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**The impact of credibility and parasocial interactions with
social media influencers on the purchase intentions of Gen Z
and Millennial consumers in South Africa.**

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*I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours in
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ABSTRACT

While there is an increase in influencer marketing budgets attempting to affect users' purchase intentions, the relationship between influencer marketing and users' purchase intentions among Generation Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa has not been explored.

The focus of the study is on Instagram and YouTube. YouTube has 2.291 billion active users and Instagram has 1.386 billion active users, 62.1% of which are between 18-35 years of age and are regularly exposed to influencers. It is against this backdrop that this paper sought to understand whether influencers can, through the relationships with their audiences, shape consumers' purchase intentions in the lifestyle, finance and beauty segments. In particular, the study analysed two aspects of this relationship, influencers' perceived credibility and the parasocial interactions between influencers and their audiences. The study used a mixed method approach (survey (quantitative) N=177 and in-depth interviews (qualitative) N=8) to explore the causal relationships and to add further nuance to the argument by exploring the variation of these relationships across product categories. The main findings of the paper show that consumers who perceive influencers to be credible, and/or had strong positive parasocial interactions with an influencer, were most likely to consider a product that is advertised by the influencer.

Key words: Social media Influencer; Influencer marketing; Credibility; Purchasing intention; Parasocial Interaction; Youtube; Instagram

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Section 1: Introduction

While there is an increase in influencer marketing budgets (Insider Intelligence 2021) attempting to affect users' purchase intentions (Djafarova & Kramer 2019), the relationship between influencer marketing and users' purchase intentions among Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennial consumers in South Africa has not been explored. The Gen Z and Millennial consumers are generally young people who 'live' and consume online products and services.

This study analyses how Gen Z and Millennial consumers' parasocial relationships (a largely one way relationship as a result of 1 (influencer) to many (followers) interactions) as well as the perceived credibility of the influencer affect purchase intentions. Previous research has shown that compared to traditional celebrities, influencers are more persuasive and credible in the eyes of their followers (Djafarova & Rushworth 2017). Yet, relatively little is known about why these parasocial relationships are effective (Taylor 2020), especially in a growing market such as South Africa. Thus, this study sets out to fill this gap in the literature through a mixed-methods study of the relationship between an influencers' perceived credibility and the effects of parasocial relationships and the purchasing intentions among gen Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa.

1.1 Contextualisation

With traditional word of mouth (WOM) having moved online, becoming electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Chang et al. 2015; Henning-Thurau et. al 2004; Alalwan et al. 2017), digital personalities - social media influencers - have become increasingly important partners for brands and marketers. With continuously increasing budgets for influencer marketing (Insider Intelligence 2021), brands are increasingly relying on influencers to communicate their brand message to audiences in the hope of increasing users' purchase intentions (Djafarova & Kramer 2019).

Moreover, as a response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, many industries have

experienced significant changes. While pandemic related restrictions changed how people work, live, travel, and interact (Sheth 2020), their exposure to marketing and consumption behaviours were also impacted (Cox et al. 2020). A further corollary of the pandemic has been the unprecedented integration of social media into people's lives (Francisco et al. 2021) and the resulting accelerated growth of influencer marketing (Haenlein et al. 2020).

1.2 Rationale

The rationale for this study is twofold. On the one hand, it will provide new theoretical insight on how influencer marketing is moving beyond engagement and reach of consumers, and instead focuses on full funnel impact. That is, by analysing consumers' purchase intentions vis-a-vis a specific product or service, rather than only focusing on their awareness of a brand, this study provides important new insight into the versatility and effectiveness of influencer based-marketing (Hoque 2020).

On the other hand, findings from this study will help influencers and marketers in a comparatively less saturated context (i.e., South Africa) to improve their relationship with consumers of their content, build better interactions and improve their return on investment. Relatedly, the findings of this study will help to refine marketers' understanding of the value of selecting influencers based on credibility, and their interaction with the audience.

1.3 Problem Statement

Research has shown that compared to traditional celebrities, influencers are perceived by their followers to be more persuasive and credible (Djafarova & Rushworth 2017). Additionally, as highlighted at the outset of this report, brands are increasingly relying on influencers to communicate their brand message to audiences (Djafarova & Kramer 2019). Yet relatively little is known about why these relationships are effective (Taylor 2020). Understanding these dynamics is especially important in fast growing markets such as South Africa where the

percentage of daily internet users has skyrocketed from 8% in 2008 to 48% in 2021 (Afrobarometer 2021). With more and more people transitioning to online media and social media platforms in particular, the need to better understand the impact and advertising value of social media influencers is growing rapidly. Thus, this study sets out to fill this gap in the literature through a mixed-methods study. The focus of this study is on how two specific dimensions of influencer marketing - influencers' perceived credibility, as well as their parasocial interactions with their audiences - affects purchasing intentions among Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennial consumers in South Africa.

1.4 Purpose Statement

Following the above stated aim of this research, this study expands on the existing literature from the Global North (e.g., Sokolova & Kefi (2020)) in two ways. First, by testing previous findings in a different context (South Africa), and second, to see whether the proposed relationships hold across different content and product categories (e.g., finance and lifestyle). Anticipating some of the insights from the literature review, it is worth mentioning here that previous research has not paid sufficient attention to the varying levels of effectiveness of influencer marketing across different product categories. For example, there is good reason to believe that influencer credibility might be more important when talking about finances (e.g., reviews of insurance, or investment products), compared to lifestyle or beauty products for at least two reasons. First, the former is traditionally associated with specific professions (e.g., banker, or financial advisor) and thus, it might be more difficult for influencers who do not have the necessary professional background to develop similar levels of credibility; and second, it is possible that these types of services and products involve larger financial commitments on the part of consumers compared to beauty products. In this case, too, the importance of credibility is likely to vary systematically depending on the product category. More broadly, improving our understanding of how effective influencer marketing is in South Africa and across different product categories will also provide much needed insights for the growing African market.

1.5 Research Question

Do credibility and parasocial interactions with social media influencers impact purchase intentions among Generation Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis: *Credibility and parasocial interactions with influencers have no effect on the purchasing intention of Generation Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa.*

Hypothesis 1: *An influencer's credibility is positively related to the user's intention to purchase a featured product.*

Hypothesis 2: *Parasocial interactions between the influencer and his or her followers is positively related to the user's intention to purchase a featured product.*

Hypothesis 3: *An influencer's credibility matters more for product categories such as finance compared to lifestyle and beauty.*

Hypothesis 4: *Parasocial interactions between the influencer and his or her followers matter more for lifestyle and beauty, compared to the finance category.*

1.7 Structure of the paper

In this section a background of the study on credibility and parasocial interactions with social media influencers in relation to the purchase intentions of consumers has been outlined. The research problem and hypotheses of the study are outlined and expanded on.

In Section 2, a review of relevant literature is presented. The section also explains the theory of reasoned action and parasocial interactions and its key concepts.

In the penultimate section (Section 3), the research methodology used is explained as well as the sampling method. It is followed by an outline of data gathering and data analysis methods.

In Section 4, the research findings are presented augmented with figures and tables as appropriate. It also discusses findings and its association to the past literature, research problem, research question and hypotheses followed by an overall conclusion and recommendations in Section 5.

Section 2: Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical foundation

Two theories guide this study; first, to conceptualize and analyse the relationship between influencers and social media users, this study relies on the theory of parasocial relationships to aid in the understanding of the relationship between the two actors and the associated illusion of intimacy as a “real” interpersonal relationship (Horton & Wohl 1956, Dibble et al. 2016).

Second, this study relies on the theory of reasoned action as initially outlined by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), and further refined by Loudon & Bellabetta (1993). These theories are not only compatible with each other, but also flexible enough to link the key concepts outlined below.

2.1.1 The theory of parasocial relationships

The theory of parasocial relationships established by Horton & Wohl (1956), and Horton & Strauss (1957), describes an enduring asymmetrical relationship between a media user and a media performer. Initially developed to describe relationships between TV personalities and their viewers, this relationship is often defined as being long-term, typically positive, and one-sided. Thus, the form of intimacy which the media user develops towards the performer over repeat encounters usually remains at a distance.

While Rubin et al (1985) suggested to use these terms of parasocial interaction (PSI) and parasocial relationship (PSR) interchangeably to describe an overarching long-term social involvement, more recent work emphasizes the need to separate the two (e.g., Cummins & Cui, 2014; Dibble & Rosaen, 2011; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Klimmt et al. 2006; Rosaen & Dibble, 2012; Tukachinsky, 2010). This study follows the more recent advances in the field and uses PSI as a concept – a single interaction between an ordinary consumer and a persona (see subsequent section for more

detail); and PSR as a theory – a series of PSIs that can be, among other things, shaped by a persona's credibility, and other contextual factors.

A common feature of parasocial relationships is that the sequence of interactions that constitutes them often create a 'lingering' feeling of intimacy, or friendship that continues, even after an individual PSI is over.

Since the emergence of social media, and influencers in particular, the channels through which PSRs can be built have increased significantly. Initially, media performers were only able to use TV and radio, while today's influencers can rely on a wide range of communication channels and platforms including social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Tiktok and Twitter simultaneously. Relatedly, early studies have found that even within the less interactive environments of TV and radio, media performers who address the audience (e.g., TV audience) directly by adjusting their body language, or through the way they speak, they are able to create deeper parasocial relationships (Cohen 2001; DeVito, 2001). Today, social media platforms allow influencers to deepen these relationships in more interactive and targeted ways. Over time, the audiences on these platforms develop increasingly intimate bonds that more and more mirror real-life social interactions (Rasmussen 2018; Ballantine & Martin, 2005). Put differently, while the opportunities to create PSRs has increased, so has the chance that they resemble real life social interactions. Along similar lines, recent studies by Chen (2014), and Jin & Park (2009) have found that the new type of parasocial interactions encourage some users to develop fewer interpersonal than parasocial relationships. This illustrates the importance to better understand how the relationship between influencers and ordinary consumers emerge, and how the former can influence the latter's purchasing decisions.

2.1.2 The theory of reasoned action

This investigation into the relationship between social media influencers on the one hand, and ordinary consumers' purchasing intention on the other, also employs the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Following the initial development of a set of prescriptive cognitive models by Fishbein (1963), the TRA was developed further to

understand the antecedents of both attitudes and behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).

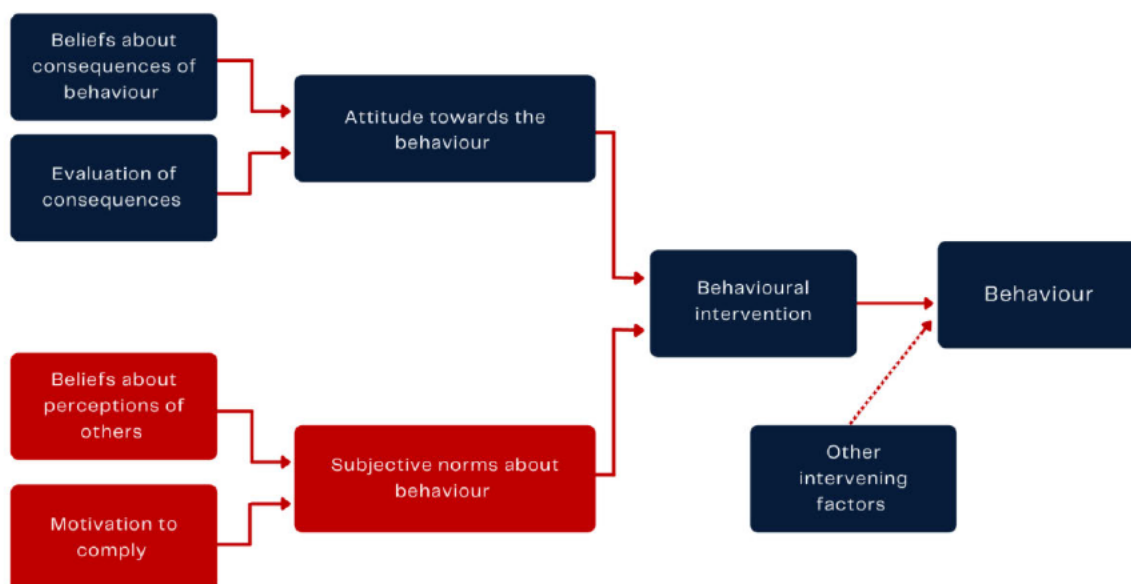


Figure 1: Theory of Reasoned Action

(Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1993) (30 Words).

The TRA is well suited for this study as it allows for an explicit and intuitive distinction between the internal and external factors that affect a consumer's behaviour (Figure 1). Simply put, a consumer's behaviour is theorised to be affected by his or her attitudes towards a behavioural intention (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) in two ways. To illustrate this, one might consider the intention to purchase an electric vehicle. First, the theory accounts for the consumer's beliefs about the consequences of buying an electric vehicle, for example, it will increase personal mobility and reduce CO2 emissions. Moreover, the model also accounts for his or her evaluations of these consequences (e.g., is it good or bad for the environment). Second, the theory accounts for external factors – subjective norms about the behaviour (Bamossey et al. 2006). The role of social media influencers, their credibility, and the parasocial relationships that consumers have with these actors fits squarely in this part of the theory. Specifically, what a consumer believes about how

others perceive a potential purchase of an electric vehicle matters. These beliefs are, at least in part, shaped by influencers and other followers that are part of the influencer's community. As Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002), as well as Ballantine and Martin (2005) have argued: "individuals desire to participate in an online community [as] a result of individual determinant[s] (e.g., positive anticipated emotions and desires) and community influences (e.g., social identity)" (Ballantine and Martin 2005: 2). Lastly, TRA assumes that a consumer's motivation to comply with these subjective norms is also determined by the community that surrounds them. That is, the consumer is expected to care about the views of the influencer and the community he or she is part of when considering buying the electric vehicle.

In short, the TRA allows for a parsimonious analysis of internal and external factors as they relate to a behavioural intention, while also accounting for the possibility that other intervening factors (e.g. economic, cultural, etc.) can influence the transition from behavioural intention to behaviour (e.g. purchase of electronic vehicle) (Bray 2008).

By combining the insights from the theory of parasocial relationships as well as the theory of reasoned action, it is possible to analyse the relative importance of influencer credibility and the extent to which influencers in South Africa use parasocial interactions to influence purchasing decisions among their followers in new ways. Specifically, it allows for a more holistic understanding of how credibility and parasocial interactions affect different stages of the "marketing funnel". At the same time, it provides theoretical guidance on how the effects of either factor might vary depending on the product category.

2.1.3 Conceptualisation

Parasocial interaction

As mentioned above, the concept of parasocial interaction (PSI) is related, but distinct from parasocial relationships (PSR). It is worth unpacking the concept of PSI in a little more detail here in order to highlight how social media platforms have vastly increased the opportunities and forms of PSI. To reiterate, a parasocial interaction is initiated if

a persona (e.g., TV presenter, or YouTube influencer) acknowledges the presence of the audience in their presentation, changes the style of the conversation to that of an informal in-person gathering, and bodily and verbally addresses the user (Horton and Wohl 1956; Horton and Strauss 1957). The intensity of the shift from the primarily mass media, to a now predominantly social media-based form of interaction is probably best summarised by the ubiquitous “Welcome back to my channel” introduction at the beginning of many YouTube videos.

Building on the description of the evolution of PSRs earlier, it is worth pointing out that the repertoire of parasocial interactions is much larger on social media platforms than in traditional media. In fact, platforms such as Twitter (Bond 2016; Frederick et al. 2012), Instagram, Facebook (Joinson 2008; Tsiotsou 2015) and YouTube all (though to varying degrees) encourage forms of limited influencer-consumer interactions by enabling consumers to respond to tweets, or comment on pictures and videos posted by the influencers they follow. Given that influencers build large communities of followers, they are not able to engage deeply with everyone, however, these interactions nevertheless simulate a more realistic social interaction, regardless of whether an influencer responds to a message from a follower (Kurtin et al. 2018) compared to traditional PSRs.

For the purposes of this study, PSIs are defined as any influencer-consumer interactions that can take place on different platforms and include, but are not limited to, a presenter’s body language, tone, an active engagement (e.g., like, dislike), as well as written comments in a forum (e.g., in the comment section of YouTube videos, or on an Instagram post or direct message).

2.2 Social Media Influencer & Influencer Marketing

The emergence of social media has reshaped how brands engage with consumers. Traditionally, celebrities acted as endorses of products or brands by using their high level of public recognition as leverage - usually by appearing with a consumer good, or as a brand ambassador in an advertisement via mass communication channels such as TV, radio and newspapers (McCracken 1989; Lou and Yuan 2019).

Today, however, consumers increasingly consume advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube rather than via traditional media channels. Consequently, a new type of endorser has emerged – social media influencers (Freberg et al. 2011). In contrast to their traditional counterparts, these new and independent third-party endorsers usually become famous by growing a following on social media through creating engaging niche content (e.g., food, fitness, or fashion). Another distinguishing feature of these “grassroots” individuals is that they frequently engage with their followers across various platforms. Thus, this study defines social media influencers as content generators who developed expertise on a specific topic, regularly produce valuable content via social media, and are at the centre of a sufficiently large, engaged and trusting community - which is of marketing value to brands (Lou and Yuan 2019; Weismueller et al. 2020).

Relatedly, influencer marketing is an important tool to impact consumer buying behaviour by identifying and convincing influencers to participate in sponsored content and share it with their followers (Dwivedi et al 2015).

2.3 Credibility

The influencer's credibility in the eyes of their followers matters. Not only does it affect the influencer's persuasiveness, but it also has the potential to affect the longevity of the relationship. Following recent advances by Munnukka and colleagues (2016), this study employs the four-dimensional conceptualization of source credibility. While credibility was initially defined as a two-dimensional concept comprised of 1) expertise - a communicator's competence, qualification, knowledge, or skills, to make certain claims about a particular subject area (McCroskey 1966); and 2), trustworthiness, referring to the receiver's perception of a communicator as sincere and truthful (Griffin 1967), more recent work also identified attractiveness and similarity as important dimensions. Here, attractiveness describes a source's physical attractiveness, or likability, while similarity refers to the perceived likeness such as demographic aspects (e.g., gender), or ideological similarity between the influencer and the follower (Lou & Yuan 2019).

While the connection between credibility and parasocial relationships, as well as their respective influence on different advertising objectives is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections, it is worth noting here that credibility affects the content people choose to view, or to ignore, on social media (Sokolova & Kefi 2020). Moreover, previous research has shown that advertisements coming from social media influencers are perceived as more credible compared to traditional media (Shareef et al. 2019) and more powerful than those by traditional celebrities (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017).

This study employs the more expansive four-dimensional definition of credibility to better understand which aspect of credibility is most relevant in the development of purchase intention. Similarly, this expanded conceptualization also provides additional analytical leverage when exploring the effect of credibility for different product categories.

2.4 Purchasing intention

A consumer's purchasing intention can be described as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh 2004: 56). Thus, it is preceded and affected by brand attitude (the summary evaluation of a brand), as well as electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and or brand awareness (Alhabash et al. 2015). Importantly, social media influencers play a crucial role in connecting brands with customers via eWOM. This position can be illustrated through the stimulus response model of buyer behaviour. According to this model, marketing stimuli (e.g., product, price, place, and promotion), as well as other stimuli (e.g., economic, technological, political, and cultural) influence the buyer's decision-making process (Kotler et al 2016: 136). Given the social media influencer's unique position vis-à-vis the buyer through eWOM as well as the above mentioned parasocial relationship and comparatively high levels of credibility, influencers are, at the same time, part of the marketing and cultural stimuli that customers are exposed to.

2.5 Conceptual framework

The diagram below (Figure 2) represents the conceptual framework.

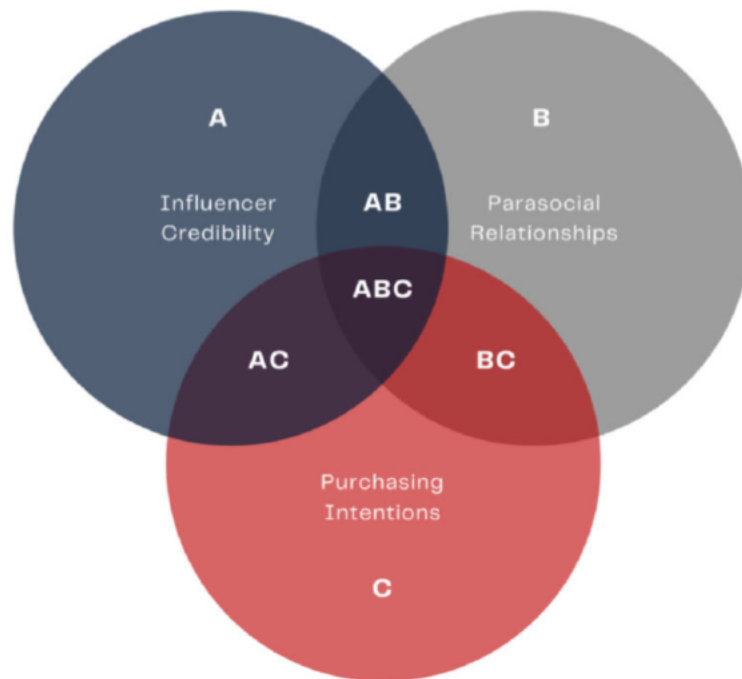


Figure 2: Venn diagram of conceptual framework Influencer credibility, parasocial relationships and purchasing intentions

(6 words)

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the three key concepts: Influencer Credibility (A), Parasocial Relationships (B) & Purchasing Intentions (C). The intersection AB depicts the influencer credibility and parasocial relationships, without influencing purchasing intentions. The area represented by BC is where parasocial relationships influence purchasing intentions without influencer credibility. AC shows the influencer credibility intersecting purchasing intentions without parasocial relationships. Finally, the intersection represented by ABC is where influencer credibility and parasocial relationships influence purchasing intentions. This study squarely focuses on the relationship represented by ABC.

2.6 Causal Relationships

This section critically reviewed the extant literature on the relationship between influencer credibility and parasocial relationships on the one hand, and consumers behaviour on the other. In doing so, the review highlights what previous studies have found in relation to a series of important and related questions: 1) What do we know about how the two key independent variables of this study - influencer credibility and PSRs with consumers - relate to each other? 2) What are the consequences of influencer credibility and PSRs with consumers regarding marketing goals in general, and purchasing intentions in particular?

1) What do we know about how influencer credibility and PSRs with consumers relate to each other?

Before investigating whether either of the key independent variables influences consumers' purchasing intentions – as hypothesised in the theory of reasoned action - it is important to first assess the relationship between the two concepts. For example, given the increased number of channels through which consumers can interact with influencers, Munnukka et al. (2019) has shown that when these new opportunities of PSI are taken up by the audience repeatedly, audience members develop parasocial relations, which in turn, increase influencer credibility.

By contrast, Yuan and Lou (2020) investigated the inverse relationship and found that consumers who perceive influencers as credible, that is, when they score influencers highly on the four dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity with the audience, they are also more likely to develop a parasocial relationship with the influencer. Additionally, the authors found that how influencers engage with the audience matters. The smaller the perceived gap in the power relation (i.e., the 'fairer' the interaction), the stronger the parasocial relationship.

Rather than identifying the direction of the causal arrow between influencer credibility and PSR, what is important for this study is the finding that the two concepts are related to each other. This finding will be revisited at the end of this review.

2) What are the consequences of influencer credibility and PSRs with consumers regarding marketing goals in general, and purchasing intentions in particular?

When moving from an investigation of the two independent variables, to how each of them relates to the main outcome variable of this study – purchasing intention – it is important to contextualise the findings. At a fundamental level, a recent survey of Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram users found that all four components of influencer credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity) increased users' trust in branded content, and positively influenced consumers' awareness of advertised brands (Lou & Yuan 2019). Similarly, Munnukka et al. (2019) demonstrated a positive relationship between perceived vlogger credibility and a positive attitude towards a brand after watching a video of American travel vloggers.

Focusing on the importance of influencer credibility on purchase intention, a study of German university students who were active Instagram users found that higher levels of perceived influencer trustworthiness led to increased likelihood of purchasing intentions (Weismueller et al. 2020).

While these studies demonstrate the connections between influencer credibility and purchasing intention, and thus speak to the influence of influencers on the subjective norms about consumers' behaviour (see TRA, Figure 1), the potential relevance of the platform, as well as the type of content (e.g., purchasing a piece of clothing vs. financial advice) remain under-theorised. Yet, there are good reasons to believe that purchase intentions might be influenced differently, depending on the good or service under consideration (Kotler et al. 2016).

Similar to influencer credibility, several studies have found that parasocial relationships affect various brand related outcomes both in direct and indirect ways.

For example, using an experimental design, Hartmann & Goldhoorn (2011) showed that participants who watched a short TV clip that increased their parasocial relationship increased their commitment to the social norms displayed in the clip. This finding fits squarely within the theory of reasoned action and demonstrates the importance of PSRs for subsequent brand-related outcomes. More directly, Sokolova & Kefi (2020) use the results of an online survey administered to French social media users who were interested in beauty and fashion content to demonstrate that PSR matters for respondents' purchase intention. Interestingly, Sokolova & Kefi (2020) also found that perceived influencer credibility was a better predictor of purchasing intentions than PSR.

These studies provide valuable additional insight into the importance of both PSR and influencer credibility, while at the same time, raise the question of whether these findings 'travel' across geographic and cultural boundaries. Is influencer credibility more or less effective in a developing country context such as South Africa? Are PSRs developing equally as fast, and strong across cultural and racial lines in South Africa as they might in comparatively more homogenous contexts such as France, or Germany? With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Duffet 2020, Duffet et al. 2019) that investigated the attitudes of social media users regarding advertising on different platforms, the literature is still relatively underdeveloped in the South African context. Similarly, many of the more complex research designs are yet to be implemented in South Africa to help disentangle the relative importance of influencer credibility and parasocial relationships on the one hand, and consumers' buying intentions on the other.

Section 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm

Following the approaches taken by Horton and Wohl (1956) in their seminal study on parasocial relationships, as well as more recent significant contributions in the field by Yuan and Lou (2020) and Weismueller et al (2020), this study works within the positivist paradigm. This study systematically analysed observable facts (du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014) about the relationship between social media influencers and ordinary consumers. By doing so, the study is able to contribute new insights to the extant literature, while at the same time, account for factors that have been highlighted by other scholars in previous studies. (Maree 2019).

Furthermore, this study also adds to the current body of knowledge by testing the effectiveness of social media influencers' credibility, and their ability to leverage parasocial relationships with their followers in a new geographic context – South Africa – and across different sub-groups of influencers. Drawing on previous findings from elsewhere, the study made use of the process of deduction hoping to uncover valid and reliable causal relationships in this new setting that can inform future actions by practitioners (e.g., marketers) as well as academics.

This study relied on two primary sources of information. First, quantitative data was collected via an original survey using questions that had been developed and tested in previous studies (e.g., Yuan & Lou (2019) on parasocial relationships and on influencer credibility (Sokolova and Kefi (2020)). Second, this study collected additional data through semi-structured interviews to better understand the proposed causal mechanisms. By replicating several of the questionnaire modules and combining both types of data collection, this mixed-methods study is also able to draw meaningful comparisons across geographic and cultural contexts (e.g., Africa vs. Europe).

3.2 Design/Conceptual Approach

To understand the impact of influencers' credibility and parasocial interactions with South African social media consumers, this study implemented a mixed methods approach.

Following Sokolova & Kefi (2020), the study made use of a survey to test the main hypotheses. Specifically, quantitative data was used to analyse whether 1) influencer credibility is positively correlated with consumers' purchasing intentions; and 2) whether more frequent parasocial interactions with a given influencer increase consumers' purchasing intention.

The insights from the survey findings were used in subsequent semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the exact causal mechanism, and to add further nuance to the argument by exploring the variation of these relationships across product categories (Ladyman, 2007:303).

3.3 Population

3.3.1 Population parameters

The study focused on the purchasing intentions among Generation Z and Millennial adults in South Africa who are YouTube and Instagram users as these are the most relevant social media platforms on which citizens execute online purchases (Creator IQ Report, 2021). The target population were male and female individuals living in South Africa aged between 18 and 35.

According to the most recently available general household survey, approximately 21 million South Africans are between 18 and 35 years old (Stats SA 2019). However, only a subset of this group frequently uses the internet in general, and social media platforms in particular. While it is difficult to estimate the size of social media users due to a lack of available data, it is possible to develop a rough estimate by focusing on those adults that use the internet daily. Among the 18–35-year-olds, almost six out of 10 (58%) use the internet daily. This is substantially more frequent than older groups

- 39% of 36–45-year-olds, and 35% of the 46–55-year-old (Afrobarometer, 2021). Using this group as an upper bound, the maximum study population would be ca. 12 million South Africans. Because the study focused on young social media users that are interested in lifestyle, finance and beauty content on YouTube and Instagram, the study population size was substantially lower. How much smaller can't be determined precisely, however, since even those that do use social media regularly, might not regularly interact with influencers and their content (e.g., they may only interact with friends and family or traditional celebrities).

3.3.2 Sampling

The unit of analysis in this study was the individual social media consumer in South Africa aged 18-35. The following subsections describe the sampling strategies for both the survey as well as the semi-structured interviews.

3.4 Quantitative Survey

The anticipated sample size of the survey was 300 respondents. Given the limitations regarding the study population (see previous section), it was not possible to draw a random sample of the population (du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014). Further, the limited time period for data collection (two weeks), did not allow for a larger sample which could have been made nationally representative using post-stratification techniques. Thus, the findings of the study are not representative of the entire South African population. Nevertheless, the collected data still provides valuable insights regarding the study's main hypotheses.

To identify survey respondents, the study relied on three types of non-probability sampling. Combining convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques had four related advantages. First, it allowed the study to use @iamtwala, a South African Instagram page with more than 6000 followers that in addition to lifestyle content (on Instagram feed) shares information on the evolution of social media and the digital landscape (on Instagram stories) as a point of departure to disseminate the survey (convenience sampling). This page was particularly well suited to disseminate survey

invitations based on the content that it frequently featured on the page, and the demographic characteristics of its followers (64% South African, 66% aged between 18-34, 64% female). Second, by using an Instagram page as the primary dissemination tool and including additional filtering questions, the study not only ensured that all participants met the minimum requirement of being an active user of Instagram and/or YouTube (purposive sampling), and between 18 and 35, but also made data collection more efficient.

Thirdly, by encouraging survey respondents to share the survey invitation with their networks, it was possible to make use of referrals (snowball sampling). Given that it was an online survey, this was likely to be particularly effective when respondents had built a sizable following on a social media platform and were willing to share the link after completing the survey themselves. Lastly, given the short timeframe of two weeks for data collection and limited budget, snowball sampling allowed the researcher to conduct the survey in a very cost-effective manner.

3.5 Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of survey respondents who upon completing the survey had indicated that they would be open to participating in a follow-up interview. To ensure that the pool of possible interviewees met the population parameters several of the survey filtering questions (e.g., age, social media consumption habits etc.) were used to screen respondents. Once the pool of possible interviewees was established, the selection was based on variation along the independent variables - respondents' perceived credibility of, and intensity of parasocial interactions with influencers (Please see Appendix E). This selection process allowed the study to maximize the insight into different causal mechanisms.

3.6 Data collection methods

The data collection for this study began by collecting quantitative data via an original online survey using questions that had been developed and tested in previous studies.

To operationalize the key constructs, this study used similar survey items to those employed in previous studies. The dependent variable (DV), Intention to purchase was operationalized following See-To and Ho (2014). For the credibility construct, and first independent variable (IV), this study adapted the measurement of McCroskey and Teven (1999) and Sokolova and Kefi (2020), while reducing the number of questions with the hope of improving the response rate for the survey. Following in the work of Yuan & Lou (2019) the second independent variable, parasocial interaction was operationalized using Rosaen and Dibble (2016). Additionally, in conformance with the literature all of the items were reflexive and almost all were assessed with a 5-point Likert scale to improve comparability. Table 1 shows the survey questions and the key constructs operationalized.

IV / DV	Concept	Question
IV	Credibility - Attractiveness	I consider my favourite SA influencer stylish.
IV	Credibility - Attractiveness	I think my favourite SA influencer is good looking.
IV	Credibility - Attractiveness	I consider my favourite SA influencer attractive
IV	Credibility - Attractiveness	I think my favourite SA influencer is sexy.
IV	Credibility - Expertise	I consider my favourite SA influencer sufficiently experienced to make content about the niche/area that I selected in the previous question.
IV	Credibility - Expertise	I consider my favourite SA influencer an expert on his/her niche/area
IV	Credibility - Expertise	I feel my favourite SA influencer knows a lot about his/her niche/area
IV	Credibility - Similarity	I can easily identify with my favourite SA influencer
IV	Credibility - Similarity	My favourite SA influencer and I are a lot alike.
IV	Credibility - Similarity	My favourite SA influencer and I have a lot in common
IV	Credibility - Trustworthiness	I feel my favourite SA influencer is truthful
IV	Credibility - Trustworthiness	I consider my favourite SA influencer trustworthy.

IV	Credibility - Trustworthiness	I feel my favourite SA influencer is honest
IV	Parasoc Relationship	My favourite SA influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend
IV	Parasoc Relationship	I look forward to seeing my favourite SA influencer's new post.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	I see my favourite SA influencer as a natural down-to-earth person.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	If my favourite SA influencer starts another social media channel, I would also follow him/her on his/her new channel.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	If I saw a story about my favourite SA influencer in another place, I would read it. (e.g. blog, magazine, newspaper etc.)
IV	Parasoc Relationship	My favourite SA influencer is the kind of person I would like to hang out with.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	I miss seeing my favourite SA influencer when he/she did not post on time.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	I would like to meet my favourite SA influencer in person.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	My favourite SA influencer would reply to my comment/DM (Direct messages) on social media.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	If my favourite SA influencer lived in my neighbourhood we would be friends.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	If something bad happens to my favourite SA influencer, I will feel sad.
IV	Parasoc Relationship	My favourite SA influencer would fit it well with my group of friends.
DV	Product advocacy	Would you encourage people close to you to buy the products promoted by your favourite SA influencer?
DV	Product awareness	Has your favourite SA influencer made you aware of a product/brand that you didn't know about?
DV	Product interest	How interested are you in the products that your favourite SA influencer promotes on his/her social media?
DV	Purchase completed	Have you ever purchased something after seeing your favourite SA influencer post about it?
DV	Purchase intention	Would you consider buying any of the products/brands that your favourite SA influencer posts about?

Table 1: Summary of survey questions

(451 Words)

The survey data (cross-sectional survey design) provides a thin but broad picture of the different relationships under investigation. Following Sokolova & Kefi (2020), the study made use of a survey to test the main hypotheses. Specifically, quantitative data was used to analyse whether 1) influencer credibility is positively correlated with consumers' purchasing intentions; and 2) whether more frequent parasocial interactions with a given influencer increase consumers' purchasing intention.

Second, the insights from the survey findings were used to select suitable participants for follow-up in-depth interviews to explore the exact causal mechanism, and to add further nuance to the argument by exploring the variation of these relationships across product categories (Ladyman, 2007:303). (Please see Appendix E)

In addition to these methodological considerations, the study also took several practical constraints into account. For example, due to the uncertainty of the research environment (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the data collection was conducted online. Since the first national lock down in March 2020 South Africa has experienced three waves of Covid-19 infections (News 24, 2021) with lock down levels being continuously adjusted. Given this unpredictability and the associated health risks, it was not feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews. As alluded to earlier, the added benefit of the online data collection is that it is the native environment to online consumers, and that the study could be executed at no additional cost.

3.7 Data analysis methods

The analysis of the quantitative data in this mixed methods study was conducted using the Microsoft Office Excel and the IBM SPSS software package. In addition to using descriptive analysis features (graphs/tables), the study followed the work of Sokolova and Kefi (2020) and used factor analysis to verify the validity of the key concepts

(credibility and parasocial interactions). The internal consistency of the multi-item survey measures for these concepts was verified using Cronbach's Alpha.

In a subsequent step, correlation analysis was used to test the strength of the proposed relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Next, ordinary least squares regression analysis was used to isolate the relative explanatory power of the different independent variables. Specifically, respondents' perceptions of influencer credibility, and their parasocial interactions were statistically isolated from other factors (e.g., age, gender) and compared across product categories.

For the interviews following the survey, the study employed a deductive qualitative content analysis. Once the findings from the survey data were mapped to the study hypotheses, the interviews were used to explore causal relationships. Specifically, to reveal the patterns in the interview data, the content of the transcripts was first organised according to the key concepts and hypotheses. In a subsequent step, the narratives were grouped according to whether they conform to the proposed causal mechanisms or not, before drawing on additional interview material to explore possible deviations from the hypothesised relationships. The key mechanisms are illustrated using quotes from respondents.

Section 4: Findings and Interpretation of Findings

4.1 Validity, reliability and/or trustworthiness

The overall goal of this study was to build on existing scholarly work by testing the significance of influencer credibility and the relevance of parasocial relationships on purchasing intentions amongst Generation Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa. As described in the literature review and hypothesis sections, this study builds on previous findings by Sokolova & Kefi (2020), Djafarova and Bowes (2021), as well as Yuan and Lou (2020). These and other scholars have developed and tested several quantitative measures of the study's key concepts in various surveys in the Global North. Therefore, this study took advantage of these advances by replicating these established closed-ended questionnaire items. Only in a few cases were questions tweaked or added in order to reflect the local South African context. Taking these steps was important to ensure comparability with other studies, as well as measurement validity and reliability (du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014).

Although the study was not intended to be representative of the entire population (see Sample section), using a large non-probability sample of N=177 in combination with semi-structured interviews helped to validate the findings across the two data sets.

There were three potential drawbacks to using a self-administered online survey with closed-ended questions that are worth highlighting with regards to data validity and reliability. First, it was difficult to establish who really filled out the questionnaire form. However, this is an issue that is germane to all online surveys, and not specific to the study's data collection efforts. Moreover, the lack of a viable alternative given the financial, and time constraints as well as the current Covid-19 related restrictions, made this potential limitation to the validity of the data tolerable.

Second, respondents may have had trouble interpreting a given question and no way of asking for clarification. This issue could reduce the validity of the survey answers.

While this is another common drawback of this type of data collection, the study aimed to at least gauge the size of the problem by asking respondents whether they had trouble understanding/answering questions.

Lastly, the survey was only available in English. In a country with 11 official languages, this was likely to disadvantage (or exclude entirely) respondents who cannot speak English at a level necessary to answer the survey questions. Thus, this was likely to exacerbate the second point regarding interpretation of survey questions. Unfortunately, given the resource limitations of the study, it was not possible to address this issue comprehensively. Nevertheless, the survey question about how difficult it was to complete the survey also helps to estimate the size of this issue.

Regarding the qualitative data that was collected via semi-structured interviews. The study adhered to best-practice interview guidelines to enhance credibility of the interviews. This included, but was not limited to, setting aside ample time to provide respondents with enough time to explore the survey topics, record and transcribe interviews to analyse the conversation at a later stage and ensure accurate representation of ideas and arguments brought forward by the interviewee.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

4.2.1 Data collection | Data set

Online survey

The data collection for the survey was conducted between 8 September and 7 October 2021 using Google Forms survey functionality. The full sample consisted of N=177 survey respondents. While the age of the respondents varied between 18 and 40+ years of age, the majority (92%, N=163) of respondents fell within the study's desired age range (18-35). Specifically, 22% (N=39) of respondents were between 18 and 24; 42% (N=74) were between 25 and 30; 28% (N=50) were between 31 and 35; and the remaining 8% (N=14) were 36 years or older. Of the 163 survey respondents that fell within the studies desired age, 160 respondents indicated that they made use of at

least one of the social media platforms that this study focuses on, namely Instagram and YouTube. In short of the 177 survey respondents 90% met the study's main criteria. Consequently, respondents who did not meet these key criteria were excluded from the study.

Several additional demographic and behavioural questions can be used to assess how representative the sample was of the study's population (Figure 3). In the research sample (N=160), 79% of respondents are female (21% male), while 63% of respondents reside in the Western Cape, 24% in Gauteng, and 8% in KwaZulu-Natal, and the remainder from other provinces. When compared to the general population, this showed that the population was skewed towards female respondents from two provinces. Next, while the most recent Afrobarometer survey, which is representative of the South African population, found that roughly six out of ten respondents used the internet on a daily basis, the share of respondents in this survey was even higher (nine out of ten, or 89%). These findings were not entirely unexpected, however, since it broadly reflected the demographic profile and interaction patterns of followers on the Instagram page that was used to canvas survey respondents. These limitations were kept in mind when interpreting the results of the study.

