

MASTER THESIS

**Micro-Influencer Motivations to Engage with the Carhartt WIP
Brand**

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ABSTRACT

Social media micro-influencer marketing strategy is a relatively new field of research and due to its constant developments, the findings of this research on micro-influencer motivations to represent the Carhartt WIP brand provide with a significant insight on current empirical reality. This qualitative research on *what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?* Offers the understanding for brand marketers to consider the importance of subculture micro-influencer motivational drivers in order to design a micro-influencer social media marketing strategy on Instagram.

Micro-influencers are often chosen by brand marketers with the aim to reach subculture communities of brand consumers, therefore a specific group of consumers who would be naturally interested in brands culture. The exploratory nature of main concepts influence, influencers and micro-influencers are aimed to clarify the current fluidity of understanding and existing misconceptions in regard to conceptualization of influencer categories when designing a branded influence marketing strategy with the aim to reach online subculture communities. Micro-influencers are likely to exert their influence in an organic way, which means that they do not focus on brand representation but rather choose to be a part of the brands culture which fits within their perception of their own subcultural context. Thematic analysis conducted during this study ultimately led to understanding of micro-influencer motivations as well as influencer marketing in general while looking at the example of Carhartt WIP brand. This study is mainly based on pre-existing literature findings, however the assessment of qualitative data obtained during the qualitative interviews better clarifies the main concepts of this study. An explanatory overview of themes related to micro-influencer motivations such as relationship, authenticity and freedom of self-expression, heritage, creativity and organic influence discovered in relation to the previous literature findings offer the insight on so called 'influence of culture' brand marketing strategy.

KEYWORDS: Influence, Influencer marketing, Social media, Instagram, micro-influencer, Carhartt WIP

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Introduction

Influencer marketing is a constantly evolving practice and there is a growing interest from brand marketers towards application of its strategy to their business. According to *Harvard Business Review*, 57% of marketers in America state that influencer generated marketing content can reach higher level of success than simple branded content communication on traditional media (Williams, 2019). In addition, a recent Forbes magazine article informs that “according to e-Marketer, Instagram, the current leading platform for influencer marketing by gross revenue, is predicted to grow to 112,5 million US based users in 2020 and 117,2 million the following year (Rahal, 2020). In addition, a social media marketing specialist Levin (2020) predicts that the influencer marketing industry is expected to grow its value up to 20 billion dollars until the year of 2024. These points were taken as an inspiration to have an enclosed look at the influencer marketing theory and to analyse influencer motivations to work with *Carhartt Work In Progress* brand and deliver branded messages to their audiences.

Influencer marketing is a strategy, nowadays executed through the use of social media platforms, mainly ‘Instagram’ with the aim to engage with a potential brand audience within selected communities. An influencer marketing by using digital means is a relatively new practice and majority of research within the field had been done by the advertising scholars from the economical or consumer centric perspective. The current theory offers an explanatory overview of what is influence and influencer marketing as well as give an insight on what essential components are to be considered when designing a successful influencer marketing strategy. The existing theory however does not offer enough sociological depth about the ‘influencer’ motivations to work professionally with certain brands and does not reveal the influencer perceptions about what does an ‘influencer’ or ‘micro-influencer’ mean to them as a profession title. In addition, the constantly developing online environment and social media developments are requiring a constant updates for the researcher’s knowledge on this topic. Above mentioned was taken as an opportunity to conduct an advertising and sociology-based research and to clarify a possible misconception regarding above mentioned concepts influence and micro-influencers which will be further revealed within this thesis.

The research aim is to answer the following research question: *what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?* Besides the

research question, it is of interest to answer the sub questions: to what extent the Carhartt WIP brand marketers are using brands' heritage as an asset to develop branded influence campaigns? And, does it affect the influencer motivations to work with the brand? There is an opportunity to improve a brand marketer understanding about the most essential factors determining influencers motivations to ensure a success-oriented communication with their audience and “delivery of corporate brand promises” (Balmer & Burghausen, 2015, p.365). The expected outcome of this research is to be of utility for brand marketers as well as advertising scholars and practitioners, providing fresh insights based on the empirical findings derived from this study, to which influencer marketing can be related as a discipline within the field of sociology of culture.¹ (O'Reilly, 2015).

The above mentioned Carhartt Work In progress brand will be viewed as an example in this thesis, providing insight into the brand's approach in engaging with the sub-culture influencers. Moreover, it is the intent of this study to elucidate how the Carhartt WIP brand manages to successfully and organically approach its market and consumers through the use of these influencers. Within the scope of this research, a Carhartt Work in Progress (Carhartt WIP) brand influencer² motivations will be analysed as an example and the findings will be compared to the pre-existing theory. Carhartt WIP evolved from the legendary American workwear brand *Carhartt Inc*³ and it continues to reflect the strong heritage roots originating from 1889 (Carhartt, 2020). In 1994 Carhartt WIP formed as a spinoff brand led by its Swiss founder Edwin Faeh, who brought it to the European market. Carhartt WIP brand plays a significant role within the street sub-culture's due to its involvement in street style, art, skateboard, BMX and music scene.

This research does consist of following sections: The first chapter offers an overview of literature findings from selected and topic related sources. The literature review section is

¹ Inspired from O'Reilly (2015) Arts Marketing “From a sociological point of view, arts marketing falls within the sociology of culture, and its offshoot the sociology of the arts (Alexander 2003; Tanner (ed.) 2003; Wolff 1993). A key thinker in this area is Bourdieu (e.g. 1993), whose work has to do, among other things, with the production, circulation and consumption of symbolic goods” (O'Reilly, 2015. p575). Alternatively: to further examine the influencer marketing from sociological perspective by focusing on influencers as ‘social actors’ engaging brand “culture as a social product situated within producer networks” (O'Reilly, 2015. p575).

² Influencers who have had a collaboration with the Carhartt WIP brand and represent the brand on their Instagram page.

³ <https://www.carhartt.com/nl/nl-nl>

aimed to discover two main concepts of this research: ‘influence’ and ‘micro-influencer’ as well as concepts such as motivation, authenticity and relationship.

Thus, the second and third chapter is dedicated to introducing the research question and to offer an overview of methodological approach to research within this master thesis. Finally, chapters four and five are committed to revealing the research results and final conclusion. The research goal is to complement existing academic theory and to optionally gain a new empirical finding as a result.

Finally, the concepts used within this thesis are related to advertising and marketing field and can be viewed from a marketing perspective while taking a significant role as brands’ strategical tools to build brand’s trust and credibility (Wiedmann et al., 2011.; Tabellion, Esch, 2019. Brown, Fiorella, 2013.; Balmer, Berghausen, 2015.; Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019).

1. Literature Review

1.1 Influence

The term ‘influence’ often used within the marketing discipline to promote a brand’s product or service, may be perceived as a variety of meanings by individuals and often there is a lack of clarity on how to approach it. Influence is often exhibited by an individual and often it is a person who has capacity of creating other individuals’ interest as well as influencing their actions_(Merriam-Webster.com, 2020; Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Therefore, influence can be expressed through action, by setting example to others.

Interesting to mention is the IKEA effect, which suggests that people are emotional beings and are likely to connect to the brand or product through the act of participation (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Mondal, 2016). In IKEA effect example consumer participation with the brands product is ensured through the opportunity to self-assemble the furniture which may be considered as emotional connection to the final product. It can be assumed that every experience of the world comes through emotions, and consumer’s knowledge of, e.g. brand culture, is gained by these experiences (Oubradous & Bal, 2011). The term consumer is important to mention since influence and influencer marketing is oriented towards successful emotional engagement of a potential consumer of the brand, which can be enabled with the

help of individuals (influencers) who exert influence over these consumers by often developing a relationship and therefore by emotionally connecting with them (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). In addition, the emotions communicated through the visual and textual branded content may influence consumer attitudes towards the brand (Straker, 2016).

The recent technological developments allow growing number of individuals and companies to exert their influence globally. There has been a shift from traditional influence channels (TV advertising and news) to a more person-oriented communication, mostly through social media engagement. This led to an understanding that influencer marketing is significantly more effective than traditional media such as radio, print advertising or blog posts (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). For example, Paul Lazarsfeld introduced two-step flow theory describing a shift away from traditional influence channels as a first step, whereas the second step would be opinion transfer from influencer to its peers or public audience (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019).

In terms of influence marketing the importance of consumer or social media follower involvement is crucial in building brands advocacy, which “is determined by the involvement of both the influencer and his or her audience” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013, ch.3). Finally, the social media engagement or involvement of consumer with the brands’ product or culture is happening within a multidimensional communication platform such as Instagram, where communication within the social networks is combined with the use of diverse online tools (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

1.2 Development of influencer marketing

The influence and influencer marketing origins may date back in history, nevertheless researching their origins is not the main orientation of this thesis. The focus is rather placed on the contemporary state of the field in 2020, and the history is only briefly highlighted to give a general understanding regarding its development. Influence marketing was researched by Daniel Edelman in the 1960s as a formal marketing strategy where he looked at celebrity influence aimed to endorse the brand awareness to its customers (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Edelman was one of the pioneers into this topic, having discovered its economic potential by analysing how using celebrity influence to affect masses of public’s perceptions can be beneficial for building a promotional brand product strategy (Brown, Fiorella, 2013).

In addition, the influencer marketing in regards to growing online opportunities can be viewed as the ‘soft-sell’ marketing practice, developed from the early 1900’s where it was

represented by two creatives Ernest Elmo Calkens and Theodore MacManus who focused on a product's 'use communicated' through visual representation rather than functional description (Okazaki, Mueller & Taylor, 2010). Further, in 1997 the soft-sell concept was introduced as an "advertising that sells debated with advocates of emotionally oriented advertising, which entertains consumers and creates bonds with them" (Okazaki, Mueller & Taylor, 2010, p. 6).

1.3 Word-of-mouth

Often influencers are reaching their audience or ‘peers’ through the ‘word-of-mouth’ (WOM), therefore through individual’s suggestions (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). The ‘word of mouth’ (WOM) is a common concept in marketing, and its most recent and significant development dates back to 20th century 1980’s and 1990’s (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). This marketing strategy allowed brands to express credibility to their audiences since they were targeting individuals who would deliver a ‘branded’ message to their network of trust (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

A significant use of celebrity influencers can be seen in 1980’s when supermodels were used to promote and suggest beauty products, but later in mid 1990’s the shift happens and they are likely replaced by popular movie cast members, while 2000’s signify the peer-to-peer power of word of mouth leaving the celebrity influence behind (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). Great example is the advertising campaign by Dove called ‘Real beauty’ which raised awareness of regular and natural women (Brown, Fiorella, 2013).

Further development of influencer marketing and especially peer-to-peer influencer category significantly grew with the Internet 2.0 technological development (Brown, Fiorella, 2013.; Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). The social media platforms enabled by Internet are now enabling and mediating new levels of influence over communities (followers) which can vary in size (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). Successful example can be dated back to 2010 where branded Old Spice campaign ‘Smell like a Man’ led to high online engagement between peer-to-peer bloggers, and influencers ‘inhabiting’ social media environment (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019).

1.4. Use of influencers in brands marketing practice

The influencer marketing use by brand marketers emerges from the marketing strategy of using individuals with large network of target audience as central mediator of brands communication (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). It is valuable to note that in today's world, social networks are significant to public figure representation (Marin, 2019). As mentioned above, in order for brands to deliver the best customer experience and service, an emotional connection with the consumer plays an important role, thus the “branding strategy addresses the growing trend of consumers seeking emotional relationships with the brand” (Kim & Sullivan, 2019, p.1). Influencers are becoming an important part of the branding strategies in

terms of relationship building with brand consumer audiences as well as in order to build consumer's trust towards the brand (Tabellion, Esch, 2019). Besides trust it also builds brand's strength, which is reflected through behaviours or associations by brand consumers (Wiedmann et al., 2011).

Branded marketing campaigns often include use of 'common' emotions such as love, joy, and sexuality related expressions designed to persuade consumer into buying or conversating about brands product. That connects well to the earlier mentioned need from the brands to approach consumers as emotional beings. Thus, it is important that the brand marketing strategy is built on common grounds with its consumer lifestyle, attitudes and culture (Wiedmann et al., 2011). To clarify, attitudes are cognitive responses of either approving or disapproving something, either positive confirmation on brands' culture, or negative (Wiedmann et al., 2011). The evaluation of this brand experience stored in the consumers' memory will likely be reflected through their attitudes, which is considered one of the core elements 'influencing' consumer decision making. Therefore, the element of 'identification' is important – the level of 'living the brands' culture', in other words credibility which leads to building trustworthy relationship with the brand (Wiedmann et al., 2011).

Credibility is an element which takes significant place within the influencer marketing strategy. Instead of naturally spreading messages between friend and family networks, influencers are credible individuals, approved by the community (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). They are individuals who purposefully or naturally work for the brand and are ready to deliver brand's message and culture to their audiences (followers), whether it is large personal network or celebrity fan base (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). There is a high degree of significance related to the influencer's word of mouth (WOM), which can be considered one of the most powerful marketing tools and is often used to influence a consumer decision-making processes (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). It is a constant ongoing communication and relationship building process between influencers and consumers who trust them, therefore trusting their opinions about the brands' product (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019).

