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Using social proof Techniques and attributes of Social Media Influencers to Promote Fresh Fish Products

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Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

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30 ECTS final thesis to the completion of an M.Sc. degree in Marketing at the Faculty of Business at Reykjavík University

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Abstract

With the rising trend of e-commerce, traditional stores have started marketing and selling their products online. Businesses need to find ways to assure potential buyers of product quality when marketed and sold online. This has proved problematic when promoting products that consumers prefer to smell, touch and feel before buying. Fresh fish is a delicate product that fits this category. Social proof techniques have a significant effect on consumers purchasing decisions. Individuals look to others for cues on how to feel, think and behave. Businesses utilize social proof attributes on social media to promote products and gain consumers trust. An important platform for social media promotions is influencer marketing. Influencers have online profiles with numerous followers, where they shape audience attitudes. Influencer marketing has not been extensively studied and little is known if using influencers can benefit the fish industry. This thesis proposes using social media influencers to market fish online by utilizing social proof attributes to convey product quality. In this thesis influencers attributes are applied when advertising fresh fish to determine their impact on purchasing decisions. A choice-based conjoint (CBC) analysis is used to understand how companies can use influencers attributes and social proof to promote fresh fish. CBC analysis was used because it measures probable consumer preferences for individual product attributes. The interventions in the CBC analysis are the number of likes and followers, influencer type and how consumers respond to these attributes when combined with extrinsic fish attributes. The results show that the extrinsic attributes of price, procurement method and place of origin are of utmost importance but having high coherence between promotions and influencers is an effective way of marketing fresh fish on social media. With the relevant influencer and message, it is possible to surpass barriers like high prices and attract consumers to healthier food options.

Keywords: Social proof, Conjoint analysis, Influencers, Social media, healthy food, Online marketing, Social media marketing, Instagram, Fresh fish
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1 Introduction

Growing online retailing presents opportunities and challenges for companies and consumers alike. The main advantage of e-commerce compared to brick and mortar stores is that consumers can do their shopping without having to leave their homes entailing less effort and time spent (Jimenez, Valades, & Salinas, 2019). Increasing usage of online retailing has also altered communications between companies and customers. Interactions are no longer exclusively face to face but also take place through online consumer-generated content, such as comments, reviews, web pages, blogs and social media (Jimenez, Valades, & Salinas, 2019). Consumers who want to know more about products and services are likely to search for online reviews and comments instead of relying solely on the information provided by companies (Cheung, & Thadani, 2012). This online information is called social proof. According to Cialdini (2007, pp. 88-89) social proof is “one means we use to determine what is correct is to find out what other people think is correct.” In other words, people copy each other’s actions when in doubt on how to behave.

In online retailing, consumers do not get the chance to touch or feel the products before buying. This can lead to hesitant consumers abandoning their virtual shopping carts before making a purchase. Research has shown that social proof attributes influence the behavior of individuals (Vashista, Okeke, Anderson, & Dell, 2018). This often happens online through social media platforms (Cheung, Xiao, and Liu 2014). Having strong, positive social proof information about the product or service can positively influence consumers decisions when buying online. One way of providing social proof to consumers is using social media influencers (SMIs). Influencers are most prominent on Instagram but also common on Youtube, Twitter and other social media platforms (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Influencers are people who have online profiles with numerous followers where they shape audience attitudes with positive feedback through videos, photos and blogs (Ghazali et al., 2006). For companies, utilizing an influencer, is a swift and easy way to reach large target groups through trusted opinion shapers (Veirman et al., 2017). However, there are some products that consumers are more skeptical about buying online. These are mostly fresh groceries and especially fresh seafood products (Campo & Breugelmans, 2015).

Consumers seek for product-related information to help with their purchase decisions (Pieniak, Vanhonacker, & Verbeke, 2013). Sigurdsson et al. (2018) have discovered which
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factors play a big role in the consumer decision-making process when buying fish. These are consumer product rating, procurement method, country of origin and price. This thesis will test whether social proof factors such as number of followers, numbers of like on post of influencers have any effect on decision making when choosing different fish products. Influencer marketing uses social media to drive brand messages through influencers rather than directly from the business. Influencer marketing is a relatively new topic and has not yet been looked closely at and is therefore important in a managerial perspective when choosing influencers to promote their products. Specifically, on the importance of social proof when promoting fresh fish online. Fish is beneficial to people's health and wellbeing (Lund, 2013). Thus, promoting healthy eating and encouraging people to buy and consume fish is valuable. This thesis will study the background of both healthy food marketing, the concept of social proof and influencer marketing. This thesis is relevant to today's society, where people seem to prefer unhealthy options (Salmon et al., 2015).

This study will identify the importance of social proof techniques and attributes of influencers when used to promote fresh fish products online to influence consumers purchasing decision? This study will answer this question by using conjoint analysis method to measure consumer preferences to both fish attributes and influencer attributes. The answer to this question can be used to understand how social proof techniques and attributes of influencers can be used in online retailing to influence consumer choice and promote healthy options such as fresh fish.

2 Literature review

2.1 Healthy eating

Today's consumers seek out fresh, natural and minimally processed foods, desiring food high in fiber and protein (Nielsen & Food Marketing Institute, 2018). Even so, there are persuasive food advertisements on every channel promoting unhealthy food choices (Salmon et al., 2015). Despite healthy alternatives and healthy intentions, people seem to go for the unhealthy options.

