

Virtual sales floor

Consumer's perception towards
microcelebrities sponsored content

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Abstract

Purpose – Since microcelebrities became a matter of interest for brands and researches and just few studies focus on the consumer point of view, the purpose of this study is to explore consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities sponsored content. Investigating consumer's experiences and attitudes towards the microcelebrity, sponsored content, and associated brand.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach – Using phenomenology as methodology, semi-structured interviews was used with 6 participants, being 3 females and 3 males. They were selected using purposive and snowballing sampling technique. The data was analysed using Crist & Tanner (2003) hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology method.

Findings – Findings indicate consumers consider microcelebrities as a profession, consequently they don't have a negative attitude towards sponsored content. They prefer when the sponsored content is relevant and provide any type of useful information. Also, if the content matches with the microcelebrity, increases consumer's positive attitude towards the influential user and brand. Having a direct effect on purchase intention and brand's acceptance.

Research limitation/implications – This study relies on the fitness and health industry, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings across all types of microcelebrities. Also, the study was conducted in Ireland, and may have different findings for changes that occur in different cultures.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the understanding of consumers towards microcelebrities sponsored content, providing in-depth information about the context, meaning, and experience. While aims to filled the gap of a qualitative study facilitating a foundation for future researches.

Key words – Social media advertising, consumer's perception, microcelebrity, sponsored content, microcelebrities and brand association, purchase intention.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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List of Abbreviations

Ad – Advertisement

ASAI – Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland

CRM – Customer relationship system

E-Marketing – Electronic marketing

E-Metrics – Electronic metrics

eWOM – Electronic word of mouth

FTC – Federal Trade Commission

ROI – Return of investment

Chapter 1: Introduction

The web 2.0 has changed the way people behave and consume; Since all these changes, new professions appeared, thus transforming microcelebrities in a huge phenomenon; Every day people subscribe on social media and start follow those influential users. For example, today, the most watched vlog on YouTube is PewDiePie, with over 56 million subscribers (Business Insider, 2017). This 27-year-old Swedish man started in 2010 filming himself while playing online games. Today, besides the games, he also produces comedy and everyday life videos hitting millions of views. Following this, other young people start to upload content on social media channel investing their time and build an audience. This is what Jerslev (2016) define as 'celebrification', a performance of celebrity in different media that is permanently updating, in order to create a feeling of accessibility, presence and intimacy. Those influential users started to appear in different medias with different interests, creating relevant content about fashion, cooking, decoration, entertainment, moreso. The internet being this diversified environment was the tool to this new hobby that has become a profession to disseminate. Since these microcelebrities impact a large number of users, they became a subject of interest for companies and researchers.

Past studies about this phenomenon focused more on the relationship between microcelebrities and brands than consumers, exploring the effectiveness of their influence, sponsored content, and sales. Because mainly of those researches were focused on the commercial side, their results do not cover consumers perceptions in depth. The few studies using the consumer point of view in the literature are using a quantitative approach, which does not give context and meaning to the phenomena (see more in 3.2). Thus, this study aims to answer the need for further in-depth information by focusing on the perceptions of generation Y when it comes to microcelebrities publishing sponsored content. Generation Y or the Millennial Generation is (broadly) composed by people born between 1981 and 1999 (Bolton *et al.*, 2013). These young adults are interesting because they are the first generation to have spent their whole lives in a digital environment, becoming digital natives (see more 2.2). They are a generation that actively contributes to

the online environment and avoid ads, preferring to rely on online reviews and recommendations from their peers (Bolton *et al.*, 2013; Kelly *et al.*, 2010). Hence, transforming sponsored content through a credible source, an important tool for contemporary marketers (see more at 2.5).

Moreover, to investigate consumer's perception surrounding this type of sponsorship, filling the gap and contributing to the literature providing a panorama, this exploratory study is using phenomenology as a methodology to deliver this thesis' four main objectives: explore consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities, investigate their perceptions towards sponsored content, understand their opinion about microcelebrities and brands association, and examine their purchase intention towards sponsored content (See more in 3.3 & 3.4). The author chose phenomenology because it is a methodology that consist in analyse those who have experienced a particular phenomenon. Since this research aims to explore the consumer's point of view, open a dialogue more than reporting fact, this methodology was a consistent choice.

Furthermore, giving a roadmap for this dissertation, in chapter 2 you will find a comprehensive review about relevant past studies, locating this study in a research area. While Chapter 3 details the methodology, presenting the researcher's choices during the process and justification for this research. Chapter 4 presents the findings and interpretation surrounding the collected data, and chapter 5 the author explores the findings relating with previous studies. Furthermore, in chapter 6 the author concludes this dissertation, reflecting about the main findings, the research process, and give recommendations to future researches.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contributes to framing the research questions listed and explained in detail at Chapter 3, while covering the relevant literature of past studies, which will help to position this research. Additionally, this gives the reader an understanding of the area of interest, making clear potential opportunities and key issues related to the topic (MacFarlane *et al.*, 2015; Hart, 1998;). The author organised the literature review in a funnel style; Starting broadly, in order to draw a big picture, the chapter begins explaining how the advances of technology and social media has influenced businesses and peoples' lives. After the background is explored, the following sections consider the specific literature related to the research topic.

Seeing that, section 2.2 explains the social media and its influences on the market and consumer lives, followed by how the contemporary promotional mix also had to change in order to supply those new demands at 2.3. The third section (2.4) explores the influence of social interaction and peoples' behaviour in a connected world, looking into the changes on how people relate to others and themselves. Approaching the specific area that this study aims to cover; the fourth section (2.5) examines 'what' and 'who' are those microcelebrities, and how they are being used as a marketing tool by brands. In the fifth and the sixth sections (2.6 & 2.7) the author looks at the specific studies related to this research, exploring consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities' sponsored content, and their reaction when they become aware of a covert sponsorship. Furthermore, this literature review ended with the section (2.8) covering the influence of sponsored content on brand's reputation and consumer's purchase intention.

2.2 Social media and Web 2.0 influence on market and consumers

The advance of the internet and technology has had a deep influence on peoples' lives and popular culture; Making available tools such as blogs and social media,

people started to share their voice and express themselves in an individual way and/or in communities. Hence, through this new stage called web 2.0 – a combination between social interaction with functions - users gained access to interact directly with other users and brands, changing the way we communicate and respond with people, brands, and services (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Lu et. Al, 2014; Ballantine & Yeung, 2014; Belk, 2013; Keng & Ting, 2009; Simmons, 2008;). The development of always-on mobile devices and wireless network resulted in a mix of online and face to face interaction.

It is clear the internet has given people the opportunity to access and generate information as they were not used before; For example, through a platform such as YouTube, users can open their own customized channel and share their ideas, experiences, and expertise in a video format. Another example is the Wikipedia, the open source encyclopaedia is generated and consumed by people simultaneously. Now, the power of the internet is largely on the users' keyboard. Consequently, having access to various types of information, consumers became digital savvy, increasing the awareness of marketing selling strategies. Being able to research these products and brands, the consumer can access other user's opinions and news information, increasing their cynicism towards traditional advertising (Liljander *et al.*, 2014).

On the other hand, the web 2.0 has not only benefited the average user, this democratic platform has provided brands with access to a new rage of customers that wasn't possible before. In addition, companies could expand their touchpoints, channels where customers and business engage, accessing them through different online channels. Prior to this firms had to have offline structure (e.g. brick and mortar store), now with websites and social media, they have gained different opportunities to reach and engage with their customers in a more precise and active strategy (see more in 2.3) (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012; Chiang & Hsieh, 2011). This collaborative environment cooperated with brands to started co-creating with their customers, empowering their relationship. Consequently, by erasing the boundaries between consumers and producers, brands had to readapt their marketing strategies. In the past, they were used to

one-way communication marketing to consumers, now they must market with consumers. Hence, transforming their brands in a social platform that unite people with the same passion. Since customers' participation is voluntary, this increases the trust and loyalty among consumers, and enhances effectiveness of marketing strategies (Kim & Drumwright, 2015; Habib, Laroche & Richard, 2014).

Furthermore, the web 2.0 facilitated the creation of online communities and user-generated brand, where consumers are part of the equation in brand's marketing. Producing online reviews, recommendations, social media posts, etc, consumers produce and consume content simultaneously fostering a collaborative relationship between brands and consumers, resulting in a peer-to-peer sharing economy (Yannapoulou, Moufahim, & Bian, 2013). Companies aiming to build a long-term and effective relationship with its customers need to adapt their strategy implementing interactive strategies and electronic customer relationship system (CRM) (Cetina, Munthiu & Radulescu, 2012).

2.3 Contemporary promotional mix & online advertisement management

Neil Border (1964) introduced the concept of marketing mix; marketing mix can be understood as a mixture of elements or channels that aim to achieve a marketing goal. Considered one of the marketing theory pillars, the marketing mix was initially designed as 4P's (price, product, promotion, and place). However, with the advent of the internet, changes in the market, and trends, the marketing mix theory had to evolve. One of the significative changes of the concept was on the promotional mix; defined as various communication methods, such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, events, sponsorship, etc., the contemporary promotional mix is used to remind customers about a product or a brand. Using all the relevant activities, materials, and medias, the activity persuades the customer to buy the offering (Connet, 2004). This shift from traditional media advertisement to online advertisement can be seen all over the globe. Online advertising can be explained as specific messages placed on third-party web, including websites or search engines (Ha, 2008). Thus, because online advertising has a maximized return in contrast of reduced the investment,

consequently companies started to allocate a main part of their marketing budget in e-marketing (Ashworth *et al.*, 2006). According to Interactive Advertising Bureau (2017) the first quarter of 2017 marked the highest earnings for digital advertising in the U.S., climbing 23% and hitting \$19.6 billion.

Today, it is essential that marketers integrate their offline and online strategies, to transmit a homogeneous message, delivering a consistent campaign. Marketers refer to campaign as a mix of methods and channels that aim to achieve a goal, and social media channels are becoming great part of this mix. This form of interactive media disseminate information through social interactions, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques (Li & Shiu, 2012). To marketers, the main advantage of using online advertisement is the capability to track user's behaviour responses, using web analytics or e-metrics they can measure the campaigns' results and make adjusts during it (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). Increase or decrease investment's budget, change the target, or even stop the campaign if is not working at all are some of the adjustments that a firm can do. For example, a brand places an ad on Instagram, this ad will appear in their target feed while they are scrolling. However, after one day marketers notice that ad didn't have as many click or reach as expected, then they decided to change the image of the post. The following day they see now the numbers of clicks are increasing, so it's up to them decide if worth to keep it or remove the ad. This type of decision is possible because of web analytics tools available in the market. One example of web analytics is Google Analytics, where marketers can obtain statistics or metrics in order to make correct decisions and optimize results. These tools not only help to analyse results, but also the users' interaction with the website, tracking customers in real time as they navigate, allowing brands to personalise their online experience on demand. Besides online advertisement, companies are also using social media as a channel to handle customer service issues, gathering innovative ideas, and 'truly' engage with customer (Solis, 2010).

In contrast, traditional medias such as television and magazines, due to the lack of measurement tools, the results can't be precisely tracked. Consequently, making companies unable to calculate an accurate return of investment (ROI) – a very

important piece of information needed to determine the efficacy of the marketing plan (Dinner, Van Heerde & Neslin, 2014). Additionally, since results can't be measured in real time, if the performance doesn't meet the expectation, marketers will only have knowledge of the overall results when the campaign is over. Another advantage of using online advertisement is those channels enable marketers to deliver information specific to their target, having a major power of clustering their customers, hence delivering, and reinforcing information to those consumers who are more likely to react on it (Chao, Corus & Li, 2012). Due to platforms such as Google and Facebook, which works collecting and retaining a great amount of data from its' users, it's possible to draw a very accurate profile of consumers. Thus, making this type of information considered very valuable for brands around the world.

On the other hand, despite the great opportunity of reach those consumers, online advertisement may raise some concerns. Privacy and regulation, are two of the current matters that people and researches are talking about. By analysing how people use their computers, which websites they enter and their online behaviour, these information helps to draw people characteristics (e.g. gender, age, etc.), their interests, and even predict future actions. This detailed data help those platforms to provide high prospects to companies and able them to charge more for the advertising space they sell. However, this big and ongoing collection of information can be considered an invasion of privacy (Evans, 2009). Another issue among marketers is the selection of the channel, with a great variety of different platforms as we have today, might be a challenge to choose the platforms that fit with the company's or product's personality. For example, a common mistake committed by brands is joining all new social media platform and delivery the same content in all channels ignoring the variability between media (Smith *et al.*, 2012). To engage with its customer, brands must deliver high-quality content; customized or high-quality content includes personalized message to each media, matching with its format in order to deliver credibility among users. Each media has its own language; for example, on Instagram the ad must be visual with a big image and a short caption, on the other hand Twitter its 140 characters text

(tweet), and on Facebook would be a mix of both - image and text. Furthermore, Ha (2008) highlight marketers must pay attention on the cultural differences, since standardization may have a negative influence among consumers. The following section consumer behaviour is considered.

2.4 Consumer behaviour in the online context: communities and extended self

Humans are social beings; The need of belongness with a community isn't new, observing and interacting with others, set our expectations of needs and ideal behaviour (Solomon *et al.*, 2016). Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) define community as a group of people that share the same context of consumption or interests, build in three pillars: shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility. In the past, groups such as religion supplied these community's needs, nowadays, the main tool to create and foment those interactions are social media platforms. In more the ten years, with the spread of connected devices among people, social media brought the human interaction to the next level. Through different platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and moreso, consumers can maintain or expand their social network, interacting with friends, acquaintances, and unfamiliar people.