The measurements of success for an influencer marketing strategy used by brand marketers varies from brand financial gains to the measurement of consumer engagement levels with the brand messages which are distributed via influencer channels on social media to their communities – measuring the sentiments of consumers and their relationships with the brand (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). The above mentioned WOM is an interesting phenomenon in terms of understanding the initial reasons of influencer marketing development which

signifies two-dimensional communication flow emerging from one-direction communication to ‘multidirectional groupthink’ or even at certain cases, so called ‘bandwagonism’ (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). In short, bandwagonism arose from WOM marketing existing and operating prior and outside of social media. This concept is used to describe an individuals’ attitudes or preferences towards community and how this community accept a certain belief of this individual (Brown, Fiorella, 2013), which is similar to earlier mentioned influence through authenticity. So, the community members are ‘jumping’ in the same wagon of belief caused by the snowball effect (Brown, Fiorella, 2013).

Another relevant term by Brown and Fiorella (2013) is the cultural groupthink as a concept evolved from Robert Axelrod’s⁴ investigation of social influence. Axelrod’s findings were following: “people are more likely to interact with others who share many of their cultural attributes and that these interactions tend to increase the number of cultural attributes they share (thus making them more likely to interact again)” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013, ch.5)⁵

A social and cultural groupthink is a “psychological phenomenon that describes how the need for harmony within a social group forces its members to assume a belief, opinion, or attitude, even when some leaders provide a genuine evaluation of the virtues of the alternative” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013, ch.5). Originating from Irving Janis theory from 1970’s, “the concept has been given renewed importance due to the mass adoption of social media communication by the global community. A modern application of Janis’ groupthink is the ‘wisdom of crowds’, which represent the sentiment: If enough people post something online—regardless of whether or not you know them—what they say must be true” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013, ch.5).

Brand developed influencer marketing strategies are likely focusing on relationship between digital and social media, brands and its consumers (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). And in terms of trust, consumers are likely to engage in a positive manner with source they perceive as personal and well known (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019).

1.4.1. Social media technology development and influencer marketing

Social media technologies are changing at a fast pace and especially Instagram "has become an important advertising platform for brands looking to reach consumers online”

⁴ “Robert Axelrod, professor of political science and public policy at the University of Michigan” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013)

⁵ This is an e-book and did not show a page number.

(Evans, Phua, Lim & Jun, 2017, p138). In addition, social media technologies allowed large amounts of individuals to gain an influencer status since social media mostly allows free expression⁶ of opinions while reaching larger groups of audiences (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). From the marketing perspective, influencers are defined as individuals whose opinions matter to their target group (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). One of the most recent Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report (IMBR) (2020) offers a great insight presenting data from 4000 surveyed field professionals⁷. Interesting finding from this survey is that a significant number of brands give their preference to micro-influencers rather than mega (celebrity) influencers (IMBR, 2020). The explanation is that the micro-influencers are likely to possess very focus oriented online audience within a certain field of interest (IMBR, 2020). From the brand or product marketer perspective it was found that 91% US survey respondents find the influencer marketing an efficient way of advertising (IMBR, 2020). A micro-influencers' follower amount might be lower than mega influencers', but micro-influencers' audience are more likely to be interested in certain topic or lifestyle rather than name of the influencer as it would often be in case of celebrity influencer (IMBR, 2020). The Figure 1 showcases that in the recent years "the ratio of mega-influencers (with one-million plus followers) to micro-influencers (with fewer than 100 000 followers) rose from 1:3 in 2016 to 1:10 in 2019" (IMBR, 2020). That showcases that the brand or product marketers are more likely to choose micro-influencers.

⁶ Some cases are exceptional and need to align with social media policies. "The First Amendment protects individuals from government censorship. Social media platforms are private companies, and can censor what people post on their websites as they see fit" (<https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/first-amendment-center/primers/free-expression-on-social-media/> Retrieved, 03.06.2020).

⁷ Marketing agencies, brands and other industry professionals

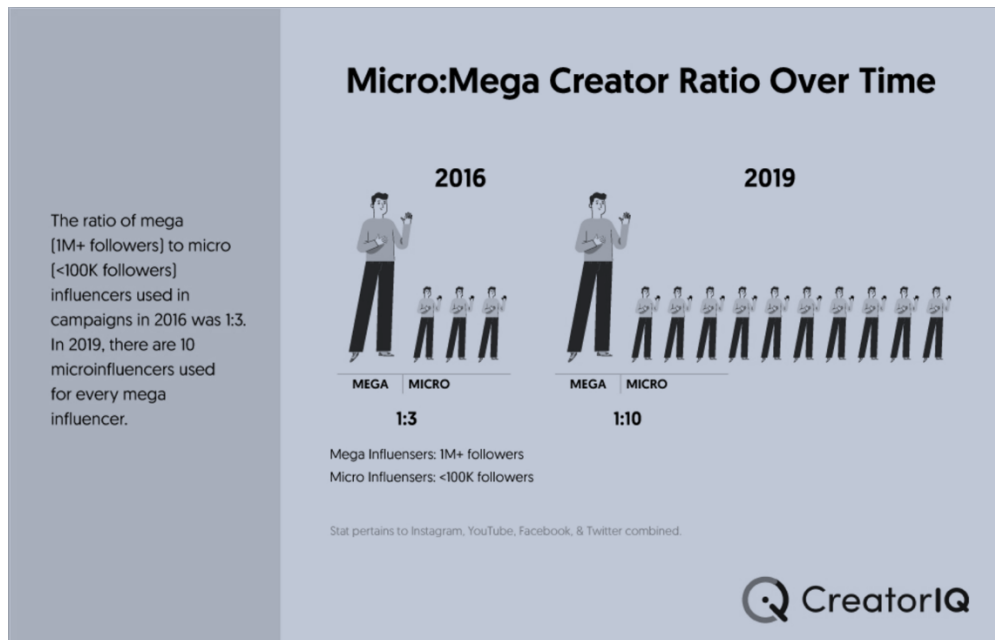


Figure 1: Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report (2020)

The influencer marketing was found to be a positive experience for majority of marketers and 79% US survey respondents shared their willingness to dedicate marketing budget for this type of advertising (IMBR, 2020). Brand marketers choose influencer marketing to mainly improve the brands’ “awareness rather than encourage sales” (IMBR, 2020). Additionally, influencer marketing can often be cost savvy and deliver the right type audience to the brand in comparison to other advertising options (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). The survey results showed that 72% of marketers “believe that the quality of customers from influencer marketing campaigns is better than other forms of marketing” (IMBR, 2020).

It is important to mention the popularity of Instagram use for the influencer marketing purposes. As shown by the Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report (2020), 87% of the respondents use and describe Instagram as a crucial online platform for influencer marketing practice⁸. Moreover, 47% of the respondents revealed that they do invest in micro-influencer

⁸ 46% of the respondents tap into Facebook for their campaigns, 36% YouTube, 22% Twitter, 16% LinkedIn (presumably those involved with B2B companies), and a further 15% spread across more specialist social networks. The most notable differences are a decline in Twitter from 24% to 22%, an increase in LinkedIn from 12% to 16%, and an increase in other networks from 12% to 15%. Presumably, the rise reflects the recent popularity of Twitch and TikTok

use for their strategy⁹ (IMBR, 2020). One of the defined challenges within the field of the influencer marketing is often a misconception that influencer must be a celebrity, but “the reality is that people trust micro-influencers far more than they do stars, and are far more likely to take notice of a micro-influencer’s recommendation than one made by celebrity” (IMBR, 2020).

1.4.2. Influencer as a profession title

After gaining general insights on influencer marketing development as well as its relation to WOM marketing strategy, it is of interest in regard to the research question to understand how the influencer status can be determined. How do we know who can be considered an influencer and what is the difference between an influencer and micro-influencer? It is of value to mention that becoming an influencer is not necessarily a career-oriented decision, but it often happens naturally, by others recognizing the authenticity and work of the individual who is capable to arouse their audience’s interest. The influencer’s success is often determined by their consistency and genuine self-representation and if assumed that “most humans live in a series of hierarchically inclusive groups” (Caccioppo, 2002, p.81), the peers are likely to make a decision to follow and trust an influencer as a credible source of information (Miles, 2019).

One of the early influencer types developed in 1980’s was ‘the marketing maven’ (Brown, Fiorella, 2013; Backaler 2018). Maven, as found in literature, is an individual with extensive personal network, likely of female gender who, by utilizing word of mouth, communicated to their peers, often purposefully delivering branded messages (Brown, Fiorella, 2013; Backaler, 2018). In other light, explanation by Oxford dictionary offers that, an influencer is “a person or thing that influences somebody/something, especially a person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by recommending it on social media” (Oxford dictionary, 2020). Another definition given by Childers, Lemon and Hoy (2019) is following: those individuals or persons can range from celebrities or professionals to non-professional community members. As earlier mentioned, there is a

(IMBR, 2020). (<https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report-2020/>)

⁹ 23% of the budget dedicated for celebrity influencers (IMBR, 2020).

misconception in terms of what influencer as a profession title means and the further theory of this section is dedicated to give a concise explanation.

As Brown & Fiorella, (2013) and Backaler (2018) explain, influencers are individuals who by using their social media means distribute branded messages or content. Due to the growing need to gain a better understanding for brands in terms of the right choice of influencer, “a clear distinction between influencers who are customers and those who are not” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013. ch11) must be made. The tools to make such a distinction fall outside the scope of this thesis, but it is a point worth mentioning in terms of influencer marketing strategy. It is also worth to explain the often-used term ‘brand advocate’ and its difference from influencer. Brand “advocates are existing customers who, based on a superior customer experience, voluntarily recommend the business brand or product” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013. ch.11). Therefore, the main difference between brand advocates and influencers is their status as either non-customer or customers. There is also a difference between the goals of influencer marketing campaigns and brand advocate marketing campaigns such as “each leverages the power of referrals, but influence marketing attracts leads through general audience engagement and promotion, whereas advocate marketing focuses on improving relationships with existing customers” (Brown & Fiorella, 2013. ch.11).

1.4.3. Micro-influencers

Influencers are opinion leaders, often trusted, credible experts who give feedback, likely on their social media (either paid or freely chosen) about branded products (Tabellion, Esch, 2019). That in return may lead to higher level of advertised product’s credibility (Tabellion, Esch, 2019). In today’s market it is important to consider that an ‘influencer’ is not necessarily a celebrity, as it can be as well an empowering non-celebrity individual with large following network or self-made online opinion leader. Often unpaid, the influencers are creating content relevant to their audiences’, which according to their preferences or attitudes, will determine brands’ favoring or decline within their networks (Tabellion, Esch, 2019). Moreover, from the brands’ perspective it is a certain challenge for brand marketers to decide whether the chosen influencer is a right fit to branded communication goals and whether it will reach the right target audience which may vary per influencer type (Brown, Fiorella, 2013).

Within this thesis the focus is placed on micro-influencers, a concept well defined in the literature (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Miles, 2019). Brown and Fiorella (2013) describes micro-influencers as a group who can reach smaller groups of audience but have higher effect on their decision-making processes rather than macro-influencers who are mainly communicating with general audiences. Brands may need to use higher number of micro-influencers to achieve impact on a larger audience (Miles, 2019), and according to this literature I assume that personal relationship micro-influencer may have with their followers can directly impact followers' behavior (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). In their theory, Brown and Fiorella (2013) highlight the micro-influencer type, defined as individuals with lower number of followers, which appears to be more relevant for the Carhartt WIP brand strategy than the celebrity status macro-influencer type. To showcase how the above mentioned can be viewed from the marketing perspective, a recent source of literature — Instagram Power (2019) by Miles was reviewed. In Miles' theory it is explained that there are differences between definitions of influencers and the success of its marketing, however he did find that there is a pattern of five common levels that are used to distinguish a type of influencers. The following framework according to Miles (2019) is: “**Nano influencers**—From 10 to 1,000 followers, **Micro influencers**—From 1,000 to 10,000 followers, **Macro influencers**—From 10,000 to 100,000 followers, **Mega influencers**—From 100,000 to 1,000,000 followers, **Celebrity influencer**—More than 1,000,000 followers” (Miles, 2019, p.231).

The first two levels of influencers, ‘nano’ and ‘micro’ are quite similar to the aforementioned brand advocates, since they are often happy to work in exchange for free branded goods without financial benefit (Miles, 2019). The higher number of followers and the higher the demand from the brands towards the influencer is, the more likely these influencers will do a transition away from free branded goods into financial gain (Miles, 2020). The opportunity to work with the nano and micro-influencers opens the doors for the marketers with smaller budgets since they can make use of “dozens, hundreds, or thousands of influencers who have a smaller, but still meaningful, reach. This unlocks massive untapped potential” (Miles, 2019, p.230).

To conclude this section, micro-influencers are individuals, often closely connected to target consumers social, personal circles which help the brand reach their target consumer on a very personal communication level, at the same time potentially affecting decision making

processes of targeted consumer audience instead of general mass of audiences (Brown, Fiorella, 2013).

1.5. Motivation, authenticity and relationship

A brief introduction of the concept of motivation is necessary, since the main aim of this study is to understand the influencer motivations to represent the Carhartt WIP brand. Heckhausen (2020) suggest that humans' motivation is "always connected with reality construction... necessity to act intentionally in the environment" (Heckhausen, 2020, p.60). In terms of influence marketing, I expect to view the influencer as the 'acting person' within the social media environment and the person who is "producing objects or changing objects in the environment" of social media (*Ibid.*). Therefore, the acting person is 'constructing artifacts' of norms for behaviour, and... mental knowledge" (Heckhausen, 2020, p.61). Also, the person is capable to 'adapt' or align their surroundings to their expected outcomes (Heckhausen, 2020). The strategy to use influencers in brands culture reality construction involves an authentic relationship and dominance with or over an influencer's community of followers.

