HOW TO WIN FANS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE

THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND THOSE THEY INFLUENCE

BY

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly acknowledged), nor material that to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Abstract

With the rise of social media in the past decade there has been very little documentation or research that considers the advent of social media opinion leaders, or influencers, and their relationship with their followers (those influenced) on social media channels. This research analyses the relationship between social media influencers and those they influence through their interactions in the comment sections of YouTube videos. A qualitative analysis measures the interactions between the influencer and the influenced, using open coding (Thomas, 2006) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis draws on the comment sections in three YouTube videos from each of the four influencers in the beauty industry: Shaaanxo, Kandee Johnson, MannyMUA and Jeffree Star, and looks at the top hundred comments from these videos.

The research has a key focus on the role of the influenced, as this is largely absent from current research. The interactions between the influencer and influenced allow for clarity as to how the influenced view the influencer. This also helps to demonstrate a collective attitude by those influenced towards the influencer, and provides a view of how the influenced interact *about* the influencer, as opposed to *with* the influencer.

This thesis finds that the dynamic between the influencer and the influenced can be summarised as a one-sided friendship, on the side of the influenced, with the influencer rarely acknowledging their following. Additionally, the influenced see themselves in a community led by the influencer. This finding is unique in that it focuses primarily on the influenced. I find that more research is needed in order to understand how the influencer operates, specifically considering the role of the influenced.

Keywords: Social media, influencers, influenced, Shaaanxo, Kandee Johnson, MannyMUA, Jeffree Star, public relations, communications studies, social media research, influencer-influenced dynamic, thematic analyses, open coding, YouTube, beauty industry, followers

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1. **Thesis Background**

My role as a public relations and marketing practitioner in the beauty industry, promoting brands such as Kevin Murphy and Eleven Australia for haircare wholesalers Crew Distributors has meant that I have spent much of my time implementing influencer and press campaigns to drive brand awareness. Influencers are now considered integral to the development of public relations strategy (Harrington, 2017), and in my position I have seen the impact influencers have on the awareness the public has of a brand. I have seen influencers use an image or picture or comment about how they feel about a new product to drive their followers to engage with brands and products. As I saw the influencers' content and the positive effects it had on sales, I began to wonder how the relationship between the influencer and their followers, those influenced, is characterised. I found that influencer content often felt commercial and impersonal, yet the influenced not only listened to the influencer, but acted on their messaging. Despite there being no evident relationship between influencer and influenced, I was curious as to why the influenced trusted the influencer, and even spent their money based on an influencer's recommendations. In order for me to plan and orchestrate influencer campaigns, I knew that I needed a greater understanding of the relationship between the influencer and influenced. It is this motivation that has driven me to investigate the dynamics between them.

Whilst explaining my professional life to acquaintances I have been asked what an influencer is. However, there is no clear scholarly consensus on the definition of an influencer. Scholarly opinions vary between seeing an influencer as a figure able to enact changes, or "someone who has an influence on the attitudes, behaviour or purchase intent of a given audience" (McKinlay, 2019). Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg (2011) argued that an influencer is defined by how their audience engages with them, whereas Nazeral (2017) suggested that an influencer is a friendly, entertaining and irreverent figure found on social media. For the purposes of this research an influencer is a combination of these ideas. This research will therefore consider an influencer as being able to generate reactions from their followers, as this allows for the influencer's influence, and also considers their followers.

A survey completed by leading industry publication 'PR Week UK' showed that influencers are becoming increasingly able to sustain a lifestyle based on their social media activity alone, and that 59 percent of the influencers surveyed felt that they would soon become more important than journalists (Harrington, 2017). Influencers are now appearing as 'stars' on programmes such as 'Dancing with the Stars' (Robertson, 2019). Professionals on the British variant of this programme, 'Strictly Come Dancing', have suggested that influencers have an unfair advantage over conventional celebrities due to the influencer's large and engaged followings (Sharkey, 2019).

Influencers are also becoming a mainstay of popular media controversies, such as the misrepresentation scandals surrounding the ill-fated Fyre Festival (Kleinman, 2019), wherein influencers promoting a luxurious music event, which ultimately saw attendees unsatisfied with the squalid conditions of the festival itself, when the reality of the festival was the opposite to what had been promised to their followers . A recent controversy surrounding influencers saw beauty influencer and entrepreneur Jaclyn Hill featured in the media after she launched a cosmetics brand and unwittingly sold lipsticks that contained metal, hairs and unidentified plastic balls to her followers (McNeal, 2019). The scrutiny that Hill received both in mainstream media and on social media meant that every customer was ultimately refunded, owing to the strong social media reaction to the aborted launch (Rackham, 2019). Influencers and their successes and scandals continue to occupy the media. Accordingly, understanding social media influence from both sides is timely and crucial from both a professional and media viewpoint, as influencer campaigns continue to be implemented to drive brand and campaign awareness.

An influencer's audience of followers has been referred to as the 'invisible audience', as the influencer is unable to see them and does not engage with them directly (Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burker & Karrer, 2013). This research will refer to that invisible audience, anonymous and unseen by the influencer (Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burke, & Karrer, 2013) as the 'influenced'. Scholarly research has generally neglected to consider those who are influenced, or considered the influenced solely as a tool for the influencer (Glucksman, 2017; Carter, 2016; Shand, 2014). Consequently, there are currently few seminal works that

address the influenced, leaving the influenced largely absent from influencer research (Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burke, & Karrer, 2013). Bernstein, Bakshy, Burker and Karrer (2013) drew upon numbers in their research, and studied the ways in which audiences engaged with social media content. This found that often the person posting, here the influencer, thought their audience to be bigger than it actually was as a result of the invisibility of those seeing the content. This research intends to focus on the influenced, and remove some of their invisibility.

1.1 <u>Approach to research</u>

This study provides insight into the relationship between the influencer and influencer through their interactions online. Exploring the interactions between the influencer and the influenced will allow for greater understanding about how the influencer works, as well as how the influenced respond to the influencer. The research will look at the communications from the influencer to the influenced so as to understand the influencer's role in the relationship they have with the influenced, and how active they are within these interactions. The interactions between the influencer and the influenced allows for clarity as to how the influenced view the influencer. In analysing the interactions that the influenced have with the influencer the relationships of the influenced and influencer can begin to be seen. A study of interactions between the influenced can demonstrate a collective attitude towards the influencer and provide a view into how the influenced interact *about* the influencer, as opposed to interacting *with* the influencer.

This thesis seeks to answer an overarching research question – "*What do interactions show about the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer?*"

The research sub-questions that this research will answer are:

1.   How does the influencer interact with the influenced?
2.   How do the influenced interact with the influencer?
3.   How do the influenced interact with each other?

This thesis answers these questions through thematic content analysis (Braun, 2008). The research uses qualitative methodology and open coding to identify common

themes in the data. The data for this research is drawn from the content of four of the leading financial publication Forbes' 2017 'Top influencers in the Beauty Industry' list. Three videos are taken from each of the influencer's content catalogue, of all videos uploaded to the influencer's YouTube channel.

These videos are one each of

1. Product launch

2. Sponsored content

3. Tutorial

From each of these videos the top hundred comments, and the associated replies to these comments, are studied. This data serves to demonstrate the interactions outlined in the research questions above. The research will be based in interactionism (Blumer, 1969), with academic theories tied to interactions such as the research of Walther (1996), which focuses on online relationships (Grunig, 2008) on the Four Models of Communication and Excellence Theory and Katz (1957) on Opinion Leaders supporting this research.

1.2 <u>Structure of Thesis</u>

This chapter introduces the research questions, as well as the background, methodology and theories that will be employed for analysis, and provides an overview of the remaining chapters.

Chapter Two reviews existing literature regarding social media influence. This will add context to the research questions and introduce core concepts used throughout the research.

Chapter Three presents the research design. The chapter initially explores the thesis' theoretical framework of interactionism, where interactions create meaning (Blumer, 1969). The chapter then provides an overview of the qualitative methodology, which Silverman and Marvasti (2008) define as being exploratory, and for understanding opinions and motivations. The open coding method is discussed with Gilbert and Stoneman (2008) stating that open coding helps to understand qualitative texts before placing them in categories for further research. Fourthly, this chapter outlines thematic textual analysis, the analytical

framework that this research employs, which allows for the development of themes and codes within data (Boyatzis, 1998). Finally, this chapter provides the data collection methodology, including how categorisation and analysis occur.

Chapter Four presents the results that have emerged through the data collection. Chapter Five discusses the findings from the previous chapter. The interactions between the influencer and influenced are considered more closely. Existing academic and theoretical approaches are considered against the thematic textual analysis.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis and discusses the significance and timeliness of the research, arguing that more research into the influencer – influenced dynamic is necessary, as the influenced currently are largely 'invisible' (Bernstein, Bakshy, Burker & Karrer, 2013) to academia. It is here that the limitations of this research are presented, and areas for further research are suggested.

2. <u>Literature Review</u>

The Internet has created a great change in how people seek advice and information. Radio and television meant that people received information from a person they were removed from but with the internet, advice has become interactive (Boyd, 2014). People are able to interact with the internet to seek advice from online opinion leaders of varying expertise as websites now allow customer feedback. This has seen influential figures within the social media landscape making careers out of their opinions. Traditionally, opinion leaders were seen to be part of a community, where individuals felt an emotional and geographic connection to one another (Katz, 1957). People seek advice from those they respect and trust, people who they believe to have more knowledge than they do – and these are opinion leaders. Opinion leaders were considered to be a credible source of information, with specified opinions and knowledge pertaining to specific interests. This meant that people could access opinion leaders easily to seek the leaders trusted advice or opinions. The introduction of mass media meant opinion leaders suddenly had the ability to reach a larger volume of people as well as influence their activity, through each evolving media, from print to television and now social media, as well as more opinion leaders becoming available to audiences, as demonstrated by the Two-Step flow of information, wherein opinion leaders shared information with their publics (Katz 1957).

Advice from opinion leaders has proved to have value to industry in marketing, public relations and advertising, as their opinions can be utilised to influence product sales, opinions and offline actions (Harrington, 2017). The powerful voices of influencers in advertising is increasingly recognised both commercially and popularly. However, there is controversy currently surrounding the guidelines for influencer advertising on social media (Penny, 2018). Controversy springs from the lack of clarity surrounding influencer marketing, and how this may not always be transparently outlined by the influencer, misleading their audience (Penny, 2018).

With influencers gaining increasing notoriety they are becoming a forceful business in their own right (Harrington, 2017). This research considers an influencer as an individual with the ability to generate change to an engaged audience, and by this interpretation of an

influencer their role as a modern opinion leader is cemented, as influencers' opinions have the ability to shape the views and actions of their audiences. Therefore, it is beneficial for the advertising, public relations and marketing industries to understand what is happening when the influencer interacts with the influenced, and how this impacts how the influencer is perceived by the influenced (Fromson, 2018).

This literature review examines the opinion leader, and how the influencer fulfils an opinion leader role, drawing from theoretical perspectives. This literature review will then examine the key components of influence, as well as introducing the relationship between the influenced and the influencer and their interactions.

2.1 Opinion Leaders, Influencers & Theoretical Perspectives

This research is guided through the theoretical framework of Interactionism. Interactionist research seeks to understand the social interactions of human beings, and how the differing perspectives that each individual brings to an interaction shapes the interaction (Kuper, Reeves & Levinson, 2008). Sociology scholar Blumer (1969) proposed that there are three key components to interactionist research and these are:

1. Human interactions are based on the meaning that the interaction either has or creates
2. Interactions with one's peers has the ability to create meanings
3. The meaning of an interaction is created and altered through the individual's interpretation

The theories explored below lend themselves to interactionist research as each seeks to understand how people interact, communicate or even form relationships.

The concept of opinion leaders is defined in Katz's (1957) Two-Step Flow. This model suggested that the traditional flow of mass information was less direct than had initially been theorised, wherein a source distributed information and it was directly received by an audience. Instead it was proposed that Opinion Leaders were the first to receive mass information, with opinion leaders being individuals whose opinions are held in high esteem

by the public. This information was then passed on by those who found the opinion leaders' view to be more credible and trustworthy, making these figures influential within their networks. The opinion leaders' views and biases were applied to information in this process. The 'two-step flow' model shows that rather than the media feeding messages directly to the public, there are networks of interconnected individuals through which mass communications can be channelled, with opinion leaders at the top of these networks (Katz, 1957). Katz (1957) explains that this model was initially dependent on the assumption that there were non-leaders and leaders within these networks, with leaders being exposed to mass media, and sharing this information with the non-leaders. It is important to note that a leader in a given area would not necessarily be a leader for all aspects of media, and the information that they receive would be tailored to the opinions they lead. 'Leaders' had access to information, and disseminated this information to the 'non-leaders'. As media forms have changed so have opinion leaders. Initially considered to be a figure within the community, the opinion leader later became a voice on the radio, then a person on the television, or seen in films, before now becoming an internet personality, or influencer.

However, according to Katz's Two-Step Flow, Opinion Leaders can be considered valid only when a leader has followers, or, when those non-leaders are active followers of those seen as leaders. More recently, research into the influence on the microblogging platform Twitter, identified four types of users: information creators, information promoters, information supporters and information consumers. The researchers suggested that the information creator, who is well followed, engaged with by those they influence, and is able to generate and distribute information, is an influencer, and accordingly, the opinion leader (Zhang, Han, Yang, & Zhang, 2017).

Online information-seeking has developed from looking to trusted news sources to the opinions of trusted individuals. Case, Johnson, Andrews, Allard, & Kelly (2004) reinforce this, arguing that how people seek information on social media has changed the definition and role of the opinion leader with the influencer no longer being a figure sought out for relevant advice, but is now an omnipresent source of information. Katz (1957) emphasises interpersonal relationships within the 'two-step flow' model, and these relationships are considered to have three purposes: channels of communication, sources of pressure to

conform as well as sources of social support. Opinion leaders and those who follow them are believed to be similar to one another with commonalities in their relationships and beliefs (Katz, 1957). Public Relations professionals have expressed the view that "an influencer is a change agent" and "someone who has an influence on the attitudes, behaviour or purchase intent of a given audience", with these both being aspects of the opinion leader explored above, and suggesting that the influencer is the newest variation of the opinion leader (McKinlay, 2019.

It is argued that people choose which influencers to follow as a result of similarities in personality, ideology and other common beliefs, suggesting that people want to follow people as opposed to following brands or blogs (Killoren, 2016). This movement, where people are looking for those with similar values in order to get advice, means that opinion leaders influence those who value their opinion. These opinion leaders therefore become influencers through their communications and content.

The Excellence Theory was developed by public relations academic James Grunig and it stands as arguably the most influential contribution to public relations research in recent years. The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) awarded Grunig a grant in 1984 to answer two research questions:

> 1. How, why and to what extent does public relations make an organization more effective, and how much is that contribution worth in monetary terms?
> 2. What characteristics of the public relations function increase the contribution that communications management makes to organizational effectiveness?
> (Grunig, 2001, p.21)

The Excellence Theory comprised a comprehensive literature review and a quantitative survey that was distributed to 321 organisations in America, the United Kingdom and Canada. This survey allowed for 20 key findings about Public Relations in an organisation, one of which was knowledge of the use of two-way symmetrical

communications, this being considered excellent. This type of media relations is able to cultivate a mutual understanding between an organisation and their publics (Grunig, 2008).

The research completed here however will draw predominantly on the four models, conceptualized by Grunig and Hunt (1984). These models later formed the framework of the excellence study. These four models are: press agentry or publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and, lastly, two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The Press Agency/Publicity model results in one-way communication between an organisation and their publics, with this model of communication utilising persuasion in order to influence publics (Gruing & Hunt, 1984). The Public Information model employs one-way communication between an organisation and its publics, such as press releases and one-way communication techniques to distribute information to publics The asymmetrical communication model emphasises the interests only of an organisation, with one-sided communications (Gruing & Hunt, 1984).. The two-way symmetrical model sees Public Relations practitioners serve in a mediation position between an organisation and their publics using communication to interact with a public, and cohesion between both parties. It allows for both parties to benefit from the communications (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

This research considers Excellence Theory and the Four Models in relation to how the influencer communicates with the influenced. This is in order to understand the interactions between the two parties, and whether the influencer's interactions with the influenced are 'excellent' (Gruing & Hunt, 1984).