Moreover, it's important to notice the influence of social media in consumers' life does not reduce to social interaction, but also on peoples' perceptions, identities, and the way they consume. The consumption behaviour can be defined as a process, that can be realized by an individual or a group. It involves searching, selecting, purchasing, using, and disposing products or services to satisfy customers' needs or desires (Solomon *et al.*, 2016). The contemporary consumer culture often consumes products or brands because its meaning, not for their utilitarian function. For example, when someone buy a Ferrari's car, it's not only because it's function to take them from a place to another, but also because it's a car that fit with their personality and the image they want to transmit to others. Seeing that, using social media as a communication channel to their community,

consumers tends to show new acquires such as cars or shoes, or experiences such as holidays trips and fancy restaurants. If before this type of information was only shared with family and friends, in an offline way, now people can share with a larger number of people or even with the whole world. Since these social media offers the possibility to users curate their own feed, sharing only their better version, this account customization creates these idealized lives or selves. Belk (2013) define this behaviour as the 'extended self', where the possessions create links to other people, representing a full collection of what people believe and think. Creating personalized identities to their online and offline lives.

Identity can be represented by how we think about ourselves (subjectivity), how we show ourselves to others (self-presentation) and how different facets we can represent simultaneously (representation). In addition, identity can refer to people as an individual or a member of a group, representing themselves differently based on context and audience, changing their presentation according to the situation (Marwick, 2013; Goffman, 1959). In an online environment, people tend to use their self-presentation, attaching meaning to their possessions. According to postmodern theorists, using products or brands as symbol to communicate who they are or want to be, consumers started to construct their identities and define themselves through their consumer goods and mass media; transforming identity in an ongoing project that can be constructed, updated and redone, liberating them of from monotony (Brown, 1995; Giddens, 1991).

Multiple postmodern identity projects in consumer culture are further enabled through the online world, Web2.0, and social media, which users both co-create and are also influenced by (Healy, 2012). In contrast, these social media platforms may create a disparity between reality and fantasy, creating this virtual reality that may not match with what is real. Hence, users of online social media platforms are enabled to play with and explore possible identities and possible ideal identities (Thompson, 1997). However, consumers' perception of what the ideal identity, lifestyle, or self-image is, may be continuously being influenced by what they see/consume on social media, and elsewhere too (e.g. offline). Since people tend to compare themselves with their peers, this 'always perfect' life that people

share, may increase envy and lower life satisfaction (Taylor & Strutton, 2016). This perception that people can improve aspects of their lives and personalities through their image may result in an anxiety to fit in a social norm, consequently labelling those that do not achieve the same results as failures. In the next section, microcelebrities' influence is considered.

2.5 Marketing through microcelebrities

Since the internet became a primary source of information, the electronic word of mouth (eWOM) arises as a credibility source. As consumers tend to trust more in other people, acquaintances, and friends' opinions (Hwang & Jeong, 2015; Ballantine & Yeung, 2014; Liljander *et al.*, 2014; Lee & Koo, 2012; Doh & Hwang, 2009;), the exchange of information by potential consumers in an electronic environment may be more effective than traditional forms of advertisement. According to Ho, Chiu, Chen & Papazafeiropoulou (2014) information search became a regular behaviour, 87% of 8,000 consumers sampled search for others' consumer's opinions before making the purchase. Additionally, users with large numbers of followers or subscribers are considered more attractive and trustworthy, source of information, or expertise than firms (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). This is called social influence, where influential users have disproportionate influence on others (Probst, Grosswiele & Pflieger, 2013).

Today, those digital influencers are called microcelebrity; The term was coined by Senft in 2001, when the researcher was writing the book 'Camgirls: young women who were broadcasting their lives over the Internet' (2008). According to Senft (2013) microcelebrity can be defined as "a collection of practices on social media, where users strategically program and plan their content they of personal information they will reveal, in order to reach followers, create engagement, increase attention, and thus improve their online status". Those users are digital natives, they grew up using computers and the internet, blurring the line between 'offline' and 'online' life, consequently transforming this online environment into a commonplace. Because social media allow ordinary people to become famous, self-branded practices and online identity became popular terms among

customers and companies. Generally, microcelebrities get well-known primarily in the online ecosystem, after going to mainstream media. (Marwick, 2015). Curating and controlling consistently their online self, those users are considered to be their own product, keeping their popularity through continuous fan management. Today is common to see 'ordinary' people and 'traditional' celebrities adopting microcelebrities tactics to gain online status or maintain popularity and relevance (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Moreover, those influential users effectively diffuse information generating personalized content (sponsored or not) to develop or maintain an audience (Kempe, Kleinberg & Tardos, 2003).

Since the traditional marketing strategies are decreasing, the market is saturated with competitors and information, marketers had to find out new solutions to advertise their products or brands in an effective way to its customers. Hence, using microcelebrity as an advertisement tool became a popular strategy among companies. Nowadays, consumers must choose between numerous different products, in their decision-making process they want to take in consideration the experience of others (Chiang & Hsieh, 2011). According to Fan & Chang (2011) 80% of internet users are interested in receiving personalised content on website they visit regularly. Since microcelebrities have a good knowledge about their subscribers, their content reflects the interests of their visitors. Hence, advertise through them is an effective way to reach directly company's targets or niche using a trustworthy person with reduced cost – when its compared with traditional media as television or radio.

Furthermore, because of the power of influence of those users in the market and consumers, in the current literature many studies have explored the theme. However, most of the times they don't include in depth information about consumers point of view about these influential users, their content, and what encourages them to follow specific ones in regard of others (see more 3.2). Examples such as Hwang & Jeong (2016) and Hsu, Lin & Chiang (2012) studies explores the impact of microcelebrities' content on consumers responses, without giving any contextual meaning. In the following two sections consumer's perception is examine.

2.6 Consumer's attitude towards sponsored recommendations

Most of microcelebrities channels starts as a personal space to share their opinions, experiences, or interests with others. Despite this genuine aspect of producing content without any marketing purpose, after a while those users start getting people and brands' attention. Consequently, this awareness increases their followers and after a certain number, brands start to approach those influential users to advertise through them. Working as a recommendation system, social advertising takes advantage of the relationship that microcelebrities develop with its followers aiming to increase brand's acceptance among those users. The social advertisements can be made placing ads at their website (e.g. banners, displays, and search ads), indirect compensation (e.g. free products), or sponsored content (e.g. paid posts). Mutum & Wang (2010) define "sponsored post" as a consumer-generated content but sponsored by a brand. Through paid posts on Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, moreso, companies are using microcelebrities as a vehicle to deliver high-quality content, consequently increasing the brand's audience and its loyalty. This sponsorship may include payment of thousands of euros or free products/services. In contrast, since this type of advertise became common, due the commercial nature and implications of sponsored content many countries create regulations (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Examples such as FTC's (Federal Trade Commission) Endorsement Guides in U.S. and Ireland's ASAI's (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland) guidance *'Recognisability of Marketing Communications'* aims to making easy to consumer identify a sponsored content to an independent editorial, in order to ensuring consumers won't be misled (ASAI, 2016; FTC, 2015;).

Seeing that, expressions such as "all opinions are my own, although this is a sponsored post" became common (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Since expertise and trustworthiness are two key sources factors that contributes for eWOM credibility, by emphasizing honest opinions, microcelebrities tries to keep their believable with its followers (Ballantine & Yeung, 2014). Hence, making them choose carefully which brands or products they will associate with, since consumers tend

to have a positive attitude towards microcelebrities when they believe the source is unbiased and credible. Maintaining a positive reputation, also help them to remove the negative effect of a sponsored content might have for them and the brand (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch (1986) define consumer attitude towards advertisement as 'a predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion'.

When microcelebrities share parts of their personal life, a sense of proximity is created between them and their followers. Hence, more the customers become familiar with a source, the perceived credibility is higher (Sweester *et al.*, 2008). A successful sponsored post must match the source personality (microcelebrity) and the sponsor (brand) announced, making consumers believe that isn't only an ad, but a credulous recommendation. Additionally, if customers' have previous knowledge and are familiar with the brand, their attitude towards the content will be positive (Lu *et al.*, 2014). Colliander & Dahlén (2011) says as long microcelebrities genuinely follows the brand, costumers will read as an honest content and as consequence might form friendship with the sponsored brand. Additionally, in Lu *et al.* (2014) study's results reveal that consumers don't have a negative perception towards posts that the blogger received any monetary payment, since they be honest about the sponsorship. On the other hand, Petty & Andrews (2008) argues that consumers might consider more credible those microcelebrities that receive free samples or indirect compensation, than those who receive cash. Since customer perceives those who receive direct compensation as obligate to publish the content, while those who receives indirect-monetary benefits have no strings attached. Moreover, Liljander *et al.*, (2014) highlights successful sponsored content requires balancing the needs of the microcelebrity, the brand, and the blog readers. Also, consumers may have an unfavourable response is they feel mislead by the source, if they feel that information it's not a 'real' opinion.

Furthermore, even the literature covers many aspects of consumer's perception towards different types of sponsored content, those studies do not give much

information about consumer's opinions towards sponsored content, reducing to a negative or positive reaction. Also, important angles such as the ideal frequency between sponsored ad and editorial content are missing.

2.7 Consumer's reaction to covert content

Consumers can react positively or negatively, being more or less favourably to a brand or a microcelebrity; since being a digital influencer has become a full-time job, those users have the challenge of balance editorial content and sponsored posts, creating high-quality content to its readers in order to maintaining their interest without losing the opportunities of monetising their work (Liljander *et al.*, 2014). A successful sponsored content depends on the credibility of the source, since the consumer perceived any bias or influence of a brand on the microcelebrity's opinions, may downgrade and disregard the message (Lu *et al.*, 2014). Ballantine & Yeung (2015) highlights when microcelebrities are seen as independents writers, there is a great likelihood for consumers to perceive the blogger as similar to themselves, treating them more as a friend rather than an endorser of a brand. Seeing that, seeking positive reactions from microcelebrities' followers some brands or marketers choose for hide and undisclosed their commercial partnership, what is called covert marketing. Petty & Andrews (2008) define covert or masked marketing when it's not clear to the consumer that content is sponsored by a firm. It's not new marketers communicates with consumers in a non-transparent way and despite of the subjectivity of regulations, covert tactics may be deceptive, but are not illegal (Milne *et al.*, 2009).

Nowadays many different formats of sponsored content are made by microcelebrities, making hard to the user identify if was a paid or spontaneous content. Different examples can be found, such as product placement, tagging brands in their picture, adding a location at their post, doing a review as free received sample, etc. without mentioned the brand or adding sponsorship hashtags (e.g. #ad or #sponsored) at the caption. For example, when a microcelebrity publish videos on Snapchat doing a 'session' showing the delivery of 'free goods' from different brands, some of those brands could also include a

cash payment for the advertisement, removing the natural aspect of the post. Another example can be found on YouTube when a microcelebrity is teaching a particular recipe and it's not clear if the chosen ingredients are brands that they usually use it or is sponsored by a firm. Moreover, online advertisement through microcelebrities represent a growing channel; however, social media changes its features very quick making harder to consumers to be familiar with marketers advertising tactics (Milne *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, despite the numerous variations of unclear online advertisement that appear every day, some social-medias' savvy users may be conscious of the partnership between companies and microcelebrities.



Figure 1: Unclear sponsored post where Rob Lipsett tag brands in the picture but don't include any advertisement at the caption. Source: Instagram, 2017.



Figure 2: Unclear sponsored post where Camila Coutinho tag brands in the picture and a hotel at location without making any mentioned if this content is sponsored by any of those brands at the caption. Source: Instagram, 2017.

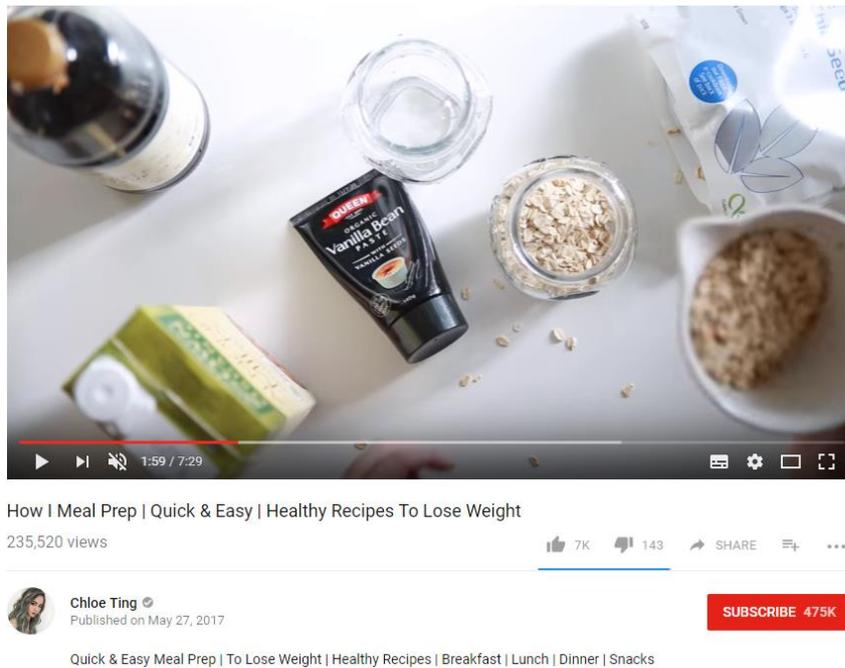


Figure 3: Unclear sponsored content where Chloe Ting uses and display products of different brands during a recipe without mention if any brand sponsored it. Source: YouTube, 2017

When a consumer has knowledge that are marketers or brands behind the content, they will be less likely to accept the message. According to Liljander *et al.* (2014) when consumers become aware of deceptive tactics, even if they accept less the message, might not always lead to negative effect on brands or decrease the purchase intention. Due to consumers access their previous experiences and

knowledge about the brand to evaluate the likelihood of a purchase. On the other hand, Milne *et al.* (2009) says covert marketing is perceived in a negative light, since the relationship of trust between follower towards microcelebrity is broken when the truth emerges. Hence, when a covert marketing is exposed consumers tend to have strong negative reactions and that influence directly on consumers' purchase likelihood, reducing the buying intention by 29,2%. Furthermore, even though both studies (Liljander *et al.*, 2014; Milne *et al.*, 2009) analyse consumer's perceptions, they of focus on deception and dishonesty in the internet, leaving a gap on the literature about consumers' perceptions towards the author of these sponsored contents – microcelebrity. The following section explores the influence of brand's reputation using sponsored ads through microcelebrities and consumers' shopping intentions.