As explained by Dupont (2014) "the dominant group is primarily able to determine and define what is authentic" (Dupont, 2014, p.650). As previously stated, an influencer is a person who can guide other's actions and Dupont's (2014) study on 'Authentic Subcultural Identities and Social Media: American Skateboarders and Instagram' suggests that "the individual becomes "real" or "authentic" when they identify with and commit to the identity, perform within the boundaries prescribed by the subculture, and the group confirms their identity" (Dupont, 2014, p.650) and that "a single confirmation will not allow the individual to maintain a subcultural identity; instead, established members of the subculture must continually reconfirm the individual's claims of authenticity" (Dupont, 2014, p.650). According to above mentioned, I expect that the influencer motivations in terms of brand representation choices will lay in the ability to shape their own environment according to their preferences, exertion of authenticity over the influencer's community as well as, relationship with the influencer's community and the brand is expected to be a motivational driver in terms of the brand representation. And it may be considered that the influencer has the "need for constructing a reality in which one finds oneself emerges from the uncertainty

of a self who is conscious of ambiguity and who has to cope with future events. Exchanges with the environment elicit basic emotions that are specifically human and connected with the conscious representation of the self and the world... crucial emotion for human beings but security, safety, and familiarity” (Heckhausen, 2020, p.61). Finally, in Backaler’s (2018) book ‘Digital Influence’ it is explained that an Influencer must represent authenticity in anything they do, to maintain their audience’s trust. For example if you are a 100% eco-friendly brand and reach out to the Influencer to ‘post’ your brands product and they do it, but their general lifestyle choices are not eco-friendly, it may cause an audience’s disappointment because it is non-authentic, it is not genuine (Backaler, 2018).

1.5.2. Relationship

Relationship between the brand marketers and influencers may be considered an important driver of influence marketing success (Backaler, 2018). That may lead to genuine engagement with brands’ culture (it also supports the above-mentioned authenticity) while acting as a bricolage of trust development within Influencer’s personal network of like-minded followers (Backaler, 2018). According to Backaler (2018) a several factors are playing an important role when it comes to influencer-brand relationship and their motivations to represent the brand: building the relationship and thinking in the long term relationship perspective, identification of mutual interest and exchange of both-sided value, seeking authenticity and allowing the freedom of expression and keeping the brand’s content relatable to influencer’s content (Backaler, 2018).

1.5.3. Influencers’ relationship with their community

For the brand who decides to work with the influencer, the community or micro-community is very important: “a targeted, engaged, and growing community is the ultimate measure of success for an influencer” (Backaler, 2018, p.30). A strategy often applied to determine the right micro-community is geofencing, which allows the brand marketers to identify the right situations to direct their marketing strategies towards (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). In terms of influencer marketing, the notion of dyadic relationships between their community need to be considered. If we perceive of an influencer’s online environment as consisting of e.g. 1000 followers, with each of them having only a notion about the others

while located in front of their phone screens, their direct relationship with the influencer figure constitutes a dyad. Explained by Brown and Fiorella (2013) “A dyad is a group of two people, the smallest possible social group. A dyadic relationship refers to discussions or communication between two people involving their mutual ideas, thoughts, behaviors, or ideals. A chance meeting between two persons at a trade show or between the host and participant within an online webinar, for example, that does not continue after the initial event does not have a lasting effect on each other. The theory suggests that “the impact of personal interactions between two people with shared culture, ideals, or circumstances is greater than the looser interactions such as someone reading another’s blog” (Brown, Fiorella, 2013, ch.5). It is likely that the dyadic relationship between the influencer figure and their follower leads to more trust and acceptance of recommendation within the latter.

1.5.4 Personal ideology and situational factors

The influencer follower or community opinions may be influenced by external ‘local situational factors’ often affected by economic or political circumstances (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). As showcased on Wiedmann’s (2011) ‘Importance performance analysis’ (See Figure 2), it was found that besides diversity of brand strategic goals, “*bonding and credibility* should be prioritized first.

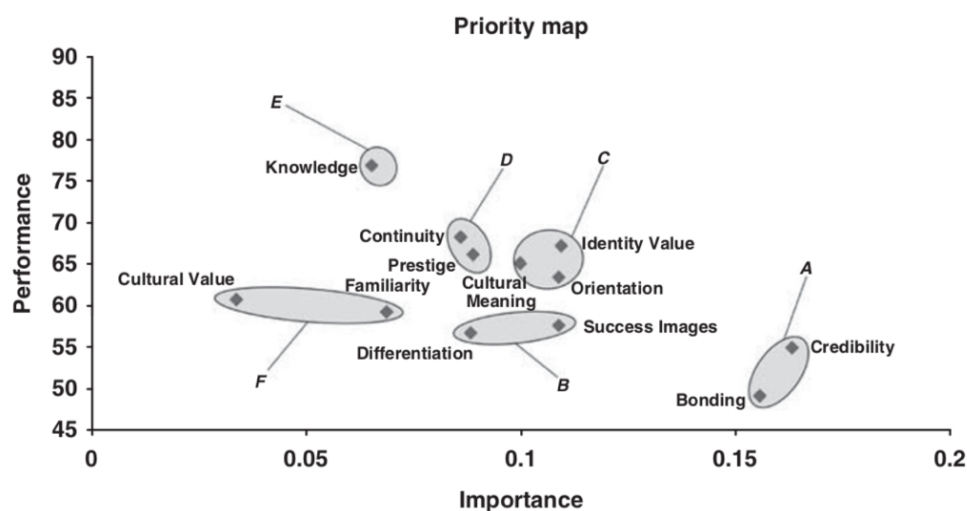


Figure 2: IPA (Importance performance analysis)¹⁰ (Wiedmann et al., 2011. p192).

¹⁰ “Used PLS-based importance performance analysis (IPA) to demonstrate the diagnostic value of our model (Slack, 1994). This analysis shows the relevance of each dimensions of perceived heritage value, potentially helping brand managers develop effective brand

After the first two priorities, next are *differentiation* and *success images* as drivers of segment (Wiedmann et al., 2011, p.191). The brand via influencer medium can engage with the consumer through the means of ‘situational influence’. The term situational influence is borrowed from the psychology studies, also named ‘situationism’ (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). As it was mentioned earlier in this paragraph, not only brand-influencer-consumer communicative interaction determines consumer perception and decision-making processes, but also independent external factors play certain role on consumers subconsciousness (Brown, Fiorella, 2013). These external factors as explained by Brown and Fiorella (2013) are societal factors related to a community’s location, ideological background and culture. Mainly distinguished factors of external situational influence exerted by macro or micro influencer are communities, social and cultural groupthink, personal ideology, and environmental factors.

After applying all mentioned priorities to an influencer marketing strategy, brand marketers must be capable to predict the outcome of planned campaign by looking beyond the level of influencers audience, engagement rate or audience size, as external factors do play an important role (Brown & Fiorella). In general, there are also other several factors playing a situational role: ideology in terms of persons approach to reality, familial situation, environment (physical and digital), emotional state, demographics, decision making lifecycle (awareness, needs-identification) and these all play a significant role in the levels of engagement with the influencer created content (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

1.5.5. The influence distribution model on social media

Working towards the Carhartt WIP brand example and towards the use of sub-culture and micro influence in their influence marketing strategy, Dupont’s (2020) theory on Authentic Subcultural Identities and Social Media is relevant to this study. Instagram is mainly as a platform for visual representation and its users may upload visual content adjusted to their preferences, including its textual description (Dupont, 2020). Therefore, “over time, images accumulate in the user’s stream and they produce a visual

programs... illustrates the results of the IPA for affective brand strength using a priority map” (Wiedmann et al., 2011. p191).

autobiography... Moreover, the media in one's feed – when viewed holistically and over time – produce a layered picture of the user's social world” (Dupont, 2020, p.652).

In times of highly advanced technological developments the use of photography shifted from its communicative intention of documentation and remembrance (Budge & Burness, 2018) to the self-representation tool which allows for sharing ephemeral experiences with others (Budge & Burness, 2018). Instagram as a photo sharing social media platform is most used by opinion leaders, tastemakers and influencers and this phenomenon has created new digital communities, that interact and influence the content of the accounts (Casaló 2018). It has been proved that originality and creativity are key elements to succeed as an influencer on social media. Besides that, the influencers network value authenticity and identity correspondence and any traces of commercial or marketing-guided posts would lead to negative connotations from both the brand and the influencers' side (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018).

1.5.6. Strategic action fields

As previously mentioned in this thesis, people are likely living in socially inclusive groups or within a certain social order, which suggests the potential success of choosing a micro-influencer-oriented marketing strategy due to its possibly higher impact on its community. Bordieusian action field theory can be viewed in connection to “social order where actors (who can be individual or collective) interact with knowledge of one another under a set of common understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field (including who has power and why), and the field’s rules” (McAdam, 2011., p.3). Considering the influencer marketing as a certain field of action, the influencers and their created work can be viewed as a ‘social capital’ (Tampakis, 2016). Inspired from Bourdieu, Tampakis (2016) explains that a “social capital ... is ‘the aggregate of the actual and or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ [Bourdieu 1986, 51]” (Tampakis, 2016, p.814). Interesting that Bordieusian theory reviews capital as conversions between networks and economical capital, which essentially develops other capitals. Moreover, “capital conversions and flows act more as ‘social energy’ than as capital flows in economics: There are conversion losses, uphill battles for legitimacy, and relative autonomy in the treatment of different fields. And thus, brings us necessarily to the concept of the field. Initially meant to denote ‘a certain distribution structure of some kind of capital’ (Tampakis, 2016, pp.814-815). According to this literature I do assume that the influencers are part of social capital and do take a power position over their network “and determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by the present and potential situation in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)” (Tampakis, 2016, p.815). Therefore, it can be assumed that when brands are choosing to use an influencer marketing strategy, they do exert a brand-dominant content, ideology etc. upon the influencer’s network since the brand has means of capital that holds power of influence (Tampakis, 2016).

1.6. Corporate Brand Heritage of Carhartt Work in Progress

The interest to analyze the Carhartt WIP brand case in terms of influencer marketing is related to my personal motivation to gain a sociological insight in this brand's long existing influence marketing strategy, allowing me to gain deeper understanding of their approach to influencer marketing. While the Carhartt WIP is relying on its original heritage of Carhartt Inc, workwear clothing line which is present in the market for more than 100 years, it is currently gaining a high-level growing popularity in today's social media environment, with 1.1 million followers on @carharttwip official Instagram page which sparks an interest to use it as an example. Recent survey of 40,960 respondents which analyzed worldwide street wear brand popularity, offers a statistic that informs of Carhartt WIP brand taking 8th place within the most popular brands, including well-known brands such as Nike or Adidas (Statista.com, 2019). The result of the survey indicates that Carhartt WIP can be considered an influential brand, especially within the subculture groups.

Carhartt WIP did start as experimentation with an 'All American' concept idea implemented in founder's original business named Big Star which was a whole business model offering a selection of diverse US clothing items "with an authentic background among them series of Carhartt workwear staples" (Carhartt WIP Archives, 2016, p.20). Further, by successfully partnering with the new design team member Salomee Faeh (Edvin Faeh's future wife at that time) joining in mid-eighties, a decision was made to approach Carhartt workwear brand directly with the aim to represent it in Europe (Carhartt WIP Archives, 2016). The Big Star became one of the first retailers in the Europe's market offering broader variation of Carhartt clothing range and "a few years later, they were given the license to produce their own Carhartt garments under the name Work in Progress" (Carhartt WIP Archives, 2016, p.20). The Faehs approached original Carhartt design and adapted it to Europe's market while at the same time keeping "the brand authentic on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean" (Carhartt WIP Archives, 2016, p.21). This is an example of how maintaining the original brand's identity, in other words brands' heritage which will be explained later within this paper, the newly established Work in Progress became a success case in the retail market.

1.6.1. Carhartt WIP, a Spinoff of Carhartt Inc

Prior to looking at Carhartt Work in Progress (WIP) brand heritage, it is worth to connect it to the concept of ‘spinoff brand’. According to Wenting (2008) spinoff brands are successful firms distracted from their parent companies. In case of Carhartt WIP, it is distracted from Carhartt, originating as American workwear brand with its Detroit roots since 1989. Considering the WIP’s growing success it does connect well to ‘spinoff brand’ concept.

Routines in terms of spinoff’s must be considered as ‘organizational skills’ inherited from the parent company and aren’t limited to the skills of individual. Organizational routines are obtained by firms or brand’s practice of ‘learning by doing’ which can be considered ‘experience knowledge’ as well as tacit knowledge. Thus, while spinoff brands are often independent from parent companies, they drive their success through routine replication in that way they do transfer the parent brands knowledge to their brand (Wenting, 2008). It may be considered important for the new brand to have enough strength to survive in the market and ‘entrants suffering from a liability of newness can overcome this by acquiring pre-entry experience” (Wenting, 2008, p.599). Note that the spinoffs are considered to be brands and companies which transfer their knowledge and routines within same industry (Wenting, 2008). Brands descending from parent companies according to Wenting (2008) are considered to have higher chances of becoming successful than start-up companies without established routines. Routine replication and knowledge transfer can be directly linked to brand heritage aspect.