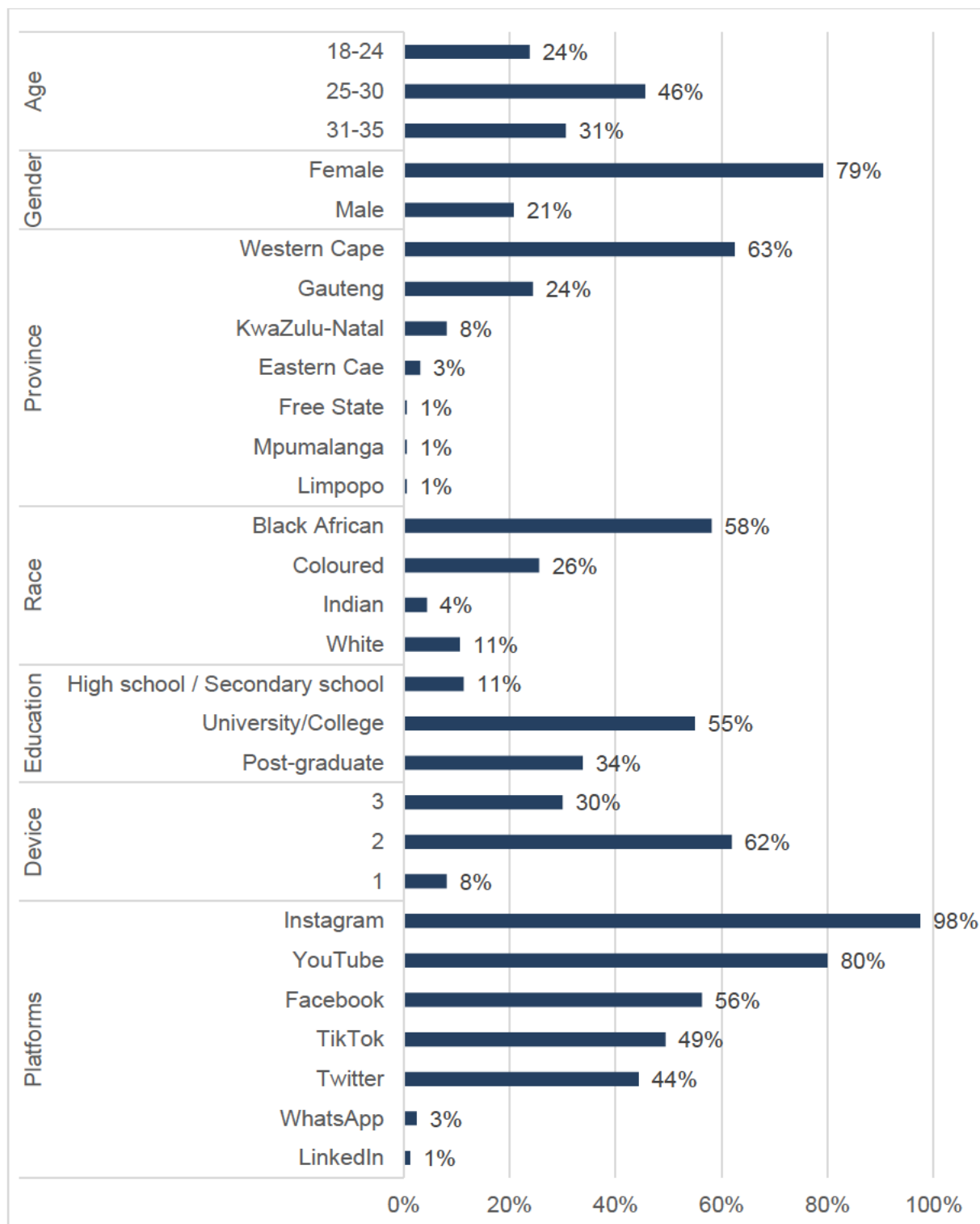


Figure 3: Overview of survey sample

(38 Words)

Lastly, to assess whether the key hypotheses of this study could be answered using the study's original survey, it was necessary that a substantial number of respondents use social media platforms on a regular basis. This was indeed the case as 100% of survey respondents personally own a mobile phone, while 62% of respondents own one additional device, and the remaining 30% own three devices. Overall, 98% of respondents use Instagram and 80% use YouTube on a regular basis, while 89% of respondents use social media every day. As anticipated, the survey sample was not representative of the total group of South Africans in this age bracket, but it nevertheless allowed for a meaningful analysis of the main research question of this study since it is possible to contextualise the findings using the demographic as well as other behavioural background variables discussed here.

4.2.2 Reliability analysis

Since credibility and parasocial relationships are two of the key concepts in this study, it is important to demonstrate that they were measured in a valid and reliable way using factor and reliability analysis, before proceeding to the regression analysis. The results in Table 2 show the factor loading for all four sub-dimensions of credibility, the aggregate measure of credibility (constructed by measuring the four sub-dimensions rather than the individual items), and parasocial interaction. For each of the indices, the Cronbach's alpha is consistently .7 or higher confirming the high internal consistency of the measures. Similarly, the average variance extracted for the respective factors is always higher than 50%, indicating substantive convergent validity between the different survey questions for each concept (and sub-dimension). Taken together, these results not only meet the conventional statistical thresholds for these types of analyses (Hair et al., 2014), but are also very similar to those recorded in Sokolova and Kefi's (2020) study of credibility and parasocial relationships among French survey respondents. Therefore, it was reasonable to continue with the analysis of the quantitative data.

Key Concepts - sub-dimension	CA	AVE
Credibility - Attractiveness	.832	67,8%
Credibility - Expertise	.869	79,5%
Credibility - Similarity	.812	72,9%
Credibility - Trustworthiness	.916	86,1%
Credibility - Overall	.734	56,2%
Parasocial relationship	.904	52%

Table 2: Key concepts - latent variable analysis

(CA=Cronbach's alpha, AVE=Average variance extracted) (15 Words)

To get a sense of the overall distribution of the data, Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for all the key variables. A few things are worth mentioning at this point. First, with the exception of the similarity sub-dimension (3,1), all indices related to credibility score higher than the parasocial relationship index (3,4). However, the mean for both variables is above the theoretical mid-point of 2,5 (on a five-point scale), indicating relatively high values of perceived credibility and parasocial relationship among survey respondents. Regarding the key dependent variable (purchase intention), we see an equally high average score (0,8 on a scale from 0-1). This means that a large proportion of respondents would consider buying any of the products/brands that the influencer who they had in mind when answering this questionnaire posts about. This is an important first clue about the power of influencers, and one that will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Scale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Credibility - Expertise	156	1-5	2,0	5,0	4,0	0,7
Credibility - Similarity	156	1-5	1,0	5,0	3,1	0,8
Credibility - Attractiveness	156	1-5	2,3	5,0	4,0	0,6
Credibility - Trustworthiness	156	1-5	2,0	5,0	3,8	0,7
Credibility - Overall	156	1-5	2,5	5,0	3,7	0,5
Parasocial relationship	156	1-5	1,5	5,0	3,4	0,7
Product interest	156	1-5	1,0	5,0	3,0	1,1
Product awareness	116	0-1	0,0	1,0	0,8	0,4
Product consideration	127	0-1	0,0	1,0	0,8	0,4
Product purchase	138	0-1	0,0	1,0	0,3	0,4
Product encourage others	113	0-1	0,0	1,0	0,7	0,4

Table 3: Overall data distribution

(31 Words)

Semi-structured Interviews | Of the 160 survey respondents that met the study's criteria 58 had indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed. From this pool of possible interviewees, the study selected a sub-sample of respondents that would maximize the opportunity to explore the causal mechanism between the key concepts. Thus, respondents were selected based on different combinations of the content vertical, the credibility and PSI/PSR scores. For more details of the combination for the individual interviewees, please see Table 4.

	Credibility	PSI/PSR	Purchase	Content Vertical
Interviewee 1	neutral	positive	positive	Beauty
Interviewee 2	neutral/negative	neutral/ negative	positive	Fashion
Interviewee 3	neutral	neutral	negative	Finance
Interviewee 4	positive	positive	positive	Lifestyle
Interviewee 5	positive	neutral/positive	positive	Finance
Interviewee 6	negative	positive	positive	Beauty
Interviewee 7	negative	positive	positive	Fashion
Interviewee 8	neutral	positive	negative	Lifestyle

Table 4: Interviewees survey data

(31 Words)

4.3 Findings

The main objective of this study is to test the four main hypotheses outlined in Section 1 of this report. This section uses empirical evidence to test each of these hypotheses including both quantitative and qualitative data.

Hypothesis 1: *An influencer's credibility is positively related to the user's intention to purchase a featured product.*

To begin with, Hypothesis 1 states that consumers who perceive influencers to be credible, will also be more likely to consider a product that is advertised by said influencer. Using survey data, it is possible to test this assertion. As can be seen in Figure 4, the survey data does indeed provide supporting evidence for this hypothesis. Respondents who score higher on the overall credibility index (x-axis) are also more likely to consider buying any of the products or brands that their favourite influencer posts about. In fact, once respondents score 4 or higher on the credibility index (1-5), every respondent said they would consider buying the product or brand.

However, it is possible that this relationship is driven by hitherto unobserved factors. To test whether the correlation displayed in Figure 4 holds, once the respondents' age, gender, and level of education is taken into consideration, all variables are included in a linear regression analysis. The results displayed in Table 5 demonstrate that the perceived credibility of an influencer is the only variable that is statistically significant in this model. Put simply, even once a respondent's demographic characteristics are accounted for, interviewees who perceived an influencer as more credible were also more inclined to buy a product/brand that their influencer posts about. Importantly, the age variable is not statistically significant. This suggests that whether a respondent is part of Gen Z, or a Millennial is less important, compared to perceived credibility of an influencer. One practical implication from this is that marketing professionals ought to worry more about whether an influencer is credible, rather than how squarely they fit into a given generational niche. The overall model explains 24,6% of the variance which suggests that credibility is a very good predictor of respondents' purchasing

intentions.

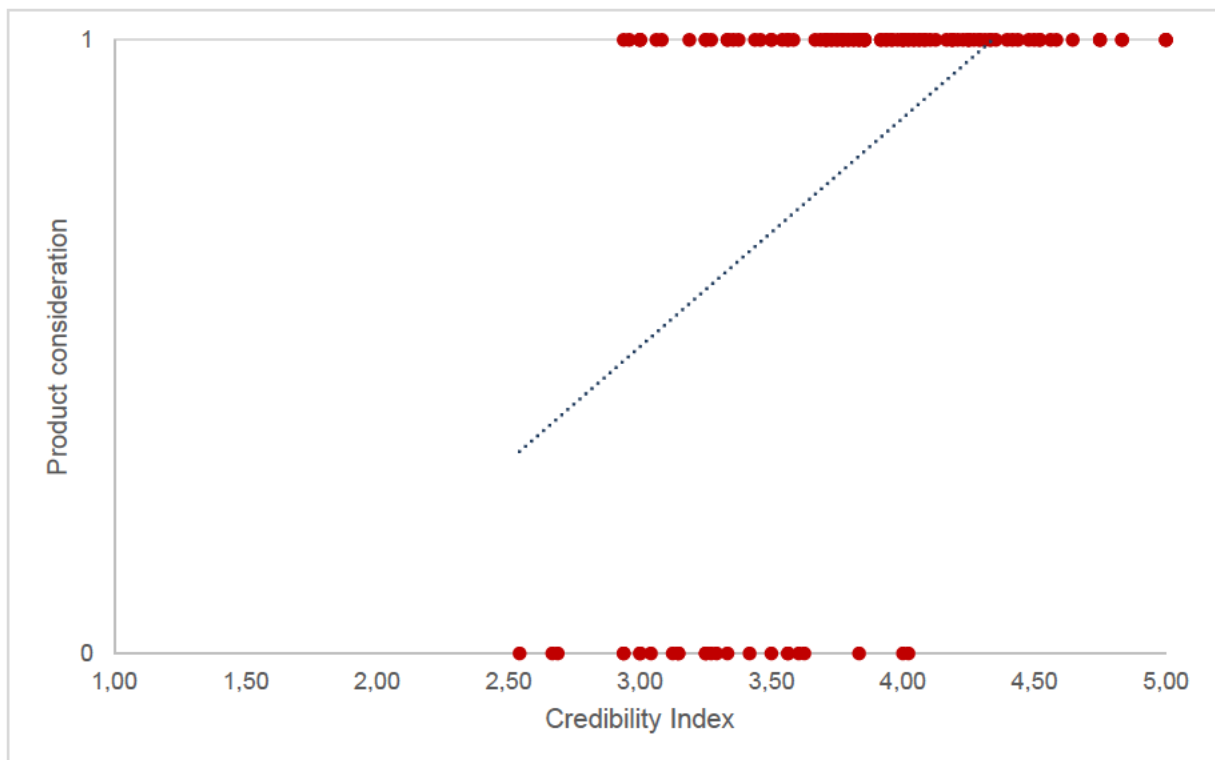


Figure 4: Scatter plot of respondents' score on the credibility index, and product consideration

Question phrasing: "Would you consider buying any of the products/brands that your favourite SA influencer posts about?" (38 Words)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	-0,620	0,263		0,020
Credibility - Overall	0,381	0,058	0,518	0,000
Gender	0,012	0,078	0,013	0,876

Age	0,010	0,043	0,019	0,811
Education	-0,026	0,048	-0,043	0,590

Table 5: Linear regression analysis of credibility and purchase intention

(N=124) (12 words)

While the survey data can confirm the importance of credibility, the interview data can provide additional insight into why this is the case.

The in-depth interviews revealed that influencers who were perceived as credible were more trusted when they recommended products or services, even when paid to do so. Their posts were seen as genuine endorsements and not adverts. In line with the above, Interviewee 1 made specific reference to two sub-dimensions of credibility. Said Interviewee 1, “I’ve never felt she (Cynthia Gwebu, influencer) was selling to us, she is just sharing what she knows with her people [Expertise]...we are very similar, I see a lot of familiarity in her.. she feels close to home [Similarity]” Interviewee 1 went on to confirm that he had in fact gone beyond the purchase intention stage and actually bought numerous products that Cynthia Gwebu had promoted on her YouTube channel and Instagram page in the past. The importance of these and other dimensions of credibility for purchase intention were echoed by other interviewees, too.

A second example suggests that influencers also can build credibility with their audience in multiple areas. Speaking about why he views Aqeelah Harron Ally, a lifestyle creator who focuses on fashion and travel as credible, Interviewee 2 highlighted three aspects:

“What makes Aqeelah credible as a content creator is because she is clearly an expert in her field [Expertise] when she talks about fashion advice, her advice is often very good [trustworthiness] and when she puts it all together, she actually looks good [Attractiveness].”

This quote clearly illustrates that Interviewee 2 views the influencer as credible in this area. However, the high level of perceived credibility is not limited to fashion alone, nor is it inconsequential. When asked if he has ever purchased something Aqeelah promoted, Interviewee 2 explicitly mentions multiple instances in which he tried to pay for experiences that Aqeelah had shared on her social media accounts.

“I've got as far as purchase intent, like going to go and look at the prices of Airbnb's at some of the places she's been to, or just the availability of some of the places she's travelled to, absolutely [...] they were just damn pricey, and I couldn't afford it.”

An important related question is how the relationship between an influencer and a brand affects the credibility of the former in the eyes of potential consumers. This is critical, because as we have seen in the survey data, once influencers are perceived as highly credible, it is highly likely that social media users will move to the purchase intention stage in the marketing funnel. The views of Interviewee 3 are informative in this regard.

“I also trust her, like I actually did buy a product that she's been recommending- I think it's Corium [...] she was definitely one reason why I bought the product because I trusted her opinion, because she's that credible source for me within the skin care space [...] I also trust Woolies, I shop there like they are a part of my daily life, my lifestyle, and so because she then worked with a brand that's part of my lifestyle. Again, there's that thing why I trust her.”

Importantly, this quote not only links credibility to purchase (intention), but it also provides valuable insight into how social media users navigate the relationship between an already credible influencer and a brand (Woolworths). The collaboration between the two increased the influencer's credibility, and thus, ability to persuade a potential customer. Another example in a subsequent section will illustrate the negative effects of a poorly matched influencer collaboration by Samsung. Thus, this illustrates the potential benefits, but also limitations of influencer credibility.

To show how low levels of credibility can negatively affect social media users' purchase intention, the following quotes help to make the point. Interviewee 4 discussed the content of Jessica Van Heerden, an influencer she enjoyed, but whom the interviewee did not find credible by saying:

"I actually like this person but Jessica Van Heerden... I love her content... although I wouldn't buy anything she posts about [...] she's just a magazine to me."

This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees as it related the influencer that they enjoyed but did not find credible (e.g., Interviewee 1 & Interviewee 7 Mhlali Ndamase; Interviewee 2 Zoe Brown; Interviewee 8 Naledi Radebe). In these examples, the interviewees' lack of trust (i.e., low score on the credibility sub-dimension), leads the interviewee to disregard any prompts to purchase an advertised product that the influencer might post (whether it is sponsored or not).

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings confirm results from previous studies. For example, in a previous survey of Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram users Lou & Yuan (2019) found that all four components of influencer credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity) increased users' trust in branded content, and positively influenced consumers' awareness of advertised brands. In another recent study, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that credibility affects the content people choose to view, or to ignore on social media.

In short, the survey as well as the interview data provide corroborating evidence for Hypothesis 1 - the positive relationship between perceived influencer credibility and the intention to purchase goods recommended by said influencers.

Hypothesis 2: Parasocial interactions between the influencer and his or her followers is positively related to the user's intention to purchase a featured product.

The second central hypothesis in this study is that respondents' perceived parasocial relationships with social media influencers matter for respondents' purchasing intentions. Following the same approach as for Hypothesis 1, it is worth first looking at the relationship graphically. In Figure 5, we can see that the more intense a respondent perceives the parasocial relationship with a given influencer, the more likely they are to consider buying a product the influencer posts about. In fact, with the exception of one outlier (score of 4,36) all respondents who scored above 3,5 on the PSI/PSR index would consider buying the product advertised by the influencer.

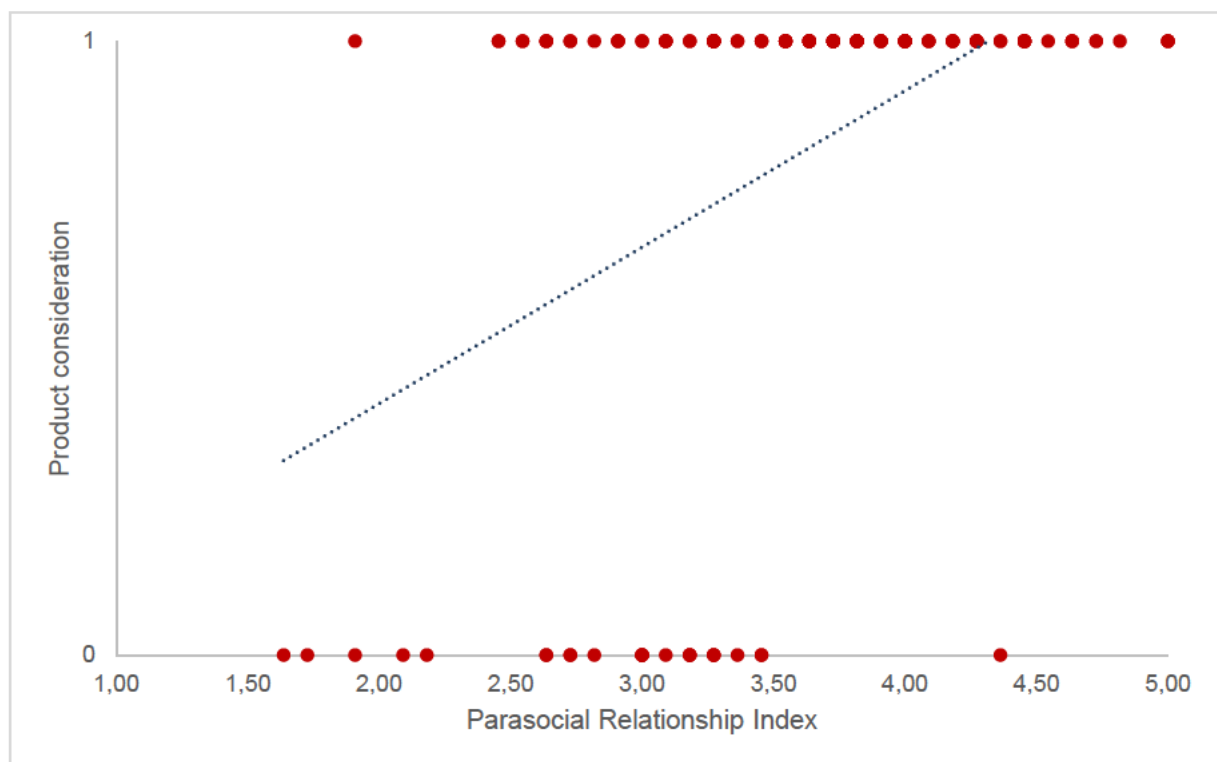


Figure 5: Scatter plot of respondents' score on the parasocial relationship index, and product consideration

Question phrasing: "Would you consider buying any of the products/brands that your favourite SA influencer posts about?" (27 Words)

When running the corresponding linear regression analysis using the PSI/PSR index as the main predictor variable, the results in Table 6 reveal a strong correlation

between the main independent and dependent variable, providing further support for Hypothesis 2. Once again, the demographic control variables do not reach statistical significance as the significance levels (last column) remain consistently above the conventional threshold of 0.1, while the overall model explains 18,9% of the variance (Table 6).

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	-0,148	0,230		0,523
PSI/PSR	0,256	0,045	0,462	0,000
Gender	0,039	0,081	0,040	0,635
Age	0,019	0,044	0,035	0,673
Education	-0,011	0,049	-0,018	0,824

Table 6: Linear regression analysis of PSI/PSR and purchase intention

(N=124) (13 words)

While a parasocial interaction as initially defined by Horton and Wohl (1956) and built upon by Horton and Strauss (1957) is initiated if a persona (e.g. TV presenter, or YouTube influencer) acknowledges the presence of the audience in their presentation, change the style of the conversation to that of an informal in-person gathering, and bodily and verbally address their users, social media platforms have vastly increased the opportunities and forms of PSI. From comments to private direct messages (DMs) that can take the form of voice messages, text messages and even a video message. These advances have not only increased the speed at which PSIs occur and PSRs

develop but also their intensity. Munnukka et al. (2019) has shown that when these new opportunities of PSI are taken up by the audience repeatedly, audience members develop parasocial relations.

The interview data in this study supports this finding and provides valuable additional context for the statistical results. Specifically, the interview data helps to elaborate on three related points: first, how powerful individual parasocial interactions can be; second, how parasocial relationships via social media evolve differently to those in the traditional media contexts; and third, what happens if a strong positive parasocial relationship is disturbed by a negative parasocial interaction. Regarding the first point, a good example of how impactful a single parasocial relationship can be is an experience described by Interviewee 1. One day he asked (via DM) his favourite influencer, Cynthia Gwebu, to film a video of herself where she wishes the interviewee's sister a happy 21st birthday - something that one would request of a close friend or family member. Cynthia obliged and sent Interviewee 1 the video for his sister. Interviewee 1 ended his recount of this story with the following:

“As if I wasn't obsessed with her before! After she did that I was like okay, I am literally a fan for life.”

Not only has Interviewee 1 purchased numerous products that have been shared by the influencer (Cynthia Gwebu), he was also able to describe in great detail brand partnerships shared by the influencer more than three years ago. Additionally, he also talked about a product that he has intentions of purchasing following YouTube and Instagram posts made by the influencer, but that is (as of yet) far outside his budget. This example also ties into the second point about the evolution of parasocial interactions on social media platforms. Unlike PSIs via traditional media, these interactions can take on more diverse and personal forms on social media through, for example, comments on YouTube and direct messages (DMs) on Instagram. Also, the reader might recall that according to the theory of reasoned action, what a consumer believes about how others perceive a potential purchase matters. Both these points are captured by the experience described by Interviewee 4.

“I think like in the DMs you could message her (@xxkhanyaxx) anytime and she'll always be willing to help you [...] If you go into her comments like you'll

see the community, wherever she goes, people will follow because of her community and because of how much work she's actually put in with us, like I did one of her courses and I message her every now and then and we chat and she just helps me even though I'm not like her coaching client" [the course mentioned here is a paid for online course developed by the influencer].

While the above example describes how social media has given rise to new forms of PSIs, the next example shows how PSRs nevertheless remain vulnerable to negative shocks. Interviewee 5 used to have a strong positive PSR with *Thickleeyonce* and even used to defend the influencer against online criticism. However, following a negative in-person interaction with *Thickleeyonce* the interviewee's interest in new content and engagement with the influencer changed substantially. Says Interviewee 5,

"... [it] didn't stay the same, so I don't really necessarily watch her content that much. I don't really comment that often or like to support or fight people who make negative content, or mean, negative comments. Yeah, what I do do though is I still look at her fashion because I do think I still want to buy something from her [...] I'm not a *Thickleeyonce* advocate anymore."

The real harm of the now more negative PSR comes out in the following excerpt of the interview. When asked specifically about *Thickleeyonce*'s ability to introduce new brands or products to the interviewee for her consideration, she said the following:

"No... I feel like it's more of a job, as opposed to really meaning it, and you know being honest about it, and so I think that's part of it. No, I don't."

Collectively, the evidence presented here to test Hypotheses 1 and 2 confirms the findings of Sokolova & Kefi (2020) in a new context. That is, intention to purchase is determined by both para-social interaction and credibility among Gen Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa. Moreover, this study also confirms another finding from the same study. Overall, the impact of credibility on purchase intention is higher than the impact of parasocial interactions. This can be seen when comparing the unstandardised B values in Tables 5 and 6. This value allows for a comparison across statistical models. Since both indices run on a scale from 1 to 5, the two values are

directly comparable. For credibility, the unstandardised B is .381, while that for PSI/PSR is somewhat lower at .256. Put simply, credibility is correlated more strongly with respondents' purchase intention, compared to PSI/PSR. Going beyond previous studies, however, this study now turns to the question of whether the overall relationship and relative impact of credibility and parasocial relationships on purchasing intentions remains stable across product categories. Hypotheses 3 and 4 consider these issues in more detail.

Hypothesis 3: An influencer's credibility matters more for product categories such as finance compared to lifestyle and beauty.

The initial intention of this study was to test Hypothesis 3 using both quantitative and qualitative evidence. However, due to the small number of respondents who frequently engage with influencers that produce content in the finance content vertical (4% of the sample), it is not possible to test Hypothesis 3 quantitatively. Nevertheless, the in-depth interviews still generated some important insights.

For example, when it comes to information or recommendations around travel (lifestyle) or make-up (beauty) Interviewee 8 mentioned that she would be open to any influencers' posts regardless of whether or not she had interacted with them before (PSI), knew them (PSR) or if travel/beauty were their niche (credibility). For example, she is interested in travel and will engage with travel content regardless of which influencer provides content. In the past, she used this approach to make purchasing decisions such as her trip to Bali. Interestingly, she does not employ the same process and rationale when it comes to content related to finance. When considering financial advice, she stated that she would need to know that the influencer is credible. This view was echoed by 50% (4 of 8) of the interviewees. To test an influencer's credibility in this content vertical, Interviewee 8 said that she would consider their academic qualifications (expertise), number of followers, if/where this influencer has been asked to speak about the topic at a conference, and what others had to say about said influencer (both in her personal circles and online) (trustworthiness).

While credibility was important for several interviewees when considering financial advice from influencers, not all of them would go to the same lengths in order to assess an influencers' credibility.

These sentiments are in stark contrast to the relevance of credibility for other content verticals. Only one interviewee mentioned that she trusted a particular beauty influencer because she had a professional qualification (Interviewee 3). However, the same interviewee also stated that she trusted other influencers who did not have any relevant professional training. Taken together, then, the evidence provided by these interviews suggests that social media consumers care more about credibility when it comes to content in the finance vertical, rather than beauty or lifestyle content. While this could be considered a partial confirmation of the above stated Hypothesis 3, further research is necessary to provide more robust findings.

These findings raise the related question of whether high levels of perceived credibility spill over into other content verticals. For example, does an influencer's expertise in finance mean that social media users automatically ascribe a high level of expertise to the influencer in another field? Here, too, the interview data provides valuable insights.

Although we already saw in an earlier example (Hypothesis 1) that it is possible to have more than one area of expertise - Interviewee 2 described an influencer as having expertise in the two adjacent fields (travel and beauty), Other interview data does not suggest that there is a true spill-over effect across two clearly distinct content verticals. When asked if they would be open to Nicolette, an influencer perceived as credible (by interviewee 3 and 5) regarding content related to personal finances, sharing her thoughts about topics outside her niche (e.g., home decor or beauty) Interviewee 3 said:

"[...] I mean I only know her finance wise so anything outside of that I'd also raise eyebrows, I have question marks because I know you for this particular niche and so if you are now telling me about how great this skin care product is I don't really know if I would trust her on that. But she's super successful in finance, so if she told me to go buy a bridge, I might go do that."

Similarly, Interviewee 5 had the following to say about Nicolette:

“Uhm No, she (Nicolette) tried to get into the whole dating story, and I was like no; like I'd rather listen to you talk about getting a bond or something. I just felt uncomfortable with that story. Plus, I know her personal experience with finances, so I don't think that if she were to branch into other content that I'd listen. I mean, that's not what I know her for. So no, I wouldn't trust her to talk about makeup or anything else.”

Both these quotes show that while credibility is important for the influencer's primary content niche (finance), this does not easily open up new areas for the influencer to advertise in. Although this finding needs to be corroborated using other data sources, it has potentially significant implications for marketers who want to work with influencers in this content vertical. For example, working with someone like Nicolette might be particularly attractive for a brand that hopes to advertise products or services that are directly or indirectly related to finance, it might be a rather poor choice for brands who are clearly positioned outside of this content vertical.

Hypothesis 4: Parasocial interaction between the influencer and his or her followers matters more for lifestyle and beauty, compared to finance.

Hypothesis 4, just like Hypothesis 3, goes beyond testing previously established relationships in a new context (South Africa) and explores the relative importance of credibility and parasocial relationships across different content verticals. For the same reasons that it was not possible to unpack the relationship quantitatively for Hypothesis 3, it is also not possible to explore the relationship for Hypothesis 4 (lack of comparative data for the finance content vertical). Nevertheless, the interview data provides some preliminary support for Hypothesis 4.

While parasocial interactions were referenced by interviewees across all content verticals, this happened far more often when interviewees talked about lifestyle and beauty influencers.

The following two quotes by Interviewee 1 talking about Cynthia Gwebu are representative of a larger set of comments about lifestyle and beauty influencers:

“You know, she feels very much like a friend or very much like a knowledgeable person that's just giving you advice like really dope advice about stuff. So yeah, I really think she's one of the good ones.”

“I think she's very open and honest, as honest and open as I guess she decides to be in her content. I've seen her be vulnerable in some of her videos. I've seen her laugh at herself and make mistakes and be honest about it and be like, okay, I'm just going to start all over again. She doesn't try to present this perfectly polished; now yes, her content is high quality but she's honest about how she got there and what it took.”

In contrast, the depth of the PSR was often described in far more muted terms for influencers who focus on financial education, with interviewee 5 saying,

“Nicolette is very honest about who she is, she is who she is, she represents herself the same way on every platform, everywhere. Even if it's something negative about a certain brand, obviously, they would have given her the go ahead for that, but she will mention it.”

However, future research should explore the difference between the fashion and beauty content verticals vis-a-vis other content verticals using additional data sources. Here, the comments sections on Instagram and YouTube, or larger scale surveys of social media users might be particularly fruitful avenues for further inquiry.

To properly test the relationship proposed in Hypothesis 4, future research should also consider how easy it is for influencers who have strong PSRs with their followers to branch out into new content verticals. The example described above showed that there are likely to be real limits when it comes to credibility - an influencer's perceived credibility in one area, does not easily transfer into another content vertical. However, there is reason to believe that PSR has some more universalistic traits. To illustrate this, consider the following passage from Interviewee 1 who when asked if there was a limit to topics, he would trust Cynthia Gwebu to discuss, or share said the following:

“Oh no, I think I'm too invested at this point. I'm way too invested. There's nothing that she could talk about that would put me off, like I want to know everything, and I know that I don't know everything [...] But the way that I'm invested in this moment, I don't think I'd be weirded out or uncomfortable with

her sharing any aspect of her life because she kind of feels like someone that I really know.”

Building on the qualitative findings of the preceding analyses related to Hypotheses 3 and 4, it is worth taking a closer look at the relationship between the two main independent variables. For example, it is theoretically possible for a social media consumer to perceive an influencer as highly credible, but a low level of PSI/PSR (e.g., when approaching a medical doctor concerning a health issue), or vice versa (low credibility and high PSI/PSR). However, as Figure 6 clearly indicates, for the social media users in this survey, influencers are often perceived to have high levels of both (top right-hand corner), or low levels of both (bottom-left corner), but rarely one without the other. Due to this high correlation between the two indices (Pearson correlation coefficient=.779), it is not advisable to conduct a linear regression in which both indices are included as it might cause issues of multicollinearity. Interestingly, the correlation is lower for the above-mentioned study (Sokolova & Kefi 2020), allowing the authors to disentangle the relationship using statistical techniques, something that was not possible with the available survey data. Nevertheless, this high degree of correlation still provides important additional insights regarding Hypothesis 4.

It suggests an intimate relationship between the two concepts. While the available quantitative data is ill-suited to explore a potential causal sequence (e.g., high PSI/PSR creates high levels of credibility), it is possible to explore this question through interviews. Based on the interview data, it seems more plausible that the more someone gets to know about an influencer (PSI/PSR), the more they trust an influencer (credibility).

It is perhaps somewhat surprising that this holds true for many of the interviewees, even if influencers say that they are not an expert in a particular area. For example, Interviewee 6 mentioned that she trusted an influencers' child rearing advice and recommendations more after the influencer shared that she was unsure about the advice she shared, that she had received the advice from her followers/online community and that she was not a paediatrician.

As predicted by the Theory of reasoned action, this sharing of crowd-sourced wisdom in combination with providing a disclaimer seems to function well, as six other

interviewees echoed similar sentiments. In short, influencers seem to be able to use their parasocial relationships to increase their credibility. This is a second avenue for influencers to increase credibility. Importantly, it is completely disconnected from the above-described option of increasing perceived credibility through strategic collaborations with brands.

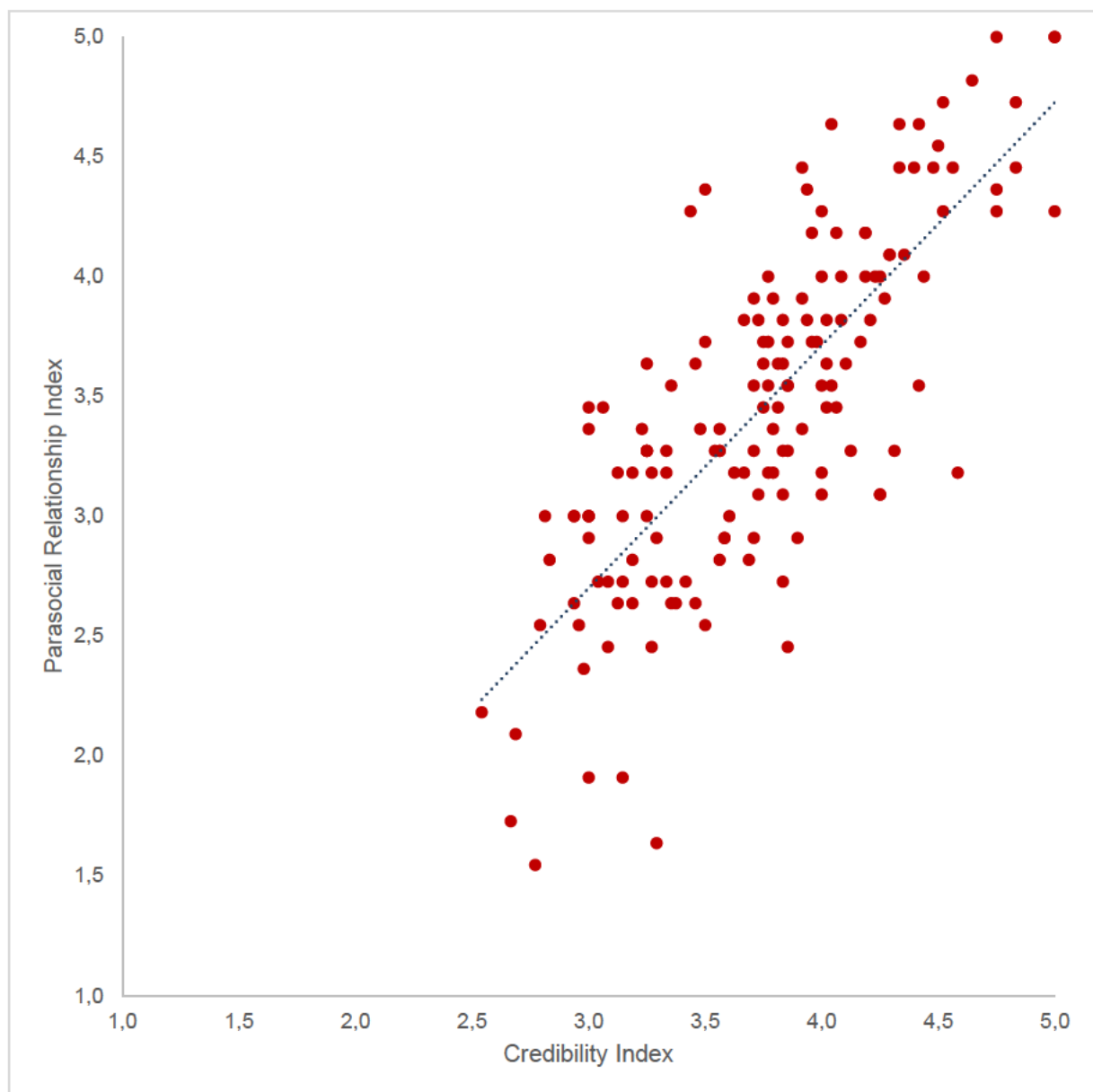


Figure 6: Correlation between credibility and parasocial relationship

(9 Words)

4.4 Substantive implications

The findings presented in relation to each of the four hypotheses have several substantive implications. The last part of this section draws out some of the most relevant ones for influencers as well as marketers in order to highlight the practical significance of this study, before contextualising the broader findings and highlighting some of the limitations of this research in the concluding section.

The first practical insight that can be derived from the qualitative research in this study is related to the building of influencer credibility. The interview evidence suggests that there are two ways in which influencers can feasibly increase their perceived credibility. First, and as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, influencers can convert strong positive parasocial relationships into credibility. While it is not clear which of the four dimensions of credibility – expertise, similarity, attractiveness, and trustworthiness – is most malleable through PSR, it seems plausible that it is most likely to apply to similarity and trustworthiness. The second avenue for influencers to increase credibility is completely disconnected from the first one, but dependent on outside collaborators. As was illustrated by the collaboration between Thokeka Bonolo Mqoco and Woolworths in Interview 3, a strategically well considered collaboration can increase the influencer's perceived credibility. The advantage of this second route is that it can be more time-efficient compared to the first option.

The second practical insight builds on the first one. Although the focus of this study has been on the impact of social media influencers on their followers' purchase intention, additional exploratory survey analysis (results not shown) as well as interviewee responses have shown that influencers can play a powerful role at all stages of the marketing funnel and throughout a customer's journey (Figure 7). To illustrate this point, we return once again to Interviewee 1 and his description of a collaboration between Cynthia Gwebu and Dove that took place three years ago and involved social media reviews and a post on her blog.

“The first thing I ever purchased that she kind of reviewed and spoke about was the Dove hand cream. I literally still buy it today and went last week and bought 2 because they like to run out of it at clicks, but it's like this dove hand cream that she used for a while. So incredible, exactly like how she describes it in the video, and on Instagram is exactly how it is. And I enjoy it- I use it.”

This successful collaboration moved the interviewee from the awareness phase all the way to the purchase and retention/loyalty stage thanks to the influencer’s review and a product that matched the description. In fact, later in the conversation, Interviewee 1 completed the full distance in the customer journey and advocated for the product:

“Oh, you have to try it, it's so good, and it leaves your hands feeling very velvety. It doesn't have any sticky residue or it's not too thick [...] it's such a good hand cream.”



Figure 7: Customer journey map

(36 Words)

Perhaps a more surprising implication of these collaborations, and one that has not received a lot of attention in the academic literature, is what happens when there is a mismatch between the influencer and the brand. The result can be devastating for both the influencer as well as the brand and result in a customer moving from the final stage (advocacy for a product) to losing brand trust and buying a product from a competitor. Indeed, the way in which Samsung has collaborated with social media influencers has been mentioned as a negative example in two separate interviews (interviews 3 and 4).

