Zero shades of green?:
A qualitative study about individuals’ responses to green exposure on social media

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Title
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Abstract
The use of social media has increased the need of interactivity and information sharing. Individuals are sharing thoughts about different issues. Today, environmental issues have become an everyday matter for many. This matter is manifested through opinion leaders and their blogs or accounts. These opinion leaders possess an incredible power to influence others, which they in many cases take advantage of to inform their readers about topics that matters. This thesis will study how individuals respond to opinion leaders’ publications of green product exposure on social media. The purpose is to deepen the understanding and analyze possible influences related to the individuals’ responses. Green consumption habits are being highlighted as important and green products are exposed through many opinion leaders’ profiles on social media, since they often have an influence on individuals purchasing decisions. To investigate consumer responses on social media a qualitative study has been implemented. This has been done through observations and the construction of a focus group with the aim to strengthen the observational results. The results have mainly showed that individuals often respond positively to opinion leaders’ posts of green products, but their positive responses are related to the opinion leader rather than highlighting the green attributes. These results have been discussed to arisen from the individuals strive to identify themselves with opinion leaders. Furthermore, additional theory has been used to analyze the comments and explain possible influences. The conclusion of this thesis includes proposals for future research related to this topic.

Keywords
Green trend, social media, opinion leaders, blogs, Instagram, influences
Acknowledgements

Thank you!

Heléne Tjärnemo
For your support and guidance throughout our writing process

Annika Fjelkner
For your supervision of linguistics and format

A special thank you to:
Our focus group for the participation

Thank you all for your dedication and inspiration, your contribution have provided us with strength to make it through our bachelor dissertation.

We thank you.

Malmö, 2016

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Contemporary society is characterized by rapid social, cultural and economical changes (Haanpää, 2007). These changes require consumers to adapt to ongoing trends and to constantly be updated, often through social media. Lately, a green trend\(^1\) has emerged. Concern about the environment has become an important topic and almost a cultural norm in western society (Haanpää, 2007). Consumers are implementing a more greener lifestyle and becoming more accepting towards green products (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011). The growth of consumers’ environmental concern is increasing consumer demand and awareness (Lu, Bock, & Joseph, 2013). As a result, consumers are obligating companies to respond to the environmental demands from society in an ethical way.

This new trend has certainly been well spread through one of the biggest communication channels of today: social media. Social media has become a two-way online communication platform (Boateng & Feehi Okoe, 2015) used among individuals and organizations on daily basis (Turosong and Faisal, 2014). Mc Donagh & M. Martin (2015) explain our time as an epoch of social media, meaning that public exposure and transparency is becoming an everyday matter. This increases consumer involvement and interactivity (Boateng & Feehi Okoe, 2015). Consumers are becoming curious and are easily taking in what they are being exposed to from opinion leaders (Boateng & Feehi Okoe, 2015). The reason for this behavior can be described as consumers’ need to emulate these perceived role models (Gillberg, 2014). These individuals are also more likely to become persuaded by them to make a certain purchase decision. Through images and different posts, consumers become inspired and influenced by the latest trends, including the green trend.

The green trend is characterized by organic, ecological and sustainable choices. The main focus is on the implementation of a greener lifestyle, which basically means that consumers want to be healthier, more conscious about what they consume and pursue a more active lifestyle (Justin & Jyoti, 2012). On social media, this trend has been supported by many opinion leaders. High profile bloggers with many readers and instagramers\(^2\) with many

\(^1\) Trend that involves an increased concern about environmental issues but also consumption of ecological and organic products and healthier living.

\(^2\) Users of the social platform Instagram
followers are posting, sharing their lives and they are often encouraging greener product choices (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

Nowadays, consumers are choosing raw food over fast food, green products over generic products that contain preservatives, which increases consumers’ will to be more physically active (Justin & Jyoti, 2012). This emerging trend has 12 million hits on Instagram using the search word “organic”, 10 million hits for the word “healthy choices” and 1 million hits for the word “eco” (Instagram, 2016). Therefore, consumers are being exposed to the green trend since bloggers are spreading this trend by publishing eco-friendly and healthier products on their profiles.

1.2 Problematization

Through social media, important environmental issues are being highlighted (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Consumers are being informed about greener alternatives which may influence them to implement these alternatives into their own lives. Since research has shown that opinion leaders have high credibility due to their free mind speaking (Carr & Hayes, 2014), opinion leaders are therefore being used to expose certain products, especially green products. Since consumers are not giving much credence to traditional advertising, opinion leaders can be used as a marketing strategy to influence consumers when they are under uncertainty (Sheehan & Atkinson, 2015). Consumers can be persuaded to purchase insignificant products when the message comes from opinion leaders (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010).

Since the green trend has become popular on social media (Luck & Ginanti, 2013), consumers are more and more exposed to greener product alternatives through opinion leaders and can take part of what is said about the products. Through opinion leaders’ persuasion, consumers’ purchase behavior towards certain products may change without having a certain attitude (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). Therefore, attitudes do not always need to be a predictor of an individuals’ behavior (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010).
Rex & Baumann (2007) argue that the attempts to explain the gap between consumers’ attitudes and their green buying behavior have been of main focus. There are consumers who have a positive attitude and a positive green buying behavior. These consumers purchase green products and take into consideration the consequences of their consumption by being highly involved in the decision process (Webster, 1975). This means that these consumers are willing to purchase green products due to factors like subjective norms, values and the will to control their behavior (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013; Rex & Baumann, 2007).

There is another group of consumers who are worried about the environment but do not have a green buying behavior. They show that they are worried about the environment by sharing their concern with others, but they lack engagement and commitment, they are price sensitive and it has to be of personal relevance for them (Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013; Cho, 2014; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2005). This group of consumers has presented to be the largest one. Another group of consumers, those who have a less positive attitude, are indifferent to green issues and prefer to see solutions as someone else’s problem (Rex & Baumann, 2007).

Finally, theory states that for some consumers, others consent can have a relevant role in individuals’ purchase decision. If a product is considered popular, it can become the decisive purchase factor (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). With thousands of readers, new followers and likes every day, these well-known opinion leaders possess the power to influence others (Hung & Li, 2007). This also applies to their thoughts about the green emerging trend through social media, and it may encourage consumers towards a greener consumption.

Young, Hwang, Mcdonald, & Oates (2009) argue that a lot of research needs to be done to understand and help behavioral change towards a greener lifestyle. Research states that instead of presupposing the existence of an already green consumer, it is important to know consumers’ needs to be able to offer suitable products (Rex & Baumann, 2007). Additionally, to achieve greener consumption patterns, it is important to reach other consumers than green consumers only (Rex & Baumann, 2007).

3 A function on Instagram where a person can show that they liked a posted picture
This thesis will therefore further investigate social influences and its relation to green consumption. The aim is to analyze and deepen the understanding of possible influences behind individuals’ responses to green posts on social media. This thesis examines how consumers respond to the exposure of green products through social media.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how consumers respond to opinion leaders’ publications and exposure of green products on social media. Further, this thesis will analyze the possible influences behind their responses.

1.4 Research question
How do consumers respond to opinion leaders’ publications and exposure of green products on social media?
2. Method

2.1 Introduction

To better illustrate the different stages that must be fulfilled when developing a research strategy, the research onion model by Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2012) will be used. The model consists of various layers: research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, research choices, time horizon as well as data collection and analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The idea is to start from the outermost layers until you reach the centre. For this research, the research philosophy of interpretivism was chosen along with an inductive approach using qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. Further explanation will be presented in the text below.

Figure 1. The research onion (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009)

2.2 Research philosophy

Ontology and epistemology are two research philosophies, each focusing on an individual perspective. Ontology is the theory of understanding the world and how it operates and it is divided into two aspects: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism is based on the fact that individuals do not have a direct effect on its social surroundings. On the contrary,
subjectivism is based on social actors’ actions and perceptions with focus on the individuals and their meanings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge and what is considered acceptable as knowledge. This theory can be divided into three aspects: positivism, realism and interpretivism (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Positivism is based on the natural scientists’ philosophy that has a socially realistic view (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Positivism can help explain a phenomenon through quantitative studies and tests an already existing theory. Interpretivism focuses on the interpretation of meaning (Bleicher, 1980). It highlights the social aspect and how individuals behave in contrast to each other. How we interpret social behaviour is based on our own perceptions and meanings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). For these studies, a qualitative method is often used. Realism is the third philosophy and it is similar to the positivistic philosophy. Realism indicates that reality is portrayed from what humans senses (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

This study was based on the philosophy of interpretivism. The aim was to understand individuals’ behavior as social actors in a certain context. To be able to understand and analyse their responses, the subjective approach was more suitable for the interpretation of the results (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

2.3 Research approach

There are two research approaches that can be used: deductive or inductive research processes (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The deductive process is based on science where quantitative data is mainly used. The inductive method is based on exploration of human interactions without the necessity to generalize the findings. Qualitative data is often used for inductive methods (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

For this study, an inductive process has been used to answer how individuals respond to green products that are exposed by opinion leaders and the explanation behind it. According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2012), when using an inductive approach, data is collected and analyzed before the use of theory. Since the theory has been developed from the results, the inductive approach increases flexibility and facilitates for the researcher to make changes if needed. However, Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) claim that it is less likely to only
use an inductive approach when interpreting data. For this reason, a hybrid approach has been employed. This means that theory can work as a complement to strengthen the findings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

2.4 Choice of methodology

The aim with the thesis is to get a more in-depth understanding of individuals’ responses to green product exposure. Hence, qualitative methods have been chosen. To collect the data, methods in form of online naturalistic observations and an online focus group have been used. Naturalistic online observations are considered suitable to capture spontaneous behaviour in natural surroundings (Kozinets, 2002). Thus, the surroundings were not manipulated by external factors since the individuals were unaware of them being a part of an observation. The online observations were collected from opinion leaders’ comment feeds on blogs and Instagram. Observations can be limited by time error since they can be time consuming. It is also possible that the collected data is unreliable (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). To avoid this effect on the results, a focus group was conducted.