The corporate brand heritage is of interest in Carhartt WIP brand’s case since its roots and brand communication is derived from “indisputably one of the most recognizable of all American working culture/class “heritage brands”” (Sinofzik, Warnett & Kessler, 2016, p.15). Heritage within this paper is defined as brands’ history as well as everything what brand had done in the past and does now, in its ‘future’ moment (Harrison, 2013). The rest of this section is dedicated to explanation of what does term heritage mean as well as what developments it has undergone and finally, what connection it offers to this thesis.

Most of the heritage related objects are controlled, overseen, defined and listed by expert- led institutions¹¹ but not every aspect of heritage can apply to rules of listing and

¹¹ UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

categorizing and, therefore there is a distinction between official (listed and categorized) and unofficial heritage (Harrison, 2013). The concept of official heritage is related to professional practices and its meanings determined by experts whereas in contrary the concept of unofficial heritage is linked to diverse set of practices related to socially active processes which are not recognized by structure of legislation (Harrison, 2013).

Harrison's (2013) theory offers that heritage is produced as an outcome of relationship between people and their environments and through its dialogue between diversity of actors social, political and environmental issues are tackled. An unofficial heritage practices such as dialogical heritage and intangible heritage, which will not be viewed at large throughout this thesis, led to innovative modes of heritage making - involving humans and objects in interconnected, creative ways enabling their expressions and making of identity (Harrison, 2013). Therefore, these practices are unofficial and recognized as separate form of heritage which holds high cultural value, but its rather hard to categorize its expression as per certain set of rules (Harrison, 2013). The intangible heritage is human co-produced, and it is under constant process of the change (Harrison, 2013). To conclude this section the concept of dialogical and intangible heritage connects well to an influence marketing use by the brands due to its interconnected relationship and co-productive nature.

1.6.2. Heritage Used as a Corporate Resource

Drawing a connection between the influencer marketing and the corporate heritage concept, both can be considered an important tool for the brands communication with existing and potential consumer. Brand's heritage may be perceived as one of the success drivers in marketing management practice which allows improving brands strength and credibility. As an example, in their influence marketing strategy, Carhartt WIP uses skate culture influencers and individuals or does collaborations with long existing record studio brands, artists etc. But "Carhartt was never strictly a skate or BMX brand, nor has it strived to be" (Sinofzik, Warnett & Kessler, 2016, p.23). As a brand it focuses on engagement with relevant subcultures and often communicate its branded content with the mediation of brand's official Instagram as well as its micro-influencer's Instagram platforms.

defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.
(<https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>)

The corporate heritage literature mainly focuses on consumer decision making processes and managerial implications and it is highly relevant in connection to sociological analysis of influencer marketing in terms of discovering the motivations of influencers to work with the brands. And as discussed earlier, the influencers can be viewed as key social actors who “accumulate cultural and symbolic capital as source of power” (O’Reilly, 2015, p.575). For Carhartt WIP, as a brand which gradually grew into a hub for street culture, an important role in its success was played by its influencers “operating outside strict disciplinary drawers, to promote diversity” (Sinofzik, Warnett & Kessler, 2016, p.23).

Therefore it ‘gives’ the brand authenticity and personality as well as it enables adaptability to adjust to the social or economic situations of present by innovating its original identity according to “present and future consumer needs” (Wiedmann et.al, 2011, p.192). As Wiedmann (2011) explains, the heritage can be used a resource to manage brand’s identity and that allows the brand to maintain its relevance in time as well as it acts a bridge connecting different consumer groups and networks. Adapting the influencer marketing strategy allows the brand to introduce its culture through the use of the heritage aspect which in return allows the consumers, connected to influencer networks, to link their identity “with a brand as consistent with one’s behaviour and self-image” (Wiedmann et al., 2011, p.184). Heritage therefore is likely used as resource to strengthen the brands marketing strategy and build brands identity which is attractive to consumers and “ultimately cultivating the heritage of a brand is key to consumer brand image construction and to the continuing success of brands” (Wiedmann et al., 2011, p.192).

1.7. Subculture and Social Media

Carhartt WIP brand’s culture was built by involving subcultural communities, often an opinion leader (previously mentioned professional skaters for example) representation and “subculturalists and subculture members often create alternative social systems that reject key elements of the hegemonic ideology of middle-class society... They build identities outside of the prescribed performances and dominant tastes of the middle-class... Developing and performing a subcultural identity allows youth to obtain status and respect within a self-contained alternative social world” (Dupont, 2020, p.649). Subculture can be described as rebellious attitude against dominant culture norms, often represented by media¹² “and

¹² Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, video.

television, often introduce these choices to the would-be subculturalists, consuming and producing media also creates opportunities for unique subcultural practices and identities to arise” (Dupont, 2020, p.649). Dupont (2020) notes that subcultural “participants regularly consume and produce media” (Dupont, 2020, p.649).

If looking at Carhartt WIP social media such as Instagram for example, it is noticeable that the skateboarding culture is taking a significant role within branded content. Considering the above-mentioned social media importance between the subculturalists, the use of skateboarding culture allows the brand to be “escaping and challenging the world of the middle-class or “mainstream” in its communication” (Dupont, 2020, p.650). That also allows the brand to hold its authenticity and “in practice, authentic skate norms, attitudes, and values emphasize self-discovery and self-development through creativity, risk, autonomy, conspicuous poverty, and alternative masculinity... authentic skate identity has depended upon one's class, gender, race, location, and the individual’s position within the dominant social structure... While skaters emphasize a rhetoric of inclusion and openness, historically, developing an authentic skate identity has depended upon one's class, gender, race, location, and the individual’s position within the dominant social structure ... working-class skaters who enter with lower levels of economic, educational, and cultural capital struggle to attain and maintain status ” (Dupont, 2020, p.650).

To conclude this section, the opportunities social media offer to skateboarders and a brand who is working with this type of micro-influencers do play an important role in the identity creation (Dupont, 2020). In addition, it can be assumed that the social media act as a tool to strengthen relationships between the brand and skateboard community. It would take additional research to understand to what extent the social media shapes the skateboarding culture (Dupont, 2020), and within this research it is expected not to answer this question. To conclude, the literature review section, did offer a broad insight in various theoretical concepts and further in *Results and Discussion* section, a relevant to this research empirical findings will be further explored.

2. Research Question

Building upon a broad set of theoretical findings which gave a general overview of the main two concepts ‘influence’ and ‘micro-influencer’, answering the following research

question is of interest: *what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?* In addition, it is of interest to answer two sub questions: 1) to what extent the Carhartt WIP brand marketers are using brand's heritage as an asset to develop branded influence campaigns, and 2) does it affect the influencer's motivation to work with the brand?

As the theory findings show, the social media influencer marketing can be considered a relatively new field of research (Tabellion, Esch, 2019) in order to gain an understanding of micro-influencers motivations as an individuals who has capacity of creating subculture group's interest and trust towards their personal and branded preferences (Brown & Fiorella, 2013) . In addition, the literature review findings offer that a successful influencer marketing' strategy may develop a beneficial and emotional relationship between the brand and its consumer (Tabellion, Esch, 2019). Based on this literature, I expect that consumers are more willing to view influencer created content at a more personal level based on their own interest, as well as reflecting on Mondal's (2016) IKEA effect it is expected that micro-influencers as a members of smaller community having the same field of interest with their peers are likely to influence their audience's openness towards their suggestions while ensuring a participation in the culture, for example skateboarding culture. As suggested by Backaler (2018) influencer's authenticity might play a significant role in terms of maintaining their audience's trust and in Carhartt WIP brands' example micro-influencers can be considered as credible individuals approved by their followers (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). In addition, the co-producing nature of brand's corporate heritage and the use micro-influencers in brands' marketing strategy in relation to this research can be viewed as an added value to Carhartt WIP brands' influence. the use of micro-influencers in brands' marketing strategy can be considered beneficial for both for the brand and for the micro-influencer, since the micro-influencer is likely to engage with the activities or products within their social, cultural groupthink. Since Carhartt WIP brands's strategy as it was mentioned earlier is to approach the subculture individuals rather than mass audiences research of micro-influencer, as the right fit influencer marketing category, motivations can be considered relevant to this thesis.

The expected outcome is to understand the influencer's lived experiences and motivations to engage and represent the Carhartt WIP brands' culture and to empirically research the main motivation drivers in terms of influencer collaboration with Carhartt WIP

brand. In addition, the aim is to gain an understanding to what extent brands corporate heritage is playing role in guiding influencer's preferences to represent the brand. This will offer a valuable insight and empirical perspective complimentary to previous literature findings while shifting away from managerial, economy-based implications towards sociological research offering a perspective of the micro-influencers as individuals perceptions in regard to their motivations and their Social media related profession title, which is from sociological perspective an under-researched area within the field of influencer marketing.

3. Methods

The qualitative paradigm was chosen for this research with the aim to answer the research question: *what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?* Qualitative findings are aimed to support an understanding of the 'lived experiences' of the selected micro-influencer interviewee sample (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). To gain a better understanding of the selected research field, a sub question is used: how does Carhartt WIP corporate brand heritage affect influencer decision making and motivation to represent the brand? Finally, the qualitative research allows to examine participants 'construction of meanings', often used as a research method in advertising scholarship (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). It is of value to note that this research is of exploratory nature since a social media influencer marketing is a relatively new field of research and due to its constant developments, a qualitative research can offer the strongest insight in the current situation.

3.1. Data collection: Interviews

The data collection for this thesis involved conducting qualitative, semi-structured digital interviews via using Zoom or WhatsApp communication depending on the interviewees preference. Both communication tools allowed to conduct a video call with the interviewee, mimicking real-life face-to-face interaction. It is worth mentioning that during the period of conducting this research, a significant health crisis occurred which resulted with

global isolation. This unfortunate event may be defined as a *Black Swan* event¹³ that led to decreased opportunities for face to face interactions, as well as set a higher challenge in reaching respondents.

Each of the interviewees were contacted via Instagram direct message function and their personal e-mails were asked. Each respondent was provided with informed consent (see Appendices D), sent digitally via e-mail for them to read and their consent agreement to be interviewed and interview material used for this research was audiotaped. The interviews conducted according to the interview guide (see Appendices C) were recorded by using the iPhone or MacBook Pro voice recorder and afterwards transcribed manually and by using mixed external transcription support tools such as Amberscript¹⁴ and Otter¹⁵. The factor of interviewees sensitivity and notion of ethical dilemmas was taken into account (Brennen, 2017). For the purpose of general interviewee protection and confidentiality, no personal information apart from their professional occupation and location, such as country abbreviation, will be provided throughout this research.

The qualitative interviewing process of selected interviewees allows to “understand context and meanings of the information” (Brennen, 2017, p.34). Additionally, the semi-structured interview approach was chosen due to its variation and flexibility during the interview process which allows to gain knowledge of respondent’s diverse perspectives (Brennen, 2017). During the semi-structured interview process the “interviewers may vary the order of the questions and may as well ask follow-up questions to delve more deeply into some of the topics or issues addressed, or to clarify answers given by the respondent” (Brennen, 2017, p.33). Since the field of this research project is quite specific, it does require detailed answers and clarification of findings during the interview process. Whilst the main interest lays in the influencer’s personal motivations to represent Carhartt WIP brand, the qualitative interview is the most accurate method, as “in qualitative interviewing, there is a

¹³ “Taleb (2007) defines a Black Swan as an event meeting three criteria: 1. It is an outlier as it lies outside the realm of regular expectations, 2. It carries extreme impact and 3. Human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence, after the fact, making it seem explainable and predictable. Black Swans are “unknown unknowns” which despite all the plans and precautions that might have been made still take the organization by surprise and lead to catastrophic consequences” (Hajikazemi, Ekambaram, Andersen, Zidane, 2015).

¹⁴ <https://www.amberscript.com/en>.

¹⁵ <https://otter.ai/>

greater interest in the interviewee's point of view" (Bryman, 2016, p.466) that allows to minimize and avoid researcher's bias. The semi-structured interview "process is flexible... questions may not be asked exactly in the way it is outlined on the schedule" (Bryman, 2016, p.468). As Bryman explains, "in qualitative interviewing, the researcher wants rich detailed answers" (Bryman, 2016, p.467). All interviews were conducted by following the interview guide (See Appendix C) which was constructed with the purpose of answering the research question, having in mind previous theoretical findings derived from the review of existing literature.

3.1.1. Sampling Procedure

To answer the research question, interviews were conducted in two phases and among two groups of purposely selected participants: 1) a total of 2 digital, social media marketing leaders from the Carhartt WIP brand; 2) a total of 10 micro-influencers representing the brand on social media.

Primarily, both brand's social media marketers were approached via a professional social media platform — LinkedIn. In addition, a personal e-mail was sent to the digital marketing manager (GE) and global social media manager (FR), both of whom agreed and confirmed via e-mail communication that the information they provided can be used for the purpose of this thesis, including answers to questions that were sent digitally and must be considered as additional insight on brand marketers' perspective towards the influence marketing.

3.1.2. Two Phased Interviews

3.1.2.1. Phase 1: Carhartt WIP Social Media marketing specialists

To ensure the interview of two aforementioned Carhartt WIP social media marketing specialists, an e-mail including the introduction to topic, confirmation that any material gathered will be used only for the purpose of this research, 6 questions to gain a better understanding on the brand's perspective and approach to influencer marketing were sent.