When marketing unhealthy food, it is very popular to utilize social proof heuristic (Salmon et al., 2015). These heuristics are simple tools that guide consumers in their decision-making process. An example is the common practice of labeling products as “best-selling product”. This will implement the idea that the product is preferred by others, making consumers follow other opinions and decisions (Salmon et al, 2015). Strategies like this work really well
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and are repeatedly used when promoting unhealthy food. These strategies are rarely seen when advertising healthy food products, that are commonly promoted in ways that are conscious and focusing on healthy aspects of the product (Salmon et al, 2015). Thus, relying on deliberate decision making and self-control opposite unhealthy food marketing (Salmon et al, 2015). Even so, consumers are willing to pay more for products that are beneficial to their health. Thus, there are many opportunities for businesses in the health sector (Nielsen & Food Marketing Institute, 2018).

Seafood is very beneficial to people's health. It is a low-fat option with a good source of protein and high consumption of seafood is associated with reduced risk of developing high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, stroke, some cancers, rheumatoid arthritis and other health issues (Lund, 2013). Fish is also rich in omega-3 (n-3) fatty acids and vitamins (Lund, 2013). Generally, it is recommended that people consume at least two portions of fish a week (Lund, 2013). Increased consumption of fish worldwide would mean improved health (Lund, 2013). According to global research, 25% of the respondents planned to buy more fish and seafood (Nielsen & Food Marketing Institute, 2018).

Factors contributing to online sales of fresh fish have not been well researched but according to results from Campo and Breugelmans (2015) people are more likely to buy fresh fish in traditional stores than using online platforms. In their study, only 1% of participants shopped for fish online (Campo & Breugelmans, 2015). Here is a potential gap in the market that is interesting to explore further, and more knowledge is needed on how to reassure consumers of product quality when selling such delicate products as fresh fish over the internet.

2.2 E-commerce

E-commerce transactions are growing at an unprecedented rate (Gefen, 2000). In the United Kingdom, online grocery shopping is the fastest growing purchasing channel (Statista, 2019a). It is estimated that in five to seven years up to 70% of consumers will use online channels to purchase groceries online (Nielsen & Food Marketing Institute, 2018). The future of grocery shopping resides on online platforms.

With the increase of user-friendly technology accessible worldwide the internet is transforming the way consumers shop (Jimenez, Valdes & Salinas, 2019; Suwunniponth, 2014). Technology is becoming an important part of many consumers daily lives, and purchasing
transactions through any digital media are steadily increasing (Jimenez, Valdes & Salinas, 2019). Due to these advancements in E-commerce shopping, many brick and mortar stores have started to provide their products or services online as well as in stores (Jimenez, Valdes & Salinas, 2019). Online shopping provides a faster and more convenient setting for consumers to make purchases (Suwunniponth, 2014).

Online grocery shopping services entail less effort for consumers by saving them considerable time and nuisance, making visits to a traditional retail store and the process of finding and picking products redundant. Online grocery shopping has many advantages over traditional shopping such as flexibility, enhanced outreach, lower cost, faster transactions, wider product range and greater convenience (Srinivasan, Anderson & Ponnavolu, 2002). Of course, consumers still need to search for products online, but the convenience of online shopping in terms of time and effort saving far outweigh the inconveniences. When compared to brick and mortar shopping, online shopping offers many conveniences by making shopping possible from anywhere, at any time (Yan Huang, 2006).

When shopping groceries online consumers do not have the chance to physically examine the products before purchase. Thus, online shopping can bring forth some uncertainty for consumers when compared to brick and mortar shopping (Ghazali, Mutum & Mahbob, 2006; Jimenez, Valdes & Salinas, 2019). To eliminate doubts, consumers research products and services before buying. Consumers spend more time researching higher-priced products such as vacations and household furniture, but spend less time researching minor purchases such as clothing and food (GlobalWebIndex, 2019). To increase trust with consumers, many e-commerce stores include ways for consumers to convey their experiences with consumer ratings, reviews, recommendations and referrals (Sau-Ling, 2010).

Mobiles are the most popular devices for buying online globally, with 57% of online purchases made within the last few months (GlobalWebIndex, 2019). Therefore, it is important for companies to approach consumers through relevant channels. Users spend around 25% of their time on social media when on their mobiles because of these social media networks are now the second most prominent channel to research products after search engines (Tiago & Veríssimo). 37% of internet users use social media to follow their favorite brands and 25% of users follow brands they are considering buying products or services from (GlobalWebIndex,
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2019). Social media is now one of the most important tools to use in online retailing (Jimenez, Valdes & Salinas, 2019).

2.4 Social media marketing

A typical social networking site consists of personalized user profiles who have the ability to construct an interconnected network of social groups. On these profiles’ users can share their everyday life, interests, preferences etc. (Trusov, Buckling, & Pauwels, 2009). Social networking sites have already attracted millions of daily users, and an exceeding number of these users have integrated these sites into their daily life practices (Ellison, & Boyd, 2007). With social media, it has never been as simple to access and share all kinds of information. Both businesses and individuals can share what they want when they want. Because of this, social media is stacked up with information and content. Even so users can actively seek out information that they are most interested in (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Social media is therefore an exceedingly consumer-centric space. Users can choose what they want to see and filter out what they believe to be irrelevant information.

Social media offers businesses plenty of opportunities and plays a significant role in connecting businesses with their customers. Businesses can utilize social media and connect to consumers on a more personal level by communicating with them and build tighter and more personal relationships (Arman, 2014). Having strong relationships with consumers gives them a sense of value and control, granting businesses a better competitive advantage (Young, & Aitken, 2007). Businesses can use social media to listen to their consumers, talk to them, improve products and services in line with consumer preferences by providing them with a platform to contact them directly (Kaplan, Andreas, Haenlein, 2010). However, these platforms do not only allow businesses to reach out to consumers and vice versa but also for consumers to interact directly with other consumers (Kaplan, Andreas, Haenlein, 2010). For this reason, today's consumers have more power than ever before. They can share their opinions about brands with a worldwide audience. These opinions or reviews if negative, can prove devastating, but if positive, they are priceless (Cheung, & Thadani, 2012). These positive or negative statements made by potential, actual or former customers about a product, brand or business via the internet are termed electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Cheung, & Thadani, 2012). This concept will be further explained in later chapters.
Traditionally marketing information was developed by businesses and went through one-way marketing channels to consumers, for example, mailings or telemarketing (Alarcón-del-Amo, Rialp-Criado, & Rialp-Criado, 2018). Social media marketing is changing how marketing information is transmitted to consumers. Now marketing information is broadcasted through personal social networks, blogs, online communities etc. The information goes from being controlled marketed ads to consumer-generated information such as customer experiences, product reviews, recommendations, ratings and remarks (Alarcón-del-Amo, Rialp-Criado, & Rialp-Criado, 2018). For businesses, this consumer-generated information is precious because it plays an increasingly important role in the consumer decision-making process (Alarcón-del-Amo, Rialp-Criado, & Rialp-Criado, 2018). The social media channels have a more direct and faster impact than other marketing channels because it provides a fast, low-cost exchange of information in an efficient manner (Alarcón-del-Amo, Rialp-Criado, & Rialp-Criado, 2018).

2.5 Electronic word of mouth

Word of mouth (e. WOM) is the passing of information from person to person by oral communication (word of mouth, n.d). The emergence of web 2.0 and the growing popularity of social media has transferred traditional word of mouth on to online platforms (Ayeh, 2015; Cheung, & Thadani, 2012). This online transfer of traditional word of mouth is termed electronic word of mouth (e.WOM). eWOM has extended conventional types of communications (Elmira & Oxana, 2018). eWOM is more powerful than traditional WOM as it is both more efficient and convenient (Trusov, Buckling and Pauwels, 2009). eWOM interactions can reach greater numbers of people than traditional WOM in a much shorter time because due to the availability of the internet, it is not restricted by time, space and relationships (Yoo, Sanders & Moon, 2013). Marketing strategies involving eWOM are very appealing because they help consumers overcome resistance at a significantly lower cost and with fast delivery (Trusov, Buckling and Pauwels, 2009).

In a world where the market is increasingly becoming saturated with information, it gets progressively harder for consumers to compare all the alternatives (Trusov, Buckling and Pauwels, 2009). As a result, consumers actively seek out what other people think about the product or service online. With the help of the internet, consumers are able to search for user-generated information related to products and services on various sites such as customer chats,
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review sites, discussion boards and etc. (Trusov, Buckling and Pauwels, 2009). Customers not only get information from family, friends and acquaintances but also from people who are unknown to them, people who have previously had some experience with the service or product that the customers are thinking of buying. This online information gathering is very important for the companies because a major factor influencing buying intentions online is trust (Gefen, 2000). Positive eWOM can help establish trust which, will have a good influence on online shopping behavior (Gefen, 2000; Suwunniponth, 2014).

Consumers will look for and pay more attention to information from other consumers rather than information from the sellers themselves (Cheung, & Thadani, 2012). The message from other customers who have already used the product proves to be more meaningful and appealing to potential customers (Yoo, Sanders & Moon, 2013). Findings from a research on consumer-generated information on products by Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) found the most important motivation for reading online reviews were: diminution of risk, lowering search time, understanding different methods on how to consume a product, reduction of purchase regret, compensation, searching for new products and increasing social status. Most e-commerce sites do encourage their customers to produce more eWOM because the information from previous customers provides potential customers with a sense of trust (Yoo, Sanders & Moon, 2013).

Even though eWOM provides consumers with the confidence to buy certain products, it will also defer them from buying others. Consumers place more weight on negative information than positive when evaluation products or services (Park & Lee, 2009; Yoo, Sanders & Moon, 2013). Negative information is more attention-grabbing and receives greater inspection than positive information. Consequently, negative information has more effect on purchase intentions (Park & Lee, 2009). A study by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) on reviews by customers on the websites Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com revealed that positive reviews lead to increase in relative sales, and negative reviews had a greater impact on consumers rather than positive reviews. The businesses do not control the information spread throughout the internet, but they have the ability to watch and try to shape the discussion. eWOM has certain opportunities for marketers. They can track conversations about their brand, respond to negative publicity but also take advantage of positive discussions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). People who are experts on special products or services are presumed to be opinion leaders who have quite
amount of influence on other people purchasing decision. These people voluntary act as brand advocated due to previous positive experiences with particular brands, products or services. Because of the trust that consumers put into these opinion leaders’ businesses have utilized paid eWOM through opinion leaders, a process known as influencer marketing (Evans, Phua, Lim & Jun 2017).

### 2.6 Influencer marketing

When scrolling through Facebook, users regularly see photos of friends and family attending various events. They might also see posts from celebrities boasting about their new Nike shoes. Both posts are examples of influencer marketing on social media sites. The only difference is that the former is free and the second one is paid for.

Influencer marketing is a very popular form of marketing established on social media. It is based on the concept that people are more likely to buy a product or a service recommended by an influencer (Statista, 2019b). The focus of influencer marketing is to find people who can assert influence over potential buyers or target market and orient marketing activities around these influencers. Influencers can be friends or family, but today value-added influencers are popular such as celebrities or industry experts (Statista, 2019b). A company's reputation is a proxy for quality that cannot be reliably signaled through the internet. When using influencers, companies can utilize their reputation to influence buying behavior (Melnik & Alm, 2002). Using influencer has resulted in increased advertising effectiveness, brand recognition, brand recall, purchase intentions and purchase behavior (Spry, Pappu and Cornwell, 2011).