Focus groups are group interviews with the importance of maintaining the focus on the issue (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009), the strategy is used to enable trends and patterns to be identified when the data collected are analysed. Thus, the focus group has been created to support the observational findings. The limitations of having a focus group online are that it is unlikely to achieve the same level of interactivity as if it were done with face-to-face interviews (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The choice of creating an online focus group was grounded on the probability that the participants would be less influenced by others personal characteristics (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Since topics about green consumption and values can be, for some people, a sensitive topic to discuss, the online environment was more suitable for these discussions.

2.5 Research design and strategy

Research design is divided into three categories: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive research (Yin, 2003). Exploratory studies are useful when seeking insights and understandings of certain problems (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Typical characteristics of exploratory research are adaptation and flexibility (Saunders, Lewis, &
Thornhill, 2009). Explanatory research explains the relationship between variables and how these variables affect each other (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). It can also be used to explain relationships between the aspects that are in focus for the research (Robson, 2002). The third research, descriptive research aims to describe accurate profiles, such as persons, events or situations (Robson, 2002). This research design can be an extension of either an exploratory or and explanatory research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

An exploratory and descriptive research were chosen to be able to answer the purpose of the thesis. Since the observational findings need to be described and validated, a descriptive design was suitable. To gain further insights on the findings, an exploratory study was combined through a focus group.

According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009), research strategy can be divided into seven subgroups: Experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research. For this thesis, the chosen strategies were grounded theory and netnography. Grounded theory is suitable when using an inductive approach and helpful when trying to explain a certain behavior. This strategy is not based on previous theories. Instead, theory is developed from collected data mainly constructed from observations (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

The aim with the thesis was not to construct theory. Instead, the strategy was used as a guideline that allows flexibility. According to Sharmaz (2014), grounded theory begins with inductive data that allows one to work with data and the analysis at the same time. It is possible to reflect on the findings during the collection process. Thus, this research was primarily inspired by grounded theory. However theory has been used to strengthen and explain the findings.

Possible limitations for grounded theory are that it requires a tacit knowledge and a field for the collected data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Using grounded theory requires creativity, experience and hard work (Suddaby, 2006). For this thesis, the requirements are not fully met. Thus, grounded theory has been used as inspiration rather than a strategy. It has therefore also been used in combination with netnography.
Netnography uses public information on online platforms to understand influences of different consumer groups (Kozinets, 2002). It is also useful when studying naturally occurring behaviors, since it is naturalistic (Kozinets, 2002). This means that the observed environment is not manipulated. The strategy of netnography was chosen since the purpose was to investigate consumers’ responses to exposed green products on social media and the factors that possibly influence them. Limitations using this strategy are the need of interpretive skills and lack of identified informants (Kozinets, 2002).

2.6 Time horizon

There are two types of time horizons: longitudinal and cross-sectional. A longitudinal time horizon studies a change or/and a development over time whilst cross-sectional studies a phenomenon at a particular time (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Since our purpose is to make observations under a short period of time, a cross-sectional time horizon was selected.

2.7 Data collection

The needed information when collecting data was individuals’ comments on opinion leaders’ posts where they exposed green products. To obtain this information, primary data was needed. Primary data is new collected data whilst secondary data is existing data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). By collecting data through primary observations and a focus group, the observation and the focus group studied consumers’ comments carried out at a specific time.

2.7.1 Observations

Observations involves recording, description, analysis and interpretation of individuals’ behavior (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This also applies to online observations (Kozinets, 2002). The purpose with this thesis was to study readers and followers’ responses to opinion leaders green product exposure. Therefore, observations were made online on two different social media platforms: Instagram and blogs. The reason for choosing blogs and Instagram for the observational study was based on the fact that opinion leaders frequently expose products and personal posts to a higher extent. On blogs, opinion leaders have a very personal approach where readers can get an insight of their daily lives. On Instagram, many of these bloggers also have an active account were they share pictures on daily basis. Through
these platforms, it is possible to be more personal with your readers and followers. These individuals can easily express their opinions publicly to the opinion leaders. Instagram and blogs are therefore suitable for the collection of comments online.

The data collection consisted of 25 observed posts on Instagram and on blogs posted by well-known opinion leaders. The choice of opinion leaders was based on their popularity. On Instagram this was shown on their profiles were it clearly states how many followers they have. We chose Instagram accounts with at least 100,000 followers. This indicate on the profile being attractive for many followers. Most of the accounts had over a hundered thousand followers, therefore some accounts were more popular than others. The bloggers were chosen from Bloggportalen (2016), which lists the most popular swedish bloggers. Younger females bloggers and instagramers were chosen since the majority of the readers and followers on these platforms are females (IIS, 2015).

The reason for not choosing green blogs or instagram account was based on the interest to see how individuals responded when non-green bloggers and instagrmers exposed green products. Since green consumers were not our target group it was more reasonable to look at bloggers and instagrmers who are popular based on other traits than green. The chosen posts on Instagram exposed one specific organic facial mask, from a brand called truselforganics. The organic facial masks were published by different opinion leaders on Instagram (see appendix 1). The chosen posts on blogs exposed different green products within the categories of food, make up and fashion. This choice were made based on the fact that bloggers publications were more personal and no bloggers exposed the same green products.

The collected data consisted of 1012 comments by followers or readers. To answer the research question, clear green messages were required on the observed posts. After choosing the posts, the collected comments were analysed and then divided into different categories. Further explanation will be presented in the chapter data analysis. The target group for the study was socially involved individuals on social media, hence the reason for choosing online observations. No other specific participant trait was required. Although we expected the main comments to come from the above-mentioned group, it is not possible to decide who can comment on these posts. When choosing posts, female bloggers and instagrmers who mainly had female followers were chosen. When collecting comments for the observations,
the majority were written by younger women with active profiles. This could be seen through their profiles and pictures.

2.7.2 Focus group
In addition to an observational approach, our research strategy included a focus group. Focus groups are interviews constructed in larger groups where the generated data is collected through communication between the participants (Kitzinger, 1995). Our role was to work as moderators to guide the participants in the right direction. According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) it is important to keep control of the discussion but not to an extent where the participants are guided towards certain opinions. This research method opens up possibilities to an insight in the participants own experiences and opinions about the subject (Kitzinger, 1995). According to Kitzinger (1995), focus groups are useful when trying to explain or explore already collected results. Thus, the focus group will be a complement to the observations of our chosen comment fields. Since the aim with the study was to get a clarified view on how individuals respond to opinion leaders’ exposure of green products on social media, the focus group strengthened the findings and led to an extended understanding.

The amount of constructed focus groups can vary for each study. Since there is a time limitation, we will only be conducting results from one focus group. However, the focus group was only used as a complement to the observations. According to Kitzinger (1995), fewer focus groups are common when combining data techniques, like in this case. The focus group was constructed on Facebook since group chats are easy to create through this platform. According to Sweet (2001), relative anonymity of online interviews facilitates more open and honest responses. It is also less time consuming and the possibility to record when being typed in (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). On the contrary, common problems with electronic interviews are that it may occur that the participants are unfamiliar with the software system. In this case, this issue was avoided since the participants were highly familiar with Facebook. Also, focus groups tend to put less focus on depth and detail regarding specific issues, this is something that you can gain from individual interviews (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Participants are likely chosen due to similar characteristics and interests (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Thus, the informants in the focus group were chosen due to their characteristics. The participants were similar to the ones that we had studied through
observations. Before the group selection, a question was asked to the informants about their activity on social media. A selection of eight informants was made through facebook; the election was based on their social involvement and activity. The group was between the ages of 18 and 25 and selected randomly on Facebook. All the participants came from Sweden to avoid language complications. An invitation for participation was sent to the informants two weeks in forehand. The appointment for the focus group was set on an evening for a 90 minutes’ session. The informants had to be available and online throughtout the whole session. During the session, open questions were asked with the aim to create discussions. To gain more specific answers, closed suplementary questions were asked (see appendix 3).

The questions, illustrated in appendix 3, were related to the purpose of the thesis. First, one question at a time was asked and the informants had some time to reflect before answering. When participants had nothing more to add or discuss, a new question was asked to keep the discussion going. As moderators, we encouraged discussion and we led the group express their opinions without interfering. Furthermore, how the data has been analyzed will be given in 2.8.

2.8 Data analysis

When using netnography as a research strategy, it is possible to get an overload of information and irrelevant information to the research (Kozinets, 2002). Therefore, the comments have been analyzed and divided into two categories: positive and negative comments. The comments have also been divided into subcategories. The categories will be presented in chapter 4.

After the data collection, the focus was primarily on the on topic messages related to the purpose of the thesis. This messages were analyzed based on own interpretations. The idea was to analyze responses related to the post. The comments were categorized after their content, expressions and indications. Despite that the comments related to opinion leaders and products were a minor group, the data collected were descriptively rich and interpreted with analytic depth and insight (Kozinets, 2002). The focus has been on contextualizing the collected comments, this has been proved by Kozinets (2002) to be challenging. By choosing to observe comments on Instagram and blogs, an understanding of common
communicational expressions online have been required. This has been facilitated since we, as observers, belong to the same category as the observed individuals.

When analyzing the collected comments, the results have been supported by the informants’ answers in the focus group. The aim was to get a deeper understanding of what the informants expressed. The focus group was analyzed through relevant comments made by the informants and the general group consensus. When analysing the answers, the comments were interpreted with the observational results in mind. Theory was used to help explain the results from the analysis. Also, our interpretations have been as subjective as possible to not influence the results.

2.9 Participant selection

Participants are likely chosen due to similar characteristics and interests (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The target group for the study was socially involved individuals on social media, hence the reason for choosing online observations. No other specific participant trait was required. Although we expected the main comments to come from the above-mentioned group, it is not possible to decide who can comment on these posts. When choosing posts, female bloggers and instagramers who mainly had female followers were chosen. When collecting comments for the observations, the majority were written by younger women with active profiles. This could be seen through their profiles and pictures.

However, the informants in the focus group were chosen due to their characteristics. The participants were similar to the ones that we had studied through observations. Before the group selection, a question was asked to the informants about their activity on social media. The eight chosen females used social media on daily basis and they were therefore suitable to discuss the chosen topic. The group was in the age of 18-25 and selected randomly on Facebook. All the participants came from Sweden to avoid language complications.

2.11 Reliability and validity

Reliability represents the extent to which your collected data, analysis procedures or observations will present the same results if being made at other occasions (Saunders, Lewis,
& Thornhill, 2009). It also represents to what degree transparency can be found in the analyzed material (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Due to time restraints, we have not been able to observe as many comments as we might have needed. Some comments have been harder to interpret, while some comments have been inadequate to the results. Thus, to be able to strengthen our findings we used the focus as a complement. The two different methods, which consisted of different informants, showed similar results. The belief is that it improved the reliability and the results could be stronger argued for than if only one of the methods would have been chosen.

Since we conduct and analyze our material based on a subjective approach, influences of our own perceptions will permeate our analysis. The research method of netnography has required us to interpret collected comments and expressions, categorize them and to subsequently draw a conclusion. The reliability of such data is therefore harder to access since the online responses rather function as a source of the informants’ expressions and views that needs to be interpreted than as an objective reality (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Ultimately, this means that our conclusion may not necessarily be in line with other individuals’ perceptions. With this in mind our result and analysis may vary from other students’ future research on this topic. It is therefore possible that observer bias exists, which means that further possible interpretations of the collected comments may exist (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Furthermore, we have tried to find observations that can be analyzed. The reliability of the focus group can also be affected since it was conducted on the internet. This means that the informants may not have devoted extensive time to fully answer the questions since they needed to write it on their computer (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). To further improve the reliability of this thesis, the leading questions in our focus group have been revised and improved. This has been done for us to be more certain that the collected data answered our research question and that the questions were understandable for the informants.

Validity concerns with whether the findings measures the expected concepts (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Two aspects of validity are described by Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) as internal and external validity. The first mentioned is
referred as internal validity. Bryman & Bell (2007) further explains that high validity is needed so that the research is relevant for the field of study. For a qualitative research, it is hard to have high validity since this kind of research is focused on observations rather than measurements. Since individuals can write a lot of irrelevant comments on the observed posts, the focus group will function as a complement to gain higher validity.

Further, Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) explains that there are different threats to validity. These threats involves the research area’s history, personal impact when testing or measuring something, instrumentation, participants dropping out of the study and maturation. For this study, there is a low risk for a history threat since the observed comments on different social platforms were often written by readers or followers who often had a positive attitude towards the opinion leaders. The chosen opinion leaders were also very popular in terms of positive comments on their posts. The same applies for the focus group, since they also had a positive attitude.

On the contrary, testing was a threat to validity when it came to the focus group. They knew they had to answer questions and the fact that the discussion was under supervision could have affected their answers. Also, two of the informants in the focus group did not participate even though they had agreed on it earlier. This loss of subjects can affect the results in many cases. For this thesis, the collected responses from the eight informants was enough material.

External validity, often also referred to as generalisability, discusses the extent to which your findings are generalizable (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This means that the findings could be similarly explained to other research settings as well (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The purpose of this research has not been to generalise the results, so generalisability will not be applied for this thesis. This research has not been based on enough observations or focus groups to be able to generalise the findings.
3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Choice of theory

Following section will be based on previous research within the field of consumer behavior where the elaboration likelihood model is further explained combined with theories of social judgement, social pressure, consumer identity and green consumption.

3.2 Social media

Social media are online platforms that enable users to share and collaborate globally (Carlson & C. Christopher, 2015; Haenlein & M. Kaplan, 2010). It includes platforms like Facebook, instagram, Twitter, snapchat, youtube and others. Social media is therefore a web-based communication tool where people share information and opinions with each others. Through social media, users create accounts, check news feeds, have followers, share videos, like pictures and use hashtags on daily basis. Using social media involves information gathering and sharing, socialization, expression of opinions and product marketing (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2011).

Research claims that social media is a present world-dominating phenomenon that is encouraging likeminded individuals to help one another (Wright, Khanfar, Harrington, & Kizer, 2010). Users can be connected twenty-four hours a day through their smart phones, which allows them to constantly be updated. Communicating with consumers is simplified today due to direct access and connection via social media (Wright, Khanfar, Harrington, & Kizer, 2010).

Since it is becoming more significant to connect with likeminded individuals, social media is requiring an established relationship with customers. Wright, Khanfar, Harrington, & Kizer (2010) claim that social media is all about the conversation. This means that consumers are becoming more involved in the conversation with marketers. The growth of social media has also become a marketing tool for businesses in advertising their products to consumers (Haenlein & M. Kaplan, 2010; Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2011; Carlson & C. Christopher, 2015). Consumers are therefore becoming more persuaded to purchase or to try products that they see exposed on social media.
However, being a platform with the possibility to reach a great amount of people, social media becomes a significant channel where important information, such as environmental information, can take place (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Research shows that opinion leaders should be targeted and used to spread environmental messages to consumers (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009). Today, this is manifested through opinion leaders publications through social media. This leads to an increase in consumer knowledge about environmental concerns. One of the most growing social platforms of today, when it comes to message sharing, is Instagram (IIS, 2015).

Instagram is one of the latest trends in social networking and the amounts of users are continuously growing. Unlike other social platforms, Instagram is a public open platform where users are able to share pictures and comments with known and unknown users, regardless the relation between them. Statistics shows that the amount of monthly active users on Instagram exceeds 400 million (Statista, 2016). The Instagram platform is an app used to upload pictures and videos. Instagram users are characterized as young, mainly females, in the age between 12-24 years, and use Instagram on a daily basis (KPCB, 2015; IIS, 2015).

Instagram has become a tool for individuals to increase their visibility and be able to share their creativity (Genc & Öksuz, 2015). Some individuals perceive Instagram as a way to expose themselves or their creations since they can take advantage of the Instagram hashtag-system to create consumer awareness (Genc & Öksuz, 2015). The hashtag-system consists of associations between words and pictures. This means that, users can hashtag words that are relevant to their own pictures, which other users also can see when searching for that specific hashtag. The hashtag-system facilitates associations to the posts; the hashtags are therefore often related to the posts specific attributes. The posts with hashtags related to green attributes can due to this reach many more individuals and create further awareness. If the aim is to create a well-known Instagram account, hashtags can be used. Consumers may discover the account easier and if they find the account of interest, they will follow it.

Well-known Instagramers do at times combine their Instagram account with a blog. While posting pictures on daily basis on Instagram, opinion leaders can express themselves further through their blog. Some of these instagrammers have blogs with millions of readers from all over the world. Additionally, green products are often exposed on blogs.
C. Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus (2005) define blogs as a frequently edited webpage where personal entries are been chronologically published. Blogs are further observed as socially interactive and community-like among users. Lately, blogging has become a very popular channel that is viewed as a forum where people can discuss and share personal feelings and ideas related to events that arise in everyday life (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin, & Chiang, 2013; Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Unlike advertisements, bloggers and readers have a two-way communication. They have an active relationship where readers can ask questions, comment on specific subjects or just express themselves to others. In return, bloggers share personal experiences and information that could be useful for the readers (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Blogging is indirectly promoting and increasing self-expression (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus (2011) explains that the desire to express one’s true identity through blogs can lead to an influential power that is supported by loyal readers.

Research shows that consumers’ decision-making process for purchasing can be influenced by blogs (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin, & Chiang, 2013). According to Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin, & Chiang (2013), the majority of consumers seek advices before purchasing through social sites and a majority of those who received advices are being influenced to make an actual purchase. Consumers need reliable and useful information about products to make a purchase decision. Thus, a blogger’s reputation as source credibility is considered an influential factor (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin, & Chiang, 2013).

Due to the development of the Internet and blogs, important subjects such as environmental issues are increasingly being highlighted (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Ostman & Parker (1987) established that the first step into becoming environmentally educated is to gather information, this information is often gathered from media sources. Emphasizing on the environmental issues through different blogs has become a commonplace since bloggers have millions of unique readers each day (Luck & Ginanti, 2013) and can therefore easily spread the word.

Since social platforms have the ability to connect people of similar interests together, green consumers and environmentalists are being offered a forum where they can express concerns (Luck & Ginanti, 2013) and share knowledge. Other consumers can therefore, be part of
conversations and discussions, increasing the flow of information about these important subjects.

Furthermore, well-known bloggers with high reputation can become opinion leaders and gain power to influence consumers to purchase on the Internet (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin, & Chiang, 2013). Their influential power can be used as a way to promote environmental awareness and stimulate the demand of green products.

### 3.3 Opinion leaders

Consumers are on a daily basis exposed to opinion leaders’ posts, opinions and recommendations. These consumers might thereby get influenced by these persons when they are to make certain choices (Menzel & Katz, 1955). Consumers view opinion leaders as people with a higher social standing and can at times be affected by what the opinion leaders think or say (Burt, 1999). Through recommendations and promotion consumers are exposed to the chosen products that opinion leaders share with their followers. The posts do often apply to later trends that opinion leaders want to spread. Social media often influence the public’s opinion on greener issues (Fernando, Suganthi, & Sivakumaran, 2016). Followers can therefore grasp the given product information and get influenced by it, especially when they are unsure of what to purchase (Watts & Dodds, 2007).

Followers’ relationship with opinion leaders can be described through a communication model. Menzel & Katz (1955) developed the idea of the two-way communication model. This idea explains how followers receive information from opinion leaders. The opinion leaders have in turn received their information from mass media.

According to the model, opinion leaders receive information from mass media and further deliver it to their followers. As a result of earlier research, the two-way communication system have shown a positive effect on peoples’ decision-making and public changes of choice (Menzel & Katz, 1955). Therefore, opinion leaders can be seen as intermediates between media and the society (Watts & Dodds, 2007) and consumers may be influenced by these individuals when they make choices (Menzel & Katz, 1955).

It is also thought that interpersonal relationships, someone closely related, can help create individuals’ opinions, norms and values. Individuals seem to create with others, a shared
behavioral pattern and ideas (Menzel & Katz, 1955). Individuals rely on close individuals in their surroundings such as friends and family (Menzel & Katz, 1955). Nevertheless, opinion leaders’ influence on consumers’ attitudes and behavior are said to have more of an impact than influence coming from interpersonal communication (King & Summers, 1970). Thus, opinion leaders can be said to lay one of the key roles in communicating and influencing individuals (Menzel & Katz, 1955). This might therefore have an effect on the adaptation to the green lifestyle that opinion leaders spread on social media today. Consumers are daily exposed to a wide variation of green products. If opinion leaders impact can affect consumers’ decisions, it may affect some consumers towards a greener consumption.

3.4.1 Consumer identity

Since many recommendations on social platforms today encourage greener alternatives, consumers may, due to emotional feeling towards the opinion leader, act in the same direction. This intimacy with public role models can be referred to as parasocial interaction (Xiang, Zheng, Li, & Zhao, 2015).

Parasocial interaction explain how consumers create a connection with social media profiles. When consumers feel a connection to these persons, they are likely to buy exposed products, often on an impulse (Park & Lennon, 2006). In this way, exposure can lead to stimulus for the consumers (Piron, 1991). This particularly involve consumers who create a strong bond with an opinion leader that they cannot contact in real life (Xiang, Zheng, Li, & Zhao, 2015). Consumers with strong parasocial interactions can create emotional attachments and will perceive opinion leaders as trustworthy sources.

This one-sided connection can result in a consumer buying behavior inspired by recommendations from opinion leaders (Xiang, Zheng, Li, & Zhao, 2015). If consumers find the opinion leader to possess desirable qualities it is more likely that they will be persuaded to buy a certain product (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). Since consumers often follow opinion leaders due to personal feelings and inspiration, these leaders have the ability to convince consumers to make certain choices.

With over a hundred thousand followers and at times, over a million, these opinion leaders therefore become aspiring for many individuals. Well-known opinion leaders can have a
greater impact on consumers since they will seem more trustworthy and attractive. Exposure of products from bloggers and instgramers that are well-known, can encourage consumers to prefer certain products (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011).

The opinion leaders function as cultural compasses whom individuals orientate after (Gillberg, 2014). Consumers have a tendency to emulate these individuals; the opinion leaders become an ideal that individuals strive to reach (Gillberg, 2014). This also applies for individuals’ implementation of certain values that opinion leaders express (Gillberg, 2014). Since many opinion leaders are expressing importance of greener values, consumers may be influenced to implement greener values into their lives.

Consumers are constantly affected by what people in their surroundings purchase. Their buying behavior will have influences of what other relatives have purchased. If socially involved consumers closely relate to opinion leaders, they may consider to buy products that they use. However, consumers are not always in need of the purchased product. It is rather the identification with the opinion leader that stimulus the decision (Bengtsson & Östberg, 2011). Since consumers often behave after recommendations from opinion leaders (Dahlén & Lange, 2009) it is possible that consumers, accordingly to opinion leaders’ recommendations, adapt to a greener consumption.

3.4 Buying behavior and attitude-behavior formation

The awareness and importance of buying green products has become a viral subject, which could explain why many consumers show an interest in green products. Motivations for purchasing greener products are often based on values, attitudes and subjective norms (Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013). Consumers who possess environmental knowledge seem to be more optimistic towards greener consumption. If consumers feel that they can make an impact through a greener consumption, they are also more likely to buy green products (Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013).

Buying green can also be personally related. Consumer may respond positively to green products through self-enhancement. When consumer possess strong personal norms they may feel obligated to morally act right and therefore consume greener goods (Young, Hwang, Mcdonald, & Oates, 2009). Health and safety reasons also seem to be of relevance when
consumers buy green (Grankvist & Biel, 2007). However, it is not always the case that a positive attitude will result in an actual green buying behavior. In this case, other factors will determine what consumers will buy. These factors could be: price, earlier habits, alternative products and the degree of trust towards the product (Rex & Baumann, 2007). These consumers may care for the environment but are not engaged enough to make greener purchase decisions (Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013). Furthermore, there exist consumers that lack both a green behavioral engagement as well as green norms and values (Rex & Baumann, 2007).

Consumers are constantly being persuaded into making greener choices because of the high exposure through bloggers and Instagramers. It is therefore possible that persuasion, either low or high elaboration processes, could lead to consumers buying greener products. When consumers are about to make a purchase decision, their attitudes can be described through three categories. According to the social judgment theory (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010), consumers may accept, reject or be somewhere in-between these two latitudes when receiving information. They are more likely to accept the information if their initial attitudes go into the same direction. Consumers have a tendency to distort received information and either assimilate the information given or act in opposite direction. Individuals can thereby, at times, be persuaded into buying a certain product. This persuasion can include the buying of greener alternatives. This consumer behavior can be described with the aid of the elaboration likelihood model below:

![Elaboration likelihood model](image)

Figure 2. Elaboration likelihood model.
According to Petty & Cacioppo (1986), persuasive messages can help to either form or create a certain attitude or behavior amongst the individuals. When elaborating, consumers put a high level or low level of effort. Consumers who elaborate on high level are often more careful and find the message itself being of importance. Attitudes that are formed based on a high level elaboration, the central route, are strong and enduring (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Elaboration that occurs on a lower level are often influenced by superficial factors; consumers are affected by other factors than the actual message. Attitudes can still be formed even though the persuasion firstly lead to a certain behavior rather than a specific attitude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Since consumers who buy green demand more information when purchasing (Pedersen & neergaard, 2005), it is more likely that they have gone through central route in the elaboration model when being convinced. These consumers will be more attentive to the message and less impulsive.

Consumers who pay less attention to the quality of the messages are more likely to be persuaded by the expertise from the person providing the information since they find the person trustworthy (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Since opinion leaders can be a trustworthy inspirational source for many consumers, it is possible that they can persuade consumers to buy a certain product despite them being engaged in the product from the beginning. Neither do these consumers focus on the information content, which makes them more passive and impulsive (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Opinion leaders have the ability to affect consumers purchase decisions (Park & Lennon, 2006), this means that they might be able to affect consumers to buy green products despite the lack of green values. This can be the case if consumers are persuaded through the peripheral route where consumers first create a purchase behavior which later can be developed to certain values (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). Individuals do not often base their purchase decision solely on their own perceptions. They may feel social pressure to purchase what other people consider as popular or accepting (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010).
4. Empirical findings

For this study, we have collected data through observations on Instagram and on blogs. As a complement to the observations, we created a focus group with the aim of strengthen our findings.

4.1 Observations

Due to a wide variation of comments, we have chosen to categorize the observed comments. The different categories will be presented in 4.1.1 Instagram.

4.1.1. Instagram

The observed Instagram-posts were divided into different categories in order to make the observation clearer. These categories are:

- **Opinion leader related**
  (comments about the characteristics of the opinion leader are presented)
- **Green related**
  (comments including positive attitudes towards green products)
- **Product related**
  (comments about the product’s traits)
- **Buying intentions**
  (comments about followers or readers’ indications to either buy or try the product)
- **Recommendations**
  (comments including recommendations to others made by followers or readers, recommendations from product users and recommendations requested to the opinion leader)
- **Other comments**
  (irrelevant comments to the subject, tags and emoji’s)

The findings will be presented separately in each category in the following chapters.

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4 Standardized icons with a meaning used in electronic messages and on the internet.
Opinion leader related

This category represented the largest group of comments. The comments included expression about the opinion leaders’ appearance and how the readers and followers felt about the opinion leader.

The comments from readers and followers emphasized on the opinion leaders’ appearance. The use of different positive adjectives where used to describe their opinions towards the opinion leader. Frequently used adjectives were beautiful and great skin. Examples of these comments are:

“I can see where the flawless skin comes from, genetics and this.” (Instagram user)

“you still slay with make up too 😊 and a mask as well.” (Instagram user)

“seriously, I wish I looked like her.” (Instagram user)

Readers and followers expressed that they wanted to look like the opinion leader. When referring to the opinion leaders’ beauty, they could refer to specific body parts that they found beautiful, like her lips or skin.

Green related

Comments that includes green statements were placed in this category. This group were relatively small in comparison to the other categories. The comments could involve readers or followers expressing delight over the opinion leaders’ usage of green products.

‘’organic and natural products all the way!’’ (Instagram user)

Comments could also involve followers or readers who informed others about the product and its green attributes.

‘’ It is the truself organic slogan, since it is like organic the products actually are natural and it is essentially like exfoliating your skin… and all that’’ (Instagram user)

Furthermore, comments that involved followers or readers’ indications to try the product due to its green traits were also found.
‘‘I have been looking for new natural face mask ideas. I will definitely be trying ☺’’

However, as mentioned earlier, only a few comments involving green statements were found in the comment fields. The results showed that the followers or readers did not, to a high extent, respond to the green traits.

**Product related**

This category included comments about the characteristics of the product. The readers or followers questioned the brand and price of the product, the use of the product, the product content and they also made comparisons with other products.

“What does the mask do?” (Instagram user)
“What brand is that?” (Instagram user)
“When you mix it, do you make it watery or thick? (Instagram user)

Most of the comments were positive comments about the product in connection to the opinion leader.

“I’ve been wanting to try this product! I Think I will order it now seeing it on your beautiful face ☺” (Instagram user)
“You are stunning! Looking forward to trying this mask. Hope it hydrates!!” (Instagram user)

The second largest group of comments were about how the product worked in comparison to others. The readers or followers shared their knowledge about the product and they compared the product to other similar products.

“You should look into Rodan and fields ☺” (Instagram user)

**Buying intensions**

This category presents the comments related to any buying intention from followers. Findings showed this category being relatively high. Followers did, in every observation, response with different indications that they considered to buy the product. These findings included followers who wanted to try the product and expressed themselves clearly.
‘’I’m trying this!!!’’ (Instagram user)
‘’Let’s buy this!’’ (Instagram user)

Results showed that followers expressed themselves to potentially buy the product. Moreover, they expressed their feelings towards the opinion leader in the same comment. These feelings did frequently indicate on the opinion leader being motivational or inspirational to the followers.

‘’Definitely going to give this mask a try! I follow you on social media because you are an inspiration to me. I would love to pursue my goals and you are a living example that no matter […]’’ (Instagram user)

Responses also showed that multiple followers got inspired by the opinion leaders’ exposure of the green product and purchased it.

‘’Just ordered mine! Thank you for all the beauty tips. You are awesome©’’ (Instagram user)
‘’Thank you for sharing, just ordered it!’’ (Instagram user)

Additionally, followers expressed themselves as convinced by the opinion leaders’ recommendations and exposure. Hence, why they bought the product.

‘’Welp I just bought some to give it a try. You have convinced me.’’ (Instagram user)

Comments from followers also indicated on their purchases being influenced by their trust to the opinion leaders. Results showed that some followers seemed to buy the product because the opinion leader used it herself. In that sense, they seemed convinced and gained trust to the product. Comments similar to the ones presented below were frequently seen among the observations.

‘’I was looking at that. And now you said it is refreshing then I will buy it!’’ (Instagram user)

‘’I trust that you really use it so I’m going to order me one to try it.’’ (Instagram user)
‘’I wanted this for like a year, but never fully trusted anyone’s review just caved and got some! Grateful for you!!’’ (Instagram user)
Findings have therefore showed results of followers either buying or wanting to try the product after being exposed to it through opinion leaders’ recommendations.

**Recommendations**

Readers and followers shared their experiences about a specific product with others and they ask for recommendations from previous consumers. Some of them tagged others on posts where the product had been exposed, if they thought that the product would be of interest for someone they knew.

“Feel like you might like this product. I think I’m going to buy @kae_est_belle” (Instagram user)

“@chelseajackson28 take a look at this product.” (Instagram user)

“@rbainsss we should try this one too 😊” (Instagram user)

Others shared that they bought or will buy the product after reading the recommendations that the opinion leader posted on Instagram, or that the product had to be good since the opinion leader is exposing this specific product.

“(chelsea_rad it might be good then!” (Instagram user)

“Anyways, that facial mask looks amazing I might try it out. 😍” (Instagram user)

“Hey @Oliviaperson just ordered mine! Thank you for all the beauty tips! You are awesome” (Instagram user)

“I’ve been waiting to try this product! I think I will order it now seeing it on your beautiful face” (Instagram user)

“you are stunning! Looking forward to trying this mask. Hope it hydrates!” (Instagram user)

Some readers expressed that they wanted the opinion leader to tell more about the product, so that they could be persuaded to buy the product.

“I wanna try the masks so bad let us know how it goes! @heidimakeupartist” (Instagram user)
Sometimes, the opinion leader responds to the comments:

“@kathleenbr0wn I only use it once per week, or if I get a bad breakout 😊 but it definitely helps!” (Instagram profile)

“I think this is my fav mask I’ve tried @gabstherealdeal” (Instagram profile)

Overall, the posts created minor discussions where those who comment expressed the need of acknowledgement from the opinion leader. The product was accepted if the opinion leader promoted the product in a way that the readers or followers could feel affiliation with the product and themselves in their daily lives.

Other comments

Based on our observations, this category was the largest. The results from the observations showed a high amount of comments irrelevant to the post; we refer to these comments as other comments. The collected comments involved responses that included emoji’s, readers and followers tagging each other and responses that discussed irrelevant topics in relation to the posted picture. Similar responses were found in every comment field. The observed comments were hard to analyze since a large amount lacked opinions, proper expressions and at times even words.

Results showed that followers and readers express their own thoughts regardless of what the opinion leader post. These comments did not only relate to positive comments, but to negative ones as well. To conclude, our observations resulted in a large category of irrelevant comments for this dissertation.

4.1.2 Blogs

Clothing

This category includes comments from readers on different posts made by famous bloggers. The bloggers promoted different pieces of clothing that were made from organic cotton. From the responses collected, we have positive, negative and neutral groups of comments.
The majority of the comments were positive. The readers expressed their love for the garment, and for the blogger for promoting the clothes. Thus, these comments were connected to appearance and superficiality.

“so much summerinspiration! I want summer now now now :D” (blog user)
“ I LOVE THE COLLECTION 😊” (blog user)

Further, the second largest group of comments were about the products. The readers were curious about where to find the clothes, how much it costed and when the collection was released.

“God such nice clothes! Do u know when they will arrive to the stores, or are they already available?” (blog user)
"Hi, is it possible to buy the clothes on their website or do you know when they will arrive to the stores? I hope you answer, and I love your blog I think you are a great role model <3 I just wanted to say that 😊 hugs 😊” (blog user)

**Beauty**

This category will present respondents comments on beauty products exposed by famous bloggers. The different subcategories will be presented in this text. Comments related to the beauty products showed similar results as the comments related to the organic mask on Instagram. The largest group was the one we refer to as appearance. Followers and users expressed their feelings towards product attributes such as *looks, colours* and *shades*.

” Nice colour, I like coloured nails and I love variation” (Blog user)
“’What shade do you use? I need a new foundation, and this organic thing is a big plus! And the price is good’” (Blog user)

However, the later comment were not only related to appearance. Since the reader expressed positive feelings towards the products green traits, this could also be classified as a green-related comment. The green-related comments was a relatively small group with only a few followers who indicated on the importance of the product being green. The comments that we found involved followers expressions of the product not being tested on animals.

“ Besides it is not even animal tested” Which should be honoured! (blog user)
Comments related to the ecological attributes were also found. The user in the comment below did combine the green traits with the products appearance.

“God it’s so good with ecological nail polish, I’ve been looking a lot for it! I think you should combine with different colours. grey and brown are colours I really like right now, they are easy to match! (blog user)

Furthermore, followers seemed to have gained certain awareness of the green product traits when being exposed to it through bloggers.

” the first eco polisher ive heard of – quality! (blog user)

Another small group of responses were the ones of curiosity. These comments involved questions about the product, such as price or other product traits. Comments were found where the follower or reader seemed curious about the product.

“how can a nail polisher be ecologic? (blog user)

Also, comments that indicated on an intension to buy were not high among comments related to the green beauty product. Only a few were to be found.

‘’ Gotta try it!’’ (blogg user)

The negative responses related to this category were frequently personal related or related to the followers’ skepticism. Results showed that there are followers, not a large amount, who seem skeptical to the bloggers recommendations. These followers seemed to believe that the product was sponsored.

‘’ I'm wondering the same. After picking up on copy/pasting text from other websites in other posts, I'm wondering why whoever writes this can't use their own words to describe a product. It really makes me question the credibility.’’ (Blog user)

Apart from the negative and positive comments. The findings showed a high amount of random comments that discussed topics irrelevant to the product and the opinion leader. Frequently, followers engaged in disputes with each other and randomly commented both positive and negative comments on the bloggers post. Since blogs and Instagram are open platforms similar results were found in every observation.
Food

The responses from the comment fields of ecological food were mainly discussions between followers. The discussions were generally unrelated to the actual product. Instead, it created discussions about what food ought to contain and not contain and the followers own recommendations. Discussions about eco food in general were also found. Due to these findings, the results may indicate on the fact that some of the observed comments were written by greener consumers. They seemed to possess knowledge and showed their concern through the discussions.

“Everything we use is basically eco/chemical free/environmental friendly. Food, shampoo, sunscreen, toys, detergent, diapers, bedclothes etc. It may sound crazy but it is NOT hard if you want to.” (Blog reader)

However, we did find comments related to the product and the opinion leader in the comment fields. These comments were not a majority, since followers on blogs seemed to discuss topics of their own interests. The comments were divided into positive and negative categories. Additionally, subcategories were created as mentioned earlier. The green-related comments involved positive responses from the readers.

“I get really happy if I realize that I’ve bought something ecological” It is something that I don’t choose consciously even if I know that it is better. But ill maybe start thinking more about what I actually buy.” (Blog reader)

This reader showed an unconscious green consumption. The reader did also, after she/he had seen the post, state that a future greener consumption can be considered. Furthermore, readers expressed that they perceived the opinion leader as an inspiration and were pleased over her choice of food.

“Bella writes that she chooses eco meat! Thats the best if you are eating meat, to choose Swedish produced is not good enough even if it is better than imported. Im happy that you choose eco-food Bella! Tnx for all the inspiration!” (Blog reader)

"good initiative to eat less meat! You inspire a lot of people and hopefully people will follow your lead ©" (blog reader)
"GO KENZA :)! So good that you inspire to go for more vego <3 for the environment, a sustainable future and for the animals!" (blog reader)

"Great that you are taking responsibility for the environment by eating less meat! You are so right! <3" (blog reader)

Most of posts included how the food was exposed, if it looked appealing or tasty.

"looks really creamy and tasty, yum!" (Blog reader)

The ecological food related blog posts also seemed to have a high amount of recommendations from other readers.

"The coco icecream is the best ive ever tried in my life. Try it, you can find them 99% of the time at ICA" (Blog reader)

These followers seemed to gladly share their opinions with the opinion leader and other followers. Comments related to an intention to buy ecological products or to go for a greener lifestyle were also found.

"Thanks for the tip! I will try it, it seems available in many stores in Stockholm. Yummy!" (Blog reader)

"good to eat less meat, i need to do that too 😊" (blog reader)

Nevertheless, negative comments were also found. Readers could criticize the blog, they questioned the opinion leader’s credibility and why the opinion leader did not do more about global issues.

"Haha, but Kenza, as much as you travel and consume (both clothes, food and stuff), it doesn’t make any difference to eat less meat! It is good that you want to eat less meat, but there is so many other things that has to change for our environment. What are your thoughts about all the trips you make? Consumption? Spend a lot of money on garments or on charity? What is most important for you today? You have not answered any of these questions so I know what it is more important for you." (blog reader)
4.2 Focus group

When we asked the question *why do you use social media?* The respondents answered very similar. The answers we received were to gain information, to keep updated with trends and to maintain personal relations with relatives. Many respondents used social media to find inspiration. According to our respondents, the inspiration they were looking for was related to make up and fashion.

We asked our respondents if *it is possible to become affected by what is being spread through social media.* All of the respondents answered yes to this question. Some said that it has both negative and positive effects on a person. To create a discussion between the respondents we asked them *how one can be affected.* Some respondents expressed feelings towards appearances. They explained that they believe that social media put pressure on individuals to look a certain way. This could, according to our respondents, lead to body fixation. They referred to this as an issue among genders. Our respondents believed that ones’ self-esteem would worsen since it is hard to live up to the high expectations that role models and opinion leaders create among these individuals.

Some respondents mentioned their willingness to buy through promotion on social media. If well-known persons did commercials on certain products, this created an awareness. The awareness of products on social media seemed to lead to purchases from the respondents. They also generally spoke about how they themselves perceive other to be affected. One of the respondents mentioned the expression “everyone has the same products after it has gone viral on social media”. This was the case when a certain person had exposed the products or used it in one of their posts.

Since our respondents talked about role models, we decided to ask *who they consider being a rolemodel.* In our case, the role models are presented as opinion leaders. The respondents had different perceptions in this specific question. Some mentioned famous bloggers, due to their trendy style and appearance. These bloggers were often related to fashion and make-up. However, some respondents expressed indicated on these persons not being role models. One respondent felt like models and celebrities were role models in her younger years. But at the moment she did not find these individuals being role models. Another respondent seemed to agree with this statement and said that the figures on social media today are not role models.
These respondents were asked to develop their thoughts. Their thoughts grounded up on facts about social pressure; the social media mogules were perfect, which in turn made women think that this is how one should look. Most of the respondents seemed to agree up on this. They did however, indicate on these individuals being very influential. We then asked the question in what way are these people influential? Again, the respondents showed similar answers. These social media figures could be influential to an extent where other individuals wanted to identify themselves with these persons. How ones hair should be, how to dress and what products to buy. The respondents mentioned big social media accounts and how exposure of their products affect people to immediately buy it. Thus, these famous opinion leaders affect were so strong and made it impossible to buy the product before it sold out.

“I think that famous people affect us because we want to be part of a “specific” group. If we see them get attention and praised because of products that they use, then we know that it is social accepted and we want to follow the same trend. Because what they use is “in” right now and not “last season”.

We then asked them to discuss opinion leaders affect on individuals buying decisions and in what way they feel that this can occur to others? The results showed that several respondents bought their products after being exposed to it on blogs or instagram accounts. They felt that they wanted trendy clothes and felt a certain trust when they bought clothes that these role models wore. This applied for make-up products as well. When several famous accounts promoted the same make-up product, one respondent expressed herself as likely to buy it. The respondents also believed that the younger generation were extremely influenced by opinion leaders, more than others. They also adressed these influenced people as trend consumers. They want what everyone has, with no opinion to the actual product. When the opinion leaders change and use other products, these persons will follow them and likely, do the same.

Our following question was “why do you think that you or others want to have what these people have or what they promote?” Our respondents made it clear that it is about how the opinion leader expose the product and what she or he writes on the post that is of interest. It had also to do with how the opinion leader wore or used the product, the respondents claimed that they got inspired by it.
“I think that people may unconsciously think that these role models know what is “in” right now and that is why you get persuaded to want it too. It is also important how they promote. They take great pictures with the clothes they want to promote and you get inspired to buy them.”

"celebrities influence is so big that they can affect people more than we think, we get inspired and motivated by people that we look up to and we become consciously or unconsciously affected by them. The choices they make make us feel "wow this I can do”. Besides, you dare to try out so much more things when they have decided if it is trendy or not.”

A supplementary question was asked: so you trust their reviews in terms of trends?

"yes I trust them, since there is a big supply and you can choose who to follow, you will follow the ones you have most in common with”

Most of the respondents agreed on their trust for the opinion leaders’ reviews. They explained that they will choose an opinion leader that they feel any type of connection with. Since opinion leaders promote different clothes for different people, there is a high supply with a lot of variation that can appeal many different groups of people.

If you are about to purchase a product, what product characteristics are important to you? What drives you to actually make a purchase?

Our respondents thought that price, fast delivery (when online purchasing), how well-known the person who was promoting the product was and quality were traits that determined the purchase decision. Also, some respondents highlighted that they feel more safe about a purchase decision when an opinion leader is promoting the product they wanted to purchase. It is also about what is considered to be currently “trendy” and “fashionable”.

“For me its about safety. if I know that a famous person promotes a product from a well-known company, I know that I won’t regret my order.”

"I certainly not think that it always is a conscious choice, but I think we are following trends and "style icons” because we are usually insecure and scared and would rather fall into the same category as the "populars"(of course there are tons of standard switches, great) but people with great influence in the fashion industry also provides security for those who follow and identify with trends in one way or another "
After discussing this theme for a while, we attached an image from a post made by a famous Instagram profile, Olivia Pierson. She exposed an organic product, an organic mask, that she had on her face. She also posted the name of the brand, and expressed that she loved the product. The post did not show any further information about the product. We asked the respondents to describe their thoughts about the image and what they thought of when seeing the picture.

“such a great scrub, have to have it.”

“ ‘advertisish’, but she is gorgeous and have nice skin so I have to try it!”

The comments below were based on the picture only, which shows how strong an opinion leader can influence their followers or readers. Nevertheless, some of the respondents showed an opposite reaction to the product.

“not so many thoughts, I don’t recognize the brand so I might just have kept scrolling.”

“It is an ad for a product through a famous instagram-profile that appeals to people and the famous instgramer earns money by it.”

Out of eight respondents, one realized that the product was organic. This respondent worked with skincare but she did not recognize the brand. Even though she realized that the product was organic, she did not emphasize it as an important characteristic when purchasing skincare products. The opinion leader was once again the main topic in the discussion.

Do you think that the opinion leader (in this case Olivia Pierson) is the determining factor when deciding to purchase this product or do you think it is the product itself?

“I think that she is the decisive factor since you get tempted to try the product because she is promoting it. Well, at least I get tempted.”

"if I knew who she was, she had been the decisive factor. I dont think the product itself would matter if you hadn't tried it before. As long as the right person promotes it.”

The majority of the responses argued that the opinion leader were the determining factor when deciding to purchase a product or not. The characteristics of the product are important afterwards, that means that the respondents would not buy the product again if the product was not good once they had tried it. Even though the product was organic, the respondents
did not emphasize that, one respondent did not even realize the products’ origin.

“I didn’t realize it was organic, but I agree with ****”

*Have you realized that these role models are promoting and going towards a greener trend? This green trend includes organic and ecological products.*

All of the respondents agreed that the green trend has never been as acclaimed as today. They also revealed that when opinion leaders or role models promote greener alternatives, their willingness to purchase this product increases.

*Assume the following: your favourite blogger or instagamer changes her or his approach into a more “greener” lifestyle, how could this affect you as a reader or follower?*

Some of the respondents admitted that many of their green choices came originally from a blogger who promoted these kind of products.

“I have sometimes made unconsciously greener choices when I’ve seen someone advertise something that looked good.”

”…. It can absolutely be a wake-up call….”

” I think its very easy to fall into this trend and I think many people do the same. You get so influenced by the social part. If you see your role model with green products you you will want to do the same.”

Others stated that they will not get affected due to the higher prices for organic products, their lack of interest and previous brand preferences.

“If I was more involved in environmental issues, climate and health, then it would have affected me but since organic products are not something I buy on daily basis the marketing had not affected me. But the awareness of eco products increases and there is a greater variation so its going to be easier to try out when you decide for it.”

“I don’t think I had been affected by it since I’m not so involved and it’s much more expensive to buy green products. I think I had thought that what I’ve used so far works so I
Do you think that you had purchased a green product if a blogger or instagamer had promoted the product in a "right” and appealing way?

Out of eight respondents, seven agreed that they had purchased the product due to the opinion leader behind the promotion.

From the focus group, the majority of the responses implied that opinion leaders’ impact on readers and followers can be significantly. According to the respondents, opinion leaders’ exposure of green products can indirectly increase a consumer’s green consumption and lead to an increase in consumer awareness.

4.3 Discussion

The observed comments on social media included more thoughts about the person behind the post than comments related to the exposed green product itself. However, a majority of the comments were unconnected to the posts and they were at times difficult to interpret. Many of the individuals had the need to express their feelings to opinion leaders. Despite that opinion leaders did not reply to the individuals’ comments, the desire to express themselves remained. They still spent time writing and expressing their admiration to opinion leaders because it mattered to them.

The category of other comments that included tags, emoji’s, random comments and discussions out of topic also indicated on individuals’ need of expression. Based on the findings, this need may had derived from the pursue to become socially involved. By writing and participating in discussions from different posts, these individuals were perceived as if they wanted to be part of the social context were opinion leaders circulated. Many discussions on the comment fields were created by the individuals themselves. Their expressions could at times be defensive and exhorting, which gave the impression that they had a need to accentuate their opinions.

The readers and followers’ behavior can be interpreted as if they had a close relationship with the opinion leaders. They tend to praise them and, according to their comments, they
were well-informed about the opinion leaders’ personal lives. Individuals highlighted personal happenings in the opinion leader’s life like they had a say in it. However, this behavior might vary depending on how much of an impact opinion leaders have on their lives.

Many of the findings were supported by arguments from the focus group. The informants confirmed that opinion leaders played an important role in many individuals’ lives and it seemed that green choices could be influenced by them. The findings indicated that individuals not always showed an interest in the conveyed green messages. Instead, individuals seemed to be in need of social belongingness or self-expression as if they had a relationship with the opinion leader. The results also showed that publications of green products gave more responses related to the opinion leader. The buying intentions were based on opinion leaders’ recommendations; the intentions were not always based on the product or its green attributes. With support from theory, the interpretations of these findings will be further analyzed and discussed in chapter five.

5. Analysis

5.1 Analysis of the observations

The data collected from the observations showed mainly positive attitudes towards the opinion leaders and what they posted on social media. The observations showed that readers and followers frequently expressed feelings about opinion leaders and their characteristics. This was of main focus among the observations. According to the studied comments, followers and readers seemed to become inspired by opinion leaders and their need to idolize them seemed of great importance.

Although we chose posts with products that did not highlighted an opinion leader’s appearance but instead had the product in focus, the appearance was still of main focus. Many readers and followers had positive associations towards the opinion leaders which led to positive associations to what they posted on social media. According to Xiang, Zheng, Li, & Zhao (2015) individuals can create a certain closeness with public role models and feel connected to them. This phenomenon is referred to as parasocial interaction (Xiang, Zheng, Li, & Zhao, 2015) and it can explain why readers and followers put such an emphasis on the opinion leader and less on the products’ attributes that these role models are highlighting on
their posts. Even though the readers or followers do not often get responses from the opinion leaders, they are still communicating with them and expressing emotions. This one-sided communication was clearly shown throughout the comment fields.

However, despite that most of the comments made by readers or followers emphasized the opinion leader’s attributes, findings showed an increased curiosity in product information. Readers and followers became interested in the green product promoted by the opinion leaders. When the opinion leaders exposed a green product, they exposed the products very clearly and exposed in an appealing way (see appendix 1). The brand and the products’ content were often mentioned and they also wrote product reviews in most of their posts. Notwithstanding, a group of readers and followers still asked about the brand name, about the product function and where to find the product. This showed that they had not been responsive to the given information or not taken in the information at all. This can be related to what Bengtsson & Östberg (2011) state about the fact that consumers purchase products, that they do not need, because they want to identify themselves with their role models. The readers and followers have shown an interest in green products, but not due to the statements about the product. Thus, the emphasis is once again on the opinion leader and what they use rather than an interest in the product itself.

Nevertheless, a minor group embraced the green products. This category focused on the green attributes of a product and they expressed their interest in this matter. This group were the smallest group of them all, consisting of very few comments. This showed that the green product attributes were not of main focus, even if there may have been some green readers or followers among those who commented. Since the group of green consumers are a minority (Rex & Baumann, 2007) this can explain the reason why only a few individuals highlighted the green attributes. Also, it is important to acknowledge that the chosen blogs and Instagram profiles belonged to famous opinion leaders with no focus on green issues, which could have had an effect on the results.

It is possible to claim that green products appeal mostly to green consumers. According to theory, green purchase decisions are often based on values and norms (Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013) having environmental knowledge is an important factor that drives consumers towards a greener behavior (Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013). There were only a few comments that indicated on the green attributes being important for the individuals when they expressed their
intentions to buy it. Instead, individuals expressed how important the opinion leader was for them and that they had convinced them. Further, followers and readers could express that they had a desire to try the product due to the opinion leader’s recommendations only. These consumers do not need to possess green values or norms, or even care about the environment to purchase a green product. If the green product is exposed through opinion leaders, the product’s features can be irrelevant.

According to Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell (2011), consumers can create certain preferences towards products exposed by opinion leaders. This may help explain why individuals seems to be positive and eager to try what opinion leaders post. As Bengtsson & Östberg (2011) explained, it does not seem to be the product that is of relevance. Instead, it is the influence coming from the opinion leader that may lead to a purchase. The findings have indicated on individuals’ intentions to purchase green products when they have been exposed through bloggers and Instagram profiles. Research have claimed that it is of interest to use social media profiles to expose green products (Sheehan & Atkinson, 2015). Therefore, the use of opinion leaders can generate new green followers.

According to Pedersen & neergaard (2005), consumers who purchase green products require more information about the product. When these consumers buy green products, they will likely take their time to go through the given product information. It is important since the green products is of interest for them. These consumers would rarely buy on impulse and need to be convinced through arguments (Pedersen & neergaard, 2005). According to the theory of elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), these individuals tend to go through the central route where the process of elaborating is more complexed. However, the observed readers or followers did not show any indication of this behavior. Instead, they acted in the opposite direction towards the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Consumers who get persuaded through this route are more impulsive and are driven by other factors than the product (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This was shown through the observations.

Theory states that opinion leaders function as a trustworthy source for many (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). The observations implied that the individuals seemed to be easily influenced by opinion leaders and therefore willing to purchase a green product. When opinion leaders expose the usage of a product, it influences individuals who finds them
trustworthy. Their recommendations and opinions were enough to make individuals consider a greener consumption.

According to Mills & Aronson (1965), consumers who believe that opinion leaders possess qualities like no others, have the ability to be persuaded by these well-known profiles. In this case, the opinion leaders seemed to encourage readers and followers to purchase greener products. This shows the influential power that they possess over consumers’ choices (Mills & Aronson, 1965). Based on the findings, the assumption is that consumers do not necessarily need to have a green attitude to purchase green products. This can be explained due to the belief that consumers who are influenced by external factors often purchase products without having any attitude or belief in it (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). The attitude can be implemented after the resulted purchase, meaning that it is not the actual attitude that determines the purchase decision (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). Instead, it is the result of an impulsive behavior that has been influenced by someone or something other than the message itself (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). Opinion leaders may be the influential external factor that has persuaded the individuals to impulsively buy the green product.

Further, a model has been created based on our findings, to explain the relation between attitudes and behavior regarding green consumption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willingness to purchase green</th>
<th>Less willingness to purchase green</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green Attitude expressions</strong></td>
<td><strong>green consumers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-green attitude expressions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Group zero</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Green attitude-behavior model

It has been argued that consumers either have a green attitude and a green behavior, a green attitude but a non-green behavior or that consumers neither have a green attitude nor green behavior. The model illustrates these three consumers’ categories.
However, findings showed that the observed readers or followers acted differently than what theory explain. These individuals seemed motivated to purchase green products without indications of green attitudes. In our model, we refer to it as *group zero*, since these consumers show associations to the opinion leader as influencers instead of a showing an importance to the green attributes in their responses.

### 5.2 Analysis of the focus group

Results from the focus group showed that there is a similarity between the informants’ answers and the comments from the observation. Similar to the results from the observations, the informants strengthened the fact that opinion leaders’ function as role models with the power to influence others. Many of the informants clearly stated that the exposure of products on social media could, in many cases, lead to a purchase. The informants expressed that opinion leaders are trendsetters who creates a certain social acceptance. This means that when an opinion leader exposes a specific product, it is more acceptable for individuals, or the society as a whole, to use the same product. These statements can be related to the theory of social pressure that Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg (2010) mentioned in their book. The theory states that individuals often base their decisions on others opinions of what is acceptable and popular; individuals rarely base their decisions on their preferences only. Since the informants explained that the opinion leaders could create a certain social acceptance, they might be important influences for individuals’ buying decisions. It can also help explain why many individuals shared positive expressions to the green exposed product that the opinion leaders’ published.

The answers indicated that it is a matter of promoting a product through an inspiring person, rather than having a product with unique attributes. What the informants expressed is comparable to the comments from the observations. In the observed comment fields, readers and followers specifically expressed that the opinion leader was the reason for them to consider a green product purchase. They could express that due to the opinion leader, they had decided to purchase the exposed product and felt satisfied with their choice. This comments are related to what the informants stated about consumers being influenced by opinion leaders. If consumers can be persuaded to purchase any kind of product, it is likely that consumers can be persuaded to purchase green products as well, which the informants agreed on.
According to Gillberg (2014), consumers can be influenced by opinion leaders’ values and they can embrace it to an extent where it becomes a part of their own values. The informants indicated that it is considerable to purchase green products and adapt to greener values if desirable opinion leaders do the same. This means that individuals may be willing to adapt to changes communicated through strong opinion leaders. Theory states that the behavior influenced by an external factor can lead to the creation of a specific value (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010).

Informants expressed that they had a desire to purchase what their role models purchase. According to theory, it can be explained through individuals frequent behavior of being influenced by opinion leaders recommendations (Xiang, Zheng, Li, & Zhao, 2015). If the role model would change lifestyle or approach, readers or followers will likely follow this trend. In this case, the focus group admitted that the ongoing green trend could be embraced if an opinion leader emphasized this matter more. This can be related to the observational findings were some readers and followers expressed that they were motivated and persuaded to think greener.

Gillberg (2014) claims that opinion leaders are seen as ideals that individuals want to imitate. The focus group showed tendencies of this behavior when answering to why they purchase products exposed on social media. When it came to beauty and fashion, the informants explained that they gladly imitated opinion leaders who appealed to them. It could be related to how the opinion leaders did their make-up and how they wore their clothes. This can be one factor that explains why the focus was mainly on appearance and looks in the comment fields and not on the green product.

The informants explained that the purchase decision is not always a conscious choice. It could rather be based on insecurity and social acceptance (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010). When purchasing products that opinion leaders wear or promote, they experience it as a safe choice. They further explained that by identifying themselves with opinion leaders, the risk to become excluded from society decreases. This means that the product that opinion leaders expose becomes popular automatically since consumers feel the need to identify themselves with the well-known opinion leader (Bengtsson & Östberg, 2011).
To conclude, consumers seem to be highly influenced by opinion leaders in their purchase decisions. This influence can be used to guide individuals towards a greener direction. When consumers have been exposed to green products on social media, the majority have shown positive responses for the exposed product but only a few expressed the importance of the green attributes. The perceptions from these findings were that consumers seemed to have a tendency to purchase green products if they were exposed through opinion leaders. By this, it is possible for individuals to implement greener choices into their daily lives.
6. Conclusion

6.1 summary of the dissertation

Researchers agree on the need of increasing green awareness among individuals. Since social media has proven to be the most popular platform of communication, this could be a useful tool to spread information about the importance of making greener choices. It has been shown that individuals are easily influenced by opinion leaders and what they spread on social media. The purpose of this thesis has therefore been to investigate how consumers respond to opinion leaders’ publications and exposure of green products on social media. It has also been of great importance to analyze and deepen the understanding of possible influences to their responses. This qualitative study has been conducted with an inductive approach using strategies of netnography and grounded theory.

The results showed responses with less focus on green attributes but still intentions to purchase the green products due to the influences from opinion leaders. In the results, this is referred to as group zero. Research have mainly focused on the promotion of green products to green consumers. Therefore, the findings and results from this thesis may strengthen the reasons to why other consumers should be targeted. Individuals that are not characterized as the typical green consumer have still shown positive buying intentions when the information have been delivered through the right person. We therefore believe that opinion leaders should be used as inspiration towards the implementation of a greener lifestyle.

6.2 Critical review

The purpose with the thesis was to explore how individuals’ response to opinion leaders’ publications of green product-related posts. The findings were analyzed and discussed based on possible motivational factors that may have affected the individuals’ responses. In turn, this was strengthened with theoretical statements. The results showed that only a minority of the comments were related to green attributes. By this, the observed individuals seemed to respond to other things than the actual green product. The majority of the comments were not directly associated with the post itself and there were many comments were the opinion leader seemed to be of focus. The results were therefore interpreted as individuals that seemed to positively respond to the exposure of green products, despite that the product itself
seem of less importance. Instead, individuals may purchase green products due to external factors. This could be the fact that the green product was exposed by an opinion leader.

However, due to a small sample and time limitations, the findings cannot be generalized. The observational samples were only based on 30 posts, and there was only time to conduct one focus group. To strengthen the findings even more, it would have been optimal to create additional focus groups and observe more posts. Also, the interpretation of comments was in many cases challenging. It is likely that other researchers would interpret the observed comments differently. To be critical, the results may therefore vary based on the researchers’ perceptions and understandings. Hence, it is not possible to state that the results are applied to the whole population.

6.3 Ethical implications

When conducting research methods, it is important to follow certain ethical guidelines. The collection of the findings for this thesis were made online, both online observations and an online focus group. The observed comments for this thesis were used without informing those who commented. However, the comments were only collected on public profiles, which shows that they are aware that their comments are visible and publicly shared with others. Precautions have been taken to keep individuals anonymous when presenting the results. This was completed to avoid harm and embarrassment to the observed individuals. Since the research purpose was to see how consumer respond on specific posts on social media, no other method could have been used. Nevertheless, according to Kozinets (2002), there is no clear consensus of ethically appropriate procedures for online observations.

To follow ethical guidelines when presenting results from the focus group, anonymity have also been taken in consideration when discussing the results. The informants were provided with information of how their answers will be used in purpose of research, to avoid any harm or misunderstandings. They were also free to withdraw from the focus group without having their answers used. It is also important to think about ethical issues related to the researchers (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009) Therefore, no personal information was given to the informants. The thesis has therefore considered ethical principles during the construction and collection of data.
6.4 Practical implications

Due to climate changes, concerns about the environment and health-related reasons, individuals are constantly being encouraged to implement a greener lifestyle. The green trend is everywhere to be found, even on the internet such as social media. For this reason, it is of importance for businesses, and especially marketers to deepen their understanding of how consumers can be turned into greener consumers, or at least how they can implement greener consumption habits. This study will therefore contribute with a deeper understanding of how individuals can be affected to buy greener products through social media profiles. Since opinion leaders’ on social platforms seem to be important influences on individuals’ decision making, these role models can impact their followers buying behavior. This have been seen in the results of this thesis where consumers indicated on an intention to buy based on the opinion leaders’ recommendation. For a greener behavior, greener attitudes amongst consumers may be implemented when opinion leaders’ act as spokespersons for green products. For this reason, marketers should have in mind the possibility to attract future greener consumers on social media through opinion leaders and conduct their strategies accordingly.

6.4 Future research

The study has been conducted as an observational study with a focus group as a complement from a consumer perspective. For future research, there are various unexplored fields within this subject that would be interesting for further studies. First, the study can be performed in a large scale. Conducting a research with a larger observational sample with additional focus groups can strengthen and contribute to a more general conclusion (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Second, the research can be conducted with usage of green blogs and Instagram accounts instead. It would be interesting to see if individuals highlight the green attributes in their responses to opinion leaders who are known to have a greener lifestyle. It would also be of interest to study a population with less social involvement and see what factors motivates them to make green choices, if even making green choices. Third, instead of a consumer perspective, an opinion leader or an organizational perspective can be studied. To do a study from an opinion leaders point of view as role model or companies as communicators can be interesting, since it is not easy to integrate green arguments into communication without being a strong influence with the power to persuade others. Fourth
and final, this study has only used blogs and Instagram as social platforms. Other social platforms could be used to study individuals’ responses to green exposure. It is also possible to compare the responses on different social platforms to see which platform that attract most positive responses towards green product exposure.
Bibliography


Appendix 1 – The observed posts

Instagram

bunnybernice

- Channelling my inner ninja turtle with @truselforganics detoxifying mask. Which ninja turtle are you?
  - #truselforganics
  - #ambassador
  - #loveyourself
  - #nobadstuff
  - #organicsskincare
  - #detoxifyingmask

hilisaa

- Healthy, soft skin is a must for me. I just used this #DetoxifyingMask from @truselforganics and I...

sophiamiacova

- Quick session with @truselforganics before I head to Australia. I love their Detoxifying Facial Mask!
  - #truselforganics
  - #nobadstuff

oliviapierson

- Had to put my @TruSelfOrganics mask on before I head to bed, I love how my face feels after! #truselforganics #nobadstuff

bayliefodford @olixandriacampbell
tenleymolzahn

Mia Span: Natural Face Lift 😊

680 gilla-markeringar

.shaunabaker

West Hollywood, California

2,879 gilla-markeringar

My weekly skin regimen is using my @trueseorganic facial mask. It’s the way I combat my acne problems. #trueseorganic #nobadstuff #loveyourself #organicskincare

1,354 gilla-markeringar

winter nights! I got sent this face mask from @trueseorganics and I love it so much! When you apply it, it starts out wet and feels so refreshing on your skin, and then as it dries you...
marateigen_ Spending my Sunday treating my skin with @TruSelfOrganics. My skin is not perfect, and very sensitive to products/makeup. I love when I find something that suits me.

jadeywadey180 Love taking care of my skin with the @TruSelfOrganics masks! It leaves me with a glowing complexion every time! #Nobadstuff

evelina Can’t feel my face but I love it. You guys always ask me what I do for skincare. I try to use organic and natural products as much as I can. This one is the Detoxifying Facial Mask by @TruSelfOrganics and I love it so far. #loveyourself

sssamanthaa Finally trying out the @TruSelfOrganics mask! I’ve been seeing this around a lot, so here’s my thoughts on it. 😊 This mask comes in powder form.
Organic Market & Food – Located between Puerto Banus and Marbella town.


Efter lunch gasade vi vidare ner till stranden. Bättre dag!


CONSCIOUS COLLECTION
6 FEBRUARY, 2011 - 16:30


Speciellt den vita kavajen, de vita byxorna, den rosa axelbandlösa klänningen och de virkade shortsen (!!).

Kollektionen, som består av plagg i ekologisk bomull och återvunnen polyester, lanceeras i april och priserna ligger mellan 99 kr – 499 kr

– DINNER AT RESTAURANT LILI IN PARIS –
Get my dress here (adlink), shoes from Zara.

En av kvällarna i Parre käkade vi en helt fantastisk middag på Lili! De serverar kantonesisk mat och vi beställdes flera rätter som vi delade på, favoritvarn var pilgrimsmussla med koriander (en av förättrarna) och en helt magisk mangopudding som jag åt till efterrätt. Så gott!

Så mycket kött som jag åt under helgen i Paris har jag inte åtit på flera månader. Hemma åter jag kött kanske en gång i veckan (köttindustrin är farliga för miljön än alla transportmedel ihop, det är hur lätt som helst att dra ner på kött och mejeriprodukter så om ni inte redan gjort det... testad) Nu går jag tillbaka till det, dags för bönsof och middag!

Baby hair gone wild haha


Appendix 2 – Example of observed comments

Can we have a video review of your thoughts? Or just a new video? I’ve been branching out and watching new makeup artists but none of them keep me as interested or have a personality like you do!

mamarrazzi

I use it everyday with apple cider vinegar to help with my acne prone skin. I just stocked up with the sale they are currently running for cyber Monday.

miux

Welp I just bought some to give it a try. You’ve convinced me.

luniskillah

Stop! I love your youtube videos so much. I am small like you so things that look good on you I know will look good on me so I love going to you for fashion inspiration.

davidetromo

marlothinorganics

Your feed is gorgeous

mariahtompson

Like it is literally goals(:

ghayya

What face mask is that??

truseoforganics

@ghayya it's ours! head to our page for more info

gchyay

@truseoforganics haha I should have probably read the caption!

leydic_0417

Estal @yarellis_j

gchyay

I love you youtube videos so much. I am small like you so things that look good on you I know will look good on me so I love going to you for fashion inspiration.

davidetromo

Can we have a video review of your thoughts? Or just a new video? I’ve been branching out and watching new makeup artists but none of them keep me as interested or have a personality like you do!

mamarrazzi

I use it everyday with apple cider vinegar to help with my acne prone skin. I just stocked up with the sale they are currently running for cyber Monday.

miux

Welp I just bought some to give it a try. You’ve convinced me.

luniskillah

Stop! I love your youtube videos so much. I am small like you so things that look good on you I know will look good on me so I love going to you for fashion inspiration.

davidetromo

marlothinorganics

Your feed is gorgeous

mariahtompson

Like it is literally goals(:

ghayya

What face mask is that??

truseoforganics

@ghayya it's ours! head to our page for more info

gchyay

@truseoforganics haha I should have probably read the caption!

leydic_0417

Estal @yarellis_j

gchyay

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Appendix 3 – Focus group interview guide

For the focus group, the recruitment flyer looked like this:
Hello! Thank you for willingness to participate in our focus group. We want to hear your opinions and ideas about opinion leaders’ and their influence on social media. You will be in a group with eight other females. Your responses to the questions will be kept anonymous. We will start with some questions and we hope that these questions can create a discussion. It is important to be completely honest and to make room for other comments. The focus group will last for about 60-90 minutes. We look forward to hear your opinion!

For the focus group, some ground rules were implemented:
- Keep a good tone in the group. Everything you write will be filed, hence it is important that you respond clearly and try to write your overall thoughts in one comment.
- It's okay to disagree on issues, it makes sense that you have different opinions. There are no right or wrong answers!
- Keep the discussion going, all the informants have to contribute with comments. You have to do all the talking.

During the focus group, we began with an engagement question to introduce the informants to and to make them comfortable with the topic of discussion.

What do you use social media for today?

We then continued with exploration questions so that the informants could get into discussion.

do you think that you get affected by what is being spread on social media? If yes, in what way are you influenced? Please develop your answers.

Role models has been mentioned, who would you consider to be a role model on social media? You may also mention what these people have for characteristics that appeal to you.

Why do you think you and others want to have what these people have or promote? what is appealing for you?

do you trust the opinion leader's reviews regarding trends?
If you now instead are about to purchase a product, which attributes are important to you? what is it that really drives you to make this purchase?

A picture will be shown (see picture 4). Describe your thoughts about the picture and what you think of when you see it. All informants should respond.

do you think she is the decisive factor in the purchase of this product or do you think it is the product itself?

Many of you have mentioned that influential people on social media affect your buying decision as they often are trendsetters. Have you noticed that these opinion leaders/role models have started to promote a greener trend? with a green trend, we mean everything that is environmentally friendly, organic and ecologically.

Suppose this: your favorite blogger/instagramer changes the approach to a more "green" lifestyle, how will this affect you?

do you think that you had bought a green product if an opinion leader had promoted the product in a "right" way? All should answer this question.