The following questions were sent to the interviewees:

1. How is the influencer or *brand ambassador* marketing strategy implemented and defined from the company's perspective?
2. Until what extent are a brand influencer's personal motivations and preferences towards the brand measured, if measured at all, at the moment of choosing their services?
3. How does the process of research and management of brand influencers look like? Any specific tools used?
4. How does that connect to the art direction, communication, marketing, commercial and financial areas?
5. Is an Influencer likely to agree to represent the brand in exchange of branded goods or against financial benefit?
6. How does the legal aspects affect the influencer-to-brand service?

When designing the questions for the micro-influencer interviews, this research departs from the interviews conducted with two Carhatt WIP social media marketers. The insights, in the form of codes gathered from these two interviews served as guiding points in designing the questions addressed at the micro-influencers.

3.1.2.2.Phase 2: Micro-Influencers

Based on the literature findings in conjunction with additional research on Carhartt WIP brand's social media presence on Instagram, it is noticeable that the brand marketers are not using 'influencers' in a 'traditionally' expected way (celebrity, etc.). Instead, the brand has rooted its strategy in becoming part of a subculture that consists of young and talented individuals, such as DJs, graffiti artists, skateboarders. This connection to the young generation remains the brand's main influence strategy constantly gaining its strength through organic, friendly relationships between the brand and individuals who find the brand's lifestyle and culture related to their own interests. Therefore, these findings validate the choice to analyse the interviews of the selected micro-influencer sample. As was explained in the literature review, micro-influencers are part of a subculture which is considered significant to Carhartt WIP brand's influence marketing strategy in terms of their communication to the consumer approach. Considering findings mentioned in previous sentences, the choice was made in favor to brand network connected individuals who meet the above-mentioned criteria. Each of the selected sample interviewees n=10 was interviewed with the aim to obtain 10 hours total of interview material. Due to the limited amount of relevant micro-influencers representing the Carhartt WIP brand on social media as well as their reachability and availability to participate the sample n=10 of respondents selected for this thesis met the closest criteria and contain almost every individual of current micro-influencer population representing the Carhartt WIP brand on their social media, Instagram. Due to different circumstances, including continuous health crisis during the writing process of this thesis as well as their personal preferences, or lack of knowledge about selected topic, some individuals from the micro-influencer population did not agree to be interviewed which made the selection process complex and not easily achievable.

For this qualitative research, it was necessary to gather 10 to 15 participants to carry out the interviews, in order to guarantee the generalizability of this investigation and to safeguard the sample. After interviewing the two Carhartt WIP social media marketing specialists and gaining a better understanding of the company's perspective, n=10 sample of micro-influencers obtained from Instagram platform, as well as by snowball sampling were chosen as the units of analysis and their answers were combined "to provide a composite picture of the group the individuals represent" (Babbie, 2011, p.102). For the purpose of

examining the desired phenomenon, participants having the following characteristics were considered as relevant to this research:

- a) Gender: Male, female
- b) Location: EU, US
- c) Influential individuals on social media, in particular Instagram, with no less than 1000 followers
- d) History of participation in Carhartt Work In Progress brand campaigns or representation of the brand on their social media.
- e) Subculture individuals defined according to literature findings.

Therefore, the selected participants for this research are individuals representing the Carhartt WIP brand while simultaneously being part of a specific subculture within the EU or the US. Significant number of respondents are professional skateboarders, as well as DJs, music and art related individuals, whereas only two respondents of the sample $n=10$ consider themselves purely influencer or model.

For this study, a snowball sampling or chain sampling method via using the social media Instagram's Direct Message function to reach the micro-influencers was used in order to seek a representative sample to answer the research question. In qualitative research, snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are difficult to find (Chaim Noy, 2008). This technique allows the sample size to grow as the selected individuals invite their acquaintances to participate, therefore, the snowball sampling works especially well when the distinctive feature of the population that the researcher wants to study tends to group these individuals, to facilitate their social contact. The advantage of choosing this method relies upon the capacity to reach difficult populations and the possibility to collect valuable data in a short amount of time. In this specific study, this technique can be the best way to target participants as beginning to do interviews with some individuals from the 'influencer' circle connected to Carhartt Work in Progress brand. It may become easier to gain access to other influential individuals who are representing the brand, but difficult to reach. All sampled respondents were selected by personal efforts without additional support from the brand marketing department side.

3.1.3. Data Analysis

Building upon the data collection approach, a theoretical approach to thematic analysis¹⁶ was chosen within the framework of this research. Therefore, based on participants responses an opportunity to generalize the dimensions and trends of influencer marketing was created. Thematic analysis of the participant interviews approach to this research can be considered the tool to “aggregate these individuals and make generalizations about the population they belong to” (Babbie, 2011, p.103).

After obtaining the information from participant sample n=10 qualitative interviews, the interviews are coded and the codes are organised according to the main themes developed based on the participants’ responses, reflective of the respondents’ motivations and experiences with representing the Carhartt WIP brand across their social media (Instagram) peer network. The coding process allowed to identify repetitive patterns for the purpose of this research and therefore to gain results related to the research question.

Coding of the interviews was done by reviewing and re-reading each answer of the respondent per question asked by interviewer and relevant answers were depleted to relevant codes. Due to the diversity of obtained answers including the interviewee answers to additional guiding questions throughout the semi-structured interviews, not each answer is expected to include certain code. Codes afterwards were clustered into thematic groups and overarching themes were assigned to each code cluster. As previously mentioned, thematic analysis is applied to analyze the interviews, due to its flexibility and opportunity to obtain “rich account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006. p78). The use of this method allows the researcher to organise the obtained codes in relevant clusters to develop an overarching themes related to researchers’ theoretical interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Each interview was coded by using in-text highlight/comment highlight with the aim to obtain as many codes as possible and finally to identify relevant themes. The codes were attained directly from the interviewee answers and were highlighted in text as well as essential quotes highlighted in MS Word document comment section, while using the interview transcript file. Codes were copied directly to the Coding Table which consists of following sections: 1) Codes 2) Groups and 3) Themes (See Appendices x) to ensure full overview of data.

¹⁶ Inspired from the theoretical framework literature findings on the main concepts, by reviewing the Carhartt WIP brand online and social media.

Coding of the interviews allows the researcher to identify recurrent themes with the potential of deriving novel contributions to existing theory through the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the findings of this research are expected to provide an answer to the research question, introducing some valuable insights the field of influencer marketing as a final product of this thesis, which will be presented in the following chapters.

Regarding the validity of this research the qualitative research and thematic analysis includes the risk of speculative nature of conclusions. The research was done by me without the second viewer of the codes and themes. However, the research was done with the attention to detail and designed in a way which is as replicable as possible.

External validity is important in terms of assessing the validity of this research, and three external validity threats were considered (Onwuegbuzie, A. J., 2000) in regard to this research project. A population validity, as borrowed from the theoretical work of Onwuegbuzie (2000) is an important to mention since the selected sample $n=10$ might be considered subject to sampling error. However, considering the selected sample size of micro-influencers it is expected to gain a sufficient degree of representativeness (Onwuegbuzie, A. J., 2000). In terms of ecological validity, it is expected that the findings obtained through the analysis can be generalized within Western countries EU and US (Onwuegbuzie, A. J., 2000). Finally, the temporal validity of the findings of this research which can be applied to the current time, whilst considering the fast-changing digital environment and socio-economic shifts the validity of the analysis outcome in regards to this research needs to be re-tested in the future (Onwuegbuzie, A. J. 2000). It is expected that the findings of this study are replicable across different samples of respondents (Onwuegbuzie, A. J., 2000). As above mentioned, the approach suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) was used to obtain the codes and establish the main themes as well as Brown and Clarke's guide for conducting a thematic analysis offers an approach which supports the validity of the research outcome.

In essence, the data gathered from $n=10$ respondents is aimed to showcase reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the specific field of this research. For transparency of the process, the thematic analysis was conducted by using six phases (see Appendices, A) with the essential/realist approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) since the goal is to understand the selected influencers' motivations and personal reflections on the field of the research, and because it allows to "theorize motivations, experience, and meaning in a straightforward way" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.85).

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter offers an insight in micro-influencer motivation to represent the Carhartt WIP brand. The results were obtained from thematic analysis of the interviews. As earlier mentioned, two phase interviews were conducted 1) n=2 Carhartt WIP brand marketers and 2) n=10 Carhartt WIP brand representing micro-influencers. After conducting the analysis of the interviews of respondents: 1) brand social media marketers and 2) subcultural individuals, with the interest to answer the research question *what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?* A following results were found and are represented in subsections below.

4.1. Results: Phase 1 Interviews

In phase 1 interviews it did unfold that, the Carhartt WIP brand is likely to work with the micro-influencers connected to the brand's network whereas the influencers with large, mainstream audience might not align or be the right brand-fit with the brand's expectations and culture. It is demonstrated through the following response by the Carhartt WIP social media marketers (April 16, 2020):

“Please note that until now, we never directly worked with any Instagrammer, Youtuber or so-called Influencer that a lot of brands tend to use nowadays. While they do have an influence on their audience, we believe this doesn't match the brand's philosophy... Everything is then naturally connected... There will be different levels of partnerships. Major projects involving the brand will see both financial and branded goods benefits, while we will also just seed some products to people from brand's network”

(Digital marketing manager, GE and global social media manager, FR,
April 16, 2020).

The codes such as organic influence, influence of culture, cultural influencers etc. obtained from the brand's social media marketers interview answers provided a rich insight for this research, revealing the brand's social media marketers perspective as well as it does

support the previous literature findings in regard to subculture micro-influencer use for branded influence marketing. As earlier elucidated in the literature review, Carhartt WIP brand's official Instagram account timeline is significantly representing a subcultural identity. That can be connected to Dupont's (2020) theory: that placement of subcultural identity in brand's culture allows to create an alternative social world which can be represented on their social media providing the authentic angle for the Carhartt WIP brand's communication. As well suggested by Dupont (2020), subcultural individuals are highly engaged in media consumption and production which aligns well with the choice made to sample the micro-influencers from subcultural background who are representing the Carhartt WIP brand on their Instagram platform. During the phase 2 interviews these respondents provided an insightful information, supportive of answering the research question.

The codes obtained from the phase 1 interview answers are presented within this section as in-text underline (U) and these codes are important to understand prior to further explanation on a micro-influencer social media marketing strategy and their motivations to represent the Carhartt WIP brand. The following interview excerpt is an example for the obtained codes from two respondents answers (April 16, 2020) combined:

“At Carhartt WIP, our influence strategy is exclusively focused on what we could call the influence of the culture. We believe that one of the most powerful and organic influence, and especially in clothing, will come from cultural influencers: artists (musicians, singers, painters etc...) or skaters. The company has always been part of multi-cultural scenes and particularly involved in Music (from Combination Records to Carhartt WIP Radio) in supporting artists from every musical background, and Skateboarding in supporting local skaters, most of them now recognized worldwide in this skateboarding niche... As the brand have always been part of different cultural scenes, it developed a certain network that is always linking to new characters to work with. Seeing the popularity rising, the brand is now contacted by a variety of people and most of the new projects result from this. (Collaborations / Musical partnerships / New Skaters...)”

(Digital marketing manager, GE and global social media manager, FR, April 16, 2020).

The phase 1 interview findings as mentioned in methods section were helpful in terms of developing the initial themes explained in the following subsection showcasing the results from the Phase 2 interviews. For the Carhartt WIP brand marketers it is a great opportunity to use these micro-influencers as mediators between the brand communication and its preferred consumer base consisting from the same subculture group as the chosen micro-influencer by supporting the micro-influencer's creativity while placing their brand's clothing in a perfect context. As one of the phase 2 respondents explained:

“They're following me just to see what I'm posting just basically mostly in terms of skateboarding. So that means they're definitely interested in seeing what I'm doing... I guess it's the same thing like there are some kind of influence but in I guess in the, for most of them in the most organic way as possible... And they are endorsing products that were in those videos. So basically, the products are put in the best context context as possible because it is more in in real life and to produce something cool and it's honest in the way that... You cannot tell like brands are like asking you to do this kind of thing. This thing is done kind of naturally by skaters. So, in this way there are influencers with them wanting to be or not, but the result is what it is, you know. So, there's a certain like, I would say, a specific type of influencer, like even without their consent, more or less. They are representing a brand. They are posting naturally but just brands could also serve on the on this dependence for skateboarders mostly, to like post this content regularly... this is pretty good deal a win-win deal for both brands and skateboarders because skateboarders also benefit from the support of brands doing this. And... brands definitely take advantage of all this kind of almost free visibility and like organic and as I said and strong content, promotion for the product difference”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR personal communication, June 4, 2020).

Findings of phase 1 interviews are used to give an insight on the brand social media marketers perspective which can be considered as valuable insight prior to delving deeper into influencer motivations to represent the Carhartt WIP brand.

4.2. Results: Phase 2 Interviews

During the phase 2 interviews, five main themes, such as 1) relationship, 2) authenticity and freedom of self-expression, 3) heritage, 4) creativity and 5) organic influence were discovered in relation to the previous literature findings.