Relationships between the influencer and influenced can be seen in both the Two-Step Flow (Katz, 1957) and the four models of communications (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), as the means and methods of influencer – influenced communications can be seen. This research seeks to understand the relationship between the influencer and the influenced, and relationships will therefore be examined here. An interpersonal relationship refers to the connection between two individuals, with this most often being an emotional tie (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). This tie, when coupled with a genuine affection for one another has the potential to lead to a 'good' relationship, wherein both parties are satisfied. The result of these connections sees individuals having the ability to see effects on one another, as well as

factoring one another into the decision-making process, suggesting that ultimately relationships are based on influence (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Additionally, in a relationship, communication between parties can be seen as means to achieve goals, or as an indicator of emotional engagement.

Relationships in a digital landscape can be explained through social information processing theory (Walther, 1996) and telepresence (Steuer, 1992). The presence of an individual within an online environment is considered in order to understand relationships within the virtual space, coined "Telepresence" (p. 81) by Steuer (1992). This distinct vibrancy, otherwise known as "vividness" (Steuer, 1992, p. 80), refers to how strongly a presence is felt online by others. Steuer considers two technological components as the determinants of telepresence – interactivity and vividness. Interactivity considers the degree to which the individual is able to alter the environment they occupy – wherein the choices that one makes within their digital surroundings alters this environment. Vividness refers to the technical aspects of the environment, and how the individual finds themselves present in this setting, as well as the potency with which this environment is experienced by the individual. Factors of vividness could include pictures, video or sound. Telepresence therefore seeks to understand how technology itself develops within interactive environments, as well as how the actions and interactions of users shape the technology that is creating the online environment (Steuer, 1992).

As well as being a part of a specific context, as seen above, relationships that are formed in an online environment require time to develop, according to Walther, as the processes needed to form an online relationship are incremental (1996). He proposed that an online relationship is a gradual process, whereas offline relationships can be formed more quickly when the parties involved are sharing a physical space. Walther also suggests that online interactions allow for either reduced or increased interactions, as the communicator desires, as they are freed from pressures to engage with interactions immediately. Without this pressure, communications are driven by the context of the relationship between the parties involved. For example, if the relationship is based on regular communications it would have a large volume of interactions, as opposed to one that is ambivalent, which would have fewer interactions. Therefore, online interactions offer individuals opportunities to

communicate as they see fit, with technology serving to enhance these communications (Walther, 1996) . Applying this theory to the influencer-influenced relationship in this research will allow for exploration into how the influenced's perceived relationship with the influencer could potentially shape their interactions.

Social identity theory provides further insight into how these relationships impact an online community. Social identity theory refers to how an individual's sense of self is shaped according to their community and group memberships, suggesting that being a part of these groups can become something an individual can be proud of, that gives them a social sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Applying this theory to an online environment Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo (2004) argue that online participation in community conversation created "intentional social action", wherein a member of a community acts in a purposeful and goal-oriented way to see a specific result (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004, p. 242). This research explores social identity theory in relation to the online community in order to understand the influenced.

Arguably, an influencer's largest role is that of persuasion, as this is where influence is seen in action (del Fresno Garcia et al., 2016). The influencer must have an understanding of the influenced in order for messages to resonate with the influenced, and persuasion to be effective. Social judgement theory may explain how an influencer can alter attitudes through persuasion. This theory suggests the people make their decisions based on three latitudes of social judgement: acceptance, rejection and noncommitment (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). The latitude of acceptance features the ideas that the individual sees as reasonable, or worthy of their consideration, whilst the latitude of rejection features the ideas that are seen as wholly unreasonable, or objectionable, and the latitude of non-commitment lies between these. When approaching these attitudes from a persuasive perspective it is key to note that very rarely does an individual shift their latitude completely, but are more responsive to messages that align with their perceptual attitude, whether it be positive or negative (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). This theory allows for an influencer's persuasive techniques to be seen on a practical level, as the influencer as an opinion leader can potentially create shifts in attitude and action.

When shifting perception it is possible to drive an individual deeper into their respective latitude. Therefore a statement can move someone deeper into their latitude of rejection. For this reason it is considered more effective to target audiences who fall into the latitude that supports a brand or organisation's perspective on an issue (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965), to ensure that the desired messaging is received.

2.2 Social Media and the Influencer Phenomenon

Current research suggests that social media is a group of media forms that share common traits that cause users to engage with participation, openness, conversation, community and connection on their respective networks (Mayfield, 2008). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), the earliest social networking website to emerge was SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997. This website saw users creating profiles, listing friends and even looking through friends' lists, with SixDegrees promoted as a means to connect people, and send messages between friends. This type of social networking has continued to evolve since the late nineties, and has seen multiple new social networks and platforms emerge, varied by aim, interest and demographic. Now there are an estimated 3.2 billion users of social media worldwide (Demidchick, 2018). These include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, to cite a few examples. There are social networks that are aimed at the mass public, with Facebook the most notable, with 2.2 billion users (Demidchick, 2018). Networks have occurred specifically to appeal to different niches, with LinkedIn a professional social platform, and YouTube and Instagram emerging as avenues to distribute more creative content.

Blogging has risen alongside these social networks, with a blog acting as a personal website wherein one can share their thoughts or creative endeavours and receive feedback from others. In 2006 there were an estimated 50 million blogs worldwide, and it was estimated that in Europe alone there were 50,000 new blogs being created daily (Gordon, 2006). As a result of this social change and embrace of blogging the 'blogosphere' has amassed over 100 million blogs, with the connections between these emerging as sources of public opinion. This has led to the rise of micro-blogging, as seen on Twitter. Twitter allows for short, in-the-moment messages to be published instantly, enabling users to blog their

experiences in real time, with over 145 million users creating approximately 90 million tweets per day in 2011, according to Kietzmann, Hermken, McCarthy, & Silvestre (2011). This number has grown to an estimated 500 million tweets daily, as of June 2018 (Omnicore, 2019). Watkins (2017) studied the development of relationships between Twitter users, and found that two-way communication is not necessarily the only factor that can contribute to social media relationship building, as there may be times when one-way communication may be more effective. This study additionally suggested that being removed from direct interactions facilitates retaining control over a message on Twitter (Watkins, 2017).

Steiglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) suggested that negative comments and ideas are quicker to develop than positive comments or ideas, and that the negative sentiments create a 'Negativity Bias'. This suggests that negative comments spread faster than positive ones, and this 'bias' is a part of being active on social media. Conversely, Walther and Dai (2018) found that, in interacting with public figures through social media, individuals felt a para-social intimacy towards the public figure, that is, where the audience of a public figure feel that they are friends despite limited social interactions. Their research additionally showed that in praising the public figure the commenter is attempting to create a friendly level of engagement, whilst showing the public figure their esteem and respect (Dai & Walther, 2018).

An extension of the blogging community is social networking platforms. Social networking sites have been defined as internet services that allow users to construct a public or semi-public online profile (Boyd & Ellison, 2007); cultivate a web of users with whom they share connections and view and navigate their own connections. The nature of these online personal connections is likely to vary between websites, as social networks have diverse intended uses. For example, Twitter utilises micro-blogging, and Instagram is a very visual network that utilises images. The differing uses for social networks suggest that relationships will be seen differently on each platform, as each platform has its own nuanced means of communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Accordingly, it can be suggested that each social media platform requires its own unique methods of communication to form connections and relationships, as each platform has a context through which users can communicate with one another. These different contexts for relationships are based on how communication on the individual social platform is seen, such as liking and responding to tweets on Twitter, engaging

in professional communications on LinkedIn, or posting your own pictures, and commenting on those of others on Instagram. Having platform-based variations in communication highlights the specific contexts and communications that are required for an individual to be influential on different social media platforms, and how mastering the nuance of a platform has the potential to lead to influence (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

2.3 Influencers

Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg (2011) proposed a definition for influence, in relation to influencers. They considered the daily hits, engagement (such as viewers and share numbers) and the number of individuals following the influencer. These factors are considered to be influencer 'capital' and a conceptualisation of the influencer's 'worth' (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011, p. 90). Brown and Hayes (2007) develop this further by defining influencers as third-party individuals who possess the ability to shape purchasing decisions of their audiences. They suggest it is the influencer's content that achieves this, rather than social media itself, as audiences are engaging with the content specifically, as opposed to social media, which is a more general engagement (Brown and Hayes, 2007).

In a social media landscape, influence is derived from connections and engagements. These connections have led to individuals having influence over their audience. Harrington (2017) suggests that, as the influencer phenomenon will just continue to grow, Public Relations practitioners need to adapt to changes seen on social media, and that they must have a clear understanding of what influencers do and how to work with them. However, there is not a clear understanding on what an influencer is, or does, as industry opinions are divided on what influence actually entails (McKinlay, 2019).

Forbes, a leading US financial publication, creates lists profiling the top ten influencers, based on the influencer's social clout (Forbes, 2017). This includes the influencer's Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube pages that are used to create a ranking. These lists are created in categories, with the most influential influencers profiled in beauty, fashion, lifestyle and even pets. In creating these lists a ranking of influencers is

created, allowing a handful of influencers to be considered 'elite', giving the impression that these influencers are of greater value than other influencers (Forbes, 2017). Nazeral (2017) suggested that the influencer's opinion is now comparable to that of a conventional celebrity, whose fame is not derived from social media, unlike the influencer. The study argued that whilst a celebrity has the ability to drive sales, an influencer is able to create brand engagement, through their content by helping their audience to engage with a brand's identity or products, and showed that both celebrity and influencer campaigns achieve a similar level of follow-through purchasing. The study, completed in collaboration with Carat, Neilson and YouTube, illustrates how, whilst the influencer trend is seen predominantly in the beauty industry, it can also be found across YouTube and further social networks (Nazeral, 2017).

A survey on the beauty industry, completed by leading drug store industry publication, Chain Drug Review, revealed consumers tend to trust an online product review from an influencer more than branded content, such as advertisements (Chain Drug Review, 2017). When understanding the rise of the influencer it is clear that, in order to appeal to millennials and Generation Z, social media personalities are the most effective method (Baker, 2017). This generation relates to influencers more so than traditional media, such as television or print advertising, as the influencer is relatable and feels like a real person to their audience (Hulyk, 2015).

According to a survey of influencers (Harrington, 2017), many influencers did not start their social networks with career aspirations. However, these people are increasingly professional with regards to their social media careers – treating their social media channels as a job. As a result of this, influencers have become increasingly aware of the value that their reach and audience holds for brands. Fifty-eight percent of the influencers surveyed believed that their influence is a commodity for which brands should pay, as the reach and brand engagement that can be created has the potential to create major returns for a brand. Equally, influencers have become increasingly aware of who they work with as it has the potential to affect their personal brand, both positively and negatively. The survey also revealed that more than half the influencers questioned believed that they will become more

important than journalists in the future, suggesting that social media influence will continue to gain prominence (Harrington, 2017).

These perspectives suggest an image of the influencer as an individual trusted by the people they interact with within their network, their audience. Trust in this relationship between the influenced and the influencer allows for the influencer to impact the decisions the influenced makes. This ability to influence audience decision-making is considered to be a key point of difference between an influencer and a celebrity (Nazeral, 2017).

2.4 Introducing the influencer – influenced relationship

This research explores how the influenced and influencer interact with each other. The influencer needs an audience in order to be able to assert their influence. Therefore, development of the influencer-influenced relationship is crucial to the influencer when cultivating their influence. However, it is less clear why the influenced interact with the influencer. This research aims to identify the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer and gain a greater understanding into why the influenced engage with the influencer.

The research of De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) discusses the impact that follower numbers and audience awareness can have on attitudes towards a brand. However, current literature assumes that influencers have large social media presences and engaged followings (Chandler & Munday, 2016 ; Brown & Hayes, 2007 ; Nazeral, 2017 ; Reber & Berger, 2006), and generally audience numbers are rarely mentioned in discussions about influence. More commonly, researchers focus on three key concepts: persuasion (Solis, 2010), authenticity (Carter, 2016) and content (Brown & Hayes, 2007). These three concepts are prevalent in existing research on influencers (Reber & Berger, 2006 ; Brown & Hayes, 2007 ; Solis, 2010 ; Freberg et al., 2011 ; Romero et al., 2011 ; Booth & Matic, 2011 ; Kietzmann et al., 2011 ; Bernstrain et al., 2013 ; Al Falahi et al., 2014 ; del Fresno Garcia et al., 2014 ; Shand, 2014 ; Hulyk, 2015 ; Baker, 2017 ; Nazeral, 2017 ; Glucksman, 2017 ; Audrezet et al., 2018), and are explored in this literature review.

(Perloff, 2016). Perloff argues that persuasion is a process wherein a communicator seeks to alter attitudes, opinions or behaviours through their message, whilst giving the impression of free choice. Therefore, the influencer seeks to alter the attitudes, opinions or behaviours of the influenced. Authenticity refers to how the influencer is perceived by the influenced and the image that they present (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015). Content comprises the distribution of social media content, as well as the content itself, and the impact that content can have on the relationship the influenced has with the influencer (Shand, 2014).

2.5 Influencer Persuasion

The influencer's ability to persuade the influenced is explored by Reber & Berger (2006), Solis (2010) and Freberg et al. (2011). Perloff (2016) defines persuasion as a process wherein communicators attempt to convince others to change their opinions surrounding an idea (Perloff, 2016, p. 21). The academic perspectives below explore how persuasion is seen as a tool of influencers.

Reber and Berger (2006) define influence as the ability to see real-world results from how it affects the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, decisions, statements and behaviours of others. Therefore, an influencer is an individual who has the persuasive capabilities to facilitate these shifts. This suggests that influencers are able to be viewed as a catalyst for persuasive outcomes, as result of the influence that they wield on audiences (Reber & Berger, 2006).

The American social media researcher, Brian Solis (2010), describes influencers as having an ability to instigate actions and outcomes that are able to be measured and that are beneficial for the influencer. This could entail a measure of likes and comments agreeing with a post that the influencer has made. Solis also suggests that there is a disparity between persuasive influence and popularity, and that while these ideas may have commonalities and links they are not the same. Solis suggests that influence is the ability to have people listen and take action based on what is said, whereas popularity is simply being likable. Solis' interpretation of influence suggests that the ability to create action is a defining characteristic of the influencer (Solis, 2010).

Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg (2011) argue that influencers are representative of a new kind of independent, third-party endorser. They claim influencers are able to shape audience perceptions through their social media channels by cultivating an environment where the influencer is able to offer their opinions on a given topic to the influenced, and see attitude changes or action as a result of these opinions. Their research creates an image of the influencer as an indirect marketing tool as well as a relatable figure, or one of perceived prestige (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011).

An influencer's ability to persuade audiences is emphasised by the information technology scholars, Al Falahi, Atif, & Abraham (2014). They further suggest the influencer is an individual who, as a result of their large following, has the power to both see and enact changes within communities. This research places value on the connections and relationships that are the foundation of social networks. The study argues that the influencer's importance is derived from how much they influence action within their social networks (Al Falahi, Atif & Abraham, 2014).

Del Fresno Garcia, Segado Sanchez-Cabezudo and Daly (2016) define influencers by their capacity to persuade their audiences. They define the influencer as one who has the ability to shift attitudes through social media or mainstream media. These researchers consider influencers to be engaged communicators, with diverse networks. Additionally, they see influencers as being relationship-oriented in regard to their channels and networks, where maintaining these relationships is considered a priority. Del Fresno Garcia, Segado Sanchez-Cabezudo and Daly (2016) present three types of influencer: 'disseminators' who are communicative influencers with diverse networks who see communication as the key to maintaining these networks, 'engagers', who are relationship oriented and prioritise the quality of their relationships with third parties, and 'leaders', being a combination of the two previous types. For example, the 'leader' influencer, who is a disseminator and engager, has a strong network and good relationships within this network as well as the most refined and most effective persuasive skills and therefore has the greatest impact on those they influence. The research addresses follower numbers but stresses that engagement is more important for an influencer than the number of people who follow them, as engagement demonstrates

the number of people responding to content (del Fresno Garcia, Segado Sanchez-Cabezudo and Daly, 2016). Al Falahi, Atif & Abraham (2014) reinforce this, arguing that without engagement from the influenced, the influencer is not influencing.