Responding to a question about the effect of brand collaborations interviewee 4 provided this lengthy but insightful response:

“So, Samsung, for example, they're always working with iPhone users and it's like a known thing people tweet about it every other day [...] So we are all baffled why Samsung keeps choosing iPhone users, whereas there's so many of us, I mean, I'm a Samsung user and there's so many Android people around that post about it as well, so it doesn't make sense that they aren't partnering with them. [...] So, I do think it does matter who the brand collaborates with.”

When asked what this campaign meant for her as a Samsung user interviewee 4 mentioned that she was currently on the market and looking at other brands (namely Xiaomi Redmi and iPhone) she also added the following

“...for Samsung specifically, I think if I ever had to buy one it would be purely for the specs, it wouldn't be for brand loyalty”

Interviewee 3 described a very similar experience when discussing the same Samsung campaign in another lengthy but discerning response:

“I know with Samsung, I've been such an avid user of their phones, but they also had influencers at some point for some particular campaign, but then there was word that certain influencers use a different phone, and I did the research looked into the particular influences in question, and once I also found that oh okay, cool actually, they kind of use an iPhone or whatever other phone. For me that was a big reason for losing brand trust in Samsung and it's kind of one

reason why I like switched from Samsung to iPhone. [...] I would have happily upgraded to a different Samsung. But honestly, that moment where that campaign hit and they just used people who actually used iPhones, I was like oh man, you kind of dropped the ball there for me.”

Both examples also point to a third crucial practical implication of this research. That is, even though many aspects of influencer marketing can be quantified, there are still many important effects that are difficult to measure or can't feasibly be measured at all. Yet, they are likely to have real implications for the long-term success or failure of a campaign.

Section 5: Conclusion

This study set out to answer the following research question: Do credibility and parasocial interactions with social media influencers impact purchase intentions among Generation Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa? The research revealed that the intention to purchase is determined by both credibility (H1) and para-social interaction (H2) among Gen Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa, with the impact of credibility on purchase intention being higher than that of parasocial interactions. These findings (H1 and H2) are consistent with the literature espousing that influencer credibility increased users' trust in branded content, and positively influenced consumers' awareness of advertised brands.

While H3 and H4 could not be tested using quantitative data, the qualitative data still generated some important insights that future research can build on (e.g., through using a larger and nationally representative survey sample).

Findings from this study can assist influencers in South Africa to improve their relationship with consumers of their content, build their credibility and increase their likelihood of executing successful influencer marketing campaigns. Additionally, the findings from this study can also help to refine marketers' understanding of the value of selecting influencers based on credibility and their interaction with the audience, rather than focus on vanity metrics (e.g., number of followers).

5.1 Ethical Considerations

To comply with the institutional requirements of the Vega School, all survey respondents, as well as follow-up interviewees were asked to provide voluntary informed consent. Specifically, all survey respondents were formally informed that they were about to take part in an academic study. The consent form also spelt out in plain language what was required of them during their participation, and how the information gained from their participation would be stored and used. The consent form also highlighted that respondents' answers would remain confidential. This was ensured by

separating all personal identifiers from the data set once the survey was closed, and the follow-up interviewees were identified. Lastly, the consent form explicitly stated that by starting the survey and thus continuing past the consent form, respondents acknowledge that they were 18 years old or above.

Those who participated in the semi-structured interviews, received two additional consent forms which they were required to sign prior to the interview (please see Appendix D). At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer verbally reminded the participant that the interview was going to be recorded and transcribed. Moreover, they were reminded that their personal information would not be shared with a third party, and that any quotes that would be used in the academic research paper would not be directly attributed to the interviewee.

While this study does not deal directly with sensitive information, it was difficult to predict what could be shared in the semi-structured interviews. However, any such information was protected. There was no financial, material or any other type of incentive for participants and respondents.

To safeguard against potentially wasting participants time, the online survey was self-administered so the respondents could complete it at their convenience. Given the Covid-19 related constraints, all semi-structured interviews took place digitally. They were scheduled around the participants availability with 30 gaps between interviews so that if a respondent was late or if the interview went over the allocated 1 hour, the next participant would not be left waiting.

The author of the study did not falsify information or distort results. The researcher used any information provided to them for its intended purpose and did not misuse information, the researcher undertook to use appropriate research methods and to ensure that the research was conducted ethically.

5.2 Limitations

The scope of the study

This study explores whether credibility and parasocial interactions with influencers affect the purchasing intention of Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennial consumers in

South Africa. The scope of the study was defined by its focus on the purchase intention of consumers, specifically Gen Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa aged 18-35. The aim was to identify if an Instagram/YouTube influencer's perceived credibility or their parasocial interactions with their audience had an effect on the audience's purchase intention of lifestyle, finance and beauty products.

Limitations

Time: The researcher had a total of 2 weeks in which to conduct the research. Given the time frame and limited resources, the number of anticipated survey respondents was 300 while the number of interview participants was between 5 and 10. As the in-depth interviews needed to be scheduled, conducted, and transcribed by a single researcher after the completion of the survey, the narrow time frame and limited human resource limited the amount of information that could be gathered for this study.

Survey Sample: The survey sample was administered using a combination of non-probability sampling techniques (convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques). Therefore, the survey results are not generalizable to the study population (all South Africans aged 18-35 who use social media (Instagram and YouTube)), or the South African population in general. As described in the sampling section above, the current data limitations made it difficult to address this limitation. While it would be theoretically possible to apply sampling weights to the survey responses, this lies outside the expertise of the researcher.

Delimitations

Product Categories: The study focused on a specific set of product categories (i.e., beauty, lifestyle, and finance). While these are prominent categories in the South African market (as well as elsewhere), respondents who were not interested in purchasing products in any of these categories (e.g., because they focus on Technology influencers), may have had difficulty answering some of the survey questions. A follow-up study could explore whether the findings hold across other product categories, or if the relationships differ systematically across other categories.

Social Media Platform: The study only focuses on two prominent platforms (Instagram and YouTube). However, social media platforms differ from each other in several important ways. For example, some platforms are better at facilitating online purchase behaviour. Moreover, depending on the platform, influencers might be more or less able to build credibility and develop parasocial relationships as they have different channels available through which they can communicate with their communities. Thus, follow-up studies focusing on other platforms such as Facebook, as well as TikTok might be able to discover important scope conditions to the findings of this study.

Geographic Reach and Language limitation: South Africa is only one of several fast-growing markets for social media marketing in Africa. Moreover, Africa is home to many countries with several official languages. However, in most cases citizens still only have limited access to the internet, and often only speak a few of the official languages in which influencers might communicate. While the study was unable to explore the possible effects of language barriers and access in establishing influencer credibility and parasocial interactions, future studies could explore the effects of these aspects using Africa's diversity to better understand the broader causal mechanisms under investigation in this study.

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APPENDICES AND ANNEXURE

Appendix A | Ethical clearance letter



Date: 04 August 2021

Student name: Tawela Ng'ambi

Student number: 16000561

Campus: IIE Vega Cape Town

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

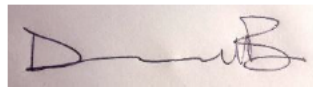
Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: Donna Bernhardt

Signature:



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name:



Signature:

Appendix B | Research report summary

The impact of credibility and parasocial interactions with social media influencers on the purchase intentions of Gen Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa.

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Methods	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
Exploring relative importance of influencer credibility and parasocial interactions matter in SA market	How do credibility and parasocial interactions with influencers impact purchasing intentions among Gen Z and Millennial consumers in South Africa	-New insight on influencer marketing in emerging markets. - help to refine marketers' understanding of the value of selecting influencers based on credibility, and their interaction with the audience.	Horton & Wohl (1956); Loudon & Della Bitta (1993); Chang et al. (2015); Djafarova & Rishworth (2017); Sokolova & Kefi (2020)	Theme 1: influencer credibility and PSRs with consumers Theme 2: consequences of influencer credibility and PSRs with consumers regarding marketing goals in general, and purchasing intentions in particular	Paradigm <i>Positivism</i> Epistemology The research will be used to advance theory building and inform practitioners' work Ontology Structural Realism Axiology	Positivist	Mixed method: Qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (survey)	Voluntary consent will be obtained from participants & respondents. Confidentiality was ensured. Participants could withdraw their contributions at any stage.	Influencers' credibility & parasocial interactions with users matter, though their relevance also varies depending on the product category (e.g. financial advice vs. Lifestyle & Beauty)	Influencers should work on PSR and credibility with their audience. credibility is also important - brands should be very selective as to who they align with for social media campaigns. future research can build on H3 and H4 (e.g. through using a larger and nationally representative survey sample).
						Population				
						Population & Parameters: Target population are male & female between 18 & 35 , using social media (YouTube/ Instagram) in SA				
Research Problem	Hypotheses	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling `	Data Analysis Methods	Limitations	Key Contribution	
Little is known about when influencer credibility and parasocial relationships matter for purchasing decisions of users	H1:Credibility matters for purchase intention H2:PSR matters for purchase intention H3&4: Product categories matter	- Social media Influencer -Credibility -Purchasing intention -Parasocial Interaction	-Theory of parasocial Relationships -Theory of reasoned action		Research should do no harm, and improve the human condition.	Non-probability sampling convenience; snowball sampling Sampling method & size: N: 177 (survey); N:8 (interviews)	Unit of Analysis: Individual - social media user Data Analysis Method(s) Excel (Excel); narrative & deductive approach (interviews)	Given the small sample size of the study, the findings are not generalizable of the entire South African population, nor to other country contexts. A focus on other product categories might yield different results.	- Improves the understanding of existing theories by testing it in a new geographic context(South Africa) - Highlights importance of alignment in social media campaigns that aim to impact purchase intentions.	

Appendix C | Survey

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How old are you?
2. Please indicate your gender
3. Which of these social media platforms do you use? (you can select more than one)
4. How often do you use social media?
5. Have you ever purchased something after seeing it on social media?
6. If yes, what did you purchase?
7. In your opinion how easy/difficult is it to be an influencer in South Africa?
8. Which one of these influencer's do you engage with/ follow the most
9. What area/s does _____ cover best? (you can select more than one)
10. I consider _____ sufficiently experienced to make content about the area/s selected in the previous question.
11. I consider _____ an expert in her area.
12. I feel _____ knows a lot about her area.
13. I feel _____ is truthful.
14. I consider _____ trustworthy.
15. I feel _____ is honest
16. I can easily identify with _____
17. _____ and I are a lot alike.
18. _____ and I have a lot in common
19. I think _____ is good looking.
20. I consider _____ stylish.
21. I consider _____ attractive.
22. I think _____ is sexy
23. I look forward to seeing _____ new post.
24. I see _____ as a natural down-to-earth person.

25. If _____ starts another social media channel, I would also follow her on her new channel.
26. If I saw a story about _____ in another place, I would read it. (eg. blog, magazine, newspaper etc.)
27. I miss seeing _____ when she does not post on time.
28. I would like to meet _____ in person.
29. If something bad happens to _____, I will feel sad.
30. _____ is the kind of person I would like to hang out with.
31. If _____ lived in my neighbourhood we would be friends.
32. _____ would fit it well with my group of friends.
33. _____ would reply to my comment/DM (Direct messages) on social media.
34. _____ makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
35. Has _____ introduced you to a product/brand that you didn't know about?
36. Have you ever purchased something after seeing _____ post about it?
37. Would you consider buying any of the products/brands that _____ posts about?
38. Would you encourage people close to you to buy the products promoted by _____?
39. Do you enjoy seeing the sponsored products that _____ posts?
40. How interested are you in the products that _____ promotes on her social media?
41. How much interest do you have in the products that _____ promotes on her social media?
42. How much do you want to see sponsored products that _____ posts on social media?
43. I would purchase the products promoted by _____.
44. Have you purchased something that _____ has promoted?
45. Which of these things do you personally own? (you can select more than one)
46. Who is your favourite South African Influencer?
47. What is your race

- 48. What is your highest level of education?
- 49. How easy or difficult was it to answer the survey questions?
- 50. Would you be willing to volunteer to be interviewed (over the phone/Zoom)

SURVEY DATA

* Please find the raw survey data linked below

[Raw Survey Data \(Responses\)](#)

Appendix D | Consent forms

Interviews: Example of consent form

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Tawela Ng'ambi and I am a student at Vega. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Donna Bernhardt about the effect that an influencer's perceived credibility and their interactions/relationship with their audience has on the purchase intentions of young adult South African consumers. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of what makes an influencer more or less effective at creating purchase intention within the South African context. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to ask you a few questions about your experience with influencers, which ones you find to be credible as well as chat about how you decide if you would like to purchase something or not. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experience with influencers. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary. • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Vega, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my BA Honors in Strategic Brand Communication. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Tawela Ng'ambi

0727840929

twala.ngambi@gmail.com

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr. Donna Bernhardt

dbernhardt@vegaschool.com

Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Tawela Ng'ambi about the effect that an influencer's perceived credibility and their interactions/relationship with their audience has on the purchase intentions of young adult South African consumers.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature	Date

Interviews: Example of Audio recording consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Tawela Ng'ambi to audio record my interviews as part of the research about the effect that an influencer's perceived credibility and their interactions/relationship with their audience has on the purchase intentions of young adult South African consumers. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

Interviews: Signed Consent Forms

* Please find consent forms signed by interview participants in the folder linked below

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/3/folders/1Jut6d2YvDgh4i7u-Il3-i3CqZXvY3wKv>

Appendix E | Interviews

Interviews: Interviewee selection

To maximise the available information about interviewees, interview candidates were selected from among survey participants. In the last section of the survey questionnaire, respondents were afforded the opportunity to sign up for follow-up interviews. Only those that were willing to participate in a follow-up interview were asked for their contact details (i.e. name, phone number, email address). Of the 177 survey respondents less than half (43%) volunteered to be interviewed.

The following selection procedure was implemented. First, the pool of possible interviewees was reduced by confirming several key study parameters. Specifically, three demographic and behavioural questions from the survey were used to filter out respondents who did not meet the key criteria: only respondents between the age of 18 and 35 years old, daily users of social media, and frequent users of Instagram or YouTube platforms were included in the updated pool of possible interviewees. This brought the number of possible interviewees down from 75 to 58. Next, the pool of possible interviewees was narrowed down further by selecting respondents with high, or low scores on the two key independent variables - respondents' perceived credibility of, and intensity of parasocial interactions with influencers.

	Credibility	PSI/PSR	Purchase	Content vertical
Interview 1	neutral	+	+	Beauty
Interview 2	neutral/negative	neutral/ negative	+	Fashion
Interview 3	neutral	neutral	-	Finance
Interview 4	+	+	+	Lifestyle

Interview 5	+	neutral/positive	+	Finance
Interview 6	-	+	+	Beauty
Interview 7	-	+	+	Fashion
Interview 8	neutral	+	-	Lifestyle

Interviews: Semi-Structured interview question guide

1. What is your definition of a social media influencer?
2. What makes a good social media influencer?
3. Who is your favourite influencer ?
4. How would you describe your favourite influencer to someone who might not know them
5. Is there someone just like your favorite influencer but who you don't follow or like as much ?
6. Why is _____ your favourite
7. Would you consider _____ to be credible? Why ?
8. In general, what makes an influencer credible?
9. Is this the same for beauty, fashion and finance
10. Would you take 'financial' (insert content vertical that falls outside the selected influencers niche) advice from your favorite influencer?
11. When you think about purchasing something, what do you consider?

Interview Audio Recordings: Interview 1-8

Please find Interview Audio files in the folder link below

[INTERVIEW AUDIO](#)

Interview Coded Transcripts | Interview 1-8

CODES	
Credibility	
PSI/PSR	
Purchase Intent	

Transcript: Interview 1

Interviewer: Regarding influencers, what is your definition of a South African influencer?

Interviewee: Ah, so a South African Influencer to me is someone with their niche, so whether it be fashion, beauty, entertainment, travel- like they are knowledgeable of that niche and they have a way of selling it or endorsing it that makes the audience member feel like it is believable or feel like it's...What am I trying to say here? Do you get what I mean though?

Interviewer: I think so. So, someone who's knowledgeable about their niche and they share it in a way that does not come across unbelievable or...

Interviewee: Basically, yeah. Exactly, they share their experience, they make it relatable, they are honest about their experience, and they share that information with their audience so that the audience can make an informed decision.

Interviewer: mmm OK. My question then and this is just like based on your description. Is it possible in South Africa to be an influencer and not be those things? So, can I still be an influencer if I'm not knowledgeable about my craft and maybe I come across as not believable? Or does that... like would I still be operating in that space? are there people like that?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think there are people there- there definitely are people. I mean I know personally because I know and I interact with a lot of influencers. I know some people will pretend or take on products that they know nothing about and hunt them for the check. I know that's very possible, but for me personally, the influencers that I celebrate and follow are the people that I have trust in. I think that's another thing that influencers (I mean, at least the really big good ones) You trust them to tell you the truth about what their niche is or what the kind of products that they're selling or experiences that they're selling. So yeah, you can definitely be an influencer that has no idea what they're doing or has no idea or they're not that clear on their craft or their

niche. But the ones that I think are usually and are successful are the ones that build trust and are experts and have knowledge about what they're talking about.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense and I think in that case like what you were describing is a good. Influencer not just a random person who posts.

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely for sure.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay and with all of that in mind, do you have someone that you'd say is either your favorite influencer or someone that you'd say is an excellent influencer? Based on what you've described as a good one.

Interviewee: Absolutely, there's one that stands out from all the rest. I followed her and I literally was introduced to her by my sister and then because I was so engaged by her and I built such a good trust with her from the jump I started and I literally went back to her very first video and basically caught up to where everybody else was- that's how much I was invested in her from the beginning and that's Cynthia Gwebu. I am obsessed with the girl. I think she's so brilliant at what she does and I'm not even into makeup- like I don't do makeup like I've never bought makeup. I'm not necessarily a makeup person, but just the way that she... watching her engage and watching her speak about her craft and be so detail oriented and so honest with her experience is very engaging. And as a person also, I just enjoy watching her live her life and like you know, her triumphs, her ups and downs within the influencer space. She's just someone that I really enjoy, admire and trust.

Interviewer: I mean, I'm quite familiar with Cynthia Gwebu. Would you say she has a good balance between how much of herself we get to know and then also how much of the craft she shares? Like she's not just like here's all the stuff you need to know about makeup.

Interviewee: Absolutely and I've never felt like she was selling herself to us, like I've never gotten that sense from her like I'm really selling myself and I'm selling this

product or I'm selling this moment or this experience. She's just sharing what she knows with her people. You know, she feels very much like friend or very much like a knowledgeable person that's just giving you advice like really dope advice about stuff. So yeah, I really think she's one of the good ones.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then, off the top of your head, is there someone... -So Cynthia's niche you said makeup and then she also shares things about her life. Is there anything else? That you'd say. Would feature in there?

Interviewee: Uhm, makeup, definitely lifestyle. I know she does fashion here and there. I know that sometimes she talks about hair and designer goods. Uhm yeah, and she does a lot of vlogs also as well. So, I think she's well-rounded in that aspect especially on her YouTube platform. Uhm yeah but definitely when I think of her, I think her niche is definitely make-up like in my opinion if she had to choose which to focus on or to only solely do I think she would definitely choose makeup because you know that's what she's fed as her passion. Uhm yeah.

Interviewer: Do you know of another influencer who is similar to Cynthia, in that they also do makeup as their main thing, maybe they do a little bit of lifestyle and vlogs; but you just don't gravitate to them the same way? is there anyone that comes to mind.

Interviewee: *Sorry, say that. Again, you're breaking up a little bit, babe.*

Interviewer: Oh sorry, I was asking is there another influencer who's similar to Cynthia in that they also do makeup and a little bit of lifestyle that you know of but you just don't gravitate to them, the same way, for whatever reason? *Can you still hear me? Oh dear, now I can't hear you anymore. Are you back? Hey, sorry about that.*

Interviewee: *No, it's just the network or whatever. We're on peak time, so the network gets weird, around here.*

Interviewer: *Oh, because obviously everyone doing their catch up or everyone is doing their interview.*

Interviewee: *hahaha, so what was the question? Is there an influencer?*

Interviewer: Yeah, is there an influencer who's similar to Cynthia in a lot of ways, but that you just don't gravitate to the same way, so maybe they also talk about makeup, they also, talk about lifestyle but they just don't hit the family?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, I'd say the biggest one would be *Mhlali* and the thing is I appreciate what she does and I appreciate how dedicated and good at her craft she is and this is just for me personally, I don't necessarily relate to her. She doesn't feel relatable to me, her interests, her lifestyle - it all looks very nice, but for me personally I'm not that engaged. I know she does produce great products. She takes a great picture. She's also into makeup and lifestyle and vlogs and hair and fashion - very similar to Cynthia. However, in terms of trusting her, I don't have as much trust in her like I do with Cynthia. And I think that's maybe because Cynthia for me is more relatable than *Mhlali*.

Interviewer: OK, and you. Would you say-

Interviewee: just in my personal opinion.

Interviewer: Yeah, of course. I mean all the all the answers would be personal. I don't think that there's like a... I mean, at least from the readings that we did. I don't think there's a way to measure it in a way that isn't personal, so yeah.

Interviewee: Right, For sure.

Interviewer: And you say that you relate more to Cynthia. What about what *Cynthia* shared or how she goes about sharing what she shares makes her more relatable to you than *Mhlali*.

Interviewee: I don't know. I think she's very honest about her... I think she's very open and honest, as honest and open as I guess she decides to be in her content. I've seen her be vulnerable in some of her videos. I've seen her like laugh at herself and make

mistakes and be honest about it and be like, okay, I'm just going to start all over again. She doesn't try to present this perfectly polished; now yes, her content is high quality but she's honest about how she got there and what it took. And yeah, I think she's just way more transparent than a lot of the other ones are, or at least the ones that I've gotten to experience. And also, I mean in in age also we're very similar, we're closer in age and then I guess me and Mhlali. We have very similar lifestyles in that she's a Capetonian, I'm a Capetonian and so I see a lot of like familiarity in her content. Like, oh, I know that wall. Oh, I know that place we have to try that place, so she feels closer to home, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, it does. With what she talks about is there a limit to the kind of things that you would trust *Cynthia* to talk about. Or do you feel like she, just shares like any person like your friend would share some financial advice? Or is there like a door where you say when *Cynthia* talks about finance-If she ever did, that you wouldn't listen. Or would you consider it?

Interviewee: Oh no, I think I'm too invested at this point. I'm way too invested. There's nothing that she could talk about that would put me off, like I want to know everything, and I know that I don't know everything and I know that she holds back and she doesn't share some aspects of her life and I respect that. But the way that I'm invested in this moment, I don't think I'd be weirded out or uncomfortable with her sharing any aspect of her life because she kind of feels like someone that I really know. And that's because, I followed her content and her life and her lifestyle. So, she feels like someone that I actually know. It's almost like that feeling where you know a character from TV and then you see them in the street, you're like "hey" and you greet them like you know them, then you're like wait, I don't know this person but I just greeted them like they're my friend. That's what it kind of feels like.

Interviewer: Have you met *Cynthia* before?

Interviewee: Yeah, a few times.

Interviewer: And what was that like?

Interviewee: Uhm, it was wonderful. She's so sweet. Like I adore *Cynthia*, We were at the A1 creators table at the Radisson Red and at that point I didn't know anything about her like I just met this girl and I was like oh she's cute and I like her. She's a plus size girl and I thought she was beautiful and I just enjoyed her as a person and then I took snaps and we took pictures obviously just like of us as a group and she was very close with the bob culture girls. They have a YouTube channel called Bob Culture. They've collaborated and they all knew each other, so I was friends with the pap culture girls and they introduced us and we all took pictures and then when my sister was like "Oh my God, you know *Cynthia*" and I was like I don't know her but I just met her. So, then she introduced me to her content and I was like, oh my gosh, she's so dope. So yeah, we know each other, but like we're not friends or whatever.

Interviewer: That's awesome and would you say for someone who has never met *Cynthia* but has watched her content on both YouTube and Instagram, is that the same person that you meet or is what I'm watching a little bit different from who she is when you meet her?

Interviewee: I think it's very close, I think because I understand *Cynthia* and the kind of person, she said that she is. I know that when I see her and I run into her at events, she definitely comes across a bit more guarded than she doesn't on her videos and that's just natural. You know, because it's an event - you don't know...You can't exactly let your guard down the way you do in your house, in front of a tripod, just speaking into a screen. So, I understand why she comes across a bit more guarded but she's always felt like it's the same girl like she's not putting on a facade/she's not putting on a character. She's just being herself. So, yeah, I think it's very similar. It's just the aspect of being in a social setting. That would be the only thing that would stand out with my experience with her, yeah.

Interviewer: OK, so it's just it's the different setting and I guess the safety as you're saying of being, I guess at home.

Interviewee: Right, which is I think everybody, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah, which makes her like a human/ like a person/ like normal.

Interviewee: Exactly you're way more comfortable at home than you are in public, because you never know what could happen out there versus you feeling safe in your own space that you created and curated. So yeah, I understand why she's like that or she came across like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, and you'd recommend that if I got a chance to meet her, that I should or would you not recommend that?

Interviewee: *Sorry, say that again.*

Interviewer: So, I'm saying if Cynthia is my favorite influencer as well, would you encourage me to go to a meet and greet, for example, or would you say meeting her doesn't add anything to or change anything? *Oh dear, I might have. I disappeared again. Can you hear me ?*

Interviewee: *Sorry it's cutting again. I have no idea what you just said.*

Interviewer: *I'm saying...*

Interviewee: *I can hear you, but I think you're a bit delayed.*

Interviewer: Oh OK, I was just asking if Cynthia is my favorite influencer as well as someone who has met her, would you say that I should definitely go to a meet and greet that she's having that I should definitely make an effort to meet her as well?

Interviewee: Oh yes, absolutely. I would definitely encourage people to go meet Cynthia, because she's very generous to the people that support her. I mean, my sister is a huge fan of her and I asked her to send my sister birthday message and she did that like Willy Nilly didn't ask too many questions. Just asked what her name was and

it was my sisters 21st so I compiled all these people that she enjoys on social media and actors and you know TV personalities. I compiled this video where people were wishing her happy birthday. And yeah, Cynthia just agreed and she was happy to do it and she sent a beautiful video that my sister still has and yeah, she didn't feel any type of way, she didn't give me attitude or anything like that. She was very willing. Uhm so yeah, I would definitely encourage people to go meet her, go experience her, definitely go support her because she's very generous. She's very generous to the people that follow her and support her and send her love, so yeah.

Interviewer: That's so sweet and I don't even know how normal that is for influences. I think that's incredible. That's really kind of her to do.

Interviewee: Yeah, for sure, absolutely. And I didn't think she would do it. But then when she did I was like Oh my God, thank you.

Interviewer: That's incredible.

Interviewee: Yeah, honestly, because A lot of them were just like where is it going? Where will it be posted? I don't have the right lighting and she literally stood in her kitchen. She wished my sister Happy birthday like she knew her. You know what I mean? It was just the sweetest thing.

Interviewer: It's incredible, and that's the kind of stuff you like – I would never forget that-that's incredible.

Interviewee: Of course, I mean as if I wasn't obsessed with her before after she did that I was just like okay, I'm literally a fan for life. Every time I see her, I thank her and I'm just like I'm obsessed with you. You're the greatest and I mean I don't even pretend like I don't know what's happening in her life I'm like, oh I saw you got engaged. Oh my God, you went to this place I saw this on your social media and she is just like okay. She probably thinks that I'm such a weirdo; like what a stalker.

Interviewer: I know that she creates some really cool content when she shops or like does these hauls and things. Is there anything like if I was going shopping in Cynthia's

closet or in her makeup room. Are there somethings there, that you would purchase for yourself or say yes copy paste that I would actually? Or do you just watch from like an entertainment perspective?

Interviewee: I mean, if I had the coin, Oh my God, I would literally... all her designer bags. All her Designer bags because she does very in depth reviews and shows you the fabrication and the interior. She tells you how much it costs and how long you have to wait. She basically takes you through the whole experience of what it takes or what it's like to purchase a designer bag and every time. She does it, I'm always just like, 'Oh my God, I need this bag' then she's like oh it's R22,000 and I'm like I don't need that back. I can't afford that bag. It's not going to happen to me. But if I could Oh my gosh, definitely all her designer bags. For sure without a doubt.

Interviewer: Do you have a favorite one of the ones she has?

Interviewee: What is it called now?... It's the one with a flap and the top handle, that's like a crossbody it's like a Louis Vuitton bag.

Interviewer: I don't know. I only know the pochette metis bag, but I don't know if that's the Louis Vuitton one. That is literally the only name from her videos that I remember.

Interviewee: What's the name of it? Say it again.

Interviewer: pochette metis or something like that.

Interviewee: Yes, that's the one that's the one.

Interviewer: I think it's a stunning bag

Interviewee: It's got like a flap and like a top handle and it's like a crossbody and it's like a square shaped bag. It's so beautiful.

Interviewer: Yeah, and it goes with pretty much everything.

Interviewee: Exactly, and I've seen how wear it so many different times and every time I see her where it or posts about it. I always go to Google and be like Oh my God,

I need it but; I'm just not willing to spend that kind. Of money on a bag yet. I just can't do it now.

Interviewer: Is there anything that she has shared or that she either uses that you have purchased?

Interviewee: Yes, I mean it's going to sound like...I mean there's a lot of things, but the first thing I ever purchased that she kind of reviewed and spoke about was the dove hand cream. I literally still buy it today and went last week and bought 2 because they like to run out of it at clicks, but it's like this dove hand cream that she used for a while. So incredible exactly like how she describes it in the video, and on Instagram is exactly how it is. And I enjoy it- I use it.

Interviewer: I need a try that. I need to try it. I'm listening to you describe it. *Oh, can you hear me then I disappear again, Oh dear.*

Interviewee: *Yeah, yeah, I can hear you. OK, I was just.*

Interviewer: I was just saying the way you describe that, I'm like I need to try that out because my hands are always super damp/dry.

Interviewee: Oh, - You have to try it, it's so good. And it leaves your hands feeling very velvety. It doesn't have any sticky residue or it's not too thick. It's very light, but it keeps your hands very moisturized, it's such a good hand cream.

Interviewer: I'm literally going to try and find it as soon as we're done chatting because I'm going to make my order.

Interviewee: I'll send it to you. I'll send you the picture it's so great and I like the cocoa butter one because it smells so decadent. So good.

Interviewer: Do you remember or did you see the- didn't she do a campaign with Dove a while ago.?

Interviewee: Yeah she did the body campaign with like the kind of beauty one recently. But this body one was like maybe three years ago. It was like a while ago with the hand cream, but the most recent one. I think it was last year where

Thickleeyonce I think was also involved. It was basically about beauty and embracing your body and your beauty the way that it is. And taking care. Of the skin and all those amazing things.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you remember the... I think it was dove. And they even took a trip somewhere?

Interviewee: Oh yeah, I think I remember something like that. I'm not sure.

Interviewer: I'll have to double check. I thought I saw her trip to I think it was London with Dove, but I'll have to double check.

Interviewee: oh, was that with Dove?

Interviewer: I just know that look beautiful. That's what really stood out. And then the other thing I'd want to find out. Is outside of Cynthia when you are just looking to purchase something, whatever it is. What are the some of the things that you think about?

Interviewee: Definitely think about the brand and if it's a brand that I'm familiar with or if it's a brand that I've heard anything about. I'm a little more brand conscious now and how I purchase things on how I spend my money. I definitely want to support brands that are more inclusive of Black owned. Local if they are any and if they aren't, then I'll obviously branch out and get whatever I can get. But yes, definitely packaging. I like packaging. I want it to look nice and look cute. Just for me personally, so that when I look at it, I'm not like, you know. Uhm, and yeah, obviously I want it to be a good product or a good purchase so is it worth it? And also, price/ price point. Am I willing to spend that much on that item or that product or whatever? Yeah, those are some of the things I'd probably think about.

Interviewer: I think those are fair things to think about before purchasing anything.

Interviewee: Yeah, for sure.

Interviewer: I have made it through the questions. I think the last one is just based on what I'm thinking about now is: When last did you make a purchase and then post it on social media yourself and what? Was that thing?

Interviewee: Uhm, huh, does an ice cream from the Creamery count?

Interviewer: Yeah, totally did it end up on social media.

Interviewee: No, I think the last purchase was this face mask from Corium and that I've been using for like 2 months or three months. I purchased it. I purchased it at a market and I hadn't/ I didn't try it until I finished this other face masks that I was using. Which was the one-minute Nivea 1? And then I tried this new Corium one I mean I've been using it for like four or five weeks, and then I kind of realized that it was kind of like the savior through winter, because usually for winter my skin goes to like hectic ups and downs with dryness and change of season and stuff like that. But that mask really helped me, so I posted a selfie of me wearing the mask just to shout out the brand and be like 'Oh my gosh, thank you guys so much.' And yeah, that was when I purchased this three months ago and I posted about it last week and obviously the brand was so sweet. They deemed and were like, can we use your picture in that story? Thank you for supporting us. Let us know if you want to know any other information about ours. Brand and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a awesome story. Yeah, I think part of my fascination with digital and social media is not just that it connects people, but also how close it brings us to these brands, right? Like you're saying, you tried out the face mask. Imagine you had like an idea for them like you could just let them know to say, hey, I like that you did this- we could add that. I think that for me makes it super exciting.

Interviewee: Yeah, the power of social media man those DM'S.

Interviewer: Yeah, hey, like. Lots of things go down in the dm's . But yeah.

Interviewee: Are you kidding me? The least of all relationships and dating -like people are building empires via DM's? Let me tell you.

Transcript: Interview 2

Interviewer: What in your personal opinion is your definition of an influencer?

Interviewee: My definition of an influencer probably would be somebody who has built an online community on a platform of their choosing. To whom they communicate with regularly and to whom they're hoping to monetize through some kind of career that they are trying to build for themselves. Yeah, trying to use that audience in that community to leverage brands and ideas and opportunities to make money.

Interviewer: OK, yeah and then, what would make a good influencer in that case?

Interviewee: Someone who has happened to/ who is able to find the balance between maintaining the community that they currently have and keeping their trust and balance that with the need to generate an income - that makes a good influencer. Yeah, that makes a good influencer.

Interviewer: That makes a good influence, so I noticed that you mentioned. The word trust like. How do you/ Is there a way to keep trust as an influencer? And how would a good influence go about doing that.

Interviewee: Yes, absolutely. because the whole premise of the conversation of an influencer already gets my back up because I think the word influencer has got like a career path associated with it. And whereas to have influence you must have something of value to give to somebody else that they find influential. And so remaining trust with the community is to - For instance, if I have built a community around me based on my love of Teaching or education or kids toys. Or whatever it is. And that's what people trust me to know a lot about or they trust my opinion or they just like my opinion in that space and I've got to trust that. This (fill in topic) is what we are going to be talking about. While we are here together that you will not break that trust in irreparable ways over time. So how does one keep that trust? I probably would imagine it's kind of keeping your focus on the only tool you have to leverage which is the community that you have built and so keeping that community happy. In fact, this is your primary objective as an influencer more so than trying to monetize. Monetizing should be a later goal. But how do you keep them happy? or keep that Trust? would be to keep the community happy question mark.

Interviewer: ha, yah, The question mark. OK so keep the community happy and then that would keep that trust. And are there things that a creator can do to keep the community happy? What does that look like?

Interviewee: Yes, I think it starts with trying to understand and remind yourself of who you are as a person and what it is that you value and what it is that you are building and this community that you are trying to build here. What is the ultimate understanding of why they exist and why they are here? So what can I do? What can an influencer do to keep or maintain or build trust? I suppose would be the same things that exist in a relationship. Are we mutually adding value to each other's lives? Are we adding value to each other? Are we honest and open with each other? Do we believe each other? Do we ensure that we are being fed? whether that be in whichever form of content you are producing. Are you being fed? Do You believe that like I am receiving ... as far as linked to the value question? But yeah, am I receiving value. Is there open honesty here. Yeah, do I believe that what you say, who you are and how it is that I experienced in the space Are they the same thing. Consistently, that'll probably be how you maintain and build trust.

Interviewer: OK, and how would you lose it then? because you said you know irreparable loss of trust like what would that look like? What would a creator need to do to have that happen with their audience?

Interviewee: Well, bearing in mind. That it is quite hard to put that across the whole community because every person that is here may be here for a slightly different reason.

Interviewer: Very true.

Interviewee: yeah and my reason for being here may be different to the person next to me and so therefore if I no longer find this content valuable and I moved out of my Life based. The trust probably has broken down. But my reason for being here might change. Or for instance, if as soon as I see a brand mention, I feel like 'oh gosh, no longer can I believe you because you've become a brand and you're selling brands I can't believe you anymore,' so I suppose by not communicating effectively about sort

of branded partnerships or campaigns or the purpose for why you create content for us in the first place. If I can see that that consistently has been uncommunicated, uh, and that I feel like I'm being used in the process, like I'm just a number of people being watched, and I suppose then my trust will be broken down and sort of over time. You could also do things that are... that well you know... you could say something irresponsible? That the broader community might think are, yeah, not OK, and you can break peoples trust in that way.

Interviewer: yeah.

Interviewee: But I think as in regards to the monetization side of building your career and being an influencer, probably by forgetting that this is a community of people who joined you before you made money that we kind of want to know. Yes, you know you need to build a career, but you know you cannot. If you represent things that do not align with your value sets or there are things that you do not necessarily use, and I trusted you to utilize or use or that are unrelated to the reason we are here in the first place. So, if I am here for beauty and things and you start to sell me a hotel, I do not know why I am here anymore. And so, if you deviate too far from the reason for being, I suppose that will break the trust irreparably.

Interviewer: Is there... so in your sort of personal life as someone who consumes media. Is there a creator or an influencer that comes to mind that you could say either changed or did one of the things that you have mentioned and subsequently that affected the trust you had for them?

Interviewee: ummm...Interesting because I do not really follow influences who are traditionally influencers on my social patterns other than for work purposes. And in the initial phase of this interview or the survey that we pulled out and the names some of the names came up like the "Nadia Jafftha"-s of the world I think it would be unfair for me to answer this question. Really, really, objectively, because I obviously work with these people. So, I understand more than what the average consumer would understand and know about their past, so I might forgive things or excuse things more than another person would. But in terms of my understanding, I would definitely say through my experience working with someone like Nadia she has she went through a

phase of, you know, not working with brands then blew up then started working with brands - overdid it and then tried to make her way back towards producing content for the community as well. And now the brands have slowly slowed down and now she is more in a space where I suppose she is producing things that she does enjoy doing. I'd probably say Nadia is a good example of somebody who felt the burn of that overcompensation, or that over commercialization of the community.

Interviewer: OK, and when you say felt the burn. Are you meaning more generally or that that's your answer to she made these changes and it affected your perception of how much you trust her as a influencer?

Interviewee: Uhm, shorts...I am finding it quite hard to separate what I know about her professionally versus what I know about just from consuming her platforms and her content. So maybe I should think of somebody else who I do not work with, and that I follow for their content and that I feel they have lost my trust.

Interviewer: Or maybe if it's easier we can chat about someone that you do follow. That is a South African influencer and that's actually good like that you trust and that you know is credible.

Interviewee: Yeah, I think there are people even though I do work with this person as well. And yeah, I don't know if I would trust. I don't really like the genre, but let me quickly have a look because I was going to think of somebody I know. I do work with him as well, but something like your. Niyaaz, Liberebil has always focused his energy on car and car content. So if I am looking for anything related to cars, I kind of know where to go. I know that he exists for cars and he loves cars and wants to bring car news, information and knowledge to the community and so I do not ever expect anything else to come from him. Any brand sponsors that I've seen or been around have been because his niche is very specific. And I understand that he is that guy. Let's see on. My feed now there are other people that I know that I remain true to that that I've yeah I've remained following because I've enjoyed that side of them. Someone that has broken my trust before from like a content perspective or I just don't believe would probably be Zoe Brown.

Interviewer: OK then.

Interviewee: Because I know, I know her personally and I know her journey so far and obviously there is a lot of content in there that has to do with her lifestyle life, but I don't really understand what the purpose of it is. And then at some point there was a lot of content obviously related to either the shows she worked on or the brand she was collaborating with. That I wasn't too sure anymore what it was that she genuinely liked and believed in, and what it was that she you know was doing because there was commercial opportunity Or, you know, maybe just busyness and craziness. Probably her and another person would have been. She's so old school now ... Lee (I think her name is)-She calls herself the giraffe.

Interviewer: is she in marketing?

Interviewee: Fitness she's into, like fitness now, was at KFM.

Interviewer: Oh Liezel.

Interviewee: uh yeah, Liezel Van Der Westhuizen. Also, at some point was like what's going on now. I don't know what you do anymore.

Interviewer: So, if for someone who doesn't know Zoe Brown for example, How would you describe her?