A significant number of respondents note that relationship between them and the brand marketers as well as other micro influencers do play a major role in their motivations to engage with the Carhartt WIP Brand. As one of the respondents from Spain explained:

“I don't know. It's just...not just the brand. It's because I like my teammates, and we hang together and like, just being friends. That's all I can say. That's the life of course, you have to be like shooting and doing stuff, but most of the time, it's just about friendship”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder ES, personal communication, 2020)

Another respondent from US provides additional insight into what his motivation to represent the Carhartt WIP brand is:

“I think the... legacy, authenticity and the products themselves. All of those combined and the counterparts, and the employees and the crew, it's like, you know, it's a really big team and a really big crew”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder US, personal communication)

The success of relationship between the micro-influencer and the brand is consisting of a mix of brand marketer team attitudes towards the micro-influencers as well as brands visual representation on the official Carhartt WIP Instagram page influences a micro-influencers motivation to identify themselves with the brand. A respondent from the

Netherlands (2020) explains:

“I feel like a certain relationship with the brand. I really like the way how it's put together and also the people that are used with a brand I can identify with with the brand, to be honest”

(DJ, NL, personal communication, 2020).

8 of 10 respondents did not use the title influencer to describe their profession title or activity on social media platform Instagram, as one of the respondents stated: “I mean, nowadays everyone is like, on Instagram, mostly” (Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder ES, personal communication, April 27, 2020). The explanatory reason why the title influencer might be excluded from the micro-influencer perceptions can be connected to the earlier mentioned Carhartt WIP social media marketing specialist suggestion that Carhartt WIP uses the ‘influence of culture’ strategy and therefore the interviewed micro-influencers can be considered a cultural influencers exerting organic influence while representing their creative skills such as skateboarding, DJing, making music and art to their follower network which is favorable for brand’s identity building.

“Being an influencer should be something that just kind of happens and you have no say”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder, US, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

While significant number of respondents prefer to not use the title micro-influencer to describe their professional activity 70% respondents however, did admit that they are receiving a financial benefit, travel cost cover for the brand projects and branded clothing in return to their engagement with the brands social media campaigns. Financial gain in exchange for brands representation on micro-influencers social media Instagram is not the most important factor for them to be motivated to represent the Carhartt WIP brand. Thus, it is an added value encouraging micro-influencer’s motivation. As one of the respondents (2020) stated:

“The product that they have, and then like, see what? No... cause we got (...) we're traveling a lot and tuning all the time, filming clips, you know, that's what I like to see like places, so they should make me travel. Then, of course, like, there's the money, but I'm not gonna say it's secondary, but somehow it is”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder ES, personal communication, 2020)

That confirms previously explained in literature section, the importance of co-creative nature and value exchange between the brand and micro-influencer to encourage micro-influencer's motivations to work with the brand.

Moreover, the success of engaging micro-influencer peers relating to the brand not only online, but as well off-line lays in the fact of how the brand marketers perform the execution of multidimensional communication across diverse channels. These channels not only include Instagram micro-influencer use in brand's marketing strategy, but also an offline communication. An additional finding, which is of value to mention to present a broader perspective on micro-influencer marketing strategy beyond the online influence, is that Carhartt WIP brand marketers do have a clear strategy of how to connect to the subculture audiences by connecting brands' retail stores to micro-influencers, by making them their employees. Therefore, this influence marketing approach leads to the micro-influencer peers coming to visit the brand's retail stores and offers them the action field to connect with the brand on a personal level. That allows to achieve relatability to the brand's cultural context involving subculture individuals cultural preferences, which must be considered as significant part of Carhartt WIP off-line influence marketing strategy. According to this finding, it can be assumed that the offline influence marketing approach does play a significant role for the brand's online success on Instagram. As one of the respondents (2020) explained:

“In Lille, France, like only skaters are working in the shops and then all the skaters they come and hang out, also to see their friends at the store and additionally engage with the brand and then you can tell... like all of the young skaters and older generation they're coming in, they're friends and they buy the product and they're all wearing Carhartt”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR personal communication, 2020).

Aforementioned findings allowed to provide a structured introduction of this chapter and the following subparagraphs are aimed to structure the main themes obtained during the thematic analysis of the interviews in presentable manner. The aim of the subsections is to explain the influencer motivations to engage with the Carhartt WIP brand culture while representing it on Instagram as well as to answer the research question.

As it was suggested by Brown & Fiorella, Instagram is a multidimensional communication platform and since the selected sample n=11 individuals may be considered as public figures within their community, social media does play a significant role for their self-representation (Marin, 2019). Appropriated self-representation on Instagram social media to the subcultural context a micro-influencer is engaged with, is important in order for the micro-influencers' community to approve and perceive them as credible individuals (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019).

To further reveal the micro-influencers' motivations, the next sub-chapters organized by five themes which were discovered from the interview analysis such as relationship, authenticity and freedom of self-expression, heritage, creativity and organic influence will be explored in a more detailed manner.

4.2.1. Relationship

Significant amount of respondents are involved in personal relationship with the Carhartt WIP brand. The success of this relationship as it was revealed throughout the interviews is mainly a mix of brand marketer team attitudes towards building a right community of micro-influencers representing the Carhartt WIP brand. One of the respondents (2020) does offer a good explanation on the relationship building process between the brand and micro-influencers:

“If you want to somehow build something organic and like be cool, makes more sense to me, to like, to build a big crew of like skaters that are

representing the brand and are also connected to each other. Makes the whole more natural and stronger as well”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR personal communication, June 4, 2020).

Besides that, majority of respondents mentioned that it is important for them to build a friend level relationship between their colleagues and brand marketers which allows them to identify with the brand on a significant level. Their preference is to work within the community of people they do know and the relationship between them is mainly strengthened during the brand sponsored travelling for branded campaign filming, especially for skateboarding micro-influencers or during the special events for others. Respondents also mentioned the importance of value exchange and the brand marketers relaxed attitude to micro-influencers’ individuality representation rather than exerting dominant branded ideology over them.

The significance of the micro-influencer motivations to engage with brands culture is likely to result in successful e-WOM marketing as it was explained by Childers, Lemon & Hoy (2019) by organically engaging their peers via sharing the brands content or product on their personal Instagram platform. That leads to the value exchange between the micro-influencers and the brand - where micro-influencers’ shared value is their follower engagement with the brand whereas brand’s shared value is branded product, financial benefits and personal relationship offered to the micro-influencers as well as micro-influencers identity representation on official Carhartt WIP brand’s Instagram which allows them to gain a general recognizability within the global subculture community following the brand’s activity online . This understanding gained from the interview analysis connects well to Backalers’ (2018) theory which explained the importance of a both sided value exchange between the brand and influencer which likely leads to long term relationship and successfully motivates the influencer to co-produce branded content. As well as, the exchange of value between the brand and micro-influencers happens while maintaining an authentic relationship between the micro-influencer and their community as it was mentioned in Heckhausen’s (2020) theory.

As it was suggested in Tabbelion and Esch’s theory (2019), the relationship may develop an emotional connection between the brand and its consumer, the interview findings suggest that it does apply to the influencer motivations as well. The emotional connection is

developed towards the brand due their personal relationship with the brand marketers and other micro-influencers. When choosing the individuals from subculture and building an embedded in brands culture relationship the influencers are motivated to live the brands culture and do not consciously think that they do advertise the branded product. One of the respondents (2020) offers a general explanation of the brands' and micro-influencers' relationship and how being part of community may act as an influence driver:

“Having a really good product, really good quality products, which include being a good fit and like looking nice, and also representing, at the same time, like being part of a certain community and with the strong logo, it comes... it's a mix between having a good product that looks good. And that represent a cool community and cool culture”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR personal communication, June 4, 2020).

Considering above mentioned, these findings support the pre-existing theory and gives an insight on how important for micro-influencers is to have a relationship with the brand in order to be motivated to represent and engage with its culture. It as well opens a window for the brand marketers understanding in order to develop a successful influence strategy.

“I like for the hip-hop community or the streetwear community I think Carhartt is maybe one of the one of those brands that you see often. If you would compare it like with other brands, like let's say Supreme, Carhartt is like one of the top five brands. For the streetwear culture I feel connected with... these people by wearing Carhartt. I don't wear Supreme, but I still feel connected with them because one of their pieces of clothing might be from Carhartt”

(DJ, NL, personal communication, 2020).

The Carhartt WIP brand can be considered as good example on how the micro-influencer marketing strategy can be built in an authentic and organic way through the approach of mutual value exchange and relationship building processes between the brand and micro-influencers.

4.2.2. Authenticity and Freedom of Self-expression

In this next section I explore the ambivalence of authenticity and freedom of self-expression as a motivation driver of micro-influencers to represent the Carhartt WIP brand's culture on their Instagram. As it was suggested by Dupont (2020) Instagram can be considered as a site of identity creation and as one of the respondents (2020) described, Instagram is:

“A great platform for brand because you get 100% control on it”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR, personal communication).

As recognised from the interviews, the freedom of self-expression can be considered one of the significant important motivation drivers for Carhartt WIP brand related micro-influencer sample, interviewed throughout this study. All respondents did mention that keeping their own identity, their own style and doing what they love is very important for them as they want to represent themselves on their social media, Instagram as authentic individuals.

“And you just don't really care about like, who's looking at you. First. You're just being you. And that's what people like I would say cause being you. It makes you like, exceptional for people. So, who really cares about like, getting on something, just do it right”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder, ES, personal communication, April 27, 2020)

“I would say really do what you're gonna do regardless of what anyone says or does, because that's pointless to listen to all of the chitter chatter that's just all around the world, like just do the thing you're gonna do. And if especially if you're skating, just have fun and go skate. If you're drawing, sit there and just draw. Don't like trip about what's coming. Like, just do the damn thing”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder, US, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

The interview coding process revealed that one of the micro-influencers motivations is the preference to maintain their own style and differentiate themselves from the general masses while representing their own and the brand’s image. The factors such as personality, staying real as well as being unique was perceived as valuable motivation drivers, therefore it aligns well with the theme of authenticity and freedom of self-expression as a significant motivation of micro-influencers to represent the Carhartt WIP brand.

4.2.3. Heritage

In the literature review section, the term heritage was viewed mainly from the perspective of dialogical heritage as well as corporate heritage and tied to the concept of spinoff brand which Carhartt WIP is. Heritage as a theme was mainly developed by following the literature review section findings as well as by following the sub questions of this research: 1) to what extent the Carhartt WIP brand marketers are using brand’s heritage as an asset to develop branded influence campaigns, and 2) does it affect the influencer’s motivation to work with the brand?

To gain the knowledge in regard to heritage theme a specific question was asked to the interviewees: how big of a role original Carhartt history plays in order for you to favor it? The interviewee answers revealed the interviewee perceptions on what is the meaning if the brands history to them as well as how it relates with their motivations to represent the brand. Within the literature section the Carhartt WIP brand was defined as spinoff-brand. The

interviews brought to light that indeed the workwear heritage play a certain role in brands identity and it may motivate them to think about the brands product as a good quality product, due to brand's origins evolving from the American workwear clothing line. And product quality was described as a motivation to choose and represent the Carhartt WIP brand for a significant number of respondents. Two different respondents confirmed following:

“I've been wearing it for my whole life, regardless of Work in Progress. I'd wear the American stuff and I'd probably end up getting to work in progress somehow”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder US, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

“I have a lot of friends that skates and especially in Amsterdam, there's a whole like little scene. And I just think it's really cool to everyone. Everyone kind of respects the... the brand as well, like everyone feels like the quality is always really good. Like it's not just shitty, and it's not like... Oh yeah, we wear Carhartt because it's cool, but it's like also like... it's actually like sustainable”

(Micro-influencer, NL, personal communication, April, 2020).

Besides the quality of the product which is clearly taking significant part of the brands heritage, the brands collaborative nature with the subculture individuals such as skateboarders, artists, DJ's etc., and its engagement in subculture context is valuable to mention within the theme of heritage. Which can be therefore considered as motivational for the subculture micro-influencers to follow the brand's activity and engage with its culture.

“The first time I saw Carhartt clothing were, was in hip hop videos and stuff. And after that, I tried to research and find some things about Carhartt because I never back in the days, I never heard of the brand. And so later

on I noticed I read that it was worker wear. And that caught my interest and that's after it connected in a sort of way with me as a person”

(DJ, NL, personal communication, April, 2020).

However, it was also found that Carhartt WIP brands’ original heritage brings complexity in distinguishing the difference between the Carhartt Inc and Carhartt WIP brands. As a professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP (2020) explained:

“This whole heritage that creates this second trend that is like, inspired and still respect all the codes and all the identity of the first brand, but it's been added in like a more casual, modern three to whatever adjective you want to put that fit to dissolve the brand... the differentiation is like, really art to begin to understand... So, yeah, I mean, I think it creates a lot of confusion for people, but in the end, this is also the DNA of both brands. This is their story and... and, yeah, it's, I guess it's difficult to communicate with it, but that's part of it... it's still some kind of work wear but in a more casual way, but this goes as well... All these artists endorsing a brand, like art and performing on stage with like, joe for jacket or wearing a beanie, somehow is, is working with this world... Carhartt WIP is like the communication and the DNA is a bit more wider. It's still some kind of workwear that... communicate like a really various messages...in some way”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR, personal communication, June 4, 2020).

Another respondent (2020) revealed:

“I see some images. And that's funny because when... I see images of Carhartt almost everybody doing construction work or dirty clothes and stuff”

(Standup comedian, NL, personal communication, June, 2020).