2.8 Brand reputation through sponsored content and its influence on consumers' shopping intentions

Ho *et al.* (2014) define brand as a name or label that differentiate a company from its' competitors. In order to create loyalty and consequently gain market share, brands aim to build positive relationship with its consumers delivering good experiences. Therefore, brand awareness is the ability of the consumer recall the brand or product, and this can be valued in two dimensions: brand recognition and brand recall (Rossiter & Percy, 1997; Keller, 1993;). When consumers are familiar to a brand and its followed by a good experience, their confidence towards the firm will increase, consequently increasing the brand's reputation (Lu *et al.*, 2014). In the marketing field, Yoon *et al.* (1993) define brand reputation as 'a contemplation of the company trajectory, communicating to its' target and directly reflecting to its products or services'. In other words, is the level of trustworthy that a company transmit to its' customers and is formed over the time.

Since keeping a positive brand reputation is mandatory in companies all over the globe, partnering with a microcelebrity can be considered as a brand alliance,

where meanings and values can be co-created with both parts. As microcelebrity are considered opinion leaders and an expert in a certain area, they might have great influence on consumers' shopping intention through their reviews and shared experiences (Wu & Lee, 2012). According to Azjen & Fishbein (1980) behavioural intention is characterized by how hard an individual is willing to take a specific action. Seeing that, shopping intention can be described as consumer's level of intention to make an effort to purchase a product (Lu *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, advertising through a microcelebrity may not only generate sales, but might also increase brand awareness and trust among brand's target. Boateng & Okoe (2015) results indicate that sponsored content in social media generate positive attitude on consumers and increase brand's reputation in 20%.

Moreover, a sponsored publication may help firms to communicate direct to a specific target through a reliable interpreter, helping brands to be notice in and increasing cluttered media space, hence increasing and soldering brand's reputation (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Additionally, Lu *et al.* (2014) highlights if consumers are willing to believe in the sponsored content, they will be more likely to purchase the product without regarding the brand. In contrast, Jain & Roy (2015) highlights time this type of microcelebrity association can address issues such as credibility and attractiveness of endorsers, product 'match-up' and negative meaning transfer. Also, is becoming a known problem that advertisements today are emphasizing more at the endorser than the brand itself. This is what Ilicic & Webster (2004) define as 'eclipsing the brand', when a microcelebrity overshadows the sponsor, making hard to consumer evaluate the brand. Furthermore, because the literature that investigates consumers shopping intention through microcelebrities sponsored content (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Lu *et al.*, 2014;) decided to use a quantitative approach using surveys, makes difficult to account for changes that may have occurred in the consumer's attitude or the process of purchase intention.

2.9 Chapter summary

This chapter reflects the areas of literature, outlining relevant aspects about the influence of technology advances and social media development on consumer behaviour and marketers' advertisement strategies considered by previous researches. Considering sponsored content through microcelebrities one of the contemporary effective marketing tools, this section provides a comprehensive view of how those influencers are used to transmit brand's message, and what is the consumer's perception about those sponsored content.

It is crystal clear the continuous change on technology and social media influence our daily life and routines (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Lu *et al.*, 2014; Ballantine & Yeung, 2014; Belk, 2013; Keng & Ting, 2009; Simmons, 2008). Since the Web 2.0 allowed the consumer to be active, removing them from the passive position of receptors and allowing them to co-create and generate content, companies must continuously evolve its strategies in order to meet those new consumers' expectations. The promotional mix develop from an offline to a hybrid (online & offline) environment, granting new opportunities to reach and engage with costumers.

Additionally, because this connected environment fomented the creating of communities and people to express themselves, sharing their experiences and opinions, a new type of celebrity appeared, the microcelebrities. Since advertise through celebrities is a common practice, and people tend to trust their peers more than companies, those digital influencers are an effective and lower cost way to achieve accurate targets (Ho *et al.*, 2014). However, because relationships build the social media environment, it's essential both (brand and microcelebrity) being honest to their followers, creating positive experiences and a bond of trust. With all information access, consumers are becoming savvy and they tend to react negatively when they become aware of deceptive tactics as shown on Liljander *et al.* (2014) and Milne *et al.* (2009) studies. Hence, reducing their purchase intention and damaging the brand's credibility.

Furthermore, the changing role of the consumer is a trend identified in the literature, hence, become essential to understand their perceptions, motivations,

and experiences. Since the gap of meaning and context on the literature towards consumer's perceptions (see more in 3.2), this dissertation aims to cover this area using an exploratory qualitative approach contributing with in-depth information. The following chapter the methodology and method are considered.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research process undertaken to accomplish this study. The chosen methodology and method are introduced and explained in detail through the chapter. The first sections (3.2 & 3.3) outline the justification for this research and research question. In the following section *Research approach*, the author looks into how to design a research, using Saunders *et al.* (2009) as a guide to go through the layers and outline the research philosophy and approach. Also, the section explores the author decisions during the research process and explain why phenomenology is the most appropriate research methodology. The method of gathering data and data interpretation is presented on the sections 3.5, and 3.6, exploring interview process and hermeneutic interpretation, while data-storing method and sampling are described in the followings ones (3.7 & 3.8). In the end of this chapter, research limitations and ethical considerations are also considered.

3.2 Justification for research: the gap to be filled

As explained in detail at chapter 2, microcelebrities became a matter of interest for brands. Hence, in order to investigate this phenomenon and explore the influence on people and market, those influential users also became a subject of interest for researches. Attractiveness, effectiveness, credibility, and persuasion are some of the angles that studies had explored in the literature. However, searching in past studies, the author noticed that even many researches were conducted on the area only a few of them explored the consumer perception. Despite the number of studies on the influence of those microcelebrities towards consumers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Roelens *et al.*, 2016; Ho *et al.*, 2015; Jin & Phua, 2014; Hsu *et al.*, 2014; Kulmala *et al.*, 2013; Probst *et al.*, 2013; Hsu *et al.*, 2013; Zanette *et al.*, 2013; Wu & Lee, 2012; Saxena, 2011; Chiang & Hsieh, 2011; Li *et al.* 2010; Watts & Dodds, 2007;). There is little research focusing in the consumers' perceptions towards this sponsored content (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Liljander *et al.*, 2014; Lu *et al.*, 2014; Bouhel *et al.*, 2010; Milne *et al.*, 2009; Keng

& Ting, 2009;) and none of those are using a qualitative approach. This may be consequence of marketers and researches are more interested to find out about the effectiveness of microcelebrities on consumers, consequently justifying the investment in those channels, more than how consumers perceive microcelebrities sponsored content.

As suggested by some researches, those microcelebrities are co-created by both the microcelebrities and their followers (Hsu *et al.*, 2014; Nardi *et al.*, 2004;). Their followers, are composed by average users that build a relationship by consuming and interacting. Those consumers are the target companies are trying to reach when they are partnering or advertising through microcelebrities, since they're the people who will consume the brand. Seeing that, because the followers are the main interest of both, microcelebrities and companies, this study aims to focus on those users and investigate their perceptions about this type of manoeuvre.

In the literature, previous studies investigating consumer's perceptions were conducted. Keng & Ting (2009) explores the emotional experiences and attitudes that users gain while reading blogs, while Lu *et al.* (2014) and Bouhel *et al.* (2010) look into the consumer's attitudes and purchase intention towards blogger's sponsored recommendation. Boateng & Okoe (2015) examine consumer's attitude and behavioural responses towards social media advertisement. On the other hand, Liljander *et al.* (2015) and Milne *et al.* (2009) study the responses of consumers to suspected covert advertise through microcelebrities. Although, even these studies are being very informative and provide good insights focusing in the consumer and their perceptions, all of them are using quantitative methodology, creating a gap of deep understanding of context, meaning, and experience (Fossey *et al.*, 2002). To do this, this study intend to contribute to the literature using a qualitative approach exploring and drawing a panorama, giving context of consumers' perceptions towards microcelebrities sponsored content.

3.3 Research question

The aim of this study is to access the consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities sponsored content in a new light and seek new insights. As an exploratory study, this research has four main objectives:

- I. Explore consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities
- II. Investigate consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities sponsored content
- III. Understand consumer's perception towards microcelebrities and brands association
- IV. Examine consumer's purchase intention towards microcelebrities' sponsored content

3.4 Research approach

More than methods, a research is composed by different layers that results in a deeper meaning. In other words, Vogt (1993, cited in Collis & Hussey 2009, pp. 111) define as is the science (and art) of planning procedures for conducting studies to get the most valid findings. In this study, the 'research onion' developed by Saunders *et al.* (2009) was used as a guide to create a research strategy.

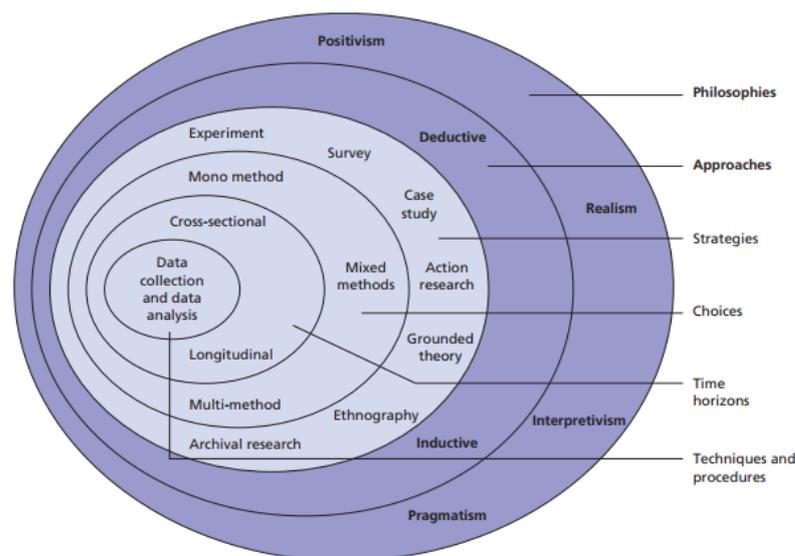


Figure 4: The research 'onion'. Source: Saunders *et al.*, 2009.

This progressive diagram gives a clear and effective guideline how a research methodology can be design. For beginners, some research components can be very confusing; some researches, including this author, might be confused about what's the logical order to follow in a research development. Consequently, they start defining advanced steps, such as strategies and data collection methods. However, these steps are inside the onion, and before making these decisions a macro thinking must be developed. As referred to in the 'onion' diagram through each layer assists researches to create context and boundaries, it's helpful guide to support the research design decisions making sense and flowing better during the research process (Saunders & Tosey, 2013).

Collis & Hussey (2009) define research paradigm as 'a philosophical framework that guides how scientific research should be conducted'. Divided in four main paradigms: positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism; the philosophy that a researcher chose to use contains important assumptions about the way he/she view the world (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). However, more than personal preferences, it's important to the researcher to reflect about all philosophical options and after the evaluation be sure about his/her decisions. This research is using an interpretivism paradigm; appeared as an alternative for social scientists, who perceive an inadequacy in the paradigm, since they believe it's impossible to separate people from social context and because of the highly structured research design might ignore relevant findings (Collis & Hussey, 2009). On the opposite of positivism, which is more used in natural sciences studies, using a logical approach is based in observation and experiment [empirical research], which believes in an independent reality and explanation through theories.

Moreover, according to Collis & Hussey (2009) the research philosophy is divided in five main assumptions: ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological. However, following Saunders *et al.* (2009) suggestion the author will focus in two of them: ontology and epistemology. The first one is concerned about the nature of reality, and is related to the way researches think the world works. Ontology can be divided in two aspects, the first consider there's only one reality and the second believes the reality is created and there are multiple ones.

The second assumption is concerned in what people considers as valid knowledge and can be divided also in two aspects: positivism, where researchers believes that only phenomena that can be measurable and observable are valid. In contrast, interpretivism understands the difference between humans as social actors, and aim to minimize the distance between the researcher and participant, including different forms of participative inquiry (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Furthermore, this study sympathise with the idea of multiple realities, where the culture and traditions have direct influence in the way people see the world. Having no right or wrong reality, just different perspectives. Also, the author considers the human as social beings that can't be removed from the equation, including the researcher.