Interviewee: From my personal experience of meeting her, or from my experience of online.

Interviewer: Are they different or?

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: ok, then let's say how would you describe her as from your personal experience. And then we'll chat about what we see online.

Interviewee: She is super hard working. She can have really deep moments where she's quite can be quite vulnerable and share quite a lot, but she remains optimistic. I think she's always quite optimistic, but at the same time can be quite deep and you can share with her and she can share with you in ways that you can talk about faith or religion or things like that quite easily or troubled relationships or the past, or boyfriends and girlfriends. And she's quite open to engaging in those things. And she's kind of a bit of a frustrated sometimes I've seen her get a bit flushed and frustrated, and when she gets stressed and frustrated, she can become quite harsh but yeah

she's very self-conscious Imageware and self-aware. Yeah, yeah, that's how I know her in person.

Interviewer: OK, and then how do we know her digitally well you Know her digitally?. I think specifically how different is it from in-person?

Interviewee: Well, I think there is not a lot that's different, but I can definitely tell you that on her digital presence she is a lot more focused on the girl next door Feel about her - little bits of jokes, comedy, lighthearted, very bright and colorful. It's often quite lifestyle-y, so I've known her to be a person who loves or is focused on fashion. I know she likes. Clothes and things. Or maybe she likes shoes more than she likes clothes, but I find a lot of her, her stuff that she posts is quite a lot about her, what she's wearing and how she looks on that day or where she is that day. The personal stuff that we get from her on her stories on Instagram is a bit more about like her cat and her house and moving and she shares a bit of those things, but they're often quite curated. So I'd say her online experience is a bit more curated girl next door and young single woman doing cool things, wearing cool clothes and is a celebrity in some way. So she shares a lot of that side of her. So they're not that different, but I don't know if I'd like if you're going to post photos of your outfits every day. Do I follow you? Because you look pretty and I want to see you in another pretty thing, because that's certainly not my cup of tea or do I follow every day Because yeah, I'm just interested in your celebrity life and getting to see behind the scenes of it. I don't follow her. For that reason, so perhaps that's the reason people follow her because they know her from her traditional space. She's a celebrity who people happen to follow online. To know more about. But because I know Zoe what I would have wanted from Zoe... what I know from her personally would be a bit more of a realist. Uh, yeah, expectation of some kind of deeper conversation, more depth than what we expect. From her in her digital world.

Interviewer: OK, and between the digital world and the real world, I guess in which do you find her to be more relatable to you?

Interviewee: In the real world.

Interviewer: OK. That seems fair. And my question then around the brand deals that she does. Is it the frequency or is it the.. The variety that. Makes you feel like you can't trust her or that she isn't that credible. Or is it something different?

Interviewee: I will probably say something different because of the fact that I was in a similar boat to hers that I know a lot of the reason she puts these things on her social might not be because she is strategically things that they're useful for a community otherwise, but because people just want you to be part of things and post things about their brands regularly and they just say new stuff, and so she creates a lot of stuff about. Stuff like I can give examples about and often in studio like oh, this person sent us Donuts and this one sent us sushi and this one sent us this thing and it's often PR drops that she's reviewing or boxing or sharing with from what I see and what I engage on and so yeah probably would be linked to the frequency at which these things happen and the lack of. personal interpretation of them, it feels like it is just I was sent this. Here's the thing. What's the why...why you? why this? Why me? I suppose it's missing for me, so it probably is the frequency. And the style at which it's brought across.

Interviewer: OK and is. There is there a difference then because you mentioned? I think Nadia Jaftha as well when it comes to a lot of branded campaigns and the either credibility or trust that is changed there. Is how Nadia is delivering her branded content or things that are dropped, different to how Zoe does it? And would you say that the one is more credible? Or do they have similar issues?

Interviewee: For me professionally or for me personally.

Interviewer: Yeah, personally.

Interviewee: Yeah, for me personally. I don't react well to hype to like 'Big noise, loud pictures make you believe it's - Go go go.' And immediately don't trust people who are like that- overly confident trying their thing. So, for me, Nadia comes across more inauthentic or not credible in that space because she does try very hard and I think for her own credit she does try very hard to integrate it in a way that makes You- ...she knows that she must make you feel that this, this is natural. And she does that by making comedy out of it or including it in a dance or whatever to make you think that this is. But I see through that quite quickly because It's trying too hard. Zoe doesn't

feel like she's trying. She needs it now. But it's just it. It feels inconvenience, not inconvenient to her, but inconvenient. It's just it's happening because she was sent it and it needs to go up today. And it's done in a calm, cool and collected way in a nicely pretty way. Doesn't feel like it's trying to try too hard, whereas I think Nadia tries too hard and I that's something that I personally really find frustrating in people in general is when you try too hard and or they are too much in your face. That will probably make me trust Nadia less. If she said to me I believe in this, then if Zoe said to me, I believe in this.

Interviewer: OK, yeah, I understand what you mean. Is there a creator that exists, so an influencer that exists that you know, as you described, doesn't try too hard and they are consistent and genuine in telling you what they do believe in?

Interviewee: So she's always been the person in my mind, but I'm worried that this is the example that's going to come. Up too regularly, but somebody like a Aqeelah. I can trust that Aqeelah Harron Alley. I can trust because number one I follow her online and I've seen her content is very consistent and curated. She knows and likes a particular thing which is fashion and a bit of lifestyle, fashion and travel. Those are the things she likes and knows and I know that about her. She's never deviated from those things and She's been very vulnerable and honest as well too with the community. So, we've seen a lot more about who she is as a person then I think the other influencers. Other influencers have definitely tried to build a brand Like they've got an online persona and they've got an in-Person persona and they are clearly personas. Whereas with Aqueela I think that Persona is very much genuinely her. We've seen her ditzy side, we've seen her clumsy side. We've seen her sad. We've seen her distraught, so we've seen all those other sides to her and I think especially because I've worked with her, she has physically declined campaigns that I've brought to her because they don't align well with what she produces or she just doesn't think she can make it work and she's OK to say no. And I know she's not rich. But I can tell you that I think there is something about the money side of it that if you are attached to the need to make money from things, it makes it much more difficult to be genuine. And I think Aqeelah is somebody who's not as interested in the money as she is in building the community

or loving the stuff that she creates. She's more in love with the content than she is with monetizing.

Interviewer: Yeah, she sounds great, I know you say you've worked with her, have you met her?

Interviewee: Yes, and I've even traveled with her.

Interviewer: And how would you describe her as I guess a person in real life?

Interviewee: Quirky ditzy, relatively shy, quite self-conscious, incredibly creative, beautifully fashionable. Like the way she puts things together is insane. She's kind, has a great fashion sense. Uhm, caring, lovely hugging.

Interviewer: And how would you describe her digitally? How does she come across there?

Interviewee: Digitally she is. Very fashionable. She is open and honest. She's a bit funny and quirky, which I would say is very similar to her in-person personality, and I recall specifically the content that you created about her Dyson and her husband when she came back from London and liked taking a joke about that. And she is warm and inviting, she gives a lot and she's quite open and honest. I think about things especially like now with her pregnancy and previous time with her miscarriage actually being open and honest about this kind of stuff. So yeah, so I find you know she's open, honest, very well curated, beautifully fashionable. Funny and quirky.

Interviewer: Yeah, your description of her digitally sounds very similar to that of her in. In real life.

Interviewee: yes, hence why I would have said that she's doing it well in the sense that I don't feel like her in person personality and her digital personality are that different or then there are sides to the point that I know that you keep some things private. But I don't feel like I don't believe her when she's digitally creating content. She just loves filters, loves fashion, and so when she creates content that comes out, I think some of the other creators. Love building a business. She just loves creating content about fashion. She loves her husband photographing her and trying on new clothes. It's like something that she loves doing and it comes out.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you find her to be a creator that you'd say is credible?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok Yeah, that's great because the others you mentioned you weren't sure about. We were kind of in the middle, so now we have one that is similar in real life as digitally and is credible. Would you like to chat about what makes her credible? Or is it related to that line up between reality and digital- Is there more to it?

Interviewee: No it is I mean. I also have the huge privilege of being able to sit on this very committee at the IAB on influencer marketing. And we have been discussing for two and. ½ years. About what is a digital influencer? What is that? And because you get celebrities who have large social media followings are they influencers? You have got experts in their fields who have small social media followers, but are there influencers. You have got content creators who make beautiful things who clearly get a following from that are they influencers? What is an influencer? And I think there are different ways to be credible as an influencer. What makes a Aqeelah credible as a content creator because she is clearly an expert in her field when she talks about fashion advice, her advice is often very good and when she puts it all together, she actually looks good. So she kind of lives out what she cooks or whatever it is. She eats her own food. So I believe her on that and when you ask her honest feedback in the DMS about products or services, she's very honest about the feedback about those things and will give you both the pros and the cons, so she's very transparent, open and I think she is an expert in her field and so I believe her for that reason that just makes her credible to me.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense.

Interviewee: But there's different reasons other people could be credible. Like Nadia Jafter is credible- does she know how to do comedy well? make good Tik Tok videos? She's credible for being a digital content creator can be consistent great -she's credible. But not for things that I would follow people for personally.

Interviewer: Yeah, which is fair and I think, I mean what I'm trying to find out is personally for you know. What kind of things make a influencer or creator credible and

I think how you've explained it really well. With FashionBreed or Aqeelah is there a limit to what you would trust her with, right? So, I know you mentioned she does fashion. She does fashion really well as she, you know progresses -you mentioned that she's pregnant. If she starts sharing, I don't know things around Parenting or decorating you nurseries and that kind of stuff, Would you be inclined to listen to that. Or is it just limited to what she's good at.

Interviewee: Her field of expertise.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Kind of depends because like, I know I mentioned fashion, but I also think I mentioned travel like I know that she does like to travel to places and explore things that are beautiful or whatever so in my world. Well, she loves those things as a person and so she invests a lot of time and energy into it. And so, if she were to deviate her content into more mummy stuff and nursery things because. I know Aqueela is like OCD. I think she would be very focused on making sure whatever decision she does make. Then if she does share it she believes it. She wouldn't share things that she doesn't necessarily believe or like. If she doesn't like a photograph -She won't post it, if she doesn't like a video- she won't post it she. If she Doesn't like a product - she won't talk about it. So, if she's sharing something about a baby product, etc., there is two reasons that I would trust her beyond fashion and travel. It would be because I know she only posts about things that she believes in. On the one hand, and on the second hand. I know that. If I asked her an opinion about that thing, she would tell me the million other pieces of research. That she had done, and what she had found and why she thinks this is the best one out there so she would give me some kind of reason to believe.

Interviewer: Yeah

Interviewee: even if I interrogated it where as other creators would either just ignore it or tell me a flat story about it and say that, well, they actually were paid, they don't really know or haven't checked it out, whereas I know Aqeelah would not do anything that she has not checked out before. She would not recommend something she did not actually like.

Interviewer: Yeah, that she didn't like and with regards to that. I think the examples we've given here are more lifestyle related. If she you know with travel, for example, if she started explaining how she organizes her finances in order to afford these trips, she takes on the you know in which she creates content. Would you equally be open to hearing that?

Interviewee: Yes, of course. Yeah, absolutely, because again linked to the same reasons she's always been transparent. She doesn't only share the good stuff, but that she also shares some of the bad things with us. And like I said, she loves these things so much that 90% of our content is unbranded and 10% of it is branded. Or maybe more like 70/30. And so when she's talking about the bag, if I can see that there's a branded product in there. I know that Aqeelah is going to be working with the brand in the background to think about how to position this product with this brand in such. A way that is believable and true. So the other tips that she gives will be valuable. That one tip I might be like. I know that she had to incorporate that brand into there, but the rest of the tips already backed and will be valuable. And I'll ask you, hey, I know that this brand approached you or you guys are doing a collaboration together "off the record. Do you believe that this is really a good product" and **I Trust that she would give me an honest answer in the DMS.**

Interviewer: OK, yeah. And when it comes to things that she's, you know, shared that are either branded pieces of content, or perhaps not sponsored, have you ever purchased anything that she's posted?

Interviewee: I've got as far as purchase intent like going to go and look at the prices of Airbnb's at some of the places she's been to, or just the availability of some of the places she's been in traveled to, absolutely. I never went ahead with that particular purchase because I think we had another location and I think it was just they weren't available on the weekend that I was trying to. Go or they were just damn pricey and I Couldn't afford it. But I've yeah, I've gone that far, but other than that, not really. I'm not a big consumer of social media, enough to kind of take a decision to purchase on the back of a piece of content, but definitely there have been some places she's traveled to that it made me go like, yeah, that's what I feel like is a holiday right now.

And I've Got to go and ask her about them all or gone to go find the name of the place and went to go and find them online and inquire about prices.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK, and so. And other times when you've made purchases unrelated to Aqeelah, what kind of things do you think about?

Interviewee: When looking at it, purchases in general or after looking at influencers content and then going. To make a purchase.

Interviewer: Just purchase in general, so even if you haven't looked at influences content. If you're just looking to book yourself a trip or make a particular purchase, what things do you consider?

Interviewee: Price always comes up for me, it's just Like sort of price. Am I in the phase of my life where I need that thing right now? So is this now top of my to-purchase list or is it down in like I'm just thinking about it /long term sort of thing ideas just oh didn't know explored a bit. So, if I'm going to make a purchase decision, I would need to be ready to purchase like it needs to be on top of my list of things to buy right now. I might have also been already thinking about things like this. So like with the Aqeelah's example, I was already trying to look for something somewhere to go for a weekend away that had a nice Jacuzzi outside that was not too expensive but was hidden away so I could be quiet and just listen to the crickets because my days are busy that when I saw that content, I was like that's. The kind of place that I'm looking for cool, let me go and inquire and I think it is the same thing outside of influencer content like I was two weeks ago thinking oh we don't have a TV at home, and we really wanted a TV. So I started doing my own browsing and looking online and seeing what's available and checking; what's the smallest TV I can find, what's the cheapest TV I can find. And if I bumped into a piece of content that was like, oh, somebody recommending a particular TV on special- It would encourage me to take the next step but yeah, price and readiness for where I am in my life at that time, or am I actually needing that thing right now Is the top of my list. Do I have a desire for it already? Yeah, I don't know if that answers the question, you are welcome to probe more, I might give you a clear answer.

Interviewer: No, it does. It definitely answers the question. It also makes me wonder, you seem as if you're pretty considered, pretty. Yep, pretty considered when making a purchase decision. When last, if ever, have you made a sort of impulse buy? Where it wasn't on top of the list, you actually didn't even know you were going to purchase this today. Yet here we are.

Interviewee: hahaha, It happens regularly, but irregularly because I think I don't even know when I'm considering it but I think in my mind- It's been considered. It happens when I'm at markets like if I spot something at like a Milnerton market or something that I'm like 'Oh my gosh, I don't need that thing. I didn't know I needed that thing, but it's here now and it looks cool and I should buy it'. Second time I do that is probably every weekend or Second weekend when I'm at Starke Ayres and I'm buying fertilizer or whatever and I'm like but that plant...Or maybe I should buy more stones... Or maybe I should get another plant... more herbs? or whatever. That's the only time I probably make impulse decisions, but it's been considered in my mind. I value gardening and growing things; it gives me Peace of Mind and it's fun. and it's something unique to do so I am in some ways primed, even though it is impulse, in my mind. And so yeah, last weekend would have been my last impulse decision. I bought a whole bunch of grey square tiles and a whole bunch of stones for the garden to Stop the dogs from digging, but to make it look slightly pretty because we have an ugly garden.

Interviewer: Ooh, why is it needing to be pretty?

Interviewee: because I never had a garden for 10 years of my life. I lived in flats and we have two doggies which are within and outside and but what's the point of having an outside in the garden if you can't sit on the grass or stand outside and be like ah? But instead, I stare out dirty sand and holes in the ground and dead leaves and ugly walls. So, to me, making that stuff pretty gives me Peace of Mind.

Interviewer: I'm sure we're deviating here, but do you have any reference photos of what you are trying to create?

Interviewee: No

Interviewer: OK, so you just sort of going about it as You discover tiles and things?

Interviewee: Exactly, and I think Marko is like the designer in our in our house he's got a very creative eye and so I do a lot of the purchasing because I do impulse buying and I think I have what's called a retail therapy. Buying things makes me feel good about myself. But I'm definitely not good at putting things in their right places and so Marko is the person who spends a lot more time on places like Pinterest and Instagram browsing aesthetic and design and trends etc. So that when I am out there thinking this garden looks terrible, he'll come up with the idea of like why don't we put big white stone? The next time I'm at Starke Ayres I'm just walking around. I'm like, oh there's big white stones -He mentioned that let me buy them now. I wasn't ready for it. I wasn't looking for them specifically, but he had mentioned it once, so it was probably going to look good so I just made an impulse buy and I was like Oh well, I'm here now so let's buy big white stones.

Interviewer: Hmm OK, that makes sense and I think that's like the social context of it, right? It's not just random white stones. If we trace it back, there was an interaction where it was either mentioned or explained that it would actually look nice. Which is great. Yeah, if we circle back to influences at some stage you mentioned. Not being able to separate. Between some of the I'm going to say critiques that you had of Nadia versus your understanding of the thought behind it. The person behind it. Do you think that it is challenging to be a successful influencer in the South African market? This is from your professional perspective as someone who does work with them.

Interviewee: Yes, my answer is absolutely and unequivocally yes.

Interviewer: And why is that?

Interviewee: I have two theories on it that I'm mulling over and thinking about. The one is what I have mentioned, I think to you before, off record but we can record it here as well. It's the understanding of this poverty mentality. Where there isn't as much economic opportunity in the space of brand deals, etc. For creators or the size of deals for creators in South Africa with the size of audiences we have to build a sustainable career of just having a community online and monetizing them. And so, I think people who are considering themselves 'influences', and I put that in inverted commas resorts

to trying to take on too many brand deals or too much stuff there because they see it as either a short window time frame or a need to generate an income from this audience and that changes the way that they see their content. That's a very hard thing to do because you quit your job -you're producing content full time, even if you're a YouTuber and you're making 5 / 10 grand a month on Google AdSense, but you're producing content like once a week or once a day, it's a lot of time commitment for just 10 grand. To scale that up to 100 grand means you have to do whatever you're doing Times 10- It's just not feasible. So the brand deals are already the only way for you to be able to generate an income that is enough to survive and carry a family or like you know, you hear of salaries of 60 grand, 40 grand and whatever and you wonder how you're going to get there - brand deals are probably the only way to be able to do that, so trying to do that is hard. The second reason why I think it's hard to be an influencer in South Africa in this context is because of the size of the economically active market, those who have access to smartphones, social media and the luxury of time to browse and engage social media means that the size of audience you're going to generate will not be able to compete with that internationally and or to grow as quickly as somebody internationally may be able to do. And when I talk about sizable, I'm talking about like our YouTubers are big if they have 100,000 subscribers, you know you're not even considered a medium sized creative, if you have 100,000 subscribers internationally, like in the sort of big Western markets like America and in the in the UK you would be considered small to medium, having like a million subscribers -now we're talking. And so that figure to build an audience like that is impossible. There are not that many people in this country to consume that kind of content, and at that scale. And so, I think you are sitting in an environment where building an audience is hard. And takes time and energy and all of those things. There isn't much money, so brands aren't as readily primed for spending money in this new media format. And so yeah, money is tied up elsewhere and you as a creator needing to make money to survive because money is probably the most important thing because you don't have as much security from you know, family and trust funds and government support that this is your only means to generate income and that can blind you regularly or give you anxiety regularly Which makes it much more difficult to produce content in this context

in South Africa, so it takes a huge amount of bravery, strategy support and clear vision of what the purpose of this is to be successful here.

Interviewer: Yeah, and what would your prediction be for... And I mean this is of course just a guess, but from what you've seen in the market is there something that brands are clearly doing wrong when it comes to, you know partnering with creators? And is there something that brands are doing really well that they should probably keep on doing as this sort of market grows?

Interviewee: I mean, I probably have a longer list of all the things that brands are doing wrong than I have all the list of things that they're doing really well. In my experience. With brands we have a very weak marketing knowledge in the country and people who are employed in positions at brands don't have as much understanding of what it is to market and they've outsourced their entire understanding of marketing and strategy to external suppliers to own and manage. And so without brands having a clear grasp or understanding or knowledge of marketing, they don't know how to strategically guide their agencies and others who have mandates and the financial constraints and things to get things done to drive campaigns that are effective. They're more focused on other metrics just to get through the job and get things done because everything's been sort of outsourced to them in that way. That's my current thinking about it and brands are doing, yeah so, so that's that. The second thing is brands see influencer marketing like they see any marketing objective or marketing challenge which is unthought out and everything is related to sales -So everything must be one post must equal a set number of sales and if it is zero, it's unsuccessful, and if it is 100, it's successful. Which is obviously not a marketing objective in any way that's an advertising objective and advertising in itself probably has a sales trajectory that is tapered off over time. It's not something that is 1 post one sale, and you can kind of pull it up that way, it probably has a slightly longer purchase cycle, depending on the kind of product you are selling, obviously. So I think brands often try and have their campaign goals and targets as product sales but they don't provide enough support to the creators or data for the creators to determine what it's going to take to get those sales or what the return on investment to them will be. They just believe that influences are better salespeople than their own sales people. Well

what do they do right? because I mean, there's obviously lots of things I could mention that they're doing wrong and I'll let your other candidates give more of that feedback because otherwise I'll start having a hernia internally. The things that they're doing right brands...I think they're awake to it, some brands, I suppose in South Africa are awake to it because we're quite culturally and socially aware as a country or trying to be more socially and culturally aware, and because there's so many diverse kinds of people in our country that people are exposed to a lot more here; I think when it regards influencer marketing, I think brands are starting to become less tone deaf. And so they're starting to realize that influencers have a means to help them build better brands. But they are starting to collaborate with creators that are all relevant and have relevance in the market and they're trying to focus on smaller audience sizes, but you know, greater impact and engagement as they're going for the large influencers and celebrities to endorse the product or the brand. I think that's probably something that they're doing well. at the moment.

Interviewer: Those are really good points. Looking back, has there been a brand collaboration between an influencer and I guess a corporate that you've seen online that really resonated with you personally?

Interviewee: gosh...That resonated with me, or that I believed.

Interviewer: Whichever is easier to answer, we can start with what you believed, where you thought this is perfect like this works great combination between brand and influencer.

Interviewee: Gosh, it's so hard and because yeah they are, but I think I need a bit of time to think about it on the spot. It's kind of hard to go through the catalog in my mind of every single post that I've seen on social inclusion that I believe. I mean if we can circle back to the creator that I do believe in any case like Aqueela and I've worked with her on a campaign or two that I felt like I did definitely believe. She's done some collaborations, I don't remember with who but I was like - 'yoh, no this is definitely something that I believe fits with her' Then maybe it was our trip with Virgin Atlantic, that we did to the UK, because it was something that I got to experience with her in-person and online. She just loves Harry Potter to death and it's like her favorite thing in the whole damn world. She loves travel and she got to travel first class or business

class and so my feeling was that the experience that we had of her online was linked to her love for travel and her love for everything else that that collaboration just seemed right that it shows a good influencer for a good campaign with things that she actually genuinely loved and Enjoyed and I think that to me felt like I could believe her love and her excitement about the collaboration was with Virgin Atlantic & Aqueelah. And to link with the other part of the question: because I work with Influences I have very strong trust issues with content in that way, I don't think I've ever felt myself being like "woah, i want that now" or "yoh i'm inspired to take that next step" From influencer content.

Interviewer: Is there anything that influences could do to change that for you?

Interviewee: In their favor, I'd probably say no because like reality TV has been ruined for me forever because I've worked on reality TV. Influencer marketing has been ruined for me forever because I work in influencer marketing and I work on the behind the scenes. Before that physical piece of content has ended up on the platform, I know that there was a negotiation, I know that there are contracts and that there's brands and there agencies, I know that there's a goal and a target in mind, I know there's some reporting that needs to go on. So my experience of those campaigns will always be tainted and I could pick it up much more sensitively. "What can they do to change my lack of trust?" Yes they can. their platforms that they produce content on, cannot be their soul source of revenue. That's how they can do it. They can treat their social media platforms like community building platforms. Platforms to engage and build the community around a particular topic or subject matter or love of something. And they can find ways to monetize that sometimes as they need to, but not as their sole source of revenue. That they have a business on the side, that they MC at events or whatever they need to do, that they start creative projects that make their money but they leverage this community. Because if you think about how brands leverage audiences online like content marketing is about trying to build a community online and then you either sell to that community or you're able to mine their data.

I think influencers do something similar- they find people who are similar to them who like similar things, and then you sell to them every now and then with things that you know that they like and that they value and you can also obviously mine that data/information and you can use that data /information for other people to get

knowledge. Some brand can come to you and say, "I'm not looking to sell anything to your audience, but I'm looking to understand the kind of people who follow you; are they more likely to do A, B or C" and to run some understanding and knowledge sharing opportunities on your platforms or quizzes to get that information and mine that is valuable and it doesn't feel like I'm being taken advantage of it's like I'm sharing information with you about my interests (yes, you happen to be monetizing that, but I don't get to know about it). I don't feel sold to or sold out or whatever. So influencers can find other sources of revenue.

Interviewer: OK, that has me super interested now because you're saying find other sources of revenue. That platform shouldn't be the main source of revenue. How would we know that?

Interviewee: Not main hey just only but yeah we are on the same page.

Interviewer: Oh only yeah.

Interviewee: It shouldn't be the only source of revenue.

Interviewer: OK yeah, how would we know that as people consuming media? Or is there an underlying...Is there a change that happens when that is someone's only source of revenue?

Interviewee: We would know about it because I've noticed a lot of American Podcasters or whatever it is, and influencers or celebrities have digital platforms where they communicate with their community and their audiences but the sole purpose of that community is not monetization only. Whereas I see creators in South Africa perhaps, their Instagram page, YouTube channel, their TikTok account as the business that needs to generate revenue. Whereas my understanding of people like you're.... like There's some people that I follow online I mean, it's probably not great examples, but they're quite active right now, like a Amy Schumer or I noticed the other one the other day that I thought was quite cool- Drew Barrymore. She does a lot more branded content which has been irritating, but she's got a TV show. So she's got a whole bunch of other things that she's doing and these people follow online because they're so interested in her life, Every now and then she does some collaboration with some brand or she talk about our own products or services that people are interested

in; but the majority of the stuff that she's creating is just about trying to give people insights into her life as a celebrity. There are other digital content creators that...

Interviewer: So is she...

Interviewee: ...Yeah, yeah, like. I can give you a good example (sorry) about people who are followed online as a primary source of income. It's people like good videographer's ,like *Ry guy*. Yeah, *ry Guy* is probably a good example,(Maybe it's a bad one...I don't follow him). But *Ry guy* is an example because we've been using him for a campaign now.His Instagram page -I don't see any branded collaborations there, rarely. I know that because of the fact that he's a brilliant videographer and he's built this brand for himself online people book him to go and shoot videos for their platforms and for their brands and everything else. And so they use their skill set and the things that people know them for and like them for, to monetize outside of the pattern. You don't see him selling new camera gear on his Instagram page, you don't see him trying to sell you filters for videos on his Instagram page. You see him building a community of like minded people who are interested in something, some subject matter, who are interested in what he does or how he does it, and he monetizes that in a different way.

Interviewer: OK, So what I'm trying to understand is... what is the negative or the thing that you would say is off putting about the person's digital platform where they have this community and have done all these wonderful things being their main source or only source of income? Yeah, what are the negative ramifications of that ?Would you be able to Unpack that a bit more?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean at a surface level I want to say we've already discussed this. It's the fact that I know that there are commercial agreements that go into this stuff which skews the purpose for the content creation in the first place.

Interviewer: OK, so are you saying? If they didn't have it as their only source of income, there would be less branded content. Is that what we're saying? Issue is?

Interviewee: Yes yeah ... aaaa yes.

Interviewer: OK.

Interviewee: I seem unsure because I'm trying to think in my mind if that theory actually plays out true- that if you had other sources of income, you wouldn't put as

much branded content on your platform- yes, and the trick to why I think I'm confused or not as like sure saying yes, it's because it doesn't matter that there's less branded content on the platform it just then you can focus more energy on having more value on the platform as opposed to selling on the platform, if that makes sense so that you can spend more of that time just doing stuff that we're interested in and you have fun doing because we we like it when you like it and we'll have fun while you're having fun -That's lekker because then we feel like we have more of a connection with you. When there is selling involved there is a different kind of relationship between the Influencer and audience member for me; that I go 'This is transactional now, You think that I follow you because I like you. You're eating sweets from brands A or brand X. I don't really need sweets right now, but I know you need to make money so I know that this is happening on the platform but I don't feel closer to you for it'. I don't have any value out of this transaction that you're trying to do here. Whereas you could have for Instance not had that brand pay for that sweetie and you could just be having sweeties because you freaking love this brand of sweeties. They're not paying you to have or talk about their brand of sweeties, but you are eating their sweeties because you freaking love their brand. I think I'm getting value because creators I have noticed who have brand collaborations always hold back their views on the sweetie, positive and negative because there's a transaction that needs to occur and certain messaging needs to come out, that it's almost it's thin. Whereas if you were talking about your favorite packet of sweeties like "Oh my gosh, do you guys remember these sticks? I found them at the spaza shops next door. Delicious! Look at how my tongue fizzes..." it'll look ugly on camera, the brand would never approve a piece of content like that, but I feel closer to you because of it now. Now you're giving me a real experience on what's going on here, so there is probably a correlation between the amount of branded content. I agree with you. But also the part is that then it needs to be replaced by content that does add value.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK, that sounds fair and I think I think my last question would just be around. Do you feel like it's possible to have valuable content that does make you feel closer so you know, So the example with the fizzing and here's where I got it. Is it possible to have that valuable content that makes you feel closer where that Creator

just happens to be getting paid for it? But how they deliver it is just the same? Or is it the paid partnership part that's really off putting for you?

Interviewee: No, it is possible. It requires 2 things. It requires a pre-existing trust. If that trust is wishy washy or not quite there. Prior to the collaboration, it's going to be very difficult to make me believe that this is something genuine and is delivered in that way that I receive it outside of its branded collaboration, so there must be a pre-existing trust. Two: there must be bravery between the brand and the creative to collaborate in a way that it's more led by the content and less by the objective of trying to get more sales. It must have a different kind of objective to sales and it must have like a brand awareness exercise, it must be about the brand awareness side of things so you know. So it can be engineered in a way that I think is believed, yes.

Interviewer: OK, and with the pre-existing trust that you're saying should be there, would it help if that influencer for example had on a different, un-sponsored post Eaten those sweets from brand X before in the way that you described, and then only months later had same brand but now sponsored. Would that have added to this pre-existing trust, or is the pre-existing trust just related to your overall experience of that creator?

Interviewee: To me, that's like an unfair question to ask because there is no trust if you had done this strategically, like you had obviously posted about a brand and mentioned that brand name told, your audience is not paid for, because obviously it wasn't at that stage. To get potentially the attention of that brand, and to at a later stage, say "oh, you guys know that I love this brand because I posted about them without being paid a while ago and now they've approached me about a collaboration, now I am being paid". It would not be my perfect scenario.

Interviewer: OK.

Interviewee: It would be my ummm... Not too sure I believe you, scenario. But it would help for instance, if I saw it more frequently, no, put it this way I would trust you more if it was communicated to me- Clearly, properly. That's said like "I know that we have built this trust over the last however many years you've been following me. I don't post about things I don't believe in and you know that. Yes, this brand has approached me, they initially approached me to do this, I said to them, no, I don't produce stuff like that- I talk about these things... I know that you like when I talk about these things as well.

So what I'm going to talk to you about this brand is very Open and they've been very clear about it. Meat brand manager A. Hi brand manager, Nice to see you cool". Now let's unpack the real questions that we have about this product, Let's Be real and Frank- then I would be like "cool". Now we're in the same position where it's all been disclosed to me in that way, not just by saying "paid partnership" that doesn't disclose it to me -it presupposes our trust, I know that you believe in things that you only post about, and you've proven that through your track record- You've only worked with brands that you believe in. The content that you've produced over time has been on things that I know, you're passionate about, that matter to you and You are an expert in the field on. This doesn't feel far aligned, too far removed from your content that you create. There is a lot of pre-work that needs to go into this brand collaboration being believable.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I think that pulling back the curtain and being transparent about it then would help in building that trust. That makes sense, yeah?

Interviewee: Yeah, it is transparent and honest. I don't know there's a- you can't just be transparent- pay up and pay. That doesn't make me believe you, it doesn't make the content now valuable to me. It's like I have been paid and there needs to be an honesty about how this all came about and why you are sharing paid content with me and there needs to be more than just transparency. It's transparency and honesty and trust like they all need to be in line for me to trust you .

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, that seems fair. That's I mean, for some creators a big ask, but it definitely makes sense. And you know, if you want someone or especially you to trust what's being delivered for the branded content that those three things would need to really be present, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, and I know I'm a tough case because I don't trust easily and it's not my natural thing to want to be like? Yeah, I believe you. I'm very cynical, I test things out, I'm very curious. I want to understand all the bits and bobs and if you don't give me the answer to the thing that I'm trying to ask, you're avoiding it and if you're avoiding, then there's something you're holding back and I don't believe you. It takes

quite a lot for me to do that so I'm a pretty tough case for an influencer to want to convert.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I mean also really well done for the influencers that have gotten you to follow them, so that's at least testament to some good work being done out there.

Interviewee: Yeah, possibly, I don't really follow influencers, but yes.

Transcript: Interview 3

Interviewer: And start off with. I guess my first question around Influencers like, how would you define that? If you had to explain to me what is an influencer ?

Interviewee: Yeah, so for me an influencer is an individual who through action and I guess Action can be, you know, either online, digital or offline, but it's through. Action or the creation of Like something you know whether it's written articles, visual photos, podcasts, audio, but my understanding of an influencer is somebody who through Action or the creation of like some type of medium, influences the decision of an individual from one Thing to another. But basically, has an impact in the decision making of an individual from one thing to another, yeah, that is like proper academics. Sounds a bit very or like Textbook academic, but that is like my understanding because and I say that from the perspective of maybe like a content creator which is what I would resonate myself as because I don't feel like I Influence or make changes to people decision making as opposed to just I do that creation process but not with the point of influencing or impacting decision making processes.

Interviewer: So, if we use, if we use that definition. Would you say then that a digital influencer is someone who does that, but instead of things like text or writing Well, not text or writing because you can do it online, but that they do all those things that you describe but online?

Interviewee: Yes, yeah through like a digital medium because I think you know an influencer that within this context might not necessarily have the same type of influence if they did it offline. Like if I make a digital influencer trying to influence me through a conversation that we're having at a coffee shop. umm, might not necessarily be versus if they created really cool videos or some kind of like a written article or something along those lines. I think that would influence my decisions per say. But yeah, it's basically like online digital mediums, yeah.

Interviewer: And then what would you say makes a good one, like a good digital influencer, other than creating stuff?

Interviewee: Oh, good question. I mean, on the one hand I want to say how many people you influence, but then I mean like. Bad influence can also, you know, influence

like 10s of thousands of people and it might not be considered a good influence, so I think it's on the one hand, yes, I think there is a numbers element in terms of like how many people you necessarily influence, but then also, on the other hand, it's how you're influencing that decision making process, because you can either influence it in a positive way, or then you can influence it in a negative way. And I leaned more towards an influencer who can, yeah, just impact or influence that decision making process in A bit more of a positive way. So, if you are for example, have an influencer who's you know trying to talk about this really cool phone and they talk more about like how it positively will impact your life as opposed to just bashing and going the negative route of saying it's better than that other phone for all of these like negative reasons. Uhm, yeah, I think it's more leaning towards how do you positively influence the decision-Making process of an individual.

Interviewer: okay, yeah, and so if you.

Interviewee: I hope I'm making Sense Oh my gosh, I'm giving you like long strings. Of words, yeah. Haha.

Interviewer: No, you're making a lot of sense. I can kind of see your thought process around that and it has me super intrigued because what you mentioned now about positively influencing versus negatively influencing? Are there specific things about the person who is this digital influencer (Whether it's you or someone that you watch) are these with specific things that they can do to make themselves more influential? or do you kind of see influence whether it's positive or negative, whether they're telling you to buy it and hear the good reasons, or whether they're bashing is that is that equal in your mind?

Interviewee: No, no, no. It's definitely the former. Like there's things that influencers themselves do that would build credibility, right? So, an influencer can be good or bad, but also just like how credible are you? So, if I know you to be credible within a particular niche that I feel like will help determine also just how good of an influencer you are and for me also just in terms of then how impactful and to what degree you can influence a person's decision. So maybe to paint the picture if I am looking for a tech product, I would trust the insight/ the credibility of an influencer if they're actually playing in that space, as opposed to if now a fitness influencer is telling me to get the

new iPhone. If that niche and that credibility is in question and for me, yeah, that's where the lines are like mmmm....You haven't really missed me there.

Interviewer: That makes sense. Well, so with that in mind. So, if you're saying you know you're looking at how credible they are, you're looking at what niche they play in and that kind of stuff. Who would you say for yourself as someone who consumes digital media? Is your favorite influencer or the influencer who has... If they, if they're different. If your favorite influencer and the influencer that you trust to influence you are not the same, that's also okay. Who would you say is your favorite?

Interviewee: Do I have to give one? Can I give maybe a couple?

Interviewer: Of course, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, so I think *Tobi Rose* for example on Instagram super, from my observations like super influential within like the travel space like this definite. I won't lie like she took a trip to Kenya recently and just like the visuals she created- I feel like Oh my gosh, yes, I definitely need to visit Kenya whenever I have the opportunity to do so. and she definitely had a role in that decision process for me, and another influencer, I think who's doing really well is Miss Dhanusha with the Self Care / mental health space, so she's also pretty influential in my opinion in that regard. there's ...she might be/Maybe she's not like a big influence, but I Think *Thobi* (*Thobeka Bonolo Mqoco*) I can't remember her surname. But she is a Skin influencer in essence, and she's in the skin care space. And I also trust her like I actually did buy a product that she's been recommending- I think it's Corium (Skincare). I bought a product purely because I mean of course for other research purposes but she was definitely like one Reason why I bought the product because I trusted her opinion because she's that credible source for me within the skin care space and then is ginger with a GoPro - Chad Nathan. I love his content also for like a bit of travel and photography as well.

Interviewer: yeah, you mentioned I think *Thobi* who you trust with like skin care. But you also mentioned that *Thobi* is not that big. What about what puppy does or creates makes her trust or trustworthy to you or credible to you? Has he created other content that's done that for you, or is it something else?

Interviewee: Yeah, so I mean number One reason is that she's actually qualified, so she's a qualified Somatologist which I believe is someone who basically studies their skin. So, because she has liked an actual qualification- I trust her, I trust that whatever she's saying is actual and trustworthy information. Because yes, I could go on Google and ask Google what is niacin amide? But whenever *Thobi* is talking about it and she's sharing all of these like skin care buzz words, she gives it to me in a way that I just understand it better from her as opposed to just like Google. So yeah, reason number one is because she's qualified, I trust her immensely and two because she's also such a big driver and she's pretty strategic in the brands that she works with so *Coriam* for it. Example, I don't know if She's like their brand ambassador, but she's definitely a big brand loyal fan of *Coriam*. And then I know she also recently worked with Woolworths. Who in my opinion? Yeah, I guess in my opinion I also trust Woolies, I shop there like they are a part of my daily life/ my lifestyle, and so because she then worked with the brand as part of my lifestyle. Again, there's that thing. If I trust her. And yeah, just the content she creates is consumable for me. Who you know doesn't understand these skin care buzzwords to the Max, but she just created them in such a way that I understand better.

Interviewer: That makes sense, I think.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, oh, also sorry.

Interviewer: No, go ahead.

Interviewee: I think the last. Would be just that access to her. Which I think might be attributed to the numbers. So yes, she's not that big, but I think the plus side there is like I can reach out or respond to a tweet of hers or a quick Instagram comment, and she actually replies. So, I like that access, especially to that information around skin care, yeah it is active.

Interviewer: That makes sense. I mean I don't know, *Thobi*. But If you just had to describe the person behind the page or the influence, how would you describe her?

Interviewee: Oh my god like... Well, she appears like bubbly, friendly, approachable, always like smiling, having fun on these platforms like she's not afraid to just share reels, just about random things whether its, I don't know, just critiquing the skin care space or if she's just like doing a cute little thing at home drinking Coffee - like she's

not afraid to have fun. she is approachable like I mentioned uhm. Yeah, just positive like there's just such a positive energy around her and very like warm, like I know it's such another buzz word to describe Somebody as warm, but she has a warmth to her yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I mean just listening. I mean I don't know *Thobi* but listening to that it sounds like someone that I would enjoy being around.

Interviewee: Yes, yeah.

Interviewer: And outside of the product that you mentioned, have you bought anything else that she's talked about?

Interviewee: No, no, I haven't bought anything else.

Interviewer: And is there anything that she has spoken about that you've at least thought to yourself You know, if I felt like buying that, I would, or is there a reason behind that?

Interviewee: Well, definitely more yeah. it's only because I'm, I don't want to say finicky but I am quite finicky about the skin care products I use. I'm somebody who's pretty simple, but also Uh, you know wanting to support more local brands for example. I keep my skin care routine very short You know, I'm not a ten-step routine person, I really want to keep it like five steps, please. So usually like there's a lot of research on my end that I do; where if I'm going to try a product there's a couple of factors that go into that. It's not like just because an influencer says, try this out- I'll go out and try it. My skin care has specific needs, but I know that through *Thobi Thobi* for example. This word niacinamide, you know she talks about it like quite often in terms of just educating like what it does. She's always frequently engaging her audiences, myself included, in terms of just knowing what your skin care, I mean, your skin type is and how to treat different things. She's offered products as suggestions and I know one thing that I am thinking about is just like more serums, that was a product that I actually bought because of *Thobi*. -was like a *Corium* serum. So, I am looking more into just serums as a whole but now I'm also just looking more into serums and then actually have this niacinamide, just because yeah hydration for me is like a skin care concern and I feel

like *Thobi* has the knowledge I need and she provides like suggestions for products and I just do some research and yeah.

Interviewer: And I know that you said that *Thobi* is still, I guess, small-ish in comparison with some of the others. As she grows right as she grows and she develops as a creator, do you think that, you know how some creators add other niches... So right now she's doing skin care, if she starts talking to us about whatever, like fashion, maybe finance or something different, would you be open to hearing her speak about those other topics? Or are you specifically happy with her speaking about skin care and open to that because of her qualification?

Interviewee: Yeah, so I mean I would love for her to keep going with the skin care content, because that's what I know her primarily for but I'm also super cognizant of the fact that, like she's also human and things will change, life will grow and she will grow too and of course, interests will come into the play there. So, if for example she wants to go into fashion- it'll be perfectly fine, but maybe I might not engage with the fashion content just because I know, for me at least, like skin care and beauty- that's what I know her for and that's what I come to her for, but it's not like I would stop engaging with her if she decided to explore a new niche.

Interviewer: I see what you mean.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, like I know who's it now for example like *Aqeelah Harron*, she's definitely big with fashion and modest fashion and I know her for that but like I see she's also moving into like this Wellness and health and I mean now she's also like expecting a baby, so I'm thinking maybe she might come in with some baby content and I won't stop engaging with her just because she might start delving into new content. Yeah, just because I understand- This is life. Influencers are also humans as well, like as much as we put them on pedestals and shine spotlights- I get that they are also human and not necessarily like billboards for specific niches.

Interviewer: Yeah yeah. So even though I mean you're pretty kind that you wouldn't stop engaging with them, would anything change from your side at all?

Interviewee: Would anything change on my end? I mean, it might be the frequency of engagement. For example, if it's more of the new niche content and less of the content

that I know them for, maybe engagement might lessen on my end as I either one: Try to acclimatize to the new content or two: find it a bit difficult for me to get the content that I know them for. I think that would be like the big thing is that engagement on my end would lessen but not completely stop. Yeah, like we'd get to less than 1% but never 0%.

Interviewer: And why would you say that is?

Interviewee: Uhm, I mean for one like I know algorithms and the platforms that influencers use push content that they know, if I'm engaging with this type of content, but then the influencer is not creating as much content, naturally the algorithm might pick up that oh ok, she's not engaging with the influencer anymore because new content is coming in so I know from like a technical platform side that comes into play. The platform won't show me the content that I'm used to engaging with the influencer if there's a new niche in the works. Also, for me I'm not like a searcher of an influencer's content per say. So it's not like after work, I'll scroll through Instagram to go see what's the latest post of a particular influencer. I'm the kind of person who likes to let the platform show me what content is there and I'll scroll and engage with what I can and go through the Explore page. And it's only really when I think about -'I have a need and I think this influencer can help me get the solution to the need I have' then I'll start engaging more proactively on my end as opposed to letting the platform dictate what content I'm engaging with. Does that make sense? I feel like again, I'm just stringing words.

Interviewer: No, I'm definitely following and I'm super interested now because you said like in what you said now about if there is something that you're either looking to find out or interested in, you'd kind of know which influencer to then go and search for but you don't search for them every day.

Interviewee: yes, that's correct

Interviewer: Do you have different influences for different categories? And how do you separate? Like how do you know who to go to for what?

Interviewee: Yeah, so yes I do have certain influencers in different categories that I know could be go-to-people for any information or just maybe if their audience also on a particular topic has also engaged and I go through like what the audience says. So, for example, *Kay yarms* was someone that I never really followed for a long time, it's only recently that I followed her and that's because of her whole move to Cape Town and I did that because I'm also in the space of creating my own space and like I get her moving to Cape Town in a new place and decorating and she's, you know, reviewing that side to her and for me like there's that connection there. I know she's a beauty influencer and I know I could probably go to her for anything like beauty, but I'm actually really intrigued by her home content per say. When it comes to let's say for example like beauty, like makeup *Kay yarms* is like up there, I know Mihlali is also up there but I actually, like don't really go to her for that type of content. I think I'd rather go to like make-up artists and I know Mihlali is like a makeup artist but makeup artists for example, I think who's it... Renee (De Wit), I'm not sure what her surname is but she's super well known... like Renee van der... oh gosh, you see. Like I should be knowing these influences' names but wow, look at me. What's her name? It is Renee. Actually, pull up. Why am I out here embarrassed?

Interviewer: Not sure. Not at all- I don't know, I don't know the person either, so I'm like 'I wish I could help. '

Interviewee: Ah yes. Renee De Wit. Yes, that's her. She's a pro makeup artist and I also like I'll go to her just to look at certain looks that she creates because I've actually met her and she did make up for my face. So there's that personal connection, and I know that, yes, Renee is somebody that I can go to if it's makeup related. Even like brands even though they're not influencers for certain brands too. So If I need fashion content for example, Superbalist is really a go-to . There's actually a brand called *Abongwe*. Yes, @IamAbongwe on Instagram, I also follow her for her fashion content. Yeah, photography yeah. Chad Nathan is right up there. Tony the black Tony Stark another travel content creator but he also shares some tech content every now and then So I follow him for that. Yeah, Oh yes beauty. Cynthia Gwebu. Oh yes. She's the other top influencer that I Actually go to for beauty content. But yeah, to answer your question, I do have your specific influences for specific categories and how I distinguish them is mainly what are they known for, like naturally, if I just go onto the

influencers page, and if they declare that they're a beauty person or lifestyle influencer, then okay, I try familiarise myself with that. And yeah, just also searching them on different platforms as well, like I try to get like a bit of a holistic view of the influencer so, if they're also on Twitter or YouTube and see what other content that they're creating on those platforms, that helps me also then to better distinguish the categories that these influences in my mind will fall under.

Interviewer: Yeah yeah I have a question that just came from your answer now and it might seem silly, but I'm going to ask anyway. You mentioned that for makeup you know of *Mhali* but that's not really who you go to or the person that you trust for that- However you did mention *Cynthia*, and that she's someone that you actually do try and either listen to or go to if you have a question, some people would describe those two as very similar, what's different about them to you?

Interviewee: So, for one and this is, I think, where the human element comes into play of the influencer and understanding that they're also human, so for one there was an incident like surrounding Mhlai. It was like the whole flightsSA thing where she and her friends like made a scene or whatever and that whole debacle. And for me having like a family member who actually works in aviation and just also trying to paint a picture of that scenario from their perspective, I think for me it was a case of quite bluntly, like losing respect for Mhlai, and just being like; 'Man, there are a number of ways to skin a cat but that was not really the way to have gone about it'. So, for me it was just like a separate. Yes, the influencer and the person and just like the person that I think came to fruition in that scenario. Yeah, that didn't sit too well for me, and so because of that, I just lost interest, I lost some respect for Mhali. Without trying to take away from who she is like, I totally acknowledge she's a top influencer. She's killing the game and all of that. But just for me, you know it's a case of that one incident that can make or break, or that one time where you know, I think it's Warren Buffett who said it "it takes like 50 years to build your reputation, but like 5 seconds and it can crumble". And I think for me in my mind that incident was 5 seconds where I was like ah man. I'm not a fan here versus Cynthia where, yes, maybe she hasn't been as public, she's not really as public with her life, but I think for me like the personal connection I have with Cynthia is first of all like when I was trying to learn makeup, or

at least like beauty looks and just trying to be better at like how I do makeup. For me I feel like Cynthia has a similar vibe to... at that time also the woman I kind of wanted to be like. Cynthia has this very regal, refined, Lux but like an attainable type of lux and back then and this is like what first year varsity for me. It was like she was kind of the woman I wanted to be, and so because of that emotional connection that I had with Cynthia, which I didn't have with Mhlali at that time. I've just enjoyed watching Cynthia and just from varsity, during my varsity days watching her content and feeling like she's someone who like I wanted to be / I wanted to look like , you know, I just wanted to carry myself just like her and her vibe overall. Is what And kind of still does... I mean no longer, i don't want to be like Cynthia because she's her own person and i'm just like this awkward person now, but because of that initial emotional connection that was the big distinguisher between why I followed Cynthia and kind of why I also still go to her every now and then as opposed to Mhlai, which I don't anymore- It's that emotional connection, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense and I think that how you've explained it definitely explains how they are different.

Interviewee: I feel like there is much. Oh, my word, I almost want to say please stop me if i ...

Interviewer: No, not at all like. So from my side I'm just trying to understand how you interact with these people? Because obviously just one person looking at it is not enough, so not at all. you're not saying too much. You're not saying too little.

Interviewee: Yeah, and I think yeah just to also answer that question of how and why I go to certain influencers. It's also just because of accessibility / attainability right. Someone, for example like Kefilwe and your Sarah Langa's, like great content creators but for me they are so inaccessible and unattainable with the content they create because I'm just like I am not a private jet, Louis Vuitton, going to Dubai type like it's not me now and it's not like something I aspire to, you know, like a Chanel Foundation, sounds just expensive, but you know what, I understand that buying that good quality foundation actually helps with the overall makeup looks I'm trying to achieve. It's your Kay yarms and just the moving experience and just having fun with that but also knowing, I know like shes a wig influencer and anything with wigs like go to her and

I've never been a wig person like that much, but I am dabbling in that space and also, I feel like *Kay yarms* is like attainable and at least Like accessible because she's not like far off. She's not suggesting products that I can't ordinarily get, she just feels very like someone I can talk to versus there are influences where I feel like yoh gosh, I don't think I could even wave to say hi just because they feel so far away from me. Uhm, yeah. And that is probably one of the biggest definers of how I engage with influences is like when I take my average self, are you somebody that I can actually connect with, you know, feel like there's some kind of access to you or your information, your content, and do you feel relatable to me, and if you do then 'Hells yes, I'm there' but if you don't, then I turn around.

Interviewer: I think the relatability aspect is a big one especially if they're going to have influence.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, when it comes to, I guess the relatability part, my question would be around. Is it possible for a creator from what you've seen and consumed to be relatable without sharing their personal life? Or does the personal life sharing directly relate to them coming across as relatable?

Interviewee: Yeah, I want to say 80% yes to that and 20% No, reason being is for example, and I'll take, like she's now an international influencer, So apologies if it's not South African related, but for example like *Desi Perkins*. Before any of the fertility journeys, baby content like she was known for a lot of beauty and makeup like that was very niche and she was not on my radar. It was only when she started sharing her journey about infertility, where again like there was this, her sharing her personal life, there was that little emotional link. Where I don't think i can get more personal with this person. she's like so far away from me, but that connection and that relatability- not in the sense that i struggle-well I hope I don't struggle, but that want and that desire to be a mom- Yes.that relatability because there, there's a link and for me that's how I connected with her so. Even though she's not South African, she's best known for beauty and skin care but because she shared her personal life, I connected with her on that. *Kay yarms*, If I bring it a bit more local now. Again, I know

her for her beauty content like makeup and skin care and she's also like a Blogger but because she's going through or just went through an experience of moving to Cape Town and that whole journey, like I know what it's like to move to Cape Town, finding apartment and that relatability and her sharing like that aspect of her personal life is how I connected with Kay yarms. I know like Katie Kat for example, Yes, he goes to really cool places and game lodges and does amazing content and I do follow him for that but also just like when he shares on his stories like times when he's with his family, banter with his girlfriend like that personal aspect to him like that's what keeps me engaged. So yes, I'm there for his photography, travel content, but uhm, him sharing his personal life and personal bits about him, keep me just as engaged so. Yeah, definitely there's a definite 80/20 element to it,

Interviewer: okay so yeah, so if that's the 80% yes, what would be the 20% no.

Interviewee: So, 20% no would be like for example *Thobi*. Like I don't know a whole lot about her personal life other than like there's certain things she has changed, but because I'm actually here because you are a trusted source / a trusted authority within the skin care community; the content you've shared, anything your kind of share about your personal life at this point in time hasn't really got me to latch On to her. As opposed to just all of the beauty, skin care content that she's created - that's why I'm there. Even if she started to share more personal content, it's like I'd still stick around, maybe engagement would increase if she shares more personal things but her personal life as much as she has shared, hasn't influenced any other decisions I've made so far. In relation to her, no.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm interested though because I mean I haven't come across *Thobi* so I'm only going based on what you've sort of explained to me. From what you've seen, both from other influencers and with *Thobi*, do you think that it would be helpful to her if she shared more personal content like outside of her connection to you. Do you think that she would be bigger or more influential if there was a more personal aspect to her?

Interviewee: Yeah, yes, right Because like I said, influencers are human beings and therefore their audience is also human beings and like the biggest way and this is how

I know it from a marketing perspective and also, just how it guides what content I share. It's that people buy into people, and especially when there's like an emotional connection, I mean that's why Nike (I hardly buy Nike anything) but whenever they drop those crazy cool ads, they infuse it with that emotional aspect to it and it's like 'okay, you make me wanna buy new air forces and all of your Nike gear. And I think the same thing applies with our influencers and the influencers that I engage with, and maybe also for Tabby, If she started sharing more personal content I feel like yeah it would definitely be helpful in not just getting more engagement with her audience, but just also like understanding who she is, right? Because, this is probably one thing that irks me, uh, I don't say irks, but like one thing that turns me away from certain influences. Is when you kind of start feeling or looking or coming across as like an actual billboard. So when it's just like, not just only sponsored content, but just like content, content content. But there's zero like, what about you? I like to turn away from that. Versus yes, you can have your sponsored content and your usual content but if you infuse that with a bit of just who you are and a bit of just sharing your personal side, I feel like people latch onto that too and continue to stay. Just because we also get a bit of an idea of who the influencer actually is. And even who was it like... **Joe Human** for example like I know him, so he's like this brand guru type of person super Influential in that space and doing wonders. But I think the moment I actually really was like wow this guy like... Where I drew that emotional connection was actually meeting him and having a cup of coffee and just getting to know him and you know. Things like he's from Congo and he speaks French- like learning a bit about him. I got to just finally, like remove the guy we know. As the branding guru and the king of Twitter or whatever and just seeing Joe as an individual like that makes me now stay for his content because I've seen/ I've engaged with the human.

Interviewer: Yeah, and can you off the top of your head, think of a successful influencer that doesn't show their human side? That's like super perfect billboard-y.

Interviewee: Oh, I mean off the top of my head, I don't want to say *Mihlali* because or maybe because I actually don't see a lot of like her personal content, but bearing in mind that, uhm. I don't follow her. I can definitely say she's successful but maybe I'm not. It's hard for me to comment on that personal side because I don't see a lot of the

personal content. But then again, I'm not an active follower of her so maybe she is actually sharing, like a lot of personal content. Let me think...McAfee. Yeah, maybe also. Uhm yeah. Like when I think about it actually, like super successful but if you were to ask me to describe like who she is, It would be tough for me to actually, give you an answer. Because yeah, like actually. I don't know. uhm. And that's the marker for me in trying to describe a successful influence and whether or not they share their Personal life and how much is actually. Can I put some words to who you are as an individual outside of like the influencer that you are and if it's tough for me, then yeah, there's the struggle, so I think that's it. Yeah, *Kifilwe* for me, would be an example of someone who's super successful but like I'd struggle to tell you, who is she?

Interviewer: Yeah, and then my message was going on like....

Interviewee: I'm trying to think who else? Was there?

Interviewer: Oh sorry, go ahead. Oh, I thought you were saying something.

Interviewee: No no, no no. I was thinking but no, no I've got nobody else in mind.

Interviewer: How about an influencer that you know, and is probably successful, I guess. But that you just don't trust or find credible? For whatever reason.

Interviewee: Yeah, *Nadia Jaftha* comes to mind, purely because I actually don't know, like. I don't know what she's known for and therefore whatever she creates for me, I'm like. Are you known for this? like yeah, I see she's successful, I see she's doing great things, but I'm actually not sure what it is that she is known for other than like yes, the cool funny pranking things. Yeah, she comes to mind. *Sarah Langa* also because she delves in luxury and okay, maybe that might be because she's so far removed from me and the accessibility/relatability aspect comes into play there, but also again like if I saw content where she's recommending a particular skin care product, for example. Yeah, no, I don't think I would trust her words. Also because of the type of content she's always so put together so if for example, she was promoting some kind of skin care product, I wouldn't be able to trust her if she does that. Because in my mind I'm so used to seeing her so put together. so she's another example. I'm just trying to think about who else is in the space. Uhm, I know yes, *Fitness Financial Bunny* is it *Nicolette*? I mean I only know her finance wise, so anything outside of that I'd also raise

eyebrows, have question marks because I know you for this particular niche and so if you are now telling me about how great this skin care product is I don't really know if I would trust her on that. But she's super successful in finance, so if she told me to go buy a bridge, I might go do that. I'm trying to think of like also male influences here. That's also something I need to order. I don't actually follow a lot of male influences. Oh wait, you know what, Maps, for example, well, he's like celebrity status, but because I know him for example as a brand ambassador for Samsung. If he spoke anything outside, when it comes to tech anything outside of Samsung per say and I think maybe he's associated with LG, I don't know, maybe, it feels like it, but anything outside of what I know him to be. Yeah, like. Social media like yeah, Tech-y/ slightly tech-y things; maybe I might find it a bit tough to trust anything else he might say. Oh, you know, also Sni (Snikiwe Mhlomgo). She's also been quite an interesting case study for me because, that's the thing when you take on a lot of brand deals for association it also like makes me reduce the trust with a particular influencer, because if you're telling me about ... for her example Mr. Price and I know you to be for Mr. Price fashion and then it becomes tough for me when I also... I mean, okay, now I'm being a bit toughie. But if she is also promoting like H&M for example, and then Fochini, and then let's say cotton on and I mean you can't box these Influences I mean she's a fashion trender at the end of the day. So that's all of these brands but sometimes it becomes tough for me to trust the opinions of influencers. When I see they are either in too many niches; like you're doing fashion, Makeup, skin care and you do food and then you do travel and suddenly, if you're in a lot of niches it's tough for me to trust you. Because I am one of those customers/consumers/ people who like less is more and if you focus on like three sets of niches or four and you do that really well, it's easier for me to trust you. But if I see that like oh, okay you're out here in like 10 different niches, it's a bit tough for me too to trust.

Interviewer: Yeah, I understand what you're saying about being in too many niches. I'm interested though, and I think you mentioned. I think between Nadia and Sni this idea of having lots of brand deals from the outside looking in, is a brand partnership, not something that's like a stamp of approval or validation. How is it that it makes them less credible or less trustworthy instead of more?

Interviewee: Right, right. So, like yes, you are right. I absolutely agree. Brand deals more certainly help with that credibility element, but also for me, like I consider people right so as much as brand X you work with them and it definitely gives you that like a social stamp of approval. I'm also looking at like, do people generally give you that social proof that stamp of approval and I guess maybe in like marketing slash business terms that would translate to like customer testimonials and reviews, right like? What are the reviews? That influencers get, and that's going to come from the people so you can work with a really big brand; for example, like the influencers who did like the Huawei campaign. Big brand but then, if your audience is out here saying, yeah, but we know you to be using an iPhone and that's what the audience is saying, well, then you know for me then I go like wow, okay. It's going to be a little bit tough for me to now consume any Huawei content from this influencer. If their Audience is out here saying we know you to be using an iPhone. So, as much as brand deals definitely give an influence a stamp of approval, and they're necessary for their credibility aspect, uhm, the people also are a big element in giving an influencer credibility, right? It's why influencers will tell you, I wouldn't be here without you guys. It's that recognition or understanding that an influencer goes far because also, well, it's the people that they are influencing that help them get there so that for me is also a. big slice of the pie.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense, and I think this example that you gave now with Huawei because if they like you said used an influencer that we as the audience know, doesn't use Huawei phones in general -It's just for the campaign that you. You said that you'd be a little apprehensive about trusting that influencer with this Huawei campaign. Would a move like that from a brand have any effect on how you see the brand or how you engage with the other influencers that are part of the same campaign? Or would it only affect that one creator that we know didn't use Huawei?

Interviewee: No, no, it definitely would influence how I engage. Number one with the brand and number 2 with them with the influencers involved in the campaign. For me at least like I always look into and I know I did it recently because I think like Huawei for example was launching some over 8 phones. But then I caught wind of someone on LinkedIn saying how they've basically gotten a bunch of these influencers. But you can just see like this person they know this influencer uses a different phone and I

went about this whole rabbit hole of just researching who are the influencers on this campaign. I found myself just not really wanting to engage with them and their content because again, credibility and trust for me was kind of at the forefront of whether or not I want to keep engaging with the influencer or maybe start engaging with them based on the fresh content that they were commuting. And with this Huawei campaign for example, I just found myself like no, I'm not really keen on doing this also, with the brand. I know with Samsung, I've been such an avid user of their phones, but they also had influencers at some point for some particular campaign, but then there was wind that certain influencers use a different phone and I did the research looked into the particular influences in question, and once I also found that oh okay, cool actually, they kind of use an iPhone or whatever other phone. For me that was a big reason for losing brand trust in Samsung and it's kind of one reason why I actually like switching from Samsung 2 to Iphone. Because that one moment where I was like man, you had the opportunity to not only work with influencers who genuinely use your brand, but also how they selected influencers for particular campaigns like I'm not the biggest fan of brands selecting. Influencers who have big numbers, big reach like I get that's important metrics, but authenticity and relatability right now is also very big for audiences, myself included. And so they could have used For example, photographers, if you want to talk to me about how great the camera is. But who they chose for that campaign also was like Eish this brand. I'm not feeling them anymore. It definitely fed. Into me just losing like I mentioned, just brand trust in them. So yeah, to answer your question, it plays a role in how I interact with influencers involved in a particular campaign as well as the actual brand itself.

Interviewer: Yeah, and that's powerful because if more brands knew things like that, I think they'd be maybe more specific in who they pick or just do more research. It's yeah, it's not. It's not very yeah. It's not there-

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, I mean so. And you remember when, like Zara, was launching an online store here in South Africa and I remember doing research on how successful they were and one reason why that led to their success is they used a mixture of influencers. So yes, they had the top tier influencers who all met up and Johannesburg and did like a really cool in-person whatever. But then the actual

influences that they used to help, like gave them vouchers and gift boxes and whatnot, like I remember my former boss, she got a whole package from Zara. So, you're using your everyday average person, like that for me is like well, damn Sarah understood the assignment there. They actually used such a mixture of people in that campaign and I loved that because for me it was like, well, that's exactly why I'm going to shop at Zara. Because yes, it was for that particular campaign to launch in South Africa, but they didn't use just big influencers for reach and like mass market. They actually also used genuine people, like my own boss was part of the campaign so that for me is like such a big critical aspect of engaging with brands for example, and also then with influencers, is yes, you might have big numbers, but like that relatability, that reach for me, like do you feel accessible? Plays quite a role in how I engage with brands and yes, influencers.

Interviewer: Yeah. I think it's super powerful, especially as a consumer and like you mentioned now, like making the switch to a completely different brand, not because you weren't satisfied with your phone, or would you have been happy staying with Samsung outside of this campaign if it didn't happen? Would your next phone have been similar?

Interviewee: yes, No, I would have been happy like I would have happily upgraded to a different Samsung. Like my mom has a Samsung she raves about, so she's already like a personal little brand ambassador for Samsung in our family. But honestly, that moment where that campaign hit and they just used people who actually used iPhones, I was. Like 'oh man, you kind of dropped the ball there for me', I don't know. If I want to continue, being loyal to a brand who just for me looks like they're not listening to its audiences. I feel like I've lost that relatability to them now, that moment for me was one, whereas now I'm happy to switch.

Interviewer: And out of interest, if we're like, let's brainstorm, is there something that Samsung could do with influencers today to help change your mind?

Interviewee: I mean, for one, if they actually worked with. Uhm, like I wish they worked with creators more because if they understood that for one the world is very mobile, it's moving into a space where content creators need to be able to create content on

the go on mobile so that they can be quick to upload. If they just understood that aspect and then just worked with actual content creators as opposed to *Zozi, Maps, Bonang*, like those are the only three people I think in my mind that I associate with Samsung like and they're like Super Star figures, but if you got a local photographer or even if he had thousands or 10s of thousands of followers, but if you just got a photographer to talk to me about why the Samsung camera is so great for photography. That would have changed my mind because now you're speaking to me, like I am a photographer and if you just switched it up like that and got people who can better just feed some of the key features of the phone which is the camera and it being able to upload quickly to social media because we're mobile and all of that. If they just got people like that they would have sold me.

Interviewer: It's like they've missed a big opportunity, that makes sense though.

Interviewee: It's just a little old me, like what's one person going to do to those Samsung sales. But honestly, that's what I think because gone are the days where cell phone brands need to. For example, talk to me about how great the phone will make a phone call-like no, that's not the point. Nowadays it's about camera quality, Upload speed, Being able to create on the go and so if they just worked on that and got people who speak to that. You know photographers and content creators like, Yeah, I would have been sold.

Interviewer: Absolutely, and I think I mean I know you say it's just little old you. But other people that are consumers of the brand experience the exact same campaign, right? And it's like you might think you're just one person, but there might be a whole lot of people that had the exact same feeling going, Come on guys, you dropped the ball here, you know. I've really enjoyed. I've really enjoyed chatting to you. I feel like. We could go on for...

Transcript: Interview 4

Interviewer: So, to start off. What would you say is your definition of a digital influencer?

Interviewee: OK, so I think it's someone who has a niche and actually has built a brand around the specific thing that you do, so you are known to do, for example, you are known as a fashion influencer for millennials or whatever, based in Cape Town. So, I think it's somebody who actually has created this platform to do a specific thing and has grown a community based on that as well. I think it's not just about the numbers, I think it's more about community for me and you know, also having different platforms that you kind of use as well. Yeah, because otherwise it's just an Instagram influence not really a digital influencer. Previously, obviously it was bloggers and all that stuff, but I think it's all kind of come into one thing, so, whether you're a blogger, youtuber, Instagram person, Twitter person, whatever tik tok it's come together. Uhm, but yeah, I think it's building this brand and this reputation to be known for something on the Internet.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK, and so if that's the definition of like a digital influencer, what would you say makes a good one? Because I think we can all try and be but doesn't mean we're all good at it. What makes a good influencer?

Interviewee: So, you don't want to say, I mean the obvious thing is being yourself, right? But who is like being yourself? So obviously we don't know you, so I think it's just translating and showing your values and your kind of cool ideas with your audience based on like your niche based on what you are providing and so like if I'm talking sustainability and cruelty free and vegan or whatever. I'm not going to go and then partner with Zara or Sheen or whatever you know - It's being true to what you stand for. So for example, I'm vegetarian. I'm not going to now go talk about meat. So being true to who you are and your niche, providing a specific target audience with a specific kind of mission statement, like I do XYZ for XYZ. That to me and staying true to that. Of course, you know you always have different opportunities in that, but then staying still true to what you are here to do. I think.

Interviewer: Umm, and is there someone that comes to mind that you would say is an example of a good influencer?

Interviewee: Oh, for me my favorite one is Khanya, Khanya Mgomela “XXKhanya” on Instagram. She is a coach and she helps nano influencers kind of monetize and get brand deals. For me, I think she's the most credible in South Africa, at least.

Interviewer: That's awesome, what about her-?

Interviewee: Wait, is this local?

Interviewer: yeah, local.

Interviewee: So, I think with her she goes really deep, so she provides information that, you know, some people would not want to provide because you know how people have those competitive vibes in the industry, but it's her job to kind of do this, but even though it is her job I think she goes further than she needs to, not than she needs to, but I think she just puts in the kind of secrets and things that you wouldn't really know. I think she goes really beyond for her community. Her community, and her engagement is like crazy. I think like in the DMS you could message her anytime and she'll always be willing to help you . I mean it's not that she will respond immediately, but she's always willing to help you. If you go into her comments like you'll see the community, wherever she goes, people will follow because of her community and because of how much work she's actually put in with us, like I did one of her courses and I message her every now and then and we chat and she just helps me even though I'm not like her coaching client, I only did one of her like online courses. I think yeah, and she doesn't just partner-she could partner with literally anybody, but she doesn't. She's partnered with brands like Dell and like a few other brands, but she'll only take things that actually align with her and things that she really wants to do. She's made her money in other avenues, not necessarily the brand deals. For me, I think when you start only seeing ads like every post in your feed, it is an ad and there's nothing organic for me that's problematic. And I think, yeah, she was just able to grow by being really authentic and actually doing the work, providing solutions for problems. Yeah, you are solving a problem, if You're there and you are not actually solving a problem then I'm not sure what you are doing.

Interviewer: She sounds super awesome. I'm a bit interested in what you are saying now about brand deals. I think there's, on the one side, some people think that having lots of brand deals makes you more credible, as if there's tons of posts that are sponsored instead of having lots of them and us seeing too many of them, makes someone come across less credible.

Interviewee: So, I think this is two fold when you're in the industry. So I mean when you are in the industry, like I'm in the industry. You see that like this person is working with. Uh, I don't know...maybe some skin care brand at X, and then the next day they're posting about their competitor over the next week. You know, It's direct conflict, so it's like okay, but which is the brand? because there's no more kind of brand loyalty, we get that, but if you're posting back to back up different brands or actually competitors within a month. It's like I can't trust you anymore. Because, you know. You can't go like Chanel and Dior, you've got to choose. You know what I'm trying to say, You know, so I think in the industry from my perspective it is a little bit hard to pardon. And I don't trust, obviously, I'm going to be honest, I don't trust much of the influences that post just adds all the time. I've actually unfollowed influences that just do ads. Because I get it you need to make money but once i stop trusting you, there is no reason for me to follow you anymore. I mean from the consumer point of view and Khanya actually explains this very well, brands give you credibility, especially when you're starting out or when you're relatively smaller or whatever but you've got to pick wisely as to who you work and align with. Because like I mentioned earlier as well, if I am saying now I'm a sustainability person and then I'm working with Zara or like Shein or one of these really fast fashion brands. It doesn't make sense because that's not what I do. So I think you can work with brands of course but be selective of who you work with, make sure they're aligned with you and that you can't just be posting ads. You have to have organic content in the mix.

Interviewer: Yeah, that sense. Do you find it to be... because I think what you're saying about you know with certain influencers that you've unfollowed because they posted to many or they only posted paid content and they weren't selective. Do you find that your experience is the same when it comes to brands so if we look at it the other way around. Doesn't matter to you who a brand works with or if you love a brand,

so say you love I don't know Chanel does it matter at all who Chanel decides to partner up with?

Interviewee: I think because I am a creator, Yes it does. if I wasn't I don't think I would, I mean, well, actually no, that's not true, i think i would. So, Samsung, for example, they're always working with iPhone users and it's like a known thing people tweet about it every other day and it's so funny, yeah. You could maybe just search 'Samsung iPhone tweets' and then it will probably pop up. I think just the other day I engaged with someone who said the same thing and you can see that they're using an iPhone because their Twitter says like 'a tweet from my Iphone'. So we are all baffled why Samsung keeps choosing iPhone uses, whereas there's so many of us, I mean, I'm a Samsung user and there's so many Android people around that that post about it as well, so it doesn't make sense that they aren't partnering with them. And then I also understand when, for example Fry's is a vegetarian brand, and they make all this soya stuff right, but they've been in the market for over 20 years. I know it and I've used their brand since i was a child and now they working with meat influencers, which makes sense because they already have the entire vegetarian and vegan market. So I think that they're trying to reach the meat people that want to become more plant based or meat free Mondays or just lessen their meat consumption. So, it depends also what The strategy is, and I think because I worked in digital I kind of understand some of that, but then. I also think that you've got to choose your influences wisely when the influencers actually use your brand before you reach out to them then it becomes, organic and more fluid and you know this person really does love the brand because they talked about it before. It's like if you've never mentioned this brand or you've never used it to your audience's knowledge and then suddenly you are just in love with this brand and it's a paid post, it's not that believable and more so if it doesn't even align with what you normally do or create. So, I do think it does matter who the brand collaborates with, and I think the skin care communities in South Africa as well, they do feel a bit left out because they're small, really good local skin influences that really do go all out for these brands and don't get their recognition.

Interviewer: I'm really baffled by this, like the Samsung thing like.

Interviewee: I would assume that they had a really great like- I don't know who their agency is.

Interviewer: Did they only do it once or is this just something that they've become known for?

Interviewee: Oh, they've become known for it. I think every drop that they do and like every single campaign, it's that. I literally searched for it now and I can see tweets about it. Yeah, I don't. I don't actually know what it is, uhm? But they are, they are very well known for it.

Interviewer: What does that mean for you as a Samsung user? Like if we had to say... Yeah, like would your next phone, Is it going to be of the same make? Would you buy your phone again if you had the opportunity to choose?

Interviewee: So, I'm actually looking at a different one. I'm looking at Xiaomi Redmi because it's actually much cheaper but the same specs if not, Iphone it just depends if I eventually get my MacBook I am not an Apple person- I am definitely an Android person but because video editing is just a bit easier, not easier, but it's a little bit more reliable and the Mac is actually cheaper than the windows stuff. So yeah, for Samsung specifically, I think if I ever had to buy one it would be purely for the specs, it wouldn't be for brand loyalty and if I ever had the opportunity to work with them, I would give them the same feedback I'm giving you. I would literally tell them like who else is on your campaign, because this is what you guys are kind of like, you know, a little bit known for doing so I'd like to suggest if I can. And you can do that, I mean, I've had instances where brands asked me like do you have anybody that you think would work with this campaign, so I would do that, I would tell them. But yeah, right now I think I'm not actually looking at the Samsung now though.

Interviewer: That makes sense, and I think going back to sort of Influencers and who they partner up with and what it means. From the outside right? If we go from what we can see as the general public, someone who has lots of followers and is doing brand deals. If we define that person as a 'successful' in quotation marks here influencer. Is there someone that is kind of well known but that from your perspective just isn't credible for whatever reason?

Interviewee: Someone who is well known but isn't credible ?

Interviewer: yeah or that you just don't feel as credible like for example of the influences that you either unfollowed or thought about unfollowing because they have so many brand deals that are sometimes contradictory.

Interviewee: I'm going to be the worst person because I actually like this person but like jokes aside. So Jessica van Heerden who was like this award-winning content creator, I love her content and I haven't actually unfollowed her because I like her content, although I would not buy anything that she posts about, purely because literally every post on her feed -aside from like one or two, you can probably count on your hand- are all ads. I'm looking at it now, It's like Woolies and then it's Chanel and it's like... it's everything. She's just a magazine to me and I love the content and the way she produces content is why I still follow her. But yeah and i like her as a person So no shade, I actually genuinely like her, but I wouldn't buy anything, I wouldn't trust because it's just all paid. The one that I did unfollow was 'kiss, blush and tell, a skin care blogger. I think she was pretty authentic, up until the point where she actually went full time and now literally also everything on her page is at, you know, just one or two that's not but it just became just ads and I couldn't. I'll just buy a magazine and look at it, you know, if I wanted to see ads. It becomes like DSTV and why would I do it, if I could just do Netflix where there's no ads. That's kind of like the vibe. There are quite a few, but on the top of my head, these are these two that I would say, yeah, I don't... There's a lot of the big influences I don't follow though Like Sarah Langa and with those people. I never liked or really enjoyed that kind of content. And I think Instagram is very flakey as well, so I think people follow some people just because of lifestyle. So it's not necessarily like just because they're an influencer, it's because they want their life. So yeah, I remember the Lifeboy campaign like Sarah Langa did a Lifebuoy campaign and everyone was like no, not a chance that she uses Lifebuoy and everybody on Twitter was speaking about it and we're all keeping our comments and it was true because she's a luxury influencer. She's not using Lifebuoy.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's odd the-

Interviewee: It was very very odd, like she's all Chanel Dior, Chanel Dior, even though I don't follow her when I've seen her content. Yeah, I know everybody knows what she does. So it is, yeah.

Interviewer: I'm interested in Jessica. I think you've mentioned some points here around how you do think that she's lovely, you do think that she makes good quality content, but it's just the bit where because there's so many sponsorships, you just don't find her, either as credible or you just don't trust her for that kind of stuff.

Interviewee: Yeah, and I think it's this thing of like you know every brand wants to work with you so you've got to kind of make the distinction like which brand you actually want to work with. Like she's got... I mean okay for me, she's not even sticking to either luxury or premium, right? She's got Chanel and then she has like Woolworths and then she has Dior and then she also worked with Vaseline. Like, do you see what I'm trying to say? so people know you for being in a specific... You're either affordable or you are mid range or whatever or you are premium and then you are luxury right. So you kind of get categorized, whether you like, recognize it or not you will get categorized- some people, stick to that like they say that I am affordable. Once you start working in all the different ranges like I don't know who you cater to anymore. So who is the audience? Number 1 then number 2, well if you're talking about every skin care, every makeup brand, how do I know which ones you actually like, which products you actually like, because it's everything. There's no organic content like there's literally nothing like besides the blogs. There is like no organic content, so I'm not seeing what you want to do. So, what do you create? Why did you stop? You know what I'm trying to say? Like I always do create organic content because this is what I want my audience to see because it's not just about what brands want them to see. I mean you all started with organic and I think you just got to... You know who does it not well, I forgot to mention, *Le'Chelle Aldridge*, I think she does it well. she's got a good mix of working with brands and doing organic, and I think she even talks about the fact of mixing the organic and paid. She does it very well. Who else does it very well, I'm trying to think.

Interviewer: What kind of content does *Le'Chelle* create and how different is it from Jessica?

Interviewee: She does like Mid-style beauty and body positivity and then a bit of lifestyle as well. In comparison to Jessica, I would say she is more mid size I think, uh.

Yeah, I don't see too much of a difference. They both do beauty and lifestyle. So, I think the only difference is mid-style. And *Le'Chelle* has been doing this for like 10 years, she was a Blogger previously but yeah, I think her content is better and very high quality. She mixes up organic and paid. Also, she is quite relatable so it could also be that. That she brings that relatability through to our content.

Interviewer: Yeah, I mean, of course we'll try and do some research on her, but from your perspective, with *Le'Chelle* being relatable, what kind of things does she do/ Or is it what she says, I don't know. What about her makes her relatable?

Interviewee: She talks about her struggle, like with weight and body image, she'll also talk about random stuff that may have happened on the day. And she'll talk about like. For example, her life experiences, she looks white, but she's actually colored and so people get confused like she'll talk about things like that. She'll talk about real things, you know like when BLM was happening everybody was a bit shy to talk about these things- she was not afraid to talk about real stuff. Also, I do like... I think fashion breed also does this very well. I think both of them. Actually, they do it very well. *Le'Chelle*, what else does she do? I think she's not afraid to make a joke of herself like she'll post the bloopers and she'll post, like what it actually took to take this photo -Like I did, ten of these shots or 20 or 100 and all of them look horrible until I got like these two that actually looked Instagram worthy or the kind of thing. So she'll share some of the behind the scenes, she'll share her struggles, I think yeah, she'll share her real life which I think a lot of people struggle to do. Yeah and the other person I do FashionBreed and yeah, I think you also mentioned her when you talked to us at the Expo. Yeah, but I've been following her for years. She's amazing as well. She's very good.

Interviewer: Would you say that she's more similar to *Le'Chelle* or to Jessica, And in which ways?

Interviewee: Nah, I think FashionBreed is more similar to *Le'Chelle*. I think they do a little bit more fashion and she does more travel. Yeah, I think she also chooses who she works with selectively, she doesn't just work with anyone- Fashion breed. She also shares some behind the scenes and she also, I think, is credible because of who

she works with and she also does share certain content and she will let you know what's going on in her life. Yeah, I don't feel like she's a billboard. When I look at her posts I don't think she's just ad after ad after ad.

Interviewer: And the quality of her content, would you say it's of equal standard as Jessica's or very different?

Interviewee: I would say. It's different content, but it's very high quality, just like Jessica's -very high quality, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, and with Jessica because obviously, you know, seeing all of these campaigns like you... and I think what you're saying now with fashion breed, is that you can have high quality but you're still seeing her as credible and you're still seeing her as relatable because of the other decisions that she makes around partnerships and how she shares, yeah.

Interviewee: Like you actually told us, like she didn't want to work with Nike, you said Nike approached her, but she's an Adidas lover and she said no, I'm not going to work with Nike. Like, even if you didn't mention that I mean there's so many things that you can see, and especially with her modest fashion as well, who she chooses to and why. And she also does support...whats a big thing for me is that she supports local brands like she will do a kind of *selective rate* for smaller local brands. She can't always do it or whatever, but she does that and the fact that she cares and she's in fashion is a big thing because we already know that fashion is one of the main causes of global warming. And all these horrible things happening to the planet, so I think there is some kind of responsibility on influencers, especially within the niche to then talk about that and I mean to also partner with brands about trying to be better with that. And then she also has her causes like Palestine and other Social causes that she does talk about as well. So I do think you know how you get CSI requirements for companies as brands. We also have that. I think we do have that, and you see who the person is and what they stand for when they also talk about things that are important to them. That's a big difference, yeah,

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: Yeah, between the BLM last year and stuff, when people actually weren't talking about it. People that I followed for years, I actually unfollowed them because they didn't even say one thing and I was just shocked. Like if you're not telling us ,not whose side you are on, but if you're not speaking about it, then how do I know that you're not racist like that was me, though. I don't know about everybody else, but yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, it was a big deal for I think pretty much the whole world and yeah. There were some creators that I think after the Black Lives Matter movement came out saying, oh, I didn't know what to say. What did you Make of that?

Interviewee: You know, if you don't know what to say, then point them to people who do know or who you think know, who knows the history, who are very aware and are sharing things that you resonate with as well. So, if I didn't know what to say for, like the Palestines, when that happened this year, I didn't know what to say so then I would point them towards FashionBreed and say go and read her post on this and you know, we look at both sides of the story.

You don't have to... If you can't do the research and you can't form an opinion, then point them in the direction of people who can and there's lots of people on Instagram that are credible.

You've got to at least put in a little bit of effort to find them, if you don't know them already but I think, right now, especially right now, if you're not saying what side you're on or what you kind of like, believe in, then people are going to struggle too resonate with you.

Interviewer: it's just making me think now, that like back in the day, well, I guess sometimes even now, with celebrities like old school celebrities, they would just be quiet for so much stuff and only come out for the things that they know or know how to speak of. Do you think that, you know with influencers, If I, I don't know, if I am fashion breed and I'm all into fashion and I study this and I study that and I know all the trends. That,I might not be as involved in everything else happening in the world or do you think it's still, you know, an influencer's responsibility to speak up, even if it's not within their niche?

Interviewee: Look, I don't think it's our responsibility to always speak up, but I think if you have information or you think that people should know what's going on about a specific thing, because obviously like there's so many causes, right. So, there's LGBTQ+, BLM, BFM, GBV, you know, there's a lot. But I think if there's a specific one that you feel inclined to even talk about, even if you are not sure what you say but to maybe show them articles or show them somebody else, like an activists kind of thought on this. Like for now for me it's like, also, if you're in fashion or you in fitness and I'm not talking about how diet culture kind of affects everybody. Uhm, right now as we approach summer, we all think that we need to look a certain type of way and some of us are trying to dismantle these beauty standards. So even if you are not the right person there are so many body positivity activists and people that know what to say. So I think we can't talk about everything. No, I don't think it's our responsibility. No, I don't think it's our responsibility, but I think it is important that if something is close to you and you want to talk about it then do so. I think there is this expectation all the time that influencers must do this and also then I guess I'm contradicting myself now.

Interviewer: No, not at all because, Literally, this is how people think through things, right? It's tricky. It's a tricky one to answer.

Interviewee: It is tricky because I don't like when people then come for us like 'why aren't the influencers talking about this or that?'. Yes, we are online. Yes, we have a platform, but every cause is not ours to own. For example is when the looting happened in Durban and so Durban is my hometown. So, I kind of just paused everything all my paid content for like a week and I didn't post anything besides content or like helpful things for durban and I didn't expect everybody to go and do the same thing because it's time limiting and it's really intense. You're trying to find bread for somebody in another province by talking to somebody else, in this group, you know it's a lot. But then after the fact a lot of bloggers and a lot of people online said you know what, I'm actually going to remember the influencers that didn't even say one thing, that didn't even share one post. They didn't even talk about anything related to that looting, because when things overseas happen, such as Palestine and all these things, they are very quick, some of them to talk about these international issues. But this is on homeland and no one is saying anything and they are going to remember

that these people actually didn't and they don't want to actually be a part of their community anymore. So I think that's where it kind of hits home. So, I think, if something is close to you and you feel inclined to talk about it then definitely do so, but obviously if it's going to affect you mentally and physically, and you know it's going to affect your health or whatever, then don't. I don't know, I think the social responsibility is probably just up to the influencer themselves. What they're comfortable with, I know FashionBreed doesn't take DMs because she thinks people just cross boundaries and I'd expect that like I totally understand that. So yeah, I don't know. I think I will go with, I don't know, but the influencer must be comfortable with what they do. They can't come after two years later and say, like, yeah, you know, I'm actually passionate. Like unless they went and did the work and they found research and now they're like, yeah. But you know, Performative activism is also a problem, so I think they must choose.

Interviewer: It's a tricky 1 to juggle. I think even listening to your answers, right?

Interviewee: I'm so confused, hehe.

Interviewer: We all are, because it's juggling between on the one hand as someone who's online yourself, right, how do you make decisions of what you talk about and what you speak of and you explain that really well with the looting that happened in Durban. It's like. Of course it's close to you its your home like it's where you're from. It's literally where you are , you know, it's here in this country, so that makes sense. Then also from your answer is from the other perspective, as someone who consumes media and who follows these creators and that you hope they would do better. So yeah, your answer definitely makes sense. And then of course, the balancing of that they should be comfortable because there are people too, and that's you being really empathetic to other creators and other people online. So I don't think there's a right answer, I think it's more the idea of, you know, talking through this, thinking through it to kind of see. I think from your perspective, as someone who is a creator, right that there are other people in this research as well that have mentioned you as an influencer that they respect and that they know and enjoy. How do you juggle between, I want to speak about this, it's important to me and I think it aligns with my values and then navigating being misunderstood ?Right, which is the one side like oh is it just

false activism, and then on the far end is cancel culture because that's also a big deal that creators are either navigating or looking to really try and avoid. What is your decision making process when deciding actually yes, I will speak on this, I don't mind the other things, or do you factor in the other things before making a decision?

Interviewee: OK, so two things, one I think is researching so if I am talking about something researching and understanding it for me personally before I do talk about it, it is important. I'm just so if I get questions or if people want to engage on it. I want to be able to talk about it and elaborate further. The other thing is, if I don't know, for example, right now I'm doing like this mental health series and I'm not a psychologist or a medical profession or whatever, so I'm doing this stream of like lives where I'm chatting to people in the health profession on different topics within mental health because they are the experts and I'm not so I'm just facilitating that or hosting them but I'm talking about the things that I know my audience needs to hear, wants to hear, or struggles with. So I think there's always a way of talking about something that you want to do with getting somebody else's expert opinion on, if you're not the expert. Then there are things that I may be an expert on but making sure that what I am saying and how I word it is like my honest opinion, but also not highly offensive to you or not including, like bad words or language or anything that can be. Because what I talk about are actually very sensitive topics like mental health and physical health, emotional well being, all of those things. Within this health care niche can be quite sensitive, so I think using language that is appropriate and doing the research if not getting an expert on board. I won't talk about things that I don't know and if I do, it will be something that I've read about or researched. Like I'm looking up Shein and all the cases filed against them, I know that I would never order from Shein, and so I've shared that. I shared, like look at what this brand is doing, stealing from local young designers, and using child labor. All these kinds of things and then you know the audience can decide for themselves like what they make of that. But yeah, I think I really do think about every piece of content very selectively before I do share it and the research as well, yeah.

Interviewer: And if you had to split up the order of importance when it comes to how much research you're doing, is it purely only because you want to be factually correct

and informed or is there any percentage of that that's related to, you know, not wanting to be cancelled or the fear of getting it wrong? How would you split that or does that not factor at all for you?

Interviewee: I guess one always does think about cancel culture but I have never thought that I would ever get cancelled purely because I don't talk about things that I necessarily haven't been through or work through or experience or research. So, a lot of the things that I talk about is through my own experience and my knowledge and my audience also knows that, and I think because I am very vulnerable online pretty much what I talk about is things they know. It's just I find a different way of saying it. I think yeah, so I've shared so much in terms of my life, although I still think most of it/ a lot of it is private. I think they know me on a deep level, because of the content that I share. I have to be living the content that I share - put it that way, yeah. If you know what I'm trying to say.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: If I'm talking about mental health, I actually need to either I've lived through this or I've experienced it or I am living the values that I'm talking about or the kind of lifestyle that I'm talking about, because then it's not true. I have to do the work first because I can't talk about something. Yeah, and I think now because like maybe when I first went into Self Care which was 2019 before that I was doing beauty and lifestyle. It was different then I think then it was, you know, product reviews and whatever, whatever, it wasn't that deep like some of it was but it wasn't that deep. But now that I am in a completely different niche, it's more about me living what I preach then cleaning the house.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: And if I don't, then I'll share that. I'll share the struggle I'm having.

Interviewer: I think your audience obviously would see that as like more authentic and like the human right is-

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. 100%

Interviewer: So, if we go back to XX Khanya and you said that what she really shares about is being a creator and tips and tricks with brand campaigns and that kind of stuff. Is there a limit to what kind of things you would trust her to speak about? So, if she

started giving and not switching completely but just adding to what she's doing; if she also added some fashion content. Maybe she adds some finance content to teach us how to save. Is there a limit to what you would trust her with?

Interviewee: No, I think I would trust her with whatever she talks about because I mean what happens is you trust the person eventually, you trust all the content and you build a relationship. Right now i think of her as a friend, I think we are friends because we talk often. There's some people,who I think regard me as a friend as well, even though I don't have their number or they dont have my number, but we spend so much time online engaging and talking and so you can grow to trust the person. Because she will talk about other stuff lon her stories, you know, just stuff she bought, and she talks about gym alot and whatever she bought recently and everybody wants to see, what did you buy? What did you get? So, well, I think now there is no limit.

Interviewer: OK, that makes sense, and I think especially with someone like Khanya who's been so generous with information and things. It's that it would be understandable that she would share information about other things when she has it, you know.

Interviewee: Yeah, and the thing is, she's built her credibility, she's really built that community, and I think that's the important thing that people forget as well. Is that the brands don't only build your capability but you yourself do and your community as well.

Interviewer: Well, yeah. I know you said that Khanya has done some campaigns with brands like Dell and things.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Have you bought anything that she's shared online?

Interviewee: Uh, I think when she did one a while ago with Yardley, i bought that, but that wasn't too expensive,compared to a massive Dell PC but yeah I enjoyed the content. Uhm, yeah, I think just things, she'll just mention on her stories and things like that, I have bought but specifically I remember the Yardley.

Interviewer: And then I think what's also cool is that she does content where she's giving advice, right. Have you implemented any of her advice in your own career?

Interviewee: All of it, everything, haha... Honestly, if it wasn't for Khanyi, I don't think I would have grown as a creator, and even her free content is so valuable. Everything that she's talked about I've tried in some ways to implement and it did help like that's how I can say that I can trust her because it works. She won't talk about things unless she's actually done it herself and it worked for her and maybe her clients or students or whatever. And that's what I appreciate as well. You know what happens and I hate this about- this is a bit off the topic- but I hate this about campaigns. Is that a brand that will come to you like 'hey, we're launching this new product and would like to use you to do a post, give us your rate card. And they will tell you they want a story, a video or /and a post right or whatever. But they don't want to say hey, we want you to test this product out first to see if you like it right and give you enough time. I know how it works in the back end, right, the client wants this and then the client wants that then it becomes a campaign and they have a week or two or sometimes longer. But you know it becomes a slight thing that needs to be done. But the flip side is if you give people products to test well before and you actually see who enjoys it. I mean they are the ones to use for the campaign because they can give you honest feedback. This thing about bloggers or creators not being able to give negative feedback because big brands and PR's take them off lists is so absurd to me. But I think that it should actually be where you test the product first or you test the service first, you give them feedback, I like this, I don't like that or whatever- I'm happy to work with you or no, I'm not happy to work with you because I don't like this thing, It does work for me whatever. And then go from there. Does that sound wild?

Interviewer: Not at all, because it would also mean that... and I mean like remember when you gave the definition of a good influencer. So that would mean that the good influences would be in a place where they can genuinely say I'm not going to do this campaign because this product I have tried and it doesn't work for me and the ones that do end up doing the campaigns would be, as you mentioned before, people that would use that outside of the campaign anyway, which is like awesome. Yeah, I think that's an awesome idea.

Interviewee: Yeah, because I think that the problem is like you don't study to be an influencer and people have studied different things of course, but no ones teaching anyone ethics like besides Khanya and like a few people like there isn't like ethics that people learn. So you kind of have to like to teach yourself, and if you don't, you could just be caught out, like you don't really have a moral compass because the brand is paying you. You know, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think that's a fair way to think about it. Would you say that, that makes it really difficult to be a successful influencer? Like how difficult do you think it actually is then, if you've got to teach yourself and you've got to be the moral compass and you've also got to make these decisions that you were saying about which brands you align with so that you remain credible.

Interviewee: It is very hard. I went full time from 1st of March this year. So before that I was working my day job and doing it, which was very hard as well. But now that I'm full time it's also very hard. It's difficult because you've got to like lead contracts and you've gotta have all these Legal things in place and you've got to be your accountant and Everything and your own videographer and photographer and like strategists, it's really hard . It's not easy at all, I spend more time watching Youtubers talking about things like what Khanya talks about and all these different Youtubers talking about building your brand and growing on platforms and all these different coaches and whatever, then anything else, every single day almost I spend doing that. So maybe that's what helps as well when you ask about the research and all of that, it also does help to follow the leading people in these industries and listen to some of their advice. You will have to pick and choose what makes sense for you. But you can't learn on your own, like there's no way you can't. You've got to actually look at it and work and some of it you have to pay for. But yeah.

Interviewer: You make some good points especially around learning from the other people, right. It's like there's so much to learn and then you can always make it your own for what works for you and your audience.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah like there's all these strategies and all these different ways of looking at things. That's why you watch and you learn from different people. You take the best up their advice and then you make it your own, yeah.

Interviewer: And then I think, lastly, it would be. As a creator, do you feel that there are enough, I guess Khanyas or people that are educating digital creators in South Africa about what it's like to be in this market? Or do you think that there's an opportunity for there to be more people like XX Khanya who are giving advice and are talking people through contracts and that kind of thing.

Interviewee: I always think that there's more room for people especially within that category. Twitter spaces have really changed the game when it comes to this branding/ content creation and I guess digital marketing Joe Human, he is phenomenal at branding and he hosts all these spaces and there's a few of them that talk about this almost every night and It really has helped and I think they have lawyers on board, they have photographers, they have all the different kinds of people with different skills. Talking about the same very thing, content creation and digital influencing. I think that is changing the game because more people are able to learn and access information and ask questions. It's like live so it's like a podcast, or like a chat room, it's like a similar space to clubhouse. And then there's like brands local that are joining the spaces now, which is great. So I think yes, there is opportunity and space for more people to be doing it. And I do think that they have started with spaces. Look at Joe Human, I think he's a really good example of that.

Interviewer: Yeah, awesome. Thank you so much, I've gained so much insight from this conversation and I've really appreciated chatting to you.

Transcript: Interview 5

Interviewer: With regards to influencers what would you define that as? like what's your definition of an influencer?

Interviewee: I'm just going to answer based on my personal perspective and not my understanding of what we do at work and what I've learned so far, because I feel like this is truly what I think. I think in my opinion, influencers are the people who show a certain lifestyle, who make people aspire to sort of what they live like and so they use that kind of aspiration to get people to sort of- I don't really want to say "to get people to" do anything because that sounds negative, but to influence people into making certain decisions or doing certain things like exercise or eat healthy because people aspire sort of to be like them or to do what they do. So yeah, I think for me that's sort of what I think of influencers/ what I thought of influencers, and I still do but for the most part, not all of them. But yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, and with that in mind, what would you say makes a good influencer?

Interviewee: I think someone genuine. Someone who's real about their actual life and isn't sugarcoating things or you know editing how they look or editing how they lives actually are. Somebody who's real and who's honest about the things that they go through on a day-to-day basis and everything that they do. For me that makes a great influencer because I think when people can connect with you, and they feel the same way; it feels a lot more real and not necessarily unattainable, and I even stopped following people whose lives seemed unattainable to me-my life. It's not something that I'm looking at, but obviously I want like Valley, somebody who I can relate to somebody I can say, okay, fine, you know the next step in my life is getting a house this person is talking about, you know, being in their house and achieving that, and struggles they face in that. So, I think I mean a good influence is somebody who is genuine, you know, honest and who I can relate to. I think the last one is most important- somebody who I can relate to.

Interviewer: Yeah, and like thinking of a good influencer who as you say is genuine, real and honest that you can relate to. Is there a South African influencer that you would say ticks those boxes, or at least most of them for you?

Interviewee: Uhm, so it appears that, I think I've been doing a bit of research and I think I saw this on the form that you sent, the questionnaire that you sent as well. I don't know some of those influences like oh. My God, these people are cute. But anyway, I think the only people that I knew that I felt like I could relate to and this is before I met them physically, I think they are still nice people, but I think it kind of takes away from that sort of, you know, mystery of who they could be as a person. But I've always loved *Thickleeyonce*. Uhm, you know, mostly because of how her journey went from her being just the normal sort of model to where she is now and I think following everything that she stood true to for me, obviously because of the weight thing, you know, that I could feel like we've got something in common and she speaks up about it and I want to do that. And she dresses up, she dresses the way that she wants to, and she takes care of her body and I really want to figure out where the hell she shops and so like because of all of those, I felt okay, fine. This is somebody who I absolutely love, and I'm going to follow, and I even want to buy some of her clothes, I just have not. So that's the kind of person who I've always kind of liked. And I don't know if she's an influencer, to be honest, she is playing in that space, but *Nicolette (Mashile)* is somebody who I have absolutely adored since she started her journey as well. I think the common thing with the people that I like is the fact that I've followed them from stage one and literally I think the first time I followed *Nicolette* she was still on Facebook. I think she had just posted a couple of videos and she was talking about finances and since that day I've kind of been following her journey until where she is today. And she's one of those people who also like, no matter what content piece she is working on -she is very much herself, whether you meet her in person or you meet her virtually or whatever. She is who she is, she doesn't discriminate or do anything, she's true to herself and she'll tell it like it is. I think it's part of obviously her content and what she preaches, but I think those two people are absolutely like whether she's an influencer or I'm not sure, because in my mind I don't see her as an influencer per say. I feel more like an educator who happens to be on social media. But yeah, I'd say *Thickleeyonce* would be taking the influencer that I absolutely love.

Interviewer: You mentioned, I think there was a part where you said before I met them. Is there a difference between *Thickleeyonce* in real life and *Thickleeyonce* digitly?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely, I think online she seems like a person who stands for equality, not necessarily stands for equality but i was going to say stands for the rights of thick people. She seems a little bit, you know, online she's like a motivator, but in person she seems like somebody who just wants to get money. Also, it could just be that I like... yeah, I think we met at a shoot - I need to give you some context so we met at a shoot we worked on, i think it was Vorter together and she came to set, wasn't really communicating with anyone. You know, just sat there and just ignored everyone around her, which is not what I expected. I thought she was going to be very nice, you know, bubbly- which is what I've seen of her on social media as well, and that wasn't really what I experienced and obviously she just went in there did what she did and then left. Then she and I think it was... this guy, I forget this guy name and really it's a very easy name, but yeah, she and this guy were just chilling together and whatever. And I think for me it just felt like she's not really, the bubbly person that I saw every day on social media. She is actually very much of an introvert who is just, for me...and also there's just a feeling that I felt like she was just doing it for the money, but also, I mean there's a very high expectation I have of people. I mean she's not going to walk around saying "Fat people rights!Fat people rights!" but you know it just didn't feel, I just didn't feel that sort of warmth that I experience when I watch her content. So yeah, it could also just be the setting, it could have been just the wrong kind of setting, you know. But yeah, I just felt like, yeah, when you work on sets and productions your perception of people change quite often when you meet them, because I think also, different circumstances. I think now that I'm saying it to be honest, the more I say it. I'm just like maybe I'm expecting a lot from them Because obviously they're at work and they're not in their homes comfortable talking to their own community- The people who support them, so yeah, I understand, but yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm interested to find out from you. So, you obviously knew who she was, you'd followed her even before you met her, having met her and experienced

her in that space, did that change at all how you interact with her content? or what you think when you see it? How much you believe it, for example Or did that stay the same even after meeting her?

Interviewee: I think that absolutely didn't stay the same, so I don't really necessarily watch her content that much. I don't really comment that often or like to support or fight people who make negative content, or I mean, negative comments. Yeah, what I do do though is I still look at her fashion because I do think I still want to buy something from her because I think she's really good. But yeah, I don't necessarily/I'm not a *Thickleeyonce* advocate anymore. It could be that, when I hadn't met her, she felt like a role model. After I met her, I realized that she was just a normal person and so the novelty wore off .So, maybe that's what it could be.

Interviewer: And just to clarify, when you say you're not a *Thickleeyonce* advocate anymore. When would you say it stopped?

Interviewee: I'd honestly say that it was after I met her because literally a couple of weeks ago I was fighting someone on Twitter because they made a negative comment about her.

Interviewer: And so, fashion you say... you still...even after meeting her, even though you're not necessarily an advocate, you still value her fashion sense, and you still look to that. Is there anything else that she shares on her page? Like is she only known for fashion?

Interviewee: I know, she has a lot of content about her family and friends and stuff and then she does lots of travel. Uhm, I mean I do still watch her, I just don't engage with her as much as before. So, I am aware of what she does once in a while, when I do catch a poster or two, but It's not like I'm going to go onto a page or on Twitter and comment and like things, unless its an outfit that I absolutely love.

Interviewer: And with branded campaigns that she does on her platforms. How do you perceive those? Do you still trust her when it comes to sort of branded campaigns, even though maybe the relationship or what she's like as a person, you may have changed, but if she said, for example, please try out this body cream, it's really good.

Do you still find her credible to introduce brands to you and to speak to you about products?

Interviewee: No, I think also, it goes back to that. I feel like it's more of the job, as opposed to really meaning it, and you know being honest about it, and so I think that's out of it. No, I don't.

Interviewer: Was there ever a time where you did?

Interviewee: Again, I think I'm referring to this very often because the reason why I follow her is because I find it very difficult to find clothes for my size. But yes I did and I think there was even a time when I would ask like, okay, fine, where can I buy this bra? where can I find this? where do I get this? or where do you get that? And she was very responsive at the time. Uhm, so before, yes, definitely yes. It's just now, you find that one's Instagram page is very saturated with all these campaigns and yeah, so I don't. Again, I think it depends on what kind of content it is, so if it's something that is relevant to me, or something that I'd be interested in, like passion or something that's super affordable. I might consider it, but generally it's very hard for me to buy something off of the campaign. Like I don't watch/ I don't see something on social media and buy it because somebody said I should or is recommending it. It also depends on who the person is like, Micro influencers I would/I could believe because for some reason I feel like they aren't getting that much out of it. So, somehow in my mind I think that you know they are being honest. So, I could take their recommendation, but I think with somebody with such a big following like her, I generally don't know. I will like her things, if it's something nice but I won't know.

Interviewer: And then looking, I guess looking forward, is there anything that *Thickleeyonce* could do to change that? like is there anything that she can do or change that will get you to find her to be a little bit more credible or to trust her a bit more with the brands that she promotes?

Interviewee: To be honest, I feel like less... If she were to not promote a lot of brands and stick to something that she sees or she feels very strongly about then that's fine. Like if she's promoting lots of brands then that doesn't work for me because I just feel like she is taking on different jobs as opposed to this is the brand that I want to work

on and this is something that I strongly believe in and this is what I'm going to represent. So if she were to not represent a lot of brands, I probably would rethink it because it takes a lot of guts to choose one thing over 10 million things and she would truly mean it if she were to, I'm assuming represent one brand as opposed to multiple.

Interviewer: And with Nicolette you mentioned as well what would you say then is the difference between *Nicolette* and *Thickleeyonce*?

Interviewee: I was going to say she's real, but it was like... I mean she is doing the same thing, yeah, like. I think she'd not... Yeah, I'm really trying to think.... Also, I'm realizing that my relationship between myself and these two people is different, actually very different.

Interviewer: How is it different?

Interviewee: Yeah, because I think Nicolette is very genuine about who she is. She's not a different person when you meet her and on social media. I've met her before, I met her before she had a large following and she was the same person then, and she's the same person, and the same person on social media as well so that makes a big difference as well. I think it's very hard to tell, but Nicolette is very honest about who she is, she is who she is, she represents herself the same way on every platform, everywhere. And even if it's something negative about a certain brand, obviously, they would have given her the go ahead for that, but she will mention and so it's not all flowers and perfect. She will clarify that this might not be the best thing for you, maybe go with that option. So she's not necessarily marketing or pitching things to me all the time but presenting options and telling me what could not work for me. So, it feels like she's looking out for me as opposed to selling things to me. I think that's the difference between the two. Whereas *Thickleeyonce* is a lot more of, I like this- She likes everything. It's like yeah but you can't like everything. You can't recommend everything, there has to be something negative about a certain brand. Even if you say look, this would not be good for this kind of skin color or this would not be good for this kind of figure, then I would be like, okay, fine- great recommendation- I want to hear that. You know, you can't say this would be great for everyone. No, there's nothing like that. So, I guess that's what I like about Nicolette.

Interviewer: Yeah, and what kind of content does she do? Nicolette yeah, you mentioned educational.

Interviewee: Yeah, she does like finance. I haven't watched a lot of her content recently. But she does financial literacy videos. She's started off Facebook but she doesn't do much on Facebook anymore. She posts them on YouTube now. I know that she's been partnering with a lot of brands now, to host events and then she'll do like little snips of videos from that event and then post them on YouTube and stuff. But she does financial literacy content yeah.

Interviewer: OK, and so *Thickleeyonce* is body positive and fashion and then Nicolette is financial literacy. You've met both of them- You met Nicolette. Did anything change about how you perceived the things that she put online?

Interviewee: shoo, yes i loved her.

Interviewer: Oh, you loved her more after meeting her.?

Interviewee: Yes, I didn't love her before, I just liked her and then I fell in love with her. This might be sounding crazy but absolutely, I did love her more after meeting her.

Interviewer: It's interesting, because you know earlier you mentioned that sometimes you meet people and then I guess they become real like and I guess with Nicolette, she became real but a likeable real person.. like yeah that added to... yeah.

Interviewee: I think it's in her intentions. I think her intentions are genuinely to make a difference, and they are genuinely to share knowledge as opposed to I'm a model and I want to stand up for my own rights and I've faced this issue and so as a secondary goal I don't want anybody else to face that issue. As opposed to Nicolette, her primary goal is I want to help and I want to share this knowledge so that everyone can be able to grow, you know. So, I think it just depends on, what's priority in each of their platforms. I think with *Thickleeyonce*, it's all great, it looks great. I mean, you can't always put everybody else before you, but at the end of the day, if your priority isn't to share content for somebody else's purpose, you'll eventually choose yourself and

choose to get more money. But I think prioritizing your audience can also give you money. Just in a different way

Interviewer: I understand that makes sense. Umm and with Nicolette, right? So, she sounds amazing. I love that she's talking about financial education. Is there a limit to what you would trust her to talk about or that you'd be open to listening to? So, if Nicolette started sharing things about, investing in property (if she hasn't done that before) or if she started sharing things about decor. Uhm, would you still be open to hearing her speak about other things other than financial education?

Interviewee: Uhm No, She tried to get into the whole dating story ,and I was like no: like I'd rather listen to you talk about getting a bond or something- I just felt uncomfortable with that story. Plus, I know her personal experience with finances, so I don't think that if she were to branch into other content that I'd listen. I mean, that's not what I know her for. So no, I wouldn't trust to talk about makeup or anything else.

Interviewer: Yeah, and with *Thickleeyonce*, would you trust her vice versa if she started explaining how she organizes her finances and maybe giving tips on things like bonds and investments.

Interviewee: No, I have boxed each of them, *Thickleeyonce* into the fashion world and Nicolette into the finance world.

Interviewer: And is there anything that they could do to help you, like if *Thickleeyonce* really wanted to get into finance. Is there anything that she could do whether it's in content or you know for her own personal growth, that would encourage you to give her a chance to speak to you about finances, for example, or any different subject matter?

Interviewee: I think it's linked to any other personal journeys. So, if you know in her fashion business, she realized that finances were very important and therefore she felt like she needed to learn and share this information and it would make sense- that she's linking it in that way. So, sort of taking me on the journey from fashion to finance- that's fine, but just changing from fashion to finance without me having context or how

that happened or when it happened, that might be a bit of a challenge, but if she were to link the two, I think it would make an easy journey transition for myself.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then going back to Nicolette. So obviously finance is a touchy subject for a lot of people, at least very personal. Has there been anything that she has either shared or product or financial service that she's shared that you've actually tried out?

Interviewee: Most probably not.

Interviewer: Have you implemented any of her teachings if? If not, tried a product.

Interviewee: I have and I think that's part of the reason why I like her so much- I have. Without getting into too much detail and boring you, I have, yes. I spent about a year sort of changing things around because I was really good at finance, and I think that's part of the reason why I absolutely like her because her content came at a time where I needed to hear what she was saying. Uh, because i was making horrible financial decisions, so, I think, even though she wasn't necessarily very knowledgeable at that time, everything she had to share, that she had learned at that point, made a difference in my financial life. and so I think alot of her teachings came at a great time. So I did take a lot of her advice and a lot of her tips at that time. I just think as you go on everything that she shared started becoming a bit of a financial risk. So, although investments that she was talking about and everything, I was just like yeah no, not ready for that one- I'm not ready for that leap mean and then I was like we're going to pause here until further notice and then when I need to make those big changes, I'll come back, and I'll listen again. But yeah, I absolutely have, yeah.

Interviewer: And would you...if you had a friend or family member that needed to make some changes financially or just wanted to learn a bit more about how to manage their finances. Would you recommend her or her content to other people?

Interviewee: Absolutely I would. I share content. If I see something that I absolutely love, I share it, in most cases I do share it. I connect a lot of people who need to watch her content. I think mostly because obviously I come from a black community, she speaks to the black community, and she understands the issues and she understands

the language and she understands the challenges, so she speaks directly to that market. I think for me, I could share it with anyone, literally because I know so many people who could take that content and not necessarily become a millionaire but make small changes that could change their lives, so absolutely.

Interviewer: Yeah, and when making a decision... so after hearing what Nicolette had to say, you know a while ago, as you mentioned about changes that you could make for yourself when making the decision to make the changes. What kind of things did you consider? Or was it just enough that Nicolette said it.

Interviewee: Uhm, I don't think it was just because she had said it, I think the results she got out of it were obviously a big factor. And the fact that I was experiencing something similar to what she was experiencing was another factor. And then the fact that obviously if I didn't make any change, it's going to get a lot worse. I obviously did do a bit of research at the time after sort of listening to her, but I think I was also convinced after listening to her. So I was like 70% there and just needed that 30% to make that final decision. And I think the biggest reason why is because I was going through the same situation that she'd gone through and I felt like you know it was testimonial of what she had obviously accomplished nothing. For me that was something solid enough.

Interviewer: Yeah, and you mentioned her results. I'm assuming she shared that with her audience, how did she go about sharing that?

Interviewee: Yeah, she did. Well, I mean, I think she was very transparent about the certain things that happened in life so I think she mentioned/ she spoke about like her salary and how much she used to get paid before and then what her dates were looking like and stuff and she actually mentioned how she was able to improve or request an increase and all that. She's very transparent about everything like, ready to put all amounts on the table, everything and then how she went on about saving and buying a house and nearly every single step of what she did and every little choice that she made. Uhm, yeah, and she obviously didn't disclose how much she had at the time. But yeah, with everything else was pretty much transparent .

Interviewer: Yeah and I mean I haven't seen the piece of content so this might be I guess an easy question to answer. Was she narrating this? So was she telling you about it or did she have any proof or screenshots or...?

Interviewee: just narrating it.

Interviewer: Oh okay. I'm assuming video format then and she was narrating it.

Interviewee: Yes... haha, You are making me think that she was lying to me.

Interviewer: No, I'm just, you know, I've just got to ask questions so that if someone hasn't watched the piece of content right, they're able to imagine that it was a video, she narrated it. She was very forthcoming, and gave lots of details and yeah. So I'm definitely not asking for you to doubt it, for you to doubt that at all. I have a question around... So obviously I'm trying to find out things about trust and credibility and Nicolette. I think you know, is a great example of someone who, from what you mentioned, a good influence that does, right. She's genuine, she's real, you've said that she's really honest and forthcoming. Is there an influencer that you either see or interact with, I think in the beginning of our conversation you mentioned that they've been creators that you've stopped following. For reasons that are related to, you know what you'd consider a good influencer is. Do you remember any of those that you stopped following or that you maybe still follow but aren't as engaged with?

Interviewee: Oh, I don't remember them, but I can see if I have anybody on my profile who I don't engage with. I'll tell you now, give me a second. Instagram has no way of telling me how many people I've unfollowed?

Interviewer: No, I don't think so.

Interviewee: Let me see, I'm sure this won't take long because I have so many different people I'm following. Goodness.

Interviewer: Or if it's easier, is there someone that is an influencer, does paid campaigns, but you just don't trust them at all or you don't believe any of it. Is there someone that comes to mind?

Interviewee: Ah, not at the moment. Sorry, can you give me a second. I can't remember any at this point but I'm pretty sure there's somebody that I dislike. Can I just share thier profile with you and then you could perhaps put it in because I can't remember anyone at this point.

Interviewer: That's OK, I think. I mean, we don't have to have a specific person. What we can do is if you remember, what it was that moved you to stop following any of the accounts that you've stopped following, what kind of changes did those influencers make? Or was it just one decision you know? Was it one brand deal that made you change your mind about following them?

Interviewee: I think it's not so much about the brand deal. I think it's the kind of content they post. Everything is very pretty. And everything is very perfect and all the highlights of brands. You know, so there's nothing about them. There's no value for me, there is nothing I'm learning from it. So yeah, it's very perfect.

Interviewer: Yeah, looking at it from the other side, right, if we try to focus on brands. When it comes to brands working with influencers, is there a brand that you know does that, that you've seen there(I don't want to call them adverts), but you've seen their influencer campaigns and thought to yourself - that's a really good collaboration. That's a really good combination of influencer and brand. I believe it.

Interviewee: Yeah, I recently saw one actually. I'm not sure if this guy is an influencer actually, his name is *Lemme* - he's funny. So,he is like a comedian. I mean, I think he's a radio presenter as well. Let me share his profile with you. So, he did a Tiktok campaign with Netflix and It is the funniest thing ever. I felt like it was so relevant and it was the perfect person that I'd like to come see representing that brand and I would definitely get an account if I was watching him. I'll share his profile with you just now, i don't know if you know him.

Interviewer: Yeah, please and I'll happily include that if you share it with me. That seems like a good club is *Lemme*, *someone* who is humorous and entertaining outside of that campaign?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, He does comedy so his entire Tiktok account is comedy and he does it on Instagram as well.

Interviewer: Yeah. And then on the complete other side of that is, have you come across a brand working with an influencer where you just didn't believe the collaboration? Well, I guess where you saw it only as an exchange like someone got paid and that's why they're part of this campaign and that you just didn't believe it. Has that happened? and if so, do you remember what the campaign was or what the brand was?

Interviewee: I see a lot of those by Yardley, actually. There's so many of these makeup influencers, like I don't know how many of them there are and I see a lot of their posts and they do seem a little bit, very *filthy or feelzy*). I don't believe them. But I think that brand i've seen a lot of their content and i don't believe them. A specific influence?... Again, I don't really invest so much into people who's content, I'm not really very much involved in, so I'm just trying to figure out who these people are. I don't have a specific name right now in my mind. I was going to say Gorgeous and Body but then I love her so much I can't mention her. And she's not too much of an influencer, I don't see her as an influencer. But yeah, I think for me like I've seen a lot of those by Yardley that everyone is kind of doing a salty kind of up pitch and it's not genuine and I wouldn't believe any of their campaigns. Yeah it feels like they throw money at the influencer.

Interviewer: Yeah, and does that affect at all how you perceive the brand or the actual product that they're trying to advertise?

Interviewee: The products that I'm not already sold on, Yes. It just happens that I do actually use Yardley, but I will stick with the brand that I have tested. I will not try out any brand anybody is selling to me. So, it's kind of crazy that I'm using the brand even though I don't believe any of their content but yeah. Yeah, I wouldn't necessarily buy anything that anybody is selling me from that brand. But what I've already tried and tested and it works. I will buy it.

Interviewer: OK, and were you using what you have tried and tested before seeing these ad campaigns?

Interviewee: Yeah, I have been, I was using it too. I think I've got a good example of the kind of influencer that I think aren't sort of like the base or like you know them. But there are these twins on Escalero, they have a Tiktok account. They also do hair and natural hair content. They are called Trege and Tulu. I don't know if you know them.

Interviewer: I'm happy to find out who they are.

Interviewee: OK, let me see if I can get it.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what... so you say they do hair content?

Interviewee: They do hair and fashion, yeah.

Interviewer: and fashion.... Would you describe them as credible? or How would you go about describing them?

Interviewee: I mean, I personally don't believe that they are very credible and it's funny because they do a lot of like plusSize Fashion. But a lot of the brands that they represent do not necessarily have Plus size Fashion and clothes that look pretty. So, I don't trust that their content is true, and if there's any credibility to anything that they are posting out there because, Yeah, they look pretty, but when I go to cotton on, they don't have a size for what I wear in the outfit that I want. And plus there are too many brands on their page. I just found them actually- I'll share a link with you.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Interviewee: But they look pretty so I thought that I'd follow them.

Interviewer: Just to look at them, but they just don't help you make your decisions when it's time to shop.

Interviewee: Nope

Interviewer: I'm interested in that though, so when you are making a decision to buy something and we can go with fashion first, right? What things do you consider?

Interviewee: So, this is in general, right?

Interviewer: Yeah, this is in general. If I had said close your eyes and imagine you are at a shop maybe not Cotton on because you say they don't have appropriate sizing, but you're at a shop and you're about to buy something. What are some of the things that you've thought about before making this decision?

Interviewee: So, I think that what is really important right now is the kind of identity that I want to build. Or the kind of look that I want to create. This in general because I think the word brand has been used very widely, but I think that's kind of what I want to say that there's a certain kind of brand that I want to build, and I think that's been something that I've been very, very interested in and invested in lately, in the way that I present myself. And that's something that I always think about when I go shopping these days. How do I want to be seen? And what do I want people to think when they see me? That's the first thing I'm thinking about nowadays. And then secondly just comfort, comfort and I want to *slay*, actually the most important one I should have started with first is just can I afford it. So yeah, those are things that I think about.

Interviewer: And as I guess someone that's on social media. If you find something, or once you've bought a couple of fashion pieces and you've got your look and it fits in with how you'd like to portray yourself. Do you ever share that on social media? Or is it only experienced in real life?

Interviewee: Uhm, I would share it if it's absolutely the best match and I'm in love with it. I'd be sharing it, Everyone's got to know about it.

Interviewer: And is it the same for any other purchases or is it only fashion?

Interviewee: I think any other purchase. Not any other actually no, I mean, I don't do that for any other stuff that I buy for my little one or like any other product, so I think it depends on if it's something that I've absolutely been wanting to buy or something that I'm passionate about. Like I love fitness and I love working out, so if it's something within those spaces: fitness, fashion, food then I absolutely will share it. But if it's something that's just part of my day to day and something that's related to my little

one, which is making me sound like I don't love him, I do. It's just that I wouldn't necessarily post it. It doesn't qualify.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. Overall, if you had to think about influencers that you either interact with or that you might come across one day. Do you think that them being credible, whatever that means to you? Would affect whether or not you believe what they're trying to either sell or promote on a brand deal. Or do you think it doesn't matter if you think they're credible? That's not going to change how you experience a brand deal or a branded piece of content.

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, for me, credibility is really important and how you execute your campaigns or your objectives, I think is also very vital. If you stay credible and if you stay genuine, and you stay true to yourself in that sort of journey of speaking to your audience throughout campaigns and everything. There's nothing that could possibly change my position in that sense. I don't know if I'm answering you. I think I'm drifting away.

Interviewer: I think you're almost there, so credibility you're saying is important. And it's not. Just credibility, it's also how you execute, you say.

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely. because I think very often in the execution phase people forget why people are following you in the 1st place. They start to make things pretty, they start to make things perfect, wanting to impress the brand obviously, but if you were to stick true to what brought your audience there and speak to them the way that you generally do and do things the way that you, know you have. It feels like you haven't changed. It feels like you're still kind of talking to them. As opposed to, now changing things to make it look very advert-y and pretty. It's like I'm from Rustenburg and when I used to live there I used to speak a certain language, walk a certain way, dress a certain way. If I go back there and I'm not dressed like... You know, middle class, okay not middle class we've always been middle class. But probably, if I dress like a very rich lady, you know brands and drive around my BMW; People don't feel like I'm the old me, they don't relate to me like they used to before. Obviously certain people will not talk to me the way they used to before, they won't treat me the same way because what I have accomplished to them at that point is not reachable, or they

don't feel that connection anymore, so you know if I'm not the same person - they won't treat me the same. This kind of plays out as well, when it comes to sort of brand deals and campaigns. They would need to remember it like - the reason why you're here is because you love the way I speak, the way that I communicate, the kind of content that I create. It has to stay the same so that you can be able to still feel that connection. And then, obviously there's always room for improvement as times go by. People improve and people change, but I think the sole reason why people came there should not necessarily be changed.

Interviewer: Do you know anyone in your immediate circles or friends or family that are influencers?

Interviewee: Well, probably not. I'm just trying to think if I do know one, no?

Interviewer: Okay, so then from your understanding of-

Interviewee: So just.-

Interviewer: Oh yeah, go ahead.

Interviewee: Wait, hold on. So, like how closest friends and family? Like my own brother?

Interviewer: Oh wait, I can't seem to hear you anymore.

Interviewee: No, I think I'm going to stick with no. Oh sorry, it's a very tough one because I don't think they have a huge following, I don't necessarily see them as influences, they are more friends. I think I'm overthinking it now.

Interviewer: OK, and would you consider becoming an influencer yourself?

Interviewee: I generally don't like the term influencer. I wouldn't become an influencer, I think you know I'd want to create content for a certain audience that I'd like to share with a certain audience. And talk to them, I've always kind of wanted to do TV before and have a talk show so you know, to talk to people. And in all of that, I think for me it's not necessarily about putting up nice pictures and putting up you know, beautiful things that's not me as a person. I want to talk to the root of the problem, you know.

What are we changing? What are we improving? So, yeah, I'd absolutely love to create content, so I think I like content creators more. Instead of influencers.

Interviewer: Yeah, what would you describe the difference between a content creator and an influencer?

Interviewee: I think an influencer is somebody who you are inspired by/ want to be like. But a content creator, is somebody who you would want to talk to, somebody who you'd want to open up to, someone who is very honest and somebody who talks to real life problems and no real life challenges. Whereas an influencer makes everything look like everything is perfect and life is great and aspire to be like. Me, you know?

Interviewer: OK, so with that definition/that differentiation in mind, where would Nicholette fall?

Interviewee: I definitely think she would hold into the content creator's side.

Interviewer: And *Thickleeyonce* ?

Interviewee: On the other side the Influencer side.

Interviewer: Okay, that helps me better understand, yeah. Cool, well thank you so much for making the time to chat with me today. I really appreciate it.

Transcript: Interview 6

Interviewer: T: thanks for making the time to chat the research is about influences and our experience with them what we think and feel in your opinion how would you define an influencer?

N: how would I define an influencer ?this is tricky.. I think they would then just be people who kind of bridge the gap between what it is that we see get advertised and they kind of form the real life experience that we can sometimes rely on so I think they're like the missing middle when it comes to advertising and putting your things out there they would kind of be the ones that form the human connection with us sort of, if that makes sense

T: yeah so if there are the missing middle what would be the things on either side that they are connecting?

N: Well, honest reviews and honest usage I think that would be what I would go to them for because use surely you get advertised the things here and there and then sometimes someone around who uses it sometimes they don't but if not because you have sort of formed a relationship that seems a bit personal because you follow this person on the daily you can kind of trust them to give advice on something that you should be using so I think that's what they kind of add

T: okay and then using that definition what would you say makes a good influencer?

N: reliability and credibility,

T: yeah and what does that look like?

N: honesty and transparency I know a lot of sometimes they kind of.. how can I say...
The trust or transparency is compromised because it's a paid gig so they just don't let us know their honest opinions about it and sometimes i can pick that up with certain influences where everything they touch is 'great' and that is sort of where their honesty

and credibility gets compromised when you can no longer rely on them to give honest opinions about things that you are interested in or things that spark your attention.

so I would say credibility and transparency

T: those are fair and for a creator what would that look like like what would a creator need to do for you to think that they are either reliable or honest or transparent like you said what does that look like in practice?

N: uhm, I think that would be laying out exactly what you're doing if you are doing a campaign for instance and it's a paid gig, let us know you know, let us know in advance so that we know that we should take your advice with a pinch of salt so that would be the kind of transparency that would build up your credibility for me because then I know that whatever information you give it's not biased it's not been bought Pre say.

T: and what would they need to do to make The more reliable or would that touch on that as well?

N: to make the more reliable I think consistency, consistency not only in the brand of the things that they say but consistency throughout everything and coherence in their brand. I think because sometimes they say one thing but they preach another. Or they are you doing something that's contradictory to what they said The last time it kind of makes you question who the person is and what they stand for and whether you can actually rely on them for any information if need be.

T: is there a South African creator that you follow that you found is a good influencer you know they reliable there honest they transparent like you said is there someone that comes to mind?

N: honestly, no

T: not at all?

N: honestly no nope not one

T: how come?

N: I think I just hold them to too much of a high standard so I just don't let things slide when I see and consistency and their brand I'm just like hmmm it makes me question the whole... like everything that they've ever done and anything that I've ever thought "oh this is cool maybe I should try it out" so not one that comes to mind honestly. the one that came close Was probably Vongai And then I don't know if she's an influencer or anything but she is a make up artist I don't know if you know her but it's Dr Lekeka she's been highly reliable but I don't think she's an influencer. And then Vongai came close but there was just too many things that happened in a short period of time I think maybe a year or two ago and I was just like "no thanks" so yeah but besides that none

T: okay so besides at least or maybe Vongai and Dr Lekeka there is no one?

N: no

T: with Vongai I just wanted to find out what kind of content does she make as an influencer?

N: uhm when I started following her there was more affordable fashion plugs so I had just recently moved to Johannesburg and I didn't like know much about what was going on around in town and when I followed her she kind of provided that information. Like where to get plugs for different things whether it be fashion and then she also moved into something that I enjoy that I specialise in and it's houses homes architecture interior that kind of thing so that was interesting and yeah and then I sort of started getting interested in her personal life or how her life was going by and then she kind of lost me at a certain stage because what she preached and the things that she believed in sort of contradicted other things that she had said and did and it was just a lot of inconsistency within her brand and that just made me sort of do a doubletake on Anything that she might have 'influenced' me on

T: with some of the things that were inconsistent do you remember what they were when she said something I did something different?

N: well one thing that really stuck out for me and maybe it's because I'm looking at it through the lens of what's happened in my life but there was a video that I watched of her and she was talking about relationships I think with Mhlali or something like that they were talking about relationships and stuff like that and she was talking about the heartbreak that she has been through and that she would never date a man and never never never there were so many nevers and then she was talking about her sisters kid and how she would never have kids never ever ever ever and then these things just happened to her and they happened quickly she announced it to us and we were happy for her and then well the baby she lost the baby which is very sad and then she kind of let us in on that moment as brief as it was and then when things changed it was back to regular programming and it was never really addressed that like these things that happened regardless of how they turned out now they were things that she said that she would never want to happen for her so if in your personal life you can sort of Flippen change so quickly how much more for things for tangible things material stuff. Do you get what I'm saying?

T: yeah I understand

N: so that was my turning point

T: If we try and sort of look forward, is there anything that Vongai could do now to sort of change your mind to make you trust her again or trust her more?

N: ... Just talk I think I think what I would like to see from her is one of those I wouldn't say get to know me or catch up but somewhere in between that where she just talks about these things and gets a bit more are open and honest with us I know that that's a lot to ask for from an influencer or Creator because sometimes they just want to keep the private parts of their lives private but sometimes when they put us in the kind

of need to close the chapter officially with us to a can't just stop sharing the content and then heal from it or do whatever that needs to be done but sort of addressing it as it goes even though she might not want to address it like just let us know I think it was sort of help get that credibility back even if it's just a little,

T: Yeah from before she lost your trust in her was there a limit to the kind of things that you would sort of trust her to talk about I know you mentioned sort of beauty and then she moved into interior and decorating if she for example if she went on her charity if she had had the child and started talking about child rearing and parenting and that kind of stuff would you listen to her outside of beauty and interior (architecture)

N: I would listen to her from the point of experience so I would listen to her according to where she is in that process it's totally different if you trust someone who's had several kids or even one kid like this is not their first rodeo but for her it would sort of be like a need-to-know basis like as she goes along then you would sort of be able to trust her with that but then again no even with everything else even especially the home content It's always with a pinch of salt because I know for sure that there is something that she's probably just saying from a personal preference point of you but not necessarily because she has any technical knowledge of that so yeah besides that I don't think I would trust her for much and especially childrearing , Even if she had a child I think I would still be like "hmm maybe not" just listening to her previous videos and opinions and what she values and that kind of thing I wouldn't exactly put all my eggs in that basket when it comes to taking advice or consideration for anything

T: what would you say so between Vongai and you also mention dr Lekeka and you mentioned you're not sure if she's an influencer but you do find the dr to be credible, what makes

N: you see the thing with her is that she was a make up artist and then she kind of let go of that because of Covid and then she fell pregnant and then she so she has a huge following and I guess she is an influencer to a certain degree but I don't think she makes content like influences do so that's in the sense that I don't know if she's

an influencer but with her she's had her child and you can see that she gives real honest reviews or honest conversations because she's constantly addressing it from at this just happened this is what I'm doing this didn't work out it's not always positives and sometime she gives the real and the raw and I can really appreciate that about her and also I can see how some of the things she said are working because when she does talk about things it's not always to promote a certain product or whatever it's just things that she might be doing that can help and a lot of times she also asks her followers for help too. So that kind of engagement and sort of first-hand tag along that I have sort of been all that everyone's been on with her since she had her baby which makes her slightly reliable and the contents good even if you want a mum or anything you could still relate to her on so many issues.

T: that makes sense and especially how you're saying she goes about sharing the information and also keeping in touch with her audience. If we go back to Vongai for a second what kind of person is she if you had to describe her to someone who doesn't know her.

N: I would say she is private I would say that she likes to keep things to herself and I think she's outgoing and maybe an introvert to a certain degree but I think she's one of those people who are quiet until you get to know her, and then I can't really word exactly who i think she is but I would say like I think she still trying to find herself in terms of what rears her. And sometimes depending on the think she's doing or saying sometimes she does seem a bit surface based so yeah I can't really describe her I think she is but hopefully that helps a little bit.

T: yeah that's a good description my last question around Vongai would be how much would you say that you have in common are they things you have in common or that or similar, or is there absolutely nothing that you have in common with Vongai?

N: we are both foreign national is in South Africa navigating that world both black woman and that's it we actually don't have much in common after that we're probably polar opposites

T: is there a South African influencer that you have a lot more in common with?

N: Well there is one but I I don't necessarily follow her to that degree to sort of put myself besides her but I think her name is Buhle Nkomo I

T: okay and what is she like?

N: she's married she's had a baby she works in architecture or something like that and she is Christian so those align a lot with who I am I think but then again she is friends with other influences that I find very disturbing so I'm also on the fence about her immensely

T: oh like whom?

N: like Mpoomy, yeah she's besties with Mpoomy so that makes, well that puts a question mark On her for me.

T: with Mpoomy from how you've described Buhle she's married she's a mum she is Christian you've also mentioned Architect being some of the similarities, from the research that I have done on Mpoomy the same pillars would represent her she's married she's also a mum she is Christian she is not an architect though so that would be the only outlier? what about Mpoomy makes...

N: The thing with Mpoomy is that she...I like... she... there is a huge question mark On so many things For me based on what I've seen from her content and everything she's not consistent number one in who her brand so she is and who she really is especially with the Christian part I think in everything that you do you... I don't expect her to be like you know lock herself in doors and only wear skirts to the length of the floor I don't expect that and I wouldn't even be interested in that either but just the way that she carries herself I find it highly superficial and contradictory to who her brand so she is I think there are so many times where I've seen her right things on her status that are just so superficial And that could hardly put someone down if you're just following her and you see the life that she lives it can sort of put you down if you start comparing that because she says things that could slightly offend someone if you're not in her on her level or something like that, so yeah

T: has she from your experience has she always been this way or has it changed as she's grown?

N: I don't know because I only followed her this year sometime so it's probably been like six months or so because before that I just avoided following her I see her around but I wasn't sure what she was all about and I only started following her after I started following Buhle but I just couldn't see why they were friends besides the fact that they're both wives and they're both Christian and both moms they're just not similar to me so I don't know if she's changed or if she's been the same I think she's always been the same but it's hard to say.

T: yeah that's fair it's interesting how you know you say that with Buhle you do resonate with her for the different reasons of the things that you have in common around marriage motherhood Faith as well as your career and that her friendship or association from what we can see online with Mpoomy makes you doubt her a little bit. So Buhle being friends or friendly makes you doubt her credibility is it the same for you if Buhle or another influencer that you admire or trust if they collaborate with a brand that you don't trust or does that not affected the same way.

N: it does it does it affect of the same way because the same way that that brand is the product so is every single influencer they themselves all the product and the brand that they put out there is their image so if they are going to align their brand with another brand that I don't trust it makes all of them.. it puts a question mark On them too so the brands that they work with also matter. Brand is the same with that they stand for things brands do two they might not be a person but a brand alliance it self with things that it believes and too

T: yeah that makes sense and would it be the same the other way around so if a brand that you actually trust works with an influencer that you absolutely don't trust?

N: yes it would definitely be the same

T: has that ever happened before?

N: The only I mean maybe I get to some degree yes because Mpoomy is with Woolworths and I don't really resonate with Mpoomy the way that she is and if she's working Mpoomy says a lot about woolies and who their target market is so I think them working with her is sort of going to further perpetuate that notion that woollies is for certain calibre of people and that's the narrative that Mpoomy pushes even without knowing so I would say that's the only kind of relationship or brand deal that's sort of suss

T: that makes sense I wanna find out from you a lot of people deem success in the world of influence as having lots of brand deals is there an influencer that is South African that you know of that post a lot of branded content but that you just don't trust or wouldn't trust it all for that reason

N: No there isn't one specifically but I wouldn't trust an influencer if they post anything and everything I don't mind I'm having a lot of brand deals that doesn't really concern me but I would find it concerning if they have brand deals in every single department of a life that's highly concerning. Because how do you know things about everything besides that I wouldn't really mind and I couldn't pinpoint an influencer that has brand deals everywhere.

T: how easy or difficult do you think it is to be a good influence are in South Africa considering things like what you mentioned about reliability transparency honesty

N: I think it's difficult I think it's difficult hey it's not easy to find the balance in the things that I've said so if I am expecting that from an influencer and I can't even share that much of my own life I assumed that it would be very difficult and yeah I'm not sure if I heard the rest of your question but it's not easy at all

T: would you consider it for yourself at all the career of being an influencer

N: for the perks yes for its flexibility yes and only if I am able to know that I am totally being genuine with everything that I'm doing and what I'm sharing but if I can't

guarantee that that will be the constant as I grow and as things move for me in that part of my career the no

T: you mentioned perks what kind of perks do you believe are associated with being an influencer?

N: I think having access to people online that you can call friends or Internet friends at least and just having people that can relate to you on an issue all that could help you or you help them so I'd say those would be the perks for me and also just getting to work with cool people getting to know people and do cool stuff.

T: okay that makes sense to go back to kind of what you mentioned about someone like Vongai as well as some of the other influencers and what they share and how they share sort of real life personal issue content. If you're saying that you have doubt if someone has lots of campaigns and they're not transparent about it do you think it's possible for influences to in the same way that they might not be genuine about posting about brands do you think that it's possible for them to not be genuine when posting things that seem personal personal news or when they share these things,

N: yes I do because everything that they do on social on their social platforms is strategic so to some degree them also sharing their personal life could also be strategic at the same time it could also be disingenuous so it's like you can't believe everything that you see or hear but if they're acting really well then just maybe just maybe.

T: yeah for you personally how do you tell between what's real and what's not real

N: if they are lying I actually I think one of the things that I probably should try not to do all that I do subconsciously is that I remember details of the things that they say and do I don't do it on purpose and I'm actually a very forgetful person but I just remember sometimes they said this then the next time they all contradict that exact same thing so it makes you question like I know that this is a real moment but the story is not adding up so are you lying because if you lie sometimes when you lie a lot the

story just doesn't add up. And unfortunately we can see through that if you are an attentive followers then you can easily tell if not then it kind of just passes you by

t: okay so for you how are you tell have a live or if it can be believed is that you have other information that you remember to reference back to so you can tell they're consistent or not is that what you're saying?

N: yes

T: okay which would mean that if it's my first...

n: But if it doesn't seem true but if it's your first time it's my first time seeing their content around sharing something personal I think I would just take it off either gut feeling all the storyline adding up even if I'm there for the first time there's certain things that they can say or do that just doesn't seem it just doesn't seem possible and sometimes you can just tell genuine genuineness I don't know how but you sort of just can.

T: in your experience is it safe to say that you sort of picked up on an influencer had something personal to say or not Branded content that wasn't true or genuine have you been able to pick it up before?

N: I have been able to pick up that I didn't trust something that they was saying but I don't know if it's true or not and I don't put that kind of label on it but I have come across situations where the story is just not adding up so it's like what are you talking about.

[interviewee requested that the interview be paused so that she could attend to her newborn]

Transcript: Interview 7

Interviewer: So yeah, in your opinion, how would you describe an influencer like? What is it influencer to you?

Interviewee: OK, I I think will mean I'd say. It's someone who. Has the opportunity to to partner with the brand and they they their their influencer part comes in with them showcasing that brand and make it and creating awareness for that. And so for for an ordinary person like me, I wouldn't know about a certain brand that exists, but. Since when until? They get an opportunity to sort of like showcase that brand or create awareness of their brand or sort of like highlights the the uses of a certain product until that's done. An ordinary person like me wouldn't know that brand exists, but when they get that opportunity to sort of like showcase that brand I become influenced. So I'd say that an influencer as a person who's able to influence an ordinary person who's possibly who possibly isn't exposed to a certain product or a brand, and. Like their ability is so powerful that I myself as an ordinary person can can can like I, I can sort of like start getting like being aware of that product or being excited about the product or Like possibly wanting to try out that product, so I'd say I'd say for me and influences a person who creates awareness showcases of brand or products and and is able to influence an ordinary person like myself. I'd say for me, that's that's that's how I define Yes, added define influencer ship.

Interviewer: And keeping so keeping that definition in mind, what would you say then? Makes a good influencer.

Interviewee: OK, so I'd say a good influencer. Is someone who's who's? Who's honest someone who like? For instance, if I get a product and I tried on on my face or on my body like I will tell you. OK, I've recently received product A and I'm gonna try product. Hey, and I don't know how it will react on my skin. Obviously take into consideration that we all have different types of skin. I mean different skin types and they they sort of like, so I'd say that in a good influence as someone who's honest and someone who who. Was very transparent. They don't just give a product good reviews, they give the product honest reviews. Reviews that would possibly like. I'm sorry, let me just close my window 'cause I can hear my brother on the other. Side so I'm. So they they give so. So someone who's honest is for me, a good influencer. I'd

just say honesty, because sometimes you find. That people use. Products, but they're not really using those products. So then you think, Oh my. Gosh, it's working for. Her, but when in actual fact she's using some other advanced product. That's yeah. So yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So someone who's honest and transparent about their experience with the.

Interviewee: Transparent about experience, yes.

Interviewer: And does.

Interviewee: Also sorry, sorry to cut you off.

Interviewer: No, go ahead, go ahead.

Interviewee: Also, someone who who's able to be not relatable but like someone who's able to connect. With ordinary people.

Interviewer: How back?

Interviewee: OK.

Interviewer: How would you describe that? Like how yeah?

Interviewee: OK, so. So for instance, I'd say that. I'm I'm just gonna. I need to think around this like. For someone. Like for instance, I'm an ordinary person. I live in a Township, but there's certain things I'm exposed to in certain things that I'm not exposed to and. And I think that person needs to be just a genuine person like they need. They don't need to be trying to be other other types of influences that already exist. They could just be themselves and for me I'm able to connect with someone that they wear, whether they're coming from the suburbs, whether. They're coming from the rural. Areas, whether they come from the Township. But when they when they. Sell their products or when they showcase their products or when they create awareness for that. Product I need to be able to connect with them regardless of where they come from because they just genuinely being themselves.

Interviewer: Hmm OK, that's a good description. So a good influencer is honest. They're transparent when they're talking about products and brands and their

experience. They're able to like you said, connect with ordinary people by being their genuine selves by just being themselves. And that's a good influencer.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Is there? A South African influencer that comes to mind that you would say does these things well, like they're honest, they're transparent, they connected. You and they're genuine.

Interviewee: It isn't it. Should it be just one person or can it be like persons?

Interviewer: Oh yeah, if there's. More than one, please do let me know.

Interviewee: OK. The first one that I think is really successful with this includes shipping I'd say Mhlali. OK. Can I also count you as well? 'cause there's a lot of stuff that I've seen from your from your social media pages that have been like you know what T has this. I'm gonna go try it. I'm gonna buy it and I'm just gonna see. So you. 1st and in fact let me let me rearrange this list. The first person is yourself because I remember in varsity. I would also wait first, you know. What was it called? Yellow vitamin water, right? You used to have like like I don't know. 100 bottles in your in your res room. And you always had. Energy, and I'm like you know I'm gonna buy this. I'm going to be. As energetic as T. I'm just gonna try this on so like the best person. I say yourself because you like you. You you genuine you honestly yourself. You're not trying to be other. People like you literally just telling that and you speak your mind and you you able to connect with people and I feel like every time when I see something on your page, I'm like you know what? I'm not even a coffee person, but I'm gonna try this coffee like you know what I'm saying. So I think yourself. cause you are just Genuinely, honestly, yourself, and then I'm gonna say someone is also able to connect with people I think is Mhlali I think he's she's very successful in doing her brand. Her brand influencer ship. Stuff I mean, she's into beauty. She's also just like yourself. She's into beauty, she's into all sorts of things like largely luxury living, but I feel like I. I'm always like whenever she's showcasing a brand or product. I'm always like, you know what? This looks so nice. I wanna try this. Like I'm not. I'm not into like I don't like you know me like I'm not good with makeup but like Oh my gosh let me maybe if I buy this and watch her YouTube channel I I could

possibly be able to to contour my face. You know stuff like. That's another person that I feel it connects with people is. Thickleyonce But unfortunately with her she deals with a lot of negativity because of her. Uh, if because of her body type, which I feel is unfair, but I feel like she's also genuinely, honestly herself. It's just it's quite unfortunate every time, every now and then she needs to deal with negativity that is based on her body type. But myself like I love how she carries herself. I love how she showcases. Buddy, I love how she's not like she's not afraid to showcase sides of herself. Then and or some people you aren't so perfect, but she's just generally just shows them. I think yeah, who else? There's I'm I'm. Just trying to think I'm just thinking of the people that I follow on on on on Instagram as well. There's a lady called Doctor Connie. I don't know if. You know her. She like like I follow her 'cause like she seemed like genuinely a nice person. She's very bubbly and she's very. She's got this really positive outlook with life, so that's I think that's another thing that I enjoy about influence is that like people are trendy everywhere. People are going. Through their toughest times, just and just as. People or individuals? But when they showcase their things on social media or whenever they doing something, they just genuinely positive. So even when you going through your thing you just like you know what. Let me get let me park, let me get dressed. Let me look pretty. Let me just be excited about life so I think yeah. People that can do that? Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: For someone who has some, like if someone doesn't know Muhlali , study how would you describe her like as a person? What is she like?

Interviewee: OK, I'd say she is. She's a she's. She seemed like a nice person. I'm just gonna say seems 'cause I didn't know her personally, but she seems like a nice outgoing person who who's very confident about herself, which sometimes might possibly run rub off badly on other people. Sometimes people don't like overly confident people which. Kind of sucks. 'cause a person can be overly confident, but that's not. That doesn't mean they arrogant. They just literally just confidence. You know which isn't a bad thing? So I'd say she's someone who's confidence someone who knows. Where they're going in life? Uhm, who who's who's? Possibly nice, who personally, but I think she seems she's like she's just a nice person. Yeah yeah, that's just. Yeah, that's just from. The top of my head.

Interviewer: And Thickley once what is she like is her? What's her personality like for, at least from what you see online?

Interviewee: OK, from what I see line she's someone who speaks her truth. Someone bold about her truth. Someone who's not afraid to say today. I don't feel pretty often and this is how I feel and this is how I'm this is what I'm going through so she's honest like that. So I'll describe it like that.

Interviewer: And with Doctor Connie, what is she? Like you said, bubbly.

Interviewee: OK, with she she's probably she seems excited about and I I know. She also goes through stuff like she says when she's going through stuff, but like it's it's her waking up in the morning every time and say good morning everybody like it's. It's sounds silly, but you just go. You know what I'm actually gonna look forward to my day. I'm just gonna be positive about. My day, so she seems like she seems. Like she's she's just an uh. Bubbly person who who possibly also goes through. Her own things. But she tries. To have a positive outlook with life, she's also very honest. I mean they recently bought a new car and she said, like, oh, I don't know if it's the husband that. Bought the car as a push present but she said like afterwards like this wasn't just a thing where we just walked into the W and we gotta Tegan. We literally put aside everything that we have. Like we wrote down our finances, what we can't afford, what we can't afford and why we need this car. 'cause I think she was driving a Mini Cooper and now she has a. She has a she's like she has a kid so now they need a bigger car. So she was saying how like it? It wasn't something that just like like we did easily You know how, like in social media you see people going, oh. My gosh I got. Gifted a car and you think all? People like people are loaded, but like no they saying how like she's she mentioned. Sorry she mentions how they literally wrote down all their financial constraints, all their future constraints and everything. And they listed where the needs and and and and the and the and possibly the issues that might arise with this new. Which is I kinda enjoyed that 'cause usually you just see people showing off their new brand new cars with red ribbons and they never really say like the financial. Show the financial aspects of of what went through what, what they went through, when, when purchasing that vehicle. So yeah.

Interviewer: And do you? Do you trust any of these people?

Interviewee: OK, OK I'm gonna be I'm gonna be honest I I guess like so most of these things are about money as if we're being honest like. At at the end of. Today, a brand approaches you and they say we believe in you who you are and your brand and we feel like your brand is aligned with who we are and we'd like you to sell a certain product. Uhm, so in most cases I do sometimes wonder if it's something they would just randomly sell because they enjoy it or if they've taken that sponsorship or that influencer ship because they've signed on the dotted line and they're gonna get money so. I'd say my trust is in between. Like it's 50 50. It's not like 100%. Yeah, 'cause I mean sometime. And social media is not really what it is like. It's it's you showing just certain parts of your life, but you're not showing 100%. You're showing the parts that you want to show, so it it's 50 50 I I guess.

Interviewer: So with with branded with branded posts, you're saying you know, because if sometimes it's 'cause they've signed on the dotted line, so you can't tell if they if they. Would use it or not then yeah.

Interviewee: If they're being honest, it's really being 100% honest. Yeah, yeah?

Interviewer: What about four for Camp 4? Post that they put up that are not related to a brand like with Doctor Cornelia. You said they're the ones that bought the card, wasn't the brands. That give it to them. What about for those type of posts?

Interviewee: So for for. I mean, for those posts I mean. You use your money like you literally take your money and you believe it. You know Brandon, you fire. Because you believe in it and you wanna also just show it. You tell other people because you're so excited about this. This products because it works for you. So I think for for, for for posts that aren't ads that don't have hashtag and I kinda I'll trust that 100% 'cause I mean you don't just use like. When you use your money to buy something 'cause money, money is money is money. So when you use your money you believe in that thing. And I myself will believe in you because you've literally not wasted your money. But you've used your money, so yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK so if OK I see what you're saying. Yeah, that it's different if they if they paid for it and I'm still saying it's good 'cause it's their like they invested their money in it.

Interviewee: They many in it. They believe in it's yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And if.

Interviewee: I mean, I guess even if they it is an edge, if it if that if that product works for them, workers that products as well. So I guess I think some I mean. I I'm trying to find a. Way to rephrase. This, like I get someone like me standing right so she can. They are friends with their friends that approach her and because they are not. Aligned with her. Brand, I'd imagine she does turn them down. I don't know. I'm just this is just me imagining if she does. So I guess like the depending on where you are in your in your influencer ship scheme, like I don't know. I guess like some some brand investors. Sorry, some brand.Ambassadors do say that. Brett, a brand approached me and they not in line with my brand so I did turn them down. So yeah, I think it's still 50 50 because some people are honest and they will say so and so approached me or I can't say who approached me but I did turn them down because they're not in line with my brand.

Interviewer: Yeah, and are those. Are those influences in your opinion? Better than the ones that are just not sharing that they turn any people down that they just say yes to everyone.

Interviewee: I I don't think they even the ones that the ones that don't. I don't think they all need to share like I I wouldn't say I wouldn't say they better but it sometimes it it does it it does help. It kind of gives you an idea of of how some products they it's because they they literally align with their. Friends and it's not just about money, yeah, so it it gives you an indication. I wouldn't say though that they they being better or if they yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I get what you're saying. Thing and then I'm going to go back to Michaeli thickly on say and doctor Carnillo. If we go 1 by 1. We'll start with me clearly. Do you and Michelle have?

Interviewee: OK.

Interviewer: Can you still hear me?

Interviewee: Sorry I can't. Hear you, but sometimes you. When you say the actual. Question it, it breaks.

Interviewer: OK, let me let me come closer. Maybe that will help. So with with Mithali. Do you admittedly have things in common? Are you similar in any way, and if so, in what ways?

Interviewee: OK, I don't. OK, uhm, she seems like a hard worker. I know for I know that I'm a hard worker, so I'd say me similar in that way I'm I'm not really like a makeup person, you know this. But like yeah, like I think what I've what the common ground would be her her hard work. The the effort she puts into something when she, when she is into something that if it's and that passion she puts, she puts her mind. What I can see on a social media like? Or passion yeah yeah.

Interviewer: And with Thickley on, say, do you have anything in common?

Interviewee: But typically on say I I just like how she appreciates our body and I wouldn't say we have that in common because personally with myself there's certain like there's certain times when I'm just like not like there's certain like parts of myself that I don't showcase because I'm very like not. Self aware, but I'm very. What's the word? It's a negative word, uh, conscious of course. Oh really.

Interviewee: So so conscious about myself. So I like how she is not like I like how she just she's just herself like things that you would be self conscious about. She's just like this is me. This is my buddy. These are my thoughts and you can see them because I really love them so I love that like I really like that so it's not something we have in common, but it's something that I really view with admin admin. Right? I admire with aberration so yeah.

Interviewer: Umm and then then what? What makes her relatable to you then would you say?

Interviewee: Uhm, OK. I love how she loves herself. Like unconditionally yeah yeah yeah.

Interviewer: OK, that makes sense. And then with Doctor Kaniela. Where would you say, yeah?

Interviewee: Oh, that's so kind unit. I just like her like I just like her vibe and like how she's just a happy person. Well, she seems like a happy person. I don't know behind. Actually, let's talk this. I don't know how she goes through a day like if it if it gets hated that she starts shouting. But on social media, she looks like she's a happy person. Yeah yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: OK, I mean these all three of them sound like they're just like lovely people have you. Have you met any of them before?

Interviewee: Uh, not really, no heavens.

Interviewer: OK, that's OK.

Interviewee: And I probably. Won't like approach them when I see them. 'cause like you know how like. I would not. OK, I'm not gonna say celebrities but I'm sure they go through like. Like anxiety within the public space. So when you start approaching them, probably like I I wouldn't like, I wouldn't be upset if they freak out 'cause I Can you imagine how many people they see in a day and how many people get excited for the. And how many of those people they feel like negative energy swads? So yeah, I know like I probably wouldn't approach them. I probably wouldn't even get excited to see them. I get excited to see you though, 'cause I haven't seen you in awhile and I know you personally so. That's it. But with with guys on social media, I'll just I get excited to see them on my social media page, not on a public space, which is kind of weird. But yeah.

Interviewer: Well, it's I don't think it's weird. I think it's interesting, right? 'cause even how you described them before, like all of them seem like calm, nice people who would probably smile and greet you back and so it's interesting that even though they're they, at least from what we see digitally. Like you mentioned. That you know with. Like the doctor, she's even bubbly and happy like. I would imagine that should be positive.

Interviewee: Yeah, you don't know in in the public space if it's gonna be the same vibes.

Interviewer: To see you.

Interviewee: And also then if if when I see them in a public space and not the same vibes. I'm gonna be annoyed and deactivates. I mean sorry not yeah. I'll go ahead and stop following them because I'm gonna be like no, he's so and so it's not like that in real life. But if I, if you actually think about it, I can't really expect them to be 100% and. I mean, we talk I I receive them. You know what I mean? I don't know if I'm making sense I can't expect Doctor Connie to always be happy when I see it, even in a public space, because I don't know on that particular day what she's going through personally. So, if I were to see her and she doesn't look like she's. Happy I'll digitally just be like you know, that's that's fine. Fine, but I. Wouldn't approach her as well like I'd be like. She's human. We can't expect people who are always happy on social media to also be happy in a public space because they also human. They go through other things I wouldn't know on that particular day. What she's going through, and I think would be unfair on my on hold on on like for me to to to. To judge her on on my on my. Uhm, 'cause like on my public interaction? With her.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, I understand. Umm, I think if I know you mentioned earlier with this lady, she does makeup, contour, beauty, content and sometimes you know she'll talk about a product and you'll think to yourself. You know, maybe if you watch your videos or maybe if you try that product. Have you have you ever tried or bought anything that she's ever shared?

Interviewee: OK, I've bought. I think it. Was Revlon Lippies, if I'm not mistaken, I. Don't know if I'm quite. If yeah, she she tried she. I think she was still the thing for Revlon. I really liked those and also I liked how she used to. I try them on and mix them up and like you know how they tell you when like to be very clear while ago when there's a sale. And all of that I like that 'cause that. Saves me money. Uhm, what else did I buy that you tried, oh? I tried apples, you know, eyelashes, rice. I even put the glue from cakes I tried them on like I swear I failed with that thing. I don't know like when she puts it on and she makes it look easy. Then I put the glue on. I wait for the couple of minutes and. Then when I try. It on the. Cruise ilmu. I don't know how they do it. Then you guys just make things look easy like and then when I try it on it's just the like. You're it's rocket. It's literally rocket science, and I tried on 'cause the glue is everywhere. And like it. It's just like my my actual eyelashes start

to be sticky. Like literally like they they stick together. So not my normal eyelashes look weird and the ones that I want to put their the ones that I want to put on also look weird. Yeah, you guys make things look. Easy when they actually know it's like I don't know. So it's something. I remember I bought them and I. I watched a YouTube. Link back when she was putting them on. And she does it with so much ease and she's just like Oh yeah. And then they in. And then I try them on. And it's another story like it's just hard like it's just so hard. Uhm yeah, yeah, I think those are the two. Oh I wanted to get. I think I wanted to just recently I liked the the Facebook Nespresso page 'cause I think she was showcasing the Nespresso. So, and there's a. New there's a new. There's a new like an espresso machine that's. Out and it looks so nice. So I recently like that, but mind you like I said I'm I don't really drink coffee that much like you'll find me drinking hot chocolate and green tea. But coffee not so much so imagine. The question is, breasts are getting in espresso machine. And the capsules and I'm not even. A coffee pot. But like I recently like, I really like that so I don't know. Maybe at the same I might spoil. Myself with an espresso machine maybe? But I don't know why I'll be getting it because I'm. Not even a coffee person. But yeah, I think that's how powerful you guys are. They yeah, like, I mean they are like yeah yeah.

Interviewer: I think so with with me. Larry, I've got a few more questions there is with these, so the eyelashes. So you tried it with the glue and it didn't work out the same. Were you mad at McNally or did you just think to yourself you've just got to watch more videos and learn? Or was it a different feeling?

Interviewee: Oh no, I wasn't for me. It was just like you know. These guys make. These things look easy. I'm trying this and. It's just not working out as hey, there's also Kay yarms. Do you know Kay yarms noms think same nums? Yes, I don't.

Interviewer: Kay yarms yes.

Interviewee: Know why I left her out? OK, 'cause yeah, that's kind of sucks. I should. Have added it as well, but like. I tried it out. I wasn't angry with her, it was more like flip. Why does she make it so easy? And why is it? So hard on my side ? I mean. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: OK, so even when it didn't work out, it didn't affect how you perceive him.

Interviewee: Viewed her as a.

Interviewer: Study or viewed her.

Interviewee: Yeah, no it didn't, it didn't.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then my other question is so you know with me buddy you said she posts a lot of beauty and like makeup content would you? And obviously I guess you trust her enough to have bought stuff and tried it out. Would you trust me?

Interviewee: Hey hey.

Interviewer: Clearly if she started maybe tomorrow, so say she's still doing some beauty content but she. Also, now starts telling you about. But I don't know something different like your finances. Here's how to here's how to invest. Da da da. Da da, or maybe she starts talking to you about.

Interviewee: About my finances. No, I'm not going to trust her. I'm definitely not gonna trust me Mhlabi with my finances, 'cause this one time I was watching one over YouTube. Uhm, videos and then she was going around the luxury store and then she's looking at a bomber jacket. And then she checks the price tag. And she's like, oh, it's. That's it's not that expensive. And then she puts it away. And then when the camera zooms in, the tag is like 90 K. That's vomit check. It is 90 K and mind you, she's like it's not that expensive. So with her specifically, I'm not going to trust them with my finances. I mean clearly she's. Who did and she she like you know? For me, like I'm not gonna spend 90K on a bomber jacket unless I'm I'm millionaire. But right now I'm still like working my way up, but I'm not gonna trust her. She's the last person I would trust with my. Maybe someone who's through someone who's into finances. Someone who also has a financial background. Uh, what's that guys name? There's an Indian guy, he's but he's on on on on Twitter. There's an Indian guy who who usually talks fine. Uhm, I forgot his name. He had. A thing called banker eggs like a I don't. Know if it's a business. Why not with him? I think I trust him because he's he's got a financial background. There's also the financial Bunny. I

forgot her actual name. What's that? Same yes alright. Yeah, yes I would. I would trust them 'cause they have a financial background. But unless Mr. Lee had been all of a sudden like not all of a sudden I don't know. Maybe she studied finances and varsity, but if she starts talking about it's like I'm gonna need her to sort of like. I don't know. Like unless she studied it in Varsity, I'm looking. I'm gonna be very skeptical like I'm gonna be very, very skeptical. So yeah, I know, yeah.

Interviewer: That's interesting, I think. I mean so with McClary, right? It's like you said that jacket was 90 K for a jacket. OK.

Interviewee: 90 K and she's like, oh it's not that expensive and in my mind I'm just like I'm sorry 90 carefully check a bomber jacket, a bomber jacket that I can get from cotton on. So far, far far finance and she's just like, oh OK, I know. Obviously it has a brand and that brand gives puts it. It makes the like it it makes it worth that much. And obviously the material and whatever but.

Interviewer: But you also said you said that she seems to be loaded, right?

Interviewee: I know. Yeah, yeah yeah. OK, until recently I thought. So I'm gonna be honest if at some point points I just I I. This is just just from my opinion and so recently I thought it's this thing is a many laundry scheme like some people like. How are you buying like? For her for her just specifically, she's got LV. Bags she's got all these things, so I was just like you know, what? Like some some people need to be honest, but then. She recently she was in Casper Bryce Show and then she mentioned that her her grandma her grandmother actually owns KFC franchise in in in so she owns that. So then I'll let you know what 'cause I know. I know her father but her late. Father was a doctor and everything overseas and all of that. But the fact that the grandma, I mean you know grandma like my grandma, just so, uh, you know, fat cooks right wing like that's my grandma. So how grandma on the freaking KFC friend? Not one. But it seems like when she said it, it seems like it's more than one. So I was like OK, I get it. I guess why she'd say, oh, ninety kids not it's not that expensive I get I've I've got that and I felt bad because I kind of did like I had these pre like a pre judged her and said it so many this thing occurs in many laundries. Money laundering schemes so yeah.

Interviewer: So with with that information from this show with Casper. Do you do you believe now? That 'cause you said you thought the influencer thing was like a little bit shady money? Laundry scheme yeah. How have you made Michelis money and how she spends it makes sense? Are you saying the influencing thing is not a money laundering scheme anymore? That it's a real business? Or are you using this other information now that you know? About her family to be like. OK, it actually makes sense that she's like she's got so much money.

Interviewee: I, I think this this is as little as it might seem, but it it makes sense because I feel like if if if she grew up from OK, if if she grew up from a poor background that 90K would be a lot for bomber jackets, even though it's pretty. And even though she deserves to spoil her.

Interviewer: OK.

Interviewee: So like I'm saying, she doesn't deserve to spoil herself, and even if like she grew up from a poor background and now all of a sudden she has money. I just like. I feel like her where she grew up or how she grew up or her background would. It should be conscious about certain certain tags like. For me, like if I all of a sudden not all of a sudden but through hard work. I'm not saying she's not hard like she works hard, you can tell, but if I myself and all of a sudden I have money. And I walk into a luxury shop and the that jacket says 90K. I'm gonna be like, yeah, that's a lot. It's pretty maybe I'll buy it, but that's a lot. It won't be. Oh, it's not. It's not that it's not that expensive, no? So, so that piece of item it kind of helps align or like kinda know where she's coming from and understand why I should buy certain products easily and not be like not feel bad about no. I'm not saying she should feel bad. I mean you have to spoil yourself, you work hard. You can afford to, why not? But there's that I don't know. Like you know, OK, I'm gonna, I'm gonna I'm gonna use them 2X as an essay influences. Like overseas OK, I'm gonna take like Kim Kardashian, right? So like you can see her like like you you can see this influencer ship being how it worked and what not. But you could also see she also comes from from a wealthy family or family, but she could also, like. We've been watching keeping up with the Kardashians. From when it first show Kate, like from when we first saw it and you can see like when you can see when you look at the very first very first season and

the last season you can see how they've literally grown not just just themselves personally but financially like. The set up. You can see their first home when they showcased in keeping up with the Kardashians and the homes that they have now. Like you can see the timeline. I don't know if I'm making sense, but like you can see the very first season that house where they lived, how they lived, the stuff of the things that they that they wore, like how they dressed up in a fashion that, and what they are now you can see how they they, they they, they've used the whole brand like. The influencer ship to to to. To grow financially. So there's a timeline. It's not just some. Which really is in your in, in your, in your TV, and all of a sudden everything just like it's propped up. But you can see the growth like I don't know if I'm making sense, but you can see that they've been growing like for years and years, yeah?

Interviewer: Yeah, I get what you mean.

Interviewee: So, Oh my gosh I forgot the question now page.

Interviewer: Yeah no, but. I I get what you mean, so with with the Kardashians you've seen that progress. You can be like that's where they started and they've slowly become.

Interviewee: Yeah, like, I mean the stuff they. Used to yeah. Like the house, I don't know if you remember the house that they lived in.

Interviewer: I remember the first thing I even remember. What was her name Kylie when she had like missing teeth and was super young.

Interviewee: Yes, right? And the houses they live, not how like it's like watch that's progress.

Interviewer: Very different.

Interviewee: That's crazy and we've seen it like obviously we're not. I'm not saying that they showcase. The truthful things on their show or if their reality TV is like really truthful. But just just in terms of. Assets in terms of lifestyle, you kind of see the jump. You kind of see the progress, so yeah.

Interviewer: With Miss Ellie, is it because you haven't seen the progress on the jump or or?

Interviewee: No, but I think we've also like. I mean, if you the her first YouTube channel like when she was still putting on makeup in a room, you can't. You can't see like you can see there as well, like there's. Like obviously with oh you can. Also see that she comes from. A rich family but. Then you can. I think you can't see as well. So the progress.

Interviewer: Yeah, and with her.

Interviewee: Yeah, but that that labeled the 90K thing. Kinda like I for days. I thought about that I was like what did she mean that it's not that expensive. Like you know, but I mean. I I'm trying to think which branded wise I even forgot the brand.

Interviewer: Well, I mean, regardless of the brand, the price is still the.

Interviewee: Even with the.

Interviewer: Price right like?

Interviewee: The price is still the. Prize and it was here in South Africa. When we issue is maybe like taking taking a trip somewhere like in London or Paris or whatever, like it was literally here and I think it was in Johannesburg. If I'm not mistaken and she's like 90 Ki, 'cause I know if I had walked into that store, you know something like for me, I'm not gonna lie. When I see a product, the first thing I do is look at the price tag, then now not days. I check where it's made. Is it a South African product? Is it like you know? So I'm big on checking like where. Where is it made? Like who? Who am I funding? Basically I'm big on that, but like the very first thing I check is the price tag so I know where I am financially. If I'm going to take it or if I'm just making my heart feel so for nothing, yeah. So so yeah, for me, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, if so, if we if you had to guess right? So Mclilly clearly if 90K is not much for her I don't know what's in her bank account, but if you had to guess, would you say that? Mithali and this money that she spends on this lifestyle. She keeps up. Do you think that it's funded by this influencing stuff that it's because she's an influencer and she's booking these brand deals? That's how she has all this money Or do you think that there's a part of that money and how she has her money that's related to her? Family and where she comes from.

Interviewee: OK, I'm gonna be honest with her. There's always rumors which kind of sucks 'cause you can see like you can see like that girl works hard but like they always those rumors that she's funded by like sugar daddies. If I can say that what? What are they called, not places? You can tell I'm old who. Still uses Sugar Daddy. So they always those rumors on the Nets. I'm not gonna say they're truthful. 'cause sometimes people are jealous. People say the meanest things because they're jealous, but there's always those rumors, right? Yes, Hershey, and she hasn't really denied. Them, I mean she has. She has stated that she dates older guys 'cause she feels like she's being more mature and stuff like that then she once mentioned that somewhere I don't know if it was on Twitter but like so I'm like maybe parts of it. 'cause I pair looking from what I hear marketing in South Africa. That has loads of money at loads of loads of money. That's what I've heard on this on social media. I'm gonna take another lady, but she's not really influenced that she's she, she, I think she she's in marketing tricks. She's ahead of a marketing like. I don't know which. She's she's she's a healer like a spiritual healer, but she's also into. She's a she's in marketing, right? In fact, yesterday she was busy showing like photos of herself. She she grew up in a Township. She I don't know she's her name is Sisco right? She grew up in a Township and yesterday he showed it on Twitter showing pages where how she started like her first car was a Reynolds. And then how a 26 car was a BMW. The convert? I mean sorry. With the drop top I I don't know. Which series that is? I'm not good with cars and now currently I think at 32 if I'm not mistaken she's driving a Land Rover, you know? So she always constantly, especially with jab. Notice she comes at Michaelis defense. Joyce says marketing in South Africa has. A lot of money. And and and I kind of believe her 'cause I mean like when you see the pictures of where she comes from and when you see like the like how she?

Interviewer: The the fact.

Interviewee: That she has a house. The fact that she she drives a really amazing car and she and she's like a uh, a director. I think if I'm not mistaken. For marketing, I kind of believe her when she says marketing has a lot of money and it's an industry that people don't really look into. But it's it's actually apparently making a lot of money, and it kind of makes sense. I mean, if you look at influencers and the types

of lifestyles they they, they're living that they making many. Out of it. So if if I don't know, it's it's whether it's honest money, that's another story, but I think from from what I can tell, like people seem to be making money from it.

Interviewer: Yeah, and isn't flooding one of those people that you'd say seems to be making money out of it.

Interviewee: Yeah, I cannot connect. Yeah, I'd I'd say yeah. She's one of those people.

Interviewer: Umm OK, yeah, so the reason I ask is you know. Obviously I'm just trying to understand with. I mean, I yeah this jacket. I'm still touched by that. So I'm trying to understand if.

Interviewee: I was touched for days. I think I'm gonna try if I can. I don't know when I will even show you the other. I will send you a link of the of that of that. Some of that. Video on the. YouTube thing I was like what what does she mean? It's not expensive. It's not that. Oh, it's not that it's. It's not. Yeah, I can't get over that. To be honest I asked myself. Three times I asked three times when when I first saw that. I was like what does she mean? M Night to kill Nancy rant. Not 90 Ki was expecting her to say when you know when they zoomed in. I was expecting it. I was expecting to see like that 90 care for me I would. I would have wanted it to be a maybe 9000 even that I feel like would. Have been too. Much, but it is what it is. Or even 1990K wow. And then I asked. Myself that she realized that some people would actually build a home with that 90 team. You know, so yeah, in in South Africa, so yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I think what you've mentioned about like her upbringing and her grandma is it's the it's not. It's not that it's not though. It's not having the money, right? It's depending on how where she comes from. She can. She'll have a better understanding. Of what you can do with 90K, right? Am I understanding you correctly in that that's what you're saying? Or is that not that you're trying to say?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. I I think kinda yeah yeah. I mean I I I would want to own a LV bag. Don't get me wrong and have my initials on that on that bag. I want that but

at the same time like. Ah hey, these things are expensive and like why? Are they so expensive?

Interviewer: Umm, do you?

Interviewee: Can I just is it? Is it albeg this expensive in Paris?

Interviewer: That's a good question.

Interviewee: You know, I just I. I just want to know 'cause I'm gonna be upset if I'm buying an LV bag for 27,000 and when I get to Paris it's worth like 2000

Interviewer: Like it's it.

Interviewee: For them and LV Bag is 2000 price tag or something 2000 price range. Well, maybe 2000 is a good list like maybe. It's 10K. So what I'm buying here for 27,000 is actually just 10K. If I go to Paris, yeah?

Interviewer: Would you say that you and mclilly have a different respect for money?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely. OK, but I'm gonna be. I'm gonna say a big bat. Maybe that respect will be different if I was also in her position. So I don't know if I'm throwing myself. In the in the in the in the. In the bin for that. I mean, if I also like had like came from a wealthy family and I I and I had I had I had the funds maybe 90 K wouldn't eat so much. No so yeah, yeah. So because because we from different backgrounds yes we we have a different take on money, but if I also grab from her background, maybe, just maybe it wouldn't matter like yeah. Wouldn't be so like it wouldn't be that deep, yeah?

Interviewer: And if so, if we keep the backgrounds right, if you keep exactly your background and keeping study background, if we said next week you and we clearly are going to have the same bank balance, do you think that? You would be in the store as well. Same store with that jacket saying this is not too much. If next week you have the. Same background and seismic level.

Interviewee: I know I will find a cheaper find a cheaper jackets.

Interviewer: OK.

Interviewee: Not as cheap as like out. Maybe in the same store, but I'll find something that I think is worth that price because when I look at that jacket to me it didn't look like. Something that was. Worth 90K like it for me maybe 9000? Maybe to be honest, maybe 5000 at most. But 90 Ki would have to wear that jacket every single. Day and of every minute. Even when it's hot, I will wear that jacket because I mean I paid 90,000 for it's, you know. I would go to sleep. Wearing that jacket, I feel like, yeah.

Interviewer: Is so with Miss Ellie, you know her lifestyle and everything. Is she the same as K arms or are they 'cause I think they both do beauty? If I'm not mistaken.

Interviewee: Yes, I don't think she's the same.

Interviewer: How is Kay yarms different?

Interviewee: I can't. I think from what I hear, but this is just from what I hear Kay yarms. It comes from a, uh, normal background. I don't know if normal makes sense, but she she she doesn't come from a rich background, but she's also great. Very well. I think she recently bought some Mercedes car. She was try driving a Reynolds before Renault Clio And she's moved to Cape Town. So I think she's doing well with with what she's doing, 'cause she she doesn't like. They both don't work. Or I think. You see the thing with Kay yarmsI. Think she does work? Uhm, what's the lady name? There's a there's a. Uh, cibi. Do you know Sybil Sybil mabena right?

Interviewer: What does CBD do?

Interviewee: She she, I think she has a marketing company called the Collective. So I think that's where Mihlali. I don't know if she still works there, but every now and then like she goes, she says I'm at the office and then it's, that's that's that office. So I don't know if she works there or if they she she's one of their clients or whatever, but she seemed like she it seemed like she worked there. So so with Kay. Like I heard, she's not she. She doesn't have a, uh, a nine to five job, but she does obviously work with with the influences stuff. So I mean they're doing well. I mean, if you look at the apartments, they stay in like for me, yeah, I just I feel like. They're doing well.

Interviewer: Yeah, that.

Interviewee: Makes an ordinary person like myself, yeah?

Interviewer: Yeah, and is there. Is there an influencer that is South African that? From the outside, I think for the rest of us, right, like they've got the numbers, they're doing, the brand deals, but for you personally, you just don't trust them for whatever reason. Is there someone that exists like that?

Interviewee: OK, I'm gonna let me just see then just see UM. I'm just I'm thinking of the people that I see on a daily basis on on on Twitter.

Interviewer: Oh, even if it's a brand is there has there been a brand campaign that you've seen where you've just gone? This just seems so paid not. I don't believe any of it.

Interviewee: OK, uhm. This is the is the is but then it's hey and I can't judge them 'cause I've never bought here like there's is it win win something. When something something they do, hey so that's the celebrities you see. They've got not as his influences. You may also have nice heads and then people get their hair. And it's just a. Mess so people have been posting on on on Twitter and stuff and saying how it's win something. Uh, what's the name of that that hate brand? But they're big. They it's a big brand which is. For me, I feel like it's annoying. 'cause I even there was a time when I got. You know what I'm gonna get myself away from them 'cause it looks so nice. Then I started seeing reviews online from people saying you're cute, I've got this hair and it looked it looked like someone has has. Been wearing it for two years. It doesn't look like imagine you're expecting something new. Brand new you pay. The money and then when? You get it, it's just a. Mess so then I was just like you know what these guys. Are just they? They they that they suck? What's the name of that? And I think even Metallica has showed that brand. Uhm boy T has showed that brand so many others and every teaser showed. I don't know what burning as well like or Jessica or she has also warned that. So it's just like what what? So they give celebrities, nice hair and then as ordinary people when you buy their. Products and they they said. Like they give you bad hay. Not when you paid money, that's unfair.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's basically false advertising, yeah.

Interviewee: So people have been complaining about them. It's win something I'll I'll send the the name over WhatsApp when I remember exactly, but it's win something hey?

Interviewer: Wow so if so. This has happened before right? And everyone talked about it on Twitter. If an influencer who hasn't worked with them before, so say Doctor Carnillo, if she today or tomorrow works with them. Will you would you change how you feel about her at all or?

Interviewee: I would be like you know. Ah, you. They were. They giving you good hair you you not even you have the voice to actually say you have. You have the voice to tell them on social media that I'm only working with you, if you start giving normal customers the type of quality I mean the hair quality that you give me. So I will be. I'll be very skeptical. I'm not gonna lie like. 'cause you have like they have the ability to make them do right.

Interviewer: Yeah, so would you be skeptical?

Interviewee: What do business in good faith?

Interviewer: Would you be skeptical of the influencer 'cause we're already skeptical of the brand? If they've done this before?

Interviewee: Yeah, I'll be skeptical of the influenza. I feel like you have the, you know some. Some influencers do say so in this hair products. Please like Apple I got here from you guys and it was amazing but you've been giving my followers bad hair and that's not good for me my brand so please stay. So if they don't, if they don't voice that's then I'll feel like they're not doing something and this business is not doing business in good faith. So why they still? Why are they still showcasing it? Why are they still vouching for its?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense. I think I mean just to be conscious of your time as well. I think this has been a super insightful chat like wait, let me. I'm going to stop the recording here.

Interviewee: Yeah, I'm gonna join it actually yeah.

Transcript: Interview 8

Interviewer: OK, there we go. So, the first question would be: what is your personal definition of an influencer?

Interviewee: Oh, this is so hectic. OK, I guess someone that is able to... someone that has... I'm struggling to use proper adjectives but for the latter and for lack of a better term. I'm going to use someone that has persuasive power in the sense that... like. I don't know. Someone that can... do you know what I'm struggling with here, I'm struggling with being objective because you know I don't like things that other people do or have, so this is really tough for me to answer, but I would assume that an influencer is someone that has some sort of like persuasive power and influence. For example, like let's say you hate Crocs and you wanted to go for like another shoe and then you start seeing some like Beyoncé... and I feel as though being an influencer, it's way more than like... there's so many aspects that contribute to it because, someone like Beyoncé, right when you look at like the person that they are and all of these other great and massive aspects and whatnot. They can wear something and they can make it look like it's gold because of the following that they have, the social status, who they are, all of these things. Like if you look at the brand Ivy Park half of those things are things that people would never, ever wear but because it's something that is being endorsed, or that is being brought to the limelight by Beyoncé, everyone wants to wear it, not even because you like it sometimes but just because Beyoncé is wearing it. So that's why I use the word persuasive power, because you can persuade someone to go another direction without that person having an actual reason like you are able to bargain without even speaking because of your status or because of whomever that you are to everyone else that is being influenced by you. So, I don't know if that answers the question, but I'm really stuck on the persuasive power because you might as Tawela, have your own style, but you see someone else and you see something looking good and so you are silently persuaded into going into something else or into another style or trying something else, not necessarily because you like it or because you think it's going to look good on you but because other people are doing it and they're doing it because there's this one source or sole person or primary entity that is. So yeah, I think an influencer is someone that has the ability to

rub off onto people, whether it be good or bad. But they've got this thing about them that draws attention. That kind of is an indoctrination to a lot of people. you know it's quite deep, but I hope this answers your question.

Interviewer: It does, yeah. And then if we said that is an influencer in general, including someone like Beyoncé. How would you define a digital influencer? So, someone who is either a blogger, vlogger someone who is not a traditional celebrity. I would imagine the influence part would be the same, right they have persuasive power. How else would you describe someone that does that digitally?

Interviewee: I mean if I can look at like ... so I'll look at something that I love to do or would love to do more if I had the money to - that's traveling. If you look at a digital influencer, someone that is a Blogger and that travels. I'd say on a normal day I wouldn't spend my days sitting like looking at all of the different travel places that one can go to, but if I'm following this blogger or I'm following someone, I'm going to get influenced to go to certain places based on seeing certain things that I like. So I love the ocean and if this Blogger is giving me ocean, I am definitely going to want to do all things that have to do with ocean. And if I'm seeing things that... that's how I was really into Bali, apart from Bali being really cheap things like beautiful water and like fruits and eating in the water like things like that - that for me, it's seeing someone or how I would say I would possibly get influenced is seeing someone. Who is really invested in personal sort of attributes of mine. That's the only way I would possibly get influenced. Because I think influencing is really broad in the sense that there are other people who are like headless chickens who go with the flow like wherever this person is going like I like it because it looks cool and it's got an audience. But then there are other people who get influenced by people who are similar to them. I understand that influencers show us what they want us to see. So, by that I would say that if this Blogger is showing me what I want to see or what I like i.e. I'm a traveler and I like the ocean and I like island hopping, if they show me your islands, and if they show me your Caribbean's and all of these things, I'm going to get taken by that. Travel influencers or bloggers or whatever usually they cover everything, so expenses, what you need when you come into the country, what are the pros and cons, things like that,

and so I'm lazy and I don't want to do all of that admin and so it's great to find that you have this person that would be influencing me in the sense that they've got all of this written out. They have experienced it so I get to learn from their mistakes or learn from the things that didn't go so great to make my trip or whatever easier. So that's how I'd get influenced in that capacity, in the sense that you know I am following people that I feel like align with who I am. Granted you don't know these people personally, and that's why I keep going back to they show me whatever. So whatever false reality that they're creating- it is something that supposedly aligns with me, and so I'll go with that and I'll take that because I don't know them personally, you know, so I don't know if that Also answered your question.

Interviewer: It does. I am interested in who you are following, that that ticks those boxes for you.

Interviewee: I am not going to lie; I'm not going to say I am following people- like to be honest with you I'm not really invested like on your Instagram's or your twitters to the capacity that i can even remember the handles that I'm following. What will usually happen is that like , for example, when I was going to Bali, friends that knew that I was leaving, they were sending me people that had been there, and so I followed them, but because I don't spend like copious amounts of time on Instagram, I can't really say to you like who the people are when I see them I'll continue and ill stalk for like 30 minutes or so, to see what they've been up to, where they've been traveling, whatever the case may be, but I really don't have names. I'd honestly be lying to you if I said I can name someone. I think there was one person, I think her name might be Nuzhah but she went to Bali like during the time or just before I went to Bali. Yeah sorry no.

Interviewer: OK, so you don't, follow particular people, but it's more the subject matter?

Interviewee: Yes. So then also on Twitter like you will find where people share these packages and stuff like that. I recently retweeted like a Santorini package, which was like 12.7 for seven days- the account is @Africaandbeyond. They have

accommodation and holiday packages available and the email address is www.letsgetlost.co.za. So when I saw this, I retweeted it so that I could follow them because obviously I'll save them if its retweeted its then saved onto my timeline. But they had a seven night stay in Santorini and it was going for 12,500 per person and flights included from South Africa, well, it starts from that amount. So it's things like that that I'll find on my timeline and then ill save them and I'll stalk and find out a bit more information, but I can't say like I'm invested into social media to such an extent where, I know who the who's are. Oh, I know someone that is-... but I just like her, I don't know if I'd say she influences me to do certain things, but also, she has long and never-ending money, so I can't really say that, I can afford the places and the things that this person does- but *Leddi_g (Naledi Radebe)*. She's a travel and lifestyle digital creator. I look at the places that she goes to, I can't really say I'm influenced because she does a lot of Europe, and I mean that's very much out of my budget, quite a lot, but yeah, I like I think she's done a bit of Ghana and some Tanzania. I guess that was actually even by default, not because she wanted to, but because South Africa is a red flag country too the western and a first world country in terms of vaccines and stuff like that. So she had to travel to Amber flagged countries and stay there for like 10 days, before going to Europe /to the UK (United Kingdom). But she doesn't really do the whole, letting us know, where she booked, where she went, she is more of the aesthetics. The only thing that she gave like a good long run down on, was Europe/ was the UK. She did a whole lengthy post about how to get to England coming from South Africa and the things that she had to go through and stuff like that but other than that, I just I follow her because I like her and yeah that's about it.

Interviewer: and the things that she shared about Europe coming from South Africa. What was that related to?

Interviewee: To COVID.

Interviewer: Oh OK, so this was like the what you mentioned now about the amber and us being a red zone.

Interviewee: Yes. So, she kind of made ... I am looking at it now, she "Leddi's travel guide from SA to the UK" and she basically just explains what all of this is and says that like if you want to travel to Europe in the UK, specifically, the first thing that matters is that you have a valid visa and passport and then she speaks about how if you do not already have one do not bother because, the countries embassies and things that are closed for like tourist reasons and things like that. So that will automatically cut me off because I have never had a visa before. So. That is why I am saying some of the places that she goes to I cannot relate, because money-wise and all of these things. And then she speaks about how expensive all of this has been because she says you are going to have to book not one, but two sets of flights to organize accommodation in at least two countries and so she says you'll lose at least 10 to 12 days in transit before you even arrive to your final destination and then you have to quarantine for another 5 to 10 days because your country is a red zone. So already that's 20 days : 10 days traveling 10 days in quarantine and so that's 20 days lost of money and accommodation and then having to actually start your holiday 20 days later. So yeah.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier around how although you don't follow particular influences, you also mentioned something about how it's not false realities, but it's not all believable. If I'm understanding you correctly.

Interviewee: yup.

Interviewer: How do you decide who to believe? If you're not familiar and not following the particular people, it's just based on the Bali trip. For example, how did you go about deciding what you save, what you believe and trust?

Interviewee: What's viable and what's not? . I mean, so some of the people like the person I just mentioned now, I know she comes from a really wealthy background because her family is wealthy so she has money. I also just know from, I mean I have a friend that's also working in digital and we speak about this and just in general, like honestly speaking it goes from the smallest aspect of; when you post a picture right, whether you post it in real time or not. If I post a picture of me having my makeup done

and whatever some people think... okay, I only post in real time, well I've only ever posted in real time and obviously if I'm not posting in real time, it's me reminiscing, so it's just very clear when the time usually is. I think that it's... I wouldn't say really obvious, but if this is their life and this is the job that they're doing. If they're doing digital creating as an influencer, you have to portray a certain lifestyle in order for people to actually want to follow you. It's very rare that you're just going to have like a thing of... there's a certain niche that actually gets away with that. For example, natural hair, I think because with that, you're still doing big campaigns and you're a huge influence, but you're not trying to sell this unrealistic dream of every day- You're not trying to portray a certain lifestyle apart from this is my natural hair. Does that make sense? You are only pushing one agenda, and that's natural hair, but as opposed to if you are a content creator for lifestyle, you are wanting to make sure that everything is an aesthetic every single time everything is like. You know you're posting you're posting for the people you're posting for the likes you're posting for... You know what I mean? . It's kind of sometimes just an instant thing, and I'm also not too invested again, but again I'm not as invested so I don't really care either way. But I know that, I don't look at Naledi and think okay, with Naledi, I kind of know her family so I'm not going to use her as an example but with, let's say, Mihlali. Yes, I don't know *Mihlali* from a bar soap, but I've seen her and so I'm aware that, she's worked hard and now she's got the money or whatever the case may be. I know that whatever personality that I see there is what she gives me, so I can easily say, like, oh, I don't really follow her YouTube videos because she's boring and her personality is bland, but that's what she gives you. That's what we're getting from her and that's what she chooses to give gives to us, and so that's what she's okay with giving, but I wouldn't necessarily say that it would be fair for me to discredit her as a person, or to say like this is who she is to her people. Also I'm very much aware that it's tiring for them as an actual job and it's very tedious to be giving 100% of your authentic self to people that don't know you again from a bar of soap, so it's work. So I just think of it in terms of like if I had to apply it to myself, knowing that there's bits and pieces of myself that I need to reserve for my people and for me and for my life and to draw the line and create boundaries and stuff like that. So that's kind of how I gauge it.

Interviewer: Yeah, so for Mhlali, who you say you don't really engage with her, she's not a favorite. If you were doing research for your next trip and Mhlali 's post came about whether someone sent it to you or you just found it. Would you give it a fair shot, like would you consider it the same way you consider all the other pieces of content that you come across?

Interviewee: Yes, like I've got nothing against her like I will still watch but I don't openly or like willingly go to her channels and stuff like that, but if I'm on YouTube and then it continues to play, I'll look at the title or I do sometimes go to her channel and check like okay, what is the title of this and whether or not I'm willing to watch half of it or like how bored I am. So with Mhlali, again, I know Mhlali has never ending money, so also the places that she's going to and the type of things she is doing- I'm very much a student and so I that I consider that a lot. I know my limit, I don't go around eating again, I'm very realistic thinker and if I do get influenced like obviously it doesn't even need to be a breathing thing, but Sportscene or Adidas can release a shoe and I'm influenced because I like it and I like sneakers and then I see it on any person, like it really could be any Tom, Dick and Harry , it doesn't have to be an influencer or whatever, it just validates, like 'Oh my gosh, the shoe actually it's dope. And I want to go buy it or 'Oh no, it's a bit higher than what I expected, I actually don't like it' or it doesn't look good on my foot. So it's not a thing of like a direct...Let me put it this way, I have a lot of agency in the decisions that I make with regards to what I'm influenced by. I don't actively engage in the digital aspect of things to really care that much. But I get influenced for small things like for example I was watching DJ Zintle's show and I really liked this word; I find it really funny and I think she's pretty dope, but she says 'woah I'm suffering' and I say that a lot, like I find myself saying it more because I like it. I would say Linguistically, like it's weird because I'm a linguist, but yeah, I don't know. It's a no from me. I don't know, maybe I'm boring, but it's just not something that interests me or that tickles my fancy to such an extent that if Mhlali went, I'd look at it. if I want to go to the place, I'll go, but I won't go just because Mhlali went and she says it's great.

Interviewer: Yeah, you mentioned DJ Zintle, I mean, she's a traditional celebrity for the most part. Do you like her? What are your thoughts about her in general?

Interviewee: I enjoy her and it's weird, because I don't know her personally, but I also get the sense that, she's more relatable to people and she's human. And if she's faking that, then she's doing a really good job at it but I like her because she's human and she is honest about making mistakes and I don't see her as a celebrity like I think I draw a lot to celebrities that I don't feel like their celebrities. I mean, granted that there's no one I think I would ever jump on and scream on because I'm just a chilled person like that- like I love Beyoncé I really, really do - don't get me wrong, but it's just I respect peoples space and as I'm growing up I also respect my space so I wouldn't want a stranger jumping on me. With Zintle, I just really think she's a dope person like I really like that she's honest about the fact that she's an anxious person, she's honest about like her journey. She's just real, like she stresses out loud, she gets upset out loud, there's nothing that I would say I'm definitely influenced by, but I just like her funny character that she is choosing to show. Whether it's really or not, that's not my business.

Interviewer: Do you think it's important for her to show that as opposed to just focusing on what her craft is and what like what we know her for?

Interviewee: I think it's important because at the end of the day we support her craft. So she's doing that for us- she did the show for us to consume or else she wouldn't get the money like it all goes back. So I'm appreciative of people that know where to place where they are going to put us, call people your fans, just where to place humans. Because at the end of the day you put that show out for people to consume and you are not... You are just still human about it. She's just shows what she chooses to show us and I choose to take it home with me because I just think that it's more authentic and it's more real. Whereas another reality show that I watched like being Bonang. Bonang is great and everything but I think I would say that those were two different shows and for there it was mostly just showing us the things that you are accomplishing, as opposed to showing us how human you are. That's really it, and I'd say that that's the difference in that like this person, when they did decide to do the

show, they decided to do the show in the most humane way possible. And actually she doesn't post her mother, she doesn't post her family. She doesn't even post "happy birthday" to these people. These are people that you would actually in all honesty, when she started dating AKA and people were going on about how like she needs to get her own mom and stop hogging Aka's mom after they can't broke up and people were going on about how Zintle's mom is late and no, Zintle's mom is very much alive, she just keeps her life private and that's all it is. So for me, the fact that you actually finally let us in because she's got all of these four other siblings that we had no idea about. She never even posed them, the only people that you see that's her baby or her friends that we are familiar with- that are in the limelight. But the rest of the other people in her life- she's a normal person to them and she keeps that way and this is the first time that she's not... she's forthcoming in that she's here for just her work, and that's what she used to be but the more I think she's sharing, and the more she's expecting us to support, because if we were not buying things from *Era*, the business wouldn't run, she wouldn't make income. So I appreciate someone that walks around knowing that, two can play this game, it's a two way stream. It takes 2 to tango. You produce the things that you're producing and you depend on people/ allow people to consume it, as opposed to just feeling like the things that you're producing, you are doing us a favor and of which you're not. I mean, there's certain celebrities and influencers that walk around with that kind of energy. And so I just like the fact that she really understands and really knows that when she is creating something, she'll say I want to create something where the people that support me can have a bit of variety or have certain things to choose from. Because you know that you have a cliental as much as you refer to people, as your fans, they're also your clientele because they consume your things. Whereas for other people it's. More of an assumed thing that we're just always going to be there because we idolize you, and because you're so great. And yeah.

Interviewer: I like that. I mean, you used words like authentic and real in describing Zintle. If we go back to our conversation around digital influences, I know you

mentioned. With Mhlali and others in a similar space that they portray a certain lifestyle. Would you describe that lifestyle?

Interviewee: Like I'm not going to say portray because I don't know me Mhlali personally, but what I see you know what I mean. It's a lifestyle with money, that's what everyone is trying to go for, a soft landing, a soft living for us to see and she doesn't hide that because she went on one of Lasizwe's shows and she said she bought a handbag for 40,000. So you know it's not something that she's hiding. She's not hiding that, she's got money, she's not hiding that she's landing big campaigns. I mean, you can see it like she was on Forbes and under 30. So everyone is pretty aware that she's got money.

Interviewer: And so she's talking about it freely on different and different platforms.

Interviewee: No she doesn't. I mean, she doesn't talk about having money, but if the question is asked they were playing a game and they asked what is the most expensive item you've ever bought? And then, like a person, will pose and wear whatever they're wearing, and you will assume that it's Louis Vuitton or it's Versace. It does not come cheap, but she doesn't openly talk about the fact that she's got money or whatever it is.

Interviewer: Would you use similar words to describe her , if she's freely answering the question if it's asked about her highest/ how much she paid for something, would you describe her with the same words as DJ Zintle, as authentic and real? Or would you use other words to describe that?

Interviewee: I don't really know because I'm really not too invested in her so it's hard for me to really engage and think about it in that manner because I don't care for her, I do follow her, but I wouldn't find myself tweeting about her or saying- like you know what I mean. And also she doesn't do anything that I really personally care for or value. So that's why it's hard for me because I would be really being biased. It wouldn't be me being objective because I could easily say because I don't like or care for the thing

sthat she is doing I could say no, I don't think it's authentic. Whereas it's not fair because someone else who is into the kind/ type of things that she's doing would say and call it authentic. And so I can use the words authentic and real because I mean. I'm not invested in uDj Zintle, but I watch her show now and I just always really liked her as a person and her music and how laid back she is. Do you know what I mean? And that's why I could commit to those terms, but whereas with Mhlali, I don't really engage with the content. I retreat here and there. I like pictures, If I'm on but I don't go on social media for anyone and if I'm on Instagram today and then I'm going to stalk and go onto Mhlali and look for what she posts. I don't do that for anyone, I definitely don't do that for Mhlali i don't do that for Zintle. I'm purely on Instagram to engage in whatever I'm engaging, whether I'm there to post stupid status and then I bounce or just on there to scroll for a bit or I'm there to just look at my explore and stalk people that I don't even know that are really not even relevant. So, I can't answer that question, I'm struggling to answer that question in that capacity. Where, it's easy to call someone fake and all of these things because they don't align with things that I do or the typical things of beauty that I might call. Or you know what I mean. So yeah.

Interviewer: If we go back to DJ Zintle, on this show you mentioned that she opens up a bit more about I guess her life and personal life and that she's a businesswoman with era. If she was on the show or somewhere else, if she started sharing insights that weren't related to travels, because you've mentioned that perhaps they were related to finance, like how she saves or how she invests, for example. Would you be open to hearing about that from Zintle?

Interviewee: I would because again I get influenced about things that are important to me, not things that are randomly in the air. So as someone that is. Completing a degree and is a young adult and is trying to start and pave a certain lifestyle that I find important to myself. Yes, I would listen to her because she's a successful entrepreneur with multiple businesses, like I just found out that she's got an upholstery family business and other things that we don't know about. But the things that we are aware about our Era, Blvd and as well as Hair Majesty. So I would be open because she's a person that is elevated financially and so if she's speaking about how she saves and

what she does in terms of saving. I would be open to listen, I am open to listening because that's something I find important. If I didn't find it important, I would continue with my life and that's why I'm saying that with influencing especially with me particularly. I will give something a shot if I care for it. Like if it's something that's important to me personally at this given time and it's the same with like series and things like that or a song I can't listen to things that. I'm just different, like I can't wear things that people are wearing, I can't listen to things that people are listening or find relevant currently, because I get bored very easily. So I need to go into something because I want to go into it. Not because of people, because those people don't live in my body. I'm not them. So that's how I look at things. So, to answer your question, yes I would be interested because I personally find it important not. Because DJ Zintle is doing it.

Interviewer: OK, and would you be equally as interested if Mhlali was the one doing it?

Interviewee: Any person, and that's what I'm saying. I'm not attached to people, I'm not attaching to social media, I'm not attached to celebrities. If it's important to me, even if it wasn't Mhlali even if it was random. okay they have to be credible. So like if I went to a Ted talk with someone that I don't know but there was a Ted talk about financial or whatever and a friend invited me. I would go and I would go listen. Whether or not this person has 15 followers or whatever, I would go listen. Granted that they are credible in whichever capacity they must have been important and credible enough to show up for a TedTalk and be made to speak. So, I take it away from it being you having whatever influence that you have on social media or from being a celebrity. If I find that it's important to me I will do it, not because it's being done by other people like I very much deviate from that yes.

Interviewer: OK, that makes sense, and so if it's a topic you care about, which is if we stick with the example of finance you mentioned that provided the person is credible, you'd be happy to listen to whoever it is. How would you gauge the credibility of

someone? Like how would you decide if they are or if they're not, what kind of things would you consider or think about?

Interviewee: I mean, I guess I have to consider their background, I guess who they are and what they do. Like I don't want to sound like I'm being a narcissistic or anything but for example, if someone that is not educated but they're a millionaire, and they did it the right way and they started a business I don't want to put it solely on the fact that this person is degreed and I think that they're credible. But if they have something that shows, or that speaks for them, do you know what I'm saying? Because at the same time I'm not going to say that I'm not going to listen to someone that's uneducated because school is not for everyone like there are other people that hustle and they just have a matric and they happen to be influencers and they are able to pay their rent and then are making gang money. I don't really know how I would be able to gauge their credibility. I really don't know. I'm not also easily trusting, so if it's someone that I'm able to kind of, I don't want to use word stalk but like just do a background check on or someone that I've known or seen or has been referred, I'm not really sure. I'm struggling to come up from the top of my head what I deem as credible, without sounding very shallow because the easiest answer would be if they are well known or if they are popular, you know what I mean. But all of those things contribute, but they're not the core. They aren't the valuable things that I would say that okay, I'm going to follow this person because they've got 2,000,000 followers. For example the candidates of Miss SA, some of the girls there before they start their Miss SA journey, they've got about 1000 followers, which is an average normal person, and so I would go listen to someone that is talking about mental health or talking about you know, not basing it on the fact that they have a huge following or they have a social standing or whatever it is in society. So I don't know if I answered that correctly. In a given situation, I'm not sure how I would make someone viable or credible for that capacity, but yeah.

Interviewer: And just to clarify, you mentioned you know you'd maybe do a background check. What would that look like?

Interviewee: In terms of research, I might ask around like if someone is going to invite me, I want to know a bit about them, like what am I going to hear? What am I going to go speak about? like who is this person? I mean, because there definitely are things in the times that we live in now, people scam people, you apply for a job and you'll get a job interview but it's just really weird men that are trying to, you know. So that would kind of be important to know and go somewhere that or be referred to. I guess the numbers thing matters, not because you trust someone, but because this person has 30,000 followers or this person has 30,000 people vouching for them. Given a person that's got 10 people vouching for them, and you don't know them from a bar of soap. In that kind of capacity, but yeah.

Interviewer: OK, so you mentioned asking around and would that be in real life within your circle or would that be within a digital network?

Interviewee: It could be both like this one time there was this Tea this metabolism Tea that people were taking by those brand named Zial. And yes, a lot of people using it to lose weight and stuff like that, then I thought about and I was like as much as there are so many review stories or success stories. I don't know these people, so then I had to ask myself do i want to do this to my body that's the other thing. So I'm saying it really just depends on the product, what a type of person or whatever it is in the situation and what I feel about it for myself and that's why I'm saying like a lot of the time it's a me thing and a me-thing deciding. I will never get persuaded into something just because there is 'gees' around it. And thats when you decide, no, this doesn't sound too good. I dont know if you know about it, but therewas this diet that people used to call the Beyoncé diet. I think after giving birth to Blue Ivy or something like that, she went on this insane diet. In the morning, you have a slice of dry toast and black coffee, and then you have two boiled eggs for lunch and then you have whatever it is, but you were starving yourself basically for 13 days and people were doing that and they were loosing copious amounts of weight, but were so weak and things like that and now it's like do I want to for the sake of losing weight. Do I really want to put myself through all of that? So it's really about me. It will always be about me like you always boil down to me and what I feel.

Interviewer: Yeah, could you walk me through your thinking or what it is that you consider, So if we think of something that you want to purchase and your answer is going to be yes, that you're purchasing this thing. What would have been the things that you've thought about and considered before getting to this decision?

Interviewee: Whether I like it or not, that's it. Like for me, I think about me, and if it makes me happy whether I like it or not, yes, or no, that's it and I'll buy it. I don't go through any other sort of process like if I like a sneaker and it's a certain color and I like it. I will wear it even if it means that I can only wear it with one outfit and I have to force it with another outfit. It's literally just do I like it, doesn't make me happy. And then I'll go for it. I don't really go through like... if it's something that I've saved up for something/ If it's expensive, I will save up for it, and then I'll buy it because I like it and it makes me happy and I want it. I don't really go through how long it is going to last. And there are obviously certain things that I do like but I'm just like, at the end of the day, I don't really think it's worth it like I'm also not going to spend 1000 on a top that is going to break after two washes. They're obviously those nitty gritty things, but it's literally do I like it? Does that make me happy? Yes, I'm going to buy it, full stop.

Interviewer: Thanks yeah, I mean, I've gotten through all of the questions and I've found this a super fascinating chat, thanks so much for making the time. I'm going to stop the recording here.