That suggests that Carhartt WIP brand’s image may not be clearly established in the market and its audience may confuse it with the Carhartt Inc brand’s image.

Mainly the interview findings in regard to heritage theme, represent the micro-influencer motivations to engage with the Carhartt WIP brand's culture due to their personal interest in brand's collaborative nature with artists and subculture individuals. The brand's legacy of quality clothing, its story and cultural package was mentioned as attractive to respondents and therefore engaging into participation of brand's culture activities as well as motivation to represent it. However, it is of value to note that heritage did not play a significantly high role in connection to micro-influencer motivations to represent the Carhartt WIP brand.

4.2.4. Creativity

In this subsection the aim is not to explore the concept of creativity at large since that would require additional research. The aim is to look at creativity as theme which was revealed from the analysis of the respondent interviews and connect the empirical findings to theoretical framework of this research. It was found that creativity does play a significant role in terms of micro-influencer motivations to represent their identity as well as to engage with Carhartt WIP brand's culture. The theme of creativity can be linked to previously discussed theme of authenticity and freedom of self-expression since the creativity can be viewed as practice of self-discovery and self-development (Dupont, 2020) as well as it allows the subculture individuals to challenge the norms and represent their identities in a way that avoids commerciality, since commerciality may negatively affect their credibility (Casalo, Flavian & Ibanez-Sanchez, 2018). Therefore, as Casalo et al. (2018) suggested in their theory creativity is one of the key elements and as it was reviewed from Heckhausen's (2020) perspective, creativity does support the micro-influencer motivation of reality construction.

“Being creative makes you look at things differently. So, your whole view is different as a creative person. So, I think you're the pictures that you're making are not... you just have a different view and need to see something maybe that other people don't see that way. So, I think create... creativity is definitely super important to have to be successful in a creative art form. I think photography, which is like, Instagram and stuff is really important to be creative”.

(Micro-influencer, NL, Personal communication, April, 2020)

In addition, according to interview findings I assume that micro-influencers do experience the need of being creative, especially as subculture members they do need to maintain their credibility in order to keep an authentic relationship with their community of followers. As two of the interviewees (2020) stated:

“Instagram really is like, so important now in the ... community of skateboarding that a lot of like younger skaters now start their skating via Instagram. Like just being really good at skateboarding is not enough...

You need to have something, the approach that is like different or interesting... I just feel like if you're true, or if you stay true, whatever, posted you post stuff, then yeah, then your people would still want to follow and see what you're posting”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR, personal communication, June 4, 2020).

“There’s a lot of pressure in posting a photo nowadays. For the last two years it's been like really hard for me to find a way to post a picture that brings the message but also put me as a person and... the persona that I created with the DJ that I am to put it in the right way and let people see more than just a picture with me”

(DJ, NL, personal communication June, 2020)

According to above mentioned, it can be assumed that micro-influencers do have a need for certain degree of creativity in order to construct their social media Instagram environment while maintaining authenticity of their identity. Finally, this research of micro-influencer motivations to represent the Carhartt WIP brand is linked to the Instagram social media platform. And from the interviews it seems clear that the understanding of social media such as Instagram use for subculture individuals’ self-representation is a relatively new practice. As one respondent (2020) explained:

“I think skateboarders and people were using Instagram in a really different way, even three years ago or five years ago when it started to give access to a wider audience”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder and skateboarding department manager at Carhartt WIP, FR personal communication, June 4, 2020).

To conclude this subsection, the micro-influencers, as revealed through the thematic analysis of interviewee responses does seek to add a ‘personal touch’ to self-representation on social media either its brand related or personal content. Brand marketers must constantly follow the fast-changing social media environments and understand how to encourage micro-influencers creativity through mutual value exchange.

4.2.5. Organic Influence

Throughout the interview analysis, a repeatedly occurring codes from the respondent answers in connection to the organic influence theme were natural influence, organic and ‘unconscious influence’. As I have mentioned before, 8 of 10 respondents do not consider their title - an ‘influencer’. They rather prefer to be appreciated for their talent as skateboarder, DJ etc. One of the interviewees (2020), explains that there is a gap of understanding what does the term influencer means:

“I don't really consider myself an influencer, because I think it’s kind of like self-proclaiming that is a little bit weird, you know? So, I wouldn't call myself an influencer. I'm just a kid that skateboards who like shirts, people watch it. Or maybe there's other facets of skateboarding that they like, whether that be like fashion music or anything really, any little thing that interests.

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder US, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

The interviews from selected sample revealed that influence is likely to be exerted in natural or an organic manner and as Dupont (2020) suggests, subcultural participants regularly consume and produce media which therefore explains that, for example, professional Carhartt WIP skateboarders while representing their creative work of

skateboarding unintentionally represent the Carhartt WIP clothing on their social media to their audiences, this phenomena of unintentional influence occurs because the micro-influencers are wearing the brands clothing while representing their identity on Instagram.

Identity and freedom of self-expression was found important. As one of the respondents from the Netherlands stated: “I need to feel like I can make whatever picture I want to make with what I got. Yeah, I don't want to have list anymore, like stuff that I'm allowed to or not allowed to” (micro-influencer, April 2020 NL).

The answer from another respondent (2020) showcases that micro-influencers subcultural identity and activity might be considered more powerful in terms of Instagram representation than brand's name:

“So, when they post a picture of you, it's like, there's people that's gonna like you or those people that won't, and, and some of the people that likes you, they're just going to follow. But it's not because you're riding on Carhartt. This may be because you're just like, I mean, they just like you. So, it's kind of like, it's good for both”

(Professional Carhartt WIP skateboarder ES, personal communication, April 27, 2020)

For the Carhartt WIP brand marketers it is a great opportunity to keep the brands authenticity by placing their product in subcultural context where skateboarders act as part of the brands identity creation. As a respondent from US (2020) noted:

“It's like a mix of, like the underground like skateboarding, music, arts, like all that sort of stuff. It's like, it's kind of, it's just like a good mix of like, a good chunk of things like you can, like you can relate to”

(Professional skateboarder Carhartt WIP, US, personal communication, April 28, 2020).

Finally, it was found throughout the interview analysis, that Micro-influencer motivations are to present their skills and maintain their own identity. In addition to that, they

are happy to be financially supported for their subcultural activity such as skateboarding, music etc., rather than simply making a traditional, commercially oriented influencer marketing posts on their Instagram timeline.

5. Conclusion

The thematic analysis provided an opportunity to gain deeper insight on the selected topic of this research and to answer the research question *what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?* It did allow to unravel the micro-influencer motivations to work with the brand and their perceptions about terms ‘influence’ and ‘influencer’ and, as it was discussed, micro-influencers are likely to exert their influence in an organic way, which means that they do not focus on brand representation but rather choose to be a part of the brand which fits within their perception of their own subcultural context. Findings of this study represent certain fluidity in terms of understanding what does influence marketing and influencer profession title mean in the social media market and to the selected interviewee sample. The respondent answers vary and a significant amount of respondents did choose not to define themselves as an influencer, but rather preferred to reveal their creative, subcultural identity - such as a professional skateboarder, DJ, creative individual, and only two respondents considered themselves an influencer or a model.

A number of respondents did perceive the title ‘influencer’ with negative connotations and mostly they had the opinion that the individuals working under the profession title Influencer do not represent reality as it is, but rather represent only sales-oriented image, often depicting the product, lifestyle or body image, which is often not relatable or within the field of interest by certain communities of individuals. Taking this finding in consideration, I assume that the subculture individuals are not seeking for an engagement with traditional marketing posts on social media app Instagram.

During the interviews it was noticeable that, while consuming and using Instagram to represent Carhartt WIP, brand authenticity and subcultural identity are important for a significant amount of respondents, which aligns well with Miles’ (2019) theory. Miles (2019) explained how subculture individuals value their identity, and subculture identity must be considered as beneficial for the Carhartt WIP brand, too. By placing their product in the context of subculture, the brand can keep its authenticity or as above mentioned – influence of culture.

Therefore, this authenticity is represented through the means of Instagram posts and the subculture micro-influencer audiences are interested to view the branded content if it is represented in an authentic way. As it was suggested by Dupont (2020) - subcultural participants regularly produce and consume media content. For example, if skateboarding community individuals are following Carhartt WIP brand's content on Instagram and they do see familiar activity such as skateboarding, they might experience Mondal's (2016) IKEA effect. I would describe it as 'distant participation', since skateboarding in this example is well known to the viewer and the viewer can evaluate its process emotionally and relate it to their own experience.

The subculture micro-influencers bring credibility to the brand while maintaining their authenticity and being supported by the Carhartt WIP brand. Therefore, they get approved by the community as individuals; meanwhile the brand gets approved as well, as explained by Childers, Lemon & Hoy (2019). The freedom of self-expression as one of the main motivation drivers for micro-influencers to represent the Carhartt WIP brand, which allows them to maintain their authentic identity. And Second most significant motivational driver was a relationship as explained by majority of respondents, the personal attitude and spending time with their friends is very important for them while they are doing what they like the most. That does align with Harrison's (2013) theory of dialogical heritage and, considering relationship is one of the main motivation driver for the micro-influencers to engage with the Carhartt WIP brand, it can be concluded that there is a constant dialogue necessity between the brand and the micro influencer to align with their authentic identity and lifestyle, which leads to co-production of brands culture and, as it was mentioned by Carhartt WIP social media marketing specialists – it allows the strategy called 'influence of culture'.

The interviewing process revealed that the product quality was often mentioned motivation to represent the Carhartt WIP brand and the selected sample of micro-influencers did all agree that they feel comfortable and look good in brand's clothing. They also emphasized to a certain degree on brands heritage derived from original workwear, which is simple cut, but can be worn in diverse situations. The Carhartt WIP brand's heritage however did not play a significant role in micro-influencer motivations to choose and represent the brand. But it was recognizable throughout the interviews that brand's heritage is likely to be embedded in their memory, even without directly recognizing it. Almost all respondents knew that it is derived from the American workwear clothing tradition. That showcases the strength of Carhartt WIPs' success as a spinoff brand. By embedding the original story and certain

practices developed by Carhartt Inc and placing it in modern, underground context of Carhartt WIP brand, it raised its success

All respondents chosen for this research employ a subcultural lifestyle while getting sponsored financially by Carhartt WIP brand and their lifestyle involves freedom of expression and creativity. They are like artists, each in their own craft and they do not want to be categorized under the labels of profession, but they do like to be identified with their creative practices and within their subcultural community.

Finally, if the brand social media marketers can recognize the opportunity to work with the micro influencers in a right manner and do pay enough close attention to choose the right, brand-fit individuals who represent the brand, they can successfully develop the strategy called ‘influence of culture’. That can be considered an interesting finding of this research and serve as a suggestion for social media brand marketers to look for the ways in their strategy that allows, as mentioned by Heckhusen (2020), to build a successful, authentic relationship between influencer and their community. In addition, if looking at Backalers’ (2018) theory application in practice: importance of building a long-term relationship with the micro-influencers while ensuring an exchange of mutual value and the micro- influencers’ freedom of expression must be considered by brand marketers.

Finally, this study provides a basic understanding of micro-influencer motivations as well as influencer marketing in general while looking at the example of Carhartt WIP brand. It would be interesting to further explore how to use the knowledge of micro-influencer motivations to successfully develop a micro-influencer marketing strategy for other types of brands, especially brands which are at a start phase of their social media marketing strategy development.

The limitations of this study

There are a few limitations to this research, especially from the perspective of data collection and foundation of common attributes. Although the interviews with the micro-influencers provided for a rich data sample, the questions differed per interview as well as some of the participants did were not well informed in regard to chosen topic and had less opinions to share. This study also did not discuss an implementation of findings in real life practice. This research can be developed further by analyzing Carhartt WIP brand’s archival data which unfortunately was not accessible during the existing circumstances. The archival data

showcasing the success of the micro-influencer marketing strategy used by the Carhartt WIP brand social media marketers would be of high value in order to design an Instagram micro-influencer marketing strategy plan and through its practical implementation it can be tested in order to understand the implications related to concepts reviewed throughout this study. This study provided the basic understanding of the influence and micro-influencer marketing practices.

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Appendices

A. Six steps of thematic analysis

| Phase | Description of the process |
|---|--|
| 1. Familiarizing yourself with your data: | Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. |
| 2. Generating initial codes: | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. |
| 3. Searching for themes: | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| 4. Reviewing themes: | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. |
| 5. Defining and naming themes: | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. |
| 6. Producing the report: | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis. |

Using thematic analysis in psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p87).

B. Interview Guide

For this research the choice was made in favor to brand network connected individuals who meet the above-mentioned criteria. Each of the selected sample interviewees n=10 was interviewed with the aim to obtain 10 hours total of interview material. Due to the limited amount of relevant micro-influencers representing the Carhartt WIP brand on social media as well as their reachability and availability to participate the sample n=10 of respondents selected for this thesis met the closest criteria and contain almost every individual of current micro-influencer population representing the Carhartt WIP brand on their social media, Instagram. Due to different circumstances, including continuous health crisis during the writing process of this thesis as well as their personal preferences, or lack of knowledge about selected topic, some individuals from the micro-influencer population did not agree to be interviewed which made the selection process complex and not easily achievable.

During the interviews, different types of questions were used, such as introduction, probing questions and follow up questions. To obtain specific information direct questions will be asked

whereas structuring questions will help to move to the next topic and reveal the information needed for this research.

