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Abstract

This study examines the impact of influencers and influencer marketing on the sustainable (consumer) behavior of individuals using the example of millennials. Awareness and sensitization of climate change and the environment are increasing. People are, more than ever, aware of how wasteful their current lifestyles are, and social media sets the stage for discussions about the severity of the climate crisis. Previous academic literature has not focused on the combination of these aspects yet. This study is based on (sustainable) consumer behavior combined with ethical consumer decision making. Besides, it takes a closer look at social communication and social learning theory. In a qualitative analysis, seven individuals were interviewed about their experience with sustainability concerning the impact of influencer marketing. In particular, various factors for the successful effect of influencers were identified. Thus, content that provides added value, a guideline, or new ideas for a sustainable lifestyle are significant for successfully being influenced by influencers. Consequently, influencer marketing can have a positive impact on increasing the reach, brand awareness, and sales of sustainable brands.

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit untersucht den Einfluss von Influencern und Influencer-Marketing auf das nachhaltige (Konsum-)Verhalten von Individuen am Beispiel von Millennials. Das Bewusstsein und die Sensibilisierung für den Klimawandel und die Umwelt nehmen zu. Die Menschen sind sich mehr denn je über die Folgen ihres gegenwärtigen Lebensstils auf die Umwelt bewusst. Gleichzeitig schaffen soziale Medien die Voraussetzungen für Diskussionen über die Ernsthaftigkeit der Klimakrise. Die bisherige wissenschaftliche Literatur hat sich bislang noch nicht auf diese Kombination von Aspekten konzentriert. Die vorliegende Studie basiert zum einen auf dem (nachhaltigen) Verbraucherverhalten in Verbindung mit ethischer Entscheidungsfindung. Andererseits werden die soziale Kommunikationstheorie sowie die sozialkognitive Lerntheorie genauer untersucht. In einer qualitativen Analyse wurden sieben Personen zu ihren Erfahrungen mit Nachhaltigkeit hinsichtlich der Wirkung von Influencer-Marketing befragt. Die Resultate der Interviews zeigen, dass verschiedene Faktoren für die erfolgreiche Wirkung von Influencern verantwortlich sind. So sind Inhalte, die einen Mehrwert, eine Leitlinie oder neue Ideen für einen nachhaltigen Lebensstil bieten, für eine erfolgreiche Beeinflussung durch Influencer von Bedeutung. Infolgedessen kann Influencer-Marketing einen positiven Einfluss auf die Erhöhung der Reichweite, der Markenbekanntheit und des Absatzes von nachhaltigen Marken haben.

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List of Abbreviations

DIY	Do-it-yourself
PCI	Problem-centered interviews
PSI	Parasocial interaction
SMM	Social media marketing
TPB	Theory of planned behavior
TRA	Theory of reasoned action
USP	Unique selling proposition
VEY	Voluntary ecological year
WOM	Word-of-mouth
WOMMA	Word-of-mouth marketing

1 Introduction

Sustainability is the current buzzword (MNFST, 2020). About four million people worldwide took part in climate strikes in 2019 and Greta Thunberg has become Time's Person of The Year 2019 (Woon, 2020; Alter & Worland, 2019). Awareness and sensitization of climate change and the environment are increasing (Woon, 2020). Never before have people been so aware of how wasteful their current lifestyles are, and social media sets the stage for discussions about the severity of the climate crisis (MNFST, 2020). The more people talked about it the more people became aware of the crisis (Woon, 2020). That is where influencer marketing comes in (Woon, 2020). (Conscious) influencers are increasingly turning their attention to environmental aspects and educate people by showing them how to change to a sustainable lifestyle (Woon, 2020). Connecting with consumers and the reality we live in is key (Bogliari, 2019). Influencers adapt to the needs of consumers, and the industry should do the same. This is what is already happening. More and more companies are drawing attention to their *green* and *sustainable* practices (MNFST, 2020). And they need to do so. Consumers are increasingly considering environmental and social aspects in their purchasing decisions (Hosseinpour et al., 2015, p. 47). In the global fashion industry, for example, it is becoming increasingly important to adopt sustainable and ethical manufacturing practices as consumers demand more sustainable products (Bogliari, 2019).

Due to the increased attention to environmental and social issues, responsible brands were introduced to the market, which promotes their positive impact on environmental sustainability and social development (Unilever, 2012, p. 3). Marketing research identified motivators but also barriers, that do or do not lead to buying and using these products (Harrison et al., 2005, p. 2). An international study by Unilever (2017) showed that one-third of consumers (33%) choose to buy from social- or environmental-friendly brands.

Forbes already recorded in 2014 that 81% of millennials expect companies to make a public commitment to good corporate citizenship (Faw, 2014). The still relatively new marketing discipline *influencer marketing* is a good choice to do so, as the younger target groups want dialogue and can hardly be reached via television or print media (Jahnke, 2018, p. 2). Content (views and comments about products and interests) is shared in all forms, such as text, images, and videos, and distributed via the Internet (Jahnke, 2018, p. 2). Thus, influencers and consumers create a culture of online experts and followers (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018, p. 128). Influencers are estimated to be a $8 billion ecosystem (Bogliari, 2019).

As influencing others can be very powerful (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018, p. 128) this master thesis combines the two components and considers the potential of influencers on ethical consumption and ethical behavior of millennials.

1.1 Relevance of the Topic

The literature on ethics and sustainability in the field of marketing and management remains inadequate (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018, p. 127). Previous approaches to move consumers towards sustainable consumption have proven unsuccessful (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 381). Thus, there is a need for further research. Previous scholars connected the macro and micro perspectives and argued that mindful consumption is guided by businesses through the implementation of product, price, promotion and place, which places the challenge of sustainability on businesses (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 382). Recent research does not view the consumers as passive participants and believes that the solution of global sustainability challenges begins with consumers and their mindful consumption (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 383). From the perspective that not only companies but also consumers themselves are responsible for sustainability, the question arises as to how people can be guided towards a sustainable way of living. Influencer marketing might be one way of motivating the younger generations, in particular, to become more sustainable as influencers publicly share moral values and attitudes and thus influence others. Current studies support this by showing that especially millennials are best reached with influencer campaigns via social media (Inhoffen, 2018).

However, there is little literature on influencers and their potential impact on consumers' sustainable (buying) behavior. Whether influencers really lead to more sustainable behavior of fans and followers will be examined more closely in this master thesis. The results will be used to determine whether influencer marketing can help sustainable brands to increase their awareness and success.

1.2 Research Questions

This master thesis aims to investigate the impact that sustainable influencers have on the attitudes and purchasing intentions of their millennial followers concerning sustainable consumption and lifestyle. Since there is already basic knowledge about the individual topics, but not yet sufficient knowledge about the connection between influencers and influencer marketing on the sustainable (buying) behavior of their followers, an explorative research character becomes apparent.

For many people, it is for various reasons difficult to act sustainably. Since influencers are often specialists in their field and create content for their followers full-time or as a comprehensive hobby, the question arises whether they can help people on their way to a sustainable lifestyle, and hence support sustainable brands. The present master thesis will, therefore, investigate whether influencers help people to behave and consume more sustainably.

For this purpose, holistic insights into the sustainable behavior of the interview partners who are already interested in sustainability and who have already integrated certain sustainable actions into their everyday life is first given.

The next step is to examine whether there were certain sources of inspiration and factors influencing the respondents' interest in sustainability. Only in the second part the use of social media and experiences with influencers in the area of sustainability will be specifically addressed. In connection with examples of already implemented sustainable actions or purchased products, a recommendation for sustainable brands can then be given.

The following research questions are formulated as a result of these objectives:

1. How do influencers affect the sustainable attitudes and purchasing intentions of millennial consumers towards a sustainable lifestyle?
2. To what extent does influencer marketing help sustainable brands to reach more customers?

The aspects described in the two research questions will be examined by means of seven different interviews with millennials who have a general interest in sustainability.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This master thesis uses the idea of (sustainable) consumer behavior together with the social communication theory and social learning theory to examine the impact sustainable influencers have on the attitudes and purchasing intentions of their followers towards sustainable consumption and lifestyles.

It starts with the definition of the relevant terms to avoid comprehension difficulties (see chapter 2). Subsequently, the theory of reasoned action (TRA), the further developed theory of planned behavior (TPB), as well as the attitude-behavior gap will be explained in detail. Together with the ethical consumer decision-making process, this chapter is forming the basis for understanding (sustainable) consumer behavior. To answer the two research questions, it is important not only to understand the motivations and barriers of sustainable behavior but also how consumer behavior is influenced by social media influencers. Chapter 4 gives a deeper insight into social communication theory and explains how influencers communicate with their fans and followers. To understand their influence even more deeply, chapter 5 looks further into the social learning theory. The theoretical part will be summarized in chapter 6 and hypotheses will be composed.

The empirical part of the thesis starts with chapter 7, in which the framework for qualitative research is given. Subsequently, chapter 8 presents the results and the analysis, including the

previously presented literature. Chapter 9 then provides implications for sustainable brands before the present master thesis will be summarized and closed with the last two chapters “Limitations and Outlook” and “Conclusion”.

2 Definitions and Delimitations

This master thesis examines the relevance of influencer marketing for sustainable brands and lifestyles. Therefore, it is important to define the terms clearly and unambiguously. This chapter provides an overview of the basic definitions of sustainability and influencers as well as further information on influencer marketing, to better understand the research questions and to be able to answer them later.

2.1 Sustainability

The central topic of this master thesis is sustainability. This part is intended to explain exactly what the term means and thus opens up the way for further background literature and theories. In the mid-1980s, the first ideas of sustainability found their way into the academic lexicon (Portney, 2015, p. 1). Mazmanian and Kraft (2009, p. 15) are speaking of three epochs. The first epoch focused on federal command-and-control regulation, remediating and preventing environmental damage (Mazmanian & Kraft, 2009, p. 15). The second epoch was about achieving greater economic efficiency in environmental protection and the third and new epoch focuses more broadly on environmental concerns (Mazmanian & Kraft, 2009, p. 15). The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainability as an economic-development activity that *“meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (1987, p. 8). In conjunction with this definition, they describe three co-equal elements, the so-called three E’s of sustainability: environment, economy and equity (WCED, 1987). After the WCED (1987, pp. 8-9), sustainability can only be achieved by simultaneously protecting the environment, preserving economic growth and development, and promoting equity. Positive results should be achieved in all three elements and achievement in only one of them cannot and should not be accomplished by scarifying another (WCED, 1987, pp. 8-9).

Brown, Hanson and Liverman (1987, pp. 714-716) split the definition of sustainability into six parts as follows. *Carrying capacity* is about the optimum and maximum ability of Earth’s systems to support human life and well-being. The maximum sustainable yield from natural systems, such as forests and fisheries, is meant by sustainable use of *biological resources*, while *sustainable agriculture* describes the maintaining productivity of farming during and after disturbances such as floods and droughts. *Sustainable energy* is about finding and using renewable alternatives to dependence on fossil fuels to produce thermal energy. *Sustainable society*

and economy are achieved when human systems maintain to support economic and human well-being. To promote economic growth only to the extent and in ways that do not cause deterioration of natural systems is further meant by *sustainable development*.

Out of these, Kidd (1992) specified sustainability by six roots, which are described briefly in this paragraph. The *ecological/carrying capacity root* describes the maintenance of natural systems so that they can support human life and well-being. *Resources/environment root* says that economic growth should be only promoted to the extent and in ways that do not cause deterioration of natural systems. The human impact on the health of the Earth and its ability to support human populations is represented by the *root of the biosphere*. With Kidd's *critique of technology root*, the author rejects the notion that science and technology, by themselves, will protect and save the Earth. *No growth/slow growth root* describes the limits to the ability of the Earth to support the health and well-being of ever-growing populations and the *ecodevelopment root* is about adapting business and economic development activities to realities of natural resource and environmental limits.

As it can be seen, there are many different approaches to the issue of sustainability, but they all focus on the same goals: climate change, protecting water suppliers and systems, being prepared for the consequences of environmental changes, which might occur, and finding alternatives to avoid the disposing hazardous and toxic materials in the water and underground (Portney, 2015, p. 27).

Since this work aims to answer the question of how influencing factors influence the sustainable purchasing intentions of individuals, it is important to understand not only what is meant by sustainability in general but also what the key features of sustainable consumption are. This will be explained in the next part.

2.1.1 Sustainable Consumption

Economics taught us that people intent to buy the best quality products for the cheapest price (Beardshaw, 1992, p. 59). That phenomenon is called *traditional purchase behavior* (Harrison et al., 2005, p. 2). The *ethical purchase behavior* describes people who, for example, chose fair trade labeled coffee or an eco-labeled washing powder because social or environmental issues are important to them. They do not ignore price or quality, but they apply additional criteria in their decision-making process (Harrison et al., 2005, p. 2).

The ethics of consumption concentrates on the ethics of capitalist market systems and the reduction of consumption overall (Barnett et al., 2005, p. 21). Ethical consumers have different motives for choosing a certain product, like political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social, or other motives (Harrison et al., 2005, p. 2). What is ethical is therefore related to individual

expressions, concerns, and issues but after Harrison, Newholm and Shaw (2005, p. 2) all of them are concerned with the effects that their purchase decision has on the world around them and not only on themselves.

Mainstream economists promote growth in consumption of goods, where else the sustainable idea – deep inside – thinks of a limitation of materials and goods humans can consume (Portney, 2015, p. 44). According to Rees (2012), for some people, the only sustainable consumption is less consumption (Portney, 2015, p. 46). Moreover, Murphy and Cohen (2001, p. 5) state that it is important to understand the political, social, and cultural significance of the conventional view of consumption with its material resource consumption and environmental consequences. Developing an understanding of these consumption patterns and how to change them is called the sustainable consumption movement (Portney, 2015, p. 45). The aim is to find out what is consumed by whom and which environmental consequences result from this (Portney, 2015, p. 45).

Sustainable consumption refers not only to purchasing but also to spending, eating, and disposing of products (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 383). Sustainable consumers have an interest in the impact of their consumption on economic and personal well-being as well as on society and the environment (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 384). They are called ecologically conscious consumers (Kinnear et al., 1974), socially responsible consumers (Antil, 1984), ethical or global consumers (Elkington 1994), green consumers (Roberts, 1996), pro-social consumers (Osterhus, 1997) and citizen-consumers (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015). Of course, there are variations between the different types, which will not be further discussed since this master thesis deals with sustainable consumption behavior in general. Thus, it is not relevant for answering the research questions.

In addition to what governments and public policies need to do to increase sustainable consumption, there are also many efforts to change the behavior of individual consumers (Portney, 2015, pp. 45-46). The sustainable consumption movement tries to get people to make their own choices to minimize their environmental impact (Portney, 2015, p. 46). However, changes are limited in consumption patterns. For example, as consumers demand for renewable energy increases, public and private institutions must respond to these demands (Portney, 2015, pp. 45-46). The effort of sustainable consumption, therefore, focuses both on the individual consumer and on institutions (including governments) as vehicles that enable or limit behavioral change (Portney, 2015, p. 46).

In some areas, however, this sustainable consumption also requires sustainable companies that provide consumer goods. What makes a brand a sustainable brand is briefly explained in the next chapter and serves to answer the second research question.

2.1.2 Sustainable Brands

For a sustainable brand, the social mission is at the center of every action and commercial success (Last, 2016, p. 85). A sustainable brand creates a product or service that has a particular added value in terms of environmental and social benefits that are relevant to consumers (Belz & Peattie, 2009, p. 163). Acting responsibly creates credibility, trust, and ultimately reputation for the company, which supports sustainable corporate value (Balderjahn, 2014, p. 142). In addition to environmentally compatible business practices, the focus lies also on social business practices (Balderjahn, 2014, p. 143). These include, for example, health and safety issues during the use and manufacturing conditions and most importantly, the physical protection and well-being of people at work (Balderjahn, 2014, p. 143). In summary, sustainable brands are based on the triple bottom line concept, which integrates ecological, social, and economic concerns into the company's activities (Meffert & Hensmann, 2014, p. 28). Hence, environmental protection exists on an equal level with social and economic demands within the so-called triple bottom line concept. In general, brands can evoke positive or negative feelings (Belz & Peattie, 2009, p. 163). The more positive the perceptions and feelings towards a brand are, the higher is the probability of identification and loyalty of consumers. According to Belz and Peattie (2009, p. 163), it is, therefore, crucial to building strong brands, especially in the sustainability sector. The lead of the 21st century will take brands that understand and improve their direct and indirect impact on all stakeholders (Iannuzzi, 2018, p. xi).

The second component of this master thesis is influencer Marketing. To be able to assess the impact and the associated significance of influencers and influencer marketing on sustainable consumer behavior at a later stage, this discipline will be defined below and distinguished from other areas of marketing.

2.2 Influencer

Currently, one group of persons is gaining more and more relevance for companies: digital opinion leaders, also known as influencers. Opinion leaders have been used in their original form since 1760, by Josiah Wedgwood, founder of the Wedgwood porcelain manufactory, who used the British Royal Family to spread his corporate messages (Bauer, 2016). Brand ambassadors and influencers who are of interest to companies today are people who have gained fame, not through the classic media, but social networks (Jahnke, 2018, p. 2). An influencer is an independent individual with the capability of influencing consumer perception and behavior (Jahnke, 2018, p. 4). Thus, they have a high influence on the success of a company and are therefore used to assist companies in their marketing efforts (Dada, 2017). With their opinions expressed on blogs, communities, and social networks (explained in detail in chapter 2.4), these individuals can exert a significant influence on the opinions of many people (Kreutzer &

Land, 2017, p. 211). A combination of status, job responsibility, connections in social and business networks as well as personality and subject knowledge might decide about their amount of influence (Brown & Hayes, 2008, p. 50).

The importance of previous opinion formers has changed in the public eye (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 211). Until a few years ago, public opinion was primarily shaped by representations in mass media discussions conducted by professional opinion leaders (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 211). Over time, completely new digital opinion leaders established themselves and became stars in their community, for example on YouTube (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 211). They influenced many users without being noticed by companies so far (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 211).

Influencers are people who influence the opinions and behavior of others through their actions, authority, or popularity (Jahnke, 2018, p. 4). As multipliers, they often reach several people and disseminate products, brands, and advertising messages via various communication channels but above all via the Internet (Jahnke, 2018, p. 4). They operate their accounts independently by creating original and unique content that can include publicity for a brand's product or service, or the brand name itself (Mathew, 2018). The status and popularity of this person are important (Grabs & Sudhoff, 2014, p. 229). By making a positive statement, an influencer can create value for the company, or destroy it through negative ones (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 209). The capital of influencers is their credibility which is not only based on their thematic competence but also on the independence of their judgments (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 223).

Influencer has become a new job title that implies a digital lifestyle and the multimedia development of content (Jahnke, 2018, p. 9). Through the use of smartphones and creative ideas, an ever-growing global publishing scene with a wide reach is developing (Jahnke, 2018, p. 9). A study conducted by Webguerillas and the Macromedia University in 2015 found that there are 4.6 million influencers in Germany who use social media every day and are strongly networked (ONEtoONE, 2015). A serious occupational field is emerging, which is much broader and more diverse than initially assumed, whether as a part-time job, as a hobby, or as a solopreneur[1] (Jahnke, 2018, p. 10).

A large number of different influencers has emerged. They differ both in their reach (number of followers) and in the content they publish. The next two parts briefly explain which types of influencers can be distinguished.

[1] A solopreneur is an entrepreneur who works alone, i.e. without co-entrepreneurs and without personnel (Andersson & Wadensjö, 2007).

2.2.1 Dimensions of Influencers

Influencers are distinguished based on their range and familiarity into three dimensions: celebrity-influencer, macro-influencer, and micro-influencer.

Celebrity-Influencers

People who have already achieved a high profile through other activities, such as actors, sportsmen and -women, singers, or artists are known to us as stars (Krüger, 2018, p. 231). They have several hundred thousand subscribers and followers on their social platforms and thus enjoy an enormous reach which they were able to build up without a strategic approach due to their prominence (Krüger, 2018, p. 231). It was easy for them to monetize these services from there as well since stars have always been popular testimonials for brands (Krüger, 2018, p. 231). However, cooperation is high-priced, and stars tend to be selective (Krüger, 2018, p. 231). In the early days of influencer marketing, prominent influencers were mainly used, like the British Royal Family for Wedgwood porcelain (TapInfluence, 2015). However, brands have since realized that the ability of an influencer to reach and influence their target consumers and authentically convey their brand message was far more important than reach alone (TapInfluence, 2015). Thus, the other dimensions of influencers are less well-known personalities than celebrities but still highly effective (Krüger, 2018, p. 230).

Macro-Influencer

This dimension contains mostly full-time influencers who create professional content themselves, like images and videos, and are strongly focused on the staging of their personal brand and content (WOMMA, 2017, p. 10). When speaking about top-tier or macro-influencer, the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) (2017, p. 10) thinks of 100,000 or more followers. A growing number of influencers can be detected in this dimension (Krüger, 2018, p. 230). Although more and more companies are now using influencer marketing, the number of attractive jobs is still limited (Krüger, 2018, pp. 230-231). Despite the resulting competitive situation in the macro-influencer sector, the influencer should think long-term and predominantly enter into a cooperation that fits their channel to maintain the personal brand and the associated credibility (Krüger, 2018, p. 231). Macro-influencers have enormous reach but collaborations with them are also costly (WOMMA, 2017, p. 10).

Micro-Influencer

Micro-influencers are perceived as credible experts and are usually distinguished by their passion for their respective categories (Langan, 2019). They have a smaller range than macro-influencers but can exert a greater or higher quality influence (Krüger, 2018, p. 230). They reach their followers more selectively which can be seen by higher interaction rates and hence achieve higher fan loyalty (Krüger, 2018, p. 230). The WOMMA (2017, pp. 8-9) divides the micro-influencers into mid-level influencers (25,000 to 100,000 followers) and micro-

influencers (1000 to 25,000 followers). For micro-influencers, financial success is not the most important thing (Krüger, 2018, p. 230). They rather enjoy being an influencer, which is ideally rewarded by companies with the recognition of their work (Krüger, 2018, p. 230). The micro-influencer is attractive for companies because a return service here is not necessarily monetary but often in the form of product samples or invitations to events (Krüger, 2018, p. 230). Working with this type of influencer is particularly interesting in niches, as companies can work with experts to reach their target group (Krüger, 2018, p. 230).

2.2.2 Categories of Influencers

Furthermore, three categories of influencers are established from the published content: generalists, subject matter experts, and peer influencers.

Generalists

Influencers publish content on various topics (WOMMA, 2017, p. 12). They post content such as pictures from their daily lives with children, pets, food, sports, etc. or put videos about general thoughts online (WOMMA, 2017, p. 12). Besides, they do not focus on a specific topic and are also referred to as lifestyle influencers (WOMMA, 2017, p. 12).

Subject matter experts

The influencer focuses on a specific topic, e.g. sports, nutrition, photography, beauty, education, etc. (WOMMA, 2017, p. 12). The person does not have to be a trained expert, but this is quite possible, as with professional athletes, nutritionists, or trained make-up artists (WOMMA, 2017, p. 12).

Peer influencers

These include influencers who publish representative content (paid or unpaid) of companies or organizations (WOMMA, 2017, p. 12). They can be employees or business partners who are nevertheless perceived as trustworthy by the target audience (Herzog , 2017). They share content such as information and experience reports or expert knowledge about the company with their followers (Herzog , 2017).

Based on their ability to influence consumers, influencers are of great interest to companies. Therefore, a relatively new form of marketing has emerged: influencer marketing. The next chapter explains exactly what influencer marketing is about.

2.3 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing or social influencer management is an important discipline in digital branding (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 209). Research, done by the Keller Fay Group and Dr.

Jonah Berger, found that (micro-) influencers are *"are a reliable and credible channel that has real impact in swaying consumer behavior"* (Langan, 2019).

TapInfluence (2015) explains influencer marketing simply as marketing in social media, using influencers to spread a brand message. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association defines influencer marketing as follows: *"The act of a marketer or communicator engaging with key influencers to act upon influencees in pursuit of a business objective"* (WOMMA, 2013, p. 6).

Thus, influencer marketing is the cooperation with individual persons who can address a relevant number of viewers, listeners, or followers. The companies or responsible agencies must guarantee and ensure that these people reach the right customer segment (Fischer, 2016). Influencer marketing is an important form of the two-step flow model, which will be further described in chapter 4.3 (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 209). The positive reaction of the consumer to a message is the main goal of influencer marketing. The message is not delivered by the company itself, but by a person who is considered trustworthy and likable (Woods, 2016). Furthermore, according to a study by Launchmetrics (2015, p. 5) in 32 countries, companies using influencer marketing also like to increase brand awareness (93%), increase customer loyalty (76%) and acquire sales leads (75%).

To make influencer marketing even clearer, the following part differentiates this discipline from the very similar advocacy marketing.

2.3.1 Differentiation from Advocacy Marketing

Influencer marketing and advocacy marketing are very similar in their mode of operation but must be distinguished from each other. Influencers have an established network of followers and are sponsored to work with companies. Advocates are people who support a company on their own initiative (WOMMA, 2017, p. 21). They are convinced supporters of a brand and advertise it voluntarily both online and offline, motivated by their passion for the respective products (WOMMA, 2017, p. 21). Consumer advocates are fans of a brand and strongly identify themselves with it (WOMMA, 2017, p. 22). They communicate their positive experiences with the products to their families, acquaintances, and communities (WOMMA, 2017, p. 22).

The definition of influencer marketing has now been explained. However, to highlight the advantages and to explain the tremendous popularity surrounding this new marketing discipline, the following subchapter will take a closer look at how influencer marketing works.

2.3.2 Mechanisms of Influencer Marketing

The definition of influencer marketing is now clear, but how does influencer marketing work? Simply explained: companies look for influencers from social networks that have a good

reputation with their target customers (InfluenceME, 2020). Companies usually work with influencers that well complement their products (InfluenceME, 2020). For example, a chocolate manufacturer who launches a new variety on the market cooperates with a food influencer (InfluenceME, 2020). The food influencer tries the product and reports on his or her social media account (InfluenceME, 2020). Companies can search for suitable influencers themselves or instruct agencies to do so (InfluenceME, 2020). The independent search process should be based on important keywords for the product (InfluenceME, 2020). The search results are then filtered for influencers (e.g. blogs or social media accounts) (InfluenceME, 2020). Many followers are usually not the most important aspect (InfluenceME, 2020). It is also important that followers react to the content of the influencer, e.g. by reading a blog article, liking, commenting, forwarding, or saving a post, etc. (InfluenceME, 2020). After all, companies want their message to be seen by as many followers as possible (InfluenceME, 2020).

If the right influencer is found and contacted, cooperation is established (InfluenceME, 2020). Influencers collaborate with companies and get paid to spread the word, for instance with money or free products (TapInfluence, 2015). Influencers share the brand's message with other people through their social media platform(s), either by creating content themselves or using the brand's content (TapInfluence, 2015). A person who follows an influencer already trusts him or her and is, therefore, easier to influence (InfluenceME, 2020). For example, fans buy the same outfits to look like their favorite social media stars (InfluenceME, 2020). Successful influencers report both positive and negative aspects that affect them concerning the product or brand, and this is what the followers perceive as authentic (InfluenceME, 2020). Compared to conventional advertising, the company reaches its target group much better: anyone following a food influencer is usually interested in food (InfluenceME, 2020).

To achieve company goals (e.g. increase brand awareness), the influencers are integrated into the companies in different ways, e.g. the influencer is integrated into content promotion, content creation, corporate communications, or event management (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 209). Motivating digital opinion leaders to express themselves positively about their own company, brands, and offers is considered as a challenge (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 223). Companies should provide opinion leaders with sufficient information and have products and services tested (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 223). It is important to identify digital opinion leaders who are relevant to one's industry, company, and brand and ideally integrate them communicatively (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 212). This is important because online recommendations are the most trustworthy form of advertising with 60% after personal recommendations with 78% (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 212).

In sum, it becomes clear that influencer marketing has a dominant sales-supporting function. Therefore, it is counted as value-oriented customer management because the recommend-

dation activities of a customer increase its value for the company (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 210). Kirkpatrick (2016) found that influencer marketing can achieve returns eleven times higher than with traditional advertising methods. Based on the positive results, influencer marketing will grow and gain in importance (Woods, 2016).

In the future, companies have to continue to rely on influencer marketing above all to motivate the target group of 14- to 40-year-old consumers to buy their products (Heintze, 2017). In the younger target group, the internet not only has the potential to replace television as an influential medium, but it is also already the most important medium (Herrmann, 2017). As digitalization continues, the trend towards influencer marketing is strengthening: more social web users mean more influencers and thus potentially a greater reach for companies (Herrmann, 2017). The players on both sides are becoming more professional and the tightrope walk between reach and authenticity is further balanced on a professional level. The advantages of influencer marketing are examined in more detail in the next chapter.

2.3.3 Benefits of Influencer Marketing

In (2016), Nielsen Catalina Solutions and the marketing agency TapInfluence found that influencer marketing gives eleven times higher return on investment than traditional forms of digital marketing. They also found that consumers exposed to influencer marketing brought significantly more products with each purchase than the control group shown only traditional online marketing activities (Nielsen Catalina Solutions & TapInfluence, 2016). There were several reasons for the increase in sales. First, influencer marketing must be true engagement because consumers actively search for influencers (Nielsen Catalina Solutions & TapInfluence, 2016). Regular online advertising appears unsolicited and is not always actively noticed (Nielsen Catalina Solutions & TapInfluence, 2016). Secondly, influencer marketing creates a halo effect, which the influencer transfers to the respective brand (Nielsen Catalina Solutions & TapInfluence, 2016).

Compared to celebrities who can help increase brand awareness as well, influencers will drive product engagement even further and increase sales and brand loyalty (TapInfluence, 2017). (Micro-) Influencers very often focus on a specific niche, which can more easily lead to increased engagement around a product (see chapter 2.2.1). TapInfluence (2017) states that this might be the case because the influencer, unlike the celebrity, is interested in the brand product because he or she specializes in this type of product (e.g. sustainable fashion). It is also more likely to find out who the influencer's followers are than the fans of a celebrity (TapInfluence, 2017). That makes it easier to find the right influencers and reach the desired target group (TapInfluence, 2017).

Berger and the Keller Fay Group discovered that Micro-influencers *"have up to 22.2 times more conversations each week regarding recommendations on what to buy versus an average consumer"* (Langan, 2019). The following facts within this paragraph refer to this study. Besides, they found that influencers have more influence than an average person, as 82% of consumers are very likely to follow a recommendation from an influencer. Influencers are more direct in their recommendations. Thus, 74% encourage a person to buy or try. Because of their similar social status to their followers, influencers are perceived as more credible, trustworthy, and knowledgeable than, for example, celebrities. Influencers can also provide a better explanation of how a product works. Yet they are popular enough to be revered and used for recommendations and advice (TapInfluence, 2017).

Other benefits of influencer marketing come from side effects such as the reuse of influencer content that a company can use to fill its entire social media plan (Nielsen Catalina Solutions & TapInfluence, 2016). The brand is spread through the influencers' audience and influencer marketing is also more cost-effective than using in-house design teams (Nielsen Catalina Solutions & TapInfluence, 2016). Even after the campaign is over, consumers still have the opportunity to see the products/services, giving the influencers' marketing campaigns a lasting impact (Nielsen Catalina Solutions & TapInfluence, 2016).

Technological development has created new advertising opportunities. Online advertising is overwhelming and tries to attract attention wherever it can. However, people are increasingly trying to avoid advertising, for which programs have been developed as adblocker (Dahan, 2016). These programs allow consumers to avoid advertising by blocking the ads in film clips or removing them as a disruptive element on a web page (Dahan, 2016). Pagefair and Adobe states in their 2014 report that 40% of the Millennials use adblocker (Dahan, 2016). However, adblocker cannot block the content itself (e.g. shown in a film clip), which is one of the reasons why influencer marketing is effective (Dahan, 2016).

Since influencers are mainly present on the Internet and influencer marketing takes place on social networks, the last part of section two defines social media to avoid possible misunderstandings.

2.4 Social Media

Social media describes the exchange of information, experiences, and points of view through community websites (Weinberg, 2010, p. 1). It is defined as *"a group of Internet-based applications (…) that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content"* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Hundreds of platforms, like blogs, internet forums, message boards, images, and video portals, as well as user-generated websites and podcasts, allow users to connect (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63). They have the possibility to share and view content,

such as text, photos, and videos (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63). By inviting other platform members, they can share private information and messages with each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63). Social media gives the public access to virtual interactions, networking, and interpersonal relations (Minton et al., 2012). The tools facilitate communication about thoughts that move users and connect like-minded people all over the world (Weinberg, 2010, p. 1). In 2019, an estimated 2.82 billion people were using social media worldwide. This number will increase to 3.1 billion in 2021 (eMarketer, 2017). The use of social media is a permanent trend (Weinberg, 2010, p. 2). It is, therefore, important for businesses to address and intercept consumers where they spend most of their time: online (Evans & McKee, 2010). Marketing with social media is called Social Media Marketing (SMM) and connects service providers and companies with a broad audience of multipliers and consumers (Weinberg, 2010, p. 2). Through SMM, companies can generate more traffic, e.g. on their website, and thus achieve higher customer and brand awareness (Weinberg, 2010, p. 2).

As the third epoch, sustainability focuses on environmental concerns and can only be achieved if all three goals – environmental protection, economic growth, and promotion of equity – are accomplished simultaneously. People who consider additional e.g. environmental or social criteria in their decision-making process are consuming ethically. Sustainable consumption is not only about purchasing but also about spending, eating, and disposing of products. However, the main idea of sustainability is limited consumption. To achieve this, individual consumers and institutions have to work together. Concerning the individual consumer, influencer as digital opinion leaders of our time, becoming increasingly important. They influence consumer perception, opinions, and behavior through their actions, authority, or popularity, mostly via the Internet, which has a high impact on the success of companies. This is why it became an important topic in digital branding. In the scope of influencer marketing, influencers act upon followers and fans to achieve the business objective of the cooperation company.

Having clearly explained and delimited the terminology, the next chapter presents the theories behind (sustainable) consumer behavior. This is intended to provide a deeper understanding, which will be important later when the empirical part is evaluated.

3 (Sustainable) Consumer Behavior

The master thesis aims to explain how sustainable consumer behavior of humans can be affected by influencer marketing. For this purpose (sustainable) consumer behavior is explained using two key theories: theory of reasoned action (TRA) and theory of planned behavior (TPB). Due to the limitations of both theories, the attitude-behavior gap is further considered, which is needed to better understand the ethical consumer decision-making process. Understanding

what influences consumers' sustainable attitudes and purchasing decisions can also help to identify the importance of sustainable influencers for sustainable brands and companies.

3.1 Theory of Reasoned Action

In the 1960s, Fishbein (1967) developed a rational choice model, named the theory of reasoned action (TRA). Fishbein investigated how consumers justify their behavior (Hoyer et al., 2013). In 1980, it was further developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1980). TRA gives an understanding of the factors that drive consumer behavioral intentions. Furthermore, the intention of a certain behavior predicts, explains or influences its actual use (Hoyer et al., 2013). Thus, this theory presents a basis for marketing decisions (Lutz, 1991). The behavioral intention of consumers is driven by various factors and can predict, explain or influence actual use (Hoyer et al., 2013, pp. 133-134). It indicates how much effort people plan to put into carrying out the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). From this it can be deduced that behavior is the transfer of intention or perceived behavioral control into action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). It consists of two components: the individual's attitude towards the behavior and the subjective norm that operate in the situation.

First component – attitude towards the behavior:
Attitudes are learned and will persist over time (Schwartz, 2007). A person can have a favorable or unfavorable assessment of a certain behavior (Schwartz, 2007). Consumers' beliefs about the consequences of engaging in a particular behavior, as well as an evaluation of how significant those consequences are, have an impact on attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). A consumer who believes that the consequences of the behavior are not negative is likely to take a positive attitude towards a particular behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). A positive attitude then reinforces the behavioral intention and thus the probability of the actual performance of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Second component – subjective norm:
These are normative beliefs that result from social pressure and are influenced by the normative beliefs of consumers; by what significant others think about the behavior (Hoyer et al., 2013). These significant others may be family, friends, co-workers, etc. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). By consumers' motivation to comply with others, this normative belief can become either stronger or weaker (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). The stronger the social pressure, the more the subjective norm will influence the behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991).

TRA shows, that behavior is driven by personal attitudes and social pressure. However, TRA has limitations. For instance, only if consumers have full control over their behavior, the behavior can be forecasted (Ajzen, 1991). As a consequence, Ajzen (1991) developed a second theory, which will be presented next.

3.2 Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) adds a third component to the previously developed TRA: the perceived behavioral control, as can be seen in figure 1 (Ajzen, 1991). This paragraph refers to the findings of Ajzen (1991). In so doing, TPB takes account of the fact that an intended behavior could be influenced by factors that limit the person's control over the behavior. Consumers' control beliefs describe the beliefs of consumers as to whether those factors are present or not. These factors make it either easier or more difficult to carry out the behavior and facilitate or impede the perceived power to carry out the behavior. Consumers' control beliefs influence the perceived behavioral control. It describes consumers' beliefs as to the presence or absence of those factors which make it easier or more difficult to carry out the behavior, as well as the perceived power to carry out the behavior. Thus, the stronger the convictions of consumers about their ability to carry out the behavior, the stronger the behavioral intention will be.

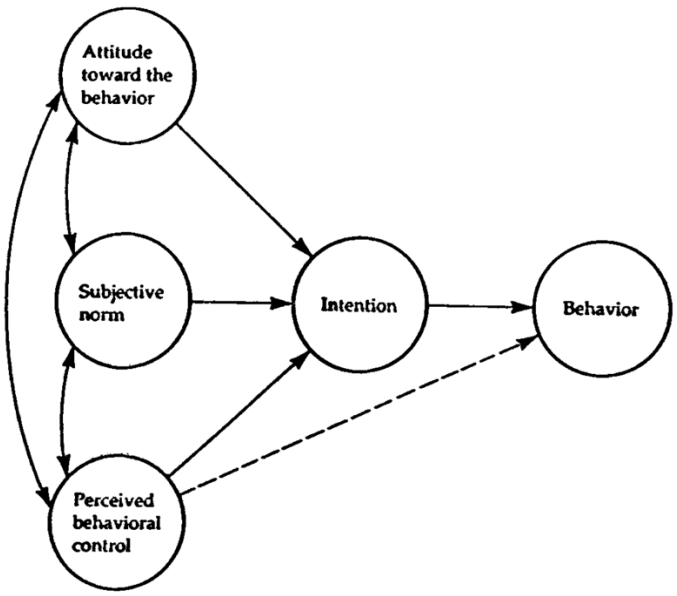

Figure 1: The theory of planned behavior
Source: Ajzen (1991)

According to Ajzen (1985), human behavior is mostly goal-directed. Hence, intentions to carry out certain behavior are predictable on the basis of their attitude towards the behavior, their perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB measures the probability of executing a particular behavior based on individual motivational factors (Glanz et al., 2015) and illustrates how consumers' attitudes and behavioral tendencies are influenced by persuasive communication (Rodgers & Thorson, 2017).

The study of Paul, Modi, and Patel "Predicting Green Product Consumption Using Theory of Planned Behavior and Reasoned Action" (2016) examined TPB in the context of ecological purchasing decisions. The authors found that there is a link between environmental awareness

and consumers' decision to buy sustainable products. A positive attitude and a sense of behavioral control towards sustainability accurately predict a consumers' intention to make sustainable purchasing decisions. Previous research confirms this connection (Yadav & Pathak, 2016).

While TRA aims to predict relatively straightforward behavior, i.e. behavior that is under the control of consumers, TPB, on the other hand, aims at predicting behavior that is not under consumer control (Madden et al., 1992).

Researchers indicate notable limitations in both models. The model does not include factors, such as demographics and personality (Ajzen & Klobas, 2013). There is also no clear definition of perceived behavior control, which is therefore difficult to measure (Kraft et al., 2005). The theories assume that consumers think and act rationally. Thus, they would make decisions based on available information and ignore unconscious motives (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Goal intentions are not taken into account either. Even though goal intentions can moderate the effect of intention on behavior (Prestwich et al., 2008; Sheeran et al., 2005).

Finally, TRA and TPB expect that the relationship between behavioral intention and actual behavior is high, but several studies have shown that behavioral intention does not always lead to actual behavior due to circumstantial limitations, which will be further discussed in the following part as attitude-behavior gap (Norberg et al., 2007).

3.3 Attitude-Behavior Gap

Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011, pp. 78-79), to whom the following paragraph refers, state that the market share of socially responsible products is limited. On the other hand, some studies have found that several consumers prefer socially responsible brands. These companies, for example, pay attention to fair trade, avoid environmental pollution, and look after the well-being of their employees. The so-called 30:3 syndrome by Cowe and Williams (2000), in which 30% of consumers assert to buy ethical products but only 3% do so, leads to misalignment of ethical intentions into actual behavior. This is known as the attitude-behavior gap, intention-behavior gap, or word/deed gap.

In most cases, ethical consumer researchers use cognitive modeling approaches to understand the purchasing decisions of ethically-minded consumers (Fukukawa, 2003), they believe that ethical purchase intentions directly determine actual purchasing behavior (TPB by Ajzen, 1991). Several empirical studies about consumer behavior and social psychology prove them wrong by showing that purchase intentions and attitudes do not necessarily translate into actual buying behavior (Ajzen et al., 2004; Bagozzi, 2000; Morwitz et al., 1993; Sheeran, 2002; Young et al., 1998). For instance, research has been conducted that has applied TPB in the

context of fair-trade shopping. The constructs of ethical commitment and self-identity serve as explanations for ethical consumer behavior (Chatzidakis et al., 2007; Shaw & Shiu, 2003). These studies explain the existence of a word-act-inconsistencies: the difference between what one says and what one does. Therefore, attitudes cannot be regarded as a valid predicate for an individual's behavior, although the use of attitudes in connection with ethical consumer behavior is commonplace (Shaw & Shiu, 2003).

Recent studies show that some ethical intentions are also authentic. Purchase decisions are influenced by internal and external factors (Carrington et al., 2010). For example, the extent to which consumers translate their ethical intentions into actual buying behavior depends on their prior planning, such as implementation intentions (Gollwitzer, 1999), their control over the buying experience, e.g. actual behavioral control (Ajzen & Madden, 1986), and aspects of the buying environment, like situational context (Belk, 1975). A lack of cognitive dissonance facilitates the ethical consumption intention-behavior gap, due to the ability of ethical consumers to rationalize or even neutralize their unethical purchasing behavior (Szmigin et al., 2009). Chatzidakis, Hibbert, and Smith (2007) mention that the ability to rationalize unethical buying behavior might be acceptable but not ethical and so facilitates the observed ethical consumption intention-behavior gap. The attitude-behavior gap might be the biggest challenge facing sustainable behavior today.

The TPB is the link between environmental awareness and consumer's decision to buy sustainable products. It assumes that human behavior is goal-directed. Persuasive communication influences consumer attitudes, their behavioral intentions, and leads to behavior. But in reality, purchase intention towards ethical products do not usually translate into actual buying behavior. External and internal factors influence the purchase decision. In general, ethical consumers are motivated primarily by a sense of personal integrity. Other factors (motives and barriers) that influence purchasing behavior are presented in the next chapter and with them the ethical consumer decision-making process.

3.4 Ethical Consumer Decision Making

Price, availability, and convenience are seen by consumers as significant barriers to ethical behavior (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 79). However, ethical consumer behavior is far more complex and heterogeneous as consumers behave and are motivated differently (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 79). A range of factors can, therefore, intervene in the purchasing process, from the moment of receiving information about an ethical or unethical product to the actual time of purchase (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 79). The previous knowledge of the attitude-behavior gap and the empirical results of the study of Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011) were integrated into a conceptual model for better understanding (see figure 2).

It presents the various factors that affect consumers' ethical decision making and can lead to word/deed inconsistencies. In the following, various factors will be examined in more detail.

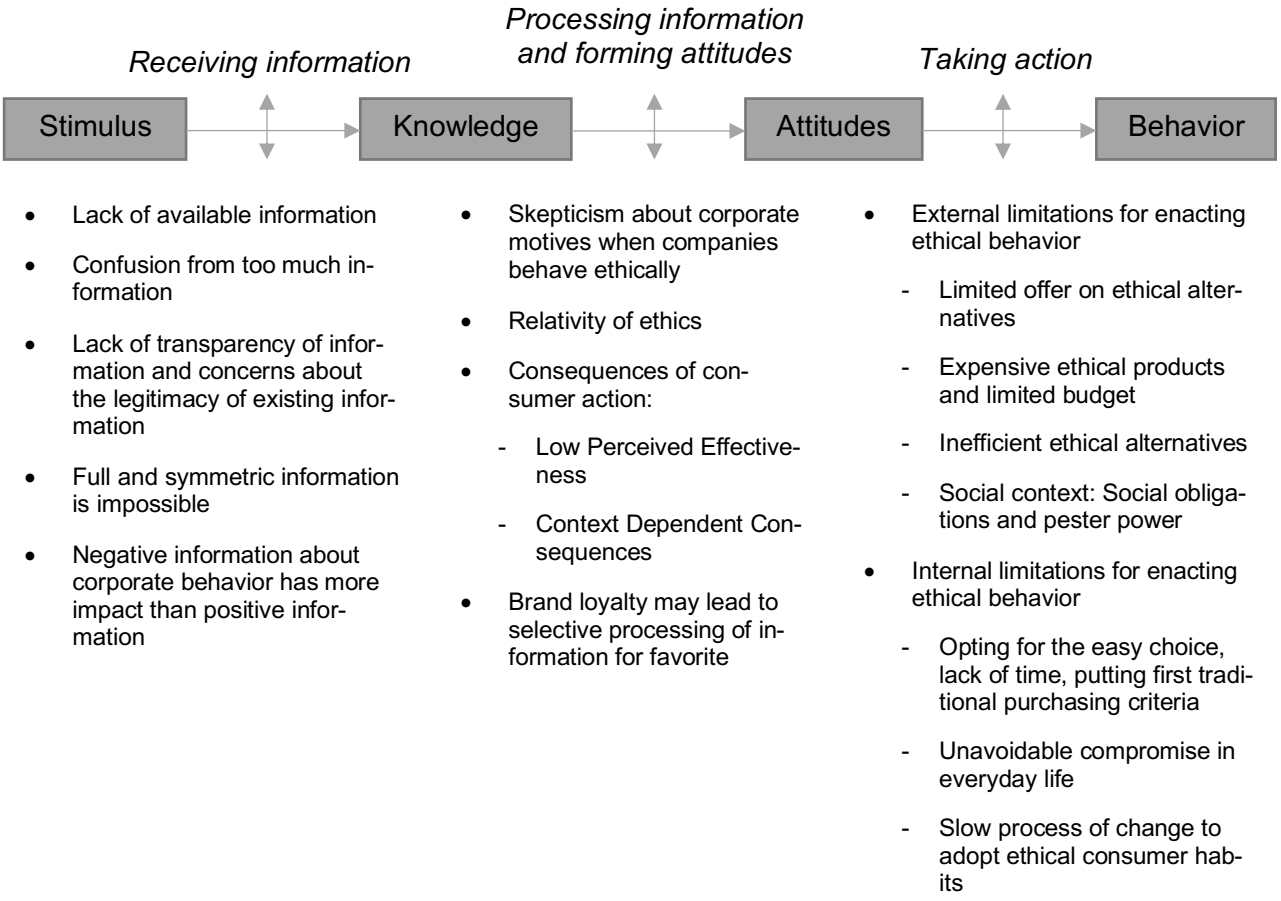

Figure 2: The attitude-behavior gap in ethical decision making
Source: Based on Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011)

3.4.1 Receiving Information

To be or to become aware of sustainable attitudes is a key driving force of sustainable development (Zoeteman & Harkink, 2012, p. 74). For consumers, one of the biggest barriers when buying ethical products is the *lack of available information* about these products (Dragon International, 1992). On the one hand, consumers complain that there is little and incomplete information on business practices (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). They are therefore demanding better product labeling. On the other hand, *too much information* overwhelms consumers and limits the credibility of the information source (Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). However, the modern production system says that *"a fully informed consumer is unattainable"* (Newholm & Shaw, 2007, p. 258).

Furthermore, the type of information is decisive for the purchase decision. The literature on impression formation highlights the diagnostic effect of *negative information* (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). This states that consumers more easily believe that companies are unethical rather

than ethical (Folkes & Kamins, 1999). *"The more extreme the negative information, the more diagnostic it is and the more impact it has on behavior"* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 79).

Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011) have conducted a study which explains, based on reflected past situations, why an ethically minded consumer may not behave according to his ethical concerns. The participants of the study also mentioned the difficulty of obtaining information about the manufacturing process of the products (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 83). Due to the lack of answers regarding the manufacturing process or the origin of the product, consumers do not feel able to make an informed and responsible decision (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 83). Besides, the listings and rankings of existing ethical companies are often incomplete (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 83). *Full and symmetric information, therefore, seems impossible* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 83). The market is dynamic and constantly changing (Newholm, 2005). Due to multiple changes in businesses and product specifications, consumers have to constantly update their search and information (Newholm, 2005).

However, the biggest problem does not seem to be the lack of information, but the *quality and credibility of the information* available (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 83). Too much information can also unsettle consumers as to which information is true (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 83). Consequently, the main concern is whether the information is credible or just urban myths (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 83).

3.4.2 Forming Attitudes

As explained above, many consumers are generally unsure whether companies are ethical or not. They are also unaware of the *real motives behind the company's apparent ethical conduct* (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Folkes & Kamins, 1999). Therefore, many consumers see a marketing trick in the ethical activities of companies and evolve stereotypical images of ethical and unethical companies, which results in skepticism and cynicism (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 79). In particular, multinationals seeking to increase profits are to some extent seen as unethical despite their good corporate performance (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 79).

There are different views on ethics in the postmodern world: *"what seems good or ethical for one [consumer] may not be so for another"* (Cherrier, 2007, p. 322). The relativity of ethics shows the importance to examine the ethical issues that every consumer support, as well as whether there is a correspondence between the morality/immorality of a company and the self-perception of a consumer (Papaoikonomou et al. 2011, p. 80). Low and Davenport (2007, p. 340) segment consumers into *"animated", "clean", "triple bottom line" and "whole earth"* consumers according to ethical issues: animal welfare, environmental welfare, social welfare. For example, if a company carries out animal testing or does not offer reusable packaging, a *"whole earth consumer"* would not buy any products from this company (Papaoikonomou et

al., 2011, p. 80). After Uusitalo's and Oksanen's (2004, p. 220) *"practice of selective ethics"* consumers might focus on single issues such as anti-child labor (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 80).

Another obstacle to ethical consumer behavior is the social impact it seems to have. Ethical consumers feel that their *efforts have little effect* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 81). Furthermore, there is a relative consideration of the *consequences of action according to the context* in which they influence. According to Auger, Devinney and Louviere (2004) and Devinney, Eckhardt and Belk (2006) sweatshops are frowned upon in Western countries but are more acceptable in Asian countries because otherwise, workers would have no income at all.

Brand loyalty is also a decisive factor for purchasing decisions in the case of unethical corporate behavior (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Ingram et al., 2005). Moreover, brand loyalty can lead to only selective processing of information about the company and the product. The results of the study made by Ingram, Skinner and Taylor (2005) which examines, for example, the impact of sweatshop practices on dedicated consumers of a particular company, show that high brand loyalty can lower the threshold to what is considered fair and ethical. As a result, the same practices are not considered as bad as they would be without brand loyalty. The information processing bias, therefore, leads loyal consumers to believe only positive information and ignore negative ones about a preferred brand (Ahluwalia et al., 2000).

3.4.3 Taking Action

Researches conducted by Carrigan and Attalla (2001) or Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) in the UK and Finland, as well as the study of Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011, p. 82), found out that many participants called the *lack of availability of ethical alternatives* an important factor, which often prevents them from purchasing according to their principles. Thus, they buy one of the alternatives that the market offers (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 82). Earlier studies have already addressed the *high prices* of ethical alternatives (Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). For most participants, the higher price from some of the ethical products and services represent an obstacle (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 84). They believe that ethical alternatives are usually expensive because there is little supply, which corresponds to a marginalized sector (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 84). Many participants are still dissatisfied with the existing ethical alternatives and fear that they will have to compromise through the *inefficient alternatives* and limited offer (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 84). While the ethical component is met, other important criteria, such as functionality or style and design, are not (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 84).

The participants in the study of Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011) live in the mainstream and do not always interact with people who share their principles. Although they

participate in ethical consumer groups and are therefore already ethically concerned, they compromise to meet their *social obligations* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 84). *Pester power* describes the influence of children on their parents' buying behavior (Gunter & Furnham, 1999). Some consumers see Pester power as the reason for the compromises they make when buying (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85). Either their children refuse to consume ethical products, or they demand ethical products when shopping (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85). It is important to remember that a large part of daily consumer decisions is not made individually but in negotiations between all members of a household (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85). Different attitudes and wishes within the household can then lead to compromises and inconsistencies in the purchasing behavior of the ethically thinking individual (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85).

Some people just do not prefer the existing ethical alternatives as it requires more time and energy to carry out (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85). Instead, they prefer the *easiest and more convenient option*. The purchase decision considers several different attributes and their evaluation is therefore very complex (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 80). If the choice is to be made between ethics and *traditional purchasing criteria* (price, quality and availability of products), consumers could compromise on ethics (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 80). The importance of price for ethical consumers is not clear. According to Creyer and Ross (1997), respondents are willing to pay a higher price for an ethical product. Mohr and Webb (2005) say that information on Corporate Social Responsibility can influence purchasing intentions more strongly than price. In comparison, De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx and Mielants (2005) found with their conjoint analysis, that consumers are not necessarily willing to pay a higher price only because its ethical. But for Folkes and Kamins (1999) as well as Sen & Bhattacharya (2001) the evidence is clear when it comes to product quality: *"Consumers do not accept ethical company behavior as a substitute for product quality"* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 81). Folkes and Kamins (1999) found that virtuous behavior is no substitute for product quality, while Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) say *"that a good social profile cannot compensate for inferior quality"* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 81). According to Creyer and Ross (1997) and Bhate (2001) availability is not so decisive. Consumers claim that they would change shops if there were no ethical alternatives (Bhate, 2001; Creyer & Ross, 1997). In contrast, other research sees availability as an obstacle to ethical consumption, precisely when consumers want to buy ethical alternatives but cannot find any (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005).

Consumers accept that they cannot always act ethically for all types of purchases (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85). They face *unavoidable compromises in their everyday life* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85). Consumer choices take a long time because consumption is an important part of our life today (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85). Therefore,

participants accept their inconsistencies as an unchanging reality, as a constant quest for ethics could make them paranoid (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 85).

Becoming an ethical consumer takes time and ethical consumers are undergoing a *slow process of change* (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 86). Although consumers perceive ethical issues as important, they change their behavior gradually rather than immediately (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 86). According to Freestone & McGoldrick (2008, p. 461), the way individuals think is changing towards more social responsibility. The ethical behavior of consumers thus depends to a large extent on the state of this development (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 86). For some respondents, inclusion in the ethical consumer group was the beginning of change (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 86). They say that such a change cannot take place immediately, but that small steps can lead to greater awareness. In the meantime, however, inconsistencies are recurring (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011, p. 86).

As just explained, there are many reasons why people do not behave sustainably. Nevertheless, some people do so. The motives that encourage sustainable behavior are explained in the last part of chapter 3.

3.4.4 Motives for Sustainable Behavior

The likelihood of buying sustainable products increases when consumers are sure that they will get more benefits than costs (Bamberg et al., 2015; Lanzini & Thøgersen, 2014). *Improving personal benefits* through sustainable consumption is thus the first motivation. Secondly, *personal beliefs and norms* play an important role for people who are committed to sustainable products (Jansson, 2011; Jansson et al., 2010). If consumers' beliefs match societal expectations, the likelihood of behaving sustainably increases (Jansson et al., 2010). The third motivation for sustainable purchasing behavior is *hedonic* in nature. This means that if a consumer feels better by buying a sustainable product, the likelihood that he or she will repeat this behavior is higher (Rezvani et al., 2017; Schuitema et al., 2013). Consumer attitudes towards green products differ according to certain consumer characteristics (Sreen et al., 2018).

Other intrinsic motives are described by the theory of virtue (Harrison et al., 2005). It pays attention to the habits and practices through which virtues are learned (Harrison et al., 2005). The question therefore arises as to which habits and practices can lead to environmentally conscious behavior. Harrison, Newholm and Shaw (2005) state that empirical studies have shown that ethical consumers are motivated by a sense of personal integrity. For instance, respondents are concerned about the consequences of their consumption habits and want to respond to their decisions with personal integrity (Newholm, 2000; Shaw & Shiu, 2003). Self-interest and altruistic aspects of morality converge as more people with personal integrity think about the consequences of their decisions (Shaw & Newholm, 2003).

In addition to the motivations mentioned above, two factors are important for environmentally friendly behavior: environmental concern (motivation) and eco-literacy (ability) (Schmuck et al., 2018). Eco-literacy is the extent to which consumers understand environmental issues and the meaning of environmentally friendly products (Cheah & Phau, 2011). This is important as awareness of environmental issues and their impact can influence the consumer decision-making process (Cheah & Phau, 2011). Eco-literacy can be divided into objective and subjective knowledge about the environment (Amyx et al., 1994). The consumer's ability to identify several ecologically related symbols and concepts present objective knowledge (Amyx et al., 1994). Eco-literacy as subjective knowledge means the amount a consumer knows in the ecological domain, measured by self-evaluation (Amyx et al., 1994). The actual knowledge of consumers does not normally correspond to their perception of what they know (Amyx et al., 1994).

As already mentioned in the introduction, it is of high importance for sustainable behavior that society as a whole needs to act in order to achieve a significant impact on the current system (Nath, 2008). Consumers need to understand, that they, as an entirety, affect businesses and policies resulting in more sustainable offers and consequently lower barriers for sustainable lifestyles (Carrete et al., 2012). Without intrinsic motivation, these efforts might not be perceived as beneficial (Stern, 1999; Stern et al., 1999).

To find out whether influencers and influencer marketing can spark this motivation for change and lead to a change in lifestyle, the social communication theory, as well as the social learning theory, will be presented in chapter 4.

4 Social Communication Theory

This part of the thesis will give a better understanding of the communication theory behind influencer marketing. Influencer marketing combines different elements of opinion leadership, WOM, and the two-step flow model. To understand these interactions, the individual components are explained below and subsequently connected with each other.

4.1 Opinion Leadership

Literature connects the process of influencing others to opinion leaders. The phenomenon when people trust the opinion of a certain person more than others is called opinion leadership (Flynn et al., 1996, p. 137). Opinion leadership describes *"the degree to which an individual can influence informally other individuals' attitudes or overt behavior in the desired way with relative frequency"* (Rogers, 2005, p. 37). In addition, Rogers and Cartano (1962) define them as *"individuals who exert an unequal amount of influence on the decision of others"* (p. 435),

and studies since that time are based on their findings (Flynn et al., 1996, p. 138). Consumers trust others' opinions more than traditional marketing advertising (Flynn et al., 1996, p. 137). They use interpersonal sources to reduce risk and chose a certain brand (Flynn et al., 1996, p. 137).

Due to the resemblance to influencer marketing, opinion leadership was widely used to explain influencer marketing e.g. (Jahnke, 2018, p. 88). However, influencers are distinguished by a new and different consumer behavior, as they are ordinary consumers who continuously communicate to a mass audience of strangers (McQuarrie et al., 2013, p. 137). Therefore, one could consider influencers as a modern form of opinion leaders.

4.1.1 Excursus: Attitude Leadership

As already described in chapter 2.2, influencers have the capability to influence the perception and behavior of people. Consequently, they may also have an impact on people's attitudes towards certain topics. However, this has not yet been mentioned in the literature. Attitude leadership has so far only been studied with leaders in an organizational context. For example, Allan Lee and his colleagues investigated *"leadership perceptions as an attitude towards the leader"* (Lee et al., 2015, p. 910). In this context, attitude is seen as the evaluation of an object in terms of the degree of its favorability or unfavourability (Lee et al., 2015, p. 911). The response to objects can be positive and approach-oriented or negative and avoidance-oriented (Eaton et al., 2008, p. 167). Preference arises from an individual's beliefs, feelings, and experiences with objects (Eaton et al., 2008, p. 167). For this master thesis, attitude leadership is not relevant within the context of leadership research but should be related to influencers.

4.1.2 Parasocial Interaction

Digital opinion leaders can exert a significant influence on the opinion of their followers in social networks. This can lead to the formation of opinion leader/opinion seeker relationships (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 211). This is supported in particular by the insights that influencers give their followers into their private life (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 111; WOMMA, 2017, p. 12). For example, bloggers provide their readers with personal pictures, share their individual opinions with them and report on their experiences (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 111). Through the commentary function of social networks, influencers can communicate with their followers and vice versa, which enables communication in both directions (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 111).

Many influencers, such as the previously mentioned bloggers, are perceived by their readers over time as part of their daily life and as personal friends (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 111). It is an illusion of a personal relationship with a public person (Ballantine & Martin, 2005,

p. 198; Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 111). This is particularly the case with influencers who share their views, images and videos on the Internet and thus make them accessible to the public. This form of connection illusion is referred to as parasocial interaction (PSI) (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 198; Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 111). As in a real friendship, trust is also an important component in a parasocial interaction and is not insignificant for influencer marketing in terms of paid product recommendations or other financially compensated contributions (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 112).

Lu, Chang and Chang (2014) analyzed the effects of different types of blog sponsorship on reader attitudes. Their results are briefly presented in this paragraph. A distinction was made between monetary and non-monetary sponsorship, the latter being price discounts, product vouchers or free samples. Contrary to the hypothesis that readers are more negative about financial remuneration than about non-remunerated payment, no effects on reader attitudes were found for either type of compensation. The authors of the study justify this with the honest disclosure of the compensation included by the blogger, the readers did not feel deceived and appreciated the honesty of the blogger. The results of the study are consistent with those of Hwang and Jeong (2016): a sincere revelation of a sponsored post limits the potential negative impact on the recruitment of followers from the outset. In this respect, both sides, influencers and companies, benefit from sincere communication (Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

The role of influencers as opinion leaders in the communication model is made clear. The next section will take a closer look at the instrument used by influencers and influencer marketing to spread a message: WOM. Richins and Root-Shaffer (1988) also state in their research that there is a relationship between opinion leadership and WOM. In addition, Colliander and Dahlén (2011) state that if PSI exists a person might evaluate a blog similar to a word-of-mouth relationship (WOM), which will be explained next.

4.2 Word-of-Mouth

The most valuable recommendation a company can receive is from customer to customer, which is known as word-of-mouth (WOM) (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2017, p. 9). According to Nielsen, 92% believe in recommendations from family and friends rather than all types of advertising (Nielsen, 2012). WOM is defined as *“oral or written recommendation by a satisfied customer to the prospective customers of a good or service”* (BusinessDictionary, 2020). Word-of-mouth is not equal to influencer marketing, but (almost) all influencer marketing campaigns include by nature word-of-mouth activities (TapInfluence, 2015). According to TapInfluence (2015) influencer marketing is all about getting key individuals to leverage their influence among their circle of friends and family. WOM is the vehicle where this communication takes place (TapInfluence, 2015). Thus, influencer marketing enables a personal and direct

approach and is therefore based on the WOM model (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2017, p. 28). Through the Internet, new possibilities of communication have been established and resulted in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which can be seen as a further development of the original WOM model (King et al., 2014). Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004) define eWOM as: *"…any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet"* (p. 39). eWOM enables communication between people who have no personal relationship with each other and takes place mainly anonymously (Lee & Youn, 2009).

In addition to the integration of the influencer into the communication process, the effects of WOM are responsible for the optimal dissemination of the advertising message (Rossmann & Sonntag, 2013, p. 164). Since social networks are not rigid entities in which messages are transmitted in only one direction, but in which users can communicate with each other within the network, the messages can spread (see figure 3, Panel C) (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 73). It is therefore crucial for companies to consider and integrate WOM effects into their campaigns (Rossmann & Sonntag, 2013, p. 165). In an influencer campaign, for example, a product is often left to the relevant opinion leader for testing. The opinion leader publishes the test experiences and product evaluations in the social network, which spreads through the multiplier effects to several people (Rossmann & Sonntag, 2013, p. 165).

4.2.1 The Psychological Mechanisms

The psychologist Ernest Dichter (1966) investigated how WOM advertising works. His findings will be described in this chapter. Consumers do not like advertisements that only serves as a sales tool. They prefer informative advertising. Thus, the consumer will turn to WOM as a solution to his buying problem. Thus, consumers use WOM to solve the buying problem. More specifically, consumers accept buying recommendations more frequently, if they observe the advertising in the unbiased atmosphere of WOM. Dichter (1966) differentiates between speaker and listener motivation. When a speaker talks about a product or service and the talking itself or the expected action of the listener creates some kind of satisfaction, the speaker is motivated to do so. Speaker motivation is divided into four different participation categories:

- Product-involvement: A consumer makes an extremely pleasant or unpleasant experience, which will be passed on whenever there is a suitable occasion.
- Self-involvement: The consumer uses the conversation for self-affirmation in front of others, to gain attention, show connoisseurship, feel like a pioneer.

- Other-involvement: The consumer wants to share the enthusiasm and benefits of things with other people. The products or services serve as a means to express feelings of love, care, friendship, etc.
- Message-involvement: Describes the skepticism and advertising awareness of consumers. Consumers are aware of the impact of advertising and have also begun to accept it as entertainment value.

The motivation of the listeners is based on two essential conditions. Firstly, the recommending person must be interested in the person listening and his or her well-being and secondly, the speaker's experience and knowledge about the product should be convincing. Potentially successful recommendations come mainly from commercial authorities, celebrities, connoisseurs[2], sharers of interest, intimates (friends and family), people of goodwill, bearers of tangible evidence (e.g. before/after pictures). In sum, a speaker expects some kind of psychological (non-material) reward for his or her product recommendation, while this non-material reward is the main motive for the listener to accept the recommendation.

4.2.2 Rationale Principle

Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner (2010, p. 72) have developed a model that not only represents the basic principle but also provides an overview of the theoretical development as a series of three shifts, all of which currently coexist and each of which relates to different circumstances.

The earliest and simplest interpretation of WOM is the organic interconsumer influence model (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72). In this model, communication between two consumers takes place without direct request, influence or measurement by marketers. Helping others, for example warning them about poor service, is the main motivational factor (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72). Through innovative and effective product notifications, advertising and sales promotion, WOM is developing by itself among consumers (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72).

In the second model, the linear model, marketers became interested in attempting to influence the credible, influential and WOM-spreading consumers (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72). They tried to influence consumer WOM through traditional marketing, like advertising and promotions (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72). The use of opinion leaders can be one strategy in this model (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72).

[2] Connoisseurs are consumers who have more specific product knowledge due to their close and authentic contact with a product (Dichter, 1966).

The Internet provides new management and measurement possibilities. The latest model, the so-called network production model, is based on the Internet (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72). As a result, the marketing scholarship changed from a transaction to a relationship orientation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 2). Today consumers are seen as active and valuable co-producers. WOM communication is, therefore, co-produced in consumer networks (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 72). The main differences to the two previous models are that, firstly, consumers or opinion leaders are addressed directly by marketers, and, secondly, messages are not just passed on in one direction but are exchanged within the consumer network (Kozinets et al., 2010, pp. 72-73).

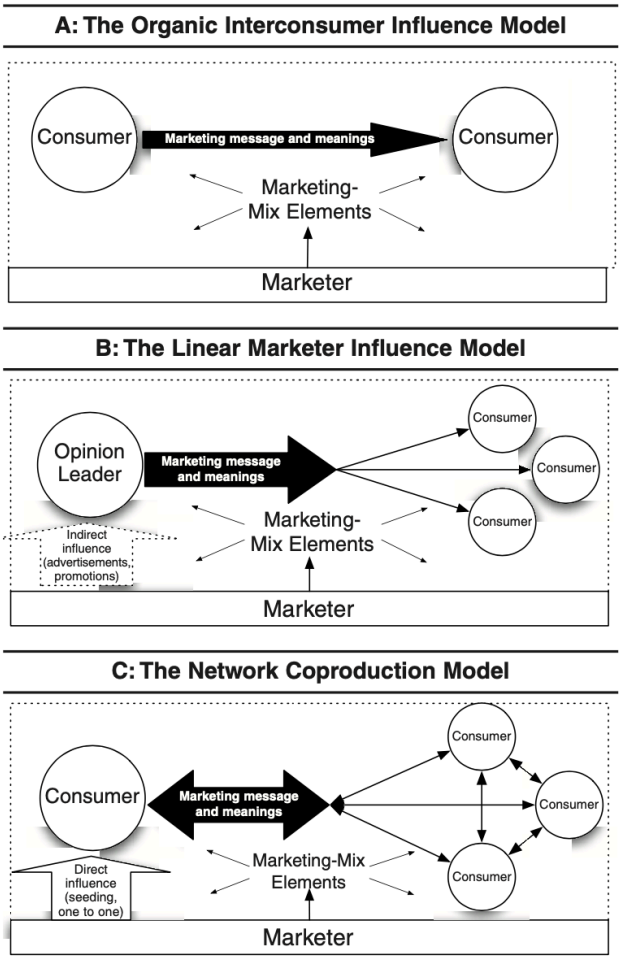

Figure 3: The evolution of WOM theory
Source: Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner (2010, p. 72)

Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner (2010, p. 74) further looked at the WOM communication, market-based messages, associated meanings and the reception by the intended audience. The results of their study set the basis for the following paragraph. They find that WOM communication is being influenced by four important factors. First, communication is influenced by personal stories or certain character types, which is called communicator character narratives by the authors. Archetypal patterns can be seen in the perspectives of people, which

develop further over time. A blogger who identifies with an environmentally conscious woman, for example, is more likely to communicate in a friendly, cosmopolitan, and enlightening way. Second, WOM communication is used primarily in forums, such as schools, dinner parties, bars, social networking sites, blogs, etc. Thirdly, the transmission, reception, and especially the meaning of a message is influenced by norms. Norms vary, for example, according to the size of the community, the interest, or the social class. Fourth, the advertising characteristics of the WOM campaign, such as brand equity and product type, also influence the message and meaning of WOM communication. These four elements are working to change WOM messages to transform them from commercial advertising to community value information.

In the following subchapter the two presented components are integrated into the communication model used by influencers, which is known as the two-step flow model of communication.

4.3 Two-Step Flow Model

In the 1940s and 1950s, Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz elaborated – with their social influence theory, as a part of social communication theory – that informal communication was widespread, with certain individuals in one group being more influential than others (Goldsmith E. B., 2015, p. 25). According to studies on social networking activity, these opinion leaders are influential both offline and online (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 71). The personal influence (as opposed to the mass media) on decisions is stronger than previously assumed (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Individuals interact with each other to transmit and thus influence each other (Goldsmith E. B., 2015, p. 25). This social communication theory is the basis of the later developed two-step flow model of communication, which is considered one of the pioneering models for consumer research (Goldsmith E. B., 2015, p. 25).

Influencer marketing is a form of Lazarsfeld's two-step flow model and is based on two stages (see figure 4). The messages are not transmitted in one line from the marketer and classic media to a person (one-stage model), but are forwarded by the influencer through a targeted integration of the influencer into the information process (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 209). Thus, the first step describes the ability of the influencer to diffuse information and the second step is about the influencer having access to a network of people to pass the information along (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). When it comes to gaining influence, ability and access are the keys to success (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

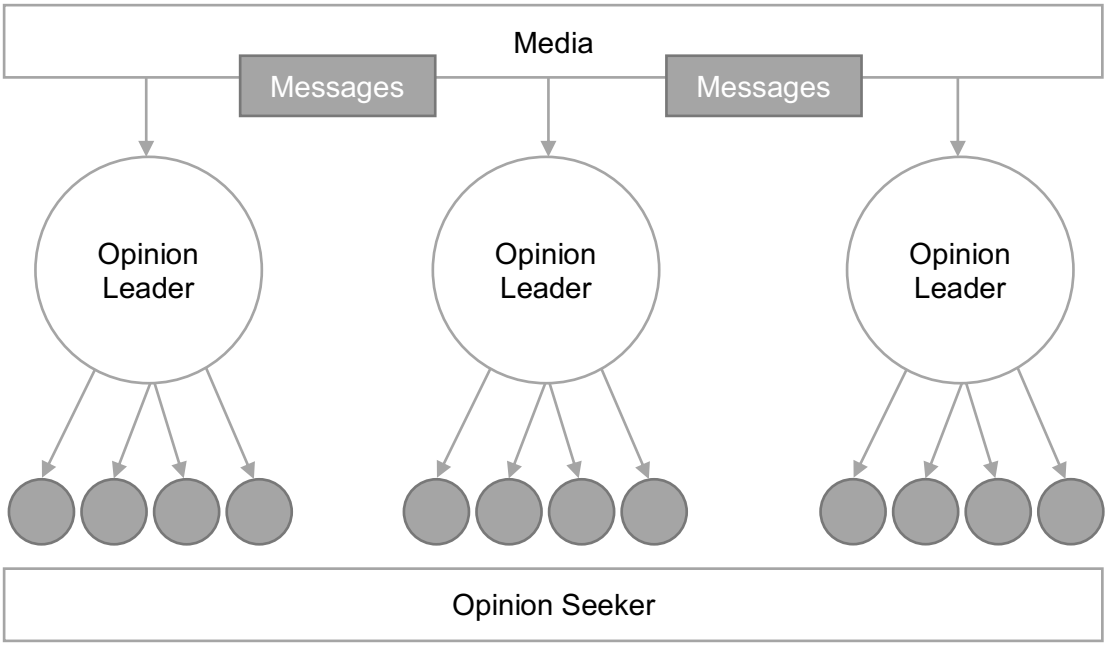

Figure 4: Two-step flow model by Lazarsfeld
Source: Based on Rossmann and Sonntag (2013, p. 163)

The company remains in the background concerning the distribution of the advertising message, which is transmitted to the target audience by the influencer (Ryte, 2015). The opinion leader only passes on selected information and thus assumes a filter and recommendation function (Rossmann & Sonntag, 2013, p. 162). At the same time, the influencer exercises a multiplier function in the communication process, as it has a certain range and reaches several recipients (Kreutzer & Land, 2017, p. 209). The probability is high that an advertising message spread by the influencer will be perceived by the recipients as more credible than it would be the case with direct communication by the company (Ryte, 2015).

Based on these elements, it can be seen that influencer marketing is a form of the two-step flow model. The influencer is positioned between the marketer and the recipient of a message and has the ability to spread information among multiple recipients. Influencers can exert a significant influence on the opinion of their followers in social networks, which can lead to the formation of opinion leader/opinion seeker relationships, where trust is an important component. This gives them the ability to influence people's habits and behavior, which makes them an extended form of opinion leaders. Influencer Marketing enables a personal and direct approach like it is the case with WOM. Thus, WOM is the vehicle by which influencers reach their followers.

5 Social Learning Theory

The theory of social learning by Bandura and Walters (1963) describes that an individual is motivated by direct or indirect social interaction of socialization agents and consequently

shows a favorable attitude (Subramanian & Subramanian, 1995; Moschis & Churchill Jr, 1978). The theory is often found in the academic research literature on communication and advertising (Bush et al., 1999). Earlier marketing studies have used this theory to understand consumer behavior through different socialization agents such as celebrities, family or peers (Clark et al., 2001; Martin & Bush, 2000; Kotze, 2001). Makgosa (2010), for instance, showed that the theory of social learning can convincingly explain the influence of celebrities on consumer behavior.

Based on the findings to date (e.g. Makgosa, 2010), social learning theory is proposed as a contextual basis for understanding influencers, as they are seen as a new form of independent third-party endorsers. This shows that the concept is in some ways similar to celebrity endorsement, which can influence audience attitudes and decisions through the use of social media. The theory of social learning thus assumes that an individual's buying intention is highly influenced by the attitudes of the respondents and the effectiveness of influencers in promoting the products. Lim, Radzol, Cheah and Wong (2017) measure the effectiveness of influencers by the credibility of the source, the attractiveness of the source, the conformity of the products and the transfer of meaning.

Source credibility

To investigate the effectiveness, the credibility of the source is often used (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Taghipoorreyneh & de Run, 2016). A credible endorser shows a positive effect on consumer perception (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Two elements, which are often discussed in the context of the credibility, are trustworthiness and expertise. Information presented by a credible source (e.g. influencers) can influence beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behavior of consumers (Wang et al., 2017). Besides, influencers who are considered experts tend to be more persuasive (Aaker & Myers, 1987) and able to influence consumers' buying intentions (Ohanian, 1991). Also Till and Busler (2000) emphasized that expertise has a positive influence on attitudes and buying intention. Trustworthiness stands for the dignity, credibility and honesty of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Relatively speaking, influencers who are perceived as very knowledgeable and trustworthy are considered to be more influential on the behavior of their followers (Lim et al., 2017).

Source attractiveness

The acceptance of an advertisement is strongly influenced by the physical attractiveness of the influencer (Lim et al., 2017). Source attractiveness focuses on the physical attributes or characteristics of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Several earlier studies have found a positive correlation between source attractiveness and consumer attitudes as well as purchase intention (Petty et al., 1983; Erdogan, 1999). Source attractiveness directly influences the

effectiveness of an endorsement (McGuire, 1985). Hence, an attractive influencer is able to positively influence consumers resulting in purchasing intention (Till & Busler, 2000).

Products conformity

For a positive result, the congruence between an endorser and the product is crucial (Lim et al., 2017). The match-up hypothesis is used to investigate the congruence between an endorser and the brand (Kamins, 1990). An adequate match between an endorser and the brand is considered as a successful marketing strategy (Till & Busler, 1998). Influencers as spokespersons for a brand must have a strong association with the product (Misra & Beatty, 1990). An ideal match leads to a positive attitude towards brand (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). The correspondence between an endorser and the brand is necessary to achieve the consumer's intention to buy (Shimp, 2000).

Transfer of meaning

An endorsement effect is driven by a meaning transfer process (McCracken, 1989). The endorsement is particularly effective when one is able to convey the meaning of the product (McCracken, 1989). The personal and professional world of the endorser is transferred to a particular product and consequently influences the consumer's self-image through consumption (McCracken, 1989). According to Fowles (1996), consumers tend to consume products that are endorsed by their idol. Furthermore, an empirical study has confirmed that the transfer of meaning correlates with consumer attitudes and also influences purchase intentions (Peetz et al., 2004).

Based on the credibility of the source, the attractiveness of the source, the conformity of the products and the transfer of meaning, the effectiveness of influencers can be measured. According to the theory of social learning, these components can be used to influence people. The next part of the paper focuses on research. It was investigated whether influencers can also affect the sustainable behavior of people and hence whether influencer marketing is an effective tool for sustainable brands.

6 Hypotheses Development

The present chapter brings together the theoretical perspectives used to justify hypotheses. The content of the previous chapters serves as a theoretical foundation to clarify the research questions:

1. How do influencers affect the sustainable attitudes and purchasing intentions of millennial consumers towards a sustainable lifestyle?

2. To what extent does influencer marketing help sustainable brands to reach more customers?

According to the TPB, persuasive communication influences consumer attitudes, behavioral intentions, and eventually leads to behavior. But internal and external factors affect consumer attitudes. Hence, purchase intention towards ethical products does not usually translate into actual buying behavior, which is explained as attitude-behavior gap.

The ethical consumer decision-making process shows a variety of factors that have an impact on consumers' ethical decision making: from barriers to receive information, like the lack of information, to processing information and forming attitudes, e.g. relativity of ethics, to the actual buying process, such as limited offer on ethical alternatives. On the other side, motives, most notably personal integrity, have a high impact on sustainable behavior as well.

As shown in chapter 3, purchase intentions towards ethical products do not necessarily translate into actual buying behavior. Reasons for that can be found in the ethical consumer decision-making process, as several barriers make the purchase decision of sustainable products and brands more difficult. Besides these barriers, there are also motives, that encourage sustainable behavior and show that some people not only claim to behave sustainably but actually do so.

Influencer marketing is a form of the two-step flow model, in which the influencer stands between the marketer and the multiple recipients of a message. Due to their impact on the opinion of their followers, opinion leader/opinion seeker relationships may arise. Influencers are thus an extended form of opinion leaders, using WOM to reach their followers.

Based on the available information and assuming that consumers are also responsible for sustainability, a hypothesis can be deviated that people can be motivated to become more sustainable by influencers and influencer marketing. By sharing moral values and attitudes publicly, influencers reach particularly younger generations.

H1: *Influencers increase the sustainable (consumer) behavior of millennials.*

Moreover, the ethical consumer decision-making process ideally ends with a purchase. As a logic consequence of H1, people that are concerned about the environment and in particular about sustainable aspects of their consumer behavior, will purchase sustainable brands.

H2: *Influencer marketing increases the consumption of sustainable brands.*

7 Empirical Study

The review of the existing literature in the previous chapters has shown that the basic theories of both sustainable behavior and influencer marketing have already been discussed independently, but research is still limited on influencers' impact on consumers' attitudes and buying behavior towards sustainable products. The aim of the following empirical part is, therefore, to find out whether and how influencers can influence the sustainable (consumption) behavior of people.

In this chapter, the research methodology of the work is explained. First, a short overview of the applied research design is given, followed by a detailed description of the preparation and procedure. Afterwards, the data is prepared in the context of a qualitative content analysis according to Mayring.

7.1 Research Design

A qualitative research approach was chosen to answer the research questions. Only in this way, a deep insight into the sustainable behavior of individuals can be obtained. In addition, sources of inspiration and experiences with sustainable influencers will be researched to determine the impact influencers have on sustainable behavior of individuals.

Qualitative research makes it possible to ask *why* and thus to put the decisions and actions of the respondents into context for a better understanding (Myers, 2013, p. 5). The focus lies also on interpretation rather than quantification of the results (Cassell & Symon, 1994). This allows detailed insights into subjective and complex phenomena (Mayoux, 2006, p. 117). Overall, qualitative methods are characterized by complexity rather than delimitable indicators and strive for a better understanding of reality.

The main focus of quantitative methods, on the other hand, is usually on simplifying processes and indicators in order to make them measurable and subsequently express them in simplified figures (Mayoux, 2006, p. 117). In the case of the underlying work, however, a holistic insight into the experiences of individuals with influencer marketing and the resulting (sustainable) behavior is necessary, which is why a qualitative method is more suitable.

7.2 Methodology

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology used for the empirical study. First of all, the data collection by means of a problem-centered interview is discussed before the sampling is clarified.

7.2.1 Data Collection

In this master thesis, qualitative research is conducted using problem-centered interviews (PCI). Witzel and Reiter (2012) define the PCI as a *"qualitative, discursive-dialog method of reconstructing knowledge about relevant problems"* (p. 4). This method involves an *"exchange between real people"* in their own *"social, cultural, and physical context"*, with a focus on meaning and behavior (Witzel & Reiter, 2012, p. 4). The researcher tries to understand both through the *"eyes and lived experience of the people"* (Schensul, 2008, pp. 521-522).

The PCI uses an interactive process between interviewer and respondent to reconstruct interactively constituted knowledge in the social world (Witzel & Reiter, 2012, p. 15). A discursive dialogue emerges from the previous knowledge of the researcher and the practical everyday knowledge of the respondent. Subjective perspectives of the respondent are fully taken into account and complement the deductive moments with inductive moments in a way that allows new data to question and revise previous knowledge. The PCI likes to support the step from pre-understanding to understanding and thus correspond to the principles of interpretative research (Gummesson, 1991, pp. 51-72; Witzel & Reiter, 2012, p. 23).

The most important link between the interests of the researcher and the respondents is the interview guide (Witzel & Reiter, 2012, pp. 51-53). The authors explanations will be described in the following paragraph. The PCI is not a conventional interview guide but rather requires the consideration of some important aspects. The background knowledge is organized thematically by the interview guide and is intended to ensure both, problem centering and comparability of the interviews. Furthermore, it serves as a memory aid for the researcher and gives the interview a certain structure. Specifically, the interview guide contains all aspects of the problem in the form of topic areas, which are further specified by keywords, categories, or sample questions. However, the interview itself should then be structured by the thematic priorities set by the interviewee in the interview. The guide then serves as a source of inspiration that can be drawn upon if necessary. Taking into account the research subject, follow-up questions and additional topics can be included depending on the situation. Since the guide is the research instrument that accompanies and facilitates this process in the background, the interview guide used to answer the two research questions is shown below. Green circles represent questions regarding the sustainable behavior of the interviewees, whereas blue ones cover the topic of influencer marketing.

Despite the interview guide, the respondents' subjective perception of relevance can lead to new insights on the part of the interviewer and thus underline the explorative character of the interview situation. Interviews offer the advantage that misinterpreted questions can be corrected ad hoc. The interviewer also has the opportunity to ask more precisely if an answer was

inconclusive or if the question has not yet been fully answered. All in all, even more complex issues can be discussed in this way.

Furthermore, in order to ensure the greatest possible objectivity of the answers, the interviewees were informed prior to the interview that all data would be made anonymous. The interview was conducted in German to avoid possible language barriers, as German is the mother tongue of all interviewees. The presented questionnaire serves as a guideline through the interview.

Themen Guide

Interview Guide

Meine Masterarbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem Thema Nachhaltigkeit im Alltag und deren Inspirationsquellen. Dazu würde ich mich gerne mit dir unterhalten.

1. **Einleitung**
   - Du interessierst dich für Nachhaltigkeit. Wie kam es dazu und wie wirkt sich das auf deinen Alltag aus? Bitte erzähl mir mehr darüber.
2. **Bedeutung von Nachhaltigkeit im Alltag**
   - Welche Bedeutung hat das Thema Nachhaltigkeit für dich im Alltag?

- Welche nachhaltigen Lebensmuster sind Teil deines Alltags?
- Konsumierst du auch (alternative) Produkte von nachhaltigen Unternehmen? Kannst du mir dazu mehr erzählen?

3. Motive und Grenzen von Nachhaltigkeit

- Erzähl mir, was genau dich motiviert, dich nachhaltig zu Verhalten. Was spürst du dadurch und was möchtest du damit bezwecken?
- Welche Hürden gibt es, die nachhaltiges Verhalten für dich erschweren oder unmöglich machen?

4. Inspiration und Beeinflussung

- Woher kam die Idee zum nachhaltigen Verhalten?
- Aus welchen Quellen hast du dir Informationen (z.B. über nachhaltige Ideen/Produkte) besorgt?
- Wurdest du beeinflusst, dich nachhaltiger zu verhalten? Durch wen und wie? Erzähl mir bitte mehr darüber.
- Ist dir bewusst, dass du zum Thema Nachhaltigkeit beeinflusst wurdest?

5. Nutzung von Social Media

- Erzähl mir ein bisschen was, über deine Nutzung von Social Media?
- Mit welchen Themen befassen sich die Personen, denen du auf Social Media folgst (die aber nicht deine Freunde sind bzw. die Influencer sind (über 1000 Follower)?

6. Bedeutung von Influencern und Influencer Marketing

- Warum folgst du Influencern, die sich mit Nachhaltigkeit auseinandersetzen?
- Inwiefern wurdest du schon einmal beeinflusst bzw. hast dein Verhalten/Leben/Alltag aufgrund eines Influencers verändert?
- Was motiviert/hindert dich, dich so zu verhalten, wie es dir ein Influencer vorlebt?
- Welche Faktoren müssen beim Influencer stimmen, dass du seinem Beispiel folgst?
- Durch welche Arten von Postings, hast du dein Verhalten/Konsum verändert (gewünschte Antworten: Produktplatzierung, Produktnennungen, Produkt-Review, Produkteinsatz etc. = Mechanismen = Beantwortung von HOW)

7. Abschlussfrage:

- Warum glaubst du, dass Influencer dir helfen können, nachhaltiger zu leben und zu konsumieren?

7.2.2 Sampling

Concerning the comparability of the data, the selection of the interviewees was based on two factors. First, respondents should belong to the Millennial generation. Millennials are the biggest generational consumer group in almost all developed countries (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016, p. 604). It is of interest to research this generation and its purchasing behavior, as the millennials represent a large part of the population and also have a high purchasing power. Brands should consider that millennials are influenced by other people's opinions much more than by traditional advertising (Smith, 2011, p. 491). Millennials have grown up in the digital world (Pate & Adams, 2013, p. 95). They spend more and more time on social networks and use them as their primary way of communication. As more than 55% of teenagers and young adults use these sites, Millennials are, out of the current adult generations, most active on social media (Pate & Adams, 2013, p. 93). Therefore, influencer marketing using WOM on social media channels seems to be the optimal advertising choice for reaching this consumer segment and is thus from high interest for this master thesis research.

The second important criterion was the persons' general interest in sustainability. This restriction was deliberately chosen as the aim is to find out whether and how people's interest in sustainability was influenced by influencers rather than exploring if a person is interested in sustainability at all. Moreover, the purpose is also to determine which factors are important for successfully influencing a more conscious lifestyle. Based on this data, the relevance of influencers and consequently influencer marketing for a sustainable lifestyle and the consumption of sustainable brands can be determined.

The interviewer will not mention influencer or influencer marketing in advance, to create a study that is as representative as possible, as there is also the possibility of having been influenced by other sources, e.g. family or peers, to behave sustainably. With regard to the sample size, it was determined in advance that 6 to 8 different persons should be interviewed. In order to ensure the most detailed observation and precise analysis possible, this sample size corresponds to the scope of the work.

7.3 Evaluation Method

For the most accurate analysis possible, the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewed persons and then transcribed. This ensured a comprehensive understanding of the various interviews and facilitated the subsequent analysis.

The content material was analyzed on the basis of the structuring content analysis corresponding to Mayring. According to Mayring (2010, p. 65), the analysis aim is to filter out certain aspects of the material, to create a cross-section of the material under pre-defined order criteria, or to assess the material based on certain criteria.

The model makes it possible to create thematic categories that precisely reflect the content material. The definition of the categories represents a central step in content analysis (Mayring, 2008, p. 74). The formation of the categories is therefore a very sensitive process that sets the course for further analysis. Mayring (2008, pp. 74-75) gives two procedures for the formation of categories, which are described in the following two paragraphs.

In deductive category building, the categories are defined in advance. Starting point for this are usually theoretical considerations. From the current state of research, from theoretical concepts or preliminary investigations, the categories can be developed with regard to the material. The individual text passages are then assigned to the predefined categories.

The inductive category formation in turn is based on a systematic reduction process. In this case, categories are only formed when the individual text passages are read, or entire text sequences are made into categories. The individual text sequences can then be classified either in existing or new categories. This is thus a generalization process without focusing on previously formulated theoretical concepts.

Both methods agree in that - starting with the research question - they categorize the individual statements of the respondents in groups with a similar context and remove repetitive statements. In the sense of a qualitative content analysis, it can be argued that the inductive approach allows a more natural, object-oriented depiction of the interview material, which prevents possible distortions caused by the researcher’s presumptions (Mayring, 2008, p. 75). For these reasons, the present research follows the approach of deductive and inductive category formation. Even though the theoretical foundations were embedded in the interview guidelines in advance, the formation of the final categories only took place during the processing of the individual text passages. The process of the structuring content analysis can be seen in figure 5.

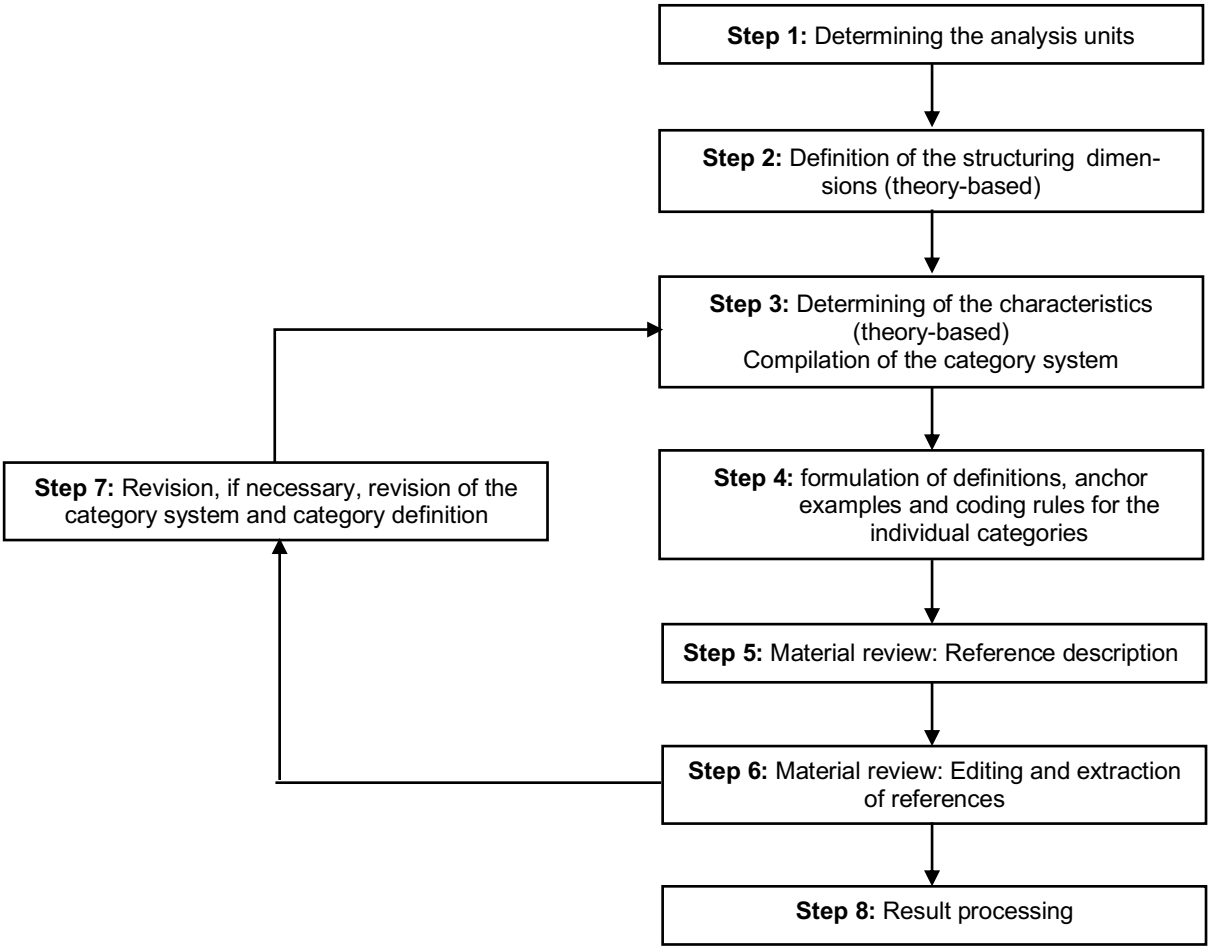

Figure 5: Process of the structured content analysis
Source: Based on Mayring (2008, p. 84)

Mayring (2008, pp. 82-84) describes the individual steps of the structuring content analysis as follows: In the first step, the analysis units are determined, i.e. the smallest and largest text components that can be assigned to a category. Then the structuring dimensions are determined. This means that - usually based on the theoretical principles - main categories are created. Subcategories are then assigned to these categories to complete the category system. For a simple and clear assignment of the respective text passages to the categories, definitions, anchor examples and coding rules for the categories are determined in the fourth step.

In this way, the following five main categories were defined for the present study: *reference to sustainability, motives & barriers of sustainable behavior, sources of inspiration for sustainability, social media usage and relevance of influencers*.[3]

[3] In the separate file in German as follows: Bezug zur Nachhaltigkeit, Motive & Hürden von nachhaltigem Verhalten, Inspirationsquellen für Nachhaltigkeit, Social Media Nutzung, Bedeutung von Influencern.

With the preparations that have been made, it is possible to start with the description of the reference. The individual text passages are then assigned to the categories and subsequently extracted. In case of possible necessary adjustments, the category system can be revised in the seventh step before the results are processed.

The model above (see figure 5) shows the basic process model of a structuring content analysis. However, this can be divided into four further subcategories: formal structuring, content structuring, typifying structuring, scaling structuring. In the course of this work, a decision was made in favor of structuring the content, as in this way certain topics or aspects can be filtered out of the material and summarized.

When structuring the content, the extracted material is paraphrased after assigning relevant text passages to the respective categories (Mayring, 2008, p. 89). The paraphrased material is then summarized first per subcategory, then per main category, what can be seen in figure 6 (Mayring, 2008, p. 89).

In a further step, the basic statements or experiences of the different persons are then compared. The main aim here is to identify commonalities and differences with regard to the categories and the relationships between them. Based on this analysis, the results of the study are presented below and implications for the use of influencer marketing for sustainable brands are worked out.

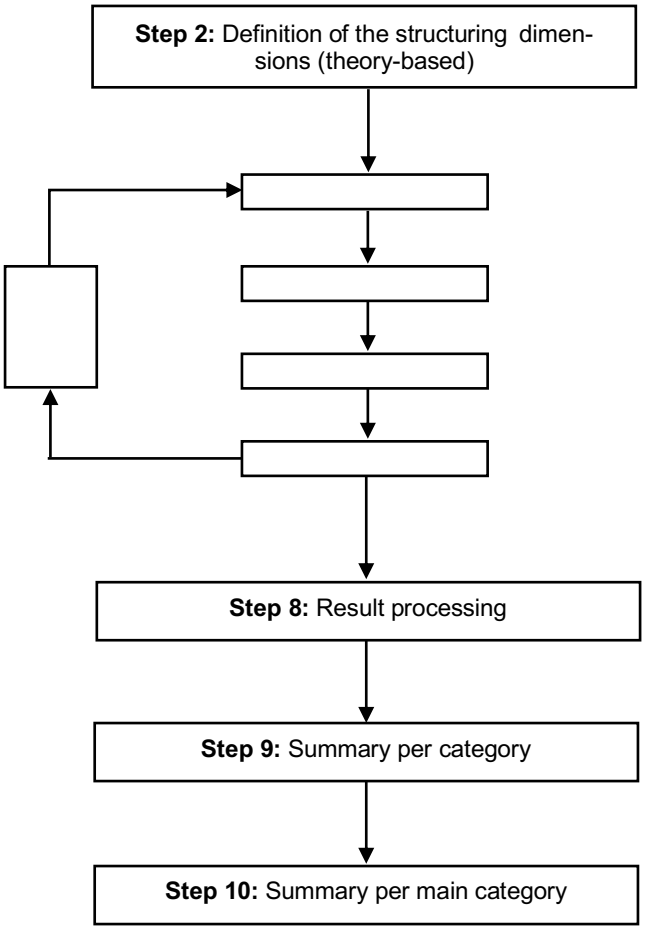

Figure 6: Process model for content structuring
Source: Based on Mayring (2008, p. 89)

8 Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative content analysis. For this purpose, the problem-centered interviews are used as a basis to analyze the experiences and behaviors of the individual persons. By specifically categorizing the content of the interviews, parts of the conversations can be viewed and processed systematically.

The first step is an overview of sustainable behavior and the importance of sustainability for people in their everyday lives. It also describes the motives that have led people to act sustainably and the obstacles that prevent them from doing so. In a final step, similarities and differences are identified and compared with the findings in the literature.

In the following chapter, the sources of inspiration and the influence on sustainable behavior are discussed. Building on this, the next chapter discusses the use of social media and experiences with influencers in the area of sustainability, as well as factors of a sustainable influencer that have contributed to influence the interviewees behavior (here, crucial to the success

of influencers and influencer marketing). It will be analyzed in how far influencers have contributed to sustainable behavior.

In a final step, the relevance of influencers for a sustainable lifestyle and sustainable brands is discussed. Each of these chapters link – as far as possible – the respective aspects with the theoretical foundations from chapter 2 to 5.

8.1 Characterization of Sustainable Behavior

In the following, the sustainable behavior in the everyday life of the interviewees is described. Furthermore, the individual motives and barriers of the respondents with regard to sustainable behavior are explained. In the last step, the respective similarities and differences are presented and compared with the findings in the literature.

8.1.1 Interview #1

Interviewee #1 has always been interested in animals and nature conservation, which for her is related to sustainability. The person studies Animal Management with the specialization in International Business and Natural Resource Management, which is also connected to sustainability. Her environment, family and friends, have also influenced her towards sustainability. The interviewee tries to integrate sustainability into everyday life and has started with waste avoidance and nutrition. Changed behaviors in terms of sustainability include taking own bags with herself when going to the supermarket, buying fruit which is not wrapped in plastic, minimizing meat consumption or consuming substitute products. In the case of bathroom products, the person looks for natural products without animal testing and has already consumed sustainable products such as a wooden hairbrush, bamboo toothbrushes, natural make-up, razors and solid shampoo.

In her view, sustainability is primarily related to nature, since without nature and animals, humans cannot survive either. Equal rights for all people are also relevant, however, environmental and nature conservation are more important to her.

Her motivation for sustainable behavior lies primarily in protecting the world and nature. Through her love for animals, she is aware that nature must be protected in order to preserve animals too. Interview partner #1 clearly sees limits for behave sustainably, but according to her, one can overcome them if one really wants to. She sees a lot of work when behaving sustainably and no support from the society at all, which is living for mass consumption and plastic. Specifically, the interviewee finds it difficult to avoid rubbish when shopping for groceries because there are no shops for bulk buying near her place of residence.

8.1.2 Interview #2

For interviewee #2, a direct contact to sustainability exists from the changed spirit of our times. Society has developed more awareness of sustainability. She grew up with sustainability and was already made aware of it at school. By running her own household, she has become even more aware of the issue, for example, that one takes an own bag with them to go shopping and buy fruit and vegetables in bulk instead of packed in plastic. Furthermore, interviewee #2 pays attention in everyday life to high-quality and durable clothing and the purchase of large packaging units for cosmetic products, in order to buy less plastic. For reasons of sustainability, she also consumes less meat or prefers regional and high-quality meat if possible. For her, sustainability means conscious consumption in every purchase decision, for example preferring the paper bag over the plastic bag. It is an issue that is always present in everyday life and one should orientate one's life towards it, and for the person questioned this also applies to energy and water consumption.

Sustainable behavior makes the interviewee feeling pleased. She wants to act according to the Kant imperative and leave out unnecessary things. Other motives for her sustainable actions come out of own experiences of waste problems in other countries and in the oceans. She thinks that everyone has to start to change on a small level so that there can be change on an overall level. Interview partner #2 sees problems in the fact that purchasing decisions are often designed to be comfortable for the customer, but not sustainable. Small compromises might make purchases less comfortable and often more expensive but sustainable. People have to consume consciously to be sustainable. According to her, however, many people in society are too lazy or too comfortable for minimal restrictions. It is already becoming easier to consume sustainably, for example more and more supermarkets are offering regional products. But the best possible, most convenient and cheapest option is the least sustainable. It becomes more difficult, especially for people who do not have the financial means or who are not aware of the issue. For the person interviewed, it is mainly a financial obstacle, especially when it comes to clothing. One would have to inform oneself and invest time and money to find sustainable clothing labels.

8.1.3 Interview #3

Due to his bachelor's degree with a focus on *Sustainable Tourism Management in Southeast Asia* and his love for cooking, interviewee #3 came across sustainability. He tries to waste little when cooking, to work with the ingredients he has and not to produce a lot of waste. Saving resources, in the sense of avoiding waste and recycling leftovers, is for him transferable to all areas of everyday life. Furthermore, the interviewee looks for good quality, fair trade,

sustainability and no plastic packaging for food, clothing and other products. He buys mainly from local producers.

The interviewee sees one motive in the fact that people have always been careful not to waste their resources. It is logical to produce things that last a long time and illogical or irrational to produce products that break after two years or have a predetermined breaking point. Personally, interviewee #3 likes it better to work with just a few, good and durable products. With electronic devices, the interviewee finds it difficult to consume sustainably as he has high expectations, but these do not correspond to a sustainable definition. Everything that is not produced sustainably needs rare earths, uses resources from all over the world and is produced globally, mostly under unsustainable conditions. The barriers are therefore in the specificity of the things that are not present in sustainable devices. For example, the specifications of sustainably produced computers or smartphones do not meet his professional standards. However, he also sees that the sustainable Fairphone, for example, does not have the professionals as target group. Further restrictions are time and money, which can lead to a bad feeling if one does not behave sustainably due to these restrictions.

8.1.4 Interview #4

For interviewee #4, sustainability is a slow process that is not yet over but is constantly evolving. The first contact with the topic came through her studies with an age of 20. The interviewee is interested in the topic and wants to make a contribution, so she implements it as good as she can. The topic has a great importance for this person: she finds it very difficult but also very important to integrate sustainability into her lifestyle and everyday life and pays attention to it especially when it comes to food. She is a vegetarian and tries to buy locally and regionally. For a year now, the interviewee has been dealing with the topic of sustainable clothing and noticed that she finds it easier to consume less and in return locally instead of buying from large concerns. Interview partner #4 mainly rides a bicycle or walks. Another change due to the interest in sustainability relates to influencers. While the person has previously followed many models and famous people, she now values influencers who talk about meaningful things.

The biggest motive for interviewee #4 is that she feels she is doing something good for herself when consuming sustainably. She describes a win-win situation: sustainable behavior is good for the environment, for the people involved in any production process and for herself, because she can buy things with a clear conscience. The person feels better by consuming less and more targeted, compared to mass consumption. Interviewee #4 says about herself, that she is sustainable in some areas and in others not, which she finds difficult. She describes it as a challenge: one tries to do something good and at the same time one has to question whether

it is really good. Concrete challenges are the temptation when walking through the city, as well as shipping and return shipping when shopping online. She also describes that for the last two months she has had more money available through a full-time job, which changes a lot.

8.1.5 Interview #5

For person #5, sustainability is a slow process as well that came through small inspirations. Television documentaries, e.g. on marine pollution, have inspired her to change her lifestyle and switch to sustainable products. The first contacts with the topic of sustainability came through Instagram, politics, laws, television and friends. Interview partner #5 followed an influencer who herself made a switch to sustainability. This inspired the interviewee and she saw how people can easily change their behavior in the household and in everyday life. The prohibition on plastic bags came from politics. Furthermore, friends who have dealt with the topic of less meat consumption have inspired her to think about change as well. Sustainability has a great importance for this person. She looks at sustainability in almost everything, including bathroom products (natural cosmetics, recyclable plastic container, solid shampoo) or when shopping (unpacked fruit and vegetables). It is very important to live as sustainable as possible, even though every now and then some products are bought that are not sustainable. In her opinion, one cannot and also does not need to be perfect. If people would pay a little attention to sustainability, this would be the first step towards improvement. Interviewee #5 does not yet buy products from consistently sustainable companies or brands. She pays particular attention to the ingredients in cosmetics and uses the app Code Check to assist her.

Interview partner #5 aims to give something in return to the world instead of polluting it. She sees no right in doing so, also the consequences of the pollution come back to the people and animals through the ground water anyway. In her opinion, it is not fair, and she does not want to hurt the world. Through climate change, she knows what people have done and what can be done in the future. She does not want to leave the world polluted for future generations. The big picture motivates her to accept greater efforts. Behaving sustainably is the more complicated way, for instance looking for new products and buying the desired products in several shops is more time-consuming. For example, there is no such thing as unpackaged broccoli and the nearest unpackaged shop is 5 km away. In addition, there is no milk bottled directly by the farmer to buy in town, which is the best way to avoid factory farming. The interviewee therefore falls back on oat milk or rice milk as alternatives. She sees sustainability as a small break in life, but once getting used to it, one integrates it into everyday life. Another obstacle is the issue of clothing. Interviewee #5 feels that sustainable clothing is more expensive. The threshold for investing in sustainable clothing is therefore still high. However, she admits that she has not yet addressed the issue of value for money and that the price may be justified.

She would have to read up on this further and is motivated by her own pride in sustainable action, e.g. she has not bought any new clothes for several months.

8.1.6 Interview #6

Interview partner #6 did a voluntary ecological year (VEY)[4] after graduating from high school and dealt with the topic of sustainability through seminars that addressed ecological aspects, sustainability, consumption and nature. It was the first time that the interviewee dealt with sustainability and it still shapes his consumption and lifestyle. For him, sustainability has a high value in his everyday life, especially in his consumption. The interviewee buys sustainable, qualitative products and pays attention to labels. The following applies to him: each label is better than none, although he is most likely to buy products with the German *Bio-Siegel*, *Demeter* label or *Naturland* label with a clear conscience. For him the most important factor is meat consumption, because it is an immense factor in terms of sustainability and CO2 emissions. Interviewee #6 tries to leave it out or cook alternatives. The more he deals with it, the easier it becomes. As far as clothing is concerned, the interviewee has not yet included the topic of sustainability, but he just started to look for sustainable brands. The interviewee uses public transport and does not own a car. He admits that he could ride his bike more often.

The motive of interviewee #6 is above all his health: he no longer eats cheap meat, as a side effect of this he eats healthier. In addition, since the VEY, he may no longer support certain companies and their way of production, as well as the lifestyle of many people in our society. The negative experience gave him the motivation to rethink and support other companies. In the beginning it was a positive feeling to disassociate himself from the lifestyle he had before. The person interviewed first had to learn that sustainability is not affordable for everyone. He sees a major obstacle to sustainable behavior in the financial aspect. He also sees the commercialization of sustainability as problematic. You have to do serious work and research on it, and you need stricter rules to be able to really consume sustainably.

8.1.7 Interview #7

Interview partner #7 sees sustainability as a necessity and describes the current lifestyle as “not good” due to the high consume of our society. Everybody has to start changing small things within themselves, so that a sustainable change can occur globally. The contact with the topic came successively in the person itself, because one is constantly confronted with it, e.g. by news, friends or other sources of information. In terms of sustainability, the person interviewed tries step by step to avoid things that are bad for the environment. This also has

[4] Known in Germany as “Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr (FÖJ)”.

to do with his parenting, e.g. taking own bags with him when he goes shopping and avoiding plastic if possible. The interviewee also tries to reduce meat and exchanges it with vegetables or other sustainable products. Reusable kitchen roll and avoiding non-seasonal products, e.g. strawberries in winter, are further changes. Within his own country he wants to reduce air travel and use bus or train instead, as long as it is rational.

For the interviewee, the environmental aspect is of great importance. In his opinion, society can no longer continue to consume such amounts, use up resources and increase CO2 consumption. Interview partner #7 does not like these things at all and therefore prefers to renounce. Other motives are also social factors, such as the exploitation of workers in low-wage countries, especially when it comes to clothing. The motivation to question oneself has to do with the personal reflection process. He tries to have a positive impact on the environment and consumer behavior, as constant consumption come off bad. According to him, sustainable consumption is a cost issue. Due to his full-time job he now has the financial means to invest in sustainable products. As a student, for instance, he was sometimes unable to afford a train ticket and therefore often chose the airplane. Flights are often cheaper, and you get faster to your destination. Time is therefore another factor. He states that it is difficult to find the balance between acting rational (according to price and time) and being sustainable.

8.1.8 Similarities and Differences

In order to analyze the sustainable behavior, the motives and barriers found are summarized in the following section on similarities and differences and the results are compared with the literature.

Sustainable Behavior:

Many similarities can be seen in the respondents' sustainable behavior as well as in their motives and barriers. Most interviewees state that they had their first contact with sustainability through their studies. Some also list family/parenting and friends. For three of the interviewees, sustainability is a gradual and slow process. This result agrees with those of Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) as well as Freestone and McGoldrick (2008) The authors also say that the change to an ethical consumer takes time and happens gradually. Two people talk about the role of politics and news but only respondent #5 mentions Instagram and influencer as one of the first points of contact for sustainability.

All interviewees avoid plastic as far as possible when shopping by bringing their own bag and buying fruit and vegetables unpacked. Meat consumption also plays an important role for all respondents and is carried out less or not at all. Only some of them state that they are looking for alternatives to meat, which is a great example for sustainable consumption, as it refers not only to purchasing but also to eating (Nguyen et al., 2019). Furthermore, the sustainable idea

is to limit consumption (Portney, 2015), which is shown by the answers of avoiding plastic and reducing meat consumption. Sustainability in concern of bathroom articles and cosmetics, in the sense of waste avoidance and natural cosmetics, seems to play a role especially for the female interviewees. Seasonal and local consumption as well as quality and fair trade is very important for at least 4 persons. Many sustainable examples of action from the everyday life of the interviewees overlap, so does the consideration of the type of transport (public transport, bicycle or walking) to be important for at least 3 interviewees. Respondent #7 also compares flights with bus or train when it comes to long distance travel. The respondents' statements and examples of behavior clearly point to ethical purchase behavior and the movement of sustainable consumption, according to which the purchase criteria are not only quality and the lowest possible price, but social or sustainable issues are important as well (Harrison et al., 2005, p. 1).

On the other hand, there were also topics that were seen differently by the respondents or were rarely mentioned. While for interviewee #1, society does not yet support sustainable behavior, interviewee #2 already sees an increased awareness in society for sustainability and a changed spirit of our times. She is also the only one who reports to have already come into contact with the topic at school. Several respondents report a change in follower behavior on social media – they now follow other (sustainable) influencers – but only interviewee #4 sees this as a change in her daily life towards sustainable behavior. Energy and water consumption were also only mentioned once (interviewee #2).

Motives:

The literature shows several barriers of sustainable behavior. In addition, many people are motivated by negative experiences to change certain behavior, as can be clearly seen in the answers of the interviewees. They mentioned a photo of a turtle swimming in the dirty sea with a straw in its nose (interviewee #1), generally of dirty beaches and seas full of plastic bags (interviewee #2 and #5) or negative information about large corporations and the meat industry (interviewee #6). But it is not only negative things that lead to a change in behavior. Several interviewees speak of a positive feeling and a clear conscience when they behave in a sustainable way. This goes hand in hand with the findings of Nguyen, Dadzie, Chaudhuri and Tanner (2019, p. 384), who say that sustainable consumers have an interest in the impact of their consumption on economic and personal well-being as well as on society and the environment. For most of the interviewees, environmental protection is the main motive. This can include animal welfare, the prevention of pollution of the environment or the consumption of resources. As described in the literature, the motivation for sustainable behavior is individual, but all of them are concerned with the effects that their purchase decision has on the world around them and not only on themselves (Harrison et al., 2005). Five of the interviewees stated that sustainable behavior makes them feel pleased or proud and that they have a clear

conscience when consuming or that they like it when they work with few but good and durable products. This phenomenon is also described in chapter 3.4.4 as hedonic, which says that the likelihood to behave sustainably will increase when the consumer feels better by purchasing a sustainable product (Rezvani et al., 2017; Schuitema et al., 2013).

While everyone is concerned about protecting the environment, only one respondent cites health as one aspect and another one talks about other social factors, such as exploitation of workers, as a motive for sustainable behavior.

Barriers:

However, sustainability is by no mean described as easy, even if the respondents consider it as very important. All respondents also see barriers that make sustainable behavior difficult or even prevent it, which is consistent with the findings of Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011). For instance, sustainability is described as a decisive break in life and means more work or effort because it is not the easy but the more complicated way. This also includes more time spent shopping for the desired products, which should be as plastic free as possible, travelling by bus or train as opposed to flying, and also through increased information and research which is needed. The convenience of many people is criticized, and it is emphasized that conscious consumption is necessary to be able to behave in a truly sustainable way. In the ethical decision-making process this is described as opting for the easy choice (see chapter 3.4), according to which some people do not prefer an ethical alternative, as the implementation requires more time and energy (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011). Instead, they prefer the easiest and most convenient option. Contrary to the findings of Creyer and Ross (1997) (people would pay premium prices for ethical products) almost all respondents see a major financial problem with sustainability, especially when it comes to clothing. High prices for ethical alternatives have already been confirmed in earlier studies (Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). Also, in the study of Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011), most participants stated that some of the ethical products and services were too expensive for them. Since clothing was explicitly mentioned again by the interviewees, this could be a confirmation that the high prices come from the (still) limited supply. But, as mentioned by two interviewees, this might also come from ethical products used and fair working conditions (price transparency - interviewee #2, legitimate price - interviewee #5).

Money and time seem to be big barriers. Other barriers mentioned sporadically are the insufficient specificity of sustainable (especially electronic) products (interviewee #3) and the commercialization of sustainability (interviewee #6). Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011) talk about inefficient alternatives in the area of taking action, where important criteria, such as functionality, are not met within ethical products. As a result of the commercialization, many people can no longer distinguish between what is truly sustainable and what is not. Constant

questioning is necessary here, as are stricter rules. This is also in line with the results of the attitude-behavior gap in ethical decision making. According to the authors, the main concern of consumers is whether the information is credible or just urban myths (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011). The temptation when strolling through the city is also mentioned as a difficulty for sustainable behavior. It is not explicitly mentioned in the literature but can be classified as an external limitation.

Despite the differences, one thing has emerged very clearly: all respondents agree that everyone has to make a contribution at a small level to ensure that sustainable change occurs globally. It is not about being perfect, but a bit of attention to sustainable behavior is the first step towards improvement (interviewee #5). One interviewee also states that the more you look at the issue, the easier it becomes (interviewee #6). Nath (2008) agrees that society as a whole needs to act to achieve a significant impact on the current system.

8.2 Inspiration and General Influence for Sustainable Behavior

The respondents use a range of information sources. Discussions and conversations with friends, and family/parenting were mentioned several times. Fellow students and also professors lead to a change during their studies, just like a Voluntary Ecological Year, which examines sustainability from different angles through seminars. News, reports and documentaries also play an important role, consumed via television or mobile on the smartphone. Three out of seven people have mentioned social media and influencers as a source of information and inspiration. The own knowledge of unsustainable behavior as a source of rethinking is only mentioned twice, e.g. cheap flights (keyword: flight shaming) (interviewee #7). Only once was the school or company named as a source of ideas (interviewee #2 and #5). The direct living environment (flat mates in a shared flat) was also mentioned explicitly only once (interviewee #4), although depending on the relationship, these people could also be count as friends or family members. The supermarket as a source of ideas is also a possibility, as regional or organic products are now labelled and more strongly emphasized.

Even if people have to decide for themselves whether they want to behave sustainably or not, the spirit of our times, the media and their own environment play a decisive role in influencing sustainable behavior (interviewee #2). Especially in the beginning, for many it was rather a subconscious influence by studies, family and friends (interviewee #1, #3, #4, #6, and #7). Only now do some realize when they are actively led in one direction, e.g. during conversations with friends. Interview partner #3 even says that sustainable behavior has become a trend from which one can no longer act independently. The interviewees agree that there has been an influence, especially through the increased appearance of the topic in the media. Specifically, there is talk of advertising, pop-up news and social media. Several small incentives have

thus led to an increased engagement with sustainability, which has led to interest and finally to a change in behavior (interviewee #5 and #7). Interviewee #5 even states that she was directly influenced by an influencer who herself has experienced a shift towards sustainability and has involved her followers on Instagram.

Besides the influence towards a more sustainable lifestyle, which is seen as positive, the respondents (interviewee #3 and #5) also indicate that the topic can also have a negative influence. For instance, guilty conscience if one does not behave sustainably (interviewee #5), e.g. due to restrictions such as little time or money (interviewee #3). However, this bad feeling is not conducive or motivating if one already behaves sustainably in many other ways (interviewee #3).

These findings are compliant to the TRA (see chapter 3.1). Personal attitudes and social pressure form significant others (e.g. the opinion of family members or friends about a certain behavior) determine behavior (Hoyer et al., 2013; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). The stronger the social pressure, the more the subjective norm will influence the behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). Also, the continuative TPB can be seen in the findings. TPB shows that persuasive communication influences consumers' attitudes, their behavioral intentions and thus leads to behavior (Rodgers & Thorson, 2017). The importance of social content is although mentioned by Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011) as a possible limitation for ethical decision making, as people might compromise their sustainable behavior in order to meet their social obligations.

In summary, it can be said that TRA, which predicts behavior that is under the control of consumers, reflects the conscious influence of the interviewees. TPB, on the other hand, describes behavior that is not under the control of the consumer and can therefore be equated with the subconscious influence of external factors, which is also mentioned by the interviewees (interviewee #3, #4, #5, #6, and #7) (Madden et al., 1992).

8.3 Impact of Influencers on Sustainable Behavior

After the general influencing factors of the interviewees have been considered, the second component of this master thesis has been introduced in the interviews. This chapter analyzes the extent to which influencers promote sustainable behavior and therefore first looks at the usage of social media and the experiences with influencers in the area of sustainability. Of great importance are the factors of (sustainable) influencers that have contributed or would contribute to influence the respondents. They determine the success of sustainable influencers as well as the relevance of influencer marketing for a sustainable lifestyle, which will be discussed in the last subchapter of this part.

8.3.1 Social Media Usage

All respondents have social media accounts and also use social media, some more, some less, which is typical for this generation, as millennials are the most active adults' generation on social media (Ostensen & Jamshidi, n.d.). Instagram is the most frequently used social media channel and thus probably the most important one in the area of sustainability for millennials. While all female respondents state that they spend a lot of time on Instagram, only one of the male respondents agrees with it (interviewee #7). The other two (interviewee #3 and #6) use Instagram and social media in general less and have no great or only professional interest in the platform. On this platform, the respondents mainly follow friends, but also influencers (people with over 1000 followers, mainly subject matter experts and generalists, see chapter 2.2.1 and 2.2.2). The subject matter ranges from animal welfare to art, sports, nutrition, celebrities, cafés and restaurants, cats, news, etc. All respondents also follow sustainable influencers or Instagram channels that have addressed the issue of sustainability, including internationally known ones, like Greta Thunberg, who is primarily politically committed to environmental protection, and the actress Emma Watson, who, in addition to her fight for more women's rights, also focuses on recycled fashion. Named influencers known in the German speaking world include dariadaria, Louisa Dellert, janaklar, Pamela Reif and Fynn Kliemann. Other Instagram channels mentioned - that are dedicated to sustainability - are the online shop Naturalou, Zero Waste Home and Eco Warrior. Specifically, these influencers and Instagram channels deal with politics, self-love and sustainability on various levels, such as healthy and vegetarian or vegan food, tips for a sustainable lifestyle and do-it-yourselves (DIY), sustainable products and fashion. There is a clear link between the interest in sustainability and the subscribed channels and influencers on social media.

In addition to Instagram, Pinterest and podcasts are also mentioned by interviewee #5 as further social media channels that are used as inspiration and information platforms on the topic of sustainability. Facebook does not seem to play a major role for the interviewees, neither on the topic of sustainability nor in social media use in general.

The respondents give very similar reasons for following sustainable influencers and channels: they want to receive inspiration for a sustainable lifestyle, e.g. through tips, recipe ideas, information on seasonal products and DIY. Thereby a learning effect and added value of the content is very important. A great advantage of sustainable influencers is Instagram as a platform itself. Interviewee #4 states that the platform is very easy to use and helps to inform about a specific topic. Besides, the user receives content daily. This saves them from having to do their own research for articles. Interview partner #7 agrees and states that the mass of information on Google quickly overwhelms himself. By following a desired influencer, the mass of

(especially differently prepared) information is reduced and he regularly gets the desired content (in his case vegetarian recipes) served.

8.3.2 Successful Influencers and Successful Influencer Marketing

The majority of the respondents say that they have been influenced by an influencer before and were motivated to act or buy. This includes tips that are implemented, such as using your own fruit nets when shopping or trying solid shampoo. But also, recipes and information about seasonal products as well as sustainable clothing and fashion labels or sustainable furniture design were taken up by influencers and partly already implemented into the own lifestyle. The other two interviewees did not mention any direct influence coming from an influencer yet, but they do not want to deny this either. Interview partner #6 at least does not want to exclude the possibility that people on social media might have a certain effect on him and encourage him to change his lifestyle, and interview partner #2 only states that this particular sustainable clothing label of the mentioned influencer Xenia Adonts is too expensive for her, which shows that the financial barrier again plays a role here.

Sustainable influencer does not necessarily mean good influencer (interviewee #4). But what makes a good influencer so that someone follows his or her example? The interviewees have named factors that influencers should bring along in any case. Authenticity was named most frequently by interviewee #3, #4, #5, and #6. It can be linked to source credibility of the social learning theory (see chapter 5), which includes trustworthiness and expertise. The influencer should promote sustainability as a lifestyle and stand behind what it shows and does, if so, the influencer is seen as trustworthy. Only product placements do not convince the respondents, although it is still positive when tips are given, for example where to buy the sustainable product shown (interviewee #1). It is generally expected that sustainable influencers provide information and ideas on a sustainable lifestyle, show alternatives and give tips (interviewee #1, #4, and #5), which equals an expert. The influencer should therefore set a good example and not just show negative things, like Louisa Dellert is doing by showing photos of her doing a beach-clean-up vs. just posting pictures of a polluted beach (interviewee #5). Thus, influencers who are perceived as very knowledgeable and trustworthy (= authenticity) are considered to be more influential on the behavior of their followers.

Another important point related to showing products is the aesthetics of the pictures. Instagram in particular is primarily a visual platform. Especially photos quickly look like advertisements and may deter people who are not yet interested in sustainability. The visual language must be appealing to the respondents. For them photos/videos/stories that show only the product are not appealing at all. The pictures should be aesthetic and well prepared, preferably with people, so that they start reading the captions and inspire imitation (interviewee #1, #2, and

#5). In addition, the content should offer added value, tell a story behind the image (interviewee #2 and #3) and provide realistic tips on how to implement sustainable behavior (interviewee #1 and #5). Through sharing their views, images and videos on the Internet, influencers form an opinion leader/opinion seeker relationships (Kreutzer & Land, 2017), which is known in the literature as PSI (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 198; Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015, p. 111). As in a real friendship, trust is significant for influencer marketing in terms of paid product recommendations or other financially compensated contributions. As Instagram has become a large marketplace this is even more important. For instance, Interviewee #6 does not want to feel like the influencers are trying to sell him products at all.

Sympathy was mentioned at least by three respondents directly. According to the statements of the interviewees, sympathy refers to internal and external characteristics of the influencer, like humor. Respondent #6 is addressed by people on social media who provide funny content and do not take themselves too seriously on the platforms. External characteristics in form of physical attractiveness can also be found within the social learning theory, as researches found a positive correlation between source attractiveness and consumer attitudes as well as purchase intention (see chapter 5). Furthermore, sympathy might be seen as an important factor, because over time, influencers are perceived by their followers as part of their daily lives and as personal friends (see chapter 4.1.2).

Further factors mentioned are the regularity of new content in - as far as possible - the same way, as not to have to constantly reorient yourself. The channel should be dedicated to the main topic only (in the example of interviewee #7 vegetarian cuisine/recipes), as compact and simple as possible. This certainly is linked to the ethical consumer decision process (see chapter 3.4), which mentions lack of time and confusion from too much information (you receive from Google - interviewee #7).

Furthermore, two of the interviewees feel it is good when celebrity influencers and (macro/micro) influencers use their fame or influence to change the existing world (interviewee #1 and #2). A great example is Emma Watson, who is a women’s rights activist and prefers recycled fashion. Nevertheless, influencers have decisive advantages over celebrities. As explained in chapter 2.3.3, celebrities can also help increase brand awareness, but influencers increase product engagement even further, thereby increasing sales and brand loyalty (TapInfluence, 2017).

8.3.3 Relevance of influencers for sustainable behavior and lifestyles

In the following, based on the previous evaluations of the interviews, it will be determined whether the use of influencer marketing is worthwhile for sustainable brands. The analysis also

includes the answers of the respondents on how they assess the impact of influencers on (their) sustainable behavior.

They agree on one thing in particular: influencers reach many people and can have an incredible power over their fans and followers. This gives them an important role, including inspiring people to adopt a sustainable lifestyle (interviewee #6). Influencers stand between advertising and the normal consumer. A person decides to actively follow an influencer (vs. watching an unsolicited advertisement). By reaching and consciously consuming the content of an influencer, they have a greater impact on people than normal advertising (interviewee #2). This statement is consistent with the fact that millennials are more affected by other people's opinions about the products they buy than traditional advertising advertisements (Smith T. K., 2011, p. 491). If an influencer defines sustainability as important, this can lead the followers to think about their own (sustainable) behavior as well (interviewee #6). Interviewee #1 also states that influencers have some responsibility for what they post. Using this influence to promote sustainability is a great potential of influencers and consequently influencer marketing, especially among young people (interviewee #6).

The daily content produced and provided by influencers is important and has several advantages:

- Influencers and their respective topics are always present.
- One does not have to search for certain articles, this saves a lot of time.
- Influencers make it easy to acquire the necessary knowledge in a short amount of time.
- They provide a guideline for the implementation into one's life.
- They present new ideas on different sub-areas of sustainability, thus allowing a broader spectrum to be considered.
- They motivate people by showing that sustainable consumer behavior is not only important but also possible to integrate into everyday life.

However, interviewee #1 still sees a problem with the significance of influencers for a sustainable lifestyle, as people need to become aware of sustainable influencers first, for this they need a certain basic interest in sustainability. This and other limitations as well as further research topics that can be derived from this master thesis will be discussed in chapter 9. Beforehand, based on the available analysis, it will be investigated whether influencer marketing offers added value for sustainable brands.

9 Implications for Sustainable Brands

In the following, based on the previous evaluations of the interviews, the two research questions can be answered. First of all, the aim was to find out how influencers affect the sustainable (consumption) behavior of millennials towards a more sustainable lifestyle.

It can be said that the first contact with the topic of sustainability does not come from influencers but rather from family, friends, studies, and others. Only after a general interest in the topic has been awakened behavior on social media changed by following sustainable influencers. By providing information on the topic and pointing out alternatives and tips, influencers help to integrate sustainability into one's own everyday life and thus lead to increased sustainable behavior (see figure 7). These findings support the first hypothesis presented in chapter 6: *Influencers increase the sustainable (consumer) behavior of millennials*.

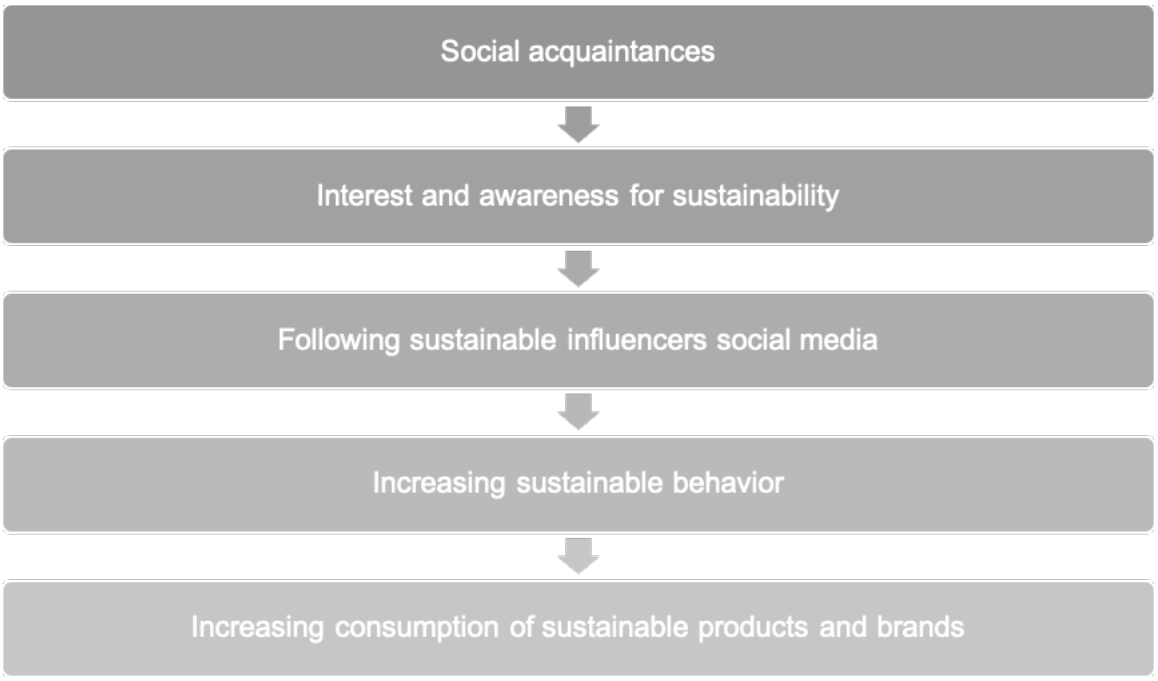

Figure 7: Process towards a sustainable lifestyle affected by influencers

Moreover, it will be determined whether the use of influencer marketing is worthwhile for sustainable brands to answer the second research question.

Both the respected literature and the findings show that influencers affect human behavior. The question was whether the increased sustainable behavior of the respondents through influencers ultimately leads to the consumption of sustainable products and brands. Studies by Paul, Modi, and Patel, for example, have found a link between environmental awareness and consumers' decision to buy sustainable products. The results of the present master thesis agree with these and show that the respondents have already been induced by influencers to buy products of sustainable brands or at least consider doing so (see figure 7 and chapter

7.3.2). Hence, also the second hypothesis *Influencers increase the purchase intentions of millennials to consumer sustainable brands* is supported by the findings of this master thesis' research. A link between the interest in sustainability and the subscribed channels and influencers on social media was found within the analysis. The respondents prefer posts with added value, e.g. guidelines, tips, and alternatives pointed out by the influencers. These tools can be used to present alternative products of sustainable brands and give tips on how to use and where to buy them.

On this basis, sustainable brands are recommended to cooperate with influencers and to engage in influencer marketing in order not only to make their brand more widely known but also to further establish sustainable awareness and consumer behavior in society.

In sum, influencers are not the first source but are important for obtaining information quickly in an era where nobody seems to have any time left. Furthermore, influencer marketing can help a sustainable brand to gain more reach and attention in that influencers – as multipliers – recommend a sustainable brand to their followers by using WOM as communication instrument. Influencers provide followers with tips and new ideas, for example on products from sustainable brands. The following chapter provides a critical assessment of the study conducted and an outlook on possible future research questions.

10 Limitations and Outlook

A qualitative method was chosen to answer the research questions. In this way, a deep insight into the experiences of the interviewees regarding their sustainable behavior in everyday life as well as the influencing factors and their attitude towards influencers could be provided, which corresponds to the explorative research character of the present thesis. Nevertheless, this type of methodology has limitations, which will be presented in the following.

Due to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to the population. However, this is not the purpose of qualitative research, and thus it was never the aim of this master thesis. The purpose was rather to work out the experiences of the individual interview partners with regard to the impact of influencers on sustainable behavior and to trace certain behaviors. Nevertheless, a larger sample size could be applied in the future for more universal results. For example, quantitative research could be used to investigate the interest in sustainability, e.g. of a certain generation, to test the state of knowledge on the topic of sustainability or to query the know-how on sustainable influencers and their significance within this generation.

The present master thesis has investigated whether sustainable (consumption) behavior has been affected by influencers or is independent of them. For this reason, a conscious decision was made to choose a target group that claims to be already interested in the topic of

sustainability and to exclude those who are not yet interested in the topic. In this case, further investigation would definitely make sense. With the help of an experiment, for example, one could find out whether the targeted influence of influencers is thought-provoking, arouses interest, and leads to changes in behavior in the sense of sustainability.

Another research topic also arises from the expressed problem of interviewee #1. The aim is to investigate how people without any interest in sustainability could become aware of sustainable influencers and their positive work, in order to make influencers' influence in this direction possible. Lifestyle influencers (they belong to the category of general influencers) are a small example of a solution to this problem and could take their followers along with them through their own change towards sustainability, similar to what the influencer Louisa Dellert did (Interview #5).

For the selection of the interview partners, only an interest in sustainability and their generations was relevant. During the evaluation process of the interviews interesting differences between the sexes could be identified, both in terms of their sustainable behavior and their use of social media and consequently their influence by influencers. Women often have several areas (nutrition, food shopping, clothing, sanitary products, and cosmetics) in which they would like to act sustainably. So far, the male interviewees have mainly dealt with sustainable nutrition and food shopping, and occasionally with means of transport and less frequently with clothing. Avoiding waste in the bathroom and natural cosmetics were not mentioned at all. Further research could, therefore, investigate a comparison between the sustainable behavior of men and women concerning influencer marketing. A different approach to gender in influencer marketing is certainly conceivable. Differences between generations and educational levels could also be of great interest and could be further researched within the topic of the master thesis.

11 Conclusion

Sustainability focuses on environmental concerns. People who consider additional e.g. environmental or social criteria in their decision-making process consume ethically. Spending, eating, and disposing of products is also part of sustainable consumption. The perception, opinions, and behavior of consumers are increasingly influenced by digital opinion leaders. Influencer and the associated marketing discipline influencer marketing are currently becoming increasingly important. This is mainly due to the fact that influencers can have a major impact on the success of companies.

From a theoretical point of view, the TPB is the link between environmental awareness and consumers' decision to buy sustainable products. According to this, human behavior is goal-

oriented, and convincing communication influences the attitude of consumers, their behavioral intentions, and leads to behavior. In reality, however, this often looks different. Not every intention to buy ethical products is translated into actual purchasing behavior. This phenomenon is described as an attitude-behavior gap. External and internal factors determine the purchase decision to a great extent. In general, ethical consumers are motivated primarily by a sense of personal integrity. Other factors, motives as well as barriers that influence buying behavior can be found in the ethical decision-making process of consumers.

Influencer marketing is a form of the two-step flow model of communication. The influencer stands between the company and the recipients of a message and thus exercises a filter function as well as a multiplication function. This means that only certain information is passed on to several recipients. Influencers can therefore significantly affect the opinions of their followers in social networks, which can lead to the formation of opinion leaders/opinion seeker relationships, in which trust is an important component. Hence, they are able to influence people's habits and behavior, which makes them an extended form of opinion leaders. Influencer marketing enables a personal and direct approach, as it is the case with WOM, which is thus the instrument to reach their followers. Based on the credibility of the source, the attractiveness of the source, the conformity of the products and the transfer of meaning, the effectiveness of influencers can be measured. According to the theory of social learning, these components can be used to influence people.

In this master thesis, qualitative research was conducted to investigate the following two hypotheses:

H1: *Influencers increase the sustainable (consumer) behavior of millennials.*

H2: *Influencer marketing increases the consumption of sustainable brands.*

By using PCI, the focus was placed on the meaning and behavior of the respondents. The respondents were selected based on two criteria: belonging to the generation of millennials and interest in sustainability. The interviews were analyzed based on Mayring's structuring content analysis using deductive and inductive category building.

All in all, both hypotheses can be supported through the findings of this master thesis. The present study was able to establish that influencers can contribute to sustainable behavior by imparting knowledge with added value, e.g. by providing general information on sustainability as well as feasible tips. They provide a kind of guide and present new ideas on sustainable behavior. Besides, they are present on social media around the clock and the information is easy to acquire and hence saves a lot of time. Through authenticity, the aesthetics of the images, the learning effect of the content and sympathy, they motivate their followers to change their behavior towards a sustainable lifestyle.

A majority of the respondents have already followed a recommendation by an influencer or at least indicate that influencers have some influence on them. Sustainable brands could use influencer marketing to get more attention from their target group and increase their reach, brand awareness, and consequently their sales.

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