Persuasive capabilities of the influencer are indicative of a perceived trust between the influenced and the influencer, with the influenced being persuaded by the influencer's authenticity, as well as their opinions and views (Al Falahi, Atif & Abraham, 2014 ; del Fresno Garcia et al., 2016 ; Freberg et al., 2011 ; Solis, 2010 ; Reber & Berger, 2006).

2.6 Authenticity and Trust Between the influencer and the Influenced

Scholars argue that authenticity is considered key to the influencer–influenced dynamic, with this serving as the foundation of the relationship between these two parties (Baker, 2017, Carter, 2016 and Nazeral, 2017). This relates to the image that the influencer cultivates, and the impact that this in turn can have on the influenced's relationship to the influencer (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015).

Hulyk (2015) completed research on marketing to 'Generation Z', those born between the late 1990s and mid 2000s and found that this generation is drawn more to an authentic figure than they are to conventional television and cinema celebrities. Generation Z find social media 'celebrities' not only more approachable, but also more authentic than 'traditional celebrities' such as cinema and television stars. Hulyk (2015) suggests that it is the authenticity that 'Generation Z' sees in influencers that makes them more responsive to the messages that influencers distribute, as opposed to hearing them from celebrities who they perceive as removed from the day-to-day reality familiar to most people. These findings suggest that Generation Z's engagement and investment in social media influencers means that influencer marketing will become increasingly important for marketing and public relations professionals as Generation Z ages (Hulyk, 2015).

Baker (2017) also analyses Generation Z and influencers, revealing this generation is drawn to those they consider trustworthy when making purchase decisions. Baker suggests that Generation Z want to be well informed prior to making purchasing choices, and as a result

turn to influencers for advice and feedback. As a result of following and engaging, the influenced develop trust in the influencer and as a result turn to the influencer for advice. Baker considers authenticity as extending beyond the influencer's content, and that it should also be applied to commercial relationships between influencers and brands. This is when content is paid for, and in order to see work completed in which both parties are happy and achieve the desired results, having an honest and authentic relationship between the brand and the influencer is beneficial to both the influencer and their audience. The audience responses to influencers suggest a shift in which opinions are being considered more trustworthy than advertisements. Accordingly, when brands wish to communicate with younger audiences, communicating to them through a voice that is authentic and relatable to their daily lives will be more effective than hearing an endorsement from a conventional celebrity (Baker, 2017). This research highlighted that for an influencer, authenticity should be applied not only to their relationship with the influenced, but also to their commercial relationships (Baker, 2017).

Celebrity theorists Hearn & Schoenhoff (2015) discuss the benefits of an authentic public persona for influencers. They examine the role of authenticity in cultivating a 'personal brand'. The cultivation of a personal brand can be seen as a way for the influencer to grow their profile. The personal brand constructs a specific brand identity of the influencer, for example as a person invested in sustainability and ethics. This interpretation of the influencer further illustrates Social Identity theory, as seen earlier, wherein the influencer creates a strong image of themselves in relation to their community (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In developing this clear personal image the influencer has the ability to form strategic relationships with commercial brands that align with what the influencer represents, and brands are able to align themselves with influencers who resonate with their target audiences. This suggests the influencer is a new type of celebrity, and offers a business-minded approach to the influencer – influenced relationship, suggesting that the influenced are more a means to an end (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015).

Carter (2016) also refers to the idea of the personal brand, suggesting that an influencer's key assets are their 'brand' (Carter, 2016, p. 10) and their 'hustle' (Carter, 2016, p. 10) – or how they are perceived, and the manner in which they conduct business. Carter

argues that this reinforces the concept of the authentic self – wherein the influencer presents an 'authentic' version of themselves to the influenced. Carter's research suggests that this is a carefully cultivated persona, designed to resonate with the influenced. This proposes that whilst an influencer may seem authentic there is a very high likelihood that this image is a reflection of the personal brand they wish to cultivate, and that has been cultivated to appeal to their desired following (Carter, 2016). Therefore, if their image has been cultivated specifically to appeal to a particular group, it is questionable how authentic this persona really is.

The concept of trust emerging as a result of perceived authenticity is also seen in research commissioned by YouTube, Neilson and Carat. Trust between influencer and influenced is found to be built through the relatability and authenticity that influencers project. The research also argues that the audience expectation between 'celebrities' and 'influencers' is different. Influencers are expected to be friendly, entertaining and irreverent, with this light-heartedness and humour often building trust with their audiences. This sense of familiarity sees influencers build audiences that both trust and respond to the influencer's messaging (Nazeral, 2017).

A case study completed by Glucksman (2017) also examined the concept of authenticity, and found that influencers who create lifestyle-driven content are required to be authentic with their audiences on their social media channels. This is believed to build the relationship between the influencer and their audience, as it allows the audience to feel they know the influencer personally. This serves to make the messages shared by the influencer with their audience more legitimate and credible, as the influencer has built a strong personal identity to support their statements. In Glucksman's case study a key lifestyle influencer Lucie Fink, who currently has 98,000 followers on YouTube (Fink, n.d) and 151,000 followers on Instagram (Lucie Fink, n.d), proposed that authenticity was the most important trait an influencer can possess for retaining and gaining followers.

The importance of authenticity for the influencer's personal brand was also emphasised by Audrezet, Kerviller and Moulard (2018). This research proposed that there are two types of authenticity that can be seen in influencer-brand partnerships – passionate

authenticity and transparent authenticity. Passionate authenticity refers to being motivated by desires and passions, as opposed to money, and Audrezet et al. (2018) suggests that passionately authentic relationships are the most fulfilling for both the brand and the influencer. Transparent authenticity refers conversely to more fact-driven partnerships, where the influencer is open about the terms of their partnership with the brand, and shares their own opinions with the influenced. The research concluded that influencers and brands must take care when developing partnerships, as alignment between brand and influencer ensures a mutually fulfilling experience for the influencer, the brand and even the influenced (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018)

Research argues that authenticity is seen to be crucial to the influencer's success, as this is seen as the trait that develops trust between the influenced and influencer (Nazeral, 2017, Glucksman, 2017 and Carter, 2016). Recent research considers how the influencer's public persona can shape their relationship with the influenced, and suggests the relationship between the influencer and influenced is based on authenticity (Baker, 2017, Carter 2016 and Hulyk, 2015).

However, these studies have not explored the concept of authenticity in relation to the interactions that are seen between the influenced and influencer, as the studies focus largely on how authenticity can be utilised by the influencer, as opposed to how the influenced perceive the influencer's authenticity, and the impact this has on the influenced.

2.7 Content, Engagement and Postings of the Influencer

Persuasive techniques by the influencer, along with attempts at authenticity, work in combination with the content produced by the influencer to influence their followers. Booth and Matic argue that an influencer's reach is determined by a combination of content-based factors: viewer numbers, engagement and post frequency (Booth & Matic, 2011). They argue that the frequency of posts is a key measurement of what constitutes influence, alongside average views and engagement, as this shows their message being received. Additionally, Romero, Galuba, Asur and Huberman (2011) also suggest that influence is tied to content. Their research outlined that influence can be determined through a variety of factors. The

key of these was that the novelty of messaging found in content is what creates influence. This suggests that having something unique to say and share has the ability to resonate with and build audiences, and therefore influence (Romero, Galuba, Asur & Huberman, 2011).

Kietzmann, Hermken, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) also highlight the frequency of an influencer's posts as significant in the relationships that influencers build with their audiences. They argue that frequent two-way engagement between the influencer and influenced surrounding this content allows for the influencer to resonate with the influenced on a meaningful level. As a result of this communication the influenced are able to form an intimate relationship with the influencer (Kietzmann, Hermken, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011).

Although Brown and Hayes (2007) argue that the influencer is able to function as a third-party promoter with the ability to shape decisions of their audiences, they propose that it is content that actually defines the influencer, and has the ability to determine their success. They further argue that the content that the influencer creates and distributes to their following that has the greatest influence over the influenced (Brown & Hayes, 2007).

Freberg, Graham, McGaughey and Freberg (2011) measure the number of times the influencer's content is consumed daily, along with engagement (such as viewers and share numbers) and follower numbers (the total number of people following the influencer). These factors are all considered part of the influencer's social capital. In proposing a measure for an influencer's capital the research suggests a quantifiable method through which an influencer's reach and impacts can be measured (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011). However, Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burke and Karrer (2013) found that the influenced often provide no feedback on content to the influencer. They found that users of social media who posted regularly thought that their audience was larger than reality. For example, they found that Facebook users reach only 35 per cent of their friends with each post, and only 61 per cent of friends in a month of posting. This research suggests that audiences are an area of social media research that requires further study, and proposes that having an understanding of audiences is a key component of understanding social media (Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burke & Karrer, 2013).

Shand (2014) argues that the influencer engaging with their own content is more likely to resonate with the audience, otherwise content runs the risk of appearing synthetic and inauthentic. Some influencers can be considered content sharers, with the quality and distribution of content a key concern for these individuals, rather than interactions with their followings and contemporaries. Shand suggests that authentic content is worth a higher value for an influencer from a business point of view than sponsored content (Shand, 2014).

Glucksman (2017) briefly considered content in her case study focusing on lifestyle influencer Lucie Fink. This found that in creating lifestyle-based content there must be a reflection of the reaction that the influencer desires woven into the video, picture or tweet, for the influenced to see and agree with. However, this study also stated that creating content solely to publicise the influencer themselves and build a public profile will not engage audiences with the message, as this lacks authenticity (Glucksman, 2017).

Despite content being seen as a crucial element of the influencer's impact on their audience (Glucksman, 2017, Shand, 2014, Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burke & Karrer, 2013, Freberg, Garaham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011 and Al Falahi, Atif & Abraham, 2014), it is by working with persuasion and authenticity that an influencer is seen to best reach their audience (Reber & Berger, 2006, Brown & Hayes, 2007, Solis, 2010, Freberg et al., 2011, Romero et al., 2011, Booth & Matic, 2011, Kietzmann et al., 2011, Bernstrain et al., 2013, Al Falahi et al., 2014, del Fresno Garcia et al , 2014, Shand, 2014, Hulyk, 2015, Baker, 2017 Nazeral, 2017, Glucksman, 2017 and Audrezet et al., 2018).

2.8 **Summary**

Current research focuses on three key capabilities of the influencer: persuasion, authenticity and content. Persuasion shows the influencer as a mechanism to drive changes within the influenced (Glucksman, 2017). Authenticity refers to the public image of the influencer, and how the influenced relates to the influencer (Carter, 2016). Content explores what the influencer creates and distributes to the influenced for consumption, including how frequently content is distributed, as well as how the influenced engage with the influencer's content (Brown & Hayes, 2007). Despite follower numbers popularly considered as a major

component of influence (Fastenau, 2018) this measure is largely absent from the literature studied (Brown & Hayes, 2017, Romero et al., 2011 and Del Fresno Garcia et al., 2016). Furthermore, research focuses on the influencer, without considering the influenced, and the uses that the influencer can be to marketing and public relations campaigns (Harrington, 2017 and Hulyk, 2015).

There is currently no seminal research that explores the influencer – influenced relationship. In studying the interactions between the influenced and the influencer this study intends to explore what interactions between these two actors reveal about the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer, so as to gain an understanding of both sides of what social media influence entails. Accordingly, this study will be guided by the research question *"What do interactions show about the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer?"* This question will guide the research in order to understand how the dynamic between the influenced and influencer is seen, and the implications of this dynamic. In order to answer this primary question the research will draw from three types of interaction, broken into supplementary questions below:

1. How does the influencer interact with the influenced?

This question allows for insights into the influencer's interactions with the influenced allowing insight into how these interactions impact the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer. In analysing the influencer's interactions with the influenced a greater understanding of the influencer's relationship to the influenced will be gained.

2. How do the influenced interact with the influencer?

Understanding how the influenced interact with the influencer allows for insight into the ways in which the dynamic between the influencer and influenced is developed and seen. Analysing interactions from the influenced towards the influencer will facilitate a greater understanding of the motivations of the influenced, as well as insight into their relationship to the influencer.

3. How do the influenced interact with each other?

In examining how the influenced interact with one another without the influencer's involvement an understanding of how the influencer shapes the inter-influenced dynamic can be seen. This question can potentially showcase how the absent influencer plays a role

in the influenced interactions, and the influenced relationships with each other are still shaped by the influencer.

This research will explore these interactions through a theoretical framework of interactionism that sees a social reality formed based on the interpretations and interactions of an individual, where each individual brings their own perspectives to the interactions (Blumer, 1969). This is facilitated through the use of Katz's 'Two-step flow' (1957), which refers to opinion leaders, Grunig and Hunt's four models (2003), as well as Walther's social information processing theory (1996) and Steuer's telepresence (1992), both of which look at interaction within a digital context.

In order to answer these questions, research methodology is employed. Research methodology requires that a set of specific procedures and systems be followed (Duignan, 2016). The approach that this research takes is outlined in the following chapter.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The following chapter details research methodology, which refers to the procedures and systems followed to execute the intended research (Duignan, 2016). Existing literature, such as Hulyk (2015), tends to examine the sales value of the influencer rather than the online relationship between the influencer and the influenced, and the dynamics in this relationship. Research by Bernstein, Bakshy, Burker and Karrer (2013) suggests that the influencer's audiences are invisible, yet quantifiable. The present study seeks to understand interactions between the influencer and the influenced, so as to understand the dynamic between these parties.

This research uses qualitative methodology with open coding to organise data and a thematic analysis of texts to develop themes within an interpretivist epistemology (Wahyuni, 2012). The theoretical framework for the research is interactionism as proposed by Blumer (1969), as mentioned in the literature review. This framework was selected as academic research that studies interactions is best utilised in order to understand how the interactions between the influencer and the influenced shape the dynamic between these two parties.

The design of the research is depicted below, outlining the processes that will be undertaken.

Epistemology	Theoretical Framework	Methodology	Method	Analysis
• Interpretivist Paradism	• Interactionism	• Qualitative	• Open Coding	• Thematic Analysis
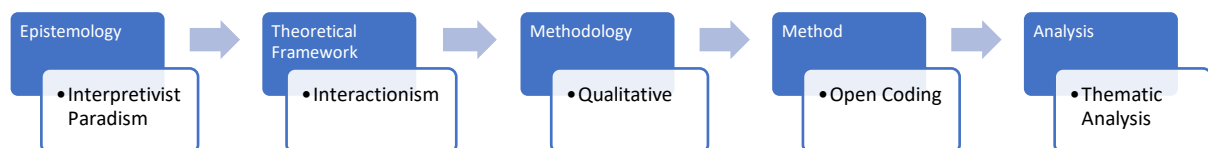
Figure 1 - Research Design Model

3.2 <u>Interpretivist Paradigm</u>

This study is shaped by an interpretivist view (Wahyuni, 2012), as it is reliant on the researcher's interpretation of the data collected. The Interpretivist Paradigm grew from the studies of phenomenology and hermeneutics with the intention of understanding the human experience through looking to theories or patterns of meanings (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This approach to research reveals subjective meanings in social phenomena, with a focus on the minutiae of a situation and the subjective meanings and motivations behind the actions (Wahyuni, 2012). The interpretivist approach believes that reality is constructed by social actors and people's perceptions of their surroundings. Traditionally, researchers using the interpretivist paradigm have favoured direct interactions with the subjects of their research. This provides the researcher with rich descriptions of the observed phenomena that they are researching, influenced by the personal experiences of the researcher (Wahyuni, 2012). Neuman (2011) states that interpretivist research creates narrative-based analysis to provide accounts of the social experience being studied. For the purposes of this study, an interpretivist approach is appropriate as the sentiments seen in comments will lend themselves to interpreting the emotional undercurrents that the influenced feel towards the influencer, and facilitate the narrative of the influenced relationship with the influencer. An interpretivist approach allows for the research question to be answered based around the perceptions seen in the data. This does, however, allow for potential limitations as the interpretations of comments could be disparate from the intention of the commenter.

Ultimately the interpretivist paradigm aims to create a study that showcases insider perspectives into, or real meanings of, social phenomena, whilst enhancing social knowledge. As a result of this, the interpretivist paradigm is used in this study in preference to the transformative paradigm that additionally looks to social phenomena, but from a political perspective, or the post positivist paradigm wherein it is assumed that phenomena are built upon layers of social theory, as these approaches to research do not allow the same depth of understanding of the social phenomena of the influencer that is looking directly to interactions between the influenced and influencer (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

3.3 <u>Theoretical Framework of Interactionism</u>

The theoretical framework guiding this research is that of interactionism. Kuper, Reeves and Levinson (2008) define this as a framework wherein social reality is constructed from an individual's interpretations and interactions within their world, where each individual brings a differing perspective to an interaction. This approach to research seeks to understand social phenomena, and study how society and interactions are shaped through the meaning that emerges from social phenomena. Therefore, it works cohesively with the interpretivist paradigm in which this research is situated. An interactionist research approach is employed to understand human beings and their social interactions. This approach to research suggests that ultimately interactions do not necessarily require a broad societal context—in this research meaning the context of social media networks and associated influencers—to understand social processes, rather suggesting that it is the direct context of social interactions that provides the greater insight into understanding interactions, as this study hopes to achieve (Handberg, Thorne, Midtgaard, Neilsen, & Lomborg, 2015). According to the sociological scholar, Blumer (1969), the interactionist approach to research suggests three key factors, it is important to note that this framework was developed prior to the internet, and will be adapted accordingly for this research:

1. Humans interact with things based on the meaning that this has or creates for them.
2. Meaning is created through interactions with one's peers.
3. Meanings are created and modified through interpretations of the individual of the things they encounter.

In this research the second of these is key, as the research looks for the meanings in interactions between individuals (Blumer, 1969). An interactionist approach is used for this research in order to gain insight into the interactions that individuals have with influencers, and the meanings that can be attributed to these interactions. This approach is limited by factors such as individuals with strong feelings about the influencer not commenting on content, which is overcome by focusing solely on video comments. The research questions guiding this research seek to understand interactions and the relationship associated with these, and accordingly this approach to the research allows for greater understanding of

what the interactions demonstrate, through the lenses of engagement, authenticity and content, as explored in the literature review.

3.4 <u>Qualitative Methodology</u>

Qualitative research can be defined as an interpretive, interdisciplinary methodology that employs communication in order to understand concepts based around the experiences of the individual as a means of gaining insight and understanding (Brennen, 2017). Silverman & Marvasti (2008) proposed qualitative research as exploratory, and for understanding opinions and motivations as well as uncovering trends in thought. The data required for qualitative research is often collected through focus groups, interviews and observations. In contrast, this research collects data from online comments found on influencer's video content. While both refer to qualitative research, these differing perspectives highlight the commonality in this research method – that it is exploratory and based around communications, be they between individuals being researched, or the researcher and interviewees.

Using qualitative measures requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the content they wish to study in order to both see and understand the phenomenon from within. In this regard, qualitative research measures are more ethnographic, and centred on social interactions, and the researcher immersing themselves within the world of the interactions (Pettey, Bracken & Pask, 2017). However, for the purpose of this research the qualitative approach proposed by Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge (2001) seems more appropriate – which suggests that qualitative analysis sees research as a reflective and ongoing process, with information taken from a period of time, and following a more traditionally narrative structure. As this research will feature written comments posted on an influencer's video content that are taken from a period of time as its data and form a narrative based around the sentiments seen within these comments, this interpretation of a qualitative approach is appropriate.

Conversely, a quantitative research approach looks at developing facts and statistics (Brennen, 2017). However, this research seeks to gain an understanding of opinion which is

subjective, especially when coupled with the interpretivist epistemology. Therefore, concrete facts or statistics are not sought. It is qualitative research that provides answers to research questions posed by researchers, whilst quantitative research employs hypotheses and seeks to either validate or disprove these (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Quantitative research entails an approach based on systematic observing, collating and recording of data that is numerically based in order to test a hypothesis (Duignan, Quantitative Research Methods, 2016). A quantitative approach is based on tangible and statistically measurable results, and as this research intends to employ sentiment, which is intangible and interpretive, as a key measure, a qualitative approach lends itself more naturally to the research.

Therefore, a qualitative approach to research was selected to provide a deeper and more detailed insight than quantitative measures, as qualitative research looks for meanings rather than statistics or facts (Brennen, 2017). This research seeks to look into the meanings and impacts that content created for social media has on relationships. The investigative techniques employed in qualitative research are based more on exploratory observations, going on to narrative reporting, with less emphasis on numerical data and insights. The methods that can be employed for qualitative research include interviews, questionnaires, interviews and ethnographic observations. The units of data need to be described and classified in accordance with the insights that are taken from the data. Maintaining objective analysis of qualitative data is likely to be more challenging than in quantitative research (Duignan, 2016). As this research employs an interpretivist approach there is a bias in how each piece of data is interpreted due to the subjective nature of interpretation and the interpretivist epistemology (Wahyuni, 2012).

3.5 Data Collection Method

The method through which the data for this research will be collected is through identifying four influencers who post YouTube videos from Forbes' 'Top Influencer in the Beauty Community' list (Forbes, 2017). This comprises two men and two women. Three types of video were then selected – one sponsored, one product launch and one tutorial, and the top hundred comments from each of these videos were analysed, providing the

data for this research. Open coding and thematic analysis are then completed to create the findings. The steps taken in this research are detailed below:

Step One	Identifying Influencers from Forbes' list who post YouTube videos	A pool of ten influencers taken from Forbes Magazine's 'Top Influencers in the Beauty Community' list (Forbes, 2017). This evaluates an influencer's influence and creates a ranking.
Step Two	Sample Selected – four influencers selected from the Forbes list who post YouTube videos	Four influencers of ten are selected for the research – two male and two female – to allow for a variety within results that would not be seen in smaller samples.
Step Three	Three different types of video selected from each influencer's YouTube catalogue	YouTube videos will be selected from three different video types. This includes branded and sponsored videos, product launches and a tutorial. One video of each type will be selected for each influencer.
Step Four	Data will be the top 100 comment posts at the time of data collection from each of these YouTube videos	The top 100 comment posts from across these 12 videos are collated, with all comments (and sub comments) being copied into a document and numbered. Comments are separated into single documents based on the influencer and video type.
Step Five	Thematic analysis	Comments are coded into categories. Categories are based on the content of comment posts and what is being said. A minimum of 1200 comment posts will form this data, as the top hundred comments from twelve videos will be studied, along with comment replies.
Step Six	Findings	Commonalities and disparities across comment categories are explored, based on numerical measures and disparities in tone and content.

Table 1 – Steps Taken in Research

This research selects influencers from the beauty industry, which has the largest number of social media influencers, as outlined by Nazeral (2017). Beauty brands were among the first companies to realise the potential of working with YouTube influencers.

Approximately 86 per cent of the top 200 beauty videos on YouTube were created by influencers, as opposed to being generated by brands or professionals. The Forbes 'Top Influencers in the Beauty Industry' list is based on the influencers' social media accounts and their associated standing — in particular their YouTube channels identify key players in the beauty industry (Forbes, 2017). YouTube is considered the primary platform through which the influencers distribute their content. Forbes classifies these individuals as influencers on account of their reach, with this measured across Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, with the cumulative reach of the ten influencers detailed in the list amounting to 135,000,000 people (Forbes, 2017).

Four influencers are studied because this allows for variety in the influencer's potential audience and assure a large data pool, allowing for data that represents a larger portion of the beauty industry. The four influencers taken from the 'Top Influencers in the Beauty Industry' list (Forbes, 2017) are those who consider their social media work to be their career: Shannon Harris, Manny Gutierrez, Jeffree Star and Kandee Johnson (Forbes, 2017). They have used their platform to launch products as well as produce beauty content, providing a variety of content to analyse. The influencers chosen will have posted at least two videos in 2018, and frequently post on other social media platforms, such as Instagram. There is no set posting schedule for influencers, with some posting every week (MannyMUA, n.d.), and others far less, such as Kandee Johnson, who posted irregularly throughout 2018 (KandeeJohnson, n.d.).

The data will be taken from three types of YouTube videos published by each of the four influencers: sponsored videos, product launch videos and organic videos. Sponsored videos are videos where the influencer has been paid to make a video surrounding a certain product or event, and promote it (Lancaster, 2008). In product launch videos the influencer will have either created the product they are launching, or worked in collaboration with a brand to create it, and the video will be used to both introduce and promote this product to their audience, in the hopes of seeing the influenced purchasing these products (Simmons, 2018). Organic content, which here is tutorials, is created by the influencer with none of the aims seen in the product launch or sponsored videos, and is not trying to sell or promote a

brand or product (MediaKix, 2015). Organic content is likely to be tutorials, here being instructional videos, especially when considering beauty influencers.

An overview of how this data will be structured is seen in the following table :

Influencer	Videos	Comments per influencer
Shannon Harris (Shaaanxo)	**1 x Product Launch** (*Lip Liner Swatch Video* 😍💄 *xoBeauty Smooth On Lip Pencil, Uploaded April 3 2018*), **1 x Sponsored** (*Glitter Festival Makeup Tutorial* ✨💬*MAKEUP CHALLENGE WITH#MECCALAND, Uploaded March 19 2018*), **1 x Tutorial** (*Chit Chat Tutorial GEMSTONE SERIES* 💎💬 *Yellow Tourmaline* 💗*, Uploaded March 29 2018*)	300 – 100 per video
Kandee Johnson	**1 x Product Launch** (*MY COLLECTION WITH TOOFACED!!!!!, Uploaded August 2017 2017*), **1 x Sponsored** (*HOW TO APPLY MAGNETIC LASHES, Uploaded December 20 2017*), **1 x Tutorial (***HOW TO CONTOUR "THE PERFECT (CELESTIAL) NOSE" TUTORIAL, Uploaded March 12 2018*)	300 – 100 per video
Jeffree Star	**1 x Product Launch** (*BLOOD SUGAR™* 💗 *PALETTE & LOVE SICK COLLECTION REVEAL | Jeffree Star Cosmetics, Uploaded January 25 2018*), **1 x Sponsored** (*MERMAID MAKEUP?! TRYING THE FALL '17 WET N WILD COLLECTION!, Uploaded August 2 2017*) , **1 x Tutorial** (*FULL COVERAGE HOLIDAY MAKEUP TUTORIAL | Jeffree Star, Uploaded December 8 2017*)	300 – 100 per video
Manny Gutierrez (MannyMUA)	**1 x Product Launch** (*JEFFREE STAR COSMETICS X MANNY MUA COLLABORATION REVEAL!, Uploaded March 4 2017*), **1 x Sponsored** (*MOST EXPENSIVE ONE BRAND TUTORIAL - CHARLOTTE TILBURY! Manny MUA, Uploaded October 17 2017*)**, 1 x Tutorial** (*TESTING NEW OVER HYPED MAKEUP! Bretman Rock x Morphe, Soft Glam Palette, ETC!, Uploaded March 11 2018*)	300 – 100 per video

Total Comments	1200

Table 2 – Influencers and Associated Videos

Data will therefore be drawn from twelve videos (three from each of the influencers) from which the top one hundred comments will be collected (these are accurate as of the data collection date, and may be subject to change). Drawing on three different types of video, with different aims from the influencer associated with each, will allow a holistic view of the influenced's relationship with the influencer, with no one video type given prominence, and an equal number of comments taken from each of these videos.

The data will be the comment posts left on these videos, both by the influenced and the influencer. The top hundred comments of each video will be collated, with replies to comments included in this, but not counting towards the hundred comments. Therefore the comments analysed will be representative of the popular opinion and discussion within the comment sections.

The collection of data will see a maximum of 1200 comments (excluding replies to comments) for analysis in this research, as it draws on the top 100 comments from 12 videos. Using the top comments means that individuals who are considered important (here meaning those who have a large following), and comments that are widely liked or engaged with are prioritised according to YouTube's algorithm. This allows for insight into the popular opinion within the comment section (Miners, 2013). This study is limited to the opinions that individuals express on social media, however, by taking the most popular comments as the research sample, commonalities and disparities are likely to emerge within the data, facilitating textual analysis.

Following the data collection, thematic analysis will begin to organise the comments. The thematic analysis will follow the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), and draw from the interpretivist approach (Neuman, 2011). The textual analysis will be completed from an interactionism perspective (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013), while seeking to answer the research question (*"What do interactions show about the dynamic between the*

influenced and the influencer?"). In order to evaluate this question, the engagement of audiences, through examining comments, will give insights into both how the influencer is defined by their following, and the potential limitations as to how influential the influencer really is for their audience. Prior to categorisation each comment will be assigned a number, with comment replies being assigned letters (i.e., comment 1A) for clarity of organisation. Data will be coded using the open coding model, explored previously. This will see codes attached to each piece of data and its associated observed findings to ensure clarity between codes and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research anticipates that there will be three predominant types of interaction seen within the data, as in the following table:

Commenter	Those being addressed
Influencer	Influenced
Influenced	Influencer
Influenced	Influenced

Table 3 – Interactions Anticipated in Research

Should any influencer's comment on the influencer's video they will be considered as a part of the influenced, as they are not the uploading influencer.

This research analyses these interactions, as they are seen through comments, from the influencer and the influenced. The comments highlight different aspects of communication within the online arena and accordingly will be categorised.

This research forms categories of comments, which are subsequently counted and organised numerically to provide the research and data with structure (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Accordingly, the comments are be split into categories based on the similar themes that emerge from the researcher's interpretation of the comments, with these categories providing the foundation of the analysis.

Once the data has been separated into these individualised categories thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) will be conducted. In this process each comment category is individually analysed. This occurs in order to explore what each comment category demonstrates about the relationship between the influencer and the influenced.

3.6 Open Coding Method

An open coding method is used to code and gain a further understanding of this data.

Open coding looks to understand qualitative texts, such as YouTube comments, and place them into categories for further research (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2008). Open coding requires a 'line by line' approach, where each piece of data is treated and coded individually, with every word considered. This approach ensures that the codes that emerge are relevant to the study in question, with data compared across codes. The data that is collated when using an open coding methodology is analysed and subsequently coded, with codes then compared to one another in order to gain insights from the data (Holton, 2007).

The creation of categories emerges through open coding. Categories are formed based on common properties that are found within the data (Khandkar, 2009). In this research these will be common ideas and themes that are seen in the data. The data is entirely coded, with there being a category for each piece of information, with data categories grouped together where possible to reduce the number of categories. Following this comprehensive coding the data is 'abstracted', wherein a generalised idea of the research question is seen through the creation of these categories, allowing for analysis to take place (Berg, Lune, & Lune, 2005).

Open coding is used in preference to discourse analysis, as unlike in discourse analysis in open coding themes can be explored thoroughly, which will allow for greater insight into the sentiments behind interactions seen online. Discourse analysis aims to highlight the subjectivity and multiple meanings that can be found in texts. Due to the

interpretivist approach this research will undertake, the interpretations of data will be subjective. This aims to understand the concrete commonalities of the data itself (Thomas, 2006). Another method to data interpretation other than open coding is that of phenomenology, wherein the research seeks to uncover the meaning and feeling that is found within experience, with this research culminating in a description of these lived experiences (Thomas, 2006). This method will not be utilised for this research as, in order to gain the maximum understanding from the data, the use of themes and categories facilitated by open coding is preferable. In this research this is completed by examining the content of YouTube comments and placing a comment into a broad category, before analysing the tone and themes present in the comment, and placing it within a category.

3.7 Thematic Textual Analysis

Following the open coding process the texts analysed will look for commonalities amongst comment categories and across influencers in order to answer the research question. To achieve this the qualitative measure of thematic analysis will be executed. Thematic analysis is a process through which themes seen in data are studied and analysed, which is able to be completed with any kind of qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998), which guarantees the applicability of this method to this research.

Thematic analysis entails searching for themes that appear in research as important in answering the question. The process of thematic textual analysis requires the careful examination of data and seeking out patterns within the data. In these patterns themes are able to be identified, and these themes become categories for further analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Braun (2008) outlines the benefits of thematic analysis as being a research methodology that is flexible, relatively accessible, and most importantly for the sake of this research, able to summarise large volumes of data and of a description of sets of data. This research will draw on at least 1200 comments, and as a result employing thematic analysis will enable each comment to be coded according to themes, with codes then used to highlight theme frequencies and demonstrate relationships between themes. As previously

mentioned, qualitative research is a reflexive process, and this idea is seen further in thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Thematic analysis enables the researcher to develop themes and codes as well as check on consistency across data (Boyatzis, 1998). From a social science perspective, thematic analysis allows clarity in the articulation of the meaning drawn from the social 'facts' that have been researched, and in identifying these social facts and their subsequent meanings (Boyatzis, 1998). Only when research has been completed can thematic analysis take place, and in this stage the connection of themes and patterns within data emerges. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane suggest that in completing thematic analysis consistently re-familiarising oneself with the data allows for consistency of themes across the research. Once these themes have been identified, however, the researcher then has to ascribe a representative element to the themes, deciding what insights the theme offers into the data. The researcher additionally, when completing thematic analysis, must choose whether they take these themes at face value or whether there are factors within them that need further explaining in their own right (Willig, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a six-step model for completing thematic analysis, as follows:

Braun & Clarke's Steps	Application
1. Familiarising oneself with data	This is best seen in the data collection, as each comment is read and numbered during the process.
2. Generation of initial codes	In initial interpretation of data comments are coded based on similar sentiments.
3. Searching codes for themes	The sentiments that each code is formed around are identified, producing themes.
4. Reviewing of themes	Each comment is reviewed to ensure it is within a thematic category.
5. Definition and naming of themes	Thematic categories are defined, based on what the interaction entails.
6. Producing findings	This chapter reviews the themes developed in the earlier steps and offers the findings that these categories produced.

Table 4 - Application of Braun & Clarke's Steps for Thematic Analysis

How each step is applied to this research:

Step	Application in this Research

1. Familiarising oneself with data	Reading the 1200 collated comments and establishing familiarity with content and tone of each comment.
2. Generation of initial codes	Creation of broad codes based on the content or tone of comments, such as positive or conversational comments. Noting which influencer's video, and which type of video the comment was posted on.
3. Searching of codes for themes	Establishing the key theme that is present in each comment, based on the tone or content it contains, for example praising the influencer.
4. Reviewing of themes	Ensuring that each comment is in the most appropriate category.
5. Definition and naming of themes	Establishing what each theme concerns or actually says, and naming each theme accordingly. For example, comments that are conversational.
6. Producing the findings	Creating comparison of categories and outlining what makes each category unique based on what each comment said.

Table 5 - Six Step Model for Thematic Analysis Applied to this Research based on Braun & Clarke's Six Steps (2006)

Boyatzis (1998) cautions that in completing thematic analysis the approach is limited. It is suggested that thematic analysis may not necessarily reflect the correlations and ties between themes. To counter this the content of thematic categories will be explored, to support each theme, as well as demonstrate relationships between themes. A further critique of thematic analysis as a method is that it has been argued that thematic analysis is not in itself a method of analysis, as this method of analysis can draw from a variety of qualitative measures, and this is a secondary method of analysis rather than a method in itself (Willig, 2014). Silverman & Marvasti (2008) warn that the development of categories necessary for thematic analysis has the potential to be damaging, as there is the potential for rapid categorisations of data and, with an assumption that the categories developed are accurate without detailed analysis, the biases acknowledged as a part of the interpretivist paradigm may apply. Thematic analysis allows research flexibility when designing research, and has the ability to create a detailed and complex narrative out of the data that is coded. Whilst coding the data there is the potential for biases, as mentioned previously. As interpretation of tone is subjective to the reader, however with the researcher being the only person to code data any biases will be consistent, with the content of comments able to provide justification for comment coding should tone be unreliable.

As a result of the steps outlined in this chapter the data was collected, and open coding was employed, which led to the creation of categories based on each comment interaction found in the top hundred comments on each of the influencer videos. These comment posts were then numerically organised (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

Overview of how the data was collected:

Influencers	Influencers were identified in Forbes' 2017 Top Ten Influencers in the Beauty Industry list.
Sample Selected	Four of these influencers were selected for this study – Two male and two female. This was to allow a wide data sample.
Videos	Three types of YouTube videos from each influencer were selected to draw comments from. These videos were one sponsored video, one tutorial and one product launch to ensure varied content responses.
Comments	The top 100 comments posted on each video were copied into a document, with all replies to comments included. Each comment was then numbered. There were 100 comments per video, excluding comment replies.
Textual Analysis	Comments then coded into categories based on the content and speaker of each comment.
Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Comment categories analysed more closely, both on their own and in relation to one another based on themes seen in comments.

Table 6 - Data Collection Overview

4. <u>Findings</u>

This research analysed the top hundred comments posted on twelve YouTube videos by both the influencer themselves and the influenced. Videos were studied from the influencers Jeffree Star, MannyMUA, Shaaanxo and Kandee Johnson. The top 100 comments from each of these videos and the associated replies were categorised. The comments were categorised in accordance with the dominant theme(s) that emerged in each comment, using the 2006 Braun & Clarke model, as outlined above, and utilising an interpretivist approach considered during this process. Every comment, including comment replies on comment threads, was coded and subsequently categorised based on the themes within the comments. In this study, a comment is a statement posted on a YouTube video in response to the content uploaded by the influencer. As a result of the content of the data collected eleven categories of comments emerged.

Prior to categorisation comments were copied from the YouTube video comment section, with the comments organisation set to 'Top Comments', and then pasted into a separate document to preserve the comments and any associated comment threads for deeper analysis. From these comments 11 comment categories were formed from the content of the comments, with this being broken into the emotion or desires a comment expressed and, in some cases, who was writing the comment. This saw the collected data placed into the following categories through open coding (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2008). These categories will be used as the themes when thematic analysis is completed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research this was completed through the analysis of themes and content seen in the data. Following this analysis the data was placed into the following categories:

Comment Category	Total comments
1. Audience conversation Discussions directed both to the influencer and other viewers of the influencer's content	1164
2. Praise of Influencer Audiences praising the uploading influencer	917
3. Sales and action comments – that indicate the intent to purchase or recreate influencer recommendations	264
4. Content creation requests – audience telling the influencer what they would like to see	234
5. Complaints and negative comments – critiquing either the influencer personally or their content	152
6. Comments from influencer – responses to viewer comments	107
7. Requests for further information – viewer requests for follow-up on products and ideas seen in content	68
8. References to other influencers – allusions to influencers other than the uploader	65
9. International purchase discussion – conversation surrounding the logistics of international shopping	10
10. Non-English discussion – conversations in foreign languages	9
11. Comments from brands – comments from brands seen in content	7
TOTAL COMMENTS	**2999**

Table 7 - Overview of Data Collected
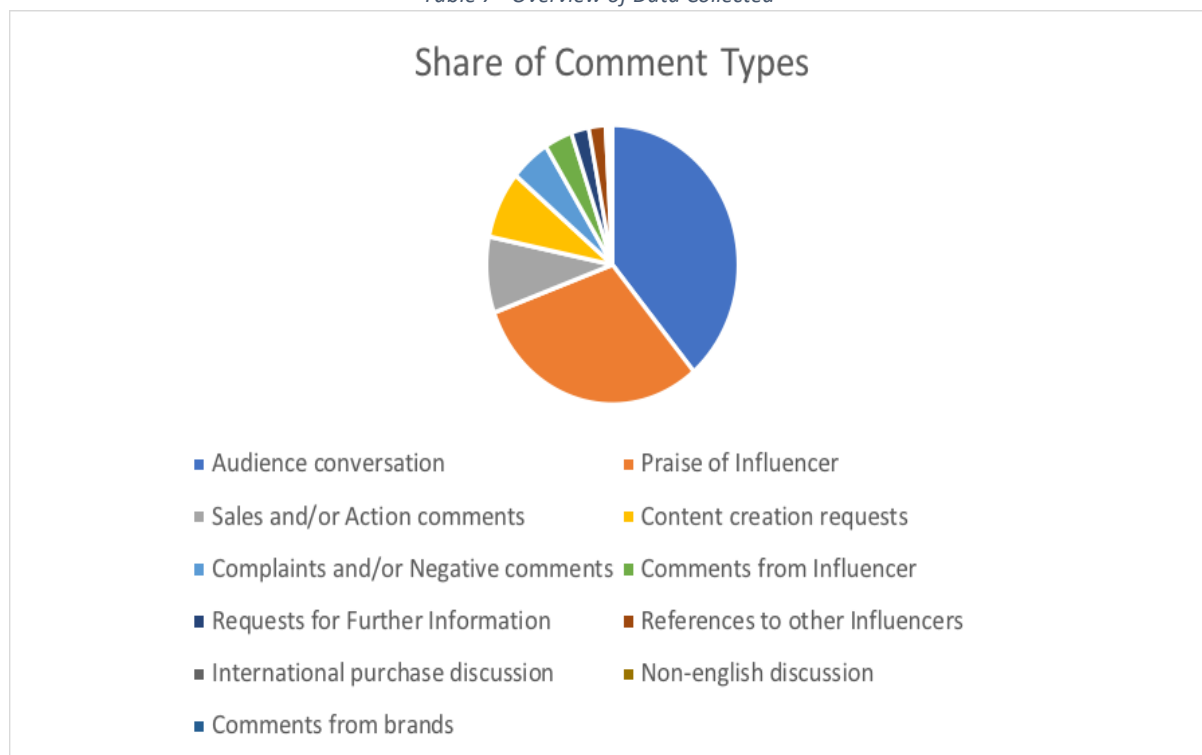
Figure 2 - Distribution of Comment Types

4.1 Audience Conversation

The largest number of comments within a single category is that of audience conversation (1164 comments). These comments include discussions between the influenced as well as comments directly addressing the influencer. However, this category could be divided further into smaller categories such as defence of the influencer, or personal sentiments, in this category comments share – a desire to be acknowledged by the influencer, and engage with them in conversation. This category shows an inclusive view of the interactions between the influenced and the influencer and the sentiments that the influenced community express, e.g.,

I'd say 52$ is really fair compared to so many other companies!! Love that palette!! Comment 305

This comment category sees the ideas proposed by Mayfield (2008) wherein there is a community and connectivity between individuals found online, as the influenced engage with both each other and the influencer, e.g.,

I need the Jocelyn lip liner. My Nana Jocelyn passed away last year from cancer and a few other health issues so as much as you made it for you I feel like it's something I would really love. My nana sounds just like yours always complimenting my makeup <3
Comment 11

This comment shows the influenced feeling confident in sharing personal and emotional details with both the influencer and the influenced community, and opening a conversation about loss.

4.2 Praise of influencer

The second largest comment category from the influenced is praise of the influencer (917 comments out of a total 2999). These comments are entirely from the influenced, praising the influencer, or the work that they create, and show a positive sentiment towards the influencer. These comments were spread equally across influencers, which

suggests that the positive sentiments expressed are a consistent presence in the comment sections of influencers e.g.,

Not going to lie they truly look stunning I love every sahde [sic] you picked perfect colors to make! Congrats!! You are one of few big makeup gurus on YouTube that I feel is a genuine smart girl. Most I find to be puppets but you are not. Thank you for being you! I have been watching you for years <3   Comment 15

4.3 Sales and action comments

The third largest comment category is sales and action comments (266 comments out of 2999). These comments demonstrate the influenced's intention to follow the influencer's advice. The comments in this category are only from the influenced. This categorisation looks at the offline translation and implications of the comments collected, with these comments suggesting that the influencer has in fact influenced the influenced's intentions at the very least. Scholars such as Butler-Young (2017) suggest that the primary function of the influencer is to drive sales, and these comments show this happening. The videos which had the largest numbers of sales and action comments were product-launching videos from each influencer. The comments seen in this category showed intention to act, e.g.,

Just bought the Candy Glow and the Banana pudding powder on Too Faced's website as both were already sold out on Ulta!! I am so excited to receive my Kandee collection items!!   Comment 1026.

These comments communicate an intent to act from the viewer to translate what they have seen from the influencer into their offline lives.

4.4 Content creation requests

The fourth largest comment category is identified as content creation requests (234 comments out of 2999). These are defined as requests from the influenced to the uploading influencer, and the comments are only from the influenced. These comments request the influencer to create specific content. In these comments the influenced are

seen to be engaging with the influencer's content, and making their requests of the influencer clear, e.g.,

>*Can you do a video explaining how you make your own colours and the*
>*process of that?*   Comment 333.

4.5 Complaints and negative comments

The fifth largest comment category was those identified as negative from the influenced towards the influencer (152 comments of 2999). Most comments directed towards the influencer were positive, however negative comments were also found in the data (917 positive comments as opposed to 152 negative). This category was defined as the comments that are critical of the influencer's content, or of the influencer and had negative or critical tones. The research completed by Steiglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) suggest that a 'negativity bias' appears online, wherein negative sentiment spreads more quickly than positive. However, as negative comments can be deleted by the video uploader (YouTube, n.d.) this data may not be an accurate reflection of the sentiments of viewers; although no comments suggested that the influenced felt negative comments were being deleted. In this study 53 of the 152 negative comments were directed towards the same influencer. In the negative comments collated across the four influencers a majority (53) were posted on Kandee Johnson's content. This statistic suggests that her comment section sees fewer comments deleted than Johnson's contemporaries within this study. As a result of the significantly larger volume of negative comments present within Johnson's comment sections, it may be that Johnson does not delete negative comments, and that the other influencers may have deleted negative comments from their videos, or did not elicit the negative reactions that Johnson had, e.g.,

>*Unsubscribing,you got old looking,got to pick some different makeup*
>*youtubers*   Comment 1174

4.6 Comments from influencer

The sixth largest comment category is comments directly from the influencer to the influenced (107 comments from influencers and 100 of these are attributed to the same

influencer, Kandee Johnson). The comments in this category were made only by the influencer who uploaded the video. This category is an anomaly in that it is the only category where the influencer is seen to directly respond to the influenced. It suggests that the influencers do not interact with the influenced through commenting, but rather the content they create. These comment interactions are responses from the influencer to comments the influenced make, and address the influenced directly. Kandee Johnson, who had the largest number of both positive and negative comments across selected videos and influencers was also the influencer most present in their comment sections, with 93 per cent of influencer comments coming from her, providing an interesting contradiction, e.g.,

I know…that's why I only like the BOLD, demi wispie ones…and I forgot to put the one inner corner magnet on….I'm fired! ha ha ha   Comment 933A

These comments were removed from the more general influenced comments, and as a result became their own category. The comments within this category do not directly impact how the influenced individuals view the influencer, due to their rareness.

4.7 Requests for further information

The seventh largest comment category was where the influenced posted a direct question, asking the influencer for further information based on the influencer's content (68 comments), e.g.,

How do you name your products or what do the names mean? All the names are so cool and interesting – I love them!!!!   Comment 9

These comments emerged as an individual category as, whilst they referred to the content of the influencer's video they did not request the creation of specific content, such as the comments seen in category four (Content Creation Requests). However, this category saw the influenced following up and engaging with the video, asking for more information about the content consumed, responding to the influencer's main form of communication with the influenced.

4.8 References to other influencers

The eighth largest comment categorisation is references to other influencers besides the uploading influencer (65 comments). These are comments from the influenced that refer to influencers besides the uploader. The most popular of the other influencer's referenced are the two influencers - SimplyNailogical and MannyMUA. It is likely that these references occurred because of SimplyNailogical's large following of seven million subscribers and popularisation of the 'holo' trend (Avila, 2017). Similarly the comments referring to MannyMUA are likely to be referring to the popular 'so pigmented' meme that was borne from his habit of repeating people (Steigman, 2017), e.g.,

Manny crashes through wall SO PIGMENTED   comment 1050

4.9 International purchase discussion

In the ninth category comments from the influenced discussed international logistics when purchasing products (10 comments). In this category the comments show that the influenced will, as a result of the influencer, purchase referenced products. These comments were separate to category three (Sales and Action comments) as they displayed a unique aspect of purchase intent – as these comments looked less to purchasing and more to the logistics involved, e.g.,

I would love these but it would cost loads to ship to the UK
Comment 7

In these comments the discussion was focused less on purchase of products, and more towards how best to navigate international shipping and shopping in order to get the products referred to by the influencer into their home country, occasionally highlighting how much the influenced are willing to spend to support the influencer.

4.10   Non-English discussion

The tenth comment category included comments that were non-English (9 of 2999). It was problematic to categorise the comments into another section, as a result of the small

total number of comments and the subjectivity of interpretation of translations. However, these comments are important as they showcase the global reach of an influencer, e.g.,

Quien es tu novio Manuelito?   Comment 608.

4.11   <u>Comments from brands</u>

The eleventh and smallest comment category was Comments from brands' – with seven comments, made from branded accounts. The comments in this section were made by cosmetics brands that have commented on the influencer's video, and are admittedly limited, at seven comments. This, like the 'Comments from Influencer' category is anomalous, as these are comments made for sales purposes. The brands seen were those featured in the influencer's video, with the most predominant being the glitter company 'In Your Dreams' on the sponsored video from Shaaanxo studied, e.g.,

Shannon! We are so happy you love our glitters! Thank you so much for featuring them in your amazing festival look!   Comment 115

These comments warranted their own categorisation as they were more promotional in nature, unlike many of the previous comment categorisations, and these were the only comments not made by the influenced or the influencer.

4.12   <u>Final findings</u>

The analysis of this data revealed that there were eleven comment categories and of these only one category included comments from the influencer, 'Comments from the Influencer' (107 comments), with nine of the other categories entirely featuring comments from the influenced, and one outlier category featuring the few comments from brands. Whilst each comment category individually offers insight into answering the research question of *"What do interactions show about the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer?"* combining the comment categories and their respective insights provides a holistic insight into the relationships that are seen between the influencer and the influenced. The categorisation of each comment is subjective, based on the key message taken away from each analysed text by the researcher. In the following chapter each of

these categories are analysed more closely through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to begin to answer the research question, and understand the interactions and dynamic between the influencer and influenced.

5. Discussion of findings

This analysis of the categories seen in the data aims to create an understanding of the interactions between the influenced and the influencer, and answer the research question of *"What do interactions show about the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer?"* At a preliminary glance it becomes apparent that the influencer generally does not communicate directly with the influenced, and suggests that there may not be a relationship between the influencer and the influenced. In order to gain a further understanding of the dynamics that exist between the influencer and the influenced the seven largest comment categories will be explored further, through thematic analysis, with each category acting as a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These are:

1. Audience Conversation (1164 comments)

2. Praise of Influencer (917 comments)

3. Sales and Action Comments (264 comments)

4. Content Creation Requests (234 comments)

5. Complaints and Negative Comments (152 comments)

6. Comments from the Influencer (107 comments)

7. Requests for Further Information (68 comments)

5.1 Audience Conversation Category: Stay for the Community

The largest number of unrequited comments were in the audience conversation category (1164). This category demonstrates a more personal relationship not only from the influenced towards the influencer, but also amongst the influenced. This category consisted of the comments that addressed the influencer as a friend, showing messages that sought to engage the influencer in conversation, mostly unsuccessfully.

The category 'audience conversation', sees the influenced reach out to and engage with the influencer. However, there was little reciprocation from the influencer to these comments (107 responses to 1164 comments). For example, one influenced talked about where she was going and then followed up with another post identifying where she would be, as if she had been in conversation with the influencer based on the content they had seen in the influencer's video:

OH MY GOD! I am also going to TOMORROWLAND! Please tell me you are going the second weekend @sacha.roest

You can find me with the big balloons   Comments 260 & 260a

These comments were uploaded by the same person, and show that they perceive the influencer (Shaaanxo), to be someone with whom they have a personal relationship, as if they were to actually meet. This builds on the research of Walther and Dai (2018) by suggesting engagement between influencers and the influenced, with an illusion of being heard and intimacy. However, this dynamic is ultimately one-sided. This results in the audience feeling as if they know the figure, in this case the influencer, as a friend. The comments that formed the data for this category showcase a strong sentiment of familiarity within the audience conversation category. In these comments the influenced continue to communicate with the influencer, despite the influencer not responding, suggesting a para-social intimacy with the influencer, as proposed by Walther and Dai (2018).

The audience conversation comments category is conversational and focuses on asking the influencers how their day has been and even sharing personal information. Comments in the 'Audience Conversation' category are indicative of the influenced having emotional engagement with the influencer and suggest a friendship between the influenced and the influencer. Kietzmann, Hermken, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) suggested that it is the cultivation of this authentic and friendly persona that allows the influencer to connect with their audiences on a deeper, meaningful level, which is a relatively low-level investment for the influencer, in comparison to the potential audience that could grow.

The friendly comments in the audience conversation category also suggest a similar familiarity to offline friendships, and shows that there can be a relationship between the influencer and the influenced, despite the influenced being rarely acknowledged by the influencer. A phenomenon that was seen in the data was that of the influenced community, born of a sense of belonging, who acted in defence of the influencer. This response is explained by social identity theory, wherein an individual's perception of themselves is altered as a result of their relationship to another person or group as a member of the

collective (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004), here the influenced are the collective. This sense of community was best highlighted by one of the influenced responding to negative or critical comments about the influencer, and the influenced community showed support for the influencer whilst often becoming combative towards the negative commenter. The influenced community, as seen in the 'Audience Conversation' category, additionally showed the influenced supporting one another as a collective and a community .

When looking at the formation of relationships online traditionally telepresence was considered to be key. This refers to online virtual reality as vividness, or technology's capability to create a diverse environment complete with interactivity, interactivity being the method through which the environment is influenced (Steuer, 1992). The interactive environment that the influencer created has facilitated the influenced to perceive their relationship with the influencer, as well as form relationships with others around the influencer. Additionally, it has been suggested that relationships online are cultivated through a sense of community (Mayfield, 2008). In the comments that fall under the 'audience conversation' category a sense of community specific to each influencer can be seen, agreeing with Mayfield's research. This in turn suggests that a community that is cultivated around the influencer is at least partially responsible for the feelings of friendship that audiences feel towards the influencer, as this is symptomatic of the surrounding community (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These ideas suggest that the influenced may come to content for the influencer, but it is the community and interactivity that they comment to, and stay for, rather than the space's 'vividness'.

The strength and passion of these communities suggests that, for the influenced, the influencer is a person worthy of defending, and that there is potentially a loyalty that motivates this. Comments such as:

LISPY CHRISSY WHY ARE YOU STILL HARASSING PEOPLE HERE?!?! Get a life and move on. Are you sad that we get more excited to spend our time watching makeup videos than with you?!?! Grow up and leave people alone.   Comment 396c

The above serves as examples of these defensive comments in action. The 'illusion of intimacy' proposed by Dai and Walther (2018) is likely to be the reason why the

influenced are quick to jump to the influencer's defence, but more research into this phenomenon would be required to offer a definitive answer. It has been suggested that audiences, as a result of telepresence generating an interactive environment, and the perceived closeness created by online interactions, develop an 'illusion of intimacy' towards the influencer (Dai & Walther, 2018). Comments such as the one seen above serve to highlight the influencer's authenticity (Hearn & Shoenhoff, 2015), as a key component of influence, as the influenced see the influencer as worthy of defending and are eager to do so. The 'Audience Conversation' comments suggests that the perception of intimacy between the influenced and influencer can be attributed to the influenced's unwavering loyalty when they see the influencer being criticised.

Equally, it is the influencer who sends out information, as in the public information model, as proposed in the four models of communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), wherein information is dispersed, without interaction. This is demonstrated with the influencer not responding to the influenced's attempt to relate to them. As Grunig & Hunt (1984) found that two-way symmetrical communications were considered to be optimum, the comments seen in the audience conversation category suggest that the interactions between the influenced and influencer are not excellent. However, the large number of comment posts demonstrates that the influenced responded to the content and the communications were effective, and the influenced received the content positively. The comments seen in this category demonstrate the phenomenon of the influenced defending the influencer best. In this category the influenced are seen sharing major life news such as the death of family members with the influencer and sharing their smaller life triumphs, with very few of these comments acknowledged by the influencer themselves. The authors of these comments form an influenced community, and either commiserate or celebrate with one another, as seen in comment thread 201-201f, in which strangers share birthday wishes with a commenter who stated that it was their birthday,

I genuinely love the longer videos <3 it's my birthday on the 30th (tomorrow) and this is exactly how I wanted to spend the night before   Comment 201

Within the comments not only did the influenced address the influencer, there was also interaction and discussion amongst the influenced, with this suggesting a community formed around the influencer, irrespective of the influencer's reciprocation to interactions.

5.2 Influencer Praise category: unrequited and unacknowledged

The second largest category is the comments showing praise - the 'Influencer Praise' category (917). These are the comments where the influenced praise the influencer. This category reveals a more intimate relationship between the influenced and the influencer. According to Dai and Walther (2018) praise shows esteem or respect for the influencer and attempts to create a friendly level of engagement. The praise-based comments often mention the influencer's authenticity as a point of celebration, as the influencer seems to be more a normal person than a public figure (Nazeral, 2017).

This category features comments that are complimentary to the influencer. These comments also suggest that the influenced want to engage with the influencer, e.g.,

i would lovee to see a lip liner video. Shannon [the influencer] I'm soo proud of everything you've done. here since the past 3 years and i love every single one of your beauty products but unfortunately since i rarely apply makeup and because of the limited funds i cannot purchase any from your lines. but the day i start building up my makeup collection yours would definitely be the first brand added to it ♡♡♡   Comment 74

In this comment the influencer's authenticity is praised. Ashworth (2017) suggests that it is authenticity that creates success for an influencer. This is supported by a study commissioned by YouTube, Neilson and Carat, which states that through relatability and authenticity an influencer builds both trust and a relationship with their audience (Nazeral, 2017). As these comments show, the influencer is seen as an authentic and relatable figure. Glucksman (2017) suggests that the influencer having a positive relationship with the influenced is key to the influencer's success – and the praise-based comments show that the influenced do perceive themselves as having a positive relationship with the influencer.

The large number of praise-based comments, (917 of 2999 total) demonstrates the positivity that the influenced feel towards the influencer, e.g.,

Manny [the influencer] is the only male guru who doesn't annoy me. I know that's rude but idk lmao. !   Comment 807

This comment suggests that it is MannyMUA's authenticity (Carter, 2016) that makes him less 'annoying' than other male influencers within the beauty community. However, this may not be an accurate representation of the reactions that the influencer's videos evoke, as YouTube videos can be moderated and comments deleted by the uploader (YouTube, n.d.). The top 100 comment posts taken from the YouTube videos and their replies suggest that the influenced clearly hold the influencer in high regard, with 30.58 per cent of all comments being in the 'Praise of Influencer' category.

Social information processing theory proposes that online relationships require more time to develop than offline relationships (Walther, 1996). This research suggests that the friend-like comments that the influenced leave the influencer have been built with time, and an instantaneous positive relationship with the influencer is unlikely.

The positive relationship to the influencer is suggested through praise-based comments, which make up the second largest comment category. Despite the large number of comments and clear affection expressed by the influenced these feelings seem to be unrequited, based on the minimal influencer responses. The influenced are seen to believe they have a relationship with the influencer, and this is a positive bond that the influenced are confident in expressing with both the influencer and other commenters. The influencer's communications with the influenced is the press-agentry model of communication, as outlined by Grunig & Hunt (1984). This entails content being created with the aim of persuading an audience, with no intention of audience reciprocation.

5.3 Sales and Action Category: Buy Before You Try

The Sales/Action comments category sees comments where the buying behaviours or intentions of the influenced are altered by the influencer. The Sales/Action Comments

category features 264 comments that assert an intention to either purchase or recreate the influencer's content, such as the following –

This is the first palette that I have truly been interested in purchasing this year thus far! Can't wait to try it!   Comment 322

These comments consider the concept of authenticity, as proposed by Hulyk (2015), wherein an influencer's authenticity leads the influenced to trust the influencer. The sales and action comments demonstrate how in the eyes of the influenced the influencer's name and opinion lends credibility to products. This category serves as an expression of the marketing function of influencers, as outlined by Butler-Young (2017), which states that influencers are a key tool for brand discovery and sales, and that this tool is increasingly effective when used to target campaigns. This is also seen in Hulyk's (2015) research, focusing specifically on influencer-marketing to 'Generation Z', seeing that this group perceives influencers to be both trustworthy and relatable (Hulyk, 2015). As suggested in the literature review, influencers act as opinion leaders (Katz, 1957) and as a result, when considering these figures from a functional Public Relations industry perspective, it can be argued that the influencer is predominantly a tool through which brand awareness can be raised. The results of the research completed in this study reinforce this perspective, with sales and action comments suggesting that the personal relationship the influenced see themselves as having with the influencer is a key factor in their motivation for action, as the large volume of action comments shows (264 of 2999), e.g.,

JEFREE (sic) *!!!! $52 for this incredible packaging AND EIGHTEEN SHADES !!!!!! That is a STEAL !! I NEED this*   Comment 313

These comments were most prevalent on videos launching products that the influencer had created. Therefore, the influencer's authenticity (Hearn & Shoenhoff, 2015) is demonstrated here, as the influencer's name and personal brand acts as an assurance of quality. The influenced's purchasing decisions accordingly can be seen as a reflection of the relationship that they have with the influencer and the way in which the influenced considers the influencer to be an opinion leader (Katz, 1957) whose opinions they respect enough to act upon.

According to Social Judgement Theory (Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall, 1965), an individual's opinions are influenced by their existing beliefs. It could be argued that as a result of these already positive opinions of the influenced towards the influencer, the launching of products by influencers appeals to the influenced, as seen through the 'Sales and Action' comments, owing to the influencer's involvement with the product, as seen in the comment below:

> *Honestly her attitude and how excited she is about everything makes me*
> *want to buy it all. Congratulations its a beautiful collection* Comment 1004

This involvement makes the product appealing to the influenced, as they are already within the latitude of acceptance regarding the influencer, as they feel positively about the influencer. The influenced being within the latitude of acceptance ensures a positive reception for products or content the influencer has created, as the influenced see themselves as having a positive relationship with the influencer and want to support them. The persuasive capabilities of the influencer are also seen best here, as the influenced are persuaded to follow the influencer's example as a result of their affection towards the influencer (del Fresno Garcia, Segado Sanchez-Cabezudo and Daly, 2016).

The sales/action comments demonstrate a relationship that is based on trusting the influencer's opinion, as the influenced make purchases based on the influencer's word alone. In this category the assumed authenticity of the influencer is seen. This comment highlights the marketing/sales role of the influencer.

5.4 Content Creation Requests & Requests for Further Information Categories: "Can you give this a shot…?"

The categories of 'Content Creation Requests' and 'Requests for Further Information' will be discussed together, as they are both based solely on content and the influenced asking the influencer about that content.

These are taken from the categories of 'Content Creation Requests' (234 comments) and 'Requests for More Information' (68 comments), with 302 comments total. In all these

comments the influenced make requests to the influencer specifically about content, asking for content they'd like to see or for more information about the video they watched. These comments highlight the engagement of audiences with what they are viewing, and their desire to be involved in the content process and engage with the influencer about the content, e.g.,

please do a hard candy makeup review   Comment 513

These two categories suggest that it is the influencer's content (such as videos) that audiences engage with that shapes their relationship with the influencer. This feeling of being involved in the content creation process builds upon research by Glucksman (2017), who found that authenticity and being aware of what audiences want to see is considered a key element of influence. Content is what the influenced are engaging with and commenting on, and accordingly through engaging with content we see the influenced as invested in the influencer. In this study, the role that content plays in the cultivation of social media influence is shown through the comments from the 'content creation requests' and 'requests for further information' categories. These categories see the influenced engage with the influencer in a more collaborative manner regardless of whether the influencer acknowledges these requests by providing the information or creating the content. This builds on research by Brown and Hayes (2007) that suggests it is the influencer's content rather than the medium of social media that carries influence.

Content is a component of an influencer's definition (Bernstrain Bakshy, Burke & Karrer, 2013, Shand, 2014 and Glucksman, 2017). Therefore, comments that refer to content are key to a good understanding of both the influencer and the dynamic between the influenced and influencer. The influencers studied in this research have varying subscriber numbers, yet highly engaged audiences, making them influential. This finding reinforces the importance of the influencer's content being accessible and worthy of engagement with the influenced, as proposed by Kietzmann, Hermken, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011). These findings are supported by the influenced's engagement with content. Accordingly, this research shows engagement, rather than followers, is the key determinant of influence itself, as suggested in Brown & Hayes (2007).

These comment suggestions and requests from the influenced illustrate this perspective, as the influenced see the influencer as listening to their input. This agrees with research by Nazeral (2017) suggesting it is an expectation of the influenced that the influencer be a friendly figure who listens to their opinions. These content-driven comments build on the research by Brown and Hayes (2008), where content is considered a key element of what makes an influencer. It also suggests that influenced engagement is a key aspect of gaining and retaining influence (del Fresno Garcia, Daly and Segado Sanchez-Cabezudo, 2016).

5.5 Complaints and Negative Comments Category: Thank you, next.

The complaints and negative comments category is the fifth largest overall comment category. Earlier research argues that negative comments and opinions are formulated and expressed more quickly than positive ones, and that the negative opinions expressed are more potent, creating a 'negativity bias' (Steiglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). In contrast, this study shows that positive sentiment was more than six times more numerous than negative comments. The low ratio of negative to positive comments (5.07% as opposed to 30.58%), found in this study suggests that this 'negativity bias' is not as prevalent as previously thought. However, as influencers are able to delete negative comments from their videos these numbers are not necessarily accurate (YouTube, n.d). An example of the negative comments that emerged is:

> hunnie, two faced? Really? After nikkie got exposed for the massive hush hush contract she has w them.. im so sorry for you, I understand having your own makeup line is a dream come true but the contract is not worth it. Unsubscribing, fuck you
> Comment 1088.

Comments such as this suggest antagonism towards the influencer, and demonstrate the strength of the influenced's negative feelings towards the influencer. However, it must be noted that this was one of the more extreme examples of the relatively small negative comment section.

Should a viewer already be a fan of the influencer, and therefore positive when watching a video, they will likely move further into the latitude of acceptance, as defined by (Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall, 1965) in social judgement theory, about the influencer and their opinions. However, should a viewer dislike the influencer but watch their content anyway these negative feelings are likely to be reinforced, which also reflects social judgement theory (Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall, 1965). This means that the influenced who leave negative comments are more likely to have had negative opinions of the influencer prior to the video, and the negative comments simply extend this negative relationship.

Fifty-three of the 152 negative comments were directed to Kandee Johnson, who was the influencer who interacted most with the influenced. This contradicts the para-social intimacy proposed by Dai and Walther (2018), in which the influencer's engagement with their following translated into a more positive relationship, and that interacting with a public figure bolsters feelings of friendship, however, this may not be statistically significant. While having the largest number of positive comments, Johnson also has the largest share of negative comments (314 of 917 positive comments). This suggests that the workings of YouTube comments requires further research, as based purely on numbers Johnson appears to be the most loved, hated and engaged influencer in this study. However, there are statistically few data points. This also suggests that other influencers may have deleted negative comments from their videos. Further research looking historically at Johnson's content and associated comments could be completed to gain an understanding of the implications that commenting has on her influence. However, as previously mentioned Johnson appears to be the outlier in a majority of the comment categories studied in this research.

5.6 Comments from the Influencer Category: Are you talking to me?

The comments from the influencer to the influenced made up 3.6% of the total comments (107 of 2999) and comprised the influencer's direct engagement with the influenced.

Scholars suggest that an influencer who engages with the influenced will develop a relationship between them. Keitzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre (2011) and Glucksman (2017) focus on the relationship of the influenced with the influencer to explore what the influencer needs from the audience, rather than how the audience responds to the influencer. Online communications scholars Dai and Walther (2018) suggest that replies from the influencer create a greater sense of intimacy between the influenced and influencer whilst also affirming the influenced's positive views of the influencer. Although engagement Is considered to be a key component of retaining influence the low number of influencer responses in this study suggests otherwise.

Among the large total number (2999) of comments from both the influencer and influenced across the twelve videos studied, are few responses (107) from the influencers, and they show limited engagement with the influenced. The influencers' videos are not as personalised as a direct comment response to the influenced. The influencers rarely respond directly to the influenced, so it is uncertain how this limited response affects the view of the influenced towards the influencer. Dai and Walther (2018) propose that interaction with audiences translates to greater positive sentiment towards the individual. Therefore, this finding would suggest that the influencer should attempt to reply to as many viewers as possible to create a positive relationship. However, in this study there are only 107 responses from influencers across the 2,999 comments collected, and 100 of these come from the same influencer, Kandee Johnson. The data found in this study suggests that an established influencer may not be required to respond to their audience and that engaging with them on this more personal level is no longer necessary for the intimacy of the relationship between the two. Further research into audience engagement may also be needed to differentiate between an established and a developing influencer.

The research completed here saw the influencer Kandee Johnson as the most active influencer in responding directly to the influenced, with her responses making up 100 of the 107 comments in the 'Comments from Influencer' category. In addition to having engaged with the influenced more than the other influencers in this study, Johnson was also seen to have the largest share of positive comments directed towards her (314 of 917). This finding confirms Dai and Walther's research, that in replying to members of their audience the

influencer facilitates the relationship between the two, and that communicating with public figures builds feelings of positivity in the influenced. This serves to enhance the familiarity and intimacy that the audience feels towards the influencer. These two categories when compared suggest that there may be a correlation between the influencer's engagement with the influenced, and the relationship that this demonstrates, and this is worthy of further research.

Telepresence (Steuer, 1992), which considers the ability of technology to create and cultivate online interactive communities, is seen here in relation to the influencer's engagement with the influenced. The lack of direct responses from them suggests the influencers are removed from this community – despite their being the community's central focus due to their content being commented on. The lack of response from three of the influencers studied suggests that while the online interactive community proposed by Steuer (1992) is seen in comment sections created around the influencer, the influencer's direct involvement with the community is not necessary for the community to flourish. Johnson again presents an exception to this, since, as mentioned previously, she had the highest numbers of responses to the influenced, and the highest number of praise-based comments from the influenced. This suggests that her involvement in the community has created a more balanced community, where engaging with the influencer on this more personal level is more likely. The prominent lack of responses from other influencers demonstrates that the relationship between the influencer and the influenced is one-sided, and less the community that Steuer proposes that occurs in an online environment.

The 'comments from the influencer' category is an outlier. These comments fall into an outlier position as, while there are ample comments from the influenced, the lack of influencer engagement with audiences presents a one-sided relationship. For the most part, the influencers studied did not reply to their viewers, so it is difficult to deduce how a greater level of interaction from the influencer could have impacted the interactions seen, as Johnson presented the most influenced comments, but also had the most negative and positive comments. The data seen in this study ultimately suggests that the relationship between the influencer and the influenced truly is one-sided and asymmetrical (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and situations where this is not the case defy the norm.

Ultimately the low number of responses from the influencer to the influenced suggest that situations where this is not the case, and the influencer regularly engages with the influenced, are the exception, not the rule. This one-sided relationship draws on the four models of communication, with the lack of influencer responses suggesting that influencer-influenced relationships follow the press-agentry model, wherein there is one-way communication to achieve influence (Grunig & Dozier, 2003). This offers a unique dynamic considering the socially interactive origins of the influencer, and the immediacy with which influencer and influenced have the ability to communicate.

5.7 Further Discussion and Limitations

It is apparent that the deliberate and intentional action of commenting on a YouTube video is a key method through which viewers of influencer-created content share their opinions. The large number of comment threads, seen in this research, more than doubling the number of comments studied (from 1200 to 2999), contradicts the theory proposed by Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burke & Karrer (2013). In their research the influenced are invisible and unwilling to engage with content. However, through commenting it is possible to gain an understanding of the relationship between the influenced and the influencer through only the comments on a video. Each category suggests a different aspect of the influenced relationship with the influencer. The employment of these categories when looking at the influenced comments begins to answer the major research question and provide insight into the dynamics of this unique one-sided relationship.

A small comment category not explored in depth is 'references to other influencers'. In these comments the influenced draw parallels between the uploading influencer and other social media influencers. References to other influencers made up 65 of the 2999 total comments, and these comments show a complex and interwoven online network that features interactivity and intertextuality, suggesting telepresence (Steuer, 1992). The intertextuality of the internet serves to facilitate these references between influencers, and these comments are demonstrative of the global community that the internet facilitates. These comments suggest that the influenced carry ideas from other influencers into other

videos, demonstrating the intertextuality of telepresence, as content from influencers is woven into the comment sections of their peers.

The most commonly referenced of these influencers were SimplyNailogical and MannyMUA, suggesting that potentially there is crossover between the followings of these two influencers and the influencers studied (Jeffree Star, Shaaanxo and Kandee Johnson, with MannyMUA being a studied influencer). A popular comment within this category are variations on the popular meme of MannyMUA repeating the words of the people he films alongside (Steigman, 2017), with the most popular of these being the phrase 'So pigmented', which is seen in multiple instances throughout this categorisation. The intertextuality this category suggests is a relatively minor, yet clearly present component of the influencer's comment sections. This creates a network that is demonstrative of the concept of telepresence, in which technology creates a diverse environment that facilitates interactivity (Steuer, 1992). These comments suggest that the influencer is seen by the influenced in relation to the wider community of influencers. This ultimately proposes that a component of the relationship between the influenced and the influencer relates to other influencers.

The global nature of the internet was seen in the last two categories, 'Non-English Discussion' and 'International purchase discussion'. These categories showcased the global appeal of the influencer, with influenced across the world interacting. 'International purchase discussion' featured only ten comments. These discussed how to obtain a product an influencer was talking about internationally. These comments draw on the community aspects of digital media, as well as demonstrating the sales function of the influencer, acting as a hybrid category of community posts and sales and action posts (Mayfield, 2018 ; Butler-Young, 2017). The global nature of influence was reinforced by the 'Non-English discussion' category, wherein comments were made in foreign languages. As social media enables a global community these comments are evidence of the global appeal of the influencer, and suggest that they anticipate others engaging with them in their own language (Keitzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre 2011).

Looking more broadly at the comment categories there are two that could be considered outliers. These are comments that fall under the headings of 'comments from brands' and 'comments from influencer'. The comments from the brands category are where a brand seen in a video's content, and thus creates a presence within the influencer's comment section. The 'Comments from Brands' category consisted of seven comments, and these were the only comments not made by the influenced or influencer. Brand involvement asserts the partnership between brand and influencer and, in the data collected, did not reveal any shifts in audience opinion of the influencer, and thus are redundant in answering the research question. In video two the brand In Your Dreams Glitter were present in the comments section, answering questions, and leaving comments such as 103C:

"Thrilled you love our glitters"

This comment asserted their presence within the comments section, and made the brand known to viewers of the video as the brand behind the product. This category is where the public relations aspect of social media influence becomes apparent (Valentini, 2015), as the public relations practitioner contributes to the conversation surrounding the brand through their comments.

As the research was completed using an interpretivist paradigm other researchers may identify different categories for comments when looking at data, and accordingly the categorisations are subjective. However, this study identified categories on robust criteria based on the content, themes and tones seen in each comment category with a minimum of five comments required to be considered a category.

Ultimately, the research suggests that the influenced-influencer relationship comfortably sits within the frameworks outlined by Grunig and Hunt (1984), as a contemporary example of the press-agentry model, spreading targeted mass messages through the medium of social media. The influenced – influencer relationship additionally, excluding critical and negative comments, is one perceived to be one of friendship from the influenced, as the data illustrates, with this relationship fitting within the model for relationships outlined by Grunig and Hunt (1984), when employing that data to see the influenced perspective of their relationship to the influencer. Through the data we see the

influenced as committed to and trusting of the influencer through defending the influencer, satisfied in their relationship with the influencer and leaving praiseworthy comments, and feeling that there is a mutuality to the relationship as the influenced believe that what they say has the power to influence the influencer.

Watkins (2017) reinforces that the online relationship is unique, finding that two-way communication is not the only factor that can contribute to social media relationship building. The lack of response from the influencer in this study appears to confirm this view. Watkins' study (2017) did however suggest that in actively engaging with audiences control of the message may be lost, and this offers an interpretation as to why the influenced were ignored.

As mentioned in the literature review there is no clear definition of an influencer by the Public Relations industry (McKinlay, 2019), however this research proposes that an influencer is in fact defined by those they influence. Considering this finding, and the overwhelmingly positive sentiment of the majority of the data, the overarching theme that emerged in this research was relationships (Theunissen & Sissons, 2017). The influenced interact with the influencer as a friend, as seen in praise-based and conversational comments, with the limited influencer feedback suggesting that this is a one-sided relationship. This research shows through interactions that the influenced see the influencer as a friend, whereas the inactivity of the influencer within comments suggests that the influencer is less directly engaged with the influenced.

6. <u>Conclusions</u>

This chapter discusses the significance of this research to the field, whilst acknowledging the limitations of the research, before suggesting areas for further research.

6.1 <u>Summary of findings</u>

This research sought to answer the question *What do interactions show about the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer?* with the following three questions supporting this:

1. How does the influencer interact with the influenced?
2. How do the influenced interact with the influencer?
3. How do the influenced interact with each other?

The first research support question *How does the influencer interact with the influenced?* drew heavily from the 'Comments from influencer', as the category showed that commenting is not how the influencer communicated with the influenced, as there were a mere 107 replies to comments, with 100 of these being from the same influencer. This suggests that the influencer communicates with the influenced through their content, and not through the direct interaction of replying to comments, as influencer replies to influenced comments in this study were not statistically significant.

The secondary research support question, *How do the influenced interact with the influencer?* is seen in eight of the eleven comment categories. These categories were:

-     Audience conversation
-     Praise of influencer
-     Sales/action comments
-     Content creation requests
-     Complaints and negative comments
-     Requests for further information
-     References to other influencers
-     International purchase discussion
-     Non-English discussion

Each of these categories showcased a different category of interactions between the influenced and the influencer: audience conversation, praise of influencer, content creation requests and requests for further information categories all saw the influenced seeing the influencer as a friendly figure that they could interact with. The sales/action comments and international purchase discussion categories suggested the influenced trusting the influencer's opinion and acting on it. References to other influencer and non-English discussion were categories that placed the influencer within a wider context, as a part of a YouTube influencer community, or on a global scale. Complaints and negative comments proved the exception to the positive interactions to the influencer seen in the previously mentioned categories, as here the influenced vocalised their distaste for the influencer. In answering this research question each of these categories could be applied individually as its own answer, or if looking at all eight categories the overwhelming sentiment is that the influenced communicate with the influencer as though they are a friend.

The third research question asked *How do the influenced interact with each other?* In answering this research question the audience conversation category is crucial. The study showed that a community forms amongst the influenced, based on the influencer. The influenced are also jumping to defend the influencer from negative comments, suggesting that the influenced have a positive relationship to one another, so long as they are in agreement. These comments show that the influenced feel a part of the community, as the influenced engage with and support one another (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The research question was *What do interactions show about the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer?* In answering it, this research found that the interactions between the influenced and influencer demonstrated a one-sided friendship on the side of the influenced. This conclusion was reached through the overwhelming number of positive and friendly interactions that the influenced addressed to the influencer, with these largely unacknowledged by the influencer.

6.2 <u>Significance of Research</u>

This research is significant as it seeks to analyse the interactions between the influenced and the influencer in order to understand how the influenced are in fact influenced by these interactions. Influencers are gaining notoriety in global media, with incidents such as the Fyre Festival (Kleinman, 2019), the increasingly public influencer scandals, such as Jaclyn Hill's lipstick launch (Rackham, 2019), as well as influencers now regularly appearing on television programmes such as 'Dancing with the Stars' (Robertson, 2019). Despite the influencer becoming increasingly visible, their audiences are considered to be 'invisible' (Bernstrain, Bakshy, Burker & Karrer, 2013). This study sought to address the lack of research, as the influenced have also been invisible in the literature. With influencers now being considered celebrities there needs to be a greater understanding of what their influence entails, as well as how that influence can best be utilised, and understanding the dynamic between the influenced and the influencer could facilitate this.

This unique research is accordingly significant to marketing and public relations professionals due to the emphasis that it places on the dynamic between the influencer and influenced, and proposing that the influenced are the reason that the influencer has any influence at all. In completing the research it was proved that pre-internet theory is able to be successfully applied to the internet, and this study builds upon these theories, as well as existing Public Relations theory, such as the excellence theory (Grunig, 2001) and two-step flow (Katz, 1957)

A practical implication of this research is that it introduces the influenced into the influencer campaign. This has the potential to bring an influencer's engagement with their

audience to the forefront of future influencer campaigns, in order to see the greatest result for public relations practitioners. The findings of this study suggest that there is a greater merit to working with influencers who have a smaller scale, but a more engaged and intimate relationship with those who follow them as this relationship is likely to be more balanced, and follow symmetrical communications that are excellent (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

6.3 <u>Limitations and Further Research</u>

This research clearly illustrates the dynamic between the influencer and influenced as seen in YouTube comments, however, it does not analyse the content of the videos that the comments were taken from. Further research could be completed that considers the influencer's video content as a response to the influenced, and studies the influencer's content as a component of the influencer-influenced dynamic.

A limitation seen in this study is that influencers have the ability to filter and delete the comments left on their social media pages, and thus an accurate representation of how the influencer's content is perceived may not be easily available, especially considering the scale of the influencers used in this study, as opposed to smaller influencers who "see all the comments" (JeffreeStar, 2018). Considering this comment, made by smaller influencer Cole Carrigan (who at the time had 11,000 subscribers on YouTube as opposed to Jeffree Star's 11,000,000) there is scope for this research to be completed with an emphasis on less prevalent influencers. Additionally, there is the potential for results differing to this study when considering the same twelve videos, as if data is collected at different date the top comments may have changed, based on the engagement each comment sees.

The primary limitation of this research was that influencers have the ability to delete comments from their YouTube videos, and as a result, the top hundred comments that were seen and analysed may not in fact have been the top hundred comments on the videos. Additionally, in focusing solely on the comment interactions between the influenced and influencer, the content of each video was not considered. Transcripts of each video could be used in future research to remedy this, as it emerged that the video content was the primary way in which the influencer communicated with the influenced.

As this research was completed using an interpretivist research paradigm the individual interpretations of each comment were decided by the researcher, with the potential for unintentional biases seen in the comment categorisations, as the comment poster's true intent may not have been transparent.

A further limitation of this study is that as a result of not using interviews it is impossible to measure the success of the influencer's influence, as this would allow for insights from brands, the influenced or the influencer themselves as to how sales had been influenced as a result of the influencer's content.

All of the influencers studied in this research are known primarily for their social media careers, however, as public figures (such as individuals who have appeared on reality TV programmes) begin to monetise their social media, research could be completed on the dynamic these influencers have with those they influence. Research looking to the differing origins of influencers has the potential to highlight how an influencer's origins shape the dynamic that they have with the influenced.

This research provides a foundation for ongoing research. Further research on the interactions of the influencer and the influenced across different social networks would be valuable to explore whether social networks influence interactions.

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Appendix A: Sample of Comments from Shaaanxo Product Launch Video

9.   eveline west2 months ago

How do you name your products or what do the names mean? All the names are so cool and interesting - I love them!!!!

REPLY

30

>   Victoria Hunter2 months ago

>   a couple of them are Māori words :) harikoa means happiness and aroha means love xx

>   REPLY

>   3

>   To A Good Home2 months ago

>   If you Google the words they all have beautiful meanings - she's chosen very well!

>   REPLY

>   1

>   eveline west2 months ago

>   I just googled them :) such lovely meanings. Makes me love Shan even more

>   REPLY

>   1

10.   freethetomatoes2 months ago

Lip liner swatches FOR SURE!! <3

REPLY

14

11.   The Makeup Junkies2 months ago

I need the Jocelyn lip liner. My Nana Jocelyn passed away last year from Cancer and a few other health issues so as much as you made it for you I feel like it's something I really would love. My Nana sounds just like yours always complementing my makeup ♡

REPLY

20

Appendix B: Sample of Comments from Shaaanxo Sponsored Video

49.	Christina Shrout1 month ago

Such a pretty look! I love it!! Wish I lived in Australia so I could enter but at least I got to see a video from you. Xoxo

REPLY

1

50.	Okie Beauty Guru1 month ago

I am obsessed with this look 😍😍😍 that glitter has me 🏷️

REPLY

1

51.	cassie zigray1 month ago

That box is bigger than me 😁😁😁😁😁

REPLY

1

52.	Mrs. Andrea Nicole Eichten1 month ago

Watching you do makeup is so relaxing! I so wish I could sign up for the chance to win! This is such a beautiful look! 🦄🖌️⬜⬜ ⬜

REPLY

1

53.	Cynthia Pomarice1 month ago

Its only open to Australian residents ugh!!!! I pick you ☺ I live in Connecticut USA us I was soooo exciting to enter until..... 😔😔😔😔😔😔😔

REPLY

1

54.	Quincy Jimenez1 month ago

I wish it was available for the US! Love you shaan♡

REPLY

1

55.

Joana Oliveira Medeiros1 month ago

Stunning! You're the best Shannon 💚😊

Appendix C: Sample of Comments from Shaaanxo Tutorial Video

21.   Ormali3 weeks ago

hey shannon can you please do a prom tutorial? like the old fashion grwm's lol, hair and makeup? I would really appreciate it.

REPLY

6

22.   Morgan Didion2 weeks ago

I think that you should do a food-inspired series! Like Mac n cheese eyeshadow, etc 😁

REPLY

10

23.   Shanna Wheeler2 weeks ago

Not exactly 5 videos but I would love to see a video based on all the planets in our solar system! (Maybe the sun too?) I think it would be really fun and there are some definitely cool colored planets out there. Anyone else??

REPLY

8

24.   Ashley Mae2 weeks ago

It would be kind of cool if you did like a soda pop series. You could do grape, orange, cherry coke, sprite, Mountain Dew... idk, seems weird but kind of fun!

REPLY

8

25.   JustWaiwai2 weeks ago (edited)

I don't really mind the length of your vids because I honestly don't notice. But every time you mention how long they are you add 5 years 😁. Just wanna say how much I love the versatility of this channel and how you experiment with looks and to hear you talk about how you backlog... 😫 Gurl I appreciate you!!

REPLY

5

26.   Ida Remelin3 weeks ago

HAULS! 😍 Every day of the week, haha.

Appendix D: Sample of Comments from Kandee Johnson Product Launch Video

88.   vxst7 months ago (edited)

hunnie, two faced? really? after nikkie got exposed for the massive hush hush

contract she has w them.. im so sorry for you, i understand having your own makeup line is

a dream come true but the contract is not worth it. unsubscribing, fuck you

REPLY

5

> Ashley Jester7 months ago
>
> vxst I'm not sure why you're saying fuck you to kandee. She didn't do
>
> anything wrong too faced did
>
> REPLY
>
> 4
>
> Danielle Ferguson7 months ago
>
> Wow. You suck
>
> REPLY
>
> 4
>
> Stephanie Del Rosario7 months ago
>
> What even is the contract
>
> REPLY
>
> 1

89.   Emme Chatterton7 months ago

I never buy celeb makeup but GIRL... I am HERE for this and cannot wait to get me

some Kandee!!

REPLY

143

> Sparkling Silver Curls7 months ago
>
> Totally same!! Hers is my first celebrity or YT famous purchase. I'm so happy
>
> for her, and so excited to get the palette!

Appendix E: Sample of Comments from Kandee Johnson Sponsored Video

38. AnnaRuth Lovelace4 months ago

Love you, Kandee!!

REPLY

3

>   Kandee Johnson4 months ago
>
>   I love you more AnnaRuth!!!
>
>   REPLY

39.   Heidi Joyce3 months ago

What about the Ardell one?

REPLY

2

40.   mademoisellekaya4 months ago

But... there are also many MANY different types of eye's.. This may be good and convenient to you but not for everybody. There is no product on this planet that will please everybody..

REPLY

1

>   Kandee Johnson4 months ago
>
>   that is so true with everything life, huh?!?
>
>   REPLY
>
>   1
>
>   mademoisellekaya4 months ago
>
>   Kandee Johnson Yes sadly .. but... YOU made me so so SO happy with noticing this little answer and I wish you and your loved ones a very merry Christmas, lots of love and health and a STUNNING NEW YEAR 🧿🤗🍃🎉 I'm so glad that I follow the sweetest person on earth 💝
>
>   REPLY

Appendix F: Sample of Comments from Kandee Johnson Tutorial Video

60.   l kozusnik1 month ago

I want to see how to contour a long narrow face to make it look shorter and wider

REPLY

1

61.   Rachael C1 month ago

Kandee, can you make a 'How to love yourself flaws and all' video? Reading these comments makes me a little sad, I wish we could all embrace our flaws and uniqueness!! 🦄🦄🦄

REPLY

1

    keedinah1 month ago

    Rachael C Agree with embracing what makes us unique! I don't consider them 'flaws' though. I'm cracking up at the whole 'you can have a perfect cute little button nose'. As evidenced by my pic there ain't nothing little or button-y about my nose, but it's 'perfect' to me. 😉

    REPLY

    Rachael C1 month ago

    keedinah That's a great point! Thank you for saying that. I have actually never wanted a 'button nose' either lol. As I can see you're gorgeous and don't need to change a thing! I'm so ready for this contouring trend to go away already, it makes everyone look the same and that's just boring!

    REPLY

    1

62.   k cutrell1 month ago

I heard you say you've done this technique on many different nose shapes. I wonder if this works on a Thai/Asian nose. I've always wondered what to do to make my nose look more attractive and less wide.

    REPLY

    1

Appendix G: Sample of Comments from MannyMua Product Launch Video

20.   Eva Frost1 year ago

Omg manny is gorgeous with and without makeup 😍

REPLY

28

21.   Jon Hopper1 year ago

I wanted to buy it all before I even saw the shades. The packaging shook me.

REPLY

85

22.   Jennifer Rose1 year ago

When you realize the packaging is close to the Turkish Flag(FYI this is not hate it is

just something I noticed)

REPLY

16

23.   leah sailus1 year ago

Mannys contour is muddy

REPLY

185

        mad love1 year ago

        leah sailus bibity bopity back the fudge up, leave manny alone😣😣

        REPLY

        56

        Brittany Rosea10 months ago

        leah sailus looks always muddy on his face

        REPLY

        15

75. Darlene Salaiz-Anaya3 months ago

Who's your boyfriend? 😁 LOVE LOVE LOVE your bloopers!!! They are always so Much Fun To Watch! 😂🤸😆

REPLY

76. Brianna Nuñez5 months ago

manny whos your boyfrined???

REPLY

77. khawla salim5 months ago

omgggg who is your boyfriend manny

REPLY

78. Josue Lopez6 months ago

Who's your boyfriend Manny?!!!!!?!?!?!?!?!!!! ♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡

REPLY

79. Victoria Alexis6 months ago

HIS LAUGH LMAO

REPLY

23

    Kayla Karcashian6 months ago

    Victoria Alexis please watch my videos I just want some feedback😫 ⛩️I'll also subscribe back♡

    REPLY

80. Jazmin Cohen5 months ago

Who was your boyfriendddd?

REPLY

81. Gracië Gëm1 month ago

That foundation was you perfect colour 😍😍👌👌

REPLY

Appendix I: Sample of Comments from MannyMua Tutorial Video

63.   Mr. Tonedeaf DV1 month ago

The see throught shirt.. oh heennyyy. I feel like a shirtless make up tutorial is

coming..

REPLY

2

64.   Kyleigh Neumeier1 month ago

I'm gonna be that speculating Bitch you were talking about lol I wonder if you're

about to come out / working on some some makeup that's colorful 😍😍 fingers crossed

🤞

REPLY

2

65.   lupita perez1 month ago

I did not like the Marc Jacobs , it just didn't work for me .... many me encantan tus

videos , hope one day I'm half as good with my make up like you 😬

REPLY

2

        Jasmine Nevarez1 month ago

        lupita perez Would you like to subscribe to my channel????😊 💞 💞

        REPLY

66.   Possible Covers1 month ago (edited)

"Oh my gawd! HuNtY "

REPLY

2

67.   Maddy Williams1 month ago

NOTIFICATIONS SQUAD WHERE U AT BITCHESSSSS 🐥🐥🐥🐥🐥🐥

REPLY

107

        Destiny Valencia1 month ago

        Maddy Williams yass

REPLY

1

Appendix J: Sample of Comments from Jeffree Star Product Launch Video

5.   AmyM& Beauty2 months ago

I'd say 52$ is really fair compared to so many other companies!! Love that palette!!

REPLY

1.1K

kindle urie2 months ago

AmyM& Beauty honestly. Especially since it's such nice packaging

REPLY

25

bobbi.brewtality2 months ago (edited)

I could never justify spending so much on makeup lol. It seems horrendous to me. Edit - the price seems horrendous, not the palette. I might sell a kidney or 2 one day for the palette.

REPLY

10

Erica Sims2 months ago

bobbi.brewtality that's you. People who don't mine paying money for good makeup, we do it.

REPLY

16

bobbi.brewtality2 months ago

Erica Sims I was clearly talking about myself, so that seems a bit redundant.

REPLY

4

Lyn za2 months ago

ehh each to their own.. i want it but would never ever buy it.... just too pricey for me. i dont spend over 20$ on ANY personal item... item of clothing even jackets, shoes, purses or make up.. i always buy sales or red tag sales and im stylish a.f

Appendix K: Sample of Comments from Jeffree Star Sponsored Video

6.   bear's trash8 months ago

Jeffree- SooOo piGmeNteD Manny- Yeah soooo pigmented *giggles and rides away on unicorn*

REPLY

348

DIY Vids2 months ago

Bear 867 hi

REPLY

Amby Cakes2 months ago

Bear 867 hahaha

REPLY

Gabriela Prado1 month ago

😂😂😂

REPLY

7.   Info Chan6 months ago

"I have no eyebrows and im pregnant" Me:OH CONGRATULATION--wait.

REPLY

181

dez zzz1 month ago

LMAOOO IM DECEASED

REPLY

3

8.

Spaceunicorn Cat6 months ago

Jeffree is the only one that makes no eyebrows look good

REPLY

103

Appendix L: Sample of Comments from Jeffree Star Tutorial Video

66.   Ale G3 months ago

En verdad no entiendo nada pero me entretengo me encantaaa😍

REPLY

2

67.   Emmy vlogs3 months ago

hey jeffree when will you make another video I have been waiting 🥴

REPLY

2

68.   Denisse Love4 months ago

Lol lipstick nick was last doing Jaclyn's makeup. I guess that is the reason Jeffree kicked her off the friend wagon

REPLY

86

Emily Jayne4 months ago

Denisse Love omg ahahaha

REPLY

1

Monica Burgos4 months ago

She's doing a tour for makeup classes really soon

REPLY

5

Vanessa Michelle4 months ago

Denisse Love Thought the same sis 😁

REPLY