Throughout the interview process, a list of potential questions, as well as online (Instagram) research information selected sample n=10 micro-influencers were done. As literature suggest, “qualitative interviewers begin primarily with icebreaker questions and then proceed with probing and follow-up questions” (Brennen, 2017. p41). Icebreaker questions were used about their perceptions on influence and term influencer. The aim was to get their trust and generate an open environment. For example, “Icebreaker questions were used establish an environment where questions can be asked and answered in a non-judgmental manner” (Brennen, 2017. p41). Following the icebreaker questions, I did move to direct and follow up questions in order to gain a significant insight for this study, “questions... should be simple, sincere, direct and open-ended, encouraging respondents to explain and elaborate about their experiences” (Brennen, 2017. p41).

Probing questions did help me to get more knowledge about their perceptions and the follow up questions were aimed to unravel complete picture of their motivation, “as you probe each topic, be sure to ask follow-up questions for clarification and to delve deeply into the experiences, emotions, and feelings of each respondent” (Brennen, 2017. p42). The confidentiality and data collection/saving details of the project were explained to the interviewees before the interview via Instagram ‘Direct message’ function.

Measuring instrument: In our project, we will use measurement steps:

- Conceptualization - What are the main motivations of micro-influencers to represent the Carhartt WIP brand?
- Nominal Definition – Micro-influencers were defined according to their Instagram follower amount >1000
- Operational definition – Motivation, relationship and authenticity explained in literature review section
- Measurements in the real world – the research question “*what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?*” (Babbie, 2011. p142).

To achieve desired outcome of this project, I will rely on the answers of the respondents. During the interview coding process, I assume to find the main themes revealing the micro-

influencer motivation to engage and represent the Carhartt WIP brand’s culture on their social media platform Instagram. Limitation, however, is that motivation is something “untouchable” and “unmeasurable” (Babbie, 2011. p392). Thus, “Evaluation research is a matter of finding out whether something is there or not there, whether something happened or didn’t happen” (Babbie, 2011. p392). Through this research, the goal is to identify the presence of the motivation of the micro-influencers representing Carhartt WIP brand.

Sample n=10 consists of following respondents:

| | |
|-------|--|
| 8784 | Professional skateboarder captured on Brand's Instagram video posts (US) |
| 3806 | Professional skateboarder captured on Brand's Instagram video posts (ES) |
| 4913 | Lifestyle Influencer, significantly represents brands clothing (visible logotype) on her Instagram timeline (NL) |
| 11389 | Professional skateboarder captured on Brand's Instagram video posts (US) |
| 7725 | Professional skateboarder captured on Brand's Instagram video posts (IT) |
| 1001 | Upcoming musician, band, significantly representing Carhartt WIP clothing (visible logotype) on their Instagram (NL) |
| 26212 | Professional skateboarder captured on Brand's Instagram video posts/ Carhartt skateboard team manager (FR) |
| 6619 | Stand up comedian (NL) |
| 2166 | Model representing Carhartt WIP clothing on his Instagram timeline (NL) |
| 10000 | DJ working for the publishing company (NL) |

To answer the research question: *what motivates the micro-influencers to choose and represent the Carhartt Work in Progress Brand?* Following interview questions were asked to the selected micro-influencer sample n=10:

1. Could you please introduce yourself?
2. Would you describe yourself as an Instagram influencer? If yes, please explain, if no, please explain.
3. What does the influence and term influencer mean to you? How would you describe it in your own words? (if not, relevant answer can be skipped).
4. To what extent you need to apply creativity to manage your social media? How important is that in your opinion? how did you gain your Instagram following?
5. How likely you would be ready to represent and work with the brands on your social media and what type of brands would attract you?
6. What a brand needs to give you that you would be ready to work with it?
7. How important brand's history and culture is to you in order to choose it as one of your favourites?

8. What was your first experience with the Carhartt WIP brand? How did you get introduced to it?
9. How its lifestyle resonates with your lifestyle?
10. How big of a role original Carhartt history plays in order for you to favour it?
11. How appealing is the brand's social media visual image to you?
12. How the brand activities align with your activities? (Since brand is engaged in music, skateboard, street culture...)
13. What would you describe as the main motivation for you to choose and represent Carhartt brand? How likely your friends are trusting you to choose it as well? Do you notice that?

*Optional: Would you like to mention anything you find important in relation to influencer marketing or Instagram platform in general, your experience? - as a tip to an upcoming 'influencer' or a brand who would like to approach you and work with you?

C. Coding Table

| CODES | GROUPS | THEMES |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| <p>people I know</p> <p>I can identify with with the brand</p> <p>Friends</p> <p>Team</p> <p>Skaters from community recommendations</p> <p>traveling's always a classic reason</p> <p>I want to meet people all over the world to work with</p> <p>money</p> <p>no pressure</p> <p>like the brand</p> <p>exchange values</p> <p>brand also represents the individual</p> <p>Collaboration</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Influencers personal and emotional engagement with the brand</u></p> <p>“Group of friends, like a very tight knit, very solid group of friends” (Professional skateboarder Carhartt WIP, US, personal communication).</p> <p>“If I engage with a brand and it has to be like, the connection must be real, like, I'm not gonna push something that doesn't fit me or does not resonate with me personally. So I really have to stand for it (Standup comedian, NL, personal communication, 2020).</p> <p>“They just, you know, open up a little more to different sides of the Unity cause not only skaters lover the brand could love the brand but also maybe this is crazy to say but like a lot of black people... around me it's only like hipster white guys that are wearing Carhartt you know?” Standup comedian, NL, personal communication, 2020).</p> <p>“I want to do it for the love and just to express the brand and I think also maybe when there's a big party when everybody's coming together or they're discussing of something, or they want to collab with me, yeah, I can make my own jacket or something” (micro-influencer, beatmaker (DJ), personal communication, May 3, 2020).</p> | <p>1. Relationship</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| | | |
| <p>I don't consider myself Influencer organic way posting naturally unconscious promotion happens and you have no say</p> <p>Love what you're doing</p> | <p>“ I just if something interests me in like real life then you will probably see it on my Instagram as well” (Standup comedian, NL, personal communication, June, 2020).</p> <p>“And I'm just doing it for the fun and see what's, what's happening. It's just like Carhartt man, I'm doing it because I like it. It's not just I want to make money, especially with it or like that. It's just for the love” (micro-influencer/beatmaker, NL, personal communication, June, 2020).</p> | <p>2. Organic Influence</p> |
| <p>do it totally, totally the opposite</p> | <p><u>Differentiation from masses</u></p> <p>“ I'm more attracted to the way they do their thing is like, it's not like the other brands the other brands are really shouting, you know,</p> | <p>3. Authenticity & Freedom of expression</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| I just want to wear what I like | like This is it, This is it! I think Carhartt is more like for the relaxed people that are, you know, you just do what you do and that's the feel I have with Carhartt. You know, it's like, it's not really, how can I say that it's not too much, too much blah, blah. You know, it's not too much theatre or too much gimmicks, no gimmicks. It's just real. And that's what appeals because they're just making what they make” (Stand up comedian, personal communication, NL, June, 2020) | |
| personality | | |
| lifestyle | | |
| the differentiation is like, really art | | |
| discovering to yourself in in a more modern way | “I just, I just post things I like to post and. If you like if you like it and if you don't Well, I don't care if I have like 2 followers tomorrow, or 10,000 I really don't care” (Stand up comedian, personal communication, NL, June, 2020) | |
| stay true | | |
| reality | | |
| escape | “You have to find your true self and you have to portray that in in your social as well” (Stand up comedian, personal communication, NL, June, 2020) | |
| do what you're gonna do regardless of what anyone says or does | “I want to show my love for Carhartt. You know, that's why I'm doing it and really being real with the brand. But I think the most Important thing for me is to express like yo... just just do what you like, what you love and where are you standing for. Because the most powerful thing about life is to be yourself... I think it's quite a niche, niche style. So for those who are really actually feeling it, its history as well a little bit and being a part of the culture. Yeah, you really need to feel it and you really need to have your individual style to really be able to implement it and I think it's amazing. It's for someone with me Their own style as you say, you are doing what you love and you are who you are like, you know, you represent yourself” | |
| Own style | | |
| Relatability | | |
| Different view | | |
| Persona | | |
| they just think that I'm an interesting individual | | |
| unique personalities | | |

| | | |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| <p>very cool DJ and he wears it</p> <p>that's what people like I would say cause being you</p> <p>itself kind of influences people to see someone's personality</p> <p>show the same product in a different light</p> | <p>(microinfluencer/beatmaker (DJ), NL, personal communication, May 3, 2020).</p> | |
| <p>Quality</p> <p>History</p> <p>hip hop community</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Brand's history role</u></p> <p>“So, the most of the time there is like... there's they're not even aware that there's this second Carhartt and, but on the other way around, like I guess, especially in Europe, I guess in Asia and Australia. They know,</p> | <p>4. Heritage</p> |

| | | |
|----------------------|---|--|
| skateboarding | they know let's say... that in the first place | |
| collaboration | it's a workwear company, but they | |
| events | understand difference and that the WIP is | |
| brands supported | common, is like the little sister of Carhartt | |
| skaters | (professional skateboarder Carhartt WIP | |
| tricks and | andskateboarding department manager, FR, | |
| performance | personal communication). | |
| cultural package | “it's like a mix of, like the underground like | |
| kind of work- | skateboarding, music, arts, like all that sort | |
| wear in a more | of stuff. It's like, it's kind of, it's just like a | |
| styled way | good mix of like, a good chunk of things like | |
| story of | you can, like you can relate to” | |
| workwear | (JProfessional skateboarder Carhartt WIP, | |
| Legacy | US, personal communication, April 28, | |
| Other Carhartt | 2020) | |
| Story to tell | I still feel like they stay true to who they are. | |
| Streetstyle | Because if you Yeah, as an example, if you | |
| use a lot of artists | look at this, it's it's it's really like working | |
| as models | clothes, but it's still sexy enough to wear... | |
| | So I think they they've done that very well | |
| | they stay true to their roots, but made it | |
| | appealing to the mainstream (Standup | |
| | Comedian, NL, personal communication, | |
| | June, 2020). | |
| | Carhartt is staying true to the streets and the | |
| | streets where I come from so it resonates | |
| | with where I come from like real people | |
| | know not too much not too much blah blah | |
| | just just keep it real man and I think Carhartt | |
| | does that as well you can see it in the clothes | |
| | to like they got the clothes like they if you | |
| | just view them it's it seems really simple. | |
| | But the comfort and the fabric are amazing | |
| | so they just keep it they just keep it real | |
| | that's that's what resonates with me (Standup | |
| | Comedian, NL, personal communication, | |
| | June, 2020). | |

| | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| | | |
| <p>Working for a publishing company</p> <p>Always wanted to work in music industry</p> <p>I DJ for more than over 20 years</p> <p>a lot of pressure in posting a photo nowadays post a picture that brings the message</p> <p>creative balance</p> <p>personal touch</p> <p>market has changed</p> <p>put it or put yourself in a market</p> <p>I started as a skater for the brand</p> | <p>Subcultural individual and Instagram</p> <p>“this is kind of new thing where like new generation of skateboarders now... because this Instagram really is like, so important now in the ... community of skateboarding that a lot of like younger skaters now start their skating via Instagram” (professional skateboarder Carhartt WIP andskateboarding department manager, FR, personal communication).</p> <p>“I can do a little bit more of managing my Instagram. But on the other hand, I don't want to because yeah, I think it's a lot of work to just, keep track of Oh, yeah, this image how they're gonna perceive this. And I know it's important for the image and for because I am my own brand of course... ” (Standup comedian, NL, personal communication, 2020).</p> | <p>5. Creativity</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>match it with your audience</p> <p>Connection</p> <p>Consistency</p> | | |
| | | |

D. Consent Form Example

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Diana Godmasa,
 Rotterdam, Netherlands
 E-mail: diana.godmasa@gmail.com Phone: +31634057564

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a Master thesis research about the ‘influencer’ motivations to engage with Carhartt WIP brand and its heritage. The purpose of the study is to understand what motivates the ‘influencers’ to follow the brands culture and represent the brand and its heritage in the case of Carhartt Work in Progress?

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to the Carhartt WIP brand strength organically growing through its influence and participation in underground and mainstream culture. The study targets to clarify any misconceptions about what term ‘influencer’ marketing means.

Note: Carhartt WIP brand is not using ‘influencers’ in traditionally expected way (paid, celebrity, etc.), but rooting its strategy by becoming the part of an underground and mainstream culture itself while supporting young and talented individuals: Dj’s, graffiti artists, skateboarders & hip-hop culture since early 80’s. This connection to the young generation remains brands main influence strategy constantly gaining its strength through organic, friendly relationships between brand and individuals who find the brand’s lifestyle and culture related to their own interests.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a phone voice recorder for the interview. You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information such as Instagram profile @name or pseudonym in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by applying pseudonym or general identification only mentioning age and gender, etc.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 30- 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation. PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish: Master thesis supervisor, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Dr. Thomas Calkins, via e-mail: calkins@eshcc.eur.nl.

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

Name:

Signature Date:

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study: YES/NO

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study: YES/NO

This digital copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

*Two copies should be made for each subject: one for the subject to keep and one for the student's records (in this case digital copy).

Signature: