Micro-influencer, the new kid on the block:

A qualitative study on the role of influencer agencies in micro-influencer-led social media campaigns

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has proven to be a vital part of digital marketing nowadays. Due to its effectiveness in reaching consumers despite the overload of information present on media channels nowadays. Dedicated influencer agencies have risen up, in response to the increasing use of influencer marketing. These agencies provide brands with the necessary tools and expertise for developing an influencer-led social media campaign. This seems highly valuable as many brands are still unaware of influencer marketing. Since the early days of influencer marketing, companies have only focused on collaborating with large scale macro-influencers. However, a relatively new trend has emerged of the so-called ''micro-influencers''. These micro-influencers might require new approaches to influencer-marketing processes. The aim of this study is to identify the development and creation of a micro-influencer-led social media campaign, and the role of influencer agencies throughout this process. The process will be explained through the lens of influencer marketing agencies, as an important intermediary between brands and influencers. To answer this question a total number of eleven in-depth expert interviews with influencer agency representatives have been conducted, following a data analysis through thematic coding. This study shows that the role of influencer agencies could not be completely generalized, as there is a discrepancy between automated and non-automated influencer agencies. However, overall the role of the influencer agency has shown to consist of multiple elements. The influencer agency educates its clients on influencer marketing and micro-influencers and guides them through the development process of a social media campaign. On top of that, the influencer agency ensures an influencer/brand fit for the campaign through the execution of multiple screening processes as well as protecting the micro-influencer's creative freedom. Ultimately, this will provide the client with the most effective micro-influencer-led social media campaign. This study has also shown that the development process of a social media campaign in cooperation with a micro-influencer as opposed to the macro-influencer is, for the most part, similar to each other. However, there are some essential elements which create a distinction between the two types of influencers. The micro-influencers prove to be effective in reaching a small and niche community. With that, the micro-influencer provides the influencer agency with a fast workflow and high level of flexibility in their cooperation.

KEYWORDS: *Micro-influencers, influencer-marketing, social media campaign, influencer agency, macro-influencer, creative process*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Influencer marketing

There has been a lot of change in the world of advertising in the last decade. Alongside the increasing use of technology, advertising agencies have had to make the shift from printed media to digital media (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2018). Consequently, traditional advertising strategies become obsolete and new strategies are required. Therefore, the advertising field has significantly changed, and brands are facing several challenges which came along with it. Such as the fact that consumers get to choose from different types of media channels on which they receive loads of information at a high pace. On these channels, brands are considered uninvited. Through all this ''noise'', brands face the issue of being regarded as ''party-crashers'' by users in the social media environment (Fournier & Avery, 2010). Accordingly, brands are most likely to be ignored, as they are regarded as inauthentic (Fournier & Avery, 2010).

An answer to these issues for companies could be found in the implementation of influencer marketing in their social media marketing strategy. Influencer marketing has proven to be a vital part of digital marketing in brand strategy nowadays. As influencer marketing shows to be an effective marketing tool, as at least 94% of marketers regard it as effective (Wiltshire, 2018). Influencers could target an intended audience through social media and create engagement, brand awareness and/or sell products/services to them (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2018). This is due to the fact that influencers could communicate with consumers through two-way communication on social media platforms and build relationships. Since the rise of influencers, there has been the notion of ''the bigger the better''. It is perceived that the more followers the influencer has, the more engagement, awareness and sales the influencer generates. However, the new trend of the so-called 'micro-influencers' has made its entrance. Studies have shown that the engagement rates of influencers with a smaller following generate higher levels of engagement (Rakoczy, Bouzeghoub, Gancarski & Wegrzyn-Wolska, 2018). Hence, it is more valuable for a brand to invest in micro-influencer produced content. Since the beginning of influencer marketing, brands have primarily chosen to collaborate with large scale influencers. However, the collaboration between brands and a smaller scale influencer; the ''micro-influencer'', might require a whole another approach.

So-called Influencer agencies started up in response to an increase in influencer marketing use among companies, providing companies with the necessary knowledge and expertise. Accordingly, these influencer agencies work together with brands and influencers in order to create and facilitate influencer marketing campaigns (''How does an influencer marketing agency work?'',

2017). Just as with traditional advertising agencies, influencer agencies are also subject to technological change. Which sparked the up rise of so-called ''automated influencer agencies''. These types of agencies automate (certain) processes in influencer-marketing through a dedicated online platform.

The aim of this study is to identify the development and creation of a micro-influencer led social media campaign, and the role of influencer agencies throughout this process. The process will be explained through the lens of influencer marketing agencies, as an important intermediary between brands and influencers.

1.2   Societal & scientific relevance

The relevance of this research is twofold. First of all, there is a gap in literature when it comes to the phenomenon of micro-influencers. Previous research in the field of marketing and communication has been mainly focused on macro-influencers. Which is a trend that has been around for a longer period of time. Because of the newness of the phenomenon micro-influencers, there is little research on this topic yet. Hence, this research will fill the gap in knowledge on this topic while contributing to the literature on influencer marketing in general. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in literature on influencer agencies. Similarly, the relative newness of the phenomenon could be a reason for this gap. Previous literature is mainly concerned with advertising agencies from which the influencer agencies branch. Hence, this research will contribute to literature on influencer agencies as well. This contribution will shed light on the development and execution process of influencer social media campaigns in influencer agencies. This is done alongside the following processes: the SMC strategy creation process, the identification/matching process and the creative process. Ultimately, this study will also provide knowledge as to what extent these processes are approached differently for micro-influencers as opposed to macro-influencers.

Additionally, by identifying this process of developing and executing a micro-influencer-led social media campaign, this research could provide useful information for brands that would like to collaborate with micro-influencers through an influencer agency. Similarly, as (automated) influencer agencies could use this information in order to optimize or start up their influencer agency.

1.3   Research question

In this research the following main question has been analysed: What is the role of an influencer agency in the process of the development of micro-influencer- led social media campaigns? This central question has been answered through the following set of sub-questions:

- What is the role of an influencer agency in the development of the social media communication strategy?
- What are the approaches to matching micro-influencers with brands?
- What are the approaches to the development and the execution process of a micro-influencer-led social media campaign?
- What are the differences in processes between micro-influencers and macro-influencers?

To fully explain the phenomenon of micro-influencers a comparison was made between micro and macro-influencers in the last sub-question. Subsequently, an improved micro-influencer definition has been suggested.

This research was conducted through 11 in-depth interviews with influencer marketing agency representatives. The final sample originated from both automated and non-automated influencer agencies. It is expected to find out that the processes of micro-influencers in the development of social media campaigns are different from the processes of macro-influencers. And the influencer agencies have different approaches for the macro- and micro-influencers in the several stages of the development process.

1.4   Thesis structure

In the subsequent chapter, a theoretical framework is established by using academic literature on influencer marketing, the macro-influencer, the micro-influencer, social media communication, influencer identification, influencer matching, the creative process and industry's publications on influencer agencies. This literature provides insights into what has been previously researched in the field of influencer marketing and social media communication practices. The method chapter explains how this qualitative research was conducted using in-depth expert interviews, and how the interviews are finally analysed using thematic coding analysis. Consequently, in the results section, the findings in connection to the sub-questions are discussed. Ultimately, the findings resulted in conclusions which are discussed in the final chapter together with this study's limitations and future recommendations. The list of references could be found at the end of this study. Finally, the appendices demonstrate the interview guide, consent form and the code trees deriving from the data analysis.

2. Theoretical framework

The following chapter functions as an exploration in previously done research on influencer marketing, social media communication, identification and matching of influencers, creative process and industry's publications on influencer agencies. The literature definitions, approaches and models were used for further analysis in the results chapter.

2.1 Influencer-marketing

2.1.1 Beginning of influencer marketing

To get a better understanding of the underlying factors and previous development, this part will focus on how influencer marketing has evolved to what it is nowadays. Traditional marketing heavily relied on, as Seth Godin defined, ''interruption marketing'' in order to gain customers' attention for a certain brand (Brown & Hayes, 2008). This marketing strategy relied on the idea that whenever a brand interrupted the consumers' day-to-day activities, the consumer will (hopefully) think about the brand at a later stage. This had resulted in marketers spending a lot of time and effort in gaining the consumers' attention without the desired results in return (Backaler, 2018). Consumers could easily identify this type of advertising and are highly likely to ignore the message (Fournier & Avery, 2010). Hence, this type of marketing used a push approach, as the brand's message, was actually pushed towards the consumers (Truong & Simmons, 2010).

As a result, the message was not received. Comparatively, when a product or service is recommended by an influencer the consumer trusts upon, he or she is highly likely to listen to it and possibly take action (Backaler, 2018). This clearly explains the difference between traditional marketing and influencer marketing. When the recommendation originates from a trusted party, the receiver is more open to it. Hence, this message creates a pull-effect and engages the consumer in the brand's message. The idea that word-of-mouth is a powerful way to communicate is definitely not new (Backaler, 2018). In the times dominated by traditional media, early on ''influencers'' were experts and knowledgeable people in consumers' direct community. The first influential people marketers used to promote products amongst consumers were celebrities in these days (Backaler, 2018). Therefore, before web 2.0 and social media, marketers relied on the celebrities to create word-of-mouth, hoping it will influence the right people for their market. However, they had no concrete control over who would receive their message. As after all, there was no accurate approach to get an insight into their audience. In that multi-channel era advertisers could deliberately choose a channel or position an add. There is some research on targeting in those days, however, the targeting was not that precise.

The act of influencing one another is now more relevant in the online world than ever due to several developments (Backaler, 2018). First of all, people have developed distrust in advertising and are heavily downloading ad-blocking software to prevent overwhelming information overload. Secondly, there is a wide range of channels and content available. Hence, for brands to rely on influencers to create online word-of-mouth is important for staying relevant and top of mind. Lastly, through the rise of social media and the availability of technological resources influencers are not only celebrities or experts (Backaler, 2018). The influencers could now be embodied by social media users sharing their recommendations through their own pages (Backaler, 2018). Also, a deeper insight in the audience of the influencer's following is now available due to the availability of tracking, targeting and analytical tools.

When did companies start to adopt influencer-marketing? In the early 2000s companies could not reach *more* people, so they had to think about ways to reach the *right* people for their brand (Brown & Hayes, 2008). This is when early-adopters started setting up influencer programmes for their companies. However, in general, influencer marketing was still quite unknown (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Companies in Europe started using influencer-marketing more and more, and the USA followed shortly after (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

2.1.2 What is influencer marketing?

Influencer marketing is a fairly new phenomenon in the advertising realm (Dalstam, Holmgren & Nordlof, 2018). Therefore, there is a concrete lack of terminology when it comes to influencer-marketing in academic literature (Backaler, 2018). However, word-of-mouth is a substantial part of what influencer marketing entails. The term word-of-mouth is defined as ''exchanging marketing information among consumers'' (Katz, Lazarsfeld & Roper, 2017). However, since influencer marketing takes place in the online environment, influencer marketing has a stronger overlap with electronic word-of-mouth. Electronic word-of-mouth is defined in a popular study by Chu & Kim 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'' (2011, p.48).

Multiple studies propose a definition of influencer marketing (Backaler, 2018; Brown & Hayes, 2008; Glucksman, 2017; Nielsen, 2015). One of them is one by Glucksman, which offers a view that influencer marketing could be defined as ''the process of identifying, engaging and supporting individuals who create conversations with a brand's customers'' (Glucksman, 2017, p.77). Another is Nielsen (2015) stating that: influencer marketing is a way for marketers to capitalize on the consumers' belief in trusted parties. Therefore, in other words, influencer marketing is the act of identifying, engaging and supporting influential peers in spreading positive

electronic word-of-mouth concerning a brand. This definition will be used to define influencer marketing in this research paper.

The Influencers are described as ''a third- party who significantly shapes the customer's purchasing decision but may ever be accountable for it." (Brown & Hayes, 2008, p. 50). Another definition is posed by the Business Dictionary, which is the following: ''Individuals who have the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of their (real or perceived) authority, knowledge, position, or relationship. In consumer spending, members of a peer group or reference group act as influencers''. These influencers, who might start of as ''ordinary'' users, obtain their own audiences through their social media channels by means of sharing texts and visuals which demonstrates their personal lives in an engaging way (Abidin, 2016). In their social media posts, they integrate advertorials in collaboration with brands. The influencers have obtained these engaged audiences through their ''likeable'' nature and are usually perceived as authentic and expert-like (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). These traits are enhanced whenever they represent a product that is in line with their own identity (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). An influencer could generate traffic, awareness, interaction and positive recommendations for the collaborating brand through online content (Biaudet, 2017). But most importantly, they generate a relationship of trust, which could potentially serve as an important factor in purchasing decision-making (Dalstam, Holmgren & Nordlof, 2018). This kind of trust relationship influencers have with their followers is not easily obtained by brands solely on their own (Hall, 2016). This relationship accounts for the success of influencer marketing, which will be explained in more detail in the following section.

2.1.3   The success of influencer marketing

The influencer marketing is already a billion-dollar business, which is expected to grow even further in the future (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2018). It is important to understand what the reasons are for this immense increase in influencer marketing. As explained in the introduction and above, nowadays, it is difficult for brands to build connections with their consumers through online paid media (Biaudet, 2017). It does not matter what the brand's message is, there is a high potential risk that consumers will not believe the message: ''You are selling something, which means you are biased''. Prospects may like your message, but they want to hear it from someone they trust.'' (Brown & Hayes, 2008, p.5). This problem is potentially solved by influencers, which are able to establish relationships with the consumers, which are based on trust. Hence, influencer-marketing is valuable for companies for making people aware of their brand and engaging them through these personal relationships. Ultimately the success of influencer marketing nowadays is mainly due to the availability of technology and consequently, social media, as the main channel to reach consumers.

With traditional marketing, brands could only target mass audiences via one-way communication. By use of social media and accordingly, influencer marketing, brands could communicate in two-ways through interaction and target a specific niche audience for a brand (Glucksman, 2017). Delivering not only awareness but also valuable information which the interactions with influencers provide.

On top of that, social media facilitates the practice of ''self-branding'' (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016). Self-branding could be defined as ''personal branding which involves individuals developing a distinctive public image for commercial gain and/or cultural capital.'' (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016, p. 191). Strategic self-branding from influencers makes it possible to capitalize on their online personality and tie this in collaboration with a brand. Subsequently, influencer marketing also thrives on the possibility for people to conduct self-branding on social media. This way the influencer could tell a brand's story through their own public image.

2.1.4 Who are 'macro-influencers' and 'micro-influencers'?

As stated in the introduction, influencers could be divided into two separate categories: macro-influencers and micro-influencers. The definition of the micro-influencer is not yet covered to a great extent, which highlights the need for more research on this phenomenon. Hence, this section also assesses the definitions that are available. Brown & Fiorella (2013) provide a definition of both types of influencers. Macro-influencers are defined by Brown & Fiorella (p.122) as follows: ''individuals with a large active social following comprised of people with whom they have a loosely defined or unknown relationship''. Micro-influencers, on the other hand, are ''individuals within a consumer's social graph who has a direct impact on the behaviour of the consumer, based on the personal nature of their relationship and communications'' (p.122).

The main difference between a micro-influencer and a macro-influencer as Bruns (2018) demonstrates is the fact that micro-influencers are perceived as more authentic which generates higher engagement. As they have a closer and more personal relationship (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). This resonates with the definition posed by Brown & Fiorella, which also emphasize the personal relationship the micro-influencer has with its following. Another definition is posed by the Keller Fay Group, an engagement lab company, which define a micro-influencer as: ''individuals who work in their category or are truly knowledgeable, passionate and authentic and are seen as a trusted source when it comes to recommendations for what to buy'' (Keller & Fay, 2016). Identically with Bruns' definition, (2018) this definition highlights the authentic element of the micro-influencer. As well as this definition emphasizes the effect on the consumer purchasing decisions just like Brown & Fiorella (2013) demonstrate in their definition.

While micro-influencers are defined as having a personal relationship with their following, being authentic and affecting the consumers' purchasing decision, the macro-influencer is identified as having a wide reach, within multiple categories with a less authentic presence. As much as the high number of followers and wide reach may be perceived as desirable by brands, their engagement levels might be on a lower level. A study by Chen for Markerly (2016) showed that when an influencer reaches a certain number of followers, the engagement level actually decreases for both sponsored and non-sponsored posts. Influencers who have a number of 10.000 to 100.000 followers obtain an average ''like rate'' of 2.4 percent, while influencers with a following of 1 million to 10 million followers and more have a like rate of approximately 1.7 percent. According to the study, the accounts with a following of 10.000 to 100.000 followers could be identified as the micro-influencers (Chen, 2016). Thus, it could be noticed that these influencers have a higher impact as they have a relatively wide reach as well as a relatively wide reach along with notably higher engagement level. However, the boundaries of who accounts for a micro-influencer and who accounts for a macro-influencer are not yet clearly defined. Some might say the limit marks at 10.000 followers, to be labelled as micro-influencer (Chen, 2016).

Therefore, this study will also look at how agencies define micro and macro-influencers in terms of followers' count, with the aim to provide more clarity on this matter. Also, this research will provide more clarity when it comes to the difference between macro- and micro-influencers throughout the process of developing a social media campaign. There is no specific differentiation in literature between micro and macro-influencers, hence, this study aims to understand the potential difference between the two parties. Accordingly, the last sub-question: ''*What are the differences in processes between micro-influencers and macro-influencers?*'' will fully explain the potential differences between macro-influencers and micro-influencers in terms of processes in creating a social media campaign.

2.2 Social media communication

2.2.1 *Social media marketing*

Influencer-marketing is typically done through social media in the digital environment on which the influencer campaigns run (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Hence, the importance to explain the necessity for brands to use social media in their communication strategy. Such a communication strategy is part of the social media marketing a company conducts. Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch (2017, p.6) provide a definition on social media marketing: ''Social media marketing is an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders'', following the shift in consumer behaviour through web 2.0. and

the ineffectiveness of traditional marketing tools as described above, new marketing strategies were needed (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014).

