research about credibility and its influence on attitude. As mentioned earlier, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) argue that the effect credibility of an ad has on consumers is reflected in the attitudes toward the ad and the brand as well as purchase intention. However, the ad attitude and brand attitude differ, in the sense that the ad attitude affects the perception of the ad, while brand attitude affects brand image, which is confirmed by Keller’s research (1993). Furthermore, it should be noted that brand attitude affects purchase intentions (Lutz, 1985, cited in Yoon et al., 1998, p. 53).

There are various studies (e.g. Lee et al., 2009) that have investigated the influence that online communication has on consumers’ evaluations of products and brands. Results show that positive brand-related UGC brought about enhanced brand attitudes, meanwhile negative brand-related UGC led to more unfavourable attitudes towards the brand, compared to when not having been exposed to any brand-related UGC at all (Lee et al., 2009, p. 8-9). Content that is extremely negative in tone, has further been found to have a greater impact on brand attitude than any other variation of content - consistent with the concept of negativity bias, which explains people’s tendency to weigh negative information more heavily than positive information. Lee et al. (2009, p. 9) additionally have found that moderately negative content and extremely positive content have a comparable effect on brand attitude.

Previous studies have been able to establish that consumer attitude affects behavioural intentions (Kraft et al., 2005). Mir and Rehman (2013, p. 649) conducted a study that determined a correlation between attitudes towards UGC on YouTube and behavioural intentions. The study showed that the quantity of posts, views and reviews affects perceived credibility and perceived usefulness, which in turn affect consumer attitudes.
towards UGC. Users with a positive attitude towards UGC will be influenced in their purchase decision making process in a positive manner (Mir & Rehman, 2013, p. 650). Therefore, it can also be assumed that the perceived credibility of the UGC will influence consumer attitudes.

2.4 Behavioural Response

There are many definitions to behavioural responses, and it should be noted that the way people react to things can differ due to individual reasons and not always depend on external stimuli. However, when it comes to marketing, researchers have managed to categorise certain responses that tend to occur often when consumers encounter marketing activities or other activities related to a product or service that has an impact on the consumer (e.g. Kim & Johnson, 2016).

The effect of brand-related UGC on behavioural responses was studied by Kim and Johnson (2016, p. 100-101), and they have defined behavioural responses as information pass-along, impulse buying, future-purchase intention, and brand engagement. Passing along information is defined by Kim and Johnson (2016, p. 100 as an eWOM activity, since it pertains to passing along opinions about or experiences with brands and products. Impulse buying is the spontaneous intent of purchasing a product without further reflection (Adelaar et al., 2003, p. 250). Future-purchase intention relate to the intention to purchase at a later time after giving the purchase some thought (Adelaar et al., 2003, p. 249). Brand engagement is the relationship between the brand and the consumer, which is an important aspect to brand managers. Customer brand engagement is defined by Hollebeek (2011, p. 565) as "the level of a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions." A study by Malthouse et al. (2016) supported that brand-related UGC engagement has an effect on consumer behaviour, and furthermore on purchase intention.

In the work by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), it is argued that the attitude towards an ad affect the attitude towards the brand. Further, Keller (1993) argues that brand attitude is part of the brand image that a consumer has. The decision-making process of consumers is heavily impacted by brand image. This can be seen in the five-stage model of the consumer buying process, where the third stage involves evaluation of alternatives (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 168) and the consumer chooses the product to buy from a set of brands that they are aware of (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 167). The decision-making process go through different stages, where the consumer is aware of a set of brands, and goes on to consider only some of these brands, to finally choose one among these (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 170). The final choice depends on whether the product meets the requirements that the buyer has set, and on the brand knowledge that the buyer has (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 170). Therefore, companies spend a lot of energy and resources on improving and exhibiting a good brand image, and one could argue that the brand image affect the buyer decision process to the point of consumers discarding products due to brand image if there are other available options.

In the conceptual framework for this thesis, the responses to the credibility of brand-related UGC will be conceptualised as attitude towards brand-related UGC, attitude towards brand, and behavioural intention, based on MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) and Bae et al. (2001), with the modification of attitude towards brand-related UGC instead of attitudes toward ad and behavioural intentions instead of purchase intention. As seen
from Kim and Johnson (2016), there are many other responses to brand-related UGC beyond purchase intention, which can be of value to a firm. Therefore, it is of interest to examine these additional responses people might have when experiencing brand-related UGC and that is why this broader conceptualisation has been adopted. Due to the connection between brand image, attitude and behavioural intention, these seem important to consider in this research.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is presented in figure 1. It is easier for readers to understand the theoretical groundwork behind the study if it is accompanied by a visual diagram that shows the different components of the model and the interactions between these (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000, p. 213). As concluded by previous research that has been reviewed in this chapter, the perceived credibility of the components involved in the communication process, act as determinants for the credibility of the brand-related UGC as a whole. Assumedly, in similarity to results from studies in ad effectiveness, the perceived credibility of the brand-related UGC affect consumers’ attitudes towards not only the content, but also attitudes towards the brand addressed. Further, it can also induce behavioural responses.

The framework is to a certain degree based on the models by Bae et al. (2001) and MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), which in their cases concerned the credibility of ads, meanwhile in this study it acts as inspiration in regard to another form of communication; brand-related UGC. The choice of integrating the sponsorship factor as an addition to factors adapted from the influential studies mentioned above, was as earlier acknowledged, due to the difference in monetary nature between marketer-controlled marketing and brand-related UGC. Furthermore, a substantial amount of studies find that the sponsorship attribute is a complex matter and does affect perceived credibility among consumers (e.g. Lu et al., 2014).

By conducting a qualitative data collection through interviews, the framework will be developed further based on empirical data, to investigate the influence credibility factors of brand-related UGC has on attitudes and behavioural intentions. Through the interviews, it will be possible to discuss interviewees’ previous experiences with brand-related UGC and their consequent responses, and the interviewees will be asked about their opinions on a number of Instagram posts and how they perceive the credibility of these posts. Further, the interviews will revolve around the impact the posts have on attitude and behavioural intentions, e.g. whether the interviewee would be interested in buying the showcased product or react in any other way. It will be possible to gain insight that enables further development of the illustrated framework, with the potential identification of additional factors that consumers find influential when they examine the credibility of brand-related UGC.
Figure 1. Conceptual model of how consumers assess credibility of brand-related UGC and consequent responses.
3. SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

The scientific methodology chapter will describe the chosen paradigm for this thesis. The chapter commences with a discussion concerning the pre-understandings of the authors and the implications they will have on the research procedure. Ontological and epistemological standpoints follow where the methods and techniques chosen to achieve the objectives of the study are discussed. Next, the research approach and design will be explained, followed by literature search. The chapter concludes with arguments for the choice of theories.

3.1 Pre-understandings

Hermeneutics touches upon the question of interpretation, to understand texts (Palmer, 1969, p. 9), and the study of hermeneutics is very broad. Researchers have at large discussed the understandings that people are influenced by when they read texts, and for example Gadamer (1960, p. 142) has studied how pre-understandings and prejudices are present in the mind of the reader even if one does not realise it. Gadamer (1960, p. 146) thinks that to separate the prejudices from the understanding, in order to avoid misunderstandings of a text and its meaning, it is important to take the time distance into consideration and assess its significance to the understanding. He even states that time distance can help in solving the hermeneutical question of how to separate true prejudices, which enables understanding, from the false prejudices, that leads to misunderstandings, and therefore a historical consciousness is important to have. Therefore, when one is reading literature and writing a research paper, it is important to take this thought into consideration, that time has an effect on prejudices and the understandings of a text. To avoid any misunderstandings due to time distance, we have tried to use as modern sources as possible, preferably from the 2010s, when the sources relate to brand-related UGC and the Internet. In some cases, this is not possible, and then one need to consider the circumstances under which the specific text was written. How did the Internet look like in this time period, and what kind of UGC was present? Were there any sponsored UGC content present, and in what channels/websites? Overall, we have tried to view the text from the perspective of the time frame in which it was written and view it according to the author. Moreover, there are cases where we have used classic work from different research fields, as these have laid the foundations of that research field.

Furthermore, Gadamer (1960, p. 140) discussed the impact of expectations of a text on the understandings. When people read a letter, they tend to try and read from the perspective of the writer of the letter and hold what is written as the truth to them. In other words, a text that is handed down to us from someone who ‘know’ what they are talking about, tend to make us susceptible to reading the text as truth, since we believe that the writer has a larger understanding of the topic than we do ourselves (Gadamer, 1960, pp. 140-141). It is important to understand hermeneutical theory of how pre-understandings affect our reading when performing research, as it has implications for how other people will view the thesis work. This might be hard for students whilst reading academic texts, as very often the text that a student reads is accepted as truth without further analysing the accuracy or credibility of the author. Especially as the academic texts are written by researchers and professors, and then the texts are published in established esteemed journals. To question the credibility of an academic article is difficult, but whilst writing this thesis we have tried to take into consideration the fact that there might be contradictory facts in published journals, and compare different texts. In some texts it has
been stated that brand-related UGC is always superior to PGC (producer-generated content) in terms of credibility to the viewer (Cheong & Morrison, 2008), however, there are some other sources arguing that it is not fully the truth (e.g. Hautz et al., 2014). When conducting research, it will create a richer picture if one considers different contrasting opinions, and try to gain an understanding of the subject, wherefore a literature search prior to writing a thesis is very insightful.

The question of understanding can also be viewed in the perspective of how the work is conducted and how the conclusions are drawn. If this study had been performed by someone else, it might have been very different in its build-up and the results, as people view things differently, and thus someone else might have made other conclusions than the ones we have made in this study. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2010, p. 11) emphasise the need for a researcher to be systematic, arguable and challengeable in their observations, and should further explain the process of data collection, make arguments for the results and the conclusions drawn from the results, and make sure to point out limitations of the study and of the researcher. Therefore, it is important to follow this type of structure that enables the reader to view the results in a similar way to how the researchers have, and to make sure the thinking pattern is made clear. Also, as previously stated, it is of importance to explain the pre-understandings of the researchers and their background in the subject. Therefore, in the following, a short introduction of the authors is needed before the thesis can proceed.

The authors of the thesis are marketing students at Umeå School of Business, Economics, and Statistics. We have studied business administration at advanced level, which implies there are certain pre-understandings about marketing and business research. The thesis concerns brand management and communication, which are topics that we have grown familiar with during studying marketing. Both authors are part of the Internet generation, meaning that we have grown up with the Internet being present in our lives. Therefore, we are knowledgeable about the Internet, social media, and are avid users of these. The Internet culture is familiar to us, and we are also part of the population that contributes to it in different ways. User-generated content as a term was new to the authors, but the concept was not, and is something that both have experienced online, and both have to a certain degree taken part in creating content online. The experience of creating brand-related UGC is limited, but both have encountered such content online. Therefore, it is plausible to say that we have certain pre-understandings about the topic that may have an effect on how we perceive the literature that we have cited and read, but also on how we understand the connections between brand-related UGC and the different variables that have been conceptualised into a framework in chapter three. Furthermore, the analysis and in effect, the results of this degree projects, will presumably be affected by the pre-understandings of the authors. Since interpretations are often very subjective and dependent on context and interpreter, the results will be affected by the individuality of the authors and the way that we interpret the world. However, although these pre-understandings will affect the study to a certain degree, it will not hinder the research but rather contribute to a nuanced picture of the research area.

3.2 Ontological Assumptions

Ontology is defined as a discipline that raises philosophical questions about the nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 99; Jacquette, 2002, p. 3). Jacquette (2002, p. xi) makes a distinction between pure philosophical ontology, meaning the concept of being
and questions e.g. why there is “something rather than nothing”, and applied scientific ontology. Applied scientific ontology can be divided into three categories; existent objects, existent states of affairs, and the actual world (Jacquette, 2002, p. xi). However, Jacquette (2002, p. xi-xii) states in his literary work that to understand the nature of reality, one has to primarily deal with pure philosophical ontology. Without understanding this question, it is difficult to discuss applied scientific ontology, and to be able to produce successful research, it is important that the ontological standpoint is a combination of pure philosophical ontology and applied scientific ontology (Jacquette, 2002, p. 275).

There are different approaches to understanding ontological standpoints, or assuming different ontological standpoints. According to Patel and Davidson (2011, p. 16), it is possible to distinguish two ideologies at each end of the spectrum; realism and idealism. Ontological realism is noting the belief that the world exists regardless of human observation or experiencing it, while ontological idealism is connoting the belief that the world cannot exist regardless of whether there is someone to observe it or experience it (Patel & Davidson, p. 16). According to Bryman (2012, p. 32), ontology can be divided into objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism states that social phenomena exist independently of social actors and that they act as external facts that cannot be influenced, while constructionism is somewhat the opposite (Bryman, 2012, p. 32). Constructionism assumes that social phenomena are accomplished by social actors and are constantly changing through the social actors (Bryman, 2012, p. 33).

As for this study, the ontological assumption that has been made is of constructivist nature - the phenomenon that we are studying is user-generated content, and the definition of this concept is diverse and varies in the literature. UGC has changed throughout the years on the Internet and is a socially constructed phenomenon, thus it is plausible that a constructivist approach is needed to further investigate UGC. Objectivism would be a less efficient assumption to make due to the nature of UGC. During the research for this thesis, one need to keep in mind that UGC is very organic and people experience it differently, also due to people having created the phenomenon itself. As objectivism assume that a phenomenon exists independently of social actors and cannot be influenced, it would not be suitable for this thesis, as UGC is heavily influenced by other social actors. Another ontological assumption is that this degree project is studied from a constructivist idealist standpoint, meaning that we believe UGC to be a phenomenon within a social context, created and experienced by people, as a product of consciousness.

3.3 Epistemological Assumptions

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 99), epistemology is about the relationship between the inquirer and the known, as well as what is known about the world. Feldman (2003, p. 1) defines it as a philosophy that deals with knowledge and rationality. Epistemology is explained by Bryman (2012, p. 27) as questioning what counts as acceptable knowledge. Furthermore, it is questioning whether social issues can be studied in the same way as the natural sciences, and there are two paradigms to epistemology; positivism and interpretivism (Bryman, 2012, p. 27). Positivism is a doctrine used in different ways throughout the literature, e.g. Bryman (2012, p. 27) explains the concept as an attempt to apply natural scientific methods of studying to social reality. There are some characteristics to positivism, with some examples described by Bryman (2012, p. 28) as the need to be objective in conducting research, and what can be accepted as
knowledge is the knowledge that can be confirmed by the senses. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 118) describes the interpretivist approach as a belief that to understand a phenomenon, one need to interpret it. Smith (1983, p. 12) states that the purpose of an interpretivist investigation should be interpretative understanding, while Gephart Jr. (2004) says that the purpose would be to understand how meanings and concepts are produced and used by social actors in their natural settings. The interpretivist researcher assumes that there are different understandings and meanings, wherefore interpretivism is about how different people with different understandings can produce different truths even as there are “competing definitions of reality” (Gephart Jr., 2004, pp. 456-457). Interpretivism investigates situations where meanings are shared or contested, but also where other understandings could be present (Gephart Jr., 2004, p. 457), wherefore the nature of reality can be said to be multiple. Smith (1983, pp. 10-11) explained that in quantitative research, facts are restricting the subjectivity of the individual, and that in interpretivist research it is the beliefs that determine what is a fact.

There is a need to acknowledge that some things cannot be known or learnt about the world, e.g. something that have happened in the past cannot always be rediscovered, and things that will happen in the future are difficult to know at present. Therefore, it is important to approach a research topic with these thoughts in mind - it might not be possible to learn everything there is to know about this topic, and that others might view things differently. Thus, this study aims to answer the research question from an interpretivist perspective, in realising that there are other truths and understandings, and this thesis aims to explore parts of reality. The results of this study will show one reality, while if another person was to re-do the procedures of this thesis, it would show another reality. Yet, these two realities would be equally of worth and credible, as interpretivist studies aim to explore contextual realities. Positivism will not be a suitable approach to this study, as it will be difficult to study brand-related UGC in a truly objective manner - the interviews and discussions are bound to be influenced by the authors. Interpretivism will allow for a more suitable approach in studying the phenomenon. Therefore, when analysing the results, the subjective interpretation of the authors will lead to unique conclusions and understandings. This means, that the results will enrich the existing knowledge of UGC, and provide further insight, which is the aim and purpose of this study.

3.4 Research Approach

There are three approaches to combining theory with empirical data; deduction, induction and abduction (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 23). Deductive approach is when conclusions are based on existing theory, and from the existing theory hypotheses are formulated to be tested on empirical data (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 23). It is said that by applying a deductive standpoint, it is possible to make objective conclusions and the results will be less influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 23). Induction is to begin with collecting empirical data, whence hypotheses can be formulated and lastly, a theory is developed (Patel & Davidson, 2011, pp. 23-24). This is the opposite approach to deduction, where the research begins with a theory and continues with empirical testing. Although there is no developed theory to start with, the researcher needs to investigate previous literature and have certain understandings of the phenomenon in order to proceed. Finally, abduction could be explained as a combination of deduction and induction, where the researcher produces a hypothetical structure to explain a single
case, and proceeds to test this hypothetical structure on other cases, whence a generalisation can be formulated (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 24).

It is common for interpretivist research to be inductive and positivism is often associated with deductive research (Knox, 2004, p. 122). However, while having established an interpretivist standing, the research in this thesis is based on a deductive approach, since the aim is to theorise a framework and investigate further within the framework. A conceptual framework is developed based on previous research, in order to precisely investigate a specific aspect of brand-related UGC. The framework will be tested by gathering data through interviews, discussing people’s credibility perceptions of brand-related UGC. At this point it will be possible to analyse the empirical material and further make conclusions. There might be a need to improve or revise the conceptual framework, but the plan is to be able to make conclusions based on subjective experiences. Therefore, the deductive approach is more suitable in this case.

3.5 Research Design

The choice of research method is based on the nature of the research problem and how the desired data can be collected. As Denzin and Lincoln put it, “not just any methodology is appropriate” (1994, p. 108), and judging from the research question and area, one has to examine which methodology and which assumptions will aid the research process in producing relevant findings and conclusions. Qualitative research is described as being multimethod in focus, as it incorporates an interpretive and naturalistic approach, and further this research approach aims to interpret a phenomenon and the meaning of it that people apply and bring to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Qualitative researchers try to study their subject in their natural setting and make sense of the meaning that people bring to different phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Therefore, it could be said that a qualitative research approach is appropriate when the purpose of a study is to discover how and why different behaviours are occurring in a population, and furthermore, when the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of a topic through investigating opinions, feelings and behaviours, as is appropriate for this study.

A distinctive feature of qualitative research is that it investigates the meaning that can be attached to people’s lives under real conditions (Yin, 2011, pp. 7-8). The topic studied is not looked at in isolation, but in a social context. A qualitative approach moreover has an ability to require and retell the opinions and viewpoints of people participating in the study in a way which gives a more accurate depiction of their actual view on a matter (Yin, 2011, p. 8). Also characterising for qualitative research, is that it gives insight into current or emerging concepts that can explain human behaviour and the aim to use multiple sources instead of sticking with one alone (Yin, 2011, pp. 8-9). Gephart Jr. (2004, p. 460) has discussed problems regarding qualitative research, and among these problems there are the issues of qualitative papers failing to provide explicit goals, not well-defined concepts, lack of examples of raw data. Taking these issues into consideration, it is important to provide clear research questions and explain concepts well, while also providing primary data examples and explaining them well.