Following the onion, an effective application of research approach should consider the nature of the phenomena being address, the researcher's personal experiences and the audience interested in the subject. Hence, setting the ideal design, choosing between a deductive or inductive approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2009) Because of the exploratory and human nature of this study, the researcher is using an inductive approach. First collecting the data and developing the theory after the data analysis. This method where the hypothesis emerges from the data had its origin from natural sciences and allows researchers to understand better the nature of the problem, since they must be finding patterns and making observations (Bryman, 2012; Saunders *et al.*, 2009;). Opposed to deductive, which the researcher must develop a theory/ hypothesis based on what is known about a particular phenomenon and design a research strategy to test it. Also, this method involves a rigours test and control, and is more appropriate to natural science studies.

Getting in the inner part of the onion a strategy had to be traced; choosing which method approach is more appropriate will depends on the research question the study is looking to answer (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Since customer's perceptions are complex, depending on individual background and personality, previous experiences, attitudes, and behaviour, hence a deep understanding is needed (Monuwe *et al.*, 2004). Seeing that, in order to clarify any research paradigm both

qualitative and quantitative methods are able to deliver results if applied appropriately.

Previous studies about consumer's perception which opted for quantitative method may simplifying results into positive or negative. For example, on Lu *et al.* (2014) study the researcher chose to use an experimental design, and their findings show consumers don't have a negative attitude towards microcelebrities sponsored recommendation. However, the results does not explain how the consumer knows when is a sponsored or an editorial content - since in some of the cases the source doesn't reveal that information - or their general perceptions about microcelebrities and their sponsored content. Another example can be seen in Keng & Ting (2009), the study uses an empirical survey using a seven-point Likert-type questionnaire to measure the consumer experience and how they feel interacting with bloggers and readers. Although, using this type of scale the study will only measures two extremities, delivering no deeper understanding. Additionally, because of the structured nature of questionnaires, it leaves no space to the respondent being spontaneous and free to talk about their experiences or feelings. Moreover, using quantitative methods and analysing this data through a computer software code, does not generate the same level of understanding to portray broader cultural meanings (Belk, 2013). Therefore, those results may generate generic responses, ignoring the context and differences of the individual perception (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011).

Seeing that, despite marketing researches uses different methods to analyse consumers, a qualitative research method is appropriated for exploratory research where a phenomenon has been under-research, helping to reveal a rich and symbolic scenario. Hence, without the human factor and its' subjectivity, assumptions, theories, and formulas wouldn't be possible. According to Fossey *et al.* (2002) qualitative research "aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans' lives and social worlds". Aims to explain how a phenomenon has been constituted in a particular society, cultural context and time, and trying to learn how people experience the world, the researcher chosen to use phenomenology

as research methodology. Since communities are comprised of persons, understanding the significance of customer's own experiences, this methodology will serve to draw an overview of consumers' perception as a group. Moreover, gathering data through mono method or mixed methods such as interview, observation, focus group and moreso, allows researchers to obtain in-depth information that help to underlines needs, desires, meaning, and choices (Kozinets, 2012). Hence, the author has chosen to use a mono method to gathering data using interviews. Additionally, since this a qualitative study, the layer of time horizon of Saunders' onion do not apply to this research. In the following section the chosen strategy is explained in detail.

3.4.1 Phenomenology

Husserl (1970) defines phenomenology as "the science of essence of consciousness"; in other words, is the deep understanding of a phenomenon through analysis of a person's lived experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). According to Van Manem (1990) phenomenological studies tend to open a dialogue about the subject more than report facts, exposing taken-for-granted assumptions. Because this research has an explorative objective – to gather as much in-depth information as possible about the phenomenon, seems natural to choose a methodology that comprehend reality through embodied experience and seeks to capture the meaning or essences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). It's what Venkatesh & Meamber (2008) notes as "a theoretical mosaic that calls for enough structure without sacrificing the informational richness of the data"

As phenomenology consists in analysing those who have experience the phenomenon of interest, this study will use an emic approach, where the researcher is part of equation and one-to-one interaction is needed to reveal meaning. Husserl (1970) claims in a phenomenological study these interactions must include attentive listening and observation. Moreover, because humans are inserted in a social context, and can't be isolated of their culture or the period they live, consequently they can't make choices and find meaning to lived experiences without those influences (Wojnar & Swason, 2007). Since research intend to study

the phenomena in context, the researcher chose to adopt an interpretive (hermeneutic) approach, instead of the descriptive – which emphasis on universal essences removing the researcher from the equation. Developed by Heidegger (1962), he believed that humans are hermeneutic, being able to find meaning in their own lives, and the context is a central concern, rather than adopt a position of “omniscient observer” (Wojnar & Swason, 2007). Additionally, Wilson (2012) says “hermeneutic phenomenology is thus a philosophical resource offering appropriate spatio-temporal images for people responding to media marketing’s branded life-styles”. In other words, is an interpretative method that allows the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection, concentrating in the historical and developmental meanings of experience, and its effects on individual and social levels (Laverty, 2003). Furthermore, the author believes there is no such thing as a better methodology, but instead a more adequate one which gives you a creative approach to understanding the phenomena. In the next section, the research design is described.

3.5 Research design

3.5.1 Narrowing the research area: selecting an industry

This qualitative study is based on 3 months research about consumer’s perceptions in Dublin. Since time and location may be determinant in a research, and the online environment offers an endless field of opportunities and scenarios, the author decided to focus in one industry, to collect data and deliver consistent findings. On account of the study area being broad and mixture of people with interests in different industry, using a small size sample as 6 participants, the chances of divergence will be increased when the data is crossed, hence resulting in inconclusive findings.

The Fitness industry is one of the areas with the most impressive growth in the last years. Representing 10.3% of the total European market, in 2015 the fitness industry generated 26.7 billion, transforming Europe the largest fitness market in the world (EuropeActive & Deloitte, 2016). In Ireland 73% of the population do

physical activities for the purpose of exercise, recreation, or sport (Central Statistics Office, 2013). Additionally, Millington (2016) claims that we are living the second ‘fitness boom’, characterized by the integration between technology and its customizability and interactivity; The first ‘boom’ was between 1970/80 when a ‘fit’ lifestyle was considered responsible living and fitness ‘tools’ became commonly available. Because the research takes place in Dublin, Ireland, was a natural decision to focus on this industry that have an impressive presence of microcelebrities into social media channels. Examples such as Rob Lipsett, Irish YouTuber, with over 250k subscribers on his channel, and the Australian personal trainer Kayla Itsines with more than 7m followers on Instagram demonstrate how many people are interested in consuming this type of content.

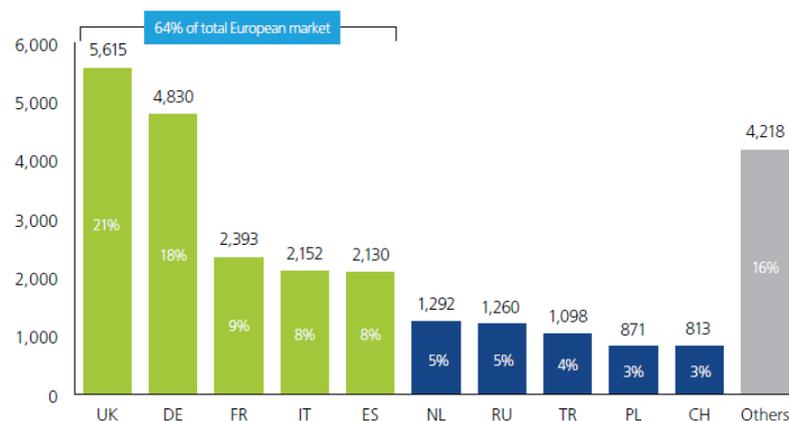


Figure 5: Top 10 European fitness markets by revenue in million EUR and share of the total European market (2015). Source: EuropeActive & Deloitte, 2016.

3.5.2 Applying the method: gathering data

Interviews are one of the most dominant methods in phenomenological research, due to the need for flexibility when the human experience is analysed (Bevan, 2014); In order to investigate and gather as many rich descriptions of the phenomena and its’ settings as possible, semi-structured in-depth interview was the chosen method to collect data.

On phenomenology's research, different approaches can be used to collect data, however the literature does not make it clear how to conceptualize or implement an interpretive study, giving generalist states such as in Giorgi (1997): "questions are generally broad and open ended so that the subject has sufficient opportunity to express his or her point of view" (Conroy, 2003; Bevan, 2014;). Few studies such as Bevan (2014) and Seidman (2006) describes how a phenomenology interview should be conducted, however both use a structured interview approach. Interviews can be applied in a structured, semi-structured, and unstructured design. The first one restricts the exploratory nature of an interpretive study, since the interviewer must follow the defined questions without any probe or additional question. In the second, the research develops the questions to have a structure and use as a guide, but has the freedom to prompt to explore any insights that may appear during the process, requiring to the participant to elaborate on their initial statement. The third one, the interviewer do not prepare any question and allows the questions to evolve during the session. However, this type of interview is very timing consuming, and might be difficult to control the range of topics that could appear (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Moreover, because gathering data with interviews is an interchange between two people with mutual interests, it is essential allow the data to emerge (Groenewald, 2004; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998;). Seeing that, to build a guide that helps to remain the interview in the topic of interest, facilitating the gathering of relevant information and analysis of the data, the author chose to use a semi-structured design. Since the researcher believes that a structured approach leaves no space to explore, not allowing the researcher to pursue topics that weren't anticipated when the interview was written (Patton, 1990). Seeing that, the researcher chose to use the interview's structure developed by Bevan (2014) adapted in a semi-structure interview approach. Hence, following a process and preserving the legitimacy and credibility, without the constrains of miss the opportunity to act and collect significant information that could appear. In the following section, the interview process is explained in detail.

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	"Tell me about becoming ill," or "Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit."
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue With Self	Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing	"Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit," or "Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis."
	Active Listening	Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions	"Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor was present at all times."

Figure 6: A structure of phenomenological interviewing. Source: Bevan, 2014.

3.5.3 Interviews

The purpose of interview with open-ended questions is to see things through someone else's perspectives and find out what is in their mind. Since researchers can't observe people's feelings, opinions, or behaviour the only way to find out about those things is asking (Patton, 1990). Seeing that, the researcher developed a semi-structure interview containing 21 open-ended questions, to gain maximum information about the phenomenon. Additionally, following Crist & Tanner (2003) 'early focus and lines of inquiry' step, after each interview, the researcher reflected about the content to direct the following interviews to provide deeper and richer understand that could be missing. Consequently, varying the length and number of querying questions from one participant to other. In total 6 formal interviews were conducted, with duration between 27 and 49 minutes, and took place at a public place like a coffee shop. Although, one interview was conducted through Facebook video call, since the participant was spending the summer abroad. All the times the place and time were easy accessed for both – researcher and interviewee. Following Bevan (2014) the questions were broken into three main domains: contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarifying the phenomenon. Also, the interview was conducted by the researcher having in mind the undertake the phenomenological reduction. The phenomenological reduction is what Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) define as naiveté and Husserl (1970)

as “bracketing”: ‘to abstain from the use of personal knowledge, setting aside of what the researcher already knows about the phenomena, becoming a perpetual beginner, and don’t take for granted any theory’.

Five questions were developed on contextualization domain, in order to give the context and meaning to the phenomenon. Trying to understand what Bevan (2014) says: “objects or experiences of the lifeworld stand out against a backdrop of context or horizon”. The second domain, apprehending the phenomenon, nine questions were developed focused on this research area, exploring in detail how people perceives microcelebrities’ sponsored content. In the third and final domain, clarifying the phenomenon, seven questions were developed using imaginative variation exploring the elements of experience while exploring the phenomenon itself. The full interview protocol can be found at the section Appendix A.

3.5.4 Pilot test

According to Turner (2010) one important element of interviews preparation is the implementation of a pilot test. The purpose to carry a prior session is to identify any problematic areas, such as limitations and flaws within the interview questions or design, and will allow the researcher to revise and adjust before starting the study. In order to test the developed questions, the researcher ran a pilot test with a participant with similar profile to those selected for the study. Named ‘Participant 00’, the same protocol was applied on following the interviews, such as probing, taking notes and recording. During the pilot session three problems were identified:

1. The length of the interview was short
2. 3 questions weren’t clear
3. A short explanation about what sponsored content is was needed during the introduction of the study

The original questionnaire had 18 open-ended questions, and after the pilot session showed to around 22 minutes and was shorter than expected. Hence, the

author added three more questions, making in total 21. Additionally, three of the questions weren't clear, making the participant ask to repeat it or giving a different answer missing the expected angle, forcing the interviewer to rephrase during probe to get the relevant information. Seeing that, the author adjusted those questions using the rephrased ones from the pilot session. Furthermore, because the participant wasn't aware of the terms such as paid post, sponsored post, or paid content, a short explanation was needed. Hence, in the following interviews during study's introduction, the author also clarified the sponsored post term. Also, instead of using the term microcelebrity, the researcher chose to use the term blogger, since it's a more common word among consumers.

3.6 Approach to data interpretation

According to Hycer (1999) the term analysis usually means a 'breaking into parts'; however, this term could have a dangerous meaning on phenomenological studies, since the method aims to investigate a phenomenon as a whole, keeping the context instead of analysing parts separately. Seeing that, despite many studies use the heading 'data analysis' for the section which explain the method of understanding the findings, because this study is using a hermeneutic phenomenological method, the author chose to use the term interpretation. Additionally, since the researcher chose to use the interpretative paradigm, is looking for depth and richness of data, hence its' e method that cannot be transformed in numerical data - a non-quantifying method.

3.6.1 Hermeneutic: an interpretative approach

Human beings interpret things all the time; from music, books or studies, the process of understanding the context and meaning is ongoing. According to Zimmermann (2015) interpretation and hermeneutic have the same meaning. The word hermeneutic comes from the ancient Greek language *hermeneuein*, that means to utter, explain, or translate. A equivalent of the term will be 'intepretari'

from Latin, that means understanding some kind of verbal or written communication (ibid).

Hermeneutics understands verbal and written communication and theorize how people may understand the world using concepts such as [pre]understanding, the hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons, and self-understanding (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Moreover, hermeneutics appears in various interpretative approaches, such as objective hermeneutic, critical hermeneutic, and phenomenological hermeneutic. This study will use the phenomenological hermeneutics, since the research intend to investigate the meaning and context of the phenomenon from the perspective of people involved.

3.6.2 Methods in hermeneutic phenomenology

According to Crist & Tanner (2003) Hermeneutic interpretative phenomenology is 'a qualitative research methodology used when the research question asks for meanings of a phenomenon with the purpose of understanding the human experience'. Despite the literature explain about the methodology, there is no clear and accepted set of conventions for analysis. Some studies will use Hycner's (1999) explicitation process, where systematic procedures are applied to identify essential features and relationship, while others will use hermeneutical spire of interpretation, including the participants as interpreters with ongoing interactions. The author chose to use the method introduced by Crist & Tanner (2003) in "Interpretation/Analysis Methods in Hermeneutic Interpretive Phenomenology", since it's a clear step-by-step guide to the interpretative process of analysis. The process is divided in five phases:

1. Early focus and lines of inquiry
2. Central concerns, exemplars, and paradigm cases
3. Shared meanings
4. Final interpretations
5. Dissemination of the interpretation

1. Early focus and lines of inquiry consist of the results from initial interpretations guide to direct the following interviews to provide deeper and richer understand that might cover missing or unclear pieces in the previous ones.
2. Central concerns, exemplars, and paradigm cases is the phase where the researcher identifies central concerns, important themes or meaning that are unfolding. Through the interpretative process, the researcher writes three-to-five-page summaries of participant's main concerns, and writing and rewriting developing the interpretation. This phase of interpretation uses more the summaries of main concerns, than whole transcripts. Transcripts will be reviewed only if reading them would assist in clarifying an emerging interpretation. As interpretations emerge, they are refined through frequent written revisions.
3. Shared meanings consist when become clear the participant's central concerns and the interpretative summary shows connection between meaning found within and across stories, or constitutive patterns.
4. Final interpretations after the three previous phases, with in-depth interpretation of excerpts and central concerns summaries, an interpretative summary is developed.
5. Dissemination of the interpretation is the phase where manuscripts reporting findings are refined, using participant's narratives and field notes. The interpretation is an unending process; however hermeneutic phenomenology research considers the final interpretation 'whether one's concern has been answered'.

3.7 Data-storing methods

Humans can be easily distracted. During an interview, no matter how attentive the interviewer is and what matter she or he use, if one word is missed the context of the answer might be different. Additionally, because the process of hermeneutic analysing data consist in interpretation and looking for patterns, if something is missing there is no substitute for this data (Patton, 1990).

To preserve veracity of the data collection, with the permission of the participants the researcher audio-recorded all sessions. Both face-to-face interviews and Facebook video call, the records were made using 'Voice Memos' app through an iPhone. During the interviews, the researcher also took notes; Patton (1990) reminds us that taking notes during the interview process is important since can help the researcher to formulate new questions while the interview moves along, also can be useful at later analysis giving context to what the participant said with their nonverbal behaviour. All the recordings were stored on the researcher personal computer and Google Drive personal account and the notes in a notebook storage at the author's house. Each interview was labelled with the date, gender, and participant number, for example, "Part02, female, 21072017". Having in mind that electronic devices can fail, the researcher double checked equipment functions and battery, making sure to have a power bank during each session (for mobile's extra battery) and an electrical outlet (for the computer). Moreover, a quiet environment was selected aiming to produce a recording as free as possible from background noise or interruptions.

Since full transcription is very timing consuming, being typically a 4:1 ratio (four hours to transcribe one-hour interview). Considering the limited time for the research, the author chose not to do full transcriptions of interviews, instead quotes, phrases, and key words were transcribed. However, to understand the process of an interpretative data analysis, the author transcribed the first interview as can be found at the Appendix B.

3.8 Sampling: Locating the research participants

Choosing the right participants is the key to understand a phenomenon; Because the respondents are a fraction of a community, consequently they can talk directly about the group per se (Babbie, 1998). Seeing that, millennials are digital natives and represent large number of users on social media. Young adults between 18 and 29 years old correspond 88% on Facebook, 59% on Instagram, 36% on Twitter, 34% on LinkedIn, and 36% on Pinterest (Pew Research Center, 2016). Seeing that, the eligible criteria was the participants must be young adults, professionals, that

use at least 2 social media channels. Since this study is focusing in the fitness and healthy lifestyle area (see more 3.5.1), those participants must follow this 'type' of microcelebrities.

Based on the researcher judgement and the phenomena that will be research, two nonprobability sampling technique were applied: purposive and snowball sampling. The recruitment started using purposive sampling, considered an important kind of non-probability sampling, the researcher identified 2 initial participants (one female and one male) that had experience the phenomenon (Welman and Kruger, 1999). The author used its own network of friends and acquaintances to selected those two initial participants. In order to trace additional participants, the researcher asked for other people recommendations. This method, known as snowballing sampling is an effective way to expand the sample through the participants, when the researcher aims to locate the target population (Patton, 2002; Patton, 1990;).

According to Boyd (2001) in qualitative studies, a number from two to ten participants are enough to achieve saturation. Additionally, for a phenomenology study Creswell (1998) recommends long interviews with up to 10 people. Hence, the author decided to interview six participants divided in 3 females and 3 males, in order to gather a good mix of both genders' information.

3.9 Research limitations

Since the data will be collected through in-depth interviews and qualitative research method have an interpretative process to analyse Its' information, the researcher notes the fact of possible bias. Seeing that, the author compromised to keep an open mind to all of type of collected data, while reinsurance the criteria of standards for veracity. It could also be argued that this research is limited, because the collected data is restricted to Ireland. However, as the author is working at the same time that the research was conducted, the researcher will collect the data sampling people only in Dublin. Additionally, due to limited to amount of time to deliver the study, the researcher had to limited the number of

participants to 6 and focus the study to one industry, since consumers that follow microcelebrities from different industries could have different perceptions, generating inconclusive findings. Furthermore, because this research only focuses on English speaking customers, since is the required language to submit the study. However, a future study can be conduct in other countries or even with specific nationalities in order to compare results.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical concerns will emerge when a research involves human beings. According to Saunders *et al.* (2009) ethics refers to ‘the appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it’. Moreover, research ethics involves designing the whole process of a research in a moral and responsible way. Seeing that, in order to deliver an ethical researcher, the author followed the National College of Ireland’s guide ‘*Ethical Guidelines and Procedure for Research involving Human Participants*’ and its main three principles: respect for person, beneficence and non-maleficence, and justice.

The first one, prior to the interview, each participant received and signed two copies of written informed consent. The researcher assured that each participant was fully aware of the requirements involved in participation. One copy stayed with the researcher and the second with the participant. The author chose to use Trinity College Dublin’s consent template¹; According to the institution: “the form was designed primarily for those doing qualitative interviews with adults from non-vulnerable populations and dealing with non-sensitive topics”.

The second, because the research do not use any vulnerable groups, any potential risk to the participants were distress. The third, the author made clear to participants the way and reason they were selected to the study. Furthermore, the author also applied the ethics suggestions of Collis & Hussey (2009) using

¹ Available at: <https://www.tcd.ie/swsp/assets/pdf/Participant%20consent%20form%20template.pdf>. Last accessed: 18/07/2017.

voluntary participation in the research sampling, also anonymity and confidentiality using coded labels on the recordings and transcriptions.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter outline the process of research design and the choices the author made to conduct the study. As shown at chapter 2 the importance of microcelebrities had grown, hence, many studies were conducted by investigating this phenomenon. However, just few of them was about their followers – people who the brands want to reach and engage – and all of them chose to use quantitative approach. Due to the gap of literature focused on the follower/consumer, this study aims to explores consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrity, their content, when they associate with brands, and shopping intention.

Following 'the onion' layers proposed by Saunders *et al.* (2009) to guide the research, this study sympathise with the interpretivism philosophy, using an inductive approach and a qualitative strategy. Since this study aim to comprehend the meaning and embodied experiences of consumers towards a phenomenon, phenomenology was chosen as an appropriate methodology. The author is using a mono method to collect data, and the gathering was conducted through semi-structured interviews adapting from Bevan (2014) interview method. Additionally, the data interpretation was executed following the step-by-step guide divided in five phases developed by Crist & Tanner (2003). Using two methods of sampling in Dublin, two initial participants (1 female and 1 male) between 18 and 29 years were purposive selected, the other four interviewees were reached though snowballing.

Furthermore, the research limitations were described, such as time limitation and one specific industry. Also, the data generate by those participants were storage respecting all the ethical considerations of privacy and anonymity, and each participant receive a copy of the consent form. The next chapter will introduce the findings of data interpretation.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to explore in detail the findings obtained from the data gathering during the interviews, as explained in Chapter 3.

Using steps two and three of the guide “Interpretation/Analysis Methods in Hermeneutic Interpretive Phenomenology” developed by Crist & Tanner (2003), the author created to each interview a ‘concerns summary’ in order to identify central concerns and important themes. Then, the researcher identified the connection between within and across stories, developing constitutive patterns resulting in the findings described in this section.

4.2 Objective 1: Explore consumer’s perceptions towards microcelebrities

4.2.1 Microcelebrity as a profession

During the interviews was clear the participants have the knowledge of being a microcelebrity is a profession. Participant 2 mentioned during the interview he could tell when it’s a professional or a hobby microcelebrities’ profile. Hence, 5 of 6 of them don’t show a negative attitude when those influential users partnering with brands or produce sponsored content.

“I don’t have any problem them [microcelebrity] making money from blogging. It’s a good profession, fun profession, and I consider as a profession because when you have to give so much time and preparation as well, you’re a content creator for other people. So, I do find fair enough make money from it.” Participant 5

“I think is fair enough, when I’m scrolling their pages [profiles] I realize that’s their lifestyle and work, and they have to live from something.” Participant 1

Most of them have a positive attitude towards it if the brand matches with the microcelebrity personality, since is a way for them keep producing their content.

“That’s [sponsored content] related to them, that’s good to them, that’s what will bring them money and keep them doing what they’re doing.” Participant 4

However, despite the participants having a clear idea being a microcelebrity is a new type of profession, they still want those influential users to maintain the 'reality' aspect – sharing their life and continuing to behave as 'real' people to become a brand. What the Participant 3 defined as 'human side'.

"If they are posting about their life, your life is not made of these things [brands]. Is anything 'natural' happening or is only hosting brands and show your clothes and sunglasses just to show off. How natural is that?" Participant 04

"Behind of that [profile] you have a life. And sometimes these kind of people [microcelebrity] just live for this [showing a 'perfect self']. (...) Sometimes I think that's too much, because you've to have a limit of what you show to your followers." Participant 2

"It's a thin line between be real or obsessive and forgetting about real life. It's all about the look, and you need to be amazing in pictures" Participant 6

On the other hand, one of the participants, because of the bad experiences trusting microcelebrities tips that went wrong, or didn't achieve the promised result, believes being a healthy lifestyle/fitness microcelebrity should be restrict to professionals.

"People who are not qualified and don't have formal education are teaching girls. (...) they're transforming the industry in life." Participant 3

4.2.2. Consumer's identification

All the participants mentioned that following bloggers that they can identify or relate to. Overall, they would follow same gender microcelebrities and would be inspired by them, because they see those influential users as a goal to be achieved.

"I follow mostly girls, because we've the same interests and I can relate to them." Participant 3

"The other one [microcelebrity] I just saw a picture of him and he was very ripped and I thought: I want to be like him." Participant 1

However, the participants would follow the opposite gender to gather relevant information, using those microcelebrities as a source of tips as recommendation, more than inspirational or motivational. Participant 4 said during the interview that she subscribed on YouTube channel 'Panelaço' leading buy a male blogger [João Gordo] because he does vegan recipes while interviewing people from the music industry – two of her interests. Same is shown in the quote bellow of participant 1.

"I follow them just on Instagram, the girl I mentioned before [Sascha Barboza] is more about eating properly. She's more like a nutritionist than goes to the gym. The other guy is more muscular and works to me as a motivation to go to gym."

Participant 1

4.2.3 Free specialized content

Another recurrent topic during the interviews were how participants could get free and specialized information through microcelebrities. Participant 6 said microcelebrities help him to 'be updated and reading more'. Additionally, participants see their content as something helpful, because they can access 'professional' tips without spending money going to professionals.

"I believe is a great way of being motivated. It's very informative and encouraging. It's fantastic!" Participant 6

"They help you a lot if you want to know how to do an exercise... or if you don't know about something they will help you with their content. And you don't have to spend money with a personal trainer or anything like that." Participant 2

"Those bloggers still make money with that [their account or page], but they also share a lot of free information, being very helpful." Participant 5

Hence, when a microcelebrity stop giving free content, creating paid memberships in their websites or releasing e-books, the participants start to have a negative attitude towards them.

“A lot of them [microcelebrities] are bullshit. They are there just to make money. You see this kind of guys posting ‘Do you want to get fit? I’ve trained for four years and study this for another ten years and I have the perfect miracle way to make you lose weight’ and they don’t give you anything until you sign up or pay for something.” Participant 5

4.2.4 Validation

All the participants mentioned they trust microcelebrities content because they’re specialized. A validation through a formal education or technical language gives the participants a sense that those influential users know what they’re talking about. Participant 3, despite saying she is very sceptical about microcelebrities in general, trusts one of them because she’s a doctor. More examples of this perception can be read in the quotes below.

“The nutritionist, every time she posts about something she would describe how much carbs [carbohydrates] and fat [the product] have. She speaks technically, and then you can tell she knows about it, the nutrition [facts]. Also, she wrote a book. The other guy he posts his body’s pictures, sometimes he posts his recipes pictures and he would say just how he made it, like one egg with a slice of bread. He wouldn’t speak about nutrition, so you can tell he doesn’t know as much as the other lady [Sascha].” Participant 1

“One of the girls I follow she’s an athlete and she’s sharing her lifestyle.” Participant 4

Additionally, two of the participants mentioned during the interview that one of the reasons they trust microcelebrities content is because of the number of followers. If so many people are following the same person, that proves they’re trustworthy. Because if they weren’t, they wouldn’t have this amount of people following and interacting with them.

“Somehow I trust what they [microcelebrity] says because if so many people are following them there is a reason.” Participant 2

4.2.5 Consistency builds trust

Four of the six participants highlight the importance of microcelebrities being consistent with their content and image. When those influential users are consistent about their preferences and beliefs, the participants tend to consider them trustworthy, hence strengthening their bond.

“I wouldn’t follow someone just because one post, the profile must to show that consistency. So, if I go through it and realize is not what I want I don’t follow them.”

Participant 4

“Definitely she would make sure about it, because of her personality and she wrote nutrition books, [that’s why] she wouldn’t put something that don’t benefit her audience, even if she would get paid for it.” Participant 1

“The trust come from what they’re [microcelebrities] are saying when they’re not being paid for it. And reading their content you can identify what they support or recommend” Participant 5

4.2.6 Ethics

Another concern that all the participants demonstrate was about the ethics involving bloggers. Through their content they can influence a lot of users. Participant 5 mentioned her problem with sponsored content is when is being done unethically, when they’re not honest about the quality or effects of what they’re advertising.

“They have to be aware they can have a very positive impact in someone’s life. But they also must be responsible to get people know they need guidance from someone, it’s not just repeat what they [microcelebrities] are doing it.” Participant

4

Moreover, concern about microcelebrities influences on consumer’s self-esteem and mental health also was considered by all the participants. Participant 2 mentioned she tries to follow more real people, because it’s a way of avoiding feeling worst in a bad day *“they make me feel like I’m not doing enough”*.

"I was talking about it a week ago with a friend, because he's following a guy and is becoming a problem because him and everybody gets obsess getting the perfect shape [physical condition]. (...). It's muscular guys posting how their life is perfect with their perfect body and I think is definitely more obsession than healthy."

Participant 1

"That might cause depression in some people and frustration, because you look those pictures and you would love to be like them. But in fairness, you've to understand this is unachievable sometimes." Participant 6

4.3 Objective II: Investigate consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities sponsored content

4.3.1 Differentiation knowledge

Overall, 5 of the 6 interviewed said they could differentiate between a sponsored content from an editorial content. They believe they could tell straight away when they look at the post.

"I know when a brand is too much in your face. For example, Sascha Fitness she does a lot of advertisement for whey protein [brands] and she will tell 'oh look I got my new protein' and after tell the benefits" Participant 5

"Absolutely, you can tell straight away from the way there is a big logo or if they're being too enthusiastic about something, that's how I can tell they're being paid for it." Participant 6

In contrast, Participant 1 says he can't differentiate a sponsored from an editorial content:

"One of the guys I follow, he's profile [Instagram account] is around to his website. The way they live, it's like they're their company...and actually I can't even tell when they post advertisement or things like that."

Moreover, Participant 5 says not all the posts that contain brands are necessarily sponsored content.

“She would also show herself [microcelebrity] doing her grocery shopping and she would show all the brands that are there, and I’m sure most of them are not paying her. If there is any paying here would be just a few.”

4.3.2 Attitudes towards sponsored content

The majority of the participants do not show any negative attitude towards microcelebrities’ sponsored content. As mentioned at section 4.2.1, 5 of 6 of them understand being a microcelebrity is a profession and posting sponsored content is a way to make profit and keep developing content. However, 5 of the participants mentioned to trust more editorial than paid content, even if the microcelebrity demonstrates consistency and a professional profile.

“I would trust more their own [microcelebrity] content. Because I wouldn’t know if they really believe that or they are just doing for the money.” Participant 4

“I think most of the time they don’t advertise what they don’t believe, but might happen if they need the money.” Participant 6

Additionally, 3 of the 6 participants demonstrate to like advertises when they considered relevant. Participant 1 said he likes when the microcelebrity incorporate the brand or product in the context of the post.

“I like paid content when is helpful and relevant.” Participant 5

In contrast, the ideal frequency of sponsored posts divided the participants. Participants 5 and 6 believes the ideal proportion would be 80% of the content editorial and 20% paid, since they’re there for their opinions, not to see advertisement. Participants 1 and 4 says a proportion of 60% editorial content and 40% paid would be fair with followers and microcelebrities. Participant 2 likes the way microcelebrities are doing, and Participant 3 believes no sponsored content should be allowed in social media.

“I think if they do more frequent than we realize, and if was a very exaggerated frequency would mean they’re not producing useful content anymore, will be only advertisement”. Participant 5

“If is purely advertisement and if is not adding anything, then it becomes boring”

Participant 6

Moreover, Participant 3 showed to have strong negative feelings towards any type of sponsored content, because of her past experiences. However, she considers less worse when the advertise is about some brand or product the microcelebrity always used or a trustworthy brand. Value by association is described on the section 4.4.3.

4.3.3 Lack of recall

Despite participants claim they can differentiate paid from editorial content, all of them showed a low level of recall about paid content. Two participants were able to describe a paid content that they liked, and only one could describe a sponsored ad he disliked. All the others couldn't remember any. On the other hand, Participant 2 could remember brands that he saw in sponsored contents, but couldn't recall what the post was about. The quotes bellow are from those two participants that could remember; The first is about a sponsored content which the participant liked, and the second is an example of content which the participant disliked.

“Yes, My protein [online sports nutrition brand]. It's a brand a guy posted it and I also saw people in the gym wearing the t-shirt.” Participant 1

“I don't remember exactly the girl, but was in Instagram stories and she was like 'look that phone' or maybe was a bag... but she was 'look at this' from some brand and using a lot of hashtags at the same time. Was a little bit too much the way she was doing it.” Participant 4

4.3.4 Avoiding advertisement

Avoiding advertise seems to be a common practice among the participants. 4 of them preferred to not receive or read any type of advertisement in social media

channels. Participant 5 says she prefers all online advertisements would be restricted to Google, and they only could impact you when you did a search.

"I prefer a world where you can choose what [advertisement] you want and when you want it" Participant 5

"I don't like them, I hate it. But I scroll off and don't pay much attention."
Participant 1

However, two participants said they like the way brands advertises nowadays. Also, they think is a useful way to keep them updated with the latest products. Although, both agree if the content is not relevant they just scroll down, having the same behaviour of the rest of the group.

"If I really like the ad [paid content] I'll click on it and read more". Participant 2

4.4 Objective III: Understand consumer's perception towards microcelebrities and brands association

4.4.1 Brands and microcelebrities association process

All the participants believe the brand reach the microcelebrities, not the other way around. During the interviews, was clear the participant perceives the collaboration as a marketing transaction, and all of them consider money as one of the factors that microcelebrities evaluate before agreeing with a collaboration. Participant 6 says when those bloggers start they goes for the money, but when they're more established they evaluate with higher criteria. Another factor of decision mentioned by the participants was the prestige of the brand.

"I think they chose the one who pays more. The first one [company] that comes and offer more money will be the one they pick." Participant 1

"They evaluate if the product is new or if is a big brand" Participant 2

However, all the participants also agree some microcelebrities wouldn't advertise and associate with brands or products they don't believe.

“The nutritionist I mentioned before [Sascha] wouldn’t post a brand just for the money. Definitely she would look the nutrition facts and ingredients, and she would make sure is a good brand and then she would post it.” Participant 1

4.4.2 Increasing identification

By unanimity, the participants agree they feel a stronger connection with microcelebrities when they associate with brands which the participants already like. Seeing that person, which some way they admire and follow, having the same interest as them. This creates a bond and a validation of their option to choose to follow those specific influencers.

“Would be a good association, because is a brand I already like with a blogger that I also like.” Participant 5

“I would be very excited, because it’s a brand that I like and I follow this person [microcelebrity], that’s really nice. Would make me feel better about the person I’m following, and that would make sense” Participant 4

Additionally, all participants agree they wouldn’t change their attitude towards a microcelebrity if they post a sponsored content about a brand they dislike. Instead to see the difference between their preferences and the microcelebrity, the participants consider this type of situation as Participant 2 define as ‘a marketing transaction’. All of them would have the same neutral attitude: scroll down.

In contrast, a change of attitude might happen if the participant perceives if their and microcelebrities’ interests and opinions are not the same.

“Only if the blogger started to advertise a massive number of brands that I dislike, then I would change my mind towards her. Because I wouldn’t relate to this person anymore” Participant 5

4.4.3 Perceptions towards association

When a partnering between a brand and a microcelebrity is made 5 of 6 participants agree it might have positive or negative influence for both.

"I think would bring more credibility to them [microcelebrities] because I don't think a brand would want to see their product in someone who has no credibility. So, I think would bring credibility to the person and to the brand." Participant 4

"Cool. I knew it [product/brand] was good, it's kind like reassuring." Participant 6

Using microcelebrities as a medium to advertise can be a way to validate their product or brands to users through a trustworthy source.

"I wouldn't think about it, but now you're saying, in my mind it would have an effect on me, in a positive way. I'd say [to myself] that brand is really good. I know unconsciously I would, like a confirmation that a brand I use [is good]." Participant 1

"I don't believe a brand would associate with someone with no credibility." Participant 4

In contrast 5 of 6 participants said they don't have a negative attitude when a brand they disliked is advertised. All the 5 participants said they 'don't mind' or 'don't bother' and Participant 2 explained wouldn't affect his opinion because is a marketing transaction and other people might like it.

"I don't bother... I just scroll" Participant 5

"It's a marketing thing, and sometimes they'll post things that you don't like but you've other people that might like" Participant 2

The other way could also being perceive, when a well-known brand transmit their credibility to microcelebrities. Participant 3 shown a negative perception towards any sponsored content, however she mentioned she would trust it more if the collaboration was with a reliable brand.

4.5 Objective IV: Examine consumer's purchase intention towards microcelebrities' sponsored content

4.5.1 Purchase intention

All the participants mentioned that they would consider buying a product advertised by a microcelebrity. They considered the content as a recommendation.

"Yes... why not? It's a way to find something that you're looking for." Participant 2

"I might believe her [microcelebrity], doesn't mean I would buy straight away, but I'll have in mind if I see it again, and I would try it out." Participant 5

4.5.2 Evaluation process

Despite participants' considering buying a product that was advertised, they still execute the purchase evaluation process. Considering factors as need, price, and other brand's similar products.

"I read what they are saying and then I'll go check in other websites (...) I wouldn't follow straight away what they're saying." Participant 2

"If I do some research and if I see that they're useful, supplements and stuff, I would check the price and if I can afford, I would buy it." Participant 6

Other factor that might have influence on the evaluation process is other users WOM.

"I always check what other people said. (...) if in the comments [section] 99% of people are saying 'no, that's shit, they don't deliver on time' or 'they wouldn't last', then I wouldn't go for them [product/brand]." Participant 4

4.5.3 Credible sources value

The participants' considerer microcelebrities as a credible source. Seeing that, the participants would consider their recommendations.

“I just got into the trap of following one that I loved and she was tagging all these people and I start following them” Participant 2

Additionally, because of the bond of trust build between followers and microcelebrity, two of the participants considered to research more about a brand they had a bad experience with and possible change their mind if the microcelebrity published a positive review.

“If is something that create a very good impression and if catch me somehow, I’d probably go do a research and I might considerer the brand again.” Participant 4

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter describes the findings gathering through interviews. Divided in the four study’s objectives, the author used the guide developed by Crist & Tanner (2003) in order to identify the participants’ main concern and finding patterns and meaning across the stories.

Exploring the participants’ perception towards microcelebrities, the findings show consumers have a clear idea of being a microcelebrity is a profession, hence they don’t develop a negative attitude towards sponsored content. Because that’s the way to those professionals make profit and keep producing. Also, consumers tend to follow those microcelebrities they relate to, seeking for specialized free content, motivation, and inspiration. They also prefer those users with consistent content and image. Additionally, microcelebrities with formal education and technical knowledge about the subject they blog, creates a sensation of professional trust among users. Consequently, increasing the bond of trust.

Look into participant’s perceptions towards sponsored content, 5 of 6 of them claims to differentiate between and editorial and paid content. Only one said because the practice became more common is hard to tell the difference. In contrast, even the participants claim can tell the difference between the contents, only 2 of 6 could recall a sponsored content. Additionally, despite the consumers do not have a negative perception towards sponsored content, they tend to trust

more editorial ones. Moreover, 3 of 6 prefer when the paid content is relevant and is inserted in the post context. On the other hand, the participants were divided about an ideal frequency of sponsored content, varying from 80%-20% proportion to no sponsored content at all.

Additionally, all the participants see the collaboration between a brand and microcelebrity as a transaction, that usually the brands reach out to the blogger, not the other way around. They also believe money is one of the main factors for microcelebrities evaluate which brand to associate with, but they also evaluate the product quality and respect their preferences, not sponsoring something they don't trust. Moreover, all the interviewee feels a stronger connection when microcelebrities advertise brands they also like, and disregards when is a brand they disliked. Moreover, 2 participants claimed they might consider a disliked brand again, if the microcelebrity does a positive review. Showing the influence of association to both parts – brands and bloggers. Furthermore, all the interviewee would consider to purchasing a brand or a product that a microcelebrity advertised, yet they still evaluate factors such as price and need, before accomplishing it.

The following chapter will discuss the findings in a greater detail and will elaborate some conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion of findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the findings explored in the previous chapter, focusing in interpret and relate to previous researches on the topic. This section will be structured based on the objectives described in chapter 3.

5.2 Objective 1: Explore consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities

According to the collected data, the consumers have a clear image that being a microcelebrity is a new type of profession. And as every profession, a payment must be provided. Hence, they don't show any negative attitude when those users profit through their page/account. This consumer's knowledge matches with the definition coined by Senft (2001), where the researcher define microcelebrities as a collection of practices on social media, where users consider to be their own product or company. On the other hand, even consumers understand the professional aspect of being a microcelebrity, they still claim for maintaining the natural aspect in their content. Keeping their 'human side' and not becoming fully a self-brand. This 'request' of consumers can be explained by the identification process, where people tend to compare themselves with their peers (Taylor & Strutton, 2016). The respondents said they tend to follow microcelebrities they can relate to or as a 'goal to be achieved'; consequently, if they can't identify with them anymore, they would lose the interest. Hence, more the customer become familiar with the source, a higher credibility is perceived (Sweester *et al.*, 2008)

Additionally, according to the findings, another main reason to consumers follow microcelebrities is to access relevant information. Since they tend to see those users as someone specialized in certain area, have a formal education or technical language, consequently the respondents consider those influential users as a free source of creditworthy recommendations. This is reinforced in the literature by Ballentine & Yeung (2014) who says expertise and trustworthiness are two main factors that contributes to credibility. As well as Djafarova & Rushworth (2016) highlights another factor that contributes to consumers to perceive

microcelebrities as attractive and trusted source of information is their large number of followers. This factor was pointed by two of the respondents, saying people wouldn't follow them if they weren't authentic. Moreover, during interviews microcelebrities' consistency appeared as a key factor for build trust and straightening follower and microcelebrity relationship. They must remain honest to their preferences and believes, curating and controlling consistently their content, to keep their popularity and followers (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

In contrast, another consumer's concern that appear in all interviews, was the ethics involving blogging. The participants recognize the influence those microcelebrities might have on users, such as self-esteem and mental health. This is pointed in the literature by Taylor & Strutton (2016) where this shared 'always perfect' life may increase envy and lower life satisfaction, creating an anxiety and a failure sensation to those who doesn't fit. Also, another main concern is about the quality and effects of products microcelebrities are advertising, and participants agree on the importance of those influential being responsible about their content.

5.3 Objective II: Investigate consumer's perceptions towards microcelebrities sponsored content

As seen in the previous section, since microcelebrities are considered a specialized source, they work as a recommendation system, which social advertising takes advantage of. 5 of 6 participants claim they can automatically differentiate a sponsored from an editorial content. However, in the literature Milne *et al.* (2009) claims since social media channels changes its features often, might be hard to consumers to identify all marketing tactics. Creating the need for regulations to ensure consumers won't be misled. In this point the literature might be right, since brands advertising are not always clear, for example when a participant mentioned that all the posts which contain brands are necessarily sponsored, giving a grocery's shopping example. However, big groups as Procter & Gamble have more than 60 different brands in their portfolio, so bloggers could be

advertising different brands from a same group, making harder to consumer make the connection (P&G, 2017).

Moreover, in the findings since microcelebrities demonstrate consistency and being trustworthy, participants do not demonstrate a negative attitude towards sponsored content. 50% of them said they like the sponsored post when is considered relevant and inserted in the content context. This contrast the statement of Bolton *et al.* (2013) and Kelly *et al.* (2010) whose claim those young consumers seem to actively avoid ads. On the other hand, corroborates Hwang & Jeong (2016) and Lu *et al.* (2014) results, that says consumers don't have a negative attitude towards microcelebrities receiving monetary compensation and tend to have a positive attitude towards sponsored content when they believe the source is unbiased, credible, and honest about the sponsorship. In contrast, the ideal frequency of sponsored posts divided participants; varying from 80% editorial-20% paid to no sponsored content at all. Also, even consumers don't hold a negative attitude, 5 of 6 participants said they trust more editorial content than sponsored ones, mentioned they couldn't fully trust if the opinion is authentic or was just because of the payment. This perception is explained in the literature by Petty & Andrews (2008), where consumers might consider more credible those microcelebrities that receive indirect compensations (e.g. free samples) than those who received cash.

In addition, avoiding advertisement is a common practice among participants. 4 of 6 of the respondents would prefer not being impacted by any type of advertisement in social media. Restricting those ads to Google, where they could active search for something and the advertise would be relate to it. Creating the need for ads-on-demand. This might be the reason that companies chose to make covert advertisement. Since consumers are less likely to accept the message when they know is a brand behind (Liljander *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, one of the findings of this research is not considered in the literature; participants' lack of recall towards sponsored content. Only 2 of 6 respondents could describe a sponsored content they liked, and only one of them could describe a disliked sponsored content. The author believes maybe this low level of recall is due to

most of the times paid content is inserted in the post context or in a very subtle way – as explored on chapter 2, section 2.5. Thus, this might create a similar effect as product placement in movies, where consumers are distracted and absorb the information in an unconscious way.

5.4 Objective III: Understand consumer's perception towards microcelebrities and brands association

A successful association between brands and microcelebrities is when both have a similar interest and 'personality'. 5 of 6 respondents agreed a partnering like this might affect both sides positively or negatively. Also, in this research findings the participants transfer the sense of credibility from brand to microcelebrity and the other way around. For example, if the consumer has previous knowledge of the brand, the content will have a positive impact, reassuring both brand and microcelebrity. In contrast, 5 of 6 respondents said if a microcelebrity they follow associate with a brand they disliked, it wouldn't affect their opinions towards the influential user, since all the participants considers this partnership as a marketing transaction. This is a very incongruous finding, since apparently the consumers tend only to considerer positive experiences and ignore the negative ones. Despite Jain & Roy (2015) considerer a wrong match-up could result in a negative meaning transfer, the author believes this consumer behaviour could be explained by the postmodern theory, where consumers tend to create their own reality ignoring what displease them (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In addition, all the participants believe the brands is the one reaching those microcelebrities. They claim those influential users evaluate the brand's proposal analysing the brand, product, and money. However, 4 of 6 claimed somethings microcelebrities would do the sponsorship only by the amount of money. If is noticeable, this might have a negative effect on both parts. These findings corroborate Colliander & Dahlén (2011), where the researchers claim as long as a microcelebrity genuinely follows and believes the brand, consumers will read as an honest content. Hence, they might form a friendship with the sponsored brand,

increasing its awareness and trust (Boateng & Okoe, 2015). Furthermore, another point is the participants seem to recall more about the type of products advertised than brands, explaining what Ilicic & Webster (2004) define as 'eclipsing the brand'.

5.5 Objective IV: Examine consumer's purchase intention towards microcelebrities' sponsored content

By unanimity, all the respondents said they would consider buying a product advertised by a microcelebrity. This finding is related to Chiang & Hsieh (2011) study, that says since consumers must choose between numerous different products, they take in consideration the experience of others. As explained in the section 5.2, due microcelebrities are considered experts and opinion leaders, they have a great influence on consumer's purchase evaluation and shopping intention (Wu & Lee, 2012).

Thus, despite the participants consider buying a sponsored product, all of them still execute the first steps of purchase evaluation process; which involves searching, selecting, and purchasing (Solomon *et al.*, 2016). In their responses, all the participants highlighted the importance of an existent need for the product, and the search for similar ones to evaluate price. This behaviour matches what Ho *et al.* (2014) define as 'information search'. Additionally, in the evaluation process the participants also access their previous experiences and knowledge about the brand. This finding helps to give a deeper comprehension of the purchase process to quantitative studies such as Lu *et al.* (2014), that analysed consumer purchase intention.

In contrast, since the trustworthy relationship between microcelebrities and followers, 2 of 6 participants said they would consider searching more about a brand and perhaps change their mind about a brand they had a previous bad experience, if the blogger published a positive review. In the literature, this finding is explained by when a microcelebrity is perceived as an independent writer and a

credible source, there is a greater likelihood for consumers treating them more as a friend rather than a professional (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015; Lu *et al.*, 2014;).

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter connected the findings from chapter 4 with the current literature, exploring the similarities and differences of findings. All the four sections the findings were explained in detail and the author found support of previous views held by academics, consequently backing this research findings in most of the cases. Additionally, the collected data has successfully supported the research objectives, thus the aim for this research was achieved. On the other hand, one more gap in the literature was found. In this study findings' the majority of the participants tend not recall about sponsored post they disliked, creating this lack of memory about the content itself and the brand.

Furthermore, in this chapter became clear the power of influence those influential users exercise on consumers, making them even reconsidered their opinions about a personal bad experience on account of a microcelebrity positive review.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

One of the major purposes of marketers is understanding customers to deliver satisfaction; As a different way to approach consumers, they started using microcelebrities as a medium to deliver a brand's message. Consequently, those influential users have become an important tool of the promotional mix, being a vehicle to delivery credible information. Since consumers are human beings and they tend to have unique responses, a deeper understanding about their perceptions were needed. Using the current literature, the author was able to trace what is known about the consumer perceptions towards microcelebrities and sponsored content, and draw what important information were missing.

With the collected data, this study provided an overview about consumers perceptions, while filled some of the gaps left by past studies. Became clear to the author even past studies of the literature are using a quantitative methodology they still got answers about what they have expected. However, a deeper understatement about the phenomenon was missing, and this could be covered with the qualitative methodology applied in this study. For example, when Lu *et al.* (2014) claims microcelebrities influences consumer's purchase intention, in this research's finding corroborate their results, while explain how their influence affects the consumer, giving extra dimensions for the problem highlighting factors such as the purchase evaluation process and the credible source value (see in 4.5.2 & 4.5.3). Another contribution of this study is the final statement of consumers have the knowledge of microcelebrities being a profession. This finding demonstrates how the web 2.0 evolution is affecting our perceptions about society and professions. Because of this influence consumers are becoming savvier and their comprehension about brands and microcelebrities collaboration is increasing. On the other hand, because consumers are aware about these changes, concern about privacy and influence on self-esteem was mentioned by all participants. This is a good indicator of people are becoming more responsible about their online activities, not differentiating their online and offline persona. Consequently, the author believes this new knowledge about the internet influencing positively and negatively, might result in the internet becoming a

better environment, decreasing pejorative comments and negative behaviour by users, and claiming more responsible content and advertising by brands and microcelebrities. Additionally, through this study's findings analysis, the researcher found a new gap in the literature, the consumer's lack of recall about sponsored content. Even the participants claim to know the different between sponsored and editorial content the majority couldn't describe any. This finding might contribute for future studies, encouraging researches to explain why the phenomenon occur.

Also, this study answered the four-main research problem proposed at chapter 3. In the objective I, the findings helped giving a panorama about consumers perceptions towards microcelebrities, and presented important angles such as validation through expertise, what encourages consumers are when they follow a microcelebrity, and their preferences of editorial and sponsored content. Covering objective II, the findings contribute to clarify if consumer have the knowledge to differentiate an editorial from sponsored content, what their perceptions and attitudes towards this manoeuvre, and where or how they would prefer to be impacted by these ads. Answering objective III, this study also adds to literature information about consumer's perceptions towards brands and microcelebrities association, corroborating some findings in past studies and presenting new ones, such as consumers ignoring when they dislike the content or brand, having no negative perceptions towards any of the parts. This finding is contrary to past literature that claims the existence of negative effects towards sponsored content (Liljander *et al.*, 2014; Milne *et al.*, 2009;) The author believes that is consequence of a shift on consumer's mindset, where they are aware of microcelebrity have to profit to keep producing, then they are aware sponsored content is 'the price to pay' to having access to their content. This support the theory seen in Consumer Behaviour module, where explained customer value is the perceived benefits minus perceived sacrifice. Finally, answering the need to examine in detail consumer's shopping intention of objective IV, the findings meets the literature saying microcelebrities directly influence on consumers shopping intentions, however consumers still considered the purchase evaluation process. Also,

consumers demonstrated an acceptance to reconsidered brands they disliked if a microcelebrity post a positive review. This might be a good area to future studies, trying to understand the influence of those users on changing consumer's opinions about brands they had have a bad experience.

Moreover, through the research process, the author learnt about the research process and how many different parts constitute a dissertation. At first sight, might be easy to identify a research problem and handle a proposal, however only through the process of analysing past studies and cross all the relevant information that you can start thinking about what your study will be about. Also, important decisions must be made all the time, from research philosophy to methods to collect data, and each of these steps influence the dissertation in some point. Many unfamiliar terms and process to a beginner might being scary, but the author believe using a structurer as the onion and the guidance of a supervisor is the key to keep on the right path. The literature review was the first step for this research, back then the author could relate each section to modules seen in the master's course. Knowledge gathered through modules such as 'Integrated Marketing Communication', 'Contemporary Consumer Behaviour', and 'Postmodern Marketing' helped the author to draw the scenario for this research, explaining how the advances of technology impacts markets and peoples' lives. Also, the selected topic was a good way to put in context everything the author learnt and discussed during classes, while gathered interesting information about an intriguing phenomenon such as microcelebrities.

Additionally, few limitations affect this study. The first one was due to limited time to deliver this dissertation, also because the author was working at the same time, the researcher had to be narrow to one industry to delivery conclusive findings. Because the internet is a vast environment, this restricted the results to one type of microcelebrity, not including other areas such as fashion and entertainment. Seeing that, the author is aware that a bigger research with a large sampling could effectively give a better panorama of the microcelebrities phenomenon. Furthermore, the overall results of this study might help some future researches to frame their research question, providing relevant findings to support a deeper

and detailed investigation. This study also could be useful to marketers, since provides a detailed report about consumers perceptions and reactions towards sponsored content, giving relevant information about brand association and how consumers prefer to be impacted by ads. These are important information that might contribute during the definition of a social media strategy. In addition, this research might also be important to microcelebrities, helping them to understand their user's perceptions, expectations, and attitudes. Thus, making those influential users rethink about association strategies, and sponsored or editorial content frequency.

6.1 Future researches

Being a qualitative study, the author is aware about the difficulties of reproduction. However, what can see as a weakness of the process is also what make a qualitative study relevant, since this type of research bring rich information and contributes to give context and meaning to a phenomenon. Additionally, since consumer's perceptions and opinions is something that change from generation, culture, location, and etc. this research could be applied to different demographics in order to get different perspectives about the same phenomenon. Also, because this research focused only in one area, in future researches the author suggest different areas could be analysed. The ideal research would be a bigger study with more participants, hence englobing all types of microcelebrities and producing a general view. This type of study would help to give a rich comprehension about the phenomenon and consumer's point of view. The author believes to this type of study, a qualitative approach is the best methodology to be applied. However, if a researcher wants to explore one specific aspect of the phenomenon, the author suggests using the data gathered by those previous qualitative studies as background, and apply a quantitative methodology, since the sampling would be larger, hence giving a better panorama. Furthermore, a new gap in the literature appeared during this research, this give a new opportunity to researches to explore the phenomena.

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Appendix

A. Interview protocol

Before you start it, check if the app is working and give a brief introduction about the research and explain sponsored content term.

SECTION 01 – CONTEXTUALIZATION

1 - Tell me about your experiences when you started to use internet.

Probe about age, location, and propose.

2 - Which social media you had at the start?

2.1 - Which ones you have now?

3- What you like in today's social media?

3.1 - What you dislike in today's social media?

4 - Can you describe your usage of social media during a day?

Ask about the routine, if it is different during week or weekends, and channels.

5 - Tell me about your interest in a healthy lifestyle and being fitness

Probe about when it started and current level of importance.

6 - Can you tell me your opinion about healthy lifestyle/fitness bloggers?

Here you've to get as much of general information as you can, from bloggers as a person, content, different medias, etc. Make the participant talk his/her perception as much as possible.

SECTION 02 – APPREHENDING THE PHENOMENON

In this specific section try to be attentive to details and body language. Probe as much as you can and go after any interesting angle.

7 - Can you tell me a little bit about the bloggers you follow, if any?

8 - What encouraged you to follow them (bloggers)?

9 - How do you perceive when those bloggers do a post sponsored by a brand?

10 - What your level of trust towards those sponsored posts?

11 - Can you describe a sponsored post that you liked, if any?

Ask what make her/him like it, ask their impressions about the brand, and the association with blogger.

12 - Can you describe a sponsored post that you disliked, if any?

Same probing from previous question, and try to understand the influence on the participant attitude.

13 - How often you search/ or considerer to try products/ or brands that a blogger you follow advertised?

14 - How often do you talk with your friends about those bloggers or their posts?

SECTION 03 – CLARIFYING THE PHENOMENON

15 - Would you consider purchasing a product that a blogger you follow has suggested?

More than yes or know, try to understand why.

16 - What would be your reaction if the post is sponsored by a brand/ product you like?

Ask for examples.

17 - What would be your reaction if the content is sponsored by a brand/ product you dislike?

Ask about the consequences towards the blogger and pay attention on body language to understand the participant attitudes.

18 - If a blogger frequently do sponsored posts, would that change your opinion towards he/she?

19 - If you could decide, what would be the proportion of sponsored content and independent (editorial) on your blogger's page?

1 post per day – 7 posts per week as a base.

20 - How do you think bloggers choose which brand/product they will advertise?

Probe the difference between beginners and established bloggers.

21 - Where would you prefer to see a brand advertisement?

B. Interview transcript sample

Participant 01 – 31072017

I – Interviewer

R – Respondent

I- As I told you this is the interview for my research and I'm researching the fitness and healthy lifestyle bloggers, but what I'm trying to find out It's how people feels about them. So...I'll start...

1 - Tell me about your experiences when you started to use internet.

R – Like internet in general or specific Instagram or Facebook?

I – In general. When you had your first computer, etc.

R – I remember when I was in school and everyone started to have internet and when I finally had in my house. In the beginning, I didn't know how to use it properly, so I didn't have a good use of it. I remember I started downloading games and that's was the most I did.

2- Which social media you had at the start?

R – Facebook.

I – How old you were?

R – I was around 15 or maybe younger.

2.1 - Which social media you have now?

R – Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat.

I – Do you use it often?

R – Yes, I use very often.

3 - What you like and dislike in todays' social media?

R – Definitely the most I like is the way you kill time using it; when you're waiting for something, it's just make it easier. It's very distracting... But what I dislike is its

consume too much of my time, and I always feel like I could be doing something else instead of scrolling on Facebook. Sometimes I feel like it's a waste of time.

I – So at the same time that helps you to kill time it consumes your time....

R – Yes, in a waiting room or something like that it's very useful, but at the same time you don't learn anything with it. Now, I'm trying on Facebook to follow websites that I can get good information, like news. But I still find a waste of time, because I still follow other sites that are not very useful.

4- Can you describe your usage of social media during a day?

R – If I'm working I'll check it in the morning while I'm having my coffee, and I scroll on Facebook, reading news, etc. In my break, during the whole hour I'm scrolling on Facebook and Instagram. And I check again at night before I go to bed.

I – When you're not working is different?

R – It's worse, it's even more!

I – So you access more times during the day?

R – Yes, much more.

5- Tell me about your interest in a healthy lifestyle and being fitness

R – I think is important in terms of food – eat healthy and everything. It's good to know how to eat properly and motivates you to exercise and have a healthier lifestyle.

I – And how important this is for you? To eat well and exercise?

R – It's very important, because makes me feel better with myself.

[To be continued]

C. Concerns summary example

① PART II - MUSE - OLOB 2017

Started at school, using MSN - around 15 y.o
Got 1^o PC at 16

Start with MSN and HiFi

Now have FB, Instagram & Snapchat

Like - On demand - you ~~can~~^{can} choose whatever you want to see

Easy to find something you like or is looking for

Dislike - Fell addict to it because spend too much time

Routine - when I have free time or boxes - usually before going to bed

⑤ Started at 20 because was stressed and feeling sick - healthy reasons (dieting and exercise).
~~Don't~~ "I can't stop doing it because now is part of my life".

⑥ Bloggers sometimes are doing it just because of the money. Behind your profile you have a life, but those bloggers live ~~just~~ just to their account — ~~personas~~ ^{PERSONAS} Identities —

Because they always show how you have to behave to achieve a certain goal (x times meals, x exercise) the participant feel overwhelmed "some times I think it's too much and ~~so~~ they should have a limit". — a call for

MORE "ACHIEVABLE" MICRO CELEBRITIES PROFILE? — (2)

— PARTICIPANT CAN DIFFERENTIATE ~~THE~~ ^{THE} DIFFERENCE OF A "PROFESSIONAL / BUSINESS" PROFILE AND A PERSONAL / HOBBY PROFILE —

FOLLOW AGAIN TO M.C. — ALWAYS CHECK AND SOMETIMES FOLLOW OTHERS PROFILES THAT M.C. INDICATE — PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN BLOGGERS TO GET MORE FOLLOWERS — AND THE PARTICIPANT AVOID TO FOLLOW TOO MANY BECAUSE THEN HE WOULD SPEND MORE TIME AT THE SM.

THE INTEREST IN FOLLOW THEM IS TO ACQUIRE INFOS ABOUT DIETING AND EXERCISE.

GOOD INFO IS THE KEY

— TEND TO SPEND MORE TIME WHEN IS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING SPECIFIC THAN WHEN IT'S JUST BROWSING — ALSO SEARCH IN ≠ PLATFORMS.

DAILY > 1H

RESEARCHING > NO TIME LIMIT, UNTIL FIND THE INFO.

"I'M NOT WATCHING TV SO I THINK THIS THE EVOLUTION OF IT"

(+) HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE OF M.C USING ≠ CHANNELS — BUT DON'T FOLLOW THEM IN ALL PLATFORMS. ALSO HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE OF IMC — BECAUSE ≠ PEOPLE HAVE ≠ PREFERENCES.

WAS ENCOURAGED TO FOLLOW THEM BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THE M.C IS A TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE OF INFO.

(3)

A WAY TO ACCESS INFO WITHOUT SPENDING MONEY
— THE POWER OF AUTONOMY AND UGC'S ON INTERNET —

THE TRUST IN THE INFO IS ALSO RELATED TO
THE PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF M.C (PERSONAL TRAINERS,
NUTRITIONIST, ETC.).

9- PERCEIVED AS AN ADVERTISEMENT AND STILL
RESEARCH ABOUT THE PRODUCT

DO THE EVALUATION ← COMPARE w/ OTHER BRANDS
NEEDS
PRICE IF FIT THEIR REQUESTS
(CARBS W. ETC.)

DON'T BELIEVE THAT YOU'VE TO BUY JUST BECAUSE
M.C ~~IS~~ ADVERTISE.

HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE OF M.C BUSINESS INTEREST —

MENTIONED SASURA FITNESS'S BRAND PROTEIN —

BUT STILL TRUST IN THE CONTENT TO READ MORE ABOUT
IT — SO THE PARTICIPANT DO NOT TOTALLY DISMISS
THE AD. DON'T HAVE A NEGATIVE REACTION TOWARDS
THE POST.

— BELIEVES IN VALIDATION BY ~~THE~~ NUMBERS: "IF (M.C)
HAVE SO MANY FOLLOWERS..." — AND ALSO THINK THE
COMPANY IS GIVING AS A SAMPLE AND BECAUSE THEY
RE INVESTING MONEY IN THIS M.C — MEANS IT'S A
CREDIBLE SOURCE.

↳ SHOWS A LITTLE BIT OF NAIVE ABOUT
THE REASONS OF M.C & BLOGGERS ~~PARTICIPATE~~ COLLABORATION.

— DON'T REMEMBER ABOUT ANY SPECIFIC AD CONTENT
THAT HE LIKED ——— PRODUCT PLACEMENT EFFECT ??

- ④ — however can recall the brands, but not the content (Brand awareness increase confirmation?)
- also can't remember about a P.P. trust dislike

⑤ not often — wait for the sales and compare with similar brands — ^{brands} ~~the~~ should ad. products that match with it's ^{m.c.} user income profile? — also don't talk much about m.c. with friends.

the participant would buy a product advertised by a m.c. — "yes, why not?!"

trusting the info and have the need ~~for~~ ^{and} money, they would buy it. "easy way to find a solution"

⑥ the participant perceives a ^{stronger} connection between him and m.c. ~~was~~

↳ when is a "bad" brand the participant see as a transaction — "it's marketing". also consider if we doesn't like, others users might like.

no negative reaction towards brands or m.c.
— "I just scroll"

⑦ also the amount on ads don't seem to affect m.c. credibility — see as ~~a~~ something you've to sacrifice to receive the content.

hence, if all the posts contain a brand but still delivering an useful info, we would like it.

— relate brand/product to a relevant content — see as an opportunity to m.c. become famous

⑤.

Also likes ~~was~~ when the M.C explains the specific benefits of the brand — in other to justify why ~~we~~ associate with this brand instead of other would make ~~the~~ the ad more believable.

Believe the brand really the blogger, and sometimes he/she would evaluate the offer, ~~if~~ ~~it~~ if it is a big brand or a new product — sounds a little bit unsure about the product — but a association value can be perceived — e.g. Advertising / buying local.

to prefer to see ad in the way it is being doing now — online & offline.

"If I really like the ad I'll click on it and read more". — ~~don't~~ ^{don't} scroll straight away.