Since most consumers engage in social media, brands should be present as well. Social media is seen as the most powerful medium for relationship building (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). It is suggested that companies should use social media channels to try to gain a competitive advantage based on strong consumer relationships. To be able to establish these relationships, digital linkages are needed between brands and (potential) consumers (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). These linkages could be created whenever a brand performs as an interactive company through a focus on digital marketing and taps into different kinds of social media interaction. Hence, interaction is key and will ultimately result in an increment of engagement and strong relationships with the consumers (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). As well as brands could reap the fruits of other benefits such as brand awareness and positive word-of-mouth (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014).

Further social media marketing research emphasizes the synergy in a company's social media strategy. Synergy refers to the idea that ''the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'' (Key & Czaplewski, 2017, p.326). All social media activities should create synergy with the rest of a company's online and offline marketing activities (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Multiple studies emphasize the importance of a company to create a coordinated and integrated strategy when it comes to social media marketing (Effing & Spil, 2016; Key & Czaplewski, 2017). As companies often make the mistake to not fully integrate a social media strategy into the company.

Key and Czaplewski (2017) also stress the importance Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch (2017) explain, it is important to keep in mind that social media marketing should be done cross-functional in the company, along with the four dimensions of social media which are: marketing scope, culture, structure and governance. In other words, companies should embrace social media opportunities, be modern, have a networked structure and deploy anarchy governance to make all departments part of the social media strategy.

A non-integrated approach is a waste of a company's time and resources, as their strategy could not be fully implemented (Key & Czaplewski, 2017). Tight coordination of the six integrated marketing communications (IMC) elements: (1) advertising (2) direct marketing (3) sales promotions (4) public relations (5) digital marketing and (6) personal selling, is required (Key & Czaplewski, 2017, p. 326). The objectives for IMC are usually not expressed in terms of return on investment (ROI) and sales volume, but rather in terms of awareness, knowledge, liking, conviction and behaviour (Key & Czaplewski, 2017). However, this paper is not focused on the measurements and ROI from social media campaigns.

2.2.2 Social media strategy creation

Nowadays, different ways to reach a customer are at an all-time high. Users are active on various social media channels which calls for a strong social media strategy as to what channels to choose, which messages and which activities to focus upon (Key & Czaplewski, 2017). As social media strategy is an important buzz-word of approximately the last decade, a wide range of studies are published on this topic. Social media is the most important channel for digital marketing, giving marketers the opportunity to track, measure and analyse the data originating from these channels (Key & Czaplewski, 2017). There are numerous different social media strategies and tools for brands to employ, which could be tailored to the unique set of goals of a company (Backaler, 2018). A few strategy approaches and models, brands could employ in the creation and execution of a social media strategy are presented in bullet points and will be explained in more details below.

Strategy approaches
- Focusing on social media goals
- Extensive research into target audience

Models for strategy creation
- Social strategy cone
- Four-stage SMM process

To effectively execute a social media strategy, a firm must focus on the goals such as spreading positive electronic word-of-mouth, creating opportunities to make users brand advocates, actively encourage online response as well as handle a mix of UGC (user-generated content) and branded content (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014).

In order to handle the complex communication landscape of this time, companies need to operate with a systematic process. This process starts with extensive research into their target audience, choosing the right channel and deciding on the most effective message (Key & Czaplewski, 2017). It is important to note that there are several models that could be followed in order to set up a social media communication strategy. Two popular studies that propose such models are explained in more details below. The social strategy cone by Effing and Spil (2016) and the four-stage social media marketing process by Dodsen (2016).

The first model, the ''social strategy cone'', could be used to make more sense out of the several steps that brands should take in setting up a social media strategy (Effing & Spil, 2016). This ''cone'' consists of three levels in the overall social media strategy development:

- (1) the initiation stage
- (2) the diffusion stage
- (3) the maturity stage.

The first stage consists of two key elements: channel choice and target audience definition. These could be identified through experiments and learning. The second stage, diffusion, refers to the key elements of policies, goals and resources. This stage is focused on the allocation of resources, creation of campaigns and making alignment with the company's business goals. The last stage, maturity, is characterized by monitoring the content activities, who are first laid out in an activity plan when it comes to posting content. These activities could be monitored, potentially with the help of software tools.

Another way to map out a social media strategy for a company is by means of the four-stage social media marketing (SMM) process posed by Dodsen (2016). This model is more tailored to setting up a social media campaign. The two first stages prior to the social media campaigns, help a brand set up the goals for a social media campaign and the right channels to fit the goals. The last two stages cover the ways to implement and finally analyse the social media campaigns (Dodsen, 2016). The model is composed of the following four stages:

- (1) Goals
- (2) Channels
- (3) Implement
- (4) Analyse

Stage 1: goals, Dodsen (2016) explains that prior to even setting up the goals it is essential to understand the social media landscape. First of all, there are several options for companies when it comes to types of promotions. Companies could make a distinction between three types: earned media which is free publicity posted by consumers and fans. Owned media, which refers to communications created and controlled by the brand itself through their own platform. Third, paid media, which is all paid advertising which will drive traffic to the company's owned media platforms. In understanding the social media landscape three key players that could be identified, as Dodsen (2016) understands: the users, the advertisers and the social platforms. Setting up the goals are an essential part of the social media strategy. These overall goals may be a combination of several goals such as: business goals (e.g., sales), customer service goals (e.g., customer satisfaction), products goals (e.g., enhancement), communication goals (e.g., brand personality) and marketing goals (e.g., awareness and engagement) (Dodsen, 2016).

In stage 2: channels, it is important to consider the company's target market and the type of product and services the company offers. Consequently, each different type of channel offers a different set of functionalities for a brand. These have to be taken into account when eventually the company decides on the type of channel (Dodsen, 2016). The channel must fit the target audience as well as their social media strategy goals. Hence, in this stage, the knowledge of the different types of channels should be analysed.

In stage 3: implementation, the company could tailor the social media campaign to their own fit in the market (Dodsen, 2016). In order to understand this fit, a company could focus on several issues to this matter: is the audience active in one specific platform or multiple platforms? What is the best style of language? Who will speak for the company? What is the key demographic and how could the company reach them? Hence, it is important for companies to listen to their audience in order to answer this set of questions (Dodsen, 2016). In this stage, the company's resources needed to carry out the strategy, is assessed as well. This could be their human assets as well as campaign budget. Following-up on the goals created in step 1, in the implementation stage the company could set up specific KPIs tailored to the channel. For engagement, these indicators could be the following: reach, followers, likes, shares, comments, click-throughs and competition entries.

Finally, in stage 4: analyse, the social media campaign progress could be measured (Dodsen, 2016). It is important that progress is constantly measured throughout the social media campaign (Dodsen, 2016). This way, the goals and thereby the KPIs could be tracked to see if the goals are met during and at the end of the campaign. In this stage, the data protection and privacy need to be taken into account as there are certain data protection laws that might restrain certain analytics (Dodsen, 2016). However, this stage is more focused on the actual execution of the social media campaign instead of the SMC strategy creation phase.

2.2.3   Approaches for obtaining the goal

In order to reach the goal and accompanying KPIs that are set for an influencer social media campaign, there are several ways for companies to collaborate with influencers (Backaler, 2018) Nevertheless, these are not fixed ways of working with influencers and are constantly changing alongside the emergence of new technologies as explained before (Backaler, 2018). The several approaches brands could take in collaborating with influencers for obtaining their goal are presented in bullet points and are explained in further detail below.

- Incentivize influencers
- Involve influencers in co-creation

- Repurposing the influencers' branded content
- Conduct affiliate sales programs
- Invite influencers to offline events

The first example and likely the most used is incentivizing influencers to make them create and share branded content. This could be by sending the influencer a product and thus incentivize the influencers to create content with this product on their social media channels (Backaler, 2018).

Secondly, a brand could collaborate with an influencer by involving them in a process of co-creation of new content. Subsequently, the influencer and the brand will post this content on both of their social media channels in order to gain a wide reach and exposure. An even further level of co-creation as the previous example could be for brands to create their own online community where influencers could share their branded content (Backaler, 2018).

Another way to enhance the collaboration with influencers is by repurposing the influencer's branded content. The influencer would initially post the content on their own social media channels. Thereafter, the brand could use this content for their own digital channels or even for printed advertising (Backaler, 2018). Alternatively, a brand could also invite influencers to their offline events. This will give brands the opportunity to enhance the relationship with the influencer. On top of that, the influencer might share live footage of the event to their following which will spread word-of-mouth on a certain product launch. A certain event could also be by grouping together a set of influencers and invite them to the company. This group of influencers could then have an advisory role for the brand (Backaler, 2018).

An approach that could be very beneficial for both parties is to conduct affiliate sales programs through the influencers. In this case, the influencer will provide promotions for the collaborating brand and the influencers will receive a percentage of the sales that are done through the influencers' social media channel (Backaler, 2018). The link will be able to track where the sale actually originates from. Next to that, a way to obtain brand engagement could be through competitions and giveaways which the influencer promotes on their social media channel. A more creative way is to let a certain influencer do a social media account takeover of the brand's channel (Backaler, 2018). Which will gain exposure from the influencer's audience.

All in all, there are diverse ways of creating a social media communication strategy alongside several approaches and collaborations with influencers. Therefore, this study will look the approaches that influencer agencies use in developing a social media communication strategy. Subsequently, sub-question one will look into how a social media campaign is developed and executed by help of influencer agencies. This question will examine the role of influencer agencies

in the development and execution of such a campaign: ''*What is the role of an influencer agency in the development of the social media communication strategy*?*''.*

2.3   Influencer identification and matching

2.3.1   Influential capabilities

Part of influencer-marketing is the identification of influential social media users. In order to attract an influencer, the company has to start with identifying the right influencer suited for their social media campaign (Probst, Grosswiele & Pfleger, 2013). This process is seen as a considerable challenge for the companies (Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). Brown & Hayes (2008) explain that the company needs to know exactly what industry they are in and which community they are looking to address. If they have defined this, they could go on to find the suited influencer in that domain (Brown & Hayes, 2008). In literature there are multiple studies on identifying and assessing the influential capabilities of an influencer or influential individual. For example, Probst, Grosswiele and Pfleger (2013) provide several factors on this matter. He identifies four factors that are related to the capability of influencing others: (1) the personification of certain values, (2) the competence, (3) the strategic location and (4) activity. More clearly this connects to ''who one is, what one knows, whom one knows and how active one is'' (Probst, Grosswiele & Pfleger, 2013, p. 184). These factors could help a brand in identifying the right influencer.

Another approach to assess the level of influence of a potential influencer is by means of the, so-called, ''four-dimension metric'' created by Brown & Hayes (2008). This model measures the level of influence of an influencer and a decision-maker in any industry. The four dimensions consist of the following elements:

- market reach
  - the awareness and level of prominence the individual has
- frequency of impact
  - how often the influencers' voice is likely to be heard by others
- quality of impact
  - the influencers opinion in terms of independence and authority
- closeness to a decision
  - how close the influencer is to the decision-maker

In other words, how impactful and significant the voice is of this influencer this is not directly connected to how often their voice is heard. A high level of ''quality of impact'' shows that the opinion of the influencer is unquestionable. All in all, it might be the case that for a specific industry

one element is more important than another. Hence, some elements might weigh more in the evaluation of an influencer.

Another path to discover an influencer's potential capabilities is by measuring three elements, the ''three R's'': reach, resonance and relevance (Backaler, 2018). The first element, reach, refers to the total amount of followers on all the social media platforms the influencer is active on, as well as the traffic. Resonance, on the other hand, refers to the engagement rates of an influencer translated in the number of likes, shares, views, comments etc. Lastly, relevance demonstrates the level of alignment between the topics covered in the content and the interest of their following.

2.3.2 Influencer size

A lot of articles have been written on the identification of influencers. Notably, often the initial step in this process is looking at the audience size and number of followers (Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017), enhancing the idea of 'the bigger the better'. For example, Brown & Fiorella (2016) explain the fisherman's influence model as a first step that could help identify potential influencers and their communities. The idea of this model is to find the ''biggest fish'' in the pond, by attracting the influencers with the biggest number of followers and thus, widest reach. This will, as the model states, attract a tremendous amount of brand awareness. Accordingly, many companies do so (Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders (2017) explain that the reason for many marketers to choose for influencers with a large following is due to the idea that this number reflects the network size and thus is an indication of popularity, which could help spread the company's' message in a campaign.

However, the size of the influencer should not be the only criterion in choosing an influencer. Frary (2018) suggests that brands make a mistake by choosing this 'big fish'. He explains, that in his view, it is much more valuable to look at influencers who could actually make an impact on the brands' target audience. Backaler also (2018) emphasizes that audience size should not be the right starting point in looking for an influencer suited for a campaign. Hence, it is more important to look at relevant content and the level of interaction the influencer has with its following (Frary, 2018).

Brown & Hayes (2008) go on to explain that marketers often make this mistake by assuming that the most prominent voice in their industry and sector is also the most influential. Even though the reach is wider, it is mainly effective for messages dedicated to a wide and diverse audience (Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). However, the real individuals influencing the purchasing decisions are more based on the force of persuasion they have on their following (Brown & Hayes, 2008). A study by Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders (2017) has shown that influencers with a large

following are perceived as less authentic and likeable if they follow a small number of users themselves. This may affect the effectiveness of the message, even though it reaches a wide audience of users.

2.3.3   Matching brands and influencers

First of all, the influential users differ per market (Frary, 2008). As there is a difference in the types of industries, there is also a difference in the types of influencers. Some influencers might fit a company in a certain industry better than another (Frary, 2008). Although there's not a wide extent of literature on matching brands with influencers, Backaler (2018) has presented several steps for brands to take in the matching process. Backaler (2018) highlights the importance of first having a concrete goal before entering the matching process. A frequently made mistake amongst businesses is that they choose to just work with an influencer without doing research in terms of how the influencer matches with the collaborating brand and the goal. Poorly done research in this sense will result in an ineffective collaboration alongside a non-genuine message. As well as possibly reaching the wrong target audience (Backaler, 2018). Hence, it is important for brands to think about the audience they would like to reach. Subsequently, use this information to do an influencer audience analysis and look at the data from that audience. After defining the target audience more concretely, a brand could identify the influencers in that specific audience. This way the brand could assess whether the influencer is the right ''fit'' for the brand and a certain campaign (Backaler, 2018). Although the search for this right fit is very time consuming and possibly complex, it is highly essential in influencer marketing. There should be a legitimate alignment between the influencer and the brand. Backaler (2018) explains that is not necessary that all previously discussed ''Three R's'' are at a high level. As it is not always suitable to have a high level of reach for example. As stated, the big fish is not always the best choice. However, relevance is usually an important factor as well as authenticity. All these steps in the matching process could usually be done through three different approaches: do it all on their own, buy or subscribe to a marketing software or hire an agency for it (Backaler, 2018).

In this process, it should still be kept in mind that even when a fitted influencer is found, it could still be the case that the influencer is not interested in working with the brand. This is a potential risk in the matching process (Backaler, 2018). On top of that, it should be kept in mind that the analysis of potential influencers actually has both subjective and objective elements (Frary, 2008). On the one hand, the number of followers (as well as the number of likes and comments) is something a company could actually see as quantifiable, therefore objective. On the other hand, assessing the type of content and language an influencer uses is actually a subjective task (Frary, 2008). This is the downside of identifying individuals as influencers as a match as it is not based on

facts (Frary, 2008). Next to that, some elements might be more of interest for a company than others, such as content theme and tone of voice (Frary, 2008). Hence, some elements might weigh in more on the final decision than others. After finding the right fit for the brand, a company should reach out to the influencers in order to set up a collaboration. Brown & Hayes (2008, p. 82) claim that the golden rule in approaching influencers is to keep in mind that influencers are not customers. Hence, companies should treat them accordingly.

Previously discussed, are all factors a company and or agency could assess in matching influencers with brands. In order to provide clarity on the factors which are analysed prior to matching a brand with a micro-influencer, sub-question two: ''*What are the approaches to matching micro-influencers with brands*? '', will look at the matching process between micro-influencers and brands by influencer agencies will be explained in more depth.

2.4   Influencer agencies

2.4.1   *What is an influencer agency?*

In the traditional understanding of the term (advertising) agency, an agency has an intermediary role between three segments: companies (brands), media outlets and consumers. In this role, agencies provide companies with valuable assistance in defining, locating and reaching target audiences by means of informative communication campaigns (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019). Most of these, so-called, traditional advertising agencies identify as a full-service agency, which means they provide planning, creation, production as well as placement. It could also broaden to PR, experiential projects and events (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019). As technological developments have significantly changed advertising, the agencies have also been subject to change. First of all, the relationships between agencies and companies have transformed as many brands have established in-house departments for digital advertising (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019). On the other hand, agencies have had to expand their services due to these changes in the advertising landscape. Accordingly, multiple types of agencies such as digital and creative started engaging in influencer marketing. However, as it is not their major area of focus and they do not specialize in influencer marketing they do not obtain the expertise knowledge on this topic. This created a niche in the market for the emergence of agencies solely focused on influencer marketing.

By lack of definition in academic literature and after assessing multiple definitions which are used in the industry and in the industry's publications, for the purpose of this paper, the following definition will be used: ''an agency that works with brands and social media influencers to create and facilitate influencer marketing campaigns'' (''How does an influencer marketing agency work?'', 2017). Hence, influencer agencies work closely with brands and influencers to provide benefits for both parties. Many established companies do not have the right knowledge, which

makes it difficult for them to create influencer campaigns, and therefore it might be valuable for them to hire an influencer agency. The agency would work alongside the brand in order to obtain a complete comprehension of the brand's values and objectives (''How does an influencer marketing agency work?'', 2017), resulting in the agency creating a tailored campaign together with the fitted influencers. Next to that, influencer agencies usually have relationships with a wide network of influencers. Giving the brand the opportunity to find the right influencer based on previous collaborations (''How does an influencer marketing agency work?'', 2017). Given these points, Wiley (2018) presented five benefits that influencer agencies have for companies. First of all, an influencer agency could provide continuity whenever they provide multiple campaigns for brands. Secondly, it increases efficiency due to the fact that these agencies have widespread knowledge of influencer marketing. Which makes sure that the process runs smoothly and time efficient. Also, as described above the personal relationships that influencer agencies have built with influencers results most likely in the quality of the content (Wiley, 2018). As well as they could find the right combination of influencers for long-term campaigns. And above all, the influencer agency aims to truly understand the companies' objectives and combine this with the knowledge of the influencer industry (Wiley, 2018).

2.4.2   Creative process

Part of the development of social media campaigns by agencies is the creative process. The creative process is defined as: ''the production of novel and appropriate responses, products, or solutions to open-ended tasks'' (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019, p.5). More tied to advertising this could be seen as ''communication that is strategic, meaning the creative work accomplishes some goal or solves a client's problem'' (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019, p.5). However, as Turnbull & Wheeler (2017) explain, there is actually no concrete consensus in advertising literature on the definition of creativity in advertising. This is mainly due to the fact that many researchers see this term as subjective (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017), which makes it hard to provide a clear definition that is usually agreed upon.

There is no research done on the creative process, specifically, in influencer agencies. However, there is literature to be found on the creative process of advertising agencies in general. Which could shed more light on the creative phase of the development of a social media campaign. In literature, the following three main topics have been assessed in research: idea generation, agency decision-making systems and the order of activities between client and the agency (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017). Turnbull & Wheeler (2017) provide more clarity on the way agencies manage the creative process. With this intention, they came up with a seven-step model of the creative process for agencies: task identification, agreement of task objectives, ideation, response, validation

internal review, validation external review and finally the decision. In this creative process three groups are involved: the agency, the client and the consumer. In their research, they emphasize the importance of the briefing in the creative process, during which, it should become clear what are the objectives of the campaign, as well as it should inspire the agency (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017).

Stuhlfaut & Windels (2019) for example present three types of models, derived from a literature review, which reflect the several ways in which the creative process could be done. These are the following: intrapersonal models, societal models and organizational models. The first types, intrapersonal models break the creative process down into four separate stages: preparation, incubation, inspiration and verification. The societal models, on the other hand, sees the creative process as one that is controlled by social, cultural and historical factors (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019), which suggests that if the environment is not taken into account, the creative product will not be as effective. The last type of models, the organizational ones, refer that although companies have different creative processes, each company usually creates ''big ideas'' (creative ideas for a campaign) through analysis of the market, target audience and the client's goals as well as problems (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019).

Nonetheless, not every agency has the same approach to working with companies in the creative process (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017). Some companies have a more open approach, and some have a more closed approach. When companies are more open throughout the development, the agency would include the company more throughout the entire process. Whereas with a more closed approach from the company, the agency would only involve them in the decision-making stage (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017).

2.4.3 Freedom within a framework

A well-known challenge for the companies in influencer marketing is giving influencers the necessary freedom in content creation (Backaler, 2018). Before influencer marketing and of course still for advertising, companies make use of creative agencies for content production. In this sense, companies give the creative agencies exact assignments and they need to produce whatever the brand asks for (Backaler, 2018). Naturally, the company pays the agency to do so. However, in influencer marketing, brands leverage on the power of influencers. Consequently, there is a different way of working with influencers in terms of content production (Backaler, 2018). This is because the influencer actually functions as a content creator as well as the distribution channel through which the message is spread (Backaler, 2018). This way they become gatekeepers for the target audience (Backaler, 2018). Hence, it is important for brands to give directions and guidelines instead of solely dictating their expectations. This level of freedom in content creation is called ''freedom within a framework'' (Backaler, 2018). In order words, brands should give the influencer

a certain template within which the influencer could create the content. The level of guidelines could differ per campaign. Some campaigns might require more guidelines in the briefing than others.

Trust is an important factor in the content production phase. As mentioned by Backaler (2018), brands should be able to let go of complete control. If not, the influencer will not come across as sincere and relatable (Backaler, 2018). This content production process could be quite challenging in terms of communication. The back and forth between a brand and an influencer could be the cause for tensions between the two parties (Backaler, 2018). Hence, an agency could play a mediating role, to maintain a positive relationship between the two.

3.   Method

In the following chapter the research design of this qualitative study is described, explaining the method of in-depth expert interviews for gathering the data. Following, the units of analysis are described including the final sample and reason behind exclusions from this sample. Subsequently, the procedure, operationalization and analysis are explained. Lastly, the reflexivity of this research is addressed.

3.1   Research design

This research is qualitative in nature, as it aims to describe a phenomenon through subjective experiences of processes. This description of a phenomenon could not be done through quantitative methods. Next to that, the choice of method depends on the type of research question that is posed and the data the research needs to collect (Matthews & Ross, 2014). This study aims to gain knowledge on the development processes of micro-influencer-led social media campaigns and the role of influencer agencies in these processes. Hence, the qualitative method could provide detailed data on expertise and experience through interviews.

A total number of 11 in-depth expert-interviews with professionals employed at influencer marketing agencies were conducted. As there is a need for research on this topic, the interviews have an explorative nature. Hence, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, to 'give room' for emergence of several directions and issues regarding the role of influencer agencies and micro-influencers to emerge from the data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Accordingly, a survey would not suffice as it does not provide possibility to uncover additional information, ask follow-up questions or take different paths that could emerge from the participants themselves. Interviews are beneficial as they generate highly contextual reports of the interviewee's experience and knowledge (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

In order to provide reliable research on this topic, the information needs to be gathered directly from the source. The sources that have knowledge of influencer-marketing have been identified as brands' representatives, macro- and micro- influencers and employees of influencer marketing agencies. As it is highly doubtful that brands would be willing to participate in interviews, due to confidentiality issues, this option is disregarded. As influencers could only give insight into either the macro-influencer or the micro-influencer side, this option has been disregarded as well. The choice has been made to conduct interviews with representatives of influencer-marketing agencies. The representatives will originate from both automated as non-automated influencer agencies. As research into the influencer agency business, revealed these two types of influencer agencies. The agencies' representatives gave insights and information on the processes for macro

and micro-influencer-led social media campaigns. And most importantly, they provided valuable insights into the role they take in the whole development process. Since micro-influencing is a relatively recent trend, the time period on which this research focused on is contemporary processes in B2C influencer-marketing.

3.2   Units of analysis

The dataset was collected through a number of 11 interviewees who are operating at either automated or non-automated influencer marketing agencies. The level of knowledge is justified through the position of the interviewee, which is either a manager, partner, head of a department or CEO position. Such a managerial function could be for instance a campaign manager or marketing manager position in the company. The final sample used for this research has a 6/5 structure, six automated influencer agencies and five non-automated influencer agencies. This was done to include the different types of influencer agencies. Accordingly, the interviewees originate from two units of analysis: six automated influencer agencies and five ''regular'' influencer agencies (meaning those that do not use automation in their processes). A quota sampling procedure was conducted as it is a non-random sample in which interviewees were selected according to the two categories with a more or less predetermined number (Neuman, 2011). Table 1 presents the final interviewee sample which was used for data collection and analysis. The sample aims to reflect a global representation of influencer agencies to get a comprehensive insight into the researched topic. For this reason, seven of the total 11 influencer agencies operate on a global scale.

Table 1. Sample

Interviewee	Title	Agency	Based in	Operates
1	Campaign Manager *(Former Employee)*	IA	Germany, Italy, UK, USA, France, Spain, Asia Pacific	Globally
2	Commercial Manager	AIA	The Netherlands	Nationally
3	Marketing Manager	IA	UK, USA, Singapore	Globally
4	Head of Partnerships and Communication	AIA	UK, USA, Germany, Poland, South-Africa, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, UAE, Portugal	Globally
5	CEO, Founder	AIA	Belgium	Nationally

6	Campaign Manager & Head of Training & Development	AIA	The Netherlands, USA	Globally
7	Brand Manager	AIA	The Netherlands	Nationally
8	Account Manager	IA	The Netherlands	Globally
9	Brand Partnership Manager	IA	The Netherlands, USA	Globally
10	Partner & Director	IA	Canada	Globally
11	CEO, Founder	AIA	The Netherlands	Nationally

Influencer Agency = IA / Automated Influencer Agency = AIA

3.3   Exclusion data sample

Information on the interviewees such as gender, client sector and years of working experience has been intentionally left out from Table 1. The reason for this is that, first of all, gender has no relevance in this type of research. The data is based on the knowledge of the professionals and has no interest in gender types in connection to the processes in influencer agencies. The client sector focus of the influencer agencies has also been excluded. Reason for this exclusion is that all interviewed agencies have said to not focus on a particular client sector and provide their services to all types of B2C companies. Lastly, the number of years the interviewees are actively working in the company has been left out as well. This is because of the relative newness of influencer marketing trend and especially when it comes to micro-influencer marketing, hence, the years of working experience in the field does not necessarily reflect their expertise in influencer marketing.

Furthermore, the decision has been made to exclude other types of agencies, such as creative and digital advertising agencies who also engage in influencer marketing. There are various reasons motivating this decision, which was derived from direct contact with multiple agencies. First, one being that advertising agencies usually don't see the engagement in influencer marketing as a differentiation anymore and have re-integrated the influencer marketing departments to social media divisions. Additionally, most of these agencies engage in influencer marketing on a small scale. It is not the focus of the services they provide for clients. What is also not uncommon, the advertising agencies hire influencer agencies for their influencer marketing activities. Therefore, they do not have the best knowledge and expertise in influencer marketing, especially not on micro-influencers. Which makes (automated) influencer agencies the most valuable sources of information. Hence, the interviews have been conducted with these units of analysis.

3.4 Procedure

As there is a lot of theory available on macro-influencers, the interviews were primarily focussed on obtaining information on micro-influencers and the role of influencer agencies. However, the knowledge on macro-influencers will both derive from literature as well as what was shared in the interviews. As many examples from macro-influencers were shared to exemplify the difference with micro-influencers. This comparison between micro and macro-influencers was used to understand the possible differences between both groups. As micro-influencers might have a significant difference in their level of involvement throughout the whole process of creating a social media campaign alongside the client and the agency. The following topics were covered:

- Social media communication strategy
- The identification process of influencers
- The matching process between brands and influencers
- The development/execution process of the social media campaign
- Differences in approaches between macro and micro-influencers in the several processes in the social media campaign development
- The involvement of technology and automation in the agencies' processes throughout the development of a social media campaign

The interviews have been conducted in a time frame between 45 to 60 minutes and were done at a time and place which was convenient for the interviewee. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face at the office of the interviewee. However, most interviews were done through a video-call, due to the remote locations of the interviewees outside of The Netherlands. Whenever a video-call was required, the interview was done either via Skype or Google Hangouts. The choice for the platform was made by the interviewee to increase the degree of comfort.

The conversations were recorded with two devices and transcribed in separate files with multiple backups. To not miss any valuable information or insights, notes were taken during and most importantly, right after the interviews (Hermanowicz, 2002). The note taking during the interviews were done at minimum, to not distract the interviewee (Hermanowicz, 2002).

Furthermore, to make sure the interviewees were correctly informed, they were provided with an informative consent form prior to the interviews. The semi-structured interviews had a flexible structure with open-ended questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). This method provides the opportunity to make use of probe questions. This means, asking the interviewee follow-up questions or asking for further clarification on a certain matter (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The set of questions started with easy to answer ''general'' questions and then moved on to more in-depth

questions relating to the interviewees' experience and knowledge. As it is proven to best start with uncomplicated questions and subsequently get into the more difficult topics (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Throughout the interview it was made sure that comprehensible language was used, to make sure that the questions are understood as intended by the interviewer (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). The complete interview plan is retrievable in appendix D.

3.5   Operationalization

To be able to interpret the data and conclusively answer the main research question, the associated variables were measured according to the list of questions used in the interviews. The set of questions was set out based on the key concepts used in the research and their definitions. Thus, the following key concepts were used for creating the question list: influencer marketing, influencer agency, social media communication strategy, matching process and the creative process.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, influencer marketing is defined as ''the process of identifying, engaging and supporting individuals who create conversations with a brand's customers'' (Glucksman, 2017, p.77). Thus, demonstrating part of the processes in which influencer agencies are involved. Influencer agencies are defined in Chapter 2 as ''an agency that works with brands and social media influencers to create and facilitate influencer marketing campaigns'' (''How does an influencer marketing agency work?'', 2017). There are two types of influencer agencies, the non-automated influencer agencies and the automated influencer agencies. Alternatively, the automated influencer agencies are software platforms designed with to help brands connect to the suitable influencers, manage the relationships and keep track of the campaign with automated tools (Sharma, 2019). Thus, the processes were researched for both types of agencies. As described in Chapter 2, there are two models that could help brands in setting up a social media communication strategy; social strategy cone by Effing & Spil (2016) and the four-stage social media marketing process by Dodsen (2016). These models helped guide the ideas on the social media communication strategy process.

To explore the approaches to the matching process, the steps provided by Backaler (2018) helped assess the matching process in the influencer agencies. Lastly, to analyse the creative process, the definition by Stuhlfaut & Windels ''the production of novel and appropriate responses, products, or solutions to open-ended tasks'' (2019, p.5) was used together with the presented four stages: preparation, incubation, inspiration and verification.

Also, to effectively assess the difference in process of cooperating with micro- and macro-influencers, throughout the entire process of campaign development, the interviewees were asked for specific differences between the two. Additionally, the technology and automation involvement

throughout the process has been evaluated through questions on how they take place in the agency. Also, both kinds of agencies were asked about their opinions on the technological involvement in throughout the campaign development process. All in all, the questions that were chosen to create the dataset for this study accurately measured the variables in the main question.

3.6   Analysis

In order to efficiently execute the transcription process, the interviews have been transcribed using transcription software. For the English spoken interviews, the interviews were transcribed using the transcription software called Descript. The Dutch spoken interviews were transcribed using the online platform Amberscript. To make them part of the data set, the Dutch spoken interviews were translated through the Word translation tool. Accordingly, the translation was re-read alongside the original file to correct any errors in translation and to not harm the intentional information shared by the interviewees. Also, to not fully rely on the transcription software the produced text was reread together with the audio files and adjusted where needed. Next to that, the label names of the interviewee/interviewer and the timestamps were added using the two types of transcription software.

Qualitative data coding by Strauss was used as a method of analysis (Neuman, 2011). This process consists of the following overarching three steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Neuman, 2011). This thematic analysis will be used to identify the major themes that emerge from the interviews' data, alongside the four sub questions posed in this study. This method is suited, as the processes and approaches are not completely laid out in literature yet and this method allows for themes to emerge from the data itself. The data sample consists of two units of analysis: automatic and non-automatic influencer agencies. Hence, the coding process was separately done in order to highlight any differences in the approaches to the development for the two types of influencer agencies.

The process of thematic analysis already started during the data collection phase. In this phase, the possible patterns were already noticed in the data collection. During the analysis, there was a continual movement between the complete dataset and the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the data collection, notes were written down on initial ideas for the coding process. Braun & Clarke (2006) provide a six phases framework for the thematic analysis process, which will be followed for analysis.

In the first phase**,** it was important to get to know the dataset consistent of all the interviews. In this immersion in the dataset, all the interview transcripts were reread alongside a more active approach to look for and mark ideas for coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In phase two the initial codes were generated. This looked at the features of the data that could be appraised as

meaningful for the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, the data was grouped into 'meaningful groups' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18). This open coding process was done in both deductive and inductive manner. Thus, codes that emerged from the data itself as well as originated from the theoretical framework in connection to the data. The analysis was done using the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.TI. Hence, in this phase, the data was coded by tagging pieces of text (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was coded alongside as many as possible interesting or potentially interesting themes. Also, a piece of data could also be coded more than once. Finally, the first phase resulted in a total number of 753 open codes. Examples of the open coding process could be seen in table 3 below. The complete coding tree could be viewed in appendix A

Table 2. Example open coding

Extract	Coded for
''So, we notice that the world is getting more conscious about what influencer marketing is.''	Growing influencer marketing consciousness
''They accept our terms and conditions so then we don't need to sign any agreements for each campaign.''	Automated agreements
''We are connected to Instagram's API, so we have all of the data automatically in our dashboard.''	API connection

In phase three the long list of initial codes was categorized into several potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done by assessing the initial codes and finding the overall theme. In this stage, some codes did not fit in any of the themes. Accordingly, they were put together in a 'residual' theme. In phase four these created themes were reviewed for validity and fit, and therefore adjusted where needed. Eventually resulting in a total number of 138 axial codes, examples of the axial coding are presented in table 4 below. For the complete coding tree, consult appendix A, B and C.

Table 3. Example axial coding

Open codes	*Axial code*
Content freedom alongside guidelines, a certain level of content freedom, influencers have creative freedom, no strict content rules	Freedom within a framework

Campaign strategy advice, offer assistance, offer guidance, minimum support, give advice, give strategy recommendations	Advisory role
Brainstorm session with influencers, influencer suggestions, creative ideas by influencers, increase influencer strategy involvement	Engaging influencers in strategy

In phase five, the thematic map of the data was created which could be further defined and refined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Also, in this phase, every theme was provided with a context and story and explained how the theme fits in the main and sub-questions of the research. Ultimately in phase six, the report was produced in the results section in this paper. This represents the thematic analysis of the data and the story of the topic it represents. Also, examples from the data were used to emphasize statements originating from the analysis. Subsequently, the sub-questions and ultimately the main question were answered aside the outcomes of the thematic analysis of the data.

3.7   Reflexivity

3.7.1   Validity and reliability

In order to increase the validity of this study, five strategies for combating threats to validity have been used (Yin, 2011). First of all, notes were taken during and after the interviews to increase the richness of the data. As well as the interviews have been recorded for reliability. To lessen the misinterpretation from statements made in the interviews, the interviewees were directly asked for further clarification whenever something was not entirely clear. Furthermore, a strategy of comparison was used as the interviewees were asked about two types of parties, micro and macro-influencers. The comparison is made through the interviews as well as comparison with existing literature on macro-influencers. Also, the use of two types of agencies in the sample strengthens the comparison approach. Moreover, when talking about the main differences in micro and macro-influencers, it was kept in mind that negative or positive statements about both parties might originate from personal experiences in the field. Hence, as the interviewees talk about their personal experiences it should not be taken for a general truth. Hence, it is only seen as a possible reflection of reality whenever those statements reoccurred in multiple interviews.

3.7.2   Ethics and anonymity

First of all, through the consent form the interviewees could be promised anonymity. As the research does not include vulnerable topics, there is no concern about possible ethical implications with asking sensitive questions. What was kept in mind is the fact that the agencies possibly could

not discuss the questions in relation to specific brands and influencers. However, many interviewees did discuss the brands the agency has worked with in examples to clarify their statements. To not harm the participating agencies or the brands, their names will be excluded from the interview data. This exclusion will not harm the statements made in the interviews. Also, certain business information and agency-tied strategies in terms of developing a social media campaign might be considered as confidential. Hence, through the anonymity the information could not be seen in connection with a specific influencer agency.

4. Results

In the following chapter the results from the interviews with the influencer agency representatives will be presented. This will demonstrate the findings concerning the way in which influencer agencies are involved throughout the entire development process of a social media campaign. Ultimately, the differences in cooperation between micro-influencers and macro-influencers will be clarified.

4.1 The role of an influencer agency in the development of the social media communication strategy

The aim of sub-question one is to define the role of an influencer agency in the development of the social media communication strategy (SMC). Influencer marketing is part of the social media marketing strategy of a company, which is used to achieve the goals set for a (social media) campaign. This is done in the first steps of campaign development. Because this research aims to provide insights into the role of influencer agencies in the development of a micro-influencer-led social media campaign, it is relevant to uncover the agencies' approaches to the creation of the SMC strategy for such a campaign. For reading comfort, the non-automated influencer agencies will be referred to as ''IA'' (influencer agency) and the automated agencies as ''AIA'' (automated influencer agency). The most important findings concerning both IAs and AIAs will be explained, revealing the role of the influencer agency in this part of social media campaign development.

4.1.1 Strategy creation in IAs

For IAs, two overarching type of roles were found, which are: '*strategy creation'* (agency creates entire SMC strategy for the campaign) or *'strategy co-creation'.* Furthermore, three ways in which the agency is involved in this phase were identified, which will be further explained below.

- Educate the client
- Understand the audience
- Understand the client

4.1.2 Strategy creation

There are two overarching ways which could define the role the agency takes in the creation of the SMC strategy. The first one being to create the complete SMC strategy for the campaign, or to co-create the SMC strategy for the campaign together with the client. As explained

above, the SMC strategy for the campaign is always part of an overarching strategy. Hence, this should always be taken into account by the agency when creating a SMC strategy.

The interviews have shown that the IA could be responsible for creating the entire SMC strategy for the client's campaign. *''We [influencer agency] come up with a strategy for them. And then also execute the campaign from A to Z. Yeah, so really create a strategy that they can use for example for a year and then make sure that it gets rolled out.''* (Interviewee 8). After having a first conversation with the client the agency could create the SMC strategy by coming up with several strategy ideas.

''So, how it kind of works with our creative strategy is that we will give them [clients] up to five different creative strategies … so that they can decide okay, which way do they want to go.'' (Interviewee 8)

''We'll come up with something like or maybe a couple of different creative ideas. And then the proposal team will, you know, create a proposal, take that back to the client. '' (Interviewee 3)

After that, the client could wish to approve or select a creative strategy idea that was proposed to them by the IA. In that case, the only involvement from the client would be to agree upon a certain SMC strategy for the campaign that is created by the agency.

In order to create this SMC strategy for the campaign, the agency would need to create specific objectives deriving from the client's goals for the campaign and calculate the necessary budget. Accordingly, the IA translates the provided goals into campaign specific KPIs, the objectives which indicate the performance of the campaign. Giving them the opportunity to track the campaign once it has gone live. This resonates with the ''implementation stage'' by Dodsen (2016), in which the KPIs are set. Also, the necessary budget would be calculated by the agency, which provides the client with the most effective SMC strategy for their campaign.

4.1.3 Strategy co-creation

Alternatively, the client and the agency could also engage in a co-creation when it comes to the creation of the SMC strategy. As opposed to the approach above, where the client only provides goals for the campaign and leaves the rest to the IA. This is reflected in the overarching theme *'strategy co-creation'.* In the first conversation, the agency could assess what is needed for the client and how much involvement in the strategy creation is required. The co-creation is facilitated through further online and possibly offline contact. This way the agency is briefed by the client on specific elements that they already know they want to incorporate in the SMC strategy. In this case, the client is more involved in this process through providing more campaign specific input. *''It really depends on sometimes the clients have a very specific campaign in mind. (...) like it's possible that*

we only do parts of the campaign as well. " (Interviewee 1). The agency's involvement would depend on what is provided by the client. For example, it could be that the agency only creates the campaign message for the brand, or only engages in the research into the target audience. In case of co-creation the agency comes up with campaign objectives together with the client: *"It can be either provided by the client or it can be a mutual conception between us and the client from a meeting that we've had."* (Interviewee 10)*. "(...) we sit together with the client and then come up with goals."* (Interviewee 8).

4.1.4   Educate the client

The overall theme *'company influencer educator'* explains one of the aspects of the IAs role in SMC strategy creation. The IAs take on the role of an ''educator'' in terms of providing knowledge and expertise to the development process of the SMC strategy. This seems to be necessary as multiple interviewees expressed through their experience that many companies are still relatively unaware of influencer marketing. Some companies might create a SMC strategy based on the idea that influencer-marketing works the same as advertising, as stated by interviewee 9: *"(...) sometimes people think it's still a bit the same as advertising, which is also not true. Because influencers are simply a human voice."*. This shows that in general many companies could gain more knowledge on influencer marketing, and correspondingly, micro-influencers. In that sense, the IAs bring the company value through their specialised expertise and by helping them in their strategy creation process.

Provided that the level of influencer marketing and social media knowledge differs per market and on a company level as the interviews have shown. The certain ideas and expectations companies have of influencers and particularly, micro-influencers are dependent on their level of knowledge. Accordingly, through experience, the IAs could manage the correct assumptions. Through the right knowledge, a corresponding and manageable strategy could be created. Interviews have shown that the level of knowledge is usually higher with more young and modern companies as opposed to bigger and more rigid companies, as explained by Interviewee 3:

"I think sometimes there's a level of education and depends on often who you're working with because you might be working with a fifty-year-old/sixty-year-old CMO [Chief Marketing Officer] or you might be working with a 25-year-old founder of a company, that's all young and dynamic so their expectations and their understandings of what social media can do and what it is. You need to make sure you're managing those expectations."

Furthermore, there are different levels of maturity on influencer marketing expertise amongst geographical markets: *'It's like different maturities across the world of like how they're*

using the platforms and how they are approaching influencer marketing.'' (Interviewee 3). For example, the United States are said to be on a mature level of knowledge (I3), which explains that the USA is, in general, a frontrunner in the field of influencer marketing. As they were also the first to engage in influencer marketing. Whereas other geographical markets might need more knowledge acquisition through the assistance of an IA. Therefore, one of the roles of an agency could be ''educating'' the client in order to create an effective SMC strategy: *''it takes like the right kind of agency to make the client understand the real power of micro-influencers. (...) The micro-influencers can be used in a lot of creative ways. It just takes the person who's in control to educate the client. ''* (Interviewee 10)*.*

However, multiple interviewees did state that the knowledge on influencer marketing and micro-influencers is actually growing (I3, I9, I10). Which could be explained through the decreasing newness of influencer marketing and micro-influencers. Accordingly, some clients might require more education on influencer marketing than others.

4.1.5   Understand the target audience

What was frequently mentioned as an important element in the SMC strategy creation process is the creation of the right fit between the brand and the influencer. This reflects another part of the IAs role; emphasizing the importance of an influencer match and/or through a target audience research. Through a target audience research and analysis, the correct fit could be made based on the audience overlap from the brands' audience and that of the influencer. Or when the influencer's audience fits the description of a new audience the client wants to reach. Similarly, Backaler (2018) as well as Effing and Spil (2016) state that an influencer audience analysis, through assessing the audience data, provides a solid basis for a social media campaign. Poorly done research into the target audience, will result in an ineffective collaboration between the brand and the influencer. Consequently, resulting in a non-genuine message as it may reach the wrong audience (Backaler, 2018).

This research is what Effing and Spil (2016) explain to be a part of their social strategy cone, in step one, the target audience must be defined. Also, the brands' campaign theme should resemble the influencer's area(s) of interest in their social media channels. Interviewee 1 emphasized the importance of this in a SMC strategy: *''I think the most important thing in influencer marketing in general, but also very important for current influencer strategies, is that influencers are of good quality and that they match the theme and the target audience perfectly.''* (Interviewee 1)*.* This match on theme between the campaign and the influencer, is not only important in the matching process but already in the SMC strategy creation stage as well.

4.1.6   Understand the client

Furthermore, the IAs role is to understand the brand and the key message behind the campaign thoroughly so that they could create an effective SMC strategy. Normally in IAs the agency starts with an open conversation with the client, where the client briefs the agency on their ideas for the social media campaign and/or provide company specific information.

Essential pieces of information from the company's side in this initial conversation could be information such as: the company's history with influencer marketing and what they would want from the campaign. These ''wants'' could already be expressed by the client in specific campaign goals: *''First, I have a conversation with the client; what are their goals, what do they need for a successful campaign.''* (Interviewee 9). Furthermore, the client could also provide social media specific information such as the channel on which they are active, or a certain message or story which their product represents.

What should be kept in mind, what multiple interviewees have emphasized (I1, I10, I9), the SMC strategy is usually part of a company's overarching communication strategy. Hence, IAs don't necessarily talk about an ''overall'' SMC strategy creation process. A *strategy* might be ''too big of a word''. Such as Interviewee 1 describes: *''(…) influencer marketing is in the end just a part of the entire social media strategy.''*.

Therefore, the overall communication strategy of the company should be considered by the agency as well. This might explain the idea behind the companies providing the goals themselves, as the strategy for the campaign should be in line with their overall social media strategy. Key & Czaplewski refer to ''synergy'' as ''the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'' (2017). This way the agency could contribute to the synergy for the brand, by creating an effective SMC strategy. Both the studies from Effing & Spil (2016) and Key & Czaplewski (2017), emphasize the importance of creating an integrated strategy for social media marketing. Otherwise, this might result in a waste of the company's resources. Subsequently, the influencer marketing activities should be in line with the other five integrated marketing communications elements: advertising, direct marketing, sales promotions, public relations, digital marketing, and personal selling as stated by Key & Czaplewski (2017).

4.1.7   Strategy creation in AIAs

When looking at AIAs, one overarching type of role was found, which is: *'offer strategy aid'.* Furthermore, four elements of the AIAs role in this phase are identified, which will be further explained below.

- Educate the client

- Understand the client

- Link influencer and client

- Provide client autonomy

4.1.8 Offer strategy aid

The AIAs primarily have an advisory role in the SMC strategy development. This became evident from the overall theme offer *strategy aid'.* This assistance for the client could be provided in several ways. Such as through online communication (email, WhatsApp, etc.) following an initial face-to-face conversation with the client in the first steps of strategy creation.

A recurring theme revolved around the fact that the AIAs mostly function as a guide for the client providing advice, assistance, and correspondingly only give minimum support for the SMC strategy. *''Of course, I always give advice and campaigns only go online, if we think it works, so we give advice on the strategy of the campaign.''* (Interviewee 7).

As the idea is that clients mostly do everything themselves on the automated platform. This assisting role of the AIAs also translates to them co-creating parts of the SMC strategy. The interviews have shown that they usually involve in 'co-creation strategy' and 'co-decide on KPIs'. This is for example done through *''writing the campaign plan together''* (Interviewee 11). Or the client offers their input for the strategy creation, which could be several things such as timelines, channel choice, objectives or budgets.

4.1.9 Educate the client

Likewise, from the interviews with AIA representatives, the theme *'company influencer educator'* also emerged. AIAs also acknowledge the fact that many companies who rely on them for influencer marketing campaigns, especially involving micro-influencers, are unaware of how they work. Nevertheless, the AIA representatives put less emphasis on the educational role than the IA representatives did. This could be due to the idea that clients do more themselves on automated platforms, and the AIAs are less involved with their clients. This would not necessarily mean that they are more knowledgeable on micro-influencers. As the agency still provides the client with assistance (whenever necessary). This will be explained in more detail in the findings on *'provide client autonomy'.*

4.1.10 Understand the client

Similarly, the AIAs role is also to understand their clients. This is necessary when the agency has to provide the client advice. The AIA representatives also acknowledge the fact that the SMC strategy for the influencer campaign is part of an overarching company-wide communication

strategy. Hence, the agency has to understand this overarching strategy. However, less company information is provided such as the background or the history. The information that is shared is mostly campaign specific elements such as objectives or timelines. Consequently, the level of involvement from the agency would differ according to the level of client autonomy in this process.

4.1.11 Link influencer and client

Interestingly, opposed to the process in IAs, the AIAs fill in the role of facilitating the communicative link between the influencer and the client. This became evident from the theme *'link influencer and client'* which emerged. However, in some AIAs this is more facilitated than in others or not at all. The major role of all influencer agencies is to establish a connection between the influencer and the collaborating brand. They serve as the link between the brand and the influencer. This is reinforced in AIA platforms through the integration of a chat-feature (or the possibility to have e-mail contact): ''*We have integrated a new chat feature so that, in fact, the chat between us and the brand, and the influencer and the work can be facilitated.''* (Interviewee 5). In such case, the influencer and the client could communicate with each other prior, during or after the social media campaign. This way, the client could also benefit from the influencer's insights and knowledge. However, some AIA might not use the input from the influencers. Therefore, the level of involvement differs per AIA.

Another way influencers could engage in strategy creation is through offline brainstorm sessions with the client or the possibility for the influencer to pitch their campaign ideas to the client. This touches upon the idea of involving the influencers through offline events, as stated by Backaler (2018). Hence, increases the likelihood of obtaining the campaigns' objectives. Interviewee 2, even advises clients to engage in a conversation with the influencer in order to come up with creative ideas for a campaign: *''We do normally say that they should also talk with influencers; '' This is what I want as an advertiser and pitch your creative idea to me''.* This is not facilitated in IAs, as the only involvement from the influencers is present in the matching and the execution process.

Another interviewee also shared the interesting idea of challenging the influencer to set its own targets for their social media post for the campaign. This way, the influencer has to actively use their insights and previous experience to create attainable objectives.

4.1.12 Provide client autonomy

However, as the selective code *'agency strategy aid'* demonstrates, the clients are provided with quite some freedom on the platform, such as the emerged theme *'provide client autonomy'* presents. The clients usually subscribe to the platform themselves, or only use the platform through a ''one-off''. Consequently, they could have complete autonomy. Interviewee 7 shows through this statement: *''Basically, look we really facilitate software and I do give advice (…) but our brands do*

everything themselves.'', that it is not uncommon in AIAs to give the client full freedom throughout the whole development process, and only provide assistance when necessary. This corresponds with the idea that AIAs are dedicated to the more experienced brands in influencer marketing. Whenever a company is more aware and on a mature level in influencer marketing, less guidance is required from the agency.

4.1.13   The role of the influencer agency

Conclusively, both of the agencies fill in an educating role for their clients in terms of influencer marketing knowledge. This shows the preliminary role of influencer agencies in the development of the SMC strategy. Through this knowledge sharing, the most effective strategy could be (co)-created. However, the IAs touched upon this theme more as opposed to the AIA who shared this on a smaller scale. This could be explained through the relative freedom that is provided for the clients on these automated platforms throughout the development process. Furthermore, both of the types of agencies explain that the SMC strategy is a part of an overarching SMC strategy. In that sense, the agencies role is to understand the brand thoroughly. In IAs an additional role is also to understand the target audience, to be able to (co-)create the SMC strategy for the campaign.

Additionally, the AIAs take on the role of facilitating a communicative link between influencers and the brands. Interestingly, one interviewee from the IAs shared that contact between the client and the influencers is not even allowed. Reflecting a clear discrepancy between the two agencies in facilitating communication between the client and the influencer. The results have shown that the model of AIAs is more suitable for more experienced clients as the AIAs role is primarily providing advice. Opposed to the IAs, who either create or co-create the SMC strategy for the campaign. Therefore, the role of IAs is more beneficial for the ''not so experienced'' clients as it is more based on co-creation.

4.2   Approaches to matching micro-influencers with brands

Following the strategy creation for a campaign, the (micro-) influencer must be matched with the brand as a next step in the development process. Backaler (2018) highlights the importance of first having a concrete goal before entering the matching process. The previous findings already shed light on the idea that the right fit between the brand and the influencer is an important factor for the campaign's success. In this sub-question, the approaches the two types of influencer agencies take in matching micro-influencers with brands have been be analysed.

4.2.1 Matching approaches in IAs

The matching process in IAs starts with the search for the fitted influencer. This is primarily done by consulting the agency's internal database. Whenever the right fit is not found in this database, the ''external database' (social media channels) is consulted. However, there could be a problem with storing the influencers' information in the internal database due to the GDPR restrictions. After finding potential matches, the influencers are subject to several screening processes. Once the screening processes are completed with a positive outcome, the IA provides the client with recommendations. On their turn, the client selects the final chosen influencers. Thereafter, the influencers are contacted in order to set up the collaboration.

4.2.2 Influencer sourcing

The first step in the matching process of micro-influencers with brands is searching for influencers who fit the campaign. This is shown through the emerged theme *'influencer sourcing'.* It became clear that there are two different approaches in the search process for the right (micro-)influencer, which is either consulting the IAs internal database or search social media channels; the ''external database'. These will be explained in further detail below.

How

- Devoted influencer search unit
  - o   Dedicated team
  - o   Dedicated division
- Continuous influencer search

Where

- Search internal database
- Search external database

One of the IAs' approaches to finding influencers is to have a dedicated search unit (team or division) that search for influencers per campaign. These dedicated teams work daily on finding the potential micro-influencers on social media channels: *''So, we have people in a company that are only focused on sourcing influencers and getting in touch with influencers and getting all the real data off them.''* (Interviewee 1). Furthermore, an IA could also have a dedicated division inside the agency that is responsible for finding the fitted influencer. The use of a team or an entire division is dependent on the size of the IA. Larger IAs would most likely have a division as opposed to the smaller ones that would have a dedicated search team. Such an internal division would have the

right knowledge according to a certain geographical market or industry in which the effective micro-influencers are. These divisions could be consulted on their expertise whenever the search for the matching micro-influencer begins.

Also, there is the approach of a continuous influencer search in which the IA is doing repetitive research into the (micro-)influencer landscape. This doesn't have to be specifically for a campaign. This search will be done on an ongoing basis, to uncover all the potential micro-influencers, also for future campaigns.

4.2.3   Influencer databases

The search units could search for the influencers through the IAs own internal database. Multiple interviewees shared that their agencies make use of an internal database of influencers in order to search for the fitted influencer. However, a few interviewees acknowledged the fact that this might limit the search for a brand match. The IAs primarily search within their own database but perhaps the right fit is not found in the internal database. In that case, the social media channels, ''the external database'', will be used to look for the right fit.

''You'll see that some agencies they have a set list of influencers they work with, we don't do that because we believe that we want to find the right influencer for each campaign. (...) if you work with the same 10 ones all the time, (....) they might fit in one way or another, but it might not be the correct fit for that's why we like to find the most suitable ones.'' (Interviewee 8)

The search units could make use of the databases or, make use of an influencer search software tool. How this would work is that the IA applies certain criteria in the software tool, and the tool searches a social media platform for those criteria. However, software tools are not usually used in IAs in the search for influencers.

4.2.4   Data storage conflict

Interestingly, the theme '*data storage conflict'* also emerged as a result. A few interviewees have explained that they do not handle an internal database possibly because of European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) restrictions, which was introduced in 2016 and reinforced in 2018 through a penalty regulation ('EUGDPR – Information Portal'', n.d.). The influencer must first give the IA consent to store their information. Accordingly, some IAs work as an open network, in which none of the influencers are under contract. Hence, some IAs directly ask the influencer for their social media page insights: *''So, first of all, we can't have a database because of the GDPR, so they need to give a consent so that we are allowed to store their information''* (Interviewee 8).

However, not all interviewees mentioned this as an issue even though they did say to have an internal influencer database. Hence, this database will most likely consist of public information or information that has been given by the influencer. Alternatively, it could also be the case that IAs do store non-public information, which they are not supposed to in the light of the GDPR restriction.

The lack of possibility to store this information might become a hurdle for the agency in the last stage of the social media campaign, where the campaign metrics are analysed. As Dodsen (2016) explains, the data protection and privacy laws might restrain the agency in the campaign analysation. This has to be taken into account by all agencies, especially since they work for clients who might not be aware of these regulations. This finding did not emerge from the interviews with the AIA representatives, however, this does not mean that they might experience the same hurdles in data storage.

4.2.5   Screening process

After the sourcing, a screening process takes place. In that process, the influencers are screened for several elements in order to create an effective and truthful brand/influencer collaboration. Backaler (2018) explains that research into the match between the brand and the influencer is of high importance. Without doing research, the result could be a mismatch alongside an ineffective campaign. This is a mistake that many brands presumably make (Backaler, 2018). Hence, the agencies could take an active approach in the research process for their clients. This is usually done through what the interviewees referred to as s*creening*.

There are multiple approaches to the screening of the influencers as became evident from the interviews. These approaches are reflected in the following themes concerning the screening process:

- *'manual subjective screening process'*
    - o   Evaluate influencer feed
    - o   Evaluate the tone of voice
    - o   Evaluate topic match
- '*manual objective screening process*'
    - o   Analyse audience demographics
    - o   Screen audience growth
    - o   Screen previous brand collaborations
    - o   Calculate the engagement rate
- '*objective software screening process*'

The screening process used by IAs shows resemblance with the 'three R's' presented by Backaler: reach, resonance and relevance (2018). Reach, which resembles the audience and traffic analysis, which is done as part of the objective screening process. Resonance, which is shown through the calculations of engagement rates as part of the objective screenings. Lastly, the relevance, so the topic match, is assessed in the subjective screening as described in the bullet points above. The screening processes will be explained in further detail below.

A manually done screening process that subjectively assesses the influencer could look at several elements. First of all, the IA could evaluate the influencer's feed on whether the feed matches the campaigns' feeling and overall theme. Hence, the feed could be visually screened for its content as well as the personality of the (micro-)influencer. Additionally, the IA could also evaluate the tone of voice of the influencer by analysing the language that is used on the social media page. Ultimately, the IAs could check for the brand match by assessing the topic relevance of the (micro-)influencer for the collaborating brand. This is usually done by looking at in which category the influencer could be placed, and how this resembles with the brand.

''(...) you look at the content for a bit, if that also fits the feeling of that campaign. I could have a campaign that is super energetic, and I can have one that is very sweet. Is their feed energetic or sweet, yes or no and that should just match.'' (Interviewee 9)

''You have to make sure that, like I said there are categories that fit in terms of like beauty and cosmetics then you have to make sure it's a brand fit and then you have to make sure that you're hitting all the criteria in regards to high female following, (...) that the majority of their audience is 18 to 25 or 25 to 35.'' (Interviewee 10)

After the manual subjective screening, the IA carries out more objective screenings. These objective screenings are more quantifiable and straightforward as opposed to subjective screenings, which are based on interpretations. Thus, in order to verify the influencers' audience, the demographics are for example analysed to indicate whether they match the target group of the brand. Also, the IA usually verifies whether the following is accurate and truthful through screening the growth of the following. This way the agency could check whether the influencer has possibly bought followers, by identifying fake followers. This is usually done with the (micro-)influencers that are already in the IA internal database, in case they make use of one. The screening of the truthfulness of the following could add one 'R'eliability to the 'three 'R's' by Backaler (2018). As the authenticity of the audience is part of the matching process.

Next to that, the IA could also screen the influencer for previous partnerships the influencer has done in order to prevent any brand conflicts. For example, a (micro-)influencer could have

promoted one of the client's competitors in the past. When that happens, the influencer would be disregarded. Also, one way to objectively screen the (micro-)influencer is through calculating the engagement rate. This is usually done by dividing the number of followers with the number of likes. This shows that the screening process, as stated by Frary (2008) has indeed both subjective and objective elements.

Furthermore, the IA could make use of software screening tools. Certain tools could be used to track the audience growth of an influencer for example instead of doing it manually. However, software tools are not used to a great extent in IAs, as this consisted of a relatively small theme.

The screening is mostly done by human involvement. Frary (2008) actually sees this as the downside of creating an influencer match, as it is not purely based on facts. Making the screening process a hybrid decision for the IA, a match is not laid out in facts alone. This demonstrates the idea that the screening process also has to be (partly) done through the interpretation of humans instead of only relying on software and the quantifiable elements. In that sense, the matching process could differ per agency as different people could have different interpretations and make conclusions based on their own frame of reference.

4.2.6   Influencer recommendations

After the search and screening process is completed, usually the IA provides the client with micro-influencer recommendations which suit the campaign. This became evident from the emerged theme '*influencer recommendations'.* Some interviewees refer to the list of recommended influencers as the 'long list' from which the client could make the preferred selection. The IA could make accurate recommendations based on their research and screening processes as well as their knowledge of influencer marketing. As some IA handle an internal database, they explained to use the influencers as internal benchmarks on which they base recommendations as for who will best drive the needed results.

4.2.7   Client influencer selection veto

The client usually chooses to have the final say in the selection of the (micro-)influencer(s), as shown through a selection of the following statements:

''The majority of the time the client is not involved in the researching. The client's only involvement is the approval of the talents.'' (Interviewee 10)

''It depends on the client, usually we'll put together a list (...) like, these are the ones that you should use and most of the time the brand will say, "yeah, those are great" and those work but sometimes they might say, "oh, not that girl!" or "not that person" like and then we'll just go back, find some other ones.'' (Interviewee 3)

''They are 100% involved in the selection process, but normally not really involved in research process.'' (Interviewee 1)

In case a client trusts the IA to make the right decision from the created recommended 'long list', then the final decision is in the hands of the IA.

    After the processes are finalized and the selection is made, the selected influencer is contacted as the theme *'influencer invitation'* reflects. Some IAs have a dedicated outreach team who is responsible for this part of the matching process. All in all, the IAs primary role is researching whether influencers fit the brand, and the primary role of the client is having the final say in this process.

4.2.8 Matching approaches in AIAs

    Contrastingly, in AIAs the screening process usually takes place whenever the micro-influencer applies to the platform of the AIA, and not necessarily according to a new campaign. After that, the influencers could respond to campaigns targeted to them on the online platform. AIAs make use of a so-called campaign marketplace or online dashboard on which the clients put their campaigns for the platform's (micro-)influencers to see. It could be the case that a new micro-influencer is invited to join the platform, in that case, the micro-influencer is screened prior to the campaign execution. The AIA offers the client assistance in selecting the right influencers if necessary. Finally, the client has the final say in the influencer selection.

4.2.9 Screening process

    Just as with the IAs, the AIAs also use manual objective and subjective screening processes which are shown through the emerged themes:

- '*Manual subjective screening*'
  - Screen authenticity of influencer
  - Evaluate influencer feed
  - Evaluate the tone of voice
  - Screen authenticity audience
- '*Manual objective screening*'
  - *Calculate engagement*

- o   *Following number check*
- *'Screening software'*
  - o   *Growth screening*

The sub-themes reveal that the approaches to subjective screening of the micro-influencer are somewhat done in the same manner. The evaluation of the influencer feed and tone of voice is similar to the approaches of the IAs.

Furthermore, the AIAs also screen the influencers' authenticity and that of the audience. The influencers' authenticity is screened through a verification process or sample test and the influencer is screened for fake followers in their audience. *''We do a sample test in their followers. We look at the content, what type of content, which niche they are in, which category can we put them. And is the content of high quality''* (Interviewee 7). It could be the case that IAs also screen the authenticity of the influencer, however this was not mentioned in the interviews.

The results have shown that part of the subjective screening is the evaluation of the influencers' feed, one interviewee shared that the agency analyses the page of the micro-influencer as a sort of online CV: *''it depends on how they promote themselves on their own Instagram. If they really have very good self-promotion. We are now actually seeing Instagram as a kind of CV/portfolio.''* (Interviewee 11).

Hence, the correct use of self-promotion by the influencer could benefit the influencer in gaining campaigns. This corresponds with the practice of self-branding, posed by Khamis, Ang & Welling (2016), in which an individual engages in personal branding for commercial (or cultural) capital. In this sense, the influencers strategically capitalize on their distinctive image for obtaining collaborations.

Another approach in AIAs is shown by the emerged theme '*client screening autonomy*'. Some AIAs do not screen the influencers for the clients and the clients check for a brand fit themselves. Naturally, the automated platforms are designed for clients to select the influencers themselves. The influencers usually apply to the campaigns themselves, and subsequently: '*'The advertiser has a whole list of all the people who want to collaborate and meet the criteria, and then the client can make a selection.''* (Interviewee 2).

Additionally, the AIAs also calculate the engagement, showing that this approach is also quite similar to IAs in objectively screening the influencer. However, the AIAs show a larger theme concerning '*software screening tools'.* These software tools are used to for example screen the audience. To screen the authenticity, tools such as a Google-Analytics plugin are used as well as tools to measure the number of unique visitors on someone's page. Also, a great extent of audience screening software tools are used for tracking the growth of the influencers' number of followers

and checking for fake-followers. Interviewee 4, explained that whenever the tool detects that the influencer is not truthful in terms of follower count, the influencers is automatically blocked from the platform: *''(...) if our system detects like a huge growth of followers or like for each day an influencer has for example, 100, 100 and 100 more than our system detects it and blocks out the automatically the influencer.''*. However, the AIA representative did mention that a manual double check is necessary. The growth in the influencers' following number might be due to a public appearance.

An interesting development in the matching process for AIA is shown by interviewee 4 who said to be experimenting with Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the matching process: *''It depends I think on the software development because, for example, we have right now, we use AI from Amazon, recognition. So, we can just like from our base of influencers, we can find influencers by the content they post.''* (Interviewee 4). Furthermore, one interviewee explained to be aiming for using AI in the near future: *''(...) of course in the future, we want to use AI learning to do the matching.''* (Interviewee 7). The AI software would be used to scan for certain content on social media channels, in order to find a brand match. However, the software is still in its infancy and additional manual screening is still required for the best accuracy.

4.2.10 Influencer response process

The overall theme '*influencer response process'* reveals how the process usually further takes place. Most AIAs platforms have targeting options they could use to target certain kinds of influencers and set specific requirements. These targeting options could be set by the agency or the client. Thanks to these, the campaign could only be seen and responded to, by (micro-)influencers who fit the companies' campaign requirements such as a minimum follower's range or a certain category fit. Accordingly, the interested (micro-)influencers could respond to the campaign on the platform and let the brand know that they would like to engage in the campaign: '*Like we target it through our app, so we have targeting options. So, if we target the campaign to people between 24 or 27 years old, then only people from our app in this age range can see this campaign.''* (Interviewee 4).

The possibility for micro-influencers to respond to campaigns themselves makes the process easier for both the agency and the micro-influencers themselves. The process of finding niche micro-influencers could be a time-consuming practice, as they are more numerous and spread out. First of all, this response process saves time for the agency. Secondly, the micro-influencers who might have trouble in finding campaigns, as they are usually not approached by brands or agencies themselves (as opposed to macro-influencers), could now easily connect with brands looking for micro-influencers.

On the platforms' marketplace, the client or agency could include a brief with the guidelines for the campaign dedicated to the influencer. In this brief, the brand could incorporate elements such as the theme, the preferred channel and possibly the fixed hashtags for the post.

The briefing takes place in the matching process with AIA as clients usually place the brief on the platform on which the influencers could respond to. With IAs the influencer briefing stage takes place in the development process and not in the matching process, since the influencers are briefed after they are already matched with the brand. The briefing process with the IA will be explained in more detail in the next sub-question concerning the execution process.

4.2.11 Influencer selection assistance

In some AIA the agency assists the client in searching for the right influencer, as shown in the theme *'influencer selection assistance'*. The agency could also provide a recommended list for the client to choose from.

''I help them with deciding on the influencers, then I recommend with whom they should work together based on their demographics or just, yeah, based on analysis (…) So, you see in the database, you have an overview of who have all signed up and me as a Campaign Manager, I can then drag and drop them to a recommended list'' (Interviewee 6)

However, it could also be that the client would not like to receive assistance, in that case the client selects the influencers directly on the platform. Not surprisingly, it also became evident that in AIAs the client also has the final say in influencer selection or sometimes only approving of a micro-influencer for their campaign. This emerged theme is somewhat different than the influencer sourcing theme in IAs, as the results have shown they are more engaged in the sourcing process and providing recommendations for the client.

4.2.12 The influencer matching approaches

First of all, judging from the size of the emerged themes, the matching process is a significant activity in which the IAs specifically are intensively involved. However, both types of agencies engage in subjective and objective influencer screening processes which could be referred to as a hybrid screening process. This shows that even with AIAs, human involvement is still required to subjectively assess the brand match. This might change in the future as AIAs are experimenting with AI in the matching process. Accordingly, AIAs already make more use of automation in the screening possibilities than it is being done by the IAs.

Furthermore, in AIAs there appears to be less emphasis on the sourcing of influencers and they primarily offer assistance. Whereas with IAs the agency is heavily involved in the research and

matching processes. Also, with IAs the fitted influencer is selected for a campaign after the screening and matching process. With AIAs, on the other hand, the influencers submit themselves to the platform on which a screening process takes place and afterwards they could respond to campaigns placed on the marketplace/online dashboard. These explain two vastly different approaches in the matching process between the two agencies.

The level of agency involvement enhances the idea that the AIA seem to be better suited for clients familiar with influencer marketing and micro-influencers. The cooperation with IAs, on the other hand, could be more beneficial to the clients who need more guidance throughout the process. Accordingly, as the AIA mostly play an advisory role (as shown in the previous sub-question), it is not surprising that the clients have more autonomy in searching and selecting influencers for their campaign. This also requires a more active approach from the influencers since they respond to the campaigns placed on the AIAs platform/ campaign marketplace. In order for them to stand out in the crowd, their self-promotional activities are of great importance.

It should further be kept in mind that the AIAs have designed the platform in a certain way. Hence, defining the processes for the client to use throughout the development process. Accordingly, the client is steered by the AIAs in what they should provide for the briefing and which influencers they could choose from.

4.3 Approaches to the development and the execution process of a micro-influencer-led social media campaign

In sub-question three, the approaches that are used in the development and execution process of micro-influencer-led social media campaigns will be covered as shown by the two types of influencer agencies. Following the strategy creation and matching process, the content creation/execution is the next essential part of the development of the social media campaign. Hence, following reveals what is done in this stage and provides further clarity on the overall role of the influencer agency.

4.3.1 Development and execution processes in IAs

As a first step in the development and execution process the influencer is briefed on the campaign. This brief should give the influencer guidelines while leaving enough space for the influencer to create their own authentic content. Surprisingly, a combination of micro- and macro-influencers in the execution of the campaign is frequently used. Macro-influencers to help build the reach and micro-influencers for building audience engagement. Finally, insights shared by the influencer are used to create an end-report for the client. Throughout the development and execution process the IA builds on the relationship with the client.

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4.3.2   *Informative influencer brief*

The following finding *'informative influencer brief'* emerged from the interviews, demonstrating the first step in the execution process. Prior to the actual content creation for the social media campaign, the micro-influencer is first briefed on the campaign by either the agency itself or through a brief co-created by the agency and the client. This brief contains multiple informative elements which the influencer should keep in mind throughout the content creation. The findings revealed multiple examples of the briefs' content.

- Product information
- Campaign rules
- Content message guidelines
- Visual content guidelines

First of all, product information, could be provided by the client. Giving the influencer certain information concerning the promoted product. *''it obviously educates them about the product. You need to know as much about the products possible.''* (Interviewee 10).

Secondly, 'influencer campaign rules' shows that the briefing could contain the general guidelines and rules which the micro-influencer should follow: *''We'll have that sort of brief and strategy, and we'll send out the influencer a [uhm] document that's got: this is the type of content we want to create, these are the rules, these are the guidelines.''* (Interviewee 3).

The next subtheme, 'the content message guidelines', reveals that the brief could also contain the purpose, key message, the story of the campaign as well as certain hashtags to emphasize the brand's message: *''What is the concept of this campaign, so what is the story because they have to bring out, (…) a few examples of how they could do it (….), so they [influencers] can understand a bit better what we mean.''* (Interviewee 9).

Also, the subtheme 'visual content guidelines' reflects, certain guidelines for the content's so-called "look and feel" could be provided. This is for example done through a visual mood board, which could inspire the influencer.

4.3.3   *Freedom within a framework*

As the finding '*informative influencer brief*' showed, the influencer is provided with certain guidelines in the brief. However, alongside this theme, another finding surfaced, *'freedom within a framework'.* As Backaler (2018) has claimed, it is important to give the influencer a certain level of freedom in content creation. This should be done by giving the influencers certain guidelines (a framework) instead of purely dictating what they should create (Backaler, 2018). Likewise, IAs

shared that this so-called ''freedom within a framework'' is really important. Correspondingly, the interviewees frequently shared, that it is crucial to give the influencer not too many restrictions and provide them with creative freedom:

''Yes, this is the message of the story, but we don't try to give it too many restrictions because then you usually don't get so nice content… Because then is it also no more from the influencer itself, look, they are influencer because they know their own audience, not us.'' (Interviewee 9)

''So, if it was just exactly the same as the brand, it wouldn't have any value, so letting the influencer sort of do what they think is best for their audience has a lot of value and it's something that has to be respected as part of the creative process.'' (Interviewee 3)

Subsequently, a personal message could be created which resonates with their target audience. One interviewee explained that (especially) micro-influencers, know their audiences very well. Consequently, they have better insights and knowledge on their audience than the client or the agency. Next to that, the micro-influencer is already matched based on their fit with the brand. Hence, a certain amount of trust should be given that the micro-influencer will deliver the desired content.

On the other hand, the subtheme 'client veto right' shows that even though the influencer has a level of freedom in content creation, the client has the final say, just like with the influencer selection. This reflects a so-called ''closed approach'', explained by Turnbull & Wheeler (2017) as the agency only involving the client in the decision-making stage. Which is seen in IAs as, the client is only involved in the final approval of both the influencer and the content. This is not necessarily negative, as the client is relieved from timely processes throughout the development of the social media campaign.

4.3.4   *Micro & macro combination*

Another finding that has emerged from the interviews was the fact that many IAs frequently make use of a combination of both micro-influencers and macro-influencers in a social media campaign. This use of, what we could call, a ''combined campaign'', what some IAs referred to as a ''influencer marketing pyramid'' (Figure 1). What was meant with this, is that the macro-influencers are

Figure 1. Influencer marketing pyramid

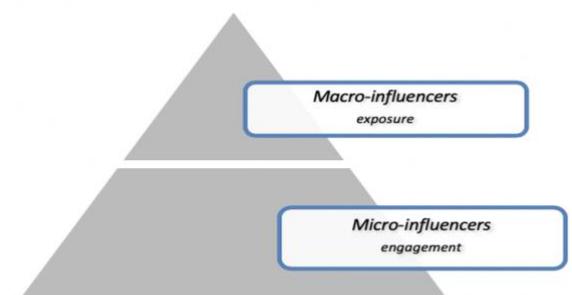selected in order to help build the reach of the campaign and the micro-influencers for building

audience engagement. In this approach, the macro-influencers would be employed in smaller numbers than the micro-influencers. The macro-influencers reach a wide audience and the micro-influencer would reach smaller and more targeted audiences. To clearly demonstrate this often-used approach by agencies, figure 1 has been created. More emphasis on the key characteristics of macro- and micro-influencers will be given in the following sub-question.

4.3.5   Throughout campaign insights

Another finding that emerged from the dataset was the '*throughout campaign insights'*. After the influencers are briefed on the campaign and the content is created alongside the given guidelines, the campaign is usually tracked. The agency could deploy multiple tracking software systems in order to keep up with the performance of the social media campaign. However, the tracking software tools are not used to a great extent by IAs, as they oftentimes keep up with the campaign manually. Alongside the tracking (or manually keeping up with the campaign), the client is provided with updates on the performance of the campaign. This could be seen by the client in real-time on a created online dashboard, however, this is not a common practice in IAs. Usually the client is updated by the agency through online contact.

4.3.6   Informative end-report

Another theme that appeared as a result was '*influencer-led insights'.* It is not uncommon within IAs that the regular updates and final results are provided by the influencer itself. Ultimately, the gathered information on the campaign will create a so-called ''end-report''. This *'informative end-report'* usually consists of the final campaign metrics, campaign metrics calculations, future influencer marketing recommendations and learnings taken from the campaign.

The final metrics the number of comments, likes, impressions etc., generated with the campaign, are reported to the client. Accordingly, these metrics could be used to create further calculations of for example the engagement rate or how the post performed opposed to the other campaign posts. One interviewee said to also look at the posts' so-called ''common validity''. What was meant by that, is that the agency assesses the relevance of comments that are posted beneath the content of the ''advertised'' product.

''Our last metric is what we call 'common validity'. So, how valid are the comments based on the message or the caption that we're trying to push. Say, if it's a hair product, and the whole campaign is about a one wash colour product for (brand's name has been excluded), if we see that in all of the comments and the comments are like hearts emoji or 'I really love your outfit' or those boots are amazing then we've not done our job correctly because the comments are invalid to the content in the caption.'' (Interviewee 10)

Another approach is to measure the engagement rate by looking at the number of the influencers followers divided by the number of likes and comments or the actual impressions of the post. This way more accurate engagement rate could be calculated based on the number of people who actually saw the post.

The end-report could create new discoveries for the client's future influencer marketing endeavours. *''Because perhaps we have discovered something, it sometimes seems that the engagement, so people who react to the content, might give new insights for the brand, on the one hand. So those are really qualitative things that they get back at the end.''* (Interviewee 9).

4.3.7   Relationship management

Throughout the execution and development process, the finding *'agency's relationship management'* came up as well. Alongside these processes, the IA is invested in the relationship with both the client and the influencers. This was shown to possibly be done through informal communication with both parties on a frequent basis. The agency does this to create a positive relationship with the client which might motivate the client to come back to the agency.

Interestingly, at the same time, the IA does prevent the influencer from having direct contact with the client. Every communication has to go through the IA to get to the client. This way some interviewees say to uphold a certain level of professionalism.

4.3.8   Development and execution processes in AIAs

For the execution and development process, the influencers are provided with a brief (which they have already received in the matching process). Similarly, to IAs, the influencers should be provided with enough freedom alongside a set of guidelines. Throughout the campaign, the client has access to real-time campaign insights on the platform. Finally, the client is provided with an (automatic) end-report of the campaign. However, the AIAs do acknowledge a few difficulties in the creation of the end report, which will all be explained in more detail below.

4.3.9   Informative influencer brief

Just like the IAs do, the AIAs also provide the influencer with an informative influencer brief. However, as stated in the previous section ''*Influencer response process*'' (4.2.10), the briefing happens usually as part of the matching process as the influencer usually responds to the briefing that is placed on the platform/online dashboard. Because it is also part of the development and execution process, this theme has emerged in connection to these processes as well.

For IAs the briefing is either made in co-creation with the client or by the agency itself. Nonetheless, with AIAs the brief is usually provided by the client on the marketplace or the draft is created by the agency and ultimately checked by the client.

4.3.10   Freedom within a framework

Identically, an equivalent major finding has emerged in connection to the development and execution process, which is '*freedom within a framework'*. As the representatives of AIAs explain, they also advise the clients to give the influencers creative freedom in the process of content creation. They need to trust their chosen influencers, to deliver the desired content, as they use their own tone of voice and style of content.

This connects to the finding which suggests that trustworthy/authentic content is of crucial relevance for the success of the campaign. The content will only come across as authentic and natural when the micro-influencer has creative freedom. The authenticity of the content is what multiple interviewees assessed as highly important in the execution process.

''(...) [the agency] want to make sure that the influencers also retain their own freedom, because it would be a pity to limit micro-influencer to just do what a company wants. So, actually, we let the micro-influencer create his or her content.'' (Interviewee 5)

''And we really try to convince clients (...) to be very flexible with influencers and to leave the whole idea to them (...) so they can be creative because very often if the brief is very narrow, influencers don't want to participate, and it doesn't fit their Instagram.'' (Interviewee 4)

4.3.11   Real-time campaign insights

Furthermore, the finding '*real-time campaign updates*' revealed that (contrary to the regular updates that are provided by IAs) AIAs always provide real-time insights in their platform: *''(...), they can really follow this [the campaign], they really see the likes coming in, in real time. And that is what you see per assignment, so per collaborations, but also on a campaign basis.''* (Interviewee 2). This is not unexpected as the AIAs make more use of tracking software. This gives the agency the possibility to load this data on the online platform on which the client could keep up with the campaign. This is done through implementing a tracking link into the influencers' social media channel.

4.3.12   Reporting difficulties

Although AIAs provide real-time insights, some interviewees did express to experience some '*reporting difficulties'*. For example, the previously mentioned GDPR restrictions prevent the agency from delivering insights into the audience that have responded to the campaigns' post. They are only allowed to store and use public data and no further information on the demographics.

The precise results from the campaign are also difficult to measure, in a sense that the social media campaigns are part of a bigger communication marketing strategy of the company. A

sudden increase in product sales could also be the effect of other marketing activities the client engages in. Both of these difficulties were not mentioned in the interviews with the IAs; however, it is expected that they also encounter these problems in their reporting.

4.3.13 Automatic end-report

Finally, just like the IAs an end-report is created at the end of the campaign. As AIAs utilize automatic tracking of the campaigns, the end-report is mostly created through automation as well. Accordingly, the finding *'automatic end-report'* emerged. Similarly, to IAs, this end-report usually consists of campaign metrics, campaign learnings and metric calculations. However, what the end-report exactly contains, differs per AIA. The campaign metrics such as likes, comments and impressions are automatically retrieved from a tracking link. These metrics are also used to further calculate insights such as engagement rates. On top of that, learnings are possibly drawn from this information in order to provide future recommendations for influencer marketing next to final evaluation.

4.3.14 The development and execution process

As discussed in Chapter 2 (''Creative process''), Turnbull & Wheeler (2017) identified three groups in the creative process for advertising agencies: the agency, the client and the consumer. Comparatively, the creative process in influencer agencies has shown to consist of the following three groups: the agency, the client and the influencer. Finally, the following steps are (usually) taken by these groups during the development and the execution process of a micro-influencer-led social media campaign.

1. *Process*

The development and execution process start with a campaign briefing for the influencer. Turnbull & Wheeler (2017) emphasize the importance of this briefing process in the first stage of the creative process, referred to as ''task identification''. As the brief makes clear what the objectives are for the campaign and it could inspire the influencer in content creation. This brief is either posted on the platform of the so-called ''marketplace'' in AIA or sent to the selected influencers in IAs.

2. *Creative freedom*

Both of the types of agencies put a great emphasis on the idea that brands should give the collaborating influencers freedom in their content creation. Certain guidelines are in place; however, those should not get in the way of the influencers' creative freedom. This is something that is suggested by the agencies, as they know from experience that this delivers the best, trustworthy and natural appearing results. Accordingly, the influencer will create the content for the campaign. Finally, the content is usually approved by the client. This shows how the

development process in influencer agencies differs from the seven-step model posed by Turnbull & Wheeler (2017). Interestingly, there is no external validation step where the content's effectiveness is tested with consumers. In comparison, the creative process in influencer agencies could be brought down to four steps:

- (Co-) creation brief (by client and/or agency)
- Brief the influencer
- Content creation
- Content validation (by client and/or agency)

3. Influencer involvement

In the process facilitated by AIAs, the influencers are engaged throughout all previously discussed processes (SMC strategy creation and matching process). During the campaign, the clients are updated in real-time when working with AIAs. Which gives them the opportunity to make immediate adjustments if necessary. As opposed to IAs who usually provide daily updates. These insights could be shared by the influencer itself, demonstrating the level of trust from the IA in the influencer. This is also a moment for the IAs to have direct contact with the influencer and the client. As with AIAs the updates are loaded in automatically, so there is no contact necessary during the campaign.

4. *Reporting*

Finally, the influencer agency provides an end-report for the client. this end-report usually consists of campaign metrics, campaign learnings and metric calculations. With AIAs this part of the process usually consists of an automatically created end-report. Whereas IAs create the end-report primarily manual.

4.4   The differences in processes between micro-influencers and macro-influencers

In this part of the study, the differences in the processes of the development of the social media campaign involving micro-and macro-influencers will be identified as those became evident from the gathered and analysed data. As explained before there is no consensus to be found on the definition of micro-influencers in either literature or industry-specific web publications. As there is no clear definition on micro-influencers, this needs to be explored first to be able to make comparisons. Hence, the interviews were also aimed at finding the differences between these two kinds of influencers, in order to bring more clarity in terms of specificity of the groups and the followers' count. Additionally, an analysis and comparison of multiple definitions has been done in order to provide one clear definition.

4.4.1   Defining micro-influencers

Not surprisingly, the micro-influencers were frequently described as having a ''small reach'' as opposed to the macro-influencers, who were regularly described as those having ''wide reach'' and speaking to a relatively large audience (as opposed to micro-influencers).

Therefore, the macro-influencer is not targeted to a niche group. Through their extensive reach, they could easily bring awareness to the crowd. However, because of this approach, the macro-influencers are usually less personally engaged with their audiences. These characteristics resonate with the literature on macro-influencers (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Bruns, 2018), who define the macro-influencer similarly.

This demonstrates a significant discrepancy with micro-influencers who have a more personal relationship with their relatively small audience. This idea that micro-influencers have a relatively ''small'' number of followers, is not incorporated in existing literature yet. This small following is mostly connected to a specific category, which is reflected in the overarching theme '*niche community'.* This shows that micro-influencers could reach a specific type of audience for a collaborating client:

''It's like if you are a brand that is communicating something very specific and you want to reach a very specific target group and you want to create engagement... then it makes sense to use micro-influencers who have a really, really good engagement and you know that almost every single one of the followers are actually interested in this specific topic.'' (Interviewee 1)

''(...) They have more niche communities. (....) If you say you look at like the nail art community like nail polish, there's a couple of fake influencers, but the rest are very very small like micro-influencers. So, like you have to sort of really drill down and go into those small communities to get a more niche market.'' (Interviewee 3)

''If you really want to put up a campaign to reach as many people as possible, I would not recommend a micro-influencer. (....) But if you have a niche market, then I would say that you have to definitely do that.'' (Interviewee 9)

Hence, they have a certain expertise in this niche community and because of that, obtain topic relevance within that niche. Consequently, a distinction needs to be made between the micro and the macro-influencer as for what kind of audience they could reach best. Both types of influencers are suited for different campaign goals.

Literature has defined micro-influencers as having a personal relationship with their following, being authentic alongside affecting the consumers' purchasing decision (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Bruns, 2018; Keller & Fay, 2016). None of the definitions take into account the ability

of the micro-influencers to reach a very specific audience. Given that, the definition of the micro-influencer could be expanded to incorporate the idea that micro-influencers could possibly be used to reach a niche community. As well as the idea that the micro-influencers have a relatively small following. An expanded micro-influencer definition could be:

Individuals who operate on a niche topic and have a direct impact on the (purchasing) behaviour (in their relatively small following) based on the personal nature of their relationship and communications. However, although this definition is imperfect and might need further adjustments this is definition guided further analysis.

4.4.2 Definition discrepancies

When the interviewees were asked to share how they classified the influencers according to a follower's range, the ranges vastly differed (see table 4). It needs to be noted that not all of the agencies were able to answer the followers' range for macro-influencers. Hence, the table only shows eight ranges for macro-influencers.

When looking at the average followers' range of the micro-influencers, taking into account all the provided ranges, the followers' range varied from 500 followers at a minimum and 60.000 followers at maximum. With a most frequently mentioned bottom-line of 5.000 and 50.000 maximum. For macro-influencers on the other hand, the followers' range ranged from 20.000 at a minimum and above, as the maximum. The most frequently mentioned bottom-line is at 50.000 followers. Also, here was no most frequently mentioned maximum.

All in all, almost every followers' range that was provided for either micro or macro-influencers differed from each other. Hence, further clarification for this discrepancy is needed.

Table 4. Followers' range

Micro-influencers	Macro-influencers
500 - 50.000	20.000 - 100.000
3.000 - 15.000	25.000 - 500.000
5.000 - 15.000	50.000 - 100.000
5.000 - 20.000	50.000 - above
5.000 - 25.000	60.000 - 200.000
5.000 - 25.000	75.000 - 250.000
5.000 - 50.000	100.000 - above
10.000 - 25.000	150.000 - 500.000
10.000 - 50.000	
15.000 - 60.000	
20.000 - 50.000	

The reason for this varying followers' range for either micro or macro-influencers could be explained. Throughout the interviews, a finding that has emerged from the dataset is defined as *'reliant influencer definition'.* What is meant by this is that the followers' range and accompanying influencer definition is not fixed. The interviewees frequently mentioned that this is heavily dependent on either the market or even company specific where they or the influencer operate:

''I would also like to emphasize that it really depends on the market you are in because if I have an influencer with 80k in America, that might still be just micro.'' (Interviewee 9)

''If it's a bigger campaign [for a bigger company] than in perspective, they're [macro-influencers] still sort of micro-influencers.'' (Interviewee 1)

''(...)t really depends on the market actually because it depends how big accounts they have. So, for example in Israel, a celebrity will have like 40k followers. And in the United States, micro-influencers have like up to 100k followers for example, so it depends on the market size'' (Interviewee 4)

What is defined as a macro-influencer in Europe, could be seen as a micro-influencer in the United States. Hence, the size of the influencer market in a certain geographical area determines what is referred to as micro- or as macro-influencer. As a result, a globally operating influencer agency handles different followers' ranges and definitions according to different countries. This explains the non-existent consensus in this regard.

4.4.3   Social media communication strategy

This section focuses on the way in which the cooperation with micro and macro-influencers differ from each other. This is analysed based on how the two types of influencers differ from each other in the first stage of social media campaign development. The table below (Table 5) gives an overview of the differences between the two types of influencers. The differences will be further explained below the table.

Table 5. Differences between micro- and macro-influencers in SMC strategy

Micro-influencers	*Macro-influencers*
• Not able to give accurate targets	• Could provide accurate targets
• Need more support	• Less support required
• Less professional quality	• Professional quality

• More flexible	• Less flexible
• Less or not at all involved	• More involvement
• Niche target audience	• Wide target audience

4.4.4 Level of professionalism

In terms of SMC strategy, it became evident that influencers are usually not involved in the SMC strategy creation process. With the exception of some AIAs, where influencers could provide ideas and elements for the SMC strategies through built-in chat rooms and the opportunity to set their own targets.

A finding that emerged from the data was *'support required'* which highlights the fact that micro-influencers need more assistance from the agency throughout the whole development process of a social media campaign. Hence, the micro-influencers are usually seen as less professional/business-like and less experienced. Likewise, what was frequently mentioned is that the micro-influencers have more difficulty in setting campaign specific targets if this is asked from the agency. Ultimately, they are less or not at all involved in the SMC strategy creation process, as emphasized by Interviewee 5: *''(...) Because micro-influencers do not actually have that much experience and their knowledge will often be too limited to think along with the strategy. That might be rude, but I'd rather leave it to a real marketer.''*.

Macro-influencers on the other hand, are seen as to be of more professional quality. Accordingly, they are usually seen as more experienced and business-like. It may even be the case that they are involved in the SMC strategy creation process, as they are seen as a small brand on their own. However, macro-influencers are seen as less flexible in terms of agreeing on the SMC strategy, as opposed to micro-influencers, who are more adaptable. *''(...) the smaller influencers can adapt a bit easier. As with macro, you just notice that they just think a little deeper about everything, yeah, a bit more business-like. (....) They know more about how to achieve goals.''* (Interviewee 2). The rigidness of macro-influencers could be due to the fact that they have their own particular way of doing things and delivering content. For example, if a brand would like to work with a macro-influencer, it could be the case that the brand would have to take into account the influencer's timelines, availability and his or her own process of content execution.

4.4.5 Tailored objectives

Additionally, what became evident from the data analysis is that the awareness around micro-influencers is starting to grow. This idea is emphasized through the finding on micro-influencers *'undervalued influencers'.* They are not only undervalued by clients in different markets

but sometimes also by themselves. In the sense that they might ask too small of a (monetary) reward in return:

''I think, above all, the attitude of the influencer itself; a micro-influencer really wants to put the time in it, who really wants to put in the effort. And they expect too little in return.'' (Interviewee 5)

''I think that they're an incredibly powerful tool. I think that micro-influencers are [uhm] undervalued in the market. So, people don't really understand how much they can bring to a campaign and how much value they can bring. '' (Interviewee 3)

As discussed in ''*The role of the influencer agency'' (*4.1.13*)*, both types of influencer agencies take on an educational role in collaboration with their clients. *''(...) it takes like the right kind of agency to make the client understand the real power of micro-influencers.''* (Interviewee 10). Possibly as a result of this, the awareness around micro-influencers is growing. The awareness around macro-influencers has possibly been more present as brands still primarily come in with a request for a ''larger'' influencer instead of a micro-influencer. In that sense, this is in line with what Frary states (2018) that brands regularly make the mistake to work with macro-influencers, as they primarily reach wide audience, which does not fit every campaign.

Contrastingly, micro-influencers speak to a more specific and targeted audience, as the finding *'niche community pioneers'* demonstrates. The SMC strategy creation is thus dependent on the target audience and accompanying objectives that the company would like to reach with their campaign. Ultimately resulting in the idea that macro-influencers could be chosen when the objectives are focused on reaching wide communities. While on the other hand, micro-influencers could be chosen for objectives based on reaching niche communities.

4.4.6   Identification and matching process

The following section sheds light on the differences between micro and macro-influencers when it comes to the identification and matching process. An outline of the differences is presented in the table below and will be explained in more detail below the table.

Table 6. Differences between micro and macro-influencers in identification and matching process

Micro-influencers	Macro-influencers
• Match based on a niche	• Match based on size
• Brand selectivity	• Limited brand selectivity
• Smooth communication	• Slow communication

• Fast workflow	• Brand pitch
	• Management representation

4.4.7 Niche vs. size

Accordingly, the micro-influencers could be matched with companies based on their niche expertise and the type of audience they address. Whenever a company would like to reach a specific audience, this might require more time in terms of finding a micro-influencer in a specific niche. When potential niche topic pioneers are found, the micro-influencers' profile and following could be assessed based on certain match requirements. Macro-influencers, on the other hand, are usually matched based on their following size (Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017), as shown by the ''big fish approach''.

4.4.8 Level of campaign selectivity

The possible risk in the matching process with micro-influencers, who work within a certain category, is that they could be very selective in their collaborations. Therefore, it could happen that micro-influencers choose not to collaborate with a brand whenever their product(s) jeopardizes their authenticity or beliefs: *''They often decline the offer and they say that it won't be authentic for their followers and that they don't like to promote these kinds of products or they usually say that they're against something that this product includes.''* (Interviewee 4).

The authenticity trait is enhanced whenever the micro-influencer represents a brand that is in line with its own identity (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). In that sense, the micro-influencers are protective of their own authenticity.

The macro-influencers, on the other hand, are not very selective in campaigns, as shown through the finding '*limited brand selectivity*'. It could be the case that the macro-influencers are more focused on obtaining campaigns instead of focusing on content consistency: *''(...) bigger influencers sometimes just take what brands give them and like they care more about the money they will get and micro-influencers, from my perspective, really care about what kind of content they post, and they want to be consistent.''* (Interviewee 4).

4.4.9 Type of cooperation

With IAs, after the matching process, the micro-influencers are usually contacted in order to make agreements and set up the collaboration. Accordingly, as the finding '*painless cooperation*' shows the communication between the agency and the micro-influencer usually runs smoothly. *''Generally, when you deal with my micro-influencers, they're way easier to communicate with, most of the time, I would say, 90% of the time.''* (Interviewee 8). As a result, the micro-influencers are

said to be pleasant to work with and provide an overall fast workflow in the development of the social media campaign. This could be due to the fact that micro-influencers represent themselves instead of being represented by an influencer management agency, resulting in a fast communication flow.

For macro-influencers, on the other hand, the communication process is not experienced as painless as with micro-influencers. The emerged theme '*costly cooperation* in connection to macro-influencers demonstrates that. First of all, as almost all of the interviewees have stated, the macro-influencers are usually represented by an influencer management agency. Hence, the whole communication process has to go through a management agency who represents multiple influencers. This results in a slow process of communication, making the communication throughout the matching process more difficult for the client and the influencer agency:

Macro [influencer] generally has a manager and these managers, I prefer to not work with them because (...) most of the time what you'll see is that managers have a lot of influencers they need to take care of. Things might take a long time. While with micros, generally, they answer quite quickly, they're quite happy to work, they're fast.'' (Interviewee 8)

Whenever the influencer agency does get to speak with the macro-influencers, this is not experienced very well. The interviewees have frequently shared that the macro-influencers take a non-professional approach in communicating with the agency. However, this could not be generalized across all macro-influencers, as they are also seen as professionals in the field.

Also, companies who are focused on ''the big fish approach'' might even pitch to the macro-influencers directly. It may occur, in the situation when there is high demand for the specific influencer on the market. In that case, the roles are somewhat reversed. This is, however, uncommon when it comes to the micro-influencers, as they are smaller and more numerous.

4.4.10 Development & execution process

Table 7. Differences in development & execution process

Micro-influencers	*Macro-influencers*
• More content creation assistance	• More content creation freedom
• Overdeliver	• Work with a content team
• Effective storytelling	

4.4.11 Content creation

In terms of the execution process, the following finding could be connected to micro-influencers specifically: '*support required'*. Multiple interviewees state that micro-influencers deliver content of lower quality as opposed to the macro-influencers. What this connects to, is that micro-influencers require more often assistance in the content creation as they have shown to be less strong creative wise. Hence, the agency would suggest adjustments or offer some guidelines in order to create the best content possible. However, the ''freedom within a framework'' approach still needs to be followed and assistance should be limited to the guidelines and no concrete requirements.

The macro-influencers are said to get more freedom in terms of content creation and the accompanying guidelines. Accordingly, the macro-influencers acquire less assistance and guidelines from the influencer agency, as they oftentimes have a team working with them on content creation. As a result, the content is of higher perceived quality.

Contrastingly, multiple interviewees stated that micro-influencers actually overdeliver in terms of the execution process. They are described as passionate, excited and seen as that they really care about the content. Hence, this translates to the authentic content which resonates with the influencers' own audience, which emphasizes on the fact that the quality of the content is a subjective assessment which differs per individual. Therefore, a concrete distinction in content quality could not be made.

4.4.12 Storytelling

Interestingly, the micro-influencers were frequently connected to the phenomenon of ''storytelling''. Interviewee 3 offers the following explanation of what storytelling entails: ''*(...) storytelling and emotions is what people engage with. If you're not telling a story, if you're not showing some emotion and you're not engaging people. Then all you're doing is saying, look at my product and people don't care about your product. They care about the story behind it.*''

As experienced in the industry by the influencers agencies, the micro-influencers are effective in presenting the story of the brand through their own words and possibly also experiences: *''Well, I think a micro-influencer can and will often tell a more personal story. (...) often you get a very raw and personal story of a small influencer.''* (Interviewee 9). This effectiveness of storytelling is reliant on the authentic content and personal relationship the micro-influencer has with its following.

Through their authenticity and ''small reach'', their audiences could easily identify with micro-influencers. This results in a friend like role for the micro-influencers, making their followers trust upon them for recommendations. This is in line with the statements made by Backaler (2018),

stating that whenever consumers trust in an influencer, they are more likely to listen to them. Accordingly, making the consumers engage based on their storytelling ability.

As explained by interviewees, storytelling is effective through engaging people by emotions. Since micro-influencers connect on a personal level, the audience is able to identify with the micro-influencer. Therefore, consumers are likely to take on the influencers' story as credible, which invites them to engage with the micro-influencer:

''(...) people have a stronger relationship like a personal relationship, with micro-influencers (....) They've only got a small community and it's that community feel and that helps really create a strong relationship with influencers. And they probably have a stronger emotional tie with their audience that makes storytelling more effective rather than their ability to tell stories or anything like that, that is better. '' (Interviewee 3)

Through the storytelling component, the micro-influencers could create a distinctive image of themselves on social media. They tell the brand's story through their own public image. This way the micro-influencers thrive on the possibility to conduct self-branding on social media (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016). It helps brands in creating a strong brand message, while simultaneously, the influencers strengthen their distinctive online image.

4.4.13 Key distinctions in cooperation micro- and macro-influencers

There are a few key distinctions in ways of cooperation with micro- and macro-influencers in the development process of a social media campaign:

1. In terms of SMC strategy creation, the micro-influencers are said to be flexible to work with for the influencer agencies. As opposed to the macro-influencers who offer less flexibility making the SMC strategy creation process more complicated with macro-influencers.

2. In light of the matching process, the micro-influencers are matched with brands based on a certain niche in which the influencer is active. The macro-influencers, on the other hand, are usually matched based on their extensive reach. The search for micro-influencers would be a more time-consuming search as they are numerous but widely spread in themes. Whereas macro-influencers are easy to come across on social media channels.

3. There is also a clear difference in terms of communication between the agency and the influencers. Where macro-influencers are represented by management, the micro-influencer speak to the agency directly. Making the process once again run more smoothly with micro-influencers, resulting in a fast workflow for the agency and client.

4. Lastly, the micro-influencers seem to be more capable of representing a brands' story on social media. This is due to their small and more engaged following, with whom they have a close relationship. Resulting in higher engagement rates for social media campaigns.

5.   Conclusion

5.1   Conclusion

To be able to answer the main research question, it is important to first note that there is a difference between the two types of influencer agencies, as some aspects of the processes are quite different from each other.

First of all, there is a significant distinction in the influencer matching stage. In the AIAs the influencers respond to the campaigns targeted to them, resulting in the client having direct access to these influencers on the online platform. Whereas in IAs, the agency is heavily engaged in the search for influencers and might even have a dedicated team or division in place. Which results in a time-consuming activity, especially since micro-influencers are widespread, and the search is based on a niche topic. Both approaches to the matching stage demonstrate a different approach and involvement from the influencers' side. In AIAs the influencers apply on the online platform, afterwards, they respond to the campaigns themselves. These are two steps which are not required from the influencer in campaigns done through IAs. Furthermore, the influencers are more involved throughout the entire development process in AIAs in terms of contact with the client. Interestingly, the AIAs provide a communicative link between the client and the micro-influencer. Which is in contrast with the IAs who act solely as an intermediary without facilitating contact between the two parties. The reason for this is to ensure a level of professionalism. In that sense, the contact with the micro-influencers would definitely not be facilitated, as they are usually seen as unprofessional and inexperienced. In that regard, the AIAs functions both as an intermediary and provide direct communication between the influencers and the client. Which opens the way for clients to obtain valuable insights directly from the influencer, even if this communication is not on a ''professional'' level.

Secondly, through the automated targeting options, the AIA offers value in time efficiency, for the agency and for the client. The potential fitted influencers present to the client almost ''automatically'' as the influencers are notified whenever a suited campaign presents itself. However, with IAs the agency dedicates time and money in order to find the fitted influencer(s). The value of this is that the IA usually also searches for influencers outside of the platform. Hence, the ''grey area'' is not overlooked in which the perfect brand fit might be present. In that regard, both agencies offer different values in the matching process. The AIAs offer value in terms of time efficiency, as opposed to the IAs who offer value in finding the best-suited influencer, even when this fit is not present in their internal database. This does not mean that the best-fitted influencer could not be found with the AIA platform, however by taking the external database into account,

the chances might increase. This might change in the future as AIAs are experimenting with AI technology in the matching process, making the AIA platforms able to search the ''grey area'' without jeopardizing their time efficiency value.

Furthermore, the findings have shown a different approach to the briefing stage in the development process of the social media campaign. The influencers are briefed in the matching stage in AIAs. Hence, the influencers could choose to respond to a campaign of a certain brand based on the brief. As opposed to IAs where the influencers are briefed after the matching has been completed.

Thus, as could be seen, there are a few significant discrepancies throughout the development process between the two types of agencies. Besides these differences there are also a few significant similarities, reflecting the overall role of the influencer agency.

In the first place, the influencer agencies both reflect their role of educating their clients on influencer marketing, and more importantly on micro-influencers. There seems to be a level of unawareness amongst companies, especially when it comes to the effectiveness of micro-influencers. Resulting in the agencies taken on the responsibility of informing and guiding the client with their expertise. In IAs a bit more so, due to their higher involvement in the SMC strategy creation process.

Moreover, the overall involvement from the influencer agency in the SMC strategy creation process could be identified as an advisory role. The IAs seem to be more intensively involved through the strategy (co)creation with the client. However, the involvement of the AIA could be of a higher level, than it actually appears. Through the design of the automated platform, the agency steers the client through specific steps in the process. Hence, the level of autonomy of the client in AIAs might be deceiving. Resulting in both agencies primarily engaging in an advisory role for the client.

Another overall role which the influencer agencies take on is the screening of the influencers to ensure an accurate brand fit. Which is either done prior to the matching process (AIA) or after (IA). The human involvement is a significant element in the screening process. The reason for this is that an agency could not base the match purely on software and quantifiable elements. Hence, they also have to rely on the subjective interpretations of humans. This might result in different interpretations of influencers based on different frames of reference. Nevertheless, human involvement is still an important element throughout the development of the campaign, in screening the influencers and not to mention in the relationship management with their clients and influencers. This relationship between the micro-influencer and the influencer agency is easily maintained through the direct communication resulting in a fast workflow.

Likewise, the findings revealed a four-step model of the creative process that is more or less done in the same manner in all the influencer agencies (4.3.14). Although the brief might reach the influencer at different stages in the process, both of the influencer agencies emphasize the great importance of providing the influencer with freedom within a framework. This reflects a certain amount of trust from the agency and client in the influencer. Especially the micro-influencers know their audiences well through the close and personal relationship they have obtained through their authentic nature. Hence, the micro-influencer has better insights as for what kind of content resonates with their audience. By giving them the necessary freedom, especially the micro-influencer is able to create effective storytelling for the brand. Finally, at the end of the campaign, influencer agencies provide the client with an extensive and informative end-report. Which gives the client direction for further influencer marketing activities.

 For the most part, the development process of the social media campaign with a macro-influencer is not significantly different from a micro-influencer. However, there are some essential elements which create a distinction between the two types of influencers. As has been noted, the micro-influencer could be employed to reach a niche community alongside a fast workflow and flexible collaboration. All in all, in the development of the micro-influencer-led social media campaign, the influencer agency takes on a role which consists of several layers. In the first place, the influencer agency provides the client with the necessary knowledge and guidance. Furthermore, they ensure a brand fit for the campaign through the screening process alongside providing the micro-influencer with the necessary content freedom. Ultimately, all aiming at providing the client with the most effective micro-influencer-led social media campaign, together with recommendations for further influencer marketing endeavours.

5.2   Theoretical implications

All things considered; this study has substantiated the value of two concepts. First, the concept of freedom within a framework by Backaler (2018), states that it is important in influencer marketing to only give the influencer guidelines instead of dictating the creative outcome. This is of importance as the influencer functions as a gatekeeper which requires trust from the client. When this level of freedom is not provided, the influencer would not come across as sincere. This concept has been explicitly emphasized amongst all influencer agency representatives. Hence, the concept of freedom within a framework is also applicable to the creative process in influencer agencies.

Secondly, the concept of self-branding by Khamis, Ang & Welling (2016), which states that social media provides individuals with the opportunity to develop ''a distinctive public image for commercial gain and/or cultural capital'' (p.191). This has shown to be applicable for micro-influencers, especially since they capitalize on their distinctive image based on a niche topic.

Nevertheless, this study has shown that some theories in literature might need revising. First of all, the definitions of the micro-influencer posed by Keller & Fay (2016), Bruns (2018) and Brown & Fiorella (2013) could be expanded to incorporate the idea that micro-influencers could possibly be used to reach a niche community. The definition that is now present in literature needs to be adjusted in order to give a complete understanding of what a micro-influencer entails. Hence a suggestion for defining micro-influencers has been made: individuals who operate on a niche topic and have a direct impact on the (purchasing) behaviour (in their relatively small following) based on the personal nature of their relationship and communications.

Furthermore, the ''three 'R's'' demonstrated by Backaler (2018) used for discovering an influencers' influential capabilities in matching influencers with brands: Reach, Resonance and Relevance, could be further expanded. A suggestion, as derived from this study, has been made to incorporate a fourth R, which refers to reliability. The findings concerning the matching process have shown that the influencers' authenticity is usually screened as well in addition to the other three measures of influence.

5.3   Limitations

The chosen methodology has resulted in a few limitations for this research. Although the analysis of the semi-structured in-depth expert interviews has proven to be beneficial in obtaining valuable insights, it also accompanies several limitations. The coding analysis of the data is not purely grounded in facts and is based on the interpretations of one researcher. Therefore, as Boeije (2010) explains, engaging multiple researchers in the coding analysis would benefit the validity of the research. In that case, the researchers could exchange thoughts on the coding analysis. As Boeije (2010) further emphasizes, a team of multiple researchers would secure a valid coding of the data. Furthermore, the interviewees have not been asked to reread the transcripts after the transcription process. By making the interviewees ensure a correct transcription, the validity of the research would increase, as stated by Yin (2011). Also, a team of researchers would also increase validity in terms of the translated transcripts. Hence, researchers who could speak both Dutch and English could increase the validity of the transcripts. Not to mention that obviously, a wider spread sample would increase the possibility to generalize the findings of the study. In this regard, it would also be beneficial for (global) generalization to include agencies from other countries who have not been represented in this study.

5.4   Future recommendations

In light of future recommendations, it would be beneficial to further investigate the differences between micro and macro-influencers. This could be done in several ways as the research into this topic is very limited. For example, the difference in social media post-

performance could be investigated to get more insights into the engagement differences between the two types of influencers. On top of that, this research has shown that there is no universal fixed followers' range for micro- and macro-influencers. Hence, it would be interesting to discover the followers' range scales per country where the influencer is located. Additionally, it would also be of value to look into the two other groups involved in the development and creative process throughout the creation of the social media campaign; the client and the influencers. With the intention to capture the other perspectives in the creative process. Also, research into influencer marketing practices has demonstrated that multiple companies have their own in-house influencer department. Hence, it would be valuable to look into the development process of a social media campaign as it is done inside a company. This will substantiate the research into the development process of an influencer-led social media campaign.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix A1 Code tree SMC strategy IAs

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Company influencer educator	Market dependent know-how	USA mature level of influencer knowledge
		Market dependent knowledge
	Company influencer unawareness	Companies do not understand influencers
		Unfamiliarity conservative companies
	Educating the client on influencer marketing	Educating on micro-influencers
		Agency must educate the client
	Growing influencer marketing knowledge	Increasing influencer marketing awareness
		Familiarity influencers modern companies
	Agency expertise	Agency brings expertise
		The agency brings professionalism
Understand the client	Client strategy input	Client input: specific goals
		Client input: wants
	Company history information	Client input: influencer history
		Client input: company details
	Post-specific client information	Channel choice
		Message
	Part of overarching communication strategy	Influencers as part of overall social media strategy
		The influencer marketing part of entire social media strategy

Understand the audience	Importance of Influencer brand fit	Importance of topic match
		Importance of credibility collaboration
	Target audience research	The importance of target group match
		Analyse the target audience
Strategy creation	Objectives calculation	Guaranteed KPIs
		Agency creates concrete goals
	Calculate budgets	Agency calculates budget
		Guarantees within budget
	Agency campaign creation	Create an entire campaign
		The strategy proposed by the agency
	Strategic ideas	Proposal: different creative ideas
		Several creative strategies
Strategy co-creation	Personal client collaboration	Sit down with the client
		Relationship management
	Strategy co-creation	Co-creation goals
		Assess the goals

Appendix A2 Code tree identification & matching IAs

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Manual subjective screening	Evaluating influencer feed	Aesthetics match
		Match campaign feeling
	Tone of voice screening	Influencer language check
		Tone of voice screening
	Brand match	Brand and influencer alignment
		Relevance for the market
Manual objective screening	Audience verification	Manual growth screening
		Screening the following
	Partnership screening	Previous brand collaborations
		Frequency partnerships

| | Engagement review | Manual engagement check |
| | | Analytics check |

| Software screening tools | Screening software | The audience screening tool |
| | | Tools for screening |

Influencer sourcing	The devoted influencer search unit	Dedicated influencer search team
		Dedicated influencer division
	Continuous influencer search	Continuous influencer search
		Ongoing influencer search
	Internal influencer database	Large Influencer database
		Internal database

Influencer recommendations	Suggested influencer list	Long influencer list by agency
		Recommend influencers
	Internal benchmarks	Scale for comparison
		Internal influencer benchmarks

Data storage conflict	The influencers own insights	Deep level influencer data
		Request influencer insights
	Database difficulties	No internal database
		GDPR restrictions

| Client influencer selection veto | Client influencer decision | Client influencer approval |
| | | Client final say |

| Influencer invitation | The influencer reach out | Personal reach-out |
| | | Influencer reach out |

Appendix A3 Code tree development & Execution IAs

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Freedom within a framework	Freedom within a framework	Content freedom alongside guidelines
		Not too many content restrictions
	Client veto right	Client final content check
		Client has the final say in content

Micro & Macro combination	Influencer marketing pyramid	Pyramid campaign
		Combination micro-macro
Influencer led insights	End report metrics by influencer	Influencers provide statistics
		Influencer sents insights to the agency
Throughout campaign insights	Tracking software	Traceable link
		Tracking link
	During campaign updates	Regular campaign updates
		Mid-reporting big campaigns
Informative influencer brief	Influencer campaign ruling	Influencer briefing by the agency
		Influencer brief: do's and don'ts
	The content message guidelines	Influencer brief: purpose campaign
		Influencer brief: key message
	Visual content guidelines	Mood board
		Type of content
	Product information	Product information
		Brief by the client
Informative end report	Final campaign metrics	All statistics
		End report: impressions
	Campaign metrics calculations	Common validity
		Internal benchmarks
	Future influencer marketing recommendations	Future recommendations
		Final suggestions
	Campaign learnings	New discoveries
		Interpretation
Agency's relationship management	Agency and influencer facilitated communication	Influencer relationship management
	Client relationship management	Informal client communication
		Frequent client and brand communication

Appendix B

Appendix B1 Code tree SMC strategy AIAs

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Link the influencer and the client	Engaging influencers in strategy	Increase influencer strategy involvement
		Brainstorm session with influencers
	Influencer target creation	Influencer sets own targets
		Influencers set targets
	Connection brand & influencer	Chat feature brand and influencer
		Contact between brands and influencers
Company influencer educator	Educating the client	Masterclass successful campaign
		Educate the client
	Company influencer unawareness	Client focus on influencer size
		Rigid companies
Offer strategy aid	Personal client collaboration	Face-to-face communication
		Chat feature brand and agency
	Advisory role	Campaign strategy advice
		Minimum support
	Target audience match value	Importance influencer audience
		Importance of target group match
	Channel advice	Channel recommendation
		Importance channel choice
	Campaign co-creation	Co-decide strategy
		Co-creation campaign KPIs
Client autonomy	Full client involvement	Clients do a lot themselves
		For experienced clients
	Platform subscription	The client applies to the platform
		Subscription base

Understand the client	Client campaign input	Client input: goals
		Client input: hashtags
	Part of overarching communication strategy	Part of a bigger strategy
		In-house strategy

Appendix B2 Code tree identification & matching AIAs

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Influencer selection assistance	Influencer sourcing	Internal database
		Ongoing influencer search
	Fitted influencer recommendations	Influencer recommendations
		Automated influencer list
Briefing marketplace	Campaign marketplace	Online dashboard with campaigns
		Campaign marketplace
	Influencer briefing	Influencer brief: category criteria
		Client dashboard: the briefing
Client influencer selection veto	Client final say influencers	Client selects from the list
		Final influencer decision by the client
Influencer response process	Influencers apply	Influencers respond to a campaign
		Influencers apply on the platform
	Target influencers on the marketplace	Selected influencers could respond
		Targeting options
Manual subjective screening	Influencer authenticity screening	Authenticity verification via FB
		Influencer verification
	Evaluating influencer feed	Screening on self-promotion
		Manual screening: content quality
	Influencer tone of voice	Manual screening: tone of voice
		Influencers tone of voice
	Authentic following	Following sample test

		Manual screening: following
Manual objective screening	Following number check	Fixed following bottom line
		Minimum following range
	Engagement calculation	Manual screening: engagement
		Manual screening: engagement rates
Software screening tools	Authenticity software screening	Software authenticity check
		Google Analytics plug-in
	Audience software screening	Software growth check
		Software screening: audience demographics
Client influencer screening	Client ensures the brand match	The client checks the brand fit
		The client checks the influencer style

Appendix B3 Development & execution AIAs

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Micro & Macro combination	Influencer marketing pyramid	Powerful micro and macro combination
		Combination micro and macro
Informative influencer brief	Briefing campaign guidelines	Influencer brief: timeline
		Influencer brief: message
	Briefing check	Influencer brief check by agency,
		Influencer brief draft by agency
Freedom within a framework	Client content check	Agency approves content
		Content check by the client
	Freedom within a framework	Advice content freedom
		Give room for creativity
	Trustworthy content relevance	Importance of authentic content
		Importance of natural content

Real-time campaign insights	Tracking software	API connection
		racking link
	Real-time campaign insights	Real-time campaign insights
		Automatic reporting
Reporting difficulties	Tracking hurdles	Difficult to measure
		GDPR restriction
Automatic end-report	End report campaign metrics	Campaign insights
		Number of impressions
	End report campaign learnings	Campaign evaluation
		Recommendations
	End report: metric calculations	Automated engagement rate check
		Quality views

Appendix C

Appendix C1 Micro-influencers

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Reliant influencer definition	Dependent influencer definitions	Market dependent influencer definition
		Company dependent influencer definition
Niche community pioneers	'Small' reach	5k-20k, 5k-25k, 5k-50k, 10k-50k
	The niche influencers	Reach a very specific target group
		Niche communities
Friend-like influencers	Authentic influencers	Stay close to themselves
		Selective in campaigns
	Close audience relationships	Close like a friend
		Emotional tie audience

	Micro-storytelling	Effective storytelling
		Present the company's story
	High engagement	Good community engagement
		High interaction with following
Support required	Less content quality	Less strong content
		Less content quality
	Agency assistance	More guidance
		Need more guidance
	Non-business wise	Not able to give accurate targets
		Inexperienced
Undervalued influencers	Underestimated party	Companies not aware of their power
		Non-company demand
	Relatively low payment	Product payments
		Maximize budget
Painless cooperation	Likeable collaboration	More flexible to work with
		More flexible
	Easy communication	Easy to contact
		Communicating directly
Determined influencers	Passionate	Excitement for campaigns
		share passion
	Ambitious influencers	Strong will to grow
		Overperformance
	Content quality	Really care about the content
		Authentic content
Company micro awareness	Up and coming awareness	Trend
		Upcoming trend
	No new trend	Micro-influencer integration from 2015
		No new group
Micro effectivity	Objective effectiveness	More likely to accomplish goals Drive
		better results

	Instagram channel fit	Effective Instagram stories Effective on Instagram

Appendix C2 Macro-influencers

Selective code	Axial code	Sample open codes
Reach the crowd	Wide reach	20k-100k,150k-500k, 50k-100k
	Bring attention	Awareness Raise awareness
	Limited brand selectivity	Not selective Non-credible content
	Not targeted	Not locally tied No concrete target audience
	Low personal engagement	Hard to connect on a personal level Little interaction following
Professional quality	Professionals in the field	A high degree of experience Small brand on its own
	Qualitative content	More professional content More content support
Costly cooperation	Management representation	Management agency involvement Time-consuming communication
	High investment, high risk	High expectations from clients More expensive
	Non-professional approach	Bad attitude Bad communicative skills

Appendix D

Interview topic guide

General

- Could you describe the company you work for?
    - o What is the client sector your agency mainly focuses on?
- What is your role in the company you work for?
    - o What is your title?
- What are your responsibilities in your position?
    - o What are your daily activities?

(Micro) influencer marketing

- How would you describe the role of influencer agencies in influencer marketing?
- How much experience do you have yourself with influencer marketing?
- When did the company start working with micro-influencers?
- How would you define micro-influencers?
    - o Which range in followers count characterizes micro-influencers?
    - o And followers count range for macro-influencers?
- What do you think about this new trend of micro-influencers marketing in brand communication?
    - o Is it more valuable for a company instead of using macro-influencers?

Social media communication strategy

- Who creates a social media strategy for a micro-influencer social media campaign?
- What are the steps in creating such a strategy?
    - o Is there a systematic process?
    - o Do you analyse the target audience?
    - o How do you choose the right channel(s)? (which channel works best for micro-influencers?)
    - o Does it differ per client or/and micro-influencer?
- What is the most important element (or elements) in creating such a strategy?
- To what extent are the micro-influencers and/or brands involved in the process?
    - o Are micro/macro more involved?
    - o In which steps are they involved?
- Who creates the goals for a social media campaign?

- o   Does the brand provide goals?
- o   Is it a co-creation (between who)?

Identification micro-influencers + matching process

- How do you identify a micro-influencer on social media?
    - o   Is this an ongoing process of looking for possible micro-influencers?
    - o   Do you have a database?
- To what extent is the client involved in the selection process?
    - o   Does the client provide certain criteria?
- How do you match a brand with a micro-influencer?
    - o   Are there any steps you follow?
    - o   Or certain criteria you look at?
    - o   Who has the final say in this decision?
    - o   Is there a screening process? (manual or automated)

Development of social media campaign

- What are the steps in the creative process in creating messages for a micro-influencer social media campaign?
    - o   Does the micro-influencer have full freedom in content creation?
    - o   Does the agency or the client have a say in the type of content?
    - o   Or does the agency produce the content?
- To what extent is the social media content from the campaign in alignment with the collaborating brand's content?
    - o   Is the brands' content first analysed?
- Do you work with clients on project base or do you create long-term relationships?

Execution social media campaign

- How do you track, measure and analyse the social media campaign?
    - o   Are their certain tools you use?
    - o   Do the micro-influencers report to the agency themselves?
    - o   Do you provide an end-report for the client? (what does this contain)
- Does the client have real-time insights?

Main difference macro-micro

- What would you say is the key difference in the entire process of creating a social media campaign between micro and macro influencers?
    - In the level of involvement?
    - In the matching process?
    - In communication?
    - In content creation?

Technology

IA

- How does technology take place in the whole development process of a micro-influencer social media campaign?
- What do you think about the development in the influencer agencies field; the increase of automated influencer agencies?
- What is the value of non-automated influencer agencies vs. automated influencer agencies?

AIA

- Do you think the whole development of an influencer social media campaign should be an automated process?
    - Why should this be automated instead of done manually?
    - Are there any parts that could better be done manually?
- What is the value of automated influencer agencies vs. non-automated (or partly automated) influencer agencies?