On the other hand, there is a quantitative approach, which is the other and perhaps more common option in terms of scientific research. This approach is about measuring and analysing relationship between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4). Quantitative data collection is often numerical, and the study often produces hypotheses that the
numeric data collection will provide answers for. Qualitative data collection could also try to answer hypotheses, but in a different way. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 5-6) give five differences between quantitative and qualitative research; (1) uses of positivism, meaning both approaches stem from positivist research but the qualitative research approach has since modified its methods and researchers have become more prone to postpositivism, (2) acceptance of postmodern sensibilities, where qualitative researchers now argue that quantitative methods is but one way to describe social reality and that there are other methods of examining society, (3) capturing the individual’s point of view, qualitative researchers believe that it is possible to get closer to the individual’s perspective through qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, (4) examining the constraints of everyday life, where qualitative research is more interested in addressing the constraints of the social world and are thus committing to an emic perspective, and (5) securing rich descriptions, qualitative researchers find that to come to an understanding of the world it is important and of value to gather rich descriptions.

We find that using a qualitative approach rather than quantitative will prove more efficient as the interest of this study is to explore a phenomenon and people’s perception of said phenomenon, rather than trying to provide generalisable conclusions. Moreover, from the philosophical standpoints that were made previously one can assume the more suitable research approach; The constructivist idealist standpoint in combination with the interpretivist assumption would make qualitative research approach more sensible. Previous studies about UGC have varied in the data collection method; some are quantitative, and some are qualitative. The quantitative studies (e.g. Kim & Johnson, 2016) have researched the relationship between variables, and then interpreted the results into implications for managers, while the qualitative studies (e.g. Halliday, 2016) have explored themes and common factors. For this study, a qualitative approach is more sensible as the interviewees are allowed the freedom to talk about their views and thoughts about the topic in an open manner. By allowing the interviewees space to describe their own experiences, we hope to find some themes or patterns in the way the interviewees go about judging the credibility of a post. Credibility assessment can be very individual, e.g. due to experience, knowledge of subject and other person-specific attributes, further legitimising the choice of research design. Furthermore, we are interested in finding out what other factors contribute to credibility judgement in the case of brand-related UGC, wherefore interviews will be helpful in this quest.

3.6 Literature Search and Choice of Theories

It is essential to search for previous literature about a subject when conducting research to learn as much as possible about the chosen research area, and this process can often bring new insights by performing critical evaluation of existing literature (Hart, 2001, p. 2). Therefore, we have made an extensive literature search online using mainly Google Scholar and the databases available on Umeå University Library, e.g. Business Source Premier (EBSCO). The academic articles that have been used as sources in this thesis are peer-reviewed, as it is important that the sources used for academic work are credible and reliable (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 68). In order to make sure the literature sources are usable, it is important to read and evaluate in a critical perspective. We have made sure that the articles that have been referenced to are published in well-established and known academic journals. Furthermore, we have found it helpful to find the original source in cases where an article is referencing to another source, wherefore we mainly have tried to use primary referencing.
The research area of this thesis is concerning brand management and brand communication, and it should be noted that the thesis is only concerned with brand communication in an online environment, namely the Internet. Since the Internet is a relatively new production, most of the sources are modern sources. However, there are multiple concepts relating to classic theories, e.g. MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), and Keller (1993). These main theories that the conceptual framework has been based on have been critically evaluated and deemed suitable for our framework. MacKenzie and Lutz’s (1989) study has been cited 2736 times according to Google Scholar, making it a well-cited source. The research made by Keller (1993) has been cited 16911 times according to Google Scholar. The theories relating to brand-related UGC or eWOM are widely used in literature concerning credibility of the traditional communication model components. As the literature search went on, it became clear that there were evident gaps in the literature, and there was especially a holistic framework missing.

It has been generally acknowledged that the Internet is an environment that changes at a fast pace, which means that since the creation of the Web 2.0, the circumstances have changed drastically. Therefore, it is important to take the time distance aspect into consideration - some of the sources cited are indeed published during the 2010s, however, we feel it is necessary to note that in almost a decade, the climate and culture on the Internet can change rapidly. Many sources are from 2012-2016, and although these years might not feel too distant in memory, they are ages ago in terms of the Internet development. Therefore, it is important to note that some of the statements made in the articles cited, might have been true at that point of time, but might not be as true today. Taking this into consideration, we have tried to find newer sources when dealing with Internet usage. When it comes to more classic theories, we have tried to find the original sources, which might be published much earlier than 2010. However, as these have been the foundation of the research field, it is plausible to use classic sources that have been cited by many and is generally acknowledged as facts.

When it comes to finding relevant literature, and searching the internet for sources, it is important to use relevant keywords and not aimlessly search using random words (Hart, 2001, p. 139). Instead, one needs to plan and analyse the topic prior to searching. We discussed topics of interest to us before beginning to search for any literature, and the topic of brand-related UGC and social media were re-occurring in the discussions. Once we knew we were interested in this specific area, we began researching the literature available. The literature review is a process, in which we have read articles and found out what type of conclusions that have been made, as well as found additional directions where little research is existent. We have also to a certain degree studied other connecting areas of study, such as eWOM and advertising, as they to a certain degree relate to brand-related UGC. Previous researchers have been able to justify these connections (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Eastin et al., 2011).

Keywords: UGC, brand-related UGC, user-generated content, consumer-generated content, consumer power, consumer response, e-WOM, brand perception, co-creation, brand communication, UGC marketing, brand management, communication process, credibility
4. PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the practical methodological choices made, which relate to the design and execution of the study. The data collection process and sampling method are explained, followed by a description of the interview guide, the procedure of conducting the interviews and the transcription of data. Thereafter, the data analysis method is introduced and explained, and finally, the chapter ends with a discussion about ethical considerations.

4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

A majority of published research articles that take a qualitative approach use interviews to collect their data (Silverman, 2005, pp. 238-239). A key strength of an interview is that it enables a focus on the individual and their personal perspectives (Ritchie, 2003, p. 36). As interviews allow for depth, they are often used to gain understanding of intricate phenomena or responses to complex systems, processes or experiences (Ritchie, 2003, p. 36), using interviews to collect data for this study is therefore found suitable. The purpose of this study is to investigate the credibility that consumers attach to communication process components of brand-related UGC and how it influences attitudes and behavioural intentions. As the topic relates to perception and internal processing, a qualitative approach, and moreover interviews, allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, this approach enables understanding of the personal context of the individual, wherein the phenomenon exists, which is something that would be difficult to obtain through e.g. a formal questionnaire (Ritchie, 2003, p. 36; Byrne, 2004, p. 182).

The interview is a primary data collection method, and it has certain advantages and disadvantages. Hox and Boeije (2005, p. 593) explain that primary data is collected to answer a specific research problem, while secondary data is created by other researchers and can be reused by others in the research community. Further, the advantage of collecting primary data is the possibility to modify and design the theoretical framework and data collection strategy to fit the research question, which would make sure that the study is logical and coherent (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p. 594). The disadvantages of primary data are that the procedure takes time and is costly, meanwhile the advantages of secondary data is the low cost and the time saved due to easy access to information (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p. 594). The disadvantage with secondary data is however that the data may not be fully relevant for the research problem, since the data was collected to answer a different research problem, which means a difference in interests and purpose (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p. 594). Therefore, it was decided that by collecting primary data through interviews, the answer to the research question will be of better quality and the insights that the interviews provide will aid in understanding the phenomenon of brand-related UGC.

How structured the data collection is going to be depends on the purpose of the study, how much is known about the issue under investigation on beforehand, and to what extent the researcher is interested in issues that have not been anticipated (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 110). Exploratory studies often take use of very broad questions, in particular when looking to gain an understanding of underlying concepts, values and norms. In these kinds of studies it is the interviewee, rather than the interviewer, who is forming the interview, and the researcher instead focus on probing, to understand the context of the
interviewee’s thoughts (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 110). In other studies, such as this one, the issues that are to be explored, are to some extent already known. The consequent implications are that there are issues which consistently need to be covered in all interviews - thus, some structure is required (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 110). The interviewer in this case is more active in steering the discussion in the direction of the areas aimed to gain descriptive data about. The data collection is however still very open and broad in seeking the participants’ experiences and thoughts within these areas, and unanticipated issues are still welcome.

Denzin (1970) defines three different types of interviews; schedule standardized interview, non-schedule standardized interview and non-standardized interview. The schedule standardized interview is described as containing questions that are worded in the exact same way to every respondent, in order to obtain answers that can be compared and that will allow variations in the response to appear clear (Denzin, 1970, p. 123). The questions of a non-schedule standardized interview are phrased differently depending on the respondent, but the same type of information is being collected (Denzin, 1970, p. 125). Lastly, the non-standardized interview is freer in nature as there is no pre-specified set of questions and there is no specified order in which the questions are asked (Denzin, 1970, p. 126). According to these definitions, the interviews constructed for this thesis is in lines with the non-schedule standardized interview method, as there are a set of questions that aim to collect certain information, but the phrasing might be different depending on respondent. However, Denzin (1970, p. 128) states that it is possible to combine the different approaches in the sense that certain standard information is collected, but there are also elements of non-scheduled and non-standardized interview questions. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) have reviewed different qualitative data collection methods and describe unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Unstructured interviews are said to resemble guided conversations, while semi-structured interviews are described as containing a set of open-ended questions that have been determined prior to the interview, meanwhile allowing for a certain liberty in the discussion (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). In these authors’ terms, our interviews are semi-structured. It was chosen to do semi-structured interviews, since it is important for the participants to be able to freely tell about their opinions and experiences, while it is also important that the discussion stays within the limits of the topic. In other words, the answers would need to be relevant for the analysis, wherefore there is a need to keep the interviews semi-structured rather than unstructured.

Kvale (2007, p. 94) notes that there are limitations to the memory of an interviewer, and by simply remembering a conversation there is the risk of interpretational mistakes and bias, which would affect the data collection and thus, the analysis and conclusions drawn. There is also the issue of taking notes, which according to Kvale (2007, p. 94) can be distracting and interrupt the conversational flow. Therefore, due to these two reasons, the decision to audiotape the interviews and later transcribe them was taken. Bucher et al. (1956, p. 359-360) note five advantages of recording an interview; firstly, in written notes, the verbal production is lost, while in a recorded interview it is contained (Bucher et al., 1956, p. 359). Therefore, if there is some confusion while reading the transcript as to what was said during an interview, it will be simple to listen to the verbal answer. Second, the interviewer bias is eliminated. If the interviewer is taking notes, it is impossible to write down every single word, and the interviewer is forced to choose what to note, wherefore the selection of information is biased (Bucher et al., 1956, p. 360). Third, any modification of data is eliminated, and a recording is objective compared to
note-taking (Bucher et al., 1956, p. 360). Fourth, recording allows the interviewer to pay full attention to interviewee, since there is no need to focus on a second task such as writing down notes (Bucher et al., 1956, p. 360). Finally, it can be time consuming to write down conversations, and by recording an interview the interviewer can save time and do more interviews (Bucher et al., 1956, p. 360). There are other choices as well as to how one can record the interviews, for examples through video recording, but these were deemed as irrelevant or too complex methods to use for the purpose of this thesis. Tape recording combined with transcribing after the interviews was deemed as the most suitable choice.

4.2 Sampling Method

The sampling strategy is an important part of the research design, it does not only determine how useful the collected data is going to be, but also what kind of analyses that are possible (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 113). Robinson (2014) take a four-point approach to sampling for a qualitative study: (1) defining a sample universe, (2) deciding on a sample size, (3) setting a sample strategy, and (4) sample sourcing.

Firstly, a sample universe needs to be defined, in other words the target population of the study has to be identified (Robinson, 2014, p. 25). According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 27) boundaries firstly must be set and then a frame created. Setting the population, or the boundaries, is about defining what or who it is that is going to be sampled (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 120; Robinson, 2014, p. 28). While deciding upon the population, it should be taken into consideration which population is going to provide the richest data, if subsets of the population should be excluded due to being inappropriate for the study and whether the addition of other groups is going to provide complementary or contrasting insights (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 120-121). A set of inclusion or exclusion criteria, i.e. attributes that participants must or should not hold are required to delimit the sample universe (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). According to Grewal & Ritchie (2006), the match between interviewer and participant in terms of characteristics, e.g. gender, age, ethnicity and/or experiences related to the topic under study, has potential to ease the data collection and analysis.

To in a feasible manner study how brand-related UGC induces changes in consumers’ brand attitudes and behavioural intentions, we decided to delimit the study to the cosmetics industry, as content related to this field is common on social media and we as the researchers have an understanding and interest in this topic. Thus, it makes sense for our population to be people who are regular users of cosmetics. An additional consideration made, is who the consumers and producers of brand-related UGC are. We argue that people who have grown up being part of the Internet generation - millennials and generation Z - are the people of interest. Pew Research Center has defined millennials as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, while Generation Z consists of individuals born in 1997 and onwards (Dimock, 2019). To further narrow it down, it is plausible to limit the population to people born during the 1990s, as these individuals grew up at the time when Internet became publicly available in Sweden (Internetstiftelsen, 2018). To summarise, it makes sense for us to limit our population to people who are born during the 1990s and are regular users of cosmetic products. The population thus consists of people who are likely to encounter brand-related UGC relating to cosmetics in their everyday lives.
The choice of and limitations made to the population might interfere with the results of this study and should thus be recognised. The previous experiences of the particular individuals chosen for the study might affect the perceived credibility of brand-related UGC, as some individuals might have more experience with makeup and might have encountered more brand-related UGC relating to cosmetics, or may even actively search out brand-related UGC, while others may not. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration these types of individual differences that might exist. Furthermore, by delimiting the population to this specific age group, the results might be different had this delimitation not been made. Individuals of different age groups usually have different digital skills and are able to assess Internet credibility more critically than others, as argued by Alkali and Amichai-Hamburger (2004). Therefore, individuals of the chosen age group might be more critical towards online content, and thus, influence the results of this study accordingly.

Having defined the population, an appropriate sample frame must be identified to enable the selection of a sample (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 121). The frame consists of possible participants and can be chosen on a variety of bases. According to Ritchie et al. (2014, pp. 121-122) there are four main points which needs to be considered. Firstly, a critical issue that needs to be assessed is whether the sample frame provides the information required for selection or not, and in the case it does not, a stage of additional information-gathering is probably going to be needed (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 121). A third consideration relates to whether the sample frame is large enough to provide a sufficient number of participants, being aware of the fact that probably not everyone is going to want to participate (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 121). Finally, Ritchie et al. (2014, p. 122), bring up the importance of considering issues relating to practical feasibility, e.g. does the frame provide enough contact information, can efficient methods be employed to reach the participants, and is the time and cost justifiable? Due to practical constraints, such as time and money, the chosen sampling method for this study was convenience sampling; a choice which will be further elaborated and motivated further down the line in this chapter. To make the sampling process run smoothly, we chose to use our Facebook friends as the sampling frame. This enabled us a large enough number of potential participants, with whom we easily could make contact. Recognising that not all of our Facebook friends were going to meet the criteria of our study, we however had to do a form of secondary information-gathering stage at the point of contact, ensuring that the potential participants met the criteria we had set. A disadvantage with this approach is that there might exist certain bias, as our Facebook friends might hold similar views as ourselves or otherwise be similar to each other. Consequentially, the results of this study risk being affected. To eliminate this particular problem another sampling approach would have been preferred, but as mentioned earlier, alternative sampling methods were in this situation found to be too time consuming. At the same time, this is an exploratory study and the individuals chosen to participate will nevertheless provide important qualitative data, as they meet the other requirements set. The data will thus provide insights regardless, due to its qualitative nature. Therefore, the bias will not necessarily mean that the data gathered is going to result in false or wrong opinions and perceptions. Rather, it would mean that the results have been produced from one perspective, and that there are other perspectives that could be investigated as well.

The sample size should be decided based upon both theoretical and practical considerations (Robinson, 2014, p. 29). Samples in qualitative studies are usually not very large in size as the number does not need to be sufficient enough to provide estimates or
determine statistical significance of variables, meanwhile too many participants also equals an inability to do the richness of the data justice (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 117). Guidelines suggest that 3-16 participants is appropriate for a single study, within which individuals are wished to be given defined identities and voices, rather than making all participants submerged into a more anonymous entity (Robinson, 2014, p. 29). A larger sample size is often not realistic in practice as qualitative data collection processes usually are intensive, and after a point, increasing the sample size is not going to contribute to any new evidence (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 117). The data collection process should be carefully monitored as it progresses, since in-depth data means unpredictable challenges, and the researcher should thus also be open to reducing or increasing the sample size based on sequence of events (Robinson, 2014, p. 31). For this study an appropriate sample size was determined to be approximately 8-10 people, however recognising the possibility of doing additional or fewer interviews depending on unexpected circumstances the data collection process might bring about. The reasoning behind guideline was a desire to give each interviewee room for distinction in the data collected. After all, the aim is to gain deep insight into the thoughts and reflections individuals have about brand-related UGC experiences, rather than collecting shallow data from many. We also had to consider practical constraints, such as time.

In a probability sample, the aim is to produce a statistically representative sample, so that the information gained can be generalised for the entire population under study (Ritchie et al., p. 112). Probability sampling is mostly used in quantitative research, meanwhile in qualitative research non-probability methods usually are adopted. A non-probability sample is not intended to be statistically representative, but participants are chosen to reflect specific characteristics of groups within or the wider population that the sample is drawn from (Ritchie et al. 2014, p. 113). Random sampling methods are mostly used as part of quantitative studies where the possibility to make statistical tests and generalise is sought (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 113; Robinson, 2014, pp. 31-32). Robinson (2014, p. 32) state that studies sometimes claim to have done a random sampling procedure, meanwhile what in reality has been done is a convenience sample. Convenience sampling is a method often used because it, as the term states, is convenient (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). Potential participants nearby who meet the criteria and are willing to participate are located and interviewed one after one. Robinson (2014, p. 31) state that the danger with doing this in a qualitative research study is unwarranted generalisations. To justify this choice of method, the sample universe can be delimited as demographically and geographically local. Purposive strategies are used to ensure that particular characteristics or phenomena is existent within the sample (Robinson, 2014, p. 32; Ritchie, et al., 2014, p. 113). While employing this method, the researcher assumes an understanding of the population and phenomenon under study, and that different people from this population is going to have different perspectives, which should be captured. For this study, a convenience sampling method is employed due to practical constraints such as time and money. If more time had been available, it would have been possible to choose a sampling frame which was larger and more representative for users of cosmetics, e.g. an organisation of people with common interest in cosmetics or such. However, as explained above, the convenience sample will still provide important insights as the study is of qualitative nature and is in fact not aiming to create representative nor generalisable results. Moreover, as Robinson (2014) describe, a convenience sample is completely acceptable when delimiting the population properly.
Robinson’s (2014, p. 35) last step is to source a sample, i.e. going out and getting participants from the real world. In this stage practical, organisational and ethical skills are needed, as well as a sensitivity, to be able to behave appropriately. Another issue, which needs to be solved by the interviewer(s), is that of how to recruit participants. Advertising can e.g. be made face-to-face or online (Robinson, 2014, p. 36). As previously mentioned, we used our personal Facebook friends as our sampling frame. To recruit participants to the study, we used a form of personal advertising by reaching out to personal acquaintances through messenger, explaining the purpose, the criteria for partaking and the value of potential participants contribution. We also used the incentive of all participants having an equal chance to win a gift card å 150 SEK to a store of their choice.

4.3 Interview Guide

Prior to interviewing the participants, it is important to develop an interview guide that will aid the interviewer in asking relevant questions. Kvale (2007, p. 56) describe the interview guide as a “script that structures the course of the interview”, and notes that for a semi-structured interview it would mean “an outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions” (Kvale, 2007, p. 57). Interview guides can cover many themes with questions that can be altered during the interview (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p. 595), making an interview guide a great tool for structuring the interview and focusing on relevant information, while also allowing for a free discussion.

Byrne (2004, p. 182) notes that open-ended questions have higher likeliness of receiving responses with higher consideration, i.e. the participants have put more thought into their answers, which will allow for higher quality answers and data. Therefore, the questions in the interview guide are open-ended and flexible in nature yet targeting a certain type of answer. Open-ended questions will allow participants to freely discuss and express their thoughts about the topic. It has been recommended that the opening question to the interview should be broad and non-threatening, while relating to the research topic (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). Throughout the interview, there will be follow-up questions added to the conversation. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 316) recommend that these should be non-directive, and that the interviewer should not ask questions in a way that assumes a certain answer, but rather allow the interviewee to think about their own response.

Initially the plan was to ask participants to recall a case of brand-related UGC, and for the interviewers to ask questions about the example that the participant had in mind. However, when the interview guide was completed, a pre-test was performed on a voluntary participant, and the results of the pre-test were dissatisfactory. The participant had a hard time remembering any specific case of brand-related UGC, due to not actively registering what they viewed while scrolling. The participant said it is was too difficult to remember one case of brand-related UGC, from the amount of posts viewed in one day. This led to certain changes in how to approach the interview setting - it was decided that participants were to be provided cases of brand-related UGC and asked about their opinions on these. In order to find discussable cases, we decided upon limiting the cases to one type of social media and one brand. The brand that was chosen is Lumene, which offers makeup and skincare products (Lumene, 2019). Plenty of cosmetics brands are present on Instagram, including Lumene, and many enjoy company growth while improving their Instagram marketing strategies (Hoffower, 2019).
The decision to include the Lumene brand in this study should be analysed in relation to other practical methodological choices, such as the chosen sampling method. As Lumene positions the brand as a Nordic as well as Finnish, the convenience sampling method chosen, which resulted in interviewees of Swedish, Finnish and Danish origin, may influence the results of this study. Awareness should be brought to the fact that some of the interviewees participating may be more likely to recognise Lumene and already have certain associations to the brand, than others. The Finnish respondents may for example unconsciously have a more positive attitude toward the brand than the others due to the brand’s country of origin. Despite being similar, there might exist cultural differences between Swedes, Finns and Danes affecting the credibility judgment or affecting the perception of brand-related UGC. The nationality of the participants will be presented in the empirical results for the purpose of transparency, but meanwhile it is an interesting area for further research, its influence on consumer credibility judgement of brand-related UGC will not be further discussed in this study, but only recognised as a limitation.

Instagram is also one of the most used social media platforms among millennials and was suggested by Kim and Song (2017) as a platform for further study when it comes to brand-related UGC. Instagram was thus chosen, due to the high prevalence of brand-related UGC concerning cosmetics as well as the common use of the platform within the defined population. The cases were found through searching through a feed of posts that had tagged Lumene’s official Instagram accounts, and from these posts three were chosen to exemplify the type of content that is commonly found on Instagram, based on the experience of the authors.

The first case is a non-sponsored post uploaded by a non-influencer, who has a following of about 400 people. Since the person is not an influencer, approval was sought before the post was used in the thesis, to which the Instagrammer agreed. The post was chosen

![Non-sponsored post by a non-influencer.](image)

**Figure 2. Non-sponsored post by a non-influencer.**
due to the relatively small amount of likes and followers, the nature of the text, as well as for the fact that the post seem to be non-sponsored.

Figure 3. Non-sponsored post by an influencer.

The second case is uploaded by a verified user on Instagram, the Instagrammer being an influencer. This post was chosen due to the medium number of likes, and due to the nature of the text, which is very neutral and include other brands in the description. Also, the post was chosen as it seems non-sponsored, there is no indication or claim of it being a sponsored post.
Figure 4. Sponsored post by an influencer.

The final post is uploaded by another verified user and influencer, with a relatively larger following and amount of likes on the post. The post is sponsored and was further chosen due to the composition of the picture where the product is visible, and also due to the text in the description. These three cases show different common types of brand-related UGC that exist on Instagram; sponsored content by influencers, non-sponsored content by influencers, and non-sponsored content by non-influencers.

It is likely that the participants do not recognise any of the creators of the brand-related UGC chosen. The choice of posts by sources with different numbers of followers, and thus Instagrammers who are more and less publicly known, was deliberate, wherefore it in cases would force the participants to examine the source of the post more closely. The creator behind the third post is likely to be the Instagrammer with most followers on Instagram of all creators who have made UGC relating to the Lumene brand. Practically, it is however difficult to find and choose posts by influencers that firstly, have tagged Lumene in their posts, and secondly, that also is certain to be recognised by all of the interviewees. It would also be quite difficult, as well as ethically questionable, to find posts by the interviewees’ friends or relatives. It would moreover not be possible to execute in the timespan allocated for the workings of this thesis. Therefore, we selected the posts, to the best of our abilities, based on criteria relating to the theoretical framework developed, such as the amount of likes of the post as well as the the nature and construction of the content and the sources’ representation of themselves.
The interviews began by greeting the interviewee, explaining the purpose of the interview and the research, and emphasising the anonymity of the interviewee and the confidentiality with which their contributions will be handled. Once the interviewee was settled and comfortable, and ready to begin, the interview commenced. Before showing the cases, the interviewers were inquired about general information, such as age, nationality/city, occupation about the participant. Thereafter, general knowledge and experience with social media and brand-related UGC was questioned. This to gain some insight into the participant’s presence online, which would be of importance during the data analysis process. The cases were introduced on at a time and explained shortly, as in what the brand is and what type of source it is. The first question about the case shown was about spontaneous thoughts, what the initial reactions to the brand-related UGC were. This, in order to gain insight into what aspects that the participant noticed, and feel were important. Thereafter, each of the components of brand-related UGC introduced in the theoretical framework were discussed, one-by-one. Relating to the theories presented in the conceptual framework, the questions asked about each component of brand-related UGC aim to in some way answer to and build on the theoretical assumptions made. The relevant theories presented in the theoretical framework were brought forward through the questions, and the participant was encouraged to discuss and explain their own perception of the component. Finally, a general discussion about brand-related UGC and its impact on behaviour began, where the participant was free to share their own experiences and thoughts, e.g. if they have previously consulted brand-related UGC prior to purchasing. A complete interview guide can be found in the appendix (see Appendix A.1 and A.2).

4.4 Conducting Interviews

To participate in an interview can be stressful and daunting to some people, wherefore it is important to make the participants relax and let them feel that they can rely on the interviewer (Graham et al., 2007, p. 29). This was noted by Graham et al. (2007, p. 29) in their report, where many participants had expressed this and said that they relied on the interviewer to set the tone of the discussion and make it comfortable. The quality of the data can also depend on how comfortable the participants feel, as the responses and degree of revelations might vary depending on the individual comfort (Graham et al., 2007, p. 29). Furthermore, participants are put at ease by the information provided prior to the questioning (Graham et al., 2007, p. 29-30), where the interviewer can explain that the conditions for the interview, reassure the anonymity of the participant, and let the interviewees know that there is no right or wrong responses. Gubrium and Holstein (2011, p. 150) note that interviews are always active, meaning that there is always some sort of impact on the conversation depending on the individuals participating. It does not matter that interviewers try hard to be neutral and not allow their presence to influence the discussion, or that participants try their best to co-operate and provide answers. Therefore, it is important to note that when conducting interviews, these are always unique due to the individuals participating, and that there will always be some sort of influence from the interviewer, wherefore we believe it is important that the participants feel comfortable as if talking to a friend.

The interviews were meant to take place in person with the interviewees at a place comfortable to them, however, there were some interviewees that were unavailable to meet in person due to geographical restrictions, and in these cases a video call was performed. The video calls were deemed as equally reliable as face-to-face interviews, as
it was possible to audio tape the conversation while keeping eye contact with interviewee. The interviews were mainly conducted during the month of April at the university area. As half of the respondents are students at Umeå university, it was convenient for the respondents to attend the interviews at the university area. We booked study rooms, where the interviews could take place in a safe, quiet, and familiar environment. In the other cases, the interviews took place in the respondents’ homes to ensure a comfortable environment.

A total of 8 interviews were conducted, since the data material that we gathered was starting to get saturated, i.e. the information we received from the respondents was starting to sound the same, and we felt that the 8th interview should be the final to gather enough material to commence the analysis of data. Kvale (2007, p. 43) notes that if there are too many interviews, then it will be hard to spend enough time to analyse the material, and therefore, Kvale argues (2007, p.43) that the number of interviews entirely depends on the study and its purpose. If the purpose is to explore a phenomenon, as in the case of this study, new interviews are needed until the point of saturation, since at this point, the information gathered is not new anymore (Kvale, 2007, p. 44). The interviews were about 33:25 minutes long in average. All interviews, except one, were conducted in Swedish, the exception being in English.

Table 1. Information about the interviews and participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>44:47</td>
<td>2019-04-02</td>
<td>Umeå University</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Bachelor student in HR management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>37:49</td>
<td>2019-04-11</td>
<td>Video call</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>30:59</td>
<td>2019-04-16</td>
<td>Video call</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>On sick leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>27:36</td>
<td>2019-04-17</td>
<td>Umeå University</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Bachelor student in Political Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>36:35</td>
<td>2019-04-17</td>
<td>Umeå University</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>Bachelor student in International Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>40:20</td>
<td>2019-05-01</td>
<td>Umeå University</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Master student in Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td>29:34</td>
<td>2019-05-02</td>
<td>Video call</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Waiter / Gap year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Transcribing Data

When the interviews are done, and it is time to transcribe the audio files into text, there are some issues to consider. When conducting research, it should be noted that interviewing an individual in person is different to analysing a text. Kvale (2007, p. 92) notes that a transcript is a translation of oral conversation into written text. During the interview there is body language, tone of voice, and pace of conversation that is unreadable in the transcript (Kvale, 2007, p. 93). It is difficult to transcribe these aspects into a written text, also considering the risk of misinterpretation and loss of meaning. Furthermore, Kvale (2009, p. 178) notes that by recording an interview, there is a detachment from the actual event in the sense that body language is not included in the recording. Facial expressions, gestures and posture are impossible to translate into audio. Moreover, when writing down the audio conversation into a written text, there is a second detachment where tone of voice, intonations are missing (Kvale, 2009, p. 178).

To transcribe long interviews is very tiresome, time-consuming and stressing (Kvale, 2007, p. 95). The interviews that we recorded were below an hour, but to save time and energy, the transcripts are not entirely complete. In cases where the interviewers encourage the respondent to continue, e.g. by sounding an agreement or evidence of listening, these were not included in the transcripts. Cases where the respondents asked about the procedure of the interview, or talked about something outside of the interview (e.g. jokes or comments not relevant to the topic of the interview) were also excluded. Therefore, the transcripts were not made word-by-word, the focus lie on the answers provided by the respondents. Cases where respondent struggled to find the right word or start to say something else has been indicated by a dash (-) after a word, and ellipsis (...) indicates pauses where the respondent do not continue their sentence. (Haha) indicate laughter, [ ] square brackets indicate interviewers’ notes or explanation of some expression/word. Kvale (2007, p. 95) says there is no standard form for transcribing, but there are choices that can be made. The above-mentioned indications are the choices made for the transcripts of this study. Kvale (2007, p. 95) further note that there are no correct answers as to how much detail should be included, it is something that depends on the purpose of the study. As for this case, it was decided that detailed transcripts will not provide richer information or enhance the material, but rather it will be a time-consuming task, wherefore a simple style of transcribing was adopted.

4.6 Data Analysis Method

Kvale (2007, p. 102) argue that the choice of analysis should be decided before the interviews begin to take place, and that once the transcripts have been finished it is too late. Further, the choice of analysis should also be worked into the interview itself (Kvale, 2007, p. 102). As for the interview guide formed for this study, we took potential answers to the questions into consideration, and thought about what kind of answers that we aimed to receive, and thus, the interview guide was formed in accordance with both the theoretical framework developed in chapter two of this thesis, but also in accordance with what type of answers that was anticipated, and what kind of findings the thesis would result in. Kvale (2007, p. 102) note that the analysis will be easier to perform if the analysis procedure is thought of and taken into consideration at an early stage.

Analysing qualitative research data requires creativity and systematic searching, since there in qualitative research does not exist any rules on how to conduct analyses, in
contrast to when taking a quantitative approach (Spencer et al., 2003, pp. 199 - 200). The choice of analysis method differs depending on epistemological assumptions, tradition of the topic and intent with the results from the analysis (Spencer et al., 2003, p. 200). A commonly used method for analysing qualitative data is thematic analysis, which is an approach that involves encoding the data and identifying themes on different levels (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). A theme is an aspect of importance, retrieved from the data, that relates to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Themes have also been described as abstract and fuzzy constructs, not constricted to text but can also be pictures or sounds (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 388-389) define three classes of themes; basic theme, organising theme and global theme. Basic themes are simple characteristics of the data and can be a statement or belief that on its own does not say a lot about the data as a whole (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388-389). It is however always attached to a more central idea and can thus be understood as part of the context brought by other themes. An organising theme groups the basic themes with similar characteristics into categories (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). These clusters summarise the assumptions and main ideas of the basic themes and do so the organising themes enhance the meaning of broader themes. Finally, a global theme is a form of “macro-theme”, which groups together the organising themes that together form “an argument, or a position or an assertion about a given issue or reality” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). Depending on the data collected, there can be multiple global themes. Nevertheless, these describe the data from an overall perspective, within the context of a given analysis, in a revealing manner. This kind of thematic network is created by beginning with the identification of basic themes and then step by step working inwards until a global theme is reached (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389).

Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 85) describe a similar approach to the analysing of texts; finding themes and narrowing them down to the most important ones, structuring them into a hierarchy and linking the themes to the theory. Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 85; p. 88) additionally recognise that in order to find themes while analysing a text, it is important to form techniques, and that there are eight observational techniques and four manipulative techniques, which often can be combined. The first group of techniques described is scrutiny techniques, which are techniques that involves searching for themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88). When using interviews to collect data, the procedure of analysing and finding themes already begins during the transcription of audio recordings (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88-89). Things that researchers look for, as part of the scrutiny techniques, when searching for themes are repetition, local terms used in an unfamiliar manner, metaphors and analogies, naturally occurring shifts in content or transitions in conversation, similarities and differences, causal wordings such as “because” and “since”, conditional wordings such as “if” and “instead of”, and theory-related material (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 89-94).

The second group of techniques is processing techniques, which involves different techniques of sorting information (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 94). Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 94-96) explain these techniques; cutting and sorting technique is when one marks certain quotes or expressions, cuts them out and arranges these into groups that seem to belong together. Word lists and key words in context technique (KWIC) concern key words, for example can researchers count the numbers of times a word is used through computer programs, which could indicate that words that are repeated often are important (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 96-97). Metacoding is described as discovering new themes
among already existing themes, e.g. while analysing present themes the researcher tries to find new themes in the different theme groups (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 99-100).

As for which techniques to use and combine, Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 100-101) explain that all the techniques, except metacoding, is applicable to rich narrative data, but that not all researchers will be able to use all techniques or make use of them to their full potential. The data material collected for this study is in lines with what is described as moderately rich data with both longer and shorter answers (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 100). The authors provide a framework showing appropriate techniques depending on the type of data material, and according to this framework, the appropriate techniques for this study include repetitions, similarities and differences, cutting and sorting, indigenous typologies, word lists, etc.

After the data has been transcribed, Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 89-96) recommend authors to identify interesting characteristics found in the transcripts and code them, followed by a review of the codes and identifying themes by comparing and contrasting codes. Next, the themes and relationships these between should be analysed, defined and given names. Lastly, the writing process can proceed; the results from the data collection can coherently be explained and presented through the established themes, a discussion can be provided, and conclusions can finally be drawn.

As for this study, a combination of analysis techniques was used. To investigate how consumers make credibility judgements when encountered with brand-related UGC, semi-structured interviews were conducted and thematic analysis as described by Attride-Stirling (2001), with complementary techniques as interpreted from the work by Ryan and Bernard (2003), was the method chosen for identifying and examining distinctive and recurring themes in the data. After completing the interviews, and having transcribed the audio files, we began to read through each transcript to examine these and find identifiable themes. After having coded the data and identified themes, Attride-Stirling’s (2001, p. 388-389) three levels of themes; basic theme, organising theme and global theme were used to organise the themes and gain structure to the analysis. As this study takes a deductive approach it was expected that the themes would follow the theoretical framework developed earlier. Having coded the data, and organised it into the three levels, this assumption was confirmed. The interview guide had already been organised into global and organising themes, to simplify the analysing process. As the different concepts were heavily interconnected and over-lapping, the organising themes were furthermore colour-coded. This allowed for a clearer organising of the different themes. Thereafter, one could analyse in depth the basic themes within each organising theme. Where the participants had similar views, these comments were grouped together. In cases where the participants had different views, yet discuss the same aspect of the brand-related UGC, the comments were grouped together.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

There are different approaches and perspectives to ethical rules that dictate how research should be conducted. Graham et al. (2007, p. 48) gives different examples of approaches concerning ethics. The utilitarian approach concerns itself with consequences or outcomes, attempts to avoid harmful consequences and find the best possible outcome (Graham et al., 2007, p. 48; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, cited in Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 79). A deontological approach is dealing with morals, duty and obligations, and
concerns itself with the morals of the action rather than the consequences (Graham et al., 2007, p. 48; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, cited in Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 79). Relational approach is described by Graham et al. (2007, p. 48) as collaboration, while Ritchie et al. (2014, p. 79) further adds affirmation and empowerment to the term, referring to the relationship between the participant and the research. An ecological approach takes cultural sensitivity into consideration (Graham et al., 2007, p. 48). Virtue ethics is described by Ritchie et al. (2014, p. 79) as being person-based ethics, where the moral character of the person is of importance, instead of the ethical rules or the consequences of an action. Finally, there is the principled relativism approach, which advocates for “unique solutions for each individual context” (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 79).

All of these approaches provide specific ethical guidelines, and it is difficult to argue why one would be better than another. As authors we believe ourselves to have an internal moral compass, which will guide us to make ethically considerate decisions during the course of our thesis work. The relativism approach resides well with us, as we believe that every situation needs to be considered from the context and specific circumstances it provides us with. Simultaneously, we see a number of ethical considerations, which always needs to be present and acted upon in situations where other people are involved, particularly in an interview situation. Graham et al. (2007) provided suggestions for how to conduct ethical research that will protect participants and leave the participants with a peace of mind after having participated in an interview.

Graham et al. (2007) divide the ethical considerations that need to be taken into consideration when conducting qualitative interviews into three parts; (1) before the interview, (2) during the interview, and (3) after the interview. Before the interview, it is emphasised how the potential participants should not be pressured into participating, and that there are a number of points which need to be disclosed to these individuals before a interview takes place (Graham et al., 2007, p. 75). The potential interviewees should be given insight into why they are of interest to the study, as well as what the study is about, i.e. its objective and purpose. The individuals should moreover be given an idea about what to expect from the interview, to facilitate preparation. They should be reassured that the research is independent and legitimate and that it will be conducted with openness and honesty. During the interview, the participant has the right to take their time to answer a question and also not to give any answer at all if they do not want to (Graham et al., 2007, p. 75). As the interview situation is unfamiliar to many, and it makes some people nervous and anxious, it is important that the interviewer makes sure to show respect and aid the interviewee to feel comfortable (Graham et al., 2007, p. 76), meanwhile the participant at the same time should be given the opportunity to express themselves freely. The questions should moreover be clear and easy to understand. After the interview, the participant has the right to privacy and anonymity (Graham et al., 2007, p. 75). The reporting should be unbiased and accurate, and the participant should have the opportunity to give feedback on findings. A last ethical consideration is that the final conclusions is of actual value in a social context (Graham et al., 2007, p. 75).

These are suggestions we have followed when forming the interview guide, as well as when taking contact and meeting with the participants. To make sure participant will feel at ease and protected, the interviews will begin by asking for consent to record the interview, explaining how the participant’s information and anonymity will be protected, and how the results will be used. Furthermore, in this thesis it has been decided to change the names of the participants to numbers (e.g. Respondent 1, Respondent 2...) with no
connection to their identity. Changing the names or withholding personal information will not in any way impact or jeopardise the results of this study. The participants will be given part the final results when they have been finalised. The rules for conducting research at both national level and school level have furthermore been followed.
5. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This chapter focuses on presenting the empirical findings of the data collection. In the following sections, comments made by respondents relating to the credibility of source, message, channel and sponsorship will be presented. The most common, most similar, and other unique and relevant answers are explained. First, some general comments made about the first case will be presented, followed by the second case, and finally the third case. Answers relating to attitude and behavioural intentions are presented in the final sections of the chapter.

5.1 Credibility of Brand-related UGC

The participants were asked about their online behaviours and habits, especially relating to social media. Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat were the most commonly used web 2.0 based platforms among the people participating in the interviews. YouTube, Pinterest and Twitter are additional platforms mentioned by a couple of the interviewees.

A delimitation decided upon for this study, was to have a more thorough look into brand-related UGC on Instagram, rather than choosing multiple platforms and spreading to thin. Thus, the respondents were in an initial stage asked about general opinions about Instagram. According to respondent 8 Instagram can give quite good recommendations of products when posts are not sponsored. Respondent 7 stated that when e.g. a new makeup product is about to launch, she sometimes goes onto Instagram to look it up, as makeup brands and everyone in the cosmetics industry usually are very active on Instagram. The interviewee said:

“I usually don’t [use] Google, because I can just check their [the brand’s] Instagram.”

Respondent 7 however also said that it is difficult to assess credibility on Instagram, in particular from only viewing one individual post, without knowing anything about the person behind it. Respondent 2 similarly said that she finds Instagram as a platform quite credible, but that it ultimately depends upon who the source behind a post is. Respondent 1 said that in general question the credibility on Instagram a lot and explained that Instagram would not be her first source if she was to look for information about something. Agreeing with this was respondent 4, who after some reflection came to the conclusion that the credibility of what is posted onto Instagram often relies on who the source of the post is, as you trust someone you know more than someone random.

5.1.1 Case 1: Non-Sponsored Post by Non-Influencer

The first case shown was the post by a non-influencer Instagram user by the name elisa_lune. The post is not sponsored and does not show the product in the picture.

When shown the post, respondent 2, 7 and 8 said that the image did not seem very professional. The initial reaction of respondent 8 was:

“Not that many likes, not the most professional image, but the makeup looks good. It looks like she’s actually done it herself.”
Respondent 4 elaborated that a selfie like this one, taken at home, gives you the impression that the Instagrammer is just like everyone else, and that this is how it can look when having applied the product. Respondent 2 called the image “realistic” and said that it was not “too much”, but that she however would like to know what the product looks like. Respondent 5 found this to be a typical way in which Instagrammers talk about products; they post a picture of them wearing it and the comment on the shade and so on. The same interviewee, and also respondent 6, were both negative to the fact that they only could see half of the Instagrammer’s face.

The respondents were then asked about the message and its purpose. Most of the respondents thought of the it as a paid review. Respondent 5 thought the style of the text made it obvious that it was a review of a product, however she questioned the authenticity of the post, saying that it might be that the source had been paid to make the post. Respondent 1 said that because the Instagrammer had tagged Lumene in the beginning of the text, the interviewee felt like it was some sort of hidden advertising. The respondent however recognised that it could be the Instagrammer’s personal opinion, but that this was not the feeling she got when reading the text. Respondent 3 and 7 agreed to the message being to sell the product by Lumene. When asking respondent 4 about what the Instagrammer wanted to say with this post, she sarcastically answered:

“That you can get a nice makeup look with Lumene’s illuminator in shade rosy dawn.”

The respondent felt like the message was enforced and thought that the purpose of the post was to sell the product. Respondent 8 also thought the style of the post was typical for Instagram reviews or for makeup reviews and believed the purpose of the post to be to sell Lumene’s product. However, respondent 8 did still find the post authentic because it showed the results of using the product. Respondent 2 and 6 found the post to be more of a review and had similar views to the following statement by respondent 7:

“A spontaneous thought is that it is... Like, I get a picture of what kind of product it is, and what you use it for, because it is a rather informative post.”

Further, respondent 7 described the language as a makeup language, and felt that the text was very informative but would probably not read everything if encountering the same type of content on Instagram. Many seemed to find the first case very credible due to the informativeness, yet some felt it seemed sponsored. Respondent 3 said that if she was on the hunt for new makeup, she would probably have found the post more interesting, as well as entertaining, than she did at the moment of the interview. Although informative, the interviewee was under the impression that the person was paid to do this and explained that this was why she did not find it very credible. Respondent 8 found the makeup nice and glamourous, and she liked the glow of the skin. Further, she said that the makeup could have made her search for the product, since she would like to use the kind of product that would show the same results as the picture did. Respondent 6 did not find the image very entertaining and almost too informative, but expressed that it still seemed credible, although she felt indifferent to it because the look was not of interest to her. Respondent 1 was similarly not very impressed by the makeup look displayed by the post and did therefore not find the post very entertaining.

There were much discussion relating to the length of the text in the description. Many felt that the length of the text made them reluctant to read everything. Respondent 2, 4 and
7 had reactions similar to each other and stated that it all in all is informative, but that they never would stop to read a post like this if it popped up in their feeds, as the text is too extensive and requires too much concentration. **Respondent 4** moreover said that the post was too sales orientated for her to deem it reliable and said that she prefers someone simply saying that they have used the product and that it was good. The interviewee further elaborated:

“If I would see this on Instagram, and someone had written this much text, I wouldn’t ever read it.”

**Respondent 7** similarly said that her friends never would post this long a text about a product and said that it did not feel genuine to her. According to **respondent 5** people do not like to read more than a few sentences on Instagram and thus thought that the caption of the post was way too long. The interviewee however noted that it was very informative, meanwhile missing some central facts such as how long-wear the product is. The difficulty associated with reading the post had **respondent 5** wearied:

“Reading this - it feels like she’s doing an assignment.”

**Respondent 1** said that she did not really get an idea of how to apply the product, and that the text in that way was not very informative. The interviewee also wondered what the product looks like and a video would thus have made the post more reliable. **Respondent 5** said that she would not trust the post in its current form, but that a video had made it more authentic. A video would according for her have enabled the audience to see the Instgrammers initial reaction to the product, as well as given an idea of how to put it on. **Respondent 3 and 8** had the same reaction and said that a video would have been more informative and had helped them get a better grasp of the product. **Respondent 2** agreed that a video in which the person actually shows the product would have been preferable. **Respondent 6** said that she might have been more entertained by a video. **Respondent 4** said that it would not have mattered if it was a video, as she felt like the person behind the post only wanted to sell her something. **Respondent 7** similarly would not have preferred a video, this due to the fact that it requires more effort from her as a consumer of content. The interviewee however recognized that if the video was well-made, then it might actually have been better than an image and text.

All participants except **respondent 1** were under the impression that the source had expertise in makeup, the interviewee called the Instagrammer one among millions who makes this kind of content. **Respondent 1** felt that the makeup was too glossy and gave the impression of being “sweaty”, but also attributed her negative perception to her not following this specific trend or feeling a lack of interest in this trend. **Respondent 5** thought that a post would be more credible if the she knew that the source was an influencer or knowledgeable in makeup. Also, it was questioned if the source had done their own makeup.

“She probably knows a whole lot about makeup, because she actually succeeded well with it on the picture at least. Then you can question whether she actually did the makeup herself.” - **Respondent 3**

**Respondent 8** also commented on the source’s ability to put on makeup,
“Her makeup looks good. It also looks as if she actually did it herself.”

Further, everyone felt that the source in the first case was attractive, but few expressed a desire to follow the Instagram account. **Respondent 5** expressed disbelief in the credibility of the content, saying that one can be blinded by a pretty face, and further attributing it to the lack of familiarity with the source. Many of the participants cited familiarity with the source as being an important factor in the credibility judgment. When asked if she would stop to look at the first post, **respondent 2** said “it depends on who the person is as well”, and explained that if it would be a person she knows personally, it would be more likely that she would pause to have a look and perhaps react to the content.

“But if I would just see this post, then I would have a hard time knowing if it was genuine or not. Like, because now I don’t know anything about her. So, then it will be hard to know whether it is genuine or not.” - **Respondent 7**

When discussing the importance of the source in general credibility assessment of brand-related UGC, **respondent 4** further stated that it depends a lot on whether it is a person that she trusts and whether she likes their content, and also if she feels like they have actually used the product in question. **Respondent 1** gave an example of an account that she follows, where the source is usually posting about mental health and anxiety,

“I believe that I get much more influenced by her giving a tip about a product, than by this type of a girl … Because then you still get like ‘she’s writing so well about this thing, then maybe she knows what she’s talking about when it comes to lipstick.’”

Furthermore, **respondent 6** mentioned her lack of trust in companies, saying that consumer opinions are more believable,

“If a company post something ... You don’t like really trust companies. I am like so that I don’t care - they are only trying to sell.”

Some of the participants expressed the wish of being able to look at the source’s profile, and check what other posts that the source had and what these looked like. **Respondent 7** wished to see more posts from the source visible in the first example post, in order to determine what type of content that the source usually posts, e.g. if posts often are sponsored or not. The interviewee felt it difficult to picture the person without knowing this. She also explained that in order to assess the credibility of the poster, it would be necessary to assess the profile and the feed as well. Had all the posts been about Lumene, **respondent 7** said she would have felt that something was weird and made her questioned the source further. **Respondent 8** would have liked to see more posts in order to make the assessment of whether she would follow the Instagrammer or not, saying that she probably could if she knew more about her.

The amount of likes on the post was further noted by many, and the number of likes seemed significant to part of the participants. When shown the first case, respondents noted that the post had relatively few likes, **respondent 4** stated,

“If it is a person that wants to... 99 likes, she wants to be famous on Instagram, wants to be an influencer, and is happy to have a collaboration...”
However, respondent 7 and respondent 8 felt that the number of likes indicated genuinity and authenticity, with respondent 7 saying,

“Like, she doesn’t have so many likes so maybe she is not that big. Maybe she is just like... Someone who actually just wanted to recommend their friends about this.”

A recurring theme within the data collected is a scepticism towards everything posted on Instagram. Two of our three example posts about Lumene did not state anything about being sponsored posts, but still, a majority of the respondents were noticeably suspicious toward these. Six out of eight interviewees thought the first post was sponsored. Respondent 4 said:

“I don’t think that a regular person would choose to post something like this, a text this well-written about something just to-, yeah, no. I would believe this to be sponsored content. 100%... Or it could be someone who just is very into makeup and want to inform about. It’s difficult, I don’t know.”

Respondents 1, 5, and 8 had similar thoughts about the writing style and respondent 3 also commented on how multiple adjectives are used just to describe how wonderful the product. She further said:

“Like spontaneously, I get annoyed and I’m looking for where it says that she’s sponsored by Lumene. Then I start thinking of how reliable she is around the product if she’s sponsored.”

Respondent 1 was suspicious to the fact that the source behind the post had similar letters in her Instagram name as in the brand name Lumene. She laughed and asked whether this is the person who is behind Lumene’s products and admitted to getting a bit “psyched”. When asking respondent 7 about why she was under impression that the non-sponsored post was sponsored, she said that it probably was because it is so common with sponsored content on Instagram, so rather than expecting it is not paid for, the opposite is assumed. Further, the respondent reflected that if posts are compared to each other, and if a non-sponsored post is built in the same way as sponsored posts usually are, then it is easy to assume that this is the case. Also, if what is said about a product is overly positive, essentially, it could also be an ad for the product.

Respondent 1 also talked about the fact that many people seem to do statements about their content not being sponsored nowadays and expected the Instagrammer in the first example post to have disclosed somewhere if it was a non-sponsored post, i.e. if it came from herself. The respondent further claimed not knowing what she should think of this new behaviour of making disclosures regarding not being paid. She states:

“Is my reaction supposed to be different? Like oh my god, what a serious human being who gives recommendations that they are not paid to say! And then you think, does the person get paid for everything else that is said (that is not connected to this kind of statement)? It’s difficult.”

During the interview with respondent 7, it was uncovered that she had made similar observations:
“Directly when it’s like, not sponsored, then they really want to say that. Because nowadays it feels like you assume that it’s always sponsored or a collaboration or such.”

All in all, after some reflection, the respondents were very unsure if the content showed was sponsored or not, however, still being notably suspicious.

5.1.2 Case 2: Non-Sponsored Post by Influencer

The second case shown was the post uploaded by the influencer ida_elina. The post is non-sponsored, and the text mentions not only Lumene, but several of other brands as well.

According to respondent 7, the second post resembles a common type of content on Instagram, meant for people who like makeup. The interviewee continued by explaining that this is why the text consists of tags – so that interested people can find the cosmetics brands and products which has been used to achieve this look. The interviewee further reflected over the fact that the text is not one of those that you actually read, but you read the first couple of lines, then you realise that it only consists of product references. The participant further said that if she liked something of what she saw on the Instagrammer’s face, e.g. the lips, then she might look in the text what lip pencil that had been used. Respondent 5 and respondent 6 felt that mentioning plenty of other brands besides Lumene, enhanced the credibility of the post. Respondent 3 exclaimed:

“I trust this more than the previous one. Because there are so many different brands, and she did write that she made [the makeup] herself … and there are less superlatives in the text.”

Respondent 4 said that the post is entertaining to those who are into makeup and explained that it feels more genuine as she is only informing her audience about what she is wearing. Respondent 8 agreed with previous interviewees, who all had indicated that the post was very informative. Respondent 2 said that she would have enjoyed the possibility to tap the screen to make brands pop up, as it would be an efficient way to learn which part of the makeup look referred to which brand. Respondent 6, similarly to the other interviewees, expressed that she liked the caption and furthermore noted that the Instagrammer has a nice profile picture and many likes. Respondent 1 was skeptical to the makeup look and was thus not very into the post, meanwhile she also stated getting the impression that the Instagrammer might actually use and like all the products mentioned in the post. Respondent 1 immediately also noted that the post had more likes than the previous case, and described the source:

“I think that this is probably a popular girl, that I am ascribing her plenty of attributes that are connected to it, she is probably determined, she has made her Instagram account big ... “

Respondent 1 continued by explaining her thoughts on what the number of likes indicates:

“More likes often mean a bigger account. A bigger account means more people that will see it, ... takes part of her message, or gets it in their feed, but also, of course it will be more people to sell potential products to.”
When asked about the source, most of the respondents felt that the makeup was well done, however respondent 1 questioned the style of makeup.

Some of the respondents would again have preferred the information to have been transmitted through a video. Respondent 2 found the image to be okay but said that a video would make the message more credible, as you would be able to see if she has done everything herself, and the information would also be easier to take in from a video. Respondent 5 liked the post as it was, but also said:

“If I am to decide how to use-, or to buy a product, I want to see how to use it, and you can only see how to use it in a video.”

Although respondent 1 did not find the post entertaining nor something that she had stopped to read or look at if it popped up in her feed, she recognised that a video might have interested her more, as they in general do:

“You might get another feeling because it actually is someone-, it’s like-, you have no idea if it’s edited or anything either, which you-, in a video you see, of course you can edit videos too, but you see it in another way - like now she actually puts on this red and it really does get this glossy in reality as in the picture.”

Respondent 6 and 7 found the post in its original form to be both informative and entertaining enough and would not have preferred a video. Respondent 7 explained that she usually does not enjoy the loud music often used in makeup videos on Instagram.

The fact that the post referred to a multitude of cosmetics brands instead of only one seemed to counteract some of the seeming predisposition to suspicion of sponsorship for a few of the respondents. Respondent 4 said that this post gives no concrete indication that it is sponsored, but that it is more like a YouTube tutorial to which the creator usually attaches information about the products used in the description box. The interviewee furthermore pointed out that products are thus not pushed onto the viewer, but that they are easily accessible if someone is interested to know more. Respondent 3 and 5 said that they did not feel like the post was sponsored as the Instagrammer was mentioning so many different products that were part of her makeup. Contrary to these viewpoints, respondent 1 and respondent 6 said that they still got suspicious by this post, because of the many hashtags. As no sponsorship was disclosed, respondent 1 furthermore reflected:

“Maybe she is fishing for sponsorships, that it isn’t just because you are-, because she actually is sponsored, but more like, ‘look what I’m doing with your products, how good it looks, can’t I be sponsored?’”

Respondent 7 explained that she thought the person tagged the brands for similar reasons, because the person wants to be given attention by these brands, get sponsorships and/or gain more followers. The interviewee further said that the post could be sponsored, but that it might not be; it could also be posted to give other people who like makeup inspiration or information about which products she have used or she just does it because other people do it. Respondents 2 and 8 said that they got a feeling the post was sponsored but were unsure and could not point to exactly why. Respondent 8 claimed
that she at times has trouble distinguishing, whether a post is honest or not, and that she sometimes suspects surreptitious advertising.

5.1.3 Case 3: Sponsored Post by Influencer

The final case was the post uploaded by the influencer esteelalonde. This post is explicitly sponsored - at the end of the text there is written hashtag ad as a disclaimer.

Three out of eight respondents found the third post somewhat reliable. Respondent 3 said that the post feels reliable as you can clearly see the Instagrammer’s face and eyes, and she has a fresh and natural makeup on. The interviewee furthermore found the text informative when it comes to the product and felt like the Instagrammer must know a lot about it. The respondent however also noted that the ad hashtag had a negative effect on her credibility assessment. Respondent 5 liked the post because the girl seemed humble, both visually and in the way she expressed herself in text. The interviewee found that the Instagrammer had a nice way of addressing the message, although she directly from the look and feel of the post understood that it was sponsored. She furthermore liked that the Instagrammer did not mention the product until a few sentences into the post. The interviewee also liked that the Instagrammer put a context to the product, in this case that when you are travelling you need some extra care.

“Kind of telling her problem at first, and then she’s like - here’s a solution.” - Respondent 5

The interviewee further elaborated that the source was more credible due to the natural makeup, saying that makeup sometimes can be a disturbance, and take away the attention from the issue at hand. Respondent 8 said that the post seemed a bit constrained, but that the image was a good representation of the product, as the Instagrammer looked very fresh. The interviewee however also stated that she knew the Instagrammer from before and said that she did not believe that the source would do paid collaborations with brands or products that she did not like; the respondent thus found the post quite credible. Respondent 3, 5 and 8 also expressed positive emotions to the fact that the post referred to a video, as it is an additional source of information if you want to know more about the product. The majority of interviewees did however not show quite as positive reactions to the post as these respondents. Respondent 4 said it was the type of posts that she does not like to see in her feed. The interviewee continued:

“It feels like, ‘Lumene: hi, do you want to do a collaboration with us, you get this and this’, ‘yes absolutely, send the product’, and right when they come home, *camera click*, and then they write that they have used it. That’s what I see when I look at this post.”

The interviewee further explained that she finds it very untrustworthy as it was so clearly a sponsored collaboration and expressed dislike for the post due to the “un-originality”. Similarly, according to respondent 7, this post is very typical for sponsored content on Instagram. Respondent 6 and 1 agreed that the post did not feel genuine because of the sponsorship. Respondent 1 felt like the purpose with the post was to make her feel like she should buy the product, so that maybe she will be as happy as the source seem to be. The initial reaction that respondent 6 had was that the girl looked cute with their short hair, blue eyes and happy expression holding up a product. After having read the text
however, the interviewee recognised that the girl probably just tried to sell the product to her:

“It’s in the way that- ‘It’s packed with dreamy magic ingredients, like cloudberry’ - you know it becomes too much, it’s so exaggerated.”

According to respondent 7, not just anyone would post this kind of picture, holding up the product and so on. She continued:

“We’ve all seen these kinds of images before. And the text, very informative, like they often are, if it’s only about one brand.”

Respondent 1 said the text was a lot shorter and more concise than in the previous examples, and if you want more information it is not pushed onto you, but it is available in the video linked in the Instagrammer’s bio. The respondent was however still skeptical and commented that the Instagrammer probably gets paid based on how many clicks she gets on the link, and it thus might be a strategic way of constructing a post. At the same time the interviewee was moderately positive to the idea of a video, as it would give better indication of how to actually use the product. Respondent 6 liked the image as it showcased the product but found the text too “smushy” [corny] and also said that she felt lost in the description. Respondent 2 agreed that the post is informative in that it shows what the product looks like, but further elaborated that the text is redundant; it is not entertaining - it feels too ad-like. Respondent 7 noted that the Instagrammer never say why she likes the product, what type of skin it suits or what it does. The respondent continued explaining that it might create an awareness of the product, but not knowledge about what it is. Respondent 4 similarly explained that the Instagrammer gives information about what the product contains but not about anything related to its use. The text and image do according to the interviewee not give off the feeling that the Instagrammer has actually used the product:

“No, I don’t believe that she has used it, that is the first thing that comes to mind … No, she hasn’t used it, tested it ... But she says, like, what it contains so that’s good. But I absolutely don’t believe that she has used it herself ... “

Respondent 4 and 2 said that the credibility would have increased if the Instagrammer had actually stated that she had used the product and that it was really is good, rather than pointing to ingredients. Moreover, respondent 1, 7 and 4 were all in disbelief regarding that this would be the Instagrammer’s own words and not something she has gotten sent to her, copied and pasted, pointing to the ad resemblance of the post.

Respondent 2 asked if the person in the picture works with Lumene. She further recognised that she probably would have stopped scrolling if the image appeared, but when reading the text, she would have lost interest as it is so ad-like. Most of the respondents stated that they would not have paid attention to the post if it appeared in their feeds. Respondent 7 noted that the source was verified on Instagram, which she explained means that the source can be seen as credible on Instagram, and further elaborated:
“More likely to be sponsored, more likely to be an influencer. However, not more credible as-, in sales purposes, more like they-, it’s a credible account in the way that it isn’t just anyone, but someone with some kind of status on social media.”

The interviewee furthermore explained that she would not necessarily trust this person more, but believed that the Instagrammer must have some kind of influence on people. Respondent 1 also had similar suspicions due to the significant number of likes:

“Like, considering that she has like more than 14 000 likes, I would believe that-, this looks like a typical influencer girl, that’s the vibe I get from her ... I believe she possesses a lot more power in influencing than these two others do.”

A recurring point of discussion during the interviews was the disclosure of sponsorship. Participant 1 explained that she thinks that it is important to disclose when a post is paid for, since she as a consumer should have the right to say “thanks, but no thanks” to advertising, just like you do on your postbox. Participant 6 agreed that it is better to admit to sponsors rather than fooling people, and further noted how she reacts to sponsorships:

“... it usually is marked at the top ‘this post is sponsored’, and if it’s sponsored, then I usually scroll past it. Then I don’t care anymore.”

Participant 2 showed similar habits of scrolling past ad-like content and participant 4 said that she also always skips segments that clearly has been paid for when e.g. watching YouTube videos.

When asking about if a statement such as “this post is sponsored, but all opinion are my own” would change the interviewees’ minds about credibility varying answers were reported. Respondent 8 said that she would find it more credible than if such a statement was not included and respondent 6 showed a similar viewpoint. Respondent 5 stated that it ultimately depends on the situation and said:

“I presume that they are always supposed to give their personal opinion. But I don’t know, I’m not an influencer but... I mean it’s very rare that-, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a sponsored post and then they say something bad about it.”

After some reflection the respondent said that she was not sure if it actually would make any difference. Respondent 5 furthermore explained that many influencers say that they would never take on a sponsor that they do not like. The interviewee was however sceptical and said that at the end of the day it’s a business, referring to that you cannot trust what other people would do for money. Respondent 2 similarly said that people do anything for money:

“But really, if people get money, people do anything for money. There is people for everything. She might like this product a lot, or she might not even have tested the product, you just don’t know.”

Respondent 4 said that she usually does not think that sponsored content is genuine, but they only do it because they get paid. She furthermore explained:
“The people who are sponsored usually say that they would never do a collaboration with something that they do not believe in. But then it’s also just something that you say, because it sounds good, very good.”

Respondent 3 said that if she would have seen a person mention a brand at other times than in the sponsored post, it would be really good, which respondent 4 agreed upon. Respondent 1 was more skeptical and said that if she had seen something like that, she just would have thought that the person must have done much free advertising to be allowed to do paid advertising. Respondent 4 furthermore stated that there are certain influencers who always try to say things like “this is the best product I have ever tried, there is nothing better in the world and I recommend it to everyone” about every product they are paid to talk about. Respondent 1 said that she always questions credibility when an influencer has posted about a type of product before and then does another post about the same type of product, but from another brand. Respondent 7 reflected over the fact that sponsorships is a natural and obvious part of influencers’ content as it is their job, but that what they are saying still could be their honest opinion. She continues explaining that it can be difficult to tell influencers’ paid and unpaid opinion apart, but:

“But that’s essentially also what it’s like when you go to a store, if they want to sell something... Is it actually their genuine opinion?”

Multiple respondents implicitly indicated or explicitly expressed that they had another view of social media, and Instagram, only a few years back, but that the increased presence of ads and sponsored content has made them skeptical and given them a more negative view of the platform(s). The respondents often referred to source and message when explaining how they assess credibility of a sponsored post. All interviewees agreed that non-sponsored brand-related UGC in general is more credible than sponsored brand-related UGC.

Respondent 1 discussed why she has become more critical towards content on Instagram:

“It has affected me in the way that I feel like some people do a lot of sponsored content, which makes me feel like I can’t follow these people, because you get pushed into this-, this consumerism way of life, like ‘look now you can get 25% off here again’. But maybe I don’t need four different 25% off’s a week? Like, I mean, it does not feel all that reasonable.”

Respondent 4 elaborated on when situations in which she gets particularly fed up with sponsored content on social media and said:

“What affects me, is when I see that it is the same company all the time, then I’m just like, STOP. I really don’t want your product anymore, just because it’s so crazy... Too much.

5.2 Attitude Towards Brand-related UGC

The respondents were asked about how brand communication through consumers and companies could affect their brand attitude, and the answers differed to a certain degree. Many of the answers talked about advertisements and sponsored content, especially in the case of companies communicating on social medias. Firstly, the answers to the question of how they react to the companies on social media were mainly concerning
sponsorship. **Respondent 4** felt that this type of communication is not genuine, **respondent 2** would rather scroll past this type of content. **Respondent 3** said she thinks that when one is fed with positive or negative about a product, one might subconsciously start believing, implying that either company or consumer-generated opinions would have an effect. However, **respondent 5** brought up a positive example for her, explaining how the Fenty Beauty brand had a social issue message in their marketing campaign, and how she felt that it was a good thing to do by the brand. **Respondent 8** also had a positive view on brand communication through companies, and said the following:

“... a company with a lot of positive engagement in their posts makes you more positively inclined to try something from that company … maybe [I am] more positively inclined towards company advertisements, [whose brand] I already have a good image of, if I have used their products earlier or heard someone in my vicinity talk about it, e.g. Lumene.”

There were also many cases of respondents bringing up targeted advertising, where advertising is customized according to the user’s search history and demographics, and **respondent 6** showed an ad on her phone from a loan company. She said she was confused as to why this specific ad was shown to her. Also, **respondent 3** expressed her concern about this type of marketing, saying:

“I think it is scary when you might have searched or only spoken about a product, and then when you open up Facebook or Instagram or something else, and there’s a lot of ads showing up about the same product you just talked about.”

As for the question of how other consumers’ opinions about brands communicated on social media affects the participants, the responses were quite similar. Most said they highly valued others’ opinions and would actively seek these out before purchasing goods. **Respondent 1** said she would be likely to use what someone else has used before. **Respondent 4** felt that consumers’ posts are much more genuine than companies posting online, further saying:

“... then you know that they have actually used it, and not received something for it.”

**Respondent 3** explained that she sometimes might buy things recommended by other consumers, but that her own values concerning makeup and other beauty products is very strong and would hinder her from buying just anything. **Respondent 5** gave an example of where she saw an influencer wearing some clothes and linking to the website where the clothing items were available for purchase, and she ended up buying the clothes. Therefore, she felt she gets affected by other consumer opinions, and actively search for others’ opinions before buying products. **Respondent 7** said she often checks Instagram rather than Google to search for others’ opinions or to search for brands’ Instagram pages, to research the item she is interested in. Yet, she felt that her attitude would not change much, but that she might notice something she likes and then check it out further.

### 5.3 Attitude Towards Brand

The participants were also asked about their brand image of Lumene before shown any of the cases. **Respondent 5** did not recognize the brand. The others knew of the brand, but the user experience of the brand’s products varied. **Respondent 1** had never used
Lumene products before, but still knew of the brand due to advertisements in magazines. Respondent 2, respondent 3, respondent 7 and respondent 8 said they really liked the brand and use the products regularly. Respondent 2 have been using the products daily for a year, respondents 4 and 6 have used products from the brand earlier.

As for what kind of brand image they had of Lumene, few were able to articulate comments about how they viewed the brand. Respondent 2, who had used the products daily, said:

“They have both more expensive, or better products, and budget-priced [ones] and still completely fine. I use quite a lot of skin creams and such now. And it is Finnish. And they are using-, or they are striving to use organic [ingredients] …”

Respondent 7 also thought that the brand markets itself as using natural ingredients, and that it is relatively cheap and not comparable to high-end brands such as Chanel. Respondent 8 thought of the brand’s products as fresh and suiting Scandinavian style and Nordic skin. She felt that the products have high quality, and many of them are vegan and cruelty free, which she emphasised was an important aspect to her. Respondent 1 said she felt that the targeted segment by Lumene probably is the same as the targeted segment by VeckoRevyn (Swedish magazine for young girls). Further, she said she had noticed that the advertisements by Lumene usually are quite eye-catching.

When the cases were shown to the participants, they were asked about how these posts might affect their brand attitude, and most of the participants felt that they would not be affected by the posts. However, many expressed whether they would feel like buying the product or not based on the cases shown. Respondent 1 did not feel like she would be affected by the first post but pertained it to the fact that she did not understand the style of makeup. As the interviewee was not able to find the content credible due to the suspicion of sponsorship, it seemed to still affect her attitude towards post. Respondent 3, respondent 6 and respondent 7 felt that they were not necessarily affected by the post. Respondent 2, on the other hand, felt that she would likely be positively affected, because she liked that the post was not “too much”, and that it seems realistic. This interviewee found the source to be credible, more so than the text, and it seems to affect the attitude towards the product. Respondent 8 agreed with the comment about the post being realistic, saying she like the style of makeup. Respondent 4 felt that she would be affected, but also stated it was the first time she was reading about Lumene and could not tell if her attitude toward the brand had changed by this case.

The second and third case evoked similar answers, respondent 2 felt that the second case did not give her a strong impression of specifically Lumene, due to so many other brands being mentioned as well. However, she added that if she had reacted to something in the makeup and thought that it was nice, and see that Lumene was tagged, she would observe that it was Lumene’s makeup that had achieved the look. Respondent 8 felt similar in the sense that she liked that it was possible to achieve such a look by using Lumene products and seemed to find the content credible due to the source and message. Many had found the source and message to be credible in the second case, wherefore source and message affect the attitude towards the brand.

As for the third case, the opinions were stronger, e.g. respondent 1 felt that this case made it too obvious that it was sponsored, and that she would scroll past the post, and
further stated that none of the post had interested her. This indicates that the interviewee’s attitude was affected by the message and sponsorship factor. **Respondent 2** did not like the picture either yet felt that it would not affect her attitude toward Lumene, which could be due to the interviewee holding a strong positive brand image from before. **Respondent 6** said that none of the posts affected her attitude toward Lumene, negatively nor positively, and further explained:

“If it had been a picture with animals, beheaded bunnies or something, you know. Stuffed animals, ‘we test on animals.’ As long as it is a normal girl, and no animals, it’s fine. So she can sell as much as she would like to, and no, it does not affect my attitude ... I like Lumene’s products.”

### 5.4 Behavioural Intentions

There were few cases of participants feeling like sharing the posts with friends, family or other they know. **Respondent 2** said she would not share the posts or information, since she usually does not talk about this kind of thing with friends or family. About the first case, **respondent 1** said she would not share to others by judging only one picture, but rather if she had tried the product herself and enjoyed it, she would be likely to recommend it to others. **Respondent 6** agreed with this, saying:

“If I would try the product myself and like it, then I would surely tell others. But not otherwise.”

Further, **respondent 6** revealed that she has recommended products to other before, when finding products online, but still, only if she had tried them first and liked them. **Respondent 8** said she would be likely to recommend Lumene products to others, but pertained it to her previous experiences with Lumene, rather than the cases shown. In general, the respondents did not feel the need the pass along any information they found in the cases.

The most common answer as to what type of reaction the participants would have to the posts, were that they would like to search for the products further in Instagram and other places. **Respondent 2**, who found the source of the second post to be credible, said:

“Like the one in the middle, I would look it up and check what it is, if it has got good reviews. Then you would maybe... Find out a bit more maybe.”

**Respondent 3** also similarly noted when asked if she had bought a product after seeing it on Instagram:

“Oh, I believe so... But not only because of that, but I do more research about it as well.”

**Respondent 4** considered buying a product online before but did not. She said she checked the company’s website to see how much the products costs and other information, to evaluate whether to buy it or not. Also, she said she can check brands’ Instagram pages to see what kind of products they have, but not act upon it further than that. She attributed this to her possibly being perceptible to commercials.

Many of the participants check reviews before buying things. **Respondent 2** noted that:
“I usually do. Not always, but before I bought some Lumene products I looked through, some had commented ‘that was bad’ and then I did not buy those things.”

Respondent 3 and 5 also remarked that they check reviews before buying things. Respondent 5 said:

“I actually use reviews a lot, or just generally like, in the search page on Instagram, I write the brands name and then under the hashtag you can see if people used it or have a special opinion about [the brand] ... At the end of the day, it depends on my opinion of the brand, like if I see something interesting, I would look it up furthermore.”

Respondent 6 stated that she would be truly inspired if she sees other consumers posting and gave an example of a friend posting about exercise-related products. The participant is interested in exercising and found that in cases where this friend posts about edible products, the participant would search further about the products. Further, respondent 6 felt that she would probably ask acquaintances about a product, if she found on Instagram that someone had used it, saying she would ask them about their opinion of the product. She explained that it if she could see that someone, she knew had e.g. liked a picture, she would ask them. She found that she would probably search for the products mentioned in the second case, to check them out. Respondent 2 and 7 also found that the second case enticed them to seek out further information. Respondent 7 said:

“If it is like this ‘oh, she has got really nice eyelashes’, then I would maybe click onwards on the link, or ‘she has got really nice lip product.’”

However, respondent 7 later expressed that she would be likely to react to Lumene in the first post, saying that the second case contained too much text before she would notice the brand name, and the third felt too much like sponsored content. She further noted that the first picture looked as if a friend had uploaded a selfie. This interviewee had found the source and channel of the first post to be credible.

When asked about their purchase intentions towards Lumene, the answers varied depending on case and depending on the persons. Respondent 1 did not particularly like any of the cases enough to feel like purchasing the products. Respondent 4 was also critical towards the case and said that after viewing the third case she would not buy the product, but that the second case would entice her the most to seek out the product. In the second case, the respondent had found the source and the message to be credible.

When shown the first case, respondents 2, 7 and 8 were positive towards the products, especially respondent 8 felt that she would like to buy the product shown in the case. Respondent 2 noted that she would have liked to see the actual product. She explained that if she would have seen the product in the picture, she would recognize it later in a store, and perhaps buy it then. Further, she surmised that had the source been someone she follows on Instagram, she would be likely to try the product out. Respondent 1 agreed with consumers having the power to influence, saying:

“If now I would stand and choose something then maybe I would take what someone else has used.”
The respondent further explained that she thought it likely that if she would see the product in her feed, she might remember it later when in a store. If she would recognize the product in the store, she thinks it would be likely that she would buy it, because it is familiar. Respondent 7 further remarked that she would probably not buy the product immediately after viewing it on Instagram, but since she would learn about it from Instagram, she would be likely to consider buying it at a later occasion where she would encounter the product again. Respondent 4 had similar thoughts, and said:

“It is not like I would buy something if I wasn’t in need of such a product, then I would absolutely consider doing it. They do usually have a bit of discounts.”

These comments seem to relate to future purchase intention, and these respondents had found the source to be credible.

For the second case, respondents 2 and 6 felt that this post had the most effect on their purchase intention. Respondent 6 noted:

“The middle one. But it is kind of weird, because she did not show any picture, she has just shown her face. But she is actually someone [because of whom] I could buy.”

The interviewees had expressed their opinions on the source and message, respondent 2 found the source credible and respondent 6 found the source and the message to be credible. Other had agreed with the message being credible.

As for the third case, respondents 3, 5 and 8 had found the source and message to be credible and expressed the possibility of a future purchase. Respondent 4 found the source to not be credible, and further the disclosed sponsorship further affected the participants attitude towards the content. Respondents 1 and 6 agreed in not finding the source to particularly credible and would thus not buy the product based on the third case.

There were some similar comments regarding previous experiences of buying goods online after finding them online. Respondent 4 explained that she once was on the verge of buying a product, after finding it online, but did not. Respondent 5 gave an example of when she finds a popular brand on Instagram and bought it after doing some research. She found the product in many different posts, where the users expressed how much they liked it. The respondent thought that it would be possible that if she did not use Instagram or YouTube, she would not have bought it. Respondent 7 also had an example of when she had bought an eyeshadow palette after finding it on their Instagram, but she attributed it to actively seeking out brands’ Instagram pages. She also mentioned that when she hears about new products launching, she usually searches on brands’ official Instagram pages to make her opinion about the products. Further, she said that she had bought many things because of influencers on YouTube.
6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter consist of discussion regarding the credibility of brand-related UGC and the resulting responses. Each component’s importance to the credibility judgement is examined in light of the results from the data collection, in accordance with the chosen analytical approach - thematic analysis.

6.1 Credibility of Brand-related UGC

Through the thematic analysis two global themes were identified, the first of which was credibility of brand-related UGC. The organising themes building up to this are the communication process factors; message, source and channel, with the addition of sponsorship. The other global theme was found to be consumer response to brand-related UGC, the organising themes of which are identified as being attitude toward brand-related UGC, attitude toward brand and behavioural intention. The basic themes for the respective organising themes will be presented and analysed, in the context of the more overall themes identified, in the following sections.

6.1.1 Credibility of Source

Source is one of the organising themes and an aspect, which from the data analysis has been found to have strong influences on the credibility assessment of brand-related UGC. The thematic analysis further implicates that familiarity as well as having an admiration or liking for the source are basic themes that both are of importance when assessing credibility of the source. When participants were asked to simply describe how they perceived the source, many expressed that they found it very difficult due to not knowing anything about the source beforehand. Many accredit lack of familiarity with the sources as to why they do not find the posts credible - as one of the respondents said, “it depends on who the person is as well”, which was echoed many times throughout the interviews with other participants. The analysis further indicates that posts by unknown Instagrammers are not found as credible as those by sources that are familiar. Thus, from what it seems, familiarity with and a liking for the source make consumers of content more prone to welcoming and believing in recommendations. These findings are in lines with the results reported by Cialdini (1984, cited in Metzger el al., 2003, p. 304), who also state that psychologists long have been aware of that familiarity increases liking and that liking furthermore influence credibility judgements.

Trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness were further found to be basic themes of significance for the credibility assessment of a source. The interviewees did not feel like they could express themselves when it came to the trustworthiness of the source, as they did not know any of the sources of the example cases shown well or at all, i.e. the sources were not familiar. However, one of the respondents who previously had followed content by the source behind the third post, stated that she would trust this person, as she believed that this particular Instagrammer would not state untrue opinions only for money. Furthermore, the participants felt that the source of each post was attractive, and the sources were mostly deemed to have expertise. Meanwhile finding the source attractive, many questioned the style of makeup displayed in the second case. Multiple respondents commented on the freckles painted by the source, implying that the source indeed had expertise, but that the style did not suit the participants - i.e. it was not very relatable. This fact also had implications for how the participants assessed level of entertainment, thus
relating to the organising theme of channel. As for the third post, there were many comments about the natural style of makeup that the source wore. It was liked by many, and three respondents even felt that it made the source more trustworthy. Meanwhile, expertise was appreciated, it was not valued as highly when participants were not attracted or entertained by the particular makeup look displayed. Thus, these results go along with the classical studies, such as Hovland et al. (1953) who state that expertness and trustworthiness are important credibility determinants when assessing a source. Attractiveness, in similarity to findings by McGuire (1985), also acts as an indicator of source credibility. These results do seem to indicate that, although they are very subjective judgments to make, all these factors are used in the credibility judgement process.

Beyond these three qualities, another basic theme that was discovered, was one also connected to the organising theme channel. In the first case, many liked the fact that the picture seemed non-professional, and complimented the makeup. Similarly, many commented on the picture as being realistic, which seemed to indicate that it was liked and to some degree also credible to many. Although no reliable study that explicitly discussed this factor was found, relatability seem to be another factor which is taken into consideration when assessing credibility of brand-related UGC. The analysis thus implies that when encountered with brand-related UGC, it is more likely to be found credible if the post is more down-to-earth and relatable for the consumer.

When viewing the posts, some of the participants commented on the number of likes that the posts had received. The respondents did however not comment much on the significance of the number nor which post was better in terms of number of likes. According to De Veirman (2017) an influencer with a high number of followers would be less effective than an influencer with a moderate number of followers, in terms of marketing communication. This may not necessarily hold true for the respondents of this study, however, there were some implications as to who the source is and what the purpose of the post is. Judging by the number of likes, some thought the sources in the cases had been sponsored, and some thought they were genuinely expressing their opinions. In the first case, one of the respondents thought the source would like to become an influencer and be famous on Instagram, while another respondent commented on the third case, saying she viewed the source as a typical influencer girl with the power to influence her audience. This implicates that the number of likes that a post receives is noticed by those viewing the post, and that it does have some significance. The number of likes could arguably correlate to the number of followers that a source has, which has an impact on the marketing communication according to De Veirman (2017). The fact that one of the posts had a high number of likes, according to some respondents, indicated that the source has a large audience and that more people will get exposed to the message of her post, and that this consequently leads to higher potential sales.

The analysis implies that it is difficult to assess credibility of a source based on a single post, and few of the interviewees dared to express solid opinions on the sources. Commonly, the participants would express one thought, and then counter that thought with another, consulting with themselves. Many felt that the Instagram posts were sponsored and some doubted that the Instagrammer had applied their own makeup, as in the case of the first and the second post or written the text themselves as in the third case. The emphasis for the participants was on the sponsorship factor, which made the Instagrammers seem untrustworthy. As argued by Petty and Cacioppo (1988, cited in
Metzger et al., 2003, p. 302), when the source is anonymous, one starts to examine other parts of the content to determine the credibility. This is arguably in lines with the results of this study; when the sources were unknown to the participants, they were forced to examine other parts of the brand-related UGC in order to judge credibility. As will become clearer throughout this chapter, sponsorship was commonly mentioned and suspected, which is likely to have made the respondents assess the credibility of sources more negatively. The reasons as to why the participants felt that the posts were sponsored, will be further discussed in following chapters.

6.1.2 Credibility of Message

Participants were asked to comment on what they believed was the message of the brand-related UGC shown. For the first case, many confidently, without much consideration, stated that the message was that they should buy the product by Lumene. Most of the respondent in other words thought that the purpose of the post was to make a paid review, i.e. to sell the product, meanwhile only a few thought of the post as a genuine review. The scepticism toward the post was immediate and followed the same pattern with the two other posts as well. An assumption resulting from the data analysis is that when non-sponsored brand-related UGC is similar in its construction to how sponsored brand-related UGC usually looks, it is easy to make inaccurate interpretations. Why most of the messages were perceived as ingenuine and not very credible can further be assessed by looking into the message characteristics scrutinized by interviewees. There are several aspects of a message, that according to Metzger et al. (2003) are analysed by users when assessing credibility, and the participants were asked to examine some of these when shown the Instagram posts. The participants were asked about the structure of the message, the language, as well as the delivery of the message.

A particularly important characteristic of the basic theme of message structure was found to be the length of a text. Many respondents complained that the example posts descriptions were way too long for Instagram. One of the interviewees explicitly stated that she first eyes through the beginning of a text and then jumps to the end of the text, not fully reading the whole text. Many of the participants exclaimed that they would never read such long descriptions as displayed in e.g. the first example post. Researchers (e.g. Weinreich et al., 2008) have been able to confirm that Internet users have adopted a scanning behaviour, where content is quickly skimmed through without reading every single word. Nielsen (2008) conducted a study in which it was discovered that participants only read about 20% of the text on a website. Lengthy messages seem to make participants find a post less credible, as they could not grasp why someone would write in this way without, again, being sponsored. It could be argued, that more effective and credible brand-related UGC puts more emphasis on the picture, as people are reluctant to read long texts on social media.

Additionally, relating to the message structure, beyond the length of the text, what is communicated, and the communication style was also found to have a mediating role in determining the credibility of a message. When reacting to the second post, many respondents commented on the multitude of tags in the description, which seemed to counteract some of the suspicion of content being sponsored. A couple of the interviewees explained that since Lumene was not the only brand mentioned, they believed it actually was products that the source used and might also like. However, as recognised from the data, this can also lead someone to view the message solely as an attempt at reaching out
to brands and forming collaborative relationships - essentially getting sponsorships. All in all, the style of text was viewed as neutral information, without negative or positive connotations, which indicated that the message was found credible. When examining the third post many felt that the text was exaggerated. To many, the ad-like structure of the post was too obvious, and the sponsorship was evident. Respondents felt that the text was weighing the post down, since it so obviously was not her own words. Conversely, the post was also described as authentic, which according to Appelman and Sundar (2016) also is a form of credibility indicator, and this came from the way the image was composed and the fresh makeup look, and expression displayed by the person in the picture.

In the first case, it was acknowledged that the style of the text was typical for a review, and it was further described as being written in “makeup language”. Multiple respondents however felt like the text was too well-written to not be sponsored content. Interviewees commented on the use of what they perceived as being overly positive adjectives and how this also implied that the content was paid advertising. It seems that judging by the text alone, participants got the impression that the post was sponsored, but when judging by the picture, the reactions were different. As also mentioned as part of the organising themes of source, when content seems relatable and realistic, and a picture is not too professional the source is also found more credible, which is something that also seems true for credibility assessment of messages.

Another predictable but important basic theme that was discovered is evaluator traits. Al Mansour (2014) explains evaluator traits as a factor affecting how someone assesses credibility. This was never explicitly stated by any of the interviewees as something influencing them when determining credibility of a message or of brand-related UGC overall. However, it was noted how the participants in some cases referred to themselves and their own attributes when explaining their judgements of posts. It thus seems that the process of assessing credibility is a very individual process. For example, a respondent examining the first example post felt that the style of makeup was not resonating with her but added then that it might be due to her not following the trend that she did not like it. It consequently also noted that the experience and degree of interest in makeup was likely to affect the respondents’ assessments, as there were differences in the way the respondents viewed the makeup styles. Someone very into makeup might e.g. find a look interesting despite it not suiting them personally, meanwhile someone who has little interest in makeup might only find looks that they themselves would be able to pull off interesting.

6.1.3 Credibility of Channel

As channel according to Berlo (1960, cited in Narula, 2006) refers to the five senses, and in this study more specifically to sight and hearing, it is difficult to distinguish it from the message component and the analytical points made in the sub-chapter above. The same points will not be brought up again, but it needs to be recognised that part of what was discovered as of message to some extent also refer to channel, i.e. how something is transmitted; how the text and picture are composed and communicates the message. The fact that the communication process components cannot be fully separated has moreover also been recognised by other authors (e.g. Metzger et al., 2003). As times are different now compared to when traditional communication process models were developed, Metzger et al. (2003) also suggests equating channel with media channel, instead of
taking on an outdated definition. Smith et al. (2012) establishes that there are differences in consumer behaviour depending on platform, when encountered with brand-related UGC. This study however only concerns Instagram, and the interviewees were thus only asked to assess the credibility of Instagram as a platform and the brand-related UGC found on this platform.

Gvili and Levy (2016) depicts consumers’ perceived credibility as an outcome of their evaluation of a channel’s informativeness, entertainment, and level of irritation. Many respondents felt that the posts were highly informative, but many also indicated that there might be something such as “too informative”. According to the interviewees, the first post was found too informative and the third post included the wrong information. The thematic analysis thus identifies informativeness as an important basic theme, but also implicates that meanwhile brand-related UGC should include information about the product, this information has to be relevant and not too extensive. It should be emphasised that when it comes to recommendations, the participants particularly want to know if the source has actually used the product and whether it was good or not. Furthermore, many want to see what the product looks like and how it should be used. In the case that irrelevant and excessive information was communicated, the respondents got suspicious, bored and/or annoyed.

The entertainment aspect can, based on some analysis, be deemed to mostly depend upon how interesting the respondents found the particular content. It was noted that all study objects might not have been that into makeup, as the selection criteria only required the participant to be a regular user of makeup. The participants who were more into makeup from a creative point of view, and often view the type of content, which was showed during the interviews, might have found the content more entertaining than others did. The degree of entertainment was also found to be highly dependent upon, and related to, whether and how attractive the consumer found the source. This can be expected as cosmetics is something used to enhance certain face characteristics and people have different beauty ideals and desires when it comes to makeup. If a look does not appeal to a consumer, it is unrealistic to expect the person to find it entertaining.

Instagram is furthermore traditionally an app used for entertainment purposes, and many of the participants use Instagram as a pastime activity, to see what others are doing (see Appendix A.3). As Sung (2018) exclaimed: “we use Instagram for mindless scrolling to kill time.” The example posts chosen and shown in the interviews, were in general found to be quite unentertaining. It is however difficult to assess a post’s level of entertainment without having a scale or context. If posts from other platforms also were shown, the respondents might have indicated that a post on Instagram was more entertaining than a post on e.g. Facebook. Studies (e.g. Gvili & Levy, 2016) have compared different platforms in terms of entertainment and confirmed this assumption.

Many respondents were furthermore visible irritated or sighed when faced with posts, as they directly assumed that it was just another sponsored post. The interviewees expressed being fed up with the increased presence of sponsored content on Instagram. A basic theme also touched upon earlier in the discussion is how relatability through “natural settings” and pictures of more personal nature implicates credibility, meanwhile pictures that seem professional or staged are not found as credible due to their ad-like characteristics. Hautz et al. (2014) similarly claim that UGC of low quality is more
credible than low quality PGC, and that high quality UGC and PGC are equal, but provide no implications on credibility.

Some of the participants furthermore mentioned other platforms than Instagram, and how these are more reliable when viewing brand-related UGC. Commonly, YouTube was mentioned as a preferred platform when researching about a product and seeking other consumers’ opinions. The reason as to why many may find the credibility on Instagram to be lacking compared to YouTube could be, as Appiah (2012) and Flanagin and Metzger (2007) suggests, that credibility judgments of platforms are formed by assessing site features and attributes. The data furthermore shows that content in video format is perceived as more informative, and in some cases also more entertaining, than a traditional Instagram post consisting of a picture and a text. Many interviewees claimed that a video would have been better, since it would have shown more of the product, the application and also more of the source. This might be why participants pointed to YouTube as a more reliable source, because it generally is more associated with videos than Instagram is. Format is thus another important basic theme, besides informativeness, entertainment, irritation, relatability, and technical quality, as it ultimately influences how credible a consumer finds a channel and furthermore how the consumer assesses the overall credibility of brand-related UGC.

### 6.1.4 Credibility of Sponsorship

The participants had much to discuss concerning sponsorship during the interviews. As previously established, only one of the three cases have explicitly expressed sponsorship, but many thought that all three cases were sponsored. Carr and Hayes (2014, p. 46) had drawn the conclusions that Internet users initially assume online content to be neutral and non-sponsored in cases where there is no mention of outside influence. When analysing the interview material, there is a clear pattern when it comes to sponsorship and first impressions of the Instagram posts. Many immediately assumed that the posts were sponsored and only on further reflection would rethink their initial assumption. The reason for this could be that the situation on social media changes incredibly fast; the climate and content on Instagram might be very different now in 2019 compared to 2014.

Carr and Hayes (2014) stated that the degree of disclosure of sponsorship would affect how people perceive credibility, but that people do not perceive a difference in credibility between a situation in which a content creator states that the post is not sponsored and one where nothing is disclosed. Interestingly, from the data it can be seen how most individuals assume sponsorship rather than non-sponsorship when nothing is disclosed. One individual indicated that she was under the impression that the Instagrammer explicitly would acknowledge if the content was not sponsored. The interviewee however also reflected over the fact that she does not know how to react to this. On one hand she seemed annoyed that people hold themselves up in that way and seem to be under the impression that they are doing her a massive favour by recommending a product, “for free”. On the other hand, she questioned whether all other posts made by the same person, which did not include this kind of statement, were paid for. Another respondent brought attention to the same matter and explained the phenomenon as a consequence from the saturated sponsorship situation on Instagram.

Hwang and Jeong (2016) stated that creators can write “all opinions are my own, although this is a sponsored post” to downplay the negative effect a sponsorship might have. Two
out of eight interviewees found that such a statement would make them perceive the post as more credible than if such a statement was not included. The analysis of the data however points to a general scepticism toward such a statement as it after all is a business, and it is found to be something you just say because it sounds good. The analysis furthermore indicates that a sponsored post would be found more credible, if it was evident that the source had been using the brand also at a previous non-sponsored stage. Moreover, sometimes non-sponsored brand-related UGC is perceived as the source begging for future sponsorships from the related brands, and this might affect the credibility assessment negatively.

The data analysis shows that most of the study objects who e.g. thought that the first non-sponsored example post was sponsored although no such disclosures, did not find the sponsored example post more credible, but were sceptical to everything showed. According to Kim and Song (2017) non-sponsored brand-related UGC is found to induce more favourable responses than sponsored brand-related UGC, because people find it less manipulative. Analysing the data, it can be concluded that the study objects were under the same impression. The interviewees moreover indicated that they generally find non-sponsored brand-related UGC more credible than brand-related UGC.

6.2 Responses to Brand-related UGC

From the global theme of consumer response, two organising themes were identified; attitudes towards brand-related UGC and the brand, and behavioural intentions. The attitude towards brand-related UGC and towards the brand were difficult to separate, as the respondents did not explicitly express their attitude towards the brand. It was easier for them to discuss the brand-related UGC and how they perceived the posts, than it was to connect the posts to their brand perception. Therefore, these attitudes seem to be heavily connected and intertwinning, and thus, these have been identified as a common organising theme. The basic themes discovered from the interviews are presented in what follows.

6.2.1 Attitudes Towards Brand-Related UGC and Brand

Hovland et al. (1953, p. 7) noted that attitude and opinion are two different concepts. It became clear throughout the interviews, that the interviewees often voiced their opinion, but rarely spoke verbally about their attitude towards the brand. The interviews were rich of comments made about the brand-related UGC; the participants described the brand-related UGC that they saw, what they thought of the style of makeup, about the picture, about the text, and how they would react to seeing in their own feed on Instagram. There were also discussions about how brand communication that was communicated by consumers and companies differs, and how it would affect the brand attitude. From the interviews, it seems as if the participants trust brand-related UGC more than they trust producer-generated content (PGC), and one participant explicitly said that it is easier to trust other consumers than companies. This is in lines with the conclusions many other researchers have drawn, relating to brand-related UGC and PGC (e.g. Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Although, there were some participants that did not view PGC of brand communication negatively. It was stated by one of the respondents that if one already had positive brand attitude, they would not react negatively to advertisements from companies. In this case, it would seem that having a strong positive brand image prior to
being exposed to brand-related UGC, the credibility of the content would be irrelevant as the consumer already views the brand positively.

There were some comments about the perception of consumer opinions. Many of the participants thought that the exposure to the product meant that they would, at a later stage, remember the product while at a store. Some suggested that they might buy it later, if they recognize the product, since they would choose a product that they know of rather than an unknown product. It does seem that the participants value the content that consumers make online, especially in cases where the buyer decision process has begun, i.e. the problem recognition stage (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 167). Edelman (2010, p. 3) had said that advocacy by an individual is an impactful way of persuasion. Lee et al. (2009, p. 9) had argued that positive brand-related UGC would lead to enhanced brand attitudes. Therefore, it could be argued that since the product was advertised by influencers or otherwise present in brand-related UGC, the participants might have felt that the brand is well-known and used by many. As many of the participants stated, they would rather choose a product that has been used by many. Therefore, in the cases where the buyer decision process has begun, brand-related UGC is very effective in affecting brand attitude. The brand-related UGC would act as a further incentive for future purchase intentions, and probably the more brand-related UGC pertaining to that particular brand, the more interested the consumer would become. In cases as these where the consumer is encountered with only a few select instances of brand-related UGC related to a specific brand, it might not be as effective, but still affect to some degree, as some of the participants had expressed interest in the product.

However, the participants were reluctant to comment on how the brand-related UGC would affect their attitude or perception toward Lumene. The present brand image that they held of Lumene was explained, the participants described their view on Lumene’s products and whether they had used them before or not. Keller (1993) had explained how exposure to a brand creates new brand associations, and how these brand associations make up the brand image that a consumer holds of a brand. It seems that those with an already positive brand image were inclined to continuously hold a positive brand image of Lumene, after viewing the brand-related UGC, whether they enjoyed the posts or not. In these cases, their brand image was probably too strong to be affected by the brand-related UGC, which would indicate that brand image is another basic theme that affect the credibility perception. As for the other respondents, almost everyone knew of the brand but had not used the products as regularly.

There were comments saying that when the need has been realised, only then would they consider seeking out brand-related UGC about specific product types. If this was not the case, they would not be as interested in viewing this type of content. Al Mansour et al. (2014) had suggested evaluator traits to affect the credibility judgment of message, which many of the comments made by the participants seem to indicate. This would imply that the needs of evaluator heavily dictate the way that brand-related UGC is perceived.

For the first case, it seems that most of the participants liked it. Whether it would affect their brand attitude, the participants could not tell. One participant felt that the she liked the post enough to say that she would be positively affected, but this participant already held a positive brand image of Lumene. Other participants had found the source credible, which imply that this component heavily influence the attitude towards brand-related UGC. One participant did not find the post credible nor enjoy the style of makeup. This
participant did not express the wish of seeing more of the source’s profile or seeing more of the product in other brand-related UGC posts, or seeing the brand’s website. This could possibly mean that the somewhat negative attitude toward the brand-related UGC would not lead to a purchase intent, or any other type of reactions.

As for the second case, it seems that many felt the post was credible since there were many brands mentioned, but the participants also felt that the brand “disappeared” among the others, i.e. that if the participants like some part of the makeup style, they might check one of the brands, but it did not necessarily mean that they would check Lumene further. Message characteristics affect the credibility of a message (Metzger et al., 2003), and it would seem, the attitude towards brand-related UGC. As the text had been perceived as neutral, it implies that the text is credible. Since many found the post credible, it could be that by simply mentioning Lumene as part of the makeup routine, the participants would view the brand positively.

In the third case, the question of sponsorship was raised once again. Some were irritated by this post, while others liked it due to the natural design of the picture, or due to having good brand image or knowing the source from before. It seems that out of the cases, the third post was the least liked. It could be attributed to the fact that many felt that the post was obviously sponsored, which made the post’s intent untrustworthy. As Lu et al. (2014) had concluded, the sponsorship factor is an important factor in the credibility judgment, and it was evident throughout the interviews that it had an impact on the credibility. It affected the consumers’ perception of the post, as many felt that they did not like the post.

The conceptual framework suggests that the credibility of brand-related UGC would affect the attitude toward the brand-related UGC. This could arguably be the case, since the first and the second case were found to be reliable and credible by most of the participants, despite some comments about possible sponsorship. After having viewed all three cases, and then being able to compare the three posts with each other, most of the participants liked the first and the second post and said that these were the most likely to affect them. The third was evidently sponsored, and most felt that the opinions expressed by the source in this post was not credible enough for them to find the post better than the previous two. Further, the conceptual framework state that brand attitude will affect purchase intention, but this was not fully the case in this study. Rather, attitude seem to affect behavioural intentions, in the sense that the respondents did react to the brand-related UGC, in ways that will be further discussed in the next section. This would be in line with the study by Kraft et al. (2005), and Mir and Rehman (2013), who concluded that consumer attitude affects behavioural intentions. As Keller (1993) had formulated, brand attitudes lay the foundation for behavioural intentions.

### 6.2.2 Behavioural Intentions

As for the results of this study, there were few indications of passing along information. The participants were sometimes asked if they would like to tell their friends or others about the information they had acquired from the posts, or about the product itself, but rarely did the participants want to do so. Kim and Johnson (2016) had four types of responses in their conceptual model; impulse buying, information pass-along, brand engagement and future purchase intention.
There were other themes discovered, however, relating to the behavioural responses Kim and Johnson defined. The most common response was that the respondent wanted to do more research, e.g. by viewing the profile of the Instagrammer, by visiting the brand’s website or by searching on other platforms for more information. This could be argued to be brand engagement, as the participant is engaging with the brand by familiarising themselves further with it. As Hollebeek (2011, p. 565) had explained brand engagement, “…cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions”, the consumers are cognitively and behaviourally investing themselves in the brand. Hansen et al. (2014) recognise that consumer-generated advertising increases searches for related videos, among other interactions, which is what the participants felt during the interviews. Many explained that they often read reviews before purchasing, or that they search for other types of brand-related UGC to find out more about the product they are interested in. This could be an implication that the credibility judgement process is not complete or that it is an ongoing process, since the respondents felt that they need to do more research in order to fully assess the credibility of the posts and the information provided. Thus, it is difficult to state that by being exposed to one case of a credible post, it would lead to purchase intention. Rather, it would lead to brand engagement and possibly information pass-along in the sense that the person shares the brand-related UGC in order to hear other’s opinions on the matter.

There were few instances of the participants wanting to purchase the products shown. Some said that they could possibly buy it, albeit at a later stage, which would refer to future-purchase intention. There were no cases of impulse buying-responses. There were many examples given by the respondents of previous occasions where they have bought something because of brand-related UGC, but the respondents explained that they had actively searched about the product after first learning about it. It was only after having done some research that the respondents had been satisfied with the credibility and had carried out the purchase.

Further, some of the participants thought that they would not be interested in the content, since they were not in need of such products and thus not actively seeking out what was showcased in the posts. Otherwise, she would not be interested in viewing that type of content. Another said that she does not want to be dragged into the consumerism way of life. Further, other participants explained that if they encounter this type of content while scrolling their social media, they will probably not buy the product immediately, but will remember having seen the product at a later stage. Adelaar et al. (2003) had described future-purchase intention, and Malthouse (2016) had concluded that engagement with brand-related UGC would affect purchase intention. As speculated earlier, it might be that the respondents were not certain as to whether they found the posts to be credible enough for them to trust the recommendations. Instead, as some of the respondents themselves had speculated, it might be that the participants at a later stage might be interested in buying the products, when they encounter the product again or when they feel that they need to buy the specific product type. As most had been interested in engaging with the brand by researching it, it indicates a certain interest, which would develop into purchase intention at a later stage, i.e. future-purchase intention. It would seem these two behavioural intentions are very much connected to each other.
7. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis and the discussion, this chapter will summarise and conclude the study and its contributions in general and in the academic field. Thereafter, managerial implications will be discussed, ending with a section about limitations of the study and what future research in the area could focus on.

7.1 General Conclusions

With Web 2.0 platforms continuing to grow, and the evident need for further research in regard to communication effectiveness of brand-related UGC, the purpose of this study was to investigate how consumers assess credibility of brand-related UGC that they encounter on Web 2.0-based platforms. Furthermore, it was of interest to look into the responses displayed as a consequence of this credibility assessment. The research question developed in the initial stages of the study reads as follows:

*How do consumers assess credibility when encountered with brand-related UGC online, and how do consumers’ attitudes and behavioural intentions vary accordingly?*

To be able to answer the research question, a theoretical framework that summarised prior research of relevance was developed, which enabled the forming of an effective semi-structured interview guide. After the interviews had been conducted, the data material was analysed by performing a thematic analysis, through which themes were identified, coded and organised. Finally, the findings from the thematic analysis was further discussed and contrasted with previous research on the topic.

There are a couple of more general conclusions that can be drawn from this study in regard to communication effectiveness of brand-related UGC, based on how consumers assess credibility and their subsequent responses. Firstly, just as in the initial stages theorised, based on previous research, it was found that there were several characteristics that consumers look at to assess credibility of brand-related UGC. It was furthermore found that these characteristics all corresponded and could be categorised under the communication process components of source, message, and channel, although with the addition of sponsorship. From the analysis, source seems to be one of the most important components when assessing credibility of brand-related UGC. If the source is found reliable and trustworthy, then the reaction is likely to be that one finds the brand-related UGC to be credible. The credibility of channel and message certainly are relevant during the credibility perception process, but not to an equal degree to the credibility of source. When it comes to channel, the format of the brand-related UGC as well as the platform seem to be particularly important. The analysis indicated that videos are found more credible due to their nature of being more descriptive than other formats. Yadav et al. (2011) asks in the title of their study “*if a picture is worth a thousand words, is a video worth a million?*” The study was able to confirm that a video is more powerful than text in terms of engaging the participants (Yadav et al., 2011, p. 32).

Second, the by far most discussed aspect of brand-related UGC has been sponsorship. It seems as if this is something very commonly present on Instagram, and other social media platforms as well, and something that the participants have encountered many times. The respondents seemed very inclined to immediately assume sponsorship. Also, the respondents gave off the impression that they are tired of being bombarded with
sponsored content, just like consumers have been, and still is, bombarded with advertisements. Before, consumers were able to block these advertising messages out by for example applying an ad-block device to their computer or smartphone, but with the emergence of influencer marketing, it is becoming difficult to avoid these.

Next, it was found that the credibility of brand-related UGC is important when consumers judge brand-related UGC and form an attitude about these. It seems that the cases where the posts were deemed as credible, the attitude towards that brand-related UGC post was more positive than towards the post that was deemed as less credible. In other words, the posts that were liked by the respondents were also the ones deemed as the most credible. Further, it was expected that the attitude towards brand-related UGC would affect the attitude towards the brand, similarly as to how attitude towards an ad affects the attitude towards a brand (McKenzie & Lutz, 1989). This assumption would need more research in order to validate the relationship between the variables, however, judging by the findings of this degree project, there is likely to exist a connection between these.

Finally, the findings imply that the most common behavioural response to being exposed to brand-related UGC is brand engagement - i.e. consumers wishing to learn more about the brand and the products. It became evident through the data analysis that this was the most likely reaction that consumers would have to viewing brand-related UGC online. It would seem that consumers that have been exposed to a single brand-related UGC post would like to view additional posts about the brand and product, and visit the website of the brand, and when the brand perception has been formed, consumers continue to react by adopting other type of behavioural intentions, e.g. purchase intention. Further, some participants had expressed the possibility of future purchase intention, wherefore it would be another behavioural response to brand-related UGC.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

There is an evident lack of research regarding brand-related UGC in the context of consumer behaviour, how consumer assess credibility of brand-related UGC, and further how this credibility perception affects consumer responses. The communication model developed by Berlo (1960, cited in Narulo, 2006) has been used as a point of departure for the theoretical framework, to find components that form the credibility perception process of brand-related UGC. There are no studies on brand-related UGC that have done this type of investigation, and furthermore there is a lack of a holistic framework that includes credibility, brand-related UGC, attitude and behavioural intention. Furthermore, the study is advancing the field of marketing communication, by connecting the communication model with credibility of brand-related UGC.

MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) had studied ad credibility and concluded that credibility affects the attitude towards the ad and ultimately the brand. This study was able to make similar claims in regard to brand-related UGC, based on the analysis of the data collection and the discussion. As this area lacks previous research relating to brand-related UGC, the study is able to advance the research in this area. Other theories that had laid the foundations of the theoretical framework are by Cheong and Morrison (2008), Hautz et al. (2014), Kim and Johnson (2016), among others. These sources all relate to brand-related UGC, and this study is able to advance the research field by connecting these theories to one model. Furthermore, with the addition of other works by researchers such
as Ohanian (1990) and Metzger et al. (2003), relating to credibility, the study adds to the research field of credibility.

The results of this study have contributed to the theoretical field of marketing. Specifically, the results are relevant to the field of online marketing. Moreover, this study has been able to provide a holistic framework that connects the components of the communication model with the credibility of brand-related UGC, and further to the corresponding responses consumers have by experiencing brand-related UGC. As previously stated, there is little research in the field of brand-related UGC relating to credibility and consumer responses, and the research field pertaining to attitude towards brand-related UGC is lacking as well. Therefore, this study provides new insights that can be of interest for marketing managers as well as future research.

The study has only focused on Instagram as a platform for brand-related UGC, which means that the findings would contribute to an understanding of the climate, culture and perception of Instagram. As has been previously stated in this thesis, the Internet changes fast, and most of the sources that have been used in this thesis have already become outdated. There has been much difficulty with finding sources that are from year 2015 or later, 2015 is moreover already four years ago and in four years a lot evidently has happened in terms of development on Web 2.0 platforms. Therefore, this study also acts as an updated source as to how consumers perceive Instagram and the brand-related UGC that is present on this platform.

7.3 Managerial Implications

As probably clear by now, consumers nowadays enjoy a larger freedom than ever before in the content they consume online. Evidently, they also in general put more trust into fellow consumers’ words than marketing communication when it comes to messages about brands. A common practice by managers these days is to use and incorporate brand-related UGC in their marketing campaigns (Urrutia, 2019). Urrutia (2019) discusses advantages of doing so and gives examples of cases where brands have used brand-related UGC to make successful marketing campaigns. It is recognised that the results from this thesis could give further implications for managers interested in taking use of brand-related UGC as a marketing tool, more specifically in terms of how to form brand-related UGC that accommodates the expectations of consumers as well as means maximum impact. Thus, knowing what type of brand-related UGC that consumers find credible and show positive responses to, in terms of attitude formation and behavioural intentions, is of value.

Managers are interested in creating brand-related UGC that will lead to certain brand associations in the minds of consumers. Enhancing consumers’ attitudes toward a brand through this mean will ultimately lead to behavioural intentions that are beneficial from the company’s perspective. A conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that managers need to be aware of how their choice of source, message, channel and sponsorship in creating brand-related UGC influences the consumer response.

The source should be relevant to the product category or brand, e.g. if the brand-related UGC refers to a cosmetics brand, the source needs to be perceived to have a connection to cosmetics, e.g. in terms of expertise or interest. Moreover, a source whose following largely coincides with the brand’s desired target customers should be chosen, as the
results from this study indicate that consumers find brand-related UGC by familiar as well as relatable sources to be more credible. How large a source’s following is and the amount of likes the source gets also has implications for the consumers, who based on this study seem to assume content to be sponsored when audiences are larger, meanwhile they also find that sponsorship makes content less credible. The choice of source to communicate a message is therefore a decision that needs to be carefully considered.

The respondents of this study interpreted the messages of the brand-related content shown based on the visual components of the particular post; i.e. the image and the text. The brand-related UGC should give just the right amount of information, since according to our results, too much information is overwhelming, meanwhile too little is not credible enough. It was often assumed that the purpose of the brand-related UGC shown was to sell a product, even when no explicit statement about sponsorship was made. This was particularly evident when the respondents perceived the text to be too professional and well-written to have been created by the sources themselves, without any incentives. Another reasoning multiple study objects had, was that if the source was not sponsored in that particular case, the purpose of the brand-related UGC was to showcase skills and increase the possibilities of receiving future sponsorships. Messages that have ad-like structures, according to the findings decrease the perceived credibility of brand-related UGC. A consequent practical implication for managers when it comes to the message of brand-related UGC, is to keep messages in brand-related UGC down to earth, but still informative in a “how-to-use”- and results-oriented sense.

Meanwhile it might depend on product category, it is evident from this study that consumers find brand-related UGC in the form of videos more credible than other formats, as the product through motion picture can be showcased more thoroughly. As for cosmetics, this was obvious, since the respondents commonly stated that a video would have enabled a more realistic and trustworthy assessment of the application and results of the products. However, brand-related UGC in the form of a video may also require more effort from the consumer. The consumer must be interested enough to click the video and not just scroll past it, as a video requires more time and attention to be given to the brand-related UGC. The format may therefore affect the reach of the brand-related UGC and this is a consideration that must be made by managers.

The components of the communication process do intertwine and as clear from the study conducted, sponsorship was a theme which came to permeate the entire data collection process. All the respondents at some stage indicated that they found sponsored brand-related UGC to be less credible than brand-related UGC that is not sponsored. Further, when asked about the credibility of the source, message and channel, the respondents’ reasoning often revolved around whether they believed the brand-related UGC to be sponsored or not. If the source was perceived to be someone who could be working with social media - the credibility decreased, if the message was very professionally structured - the credibility decreased, and if the image looked very staged - the credibility decreased - sponsorship was continuously suspected and credibility thus questioned. The conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis is that if such suspicions are to be avoided, brand-related UGC on Instagram needs to differentiate itself from typical ad-like forms and be carefully formed. As the results from this study indicate that sponsorship equals a disposition to not find brand-related UGC as credible, and thus will not have positive influences on attitudes and behavioural intentions, encouraging consumers to create brand-related UGC from hedonic motivation might be more
beneficial. This, as it has the potential to generate more genuine brand-related UGC than sponsorships or paid collaborations may do.

7.4 Societal Implications

There are some societal implications that can be connected to the conclusions of this thesis. As the study concerns brand-related UGC, which is typically consumers creating content online about brands, the implications of this research affect consumers. Every member of a society is a consumer, as there are basic needs which need to be met. There are choices to be made, and companies try their best to reach out to consumers to convince them that their products are the ones to choose. As have become evident through the analysis and discussion of this thesis, consumers are worried about the sponsored content that they encounter online. With the emergence of the Internet, marketers have found new ways of reaching consumers with marketing messages, and in some cases, these ways might not be ethical. When ads became common on websites, ad-block add-ons came as a solution for consumers who do not want to receive marketing messages. Now, when famous celebrities and influencers online are getting sponsorships, it is hard to avoid marketing messages online. Further, as even micro-influencers are using sponsorship to earn their salary, it is growing difficult to know what type of content is sponsored or not. Therefore, this thesis provides important findings about the perception of consumers when being bombarded with advertisements or sponsored content online. Not every consumer is aware of how sponsorship works, wherefore the interviews provide some insight into how consumers perceive sponsorship.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research

There were a number of limitations that related to the study. As the degree project is constrained to one semester, there was a time restriction to take into consideration when forming the study. Therefore, it was not possible to venture into all areas that most certainly have an effect on many of the components that this study concerns itself with.

As the interviews were formed as semi-structured, the conversations during the interviews were flowing freely and naturally, however, there were some questions that remained unanswered by some participants. The quality of data further also varied between participants; some had many comments and experiences with brand-related UGC, while some had less to say about the topic.

After a test interview had been conducted, it was realised that the initial plan of asking respondents to recall brand-related UGC from their feeds would not work, as it proved too difficult for the interviewee to remember. This however further confirmed the assumption that consumers often take a passive approach and do not fully process everything they see while scrolling their feeds. This led to a limitation in the form of having to take use of exemplary cases. Three Instagram posts of varying reach and qualities, all concerning the same brand, were chosen to complement the interview guide. One issue the posts however had in common, was that they all expressed positive emotions in regard to the brand. Due to this, our findings provide no insight into how consumers assess credibility of brand-related UGC that is negative in nature nor into their consequent responses. Thus, future research could focus on investigating negative brand-related UGC.
Since most of the example posts were not viewed as particularly credible by the interviewees, the data and following analysis on responses did not provide as deep and insightful data as hoped for. Many of the respondents stated that they would scroll past most of the posts shown and not necessarily act upon what they had seen. It is however difficult to know if other or additional implications and insight would have been revealed, had other posts or another brand been chosen, or had the sampling criteria been further narrowed down by e.g. limiting respondents by a more serious interest in cosmetics. Further research in regard to different brands, product categories and/or style of UGC would therefore be of value to provide a more thorough understanding of how consumers form responses to brand-related UGC.

The second part of the research question is quite complex as it cannot be said for sure that the responses interviewees expressed after having assessed the credibility were solely related to the specific post shown or the credibility attached. As an example, most of the interviewees stated knowing Lumene from before and a couple of them were regular users of products from the brand. Thus, it is not certain that the respondents who implicated that they might look up a product further, would do so only because of the particular post viewed, as they could have encountered the product before and multiple exposures to positive statements about a product might e.g. with time have awoken the consumer’s interest. Furthermore, there could also be other factors, beyond credibility assessment and brand or product knowledge, interfering with how consumers respond. Brand-related UGC should therefore in coming research be investigated from other perspectives than credibility.

As concluded by this study, there currently exists a scepticism toward content on Instagram which seems to have major influences on the credibility assessment of brand-related UGC, which according to our findings to some extent can be blamed on the increased presence of advertisement in the form of sponsorships on the platform. As this study is qualitative in nature, generalisations can however not be done, and it is uncertain how true our findings hold for a larger population. Although most of the interviewees of this study implicated that they would usually not get affected by the kind of content shown and that it would not make them buy a product or pass along information, this kind of marketing must in some aspect be very effective or marketers would not spend as large amounts on sponsoring people as well as encouraging the creation of brand-related UGC to the extent that they currently are. Further studies into the topic are thus needed to give wider, deeper as well as more reliable insight into the phenomenon of brand-related UGC and its impact.
8. TRUTH CRITERIA

The final chapter is concerned with truth criteria - i.e. how credible and true the results of this study are. Each aspect of the truth criteria will be discussed, followed by comments and evaluations of this thesis.

8.1 Validity and Reliability

The word validity is connotes the truth of a statement, or how sound the statement is. Validity in the context of social sciences is defined by Kvale (2007, p. 122) as making sure that the research method is appropriately investigating what the researcher has set out to investigate, i.e. is the researcher studying what was meant to be studied? Reliability is another aspect of the value of a study, which is defined by Kvale (2007, p. 122) as the consistency of the research. In other words, how trustworthy are the results, and whether the same results would be achieved by replicating the study by other researchers. For a qualitative study, this would for example entail if the respondents that had participated in the interviews would partake in a new interview and give the same answers or not, or whether the answers would differ depending on the interviewer (Kvale, 2007, p. 122). Further, the transcription and analysis process are also in the range of being affected by reliability issues, as there might be differences in the results of transcripts and analyses of the same data material performed by different researchers (Kvale, 2007, p. 122).

Stenbacka (2001, p. 552) argue that reliability is irrelevant to qualitative studies, as it is difficult to distinguish between researcher and method. Stenbacka (2001, p. 552) argue that it is not possible to measure qualitative data, wherefore reliability furthermore is not relevant. Golafshani (2003, p. 600) explain that validity and reliability pertaining to qualitative research, depends on the researcher, rather than on actual research. This is due to the fact that quantitative research is objectively measuring quantitative data, while in qualitative research, the researcher is the one that subjectively measures the qualitative data. Yet, there is a need to validate the research to the degree possible, wherefore researchers tend to define the term validity differently in qualitative studies. Due to the nature of qualitative research, and as argued by Stenbacka (2001) and Golafshani (2003), these truth measurements are irrelevant to this study. Since these relate more to quantitative research, other measures have to be taken into account when assessing qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 152) have suggested some measurements for trustworthiness of qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Thus, these will be used to assess this degree project.

8.2 Credibility

Thomas and Magilvy (2011, p. 152) explain credibility to be when the results of a study can be recognized by others, or the accounts given by the interviewees can be recognized by others. Further, it is explained that by comparing the transcripts and finding similarities between the participants as well as outside the study, the results will find further credibility (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 152). The authors provide a citation from Krefting (1991, p. 218, cited in Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 152) to explain the essence of credibility judgement of qualitative research; “a qualitative study is considered credible when it presents an accurate description or interpretation of human experience that people
who also share the same experience would immediately recognize.” Further, the authors give examples of strategies that one can use to assess the credibility of qualitative research - reflexivity, member checking, peer examination. Reflexivity has been fostered through consciously thinking about why certain choices have been made and moreover trying to reason and argue for these. Member checking has been done during the interviews, by asking participants whether they have understood questions correctly and inviting participants to make additional comments, to make sure they had been correctly understood. Peer examination was conducted by letting other students examine and do oppositions on drafts of the thesis as part of work-in-progress seminars.

Furthermore, to ensure that the data material gathered would not be issue to misinterpretations, both of the authors of the thesis were present during the interviews. The transcripts were checked by both authors before being used to analyse, in order to assure that the comments made by the respondents were interpreted the same by the authors, as to not allow for any misinterpretations. Therefore, in the context of the data material gathered, there might be slight differences in the interpretation of the implications that the answers yield. However, it has been attempted to not allow for misunderstandings or misinterpretations to lead to different types of conclusions than what any other researcher might produce.

8.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the research findings being transferable from one group to another type of group, from one context to another context, or with another group of participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). The authors propose a strategy to determine transferability is to describe the population of the study, by describing both the demographics as well as the geographic boundaries (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153).

The participants of this study were a mix of Nordic citizens - Finnish, Swedish and Danish. The answers that the participants provided were similar regardless of which of these nationalities that the participant belongs to, wherefore the transferability of this study is applicable on a Nordic group. However, if the study were to be replicated on a different group of nationality, there results might be different, as this has not been tried during this thesis work. Further, as this thesis had focused on the Internet generation, and specifically individuals born during the 1990s, there might be differences between generations.

8.4 Dependability

Thomas and Magilvy (2011, p. 153) define dependability as the possibility of the following the decision-making process of a researcher. Furthermore, the authors mean that dependability is related to reliability to a certain degree (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). To establish the dependability of a qualitative study it is necessary to make clear for the readers how the researchers have arrived at the conclusions made, both in terms of methodological choices and philosophical standpoints, as well as the resulting conclusions drawn from the discussion. Therefore, it is suggested to describe thoroughly the research methods, allow peers to participate in the analysis, or to replicate the study exactly to either enhance the findings or to compare the results (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). For this thesis, it is not plausible to include other peers in the writing
process, nor is it possible due to time restrictions to repeat the study, wherefore a thorough explanation of the choices would have to suffice.

Further, as it was argued by Stenbacka (2001), the reliability aspect is not applicable for qualitative research, wherefore generalisability is not of interest for this research. This means that if other researchers were to repeat this study in the exact same manner, it would still yield different results, or had the study been performed again with the same respondents, the answers might still not be the same, as opinions might change. Also in the case of the platform, since Instagram is a fast-changing platform on the Internet, the perception of brand-related UGC might change if there is a time distance in between the studies.

8.5 Confirmability

Confirmability is what takes place when credibility, transferability and dependability has been confirmed (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154). A qualitative researcher has to be reflective and self-aware to understand how individual preconceptions might affect a study. One way of taking a critical approach and creating a self-awareness is by writing down or audio-taping personal feelings and insights after each interview. Furthermore, the interviewer should not lead the interview, but instead follow the interviewees’ thought processes by asking them to clarify their statements. Thomas and Magilvy (2011, p. 154) argue that this allows the researcher to gain new insights through interpretations of a bigger picture, which further allows for the development of confirmability.

As we are two people conducting this study, instead of writing down or audio recording our post-interview thoughts, we have discussed our predispositional views and how these might impact our insights. This means that readers of this thesis can trust the way the study has been conducted, the credibility of the findings presented, as well as have a trust for its applicability.
LIST OF REFERENCES


cosmetics/fenty-beauty-earns-third-spot-earned-media-value-after-launch-11034624/
[Retrieved 2019-05-18]


[Retrieved 13-05-2019]


https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.1998.9677854

Law text:
APPENDIX

A.1 Interview Guide in English

Introduction

Welcome, I’m Rebecca and this is Sandra. Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study. The purpose of this interview is to collect data for our thesis, through which we are investigating consumer behaviour online.

You have been chosen to participate in this study due to being part of the Internet generation, that has grown up with the Internet present in their lives.

This interview is constructed around brand-related user-generated content. We want to investigate consumers’ exposure to brand-related content online, and the effect on their attitude and behaviour. The interview will be a maximum of 40 minutes.

We want you to know that your personal information will be confidential, and that you have the right to choose not to answer certain questions. You are also allowed to end the interview whenever you want, if you feel uncomfortable continuing.

In the results of this study, your name will be changed, and any other type of information will be concealed or changed to protect your personal information. If you have any questions, feel free to ask whenever you want to.

This interview will be audiotaped, wherefore we would like to ask for your consent. The audio file will be deleted once it has been transcribed, no one else except the interviewers will be able to listen to the audio files. If you consent, we will begin the recording now.

1. Introductory questions

1.1 Could you shortly introduce yourself?

1.2 Please describe how what kind of social media you are using and for what purposes?

1.3 Describe your presence online.
   1.3.1 What kind of content do you consume? Where?
   1.3.2 How do you interact with content?
   1.3.3 Do you create content? If yes, what type of content and why?

1.4 Can you recall seeing any beauty brands in your feeds?

1.5 Does communication on social media by a company influence your attitude toward their brand and your buying behavior? How?

1.6 Does communication on social media by other consumers influence your attitude toward this brand and your buying behavior? How?

2. Lumene
2.1 Do you know the brand Lumene? How do you perceive the brand? Have you used their products before? Experiences?

2.2 Have you seen posts online about Lumene?

*We will now show you some cases of online posts on Instagram showing Lumene products.*

2.3 What are your spontaneous thoughts about the post? What do you think about it?

2.4 How would this post influence your attitude towards the brand? Why?

2.5 How would this post influence your intention to buy their products?

3. Source

3.1 How do you perceive the creator behind this post?/What opinion do you have about the source behind this post?

*Ohanian (1990)*

3.2 Is this creator *trustworthy* to you? *Would it influence your attitude/intention?*

3.3 Do you feel like the source has *expertness*? *Would it influence your attitude/intention?*

3.4 Do you find the creator *attractive*? *Would it influence your attitude/intention?*

3.5 Would credibility of this source influence your attitude towards this content/towards Lumene/intention to order Lumene? How?

4. Message

4.1 What is the message of the content? Can you describe?

*Metzger et al. (2003)*

4.2 How do you feel the message is organised? *Straightforward? Clear? Messy?*

4.3 How well-written (*language - intensity*) and interesting do you find the message to be? (quality)

4.4 How does what is said about Lumene fit into your view of the brand? (discrepancy)

4.5 What do you think about the way the message is presented? (delivery)

*Appelman & Sundar (2016)*

4.7 How do you perceive the *authenticity* of the message?

4.8 How do you perceive the credibility of the message? *Would it influence your attitude/intention?*

5. Medium

*Appiah (2012)*
5.1 How do you perceive the format? Would it have been more/less credible if it was another form? Audio vs. video vs. text vs. picture. Would it influence your attitude/intention?

Hautz et al. (2014)
5.2 How is the technical quality of the UGC? High, moderate, low? Would it influence your attitude/intention?

Gvili & Levy (2016)
5.3 How do you perceive the informativeness? Would it influence your attitude/intention?
5.4 How do you perceive the entertainment? Would it influence your attitude/intention?

5.5 How do you perceive the credibility of Instagram? Do you believe there is a difference in the credibility of a post depending on where content is posted?

6. Sponsorship

Lu et al. (2014)
6.1 a) Did you notice the post was sponsored? Does this affect your evaluation of the post’s credibility? How?
6.1 b) The post we showed you was not sponsored. Do you ever question whether a post in fact is the consumer’s own opinions?

Carr & Hayes (2014)
6.2 How do you feel about the degree of disclosure? (sponsored posts)

Hwang & Jeong (2016)
6.3 The creator has stated that the post is sponsored. How would you view the content if the creator had expressed that the opinions are honest?

Kim & Song (2017)
6.4 What is the difference between sponsored and non-sponsored content? Which one out of the two is more credible to you, and why?

7. Behavioural intentions

Kim & Johnson (2016)
7.1 Would you ever consider trying Lumene’s products yourself?
7.2 Do you think you would tell someone you know about Lumene?
7.3 Do you think you will interact with Lumene in any other way sometime in the future?
7.4 Do you think you will look up/search for Lumene?
7.5 What reactions would you most likely have to this type of content?

8. Conclusion
8.1 Discuss previous experiences with brand-related UGC and its effect on attitude and behaviour.

e.g. Do you check content online prior to purchasing?

A.2 Interview Guide in Swedish

Introduktion

Välkommen, Jag är Rebecca och det här är Sandra. Tack för att du har valt att delta i vår studie. Syftet med den här intervjun är att samla in data till vår avhandling, i vilken vi undersöker konsumentbeteende online/på nätet.

Du har blivit vald till den här studien för att du är en del av Internet generationen, det vill säga du har vuxit upp med Internet närvarande under hela ditt liv.

Intervjun är uppbyggd kring användargenererat content om varumärken. Vi vill undersöka konsumenters exponering av varumärkesrelaterat content på nätet, och de effekter de har på attityder och beteende. Intervjun kommer max ta 40 minuter.

Du kommer att vara anonym i vår studie, och du har rätt till att inte svara på frågor du inte vill. Du har också rätt att avsluta intervjun närsomhelst du vill, om du t.ex. känner dig obekväm med att fortsätta.

I resultaten för den här studien kommer ditt namn att ändras, och all annan typ av information som kan kopplas till dig kommer att ändras eller att döljas för att skydda din integritet. Om du har några frågor är du välkommen att fråga när helst du vill.

Den här intervjun kommer att spelas in, och därför vill vi be om ditt godkännande till detta. Ljudfilen kommer att raderas när vi har transkriberat intervjun, och ingen annan person förutom oss kommer att ha möjlighet till att lyssna på ljudfilen. Om du godkänner till detta, kommer vi nu att påbörja inspelningsen.

1. Allmän information

1.1 Kan du kort presentera dig själv? (e.g. ålder, sysselsättning).

1.2 Kan du berätta om vilka sociala medier du använder och till vilket syfte?

1.3 Beskriv din närvaro online.

1.3.1 Vilken typ av innehåll konsumerar du? (vilka följer du?)

1.3.2 Hur interagerar du med innehåll? (kommentar, gillar)

1.3.3 Skapar du innehåll? Om ja, vilken typ av innehåll och varför?

1.4 Kan du minnas om du skulle ha sett några skönhetsprodukter/varumärken i dina feeds?

1.5 Påverkar företagskommunikation på sociala medier din attityd gentemot deras varumärke och ditt köpbeteende? Hur?
1.6 Påverkar andra konsumenters kommunikation på sociala medier din attityd gentemot det varumärke som diskuteras och ditt köpbeteende? Hur?

2. Lumene

2.1 Känner du till varumärket Lumene? Hur ser du på varumärket? Har du använt det förut? Experiences?

2.2 Har du sett inlägg online om Lumene?

Vi kommer nu att visa några Instagram inlägg om Lumene produkter.

2.3 Vad är dina spontana tankar om inlägget? Vad tycker du om det?

2.4 Skulle det påverka din attityd mot varumärket? Hur?

2.5 Skulle det påverka dig till att köpa produkten? Hur?

3. Källa

3.1 Hur uppfattar du skaparen av inlägget?

Ohanian (1990)

3.2 Är den här skaparen trovärdig enligt dig? Skulle det kunna påverka din attityd/intention?

3.3 Känner du att skaparen erhåller expertis? Skulle det kunna påverka din attityd/intention?

3.4 Finner du skaparen attraktiv? Skulle det kunna påverka din attityd/intention?

4. Budskap

4.1 Vad är budskapet av innehållet? Kan du förklara?

Metzger et al. (2003)


4.3 Hur pass välskrivet och intressant tycker du att budskapet är? (kvalitet)

4.4 Vad tycker du om språket? (intensitet)

4.5 Vad tycker du om sättet som budskapet presenteras på? (framförande)

Appelman & Sundar (2016)

4.7 Hur uppfattar du äktheten/autenticiteten av budskapet? Hur pass äkta är budskapet?

4.8 Hur uppfattar du trovärdigheten av budskapet? Skulle det kunna påverka din attityd/intention?

5. Kanal

Appiah (2012)

5.1 Hur uppfattar du formen på inlägget? Skulle det ha varit mer/mindre trovärdigt i ett annat format? T.ex. audio, video, picture. Skulle det kunna på verka din attityd/intention?
5.2 Hur är den tekniska kvaliteten på inlägget? T.ex. bildkvaliteten. Skulle det kunna påverka din attityd/intention?

5.3 Hur pass informativt är budskapet? Skulle det kunna påverka din attityd/intention?
5.4 Hur pass underhållande är budskapet? Skulle det kunna påverka din attityd/intention?

5.3 Hur uppfattar du trovärdigheten av Instagram? Tror du att det finns någon skillnad i trovärdigheten om det är publicerat någon annanstans?

6. Sporsring

6.1 a) La du märke till att inlägget är sponsrat? Påverkar det här inläggets trovärdighet? Hur?
6.1 b) Inlägget vi visade var inte sponsrat. Brukar du ifrågasätta om inlägget faktiskt visar konsumentens egna åsikter?

6.2 Hur uppfattar du nivån av avslöjandet av sponsorship?

6.3 Hur skulle du se på inlägget om skaparen hade uttryckt att åsikterna är ärliga och äkta? “Det här inlägget är sponsrat, men åsikterna är mina egna”

6.4 Vad är skillnaden mellan sponsrat och icke-sponsrat innehåll? Vilken är mera trovärdig enligt dig?

7. Beteendeintentioner

7.1 Skulle du kunna tänka dig att köpa Lumenes produkter efter att ha sett de här inläggen?
7.2 Kommer du att berätta för andra om Lumene?
7.3 Kommer du att interagera med Lumene på något annat sätt i framtiden?
7.4 Kommer du att leta upp Lumene?
7.5 Vilken annan typ av reaktion skulle du troligtvis ha till den här typen av varumärkes-relaterade inlägg på Instagram?

8. Avslutning

8.1 Diskutera övriga erfarenheter av varumärkesrelaterade inlägg och dess påverkan på attityd och beteende.
t.ex. Brukar du kolla upp online recensioner före du köper något?