Results from a 2017 survey regarding the role of influencers in new marketing strategies in business revealed that 58% of businesses believed they would integrate influencer marketing in all marketing activities within the following three years (Statista, 2019b). This does not come as a surprise for the return on investment (e. ROI) when using influencer marketing is considerably high or around 12 dollars return for every dollar spent in 2017 (Statista, 2019b). For these reasons, 39% of marketers in the U.S states that they expect to increase the share of the 2018 budget devoted to influencer marketing.

The benefits of utilizing influencer marketing include: Improvement of brand awareness, reaching new target audiences, increase of sales conversions, increase of online traffic and the development of a loyal fan base (Statista, 2019b).
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Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through videos, photos, blogs, tweets and other kinds of media (Ghazali et al., 2006). Influencers can reach a large target group in a short period of time, and companies forge alliances with them in order to promote their brands or products. (Veirman et al., 2017). This new influencer community wields significant power over the perception of brands and companies (Booth, & Matic, 2011). The challenge for companies lies in identifying and selecting influencers, who will have a strong impact on their consumers.

Social media influencers entirely rely on followers. That is people who choose to subscribe to their social media sites to receive updates. Today the number of followers a social media account has reflects its popularity. The higher number of followers the broader reach of messages to audiences and should therefore be an indicator of power (Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers with very a large following are often considered opinion leaders. However, this popularity should not be confused with influential power. Even with a large following base, it does not mean that the followers will actively engage such as like, comment or share posted content. Thus, there is uncertainty whether a “popular” person on social media is also considered an opinion leader (Veirman et al., 2017).

2.6.1 Micro influencers

Established celebrities can use their popularity and status to become online influencers. Cristina Schlecht (2003) described celebrities as “well-known personalities who enjoy public recognition by a large share of a certain group of people”. Businesses commonly hire celebrities to endorse their brand or products. Brands or products have added value when using celebrity endorsers through the process of meaning transfer. According to the model of meaning transfer, the meaning or associations developed around a particular celebrity will be transferred to the brand or product being endorsed (Elmira & Oxana, 2018). Despite their status, research has shown that popular celebrities do not possess the same influential power as they did before the rise of social media (Elmira & Oxana, 2018).

Social media is one of the main components of modern-day influencer marketing (Statista, 2019b) and it has created a new type of celebrities known as micro-celebrities or micro-influencers (Elmira & Oxana, 2018). To become famous, individuals no longer need to possess distinct talents but can use their looks and skills to gain wide followership on social media. (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Social media offers fame to regular users by giving them the platform
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to assert strong identities online and thus making fame or celebrity status more attainable (Khamis et al., 2016). Today ordinary people are gaining large audiences on social media and are capable of building a sizeable social network of people following them (Fietkiewicz et al., 2018; Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). They are micro-influencers and trusted opinion shapers in one or several niches (Veirman et al., 2017).

Micro-influencers carefully construct personas with textual, visual or video through social media platforms (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). They systematically post content on social media outlets and engage with their audiences. They belong to many different fields, for instance: beauty, cooking, healthy eating, lifestyle and fashion (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Most micro-influencers are amateurs in their field. They are not master chefs, personal trainers or makeup artists (Riboni 2017). Most influencers who are employed to promote makeup are not specialists in any way and more often self-taught. Their amateur status, however, is the key to their success (Riboni 2017). Their motives do not seem to be economically driven to the consumer and thus gives them a more trustworthy status versus the usual marketing efforts of most companies (Riboni 2017). The fact that these influencers do not seem to be involved in marketing efforts or having a celebrity status portrays the image of an “ordinary person” (Riboni 2017). This helps influencers to highlight similarity and create a feeling of closeness with followers, unlike distant celebrities or the companies themselves (Riboni 2017). Users prefer these micro-influencers to be open and honest. The most successful micro-influencers are consistent in communication, friendly, engaging and approachable towards their audience (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Many characteristics that contribute to these influencers’ success according to the source credibility theory these characteristics are: expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002). These characteristics can lead to favorable attitudes towards the influencer and enhance their credibility and positively impact both opinions change and product evaluations (Mansour, & Diab, 2016; Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002). Source credibility is an essential antecedent to attitude towards advertisements and their effectiveness.

Micro-influencers are paid to advertise products or services by posting pictures, videos and blog posts (Fietkiewicz et al., 2018). The influencers cultivate attention and craft an authentic personal brand which can then be used by companies and advertisers to reach potential customers (Fietkiewicz et al., 2018). Businesses spend large amounts of money in hope their
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message will have a positive influence on the targeted consumer’s behavior and attitude towards the product or service (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Micro-influencers provide insight into their private lives through personal accessible and intimate narratives giving their branding a sense of realness (Khamis, Susie, 2017). Companies and advertisers work with influencers whose personality resonates with the tone and feel of their brand to reach out to consumers (Fietkiewicz et al., 2018). Due to their representation and content, micro-influencers have higher authenticity than example, wealthy celebrity endorsers (Fietkiewicz et al., 2018). Micro-influencers often engage in conversations with their followers, such as answering their questions and requests, making them more approachable and credible than “real” celebrities (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018).

2.6.2 Instagram influencers

‘Instafamous’ is a term describing an individual who has become a micro-celebrity because of their profile on the Instagram social platform (Elmira & Oxana, 2018). Micro celebrities are mostly evident on Instagram, but also exist on YouTube, Twitter, and other social platforms (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Instagram is a photo and video sharing platform that relies on visual information in association with written text (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). It was launched in 2010 and has attracted more than 1 billion monthly active users (Instagram, 2019). Instagram enables users to take pictures and edit them with a selection of photo enhancing filters. Instagram also allows for video sharing, but image posts are dominant accounting for 84 percent of all posts (Statista, 2019c). Instagram is one of the most popular mobile social apps worldwide, and the fastest growing social media platform (Statista, 2019c). It has a worldwide audience (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Because of Instagram’s rapid growth, popularity and worldwide audience reach, there is a growing interest amongst marketers to use Instagram as a marketing tool (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018).

Nowadays, photographs are a natural way of instant communication between people of all ages. These images are the medium of choice for many because they so easily communicate emotions and feelings (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Instagram users upload and share content and communicate with other users by commenting and “liking” other users’ posts. When content is posted on Instagram, users can identify the images or videos by using a hashtag (#). It is possible to use hashtags to sort out relevant content and bring together all content with the same tag (Chang, 2011). Users scroll through Instagram posts and view them quickly with limited effort. Only after viewing a photo will the respondents decide whether they are interested in reading the
message that follows the image (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Therefore, it is important to have images that instantly grab the reader's attention.

2.7 Ethical issues
Advertising as defined by Kotler (1997, p281) is “any paid form of nonpersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor.” With the rise of social media marketing, the line between paid and unpaid advertisement is growing thin.

Businesses have developed ways to reach unsuspecting consumers with disguised or stealth marketing (Campbell, Mohr & Verlegh, 2013). This way of communicating with consumers does not appear to be traditional advertising, and in return, consumers are more accepting of these messages (Campbell, Mohr & Verlegh, 2013).

eWOM content, such as online product reviews or product ratings, is perceived to be honest and unbiased consumer opinions (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Nonetheless, businesses are using the illusion of unbiased user-generated content for their benefit by paying for it (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). This paid user generated-content could, for example, be an influencer recommending a product to his followers only because he or she is compensated for doing so. Often it is hard for consumers to perceive this form of disguised advertising messages as sponsored because the source of the message is unclear, they look more like honest opinions than advertisements (Nebenzhal & Jaffe, 1998). This form of hidden persuasion is not recognized as a paid cooperation by the consumer. Disguising sponsorship gives the illusion of brand or product popularity rather than a commercial message (Nebenzhal & Jaffe, 1998).

Since many businesses are benefiting from disguised sponsored content, the Federal Trade Commission (FTD) in the U.S formed rules that mandate endorsers to disclose sponsorship information in proper ways (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). According to the FTD, if influencer endorse products they buy on their own and do not get any rewards, there is no need for disclosure. When influencers endorse products and instead get free products, discounts, or any compensation, then a disclosure is appropriate (Federal Trade Commission, n.d). The disclosure should be clear, noticeable, easy to read and understand (Federal Trade Commission, n.d). A widespread disclosure is adding a #ad on the image or video. Even after adding a clear and conspicuous disclosure there are other regulations for influencers to follow. Influencers
should not talk about experiences with a product without trying it or are dishonest about unfavorable experiences (Federal Trade Commission, n.d).

By disclosing content as sponsored advertisements, endorser’s will acknowledge that their posts are paid for. Despite the endorser’s opinion, their posts may not be as honest or sincere as they claim as they are provided with direct monetary compensation or indirect compensation for their work (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). A viable reason for not disclosing sponsorships is that they are expected to affect persuasion negatively. Research has shown that attitude towards sponsorship in TV and radio content is more negative when disclosed compared to not disclosed (Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

2.8 Social influence

2.8.1 Heuristics
Consumers making purchasing decisions rely on many approaches when evaluating the available options. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (e. ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), attitude change occurs along two routes of influence, the central route, and peripheral route. These routes differ in the amount of information processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In the central route, decisions are formed and changed after careful consideration of relevant information (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985). In the peripheral route, on the other hand, decisions are formed and changed without active thinking (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). This model can be used to describe how users view reviews by an influencer on social media. Users using the central route when presented with product reviews think critically about arguments and relevance before forming a decision about the product (Sher & Lee, 2009). When users using the peripheral route and are faced with many different options, consumers utilize heuristics. Heuristics are cognitive shortcuts that enable consumers to make rapid interpretations in situations overflowing with information with limited effort (McCollough, Denmark., & Harker, 2014). One type of heuristics is the use of social proof. Social proof builds upon the idea that an individual’s behavior is greatly influenced by those around him (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975).
2.8.2 Social proof principles

Social proof states that individuals will look to others for cues on how to feel, think, and behave (Cialdini, & Goldstein, 2000). In marketing, having social proof visible validates popularity and success of products (Cialdini, & Goldstein, 2000). For example, having favorable eWOM information such as reviews, ratings and recommendations reflects positively on sales (Myers., & Sar, 2011). Consumers brand attitudes, beliefs, and judgments are therefore affected by the opinion of other consumers (Myers., & Sar, 2011). This type of social influence is also known as the bandwagon effect or simply the act of going along with or agreeing with a visible majority (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975: Myers, & Sar, 2011).

According to Cheung et al. (2014), there are two types of social proof information, action based, and opinion based social information. Action based information refers to following other actions or so-called herd behavior. An excellent example of this is the number of followers, views and downloads visible to the consumer (Cheung et al., (2014). Opinion based information consists of opinions, evaluations and experiences provided by consumers about products or services, presented as eWOM (Cheung et al., (2014). A relevant example of opinion based social proof information in marketing efforts are influencers. Businesses pay popular endorsers to post favorable information about their brands or a particular product in an attempt to persuade consumers by sending out positive social opinion information in hopes of cutting down the decision-making process.

The cue utilization theory claims that advertising cues can be classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic (Espejel, Fandos & Falián, 2007). These cues can then be applied by consumers to judge the quality of the products. Intrinsic cues are related to direct and physical attributes of the product, while extrinsic cues are related to indirect signals (Espejel, Fandos & Falián, 2007). With increased e-commerce, the physical attributes of a product are less accessible. Therefore, extrinsic cues are becoming very important. These extrinsic cues play a significant role in the consumer’s decision making when shopping online. Among popular extrinsic cues are product ratings, influencers posts and online reviews (Espejel, Fandos & Falián, 2007). These extrinsic cues are one kind of social proof information meant to induce a hesitant customer into buying a particular product. Some product characteristics, such as price, ingredients and availability can easily be described on the web. Subjective information, such as flavor and feel require touch or even consumption before their qualities are known (Ward & Lee, 2000).
2.9 Fresh fish online

Selling fish through e-commerce channels faces several challenges. Such transactions do not allow customers to examine the products beforehand physically and therefore, a high degree of uncertainty exists, and customers need assurance of quality before they buy. In particular, perishable (fresh and frozen) items present a challenge to brands in e-commerce when it comes to conveying product quality. This is mostly due to the organoleptic (touch, smell, sight) experiences in selecting products such as seafood produce and other products that do not transfer well, online (Ghazali, Mutum, & Mahbob, 2006).

Research has shown that many consumers are not capable of using intrinsic cues that are sight and smell when evaluating the quality of fresh fish, even when shopping in brick and mortar stores (Brunsø et al., 2009). Consumers tend to look for extrinsic cues to help them pick out fresh fish. These extrinsic cues are, for example, label information on the packaging, such as wild versus farmed, frozen vs. fresh (Brunsø et al., 2009). Several studies also indicate that frozen fish products are perceived to be of worse quality. Consumers felt that buying frozen fish entailed more risk and associated it with bad smell, mushy texture, bones, poor size selection, and inferior taste (Brunsø et al., 2009). Therefore, the relevant information that portrays quality needs to be clearly visible to consumers.

There are many product-related attributes of seafood that could increase seafood sales and consumption. There are extensive studies that provide an overview of these product related attributes. For example, price, procurement method, country of origin, packaging and storage conditions (Gempesaw, Bacon, Manalo & Wessellset, 1995; Jaffry, Pickering, Ghulam, Whitmarsh, & Wattageet, 2004; Claret et al., 2012; Davidson, Pan, Hu, & Poerwantoet, 2012; Loose, Peschel & Grebitus, 2013; Sogn- Grundvåg, Larsen, and Young, 2013). Sigurdsson et al. (2018) examined consumer preferences for product related attributes of seafood to provide a comprehensive overview of consumer purchase behavior. By using conjoint analysis methods, the results portrayed four prominent factors influencing fish sales and consumption. These factors are consumers product rating, procurement method, country of origin and price. The two highest rated attributes are product ratings and procurement method. The product ratings are consumer-based, making them more trustworthy than information labeled by the companies themselves (Cheung, & Thadani, 2012). Product ratings are social proof heuristics that assist consumers in their decision-making process by providing opinion-based information of
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

popularity. With these results from Sigurdsson et al. (2018) it is evident that social proof heuristics such as product ratings have a significant impact on consumer choices. Procurement method also has a high impact on consumers, portraying that consumers prefer wild caught fish over farmed products. Therefore, it is essential to know what attributes the consumer values as most important when shopping for fish. The social proof heuristics become even more critical when consumers do not have a chance to examine the products physically.

The application of social proof principles has been studied extensively when used to promote products online. Research has shown that social proof heuristics is associated with healthy choice options (Salmon et al., 2015). Even so, with increased interest in both e-commerce and healthy eating, more research is needed to establish these principles when promoting delicate products such as seafood. Research has established that social proof principles do affect consumer decision making, but there are no studies that explore the application of influencer marketing when promoting fresh fish online. In this thesis, a choice based conjoint study will be conducted in order to understand how and if social proof techniques of influencers are applicable and effective to promote fresh fish online. The study will explore consumer choice when faced with four different promotions from influencers.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Knowing what consumers want and how to respond to their needs has always been important when trying to gain a competitive advantage (Allenby & Ginter, 1995). In a fast-paced marketing environment controlled by the internet, consumers have never had as many options and alternatives. Companies must determine which products and services consumers are more likely to buy than others (Allenby & Ginter, 1995).

Choice-based conjoint analysis was adopted to measure probable consumer preferences for individual product attributes (Feit, Beltramo & Feinberg, 2010). The results can then be used as a guide for companies when deciding on future products or services (Feit, Beltramo & Feinberg, 2010).

In this study, a choice-based conjoint analysis will be used to study attributes relating to influencers promoting fresh fish online. Influencers promoting products online have many ways to do so. They can use videos, images, and text. Even their characteristics and personality is vital
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to their influential power (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Conjoint analysis will help to identify what attributes are more favored than others. Not all attributes are equally preferred, and some are more important than others. By using conjoint analysis, it is possible to gather information about the impact of various attributes for all participants (Sigurdsson, Menon, & Fagerstrøm, 2017). The attributes are also arranged in hierarchy from most preferred to less preferred, describing to what degree each of the attributes is considered important by the respondent sample of participants (Sigurdsson, Menon, & Fagerstrøm, 2017; Green & Srinivasan, 1978). Sigurdsson et al. (2018) have already established what attributes are favored when shopping for fish. These attributes will be presented in this study, along with attributes applicable to influencers. The attributes selected to be tested for influencers are number of followers, amount of likes on posts and types of influencer blogs. Then three additional studies will be performed for further confirmation of the effect of each influencer attribute on its own.

The results will demonstrate how companies using influencer marketing can select relevant influencers when promoting their own seafood products.

3.2 Choice-based conjoint analysis: Attributes and levels

When generating a choice-based conjoint analysis, defining proper conjoint attributes and levels is fundamental (Orme, 2002). Attributes are characteristics of products (e.g., size); each attribute is made up of levels. For each characteristic, there must be at least two levels (e.g., small, medium, large). The basis of conjoint analysis is that consumers assign product characteristics, some value or utility (Orme, 2002). All products are composed of different attributes and levels, and the overall utility of any product can be found by adding up the value of products different levels (Orme, 2002). When participating in a conjoint analysis, consumers are presented with different products, each comprised of different levels of attributes (Orme, 2002). The respondents then choose what product they seem best fitting each time. Using the results, it is possible to estimate the utility of each attribute level and with that predict product preferences (Orme, 2002).
4 Experiment 1: Conjoint analysis

4.1 Survey methodology: Attributes

This survey contains six attributes; three of them were identified in previous literature (Sigurdsson et al. 2018). These three factors are the price of fish, procurement method, and place of origin. All factors were rated of the highest importance in previous literature. In addition, the survey contains three factors relating to the social proof of influencers. Because influencer marketing has not yet been notably studied, the choice of attributes is not only based upon previous experimentations but also short in-person interviews. These interviews were conducted with seven people at an Icelandic workplace, 3 females and 4 males with age ranging from 31-41 (table 1)

Table 1: Attributes for influencers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Numbers of times mentioned</th>
<th>Participant numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Followers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,6,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer type</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,3,4,5,6,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,4,5,6,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following back</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the interviews were in line with previous literature review indicating what people pay attention to while viewing influencers online. The most prominent attribute is the number of followers an influencer has. The second most common attribute mentioned was the type of influencer, such as a beauty blogger or a fitness blogger. The top three attributes were chosen to be represented in the conjoint study.
Price of fish

The high price of fish is often considered to be a barrier when buying fish (Verbeke & Vackier, 2005). The reason being, the higher the price, the higher the risk of missed purchases (Juhl & Poulsen, 2000). Price can also be a signal for product quality (Sigurdsson, Foxhall, & Saevarsson, 2010). Meaning people are willing to pay more because they expect the quality to be better (Claret et al., 2014). In this study, the attribute of price will include three levels to explore how consumers react to different price levels of fish. The price was arranged as low, medium, and high price and is based on the real price of fish in American stores.

Procurement method

The demand for seafood produce is increasing, but at the same time, the fish stocks of the world are limited (Cahu, Salen & Lorgeril, 2004). Accordingly, there has been substantial growth in fish farming as an alternative to wild caught fish (Cahu, Salen & Lorgeril, 2004). Consumers nevertheless prefer wild caught fish and perceive farmed fish as a lower quality product (Claret et al., 2014). In their study, Claret et al. (2014) questioned Spanish participants on their view on wild versus farmed fish. The participants considered wild fish to have a healthier diet, containing fewer antibiotics, and to be more fresh, healthy and natural. When questioned about farmed fish, participants perceived it to be less affected by marine pollution, heavy metals and parasites. Overall, fish selection seems to depend mainly on price, and perceived quality, and these perceptions can influence preferences and buying intentions (Claret et al., 2014). In this study, the attribute of procurement method will include the two levels of wild and farmed.

Place of origin

In addition to the procurement method consumers also want to know where the fish originates from (Pieniak et al., 2013). Product origin is an attribute that will affect the meaning consumers place on a product (Luomala 2007). Attributes such as flavor and freshness can only be determined by consumption. When purchasing food, consumers need other signals to help them decide which products to buy. This effect is called the place of origin effect. Consumers use country of origin as an extrinsic cue for determining product quality (Loureiro & Umberger, 2007; Schnettler, Ruiz, Sepúlveda, Sepúlveda, 2008). Many studies have also reported that shorter transportation of the product drives the preference of locally produced fish products.
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

(Sigurdsson et al. 2018). This study will contain the attribute of origin when promoting fish through influencers.

**Followers**

Influencers rely on their social media following for their messages to be heard. Businesses use influencer’s reach and persuasion to reach consumers on a different and more relatable level (Riboni 2017; Fietkiewicz et al., 2018). An influencer’s reach is based on his or her following. The number of followers an influencer has given an idea his or her potential reach and popularity. Social media users quickly review influencers and use social proof heuristic, such as the number of followers, to infer about the popularity and trust of the influencer (Veirman et al., 2017). Many brands have a criterion of a minimum of 10,000 followers for an influencer to be considered a brand advocate (Veirman et al., 2017). Most influencers today are so-called micro influencers, they have amassed around 3,000-1,000,000 followers (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). A higher number of followers does not always translate to better results. There are studies that reveal that the number of followers can have diverse effects on consumers (Elmira, & Oxana, 2018). Perception of popularity does not always translate into actual influence. Products endorsed by popular influencers could cause the product to lose its uniqueness as the market share grows (Veirman et al., 2017). Nonetheless, only a few studies have been conducted that examine the volume of followers and its effect on perception and influence. Hence this study will test the attribute of the number of followers on three different levels: low, medium, and high to explore what consumers prefer.

**Likes**

On social media, users share content that reflects their interests (Sen et al., 2018). Other users can engage and indicate their interest by “liking” the content with a simple press of a button. Anyone can hit the like button, and such activity does not require a pre-existing relationship between the users. Adding likes to online content has become an admissible part of interactions on social media (Jin et al., 2015).

There is limited research on the social proof aspects of the number of likes. However, the number of likes on posts on social media is often considered a proxy for popularity (Jin et al., 2015). More likes translate to better social reputation, and the user is considered to be more
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popular (Sen et al., 2018). Consequently, likes can be considered to be social proof of both the post and the user who posted the content. The hope of increased popularity and expanded audience reach has led users to artificially acquired likes (Sen et al., 2018). The practice of liking content in the hope of being reciprocated is a well-known method to increase a user’s number of likes. This practice is called “like-back” (Sen et al., 2018). “like-back” occurs when users like content not because they are generally interested in it but because it is a method to receive more likes and increased popularity. So, one might ask, can likes considered to be social proof, and to what extent? Does a post with many likes reassure users of its authenticity since other people seem to find the content interesting and genuine? Or are fewer likes perhaps a better indicator of a trustworthy post since they are less likely to be fake or “like-backs”? This study will explore these ideas by adding the attribute of likes on posts to determine whether people want posts with more or fewer likes.

*Influencer type*

Businesses have to take great care when choosing an influencer for their campaign. Research by Kanungo & Pang (1973) on a theory termed, the product match up model showed that there should be a fit between the model in an advertisement and the type of product being advertised. The results showed that when advertising products relating to femininity such as a sofa, female models proved to be more effective. Versus when a car, that was viewed as masculine was advertised, male models were more effective (Kanungo & Pang, 1973). Kanungo & Pang’s (1973) research shows that when consumers find perceptual and congruence associations between the characteristics of the product and spokesperson, it has favorable results. In situations where there is low congruence between influencer and product, the advertisement is less believable (Kanungo & Pang, 1973). Thus, when choosing an influencer, businesses need to choose an influencer who represents a similar image to the product being endorsed. In this study, the attribute of the influencer type has four levels. This attribute will explore whether influencer type does matter when promoting different fish products.

**4.2 Data collection**

The CBC survey was created using Sawtooth Discovery software and distributed with Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) outsourcing service. The CBC survey collected information from 685
participants from the age of 18-73 from the USA. The survey was composed of two parts. The first part is the traditional CBC analysis, and the second part consists of specific questions about demographics, social media behavior, and fish consumption. The attributes and levels used were selected from previous studies, literature review, and short in-person interviews. Table 3 shows the attributes and corresponding levels. The place of origin attribute was operationalized at five levels and influencer type at four levels. The price of fish, the number of followers, and number of likes were operationalized at three levels. Finally, the procurement method was operationalized at two levels. In total, six attributes and their corresponding levels constitute a 3x2x5x3x3x4 design (table 2).

Table 2: Attributes and levels used in the main CBC design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>1) $9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) $15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) $22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method</td>
<td>1) Wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Farmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of origin</td>
<td>1) Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers</td>
<td>1) 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) 100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) 1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes on post</td>
<td>1) 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) 15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer type</td>
<td>1) Fitness and health blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Beauty blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Food blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Travel blogger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All attributes are independent of one another and have no order of preference and no prohibitions or conditions. The survey has 15 choice-based questions. Each question presents the participant
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

with four choices. Each choice is a selection of attributes and levels that make up a model of an influencer product promotion. These promotions mimic actual influencer promotions as can be seen on Instagram. Each question also contains a “none” option to provide consumers with the option to choose nothing as they can do in real-life situations. An example of what a typical CBC question looked like can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Sample question from the main CBC analysis

4.3 Results and discussion

Table 4 shows the utility estimates of the different levels of each attribute. A Hierarchical Bayes estimation was used to estimate the utilities (Orme, 2016).

We see that influencer type, one of the influencer attributes, has the highest importance score of 24.96% followed by place of origin (18.97%), the price of fish (16.82%), procurement method (15.78%), likes on post (11.75%) and number of followers (11.73%) (table 3).
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

Table 3: Conjoint utility estimates and attribute importance scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Utility Estimates</th>
<th>Importance score (%)</th>
<th>Importance Score Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>$9</td>
<td>37.97</td>
<td>16.82%</td>
<td>10.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>-40.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method of fish</td>
<td>Wild</td>
<td>42.05</td>
<td>15.78%</td>
<td>11.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmed</td>
<td>42.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Origin</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>-16.35</td>
<td>18.97%</td>
<td>8.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>-9.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>-1.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of followers</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-17.33</td>
<td>11.73%</td>
<td>8.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.000</td>
<td>-1.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.000.000</td>
<td>18.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes on Post</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-18.32</td>
<td>11.75%</td>
<td>7.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.000</td>
<td>19.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer type</td>
<td>Fitness and Health blogger</td>
<td>19.19</td>
<td>24.96%</td>
<td>12.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beauty blogger</td>
<td>-65.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food blogger</td>
<td>53.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel blogger</td>
<td>-6.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-14.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of the conjoint analysis reveal that the number of followers and number of likes have the lowest importance scores. They are also of almost equal importance for participants. When looking at the utility score it rises with the increase of likes and the number of followers, indicating that the more social proof, the better. It is important to point out that negative utility scores do not imply that the level itself is negative (Orme, 2002). It only indicates that when compared side by side with other attributes, the participant is more likely to choose one over the other. An informal, follow up survey was performed to test preferences for both the number of likes and followers in order to gain a better understanding of consumer preferences. One hundred forty-one participants were asked how many “followers”/”likes” does an Instagram influencer need to have for you to consider buying a product promoted by his or her profile? It was surprising to discover that 44% of the participants choose 1000 - 10.000 followers, and 54% choose 500 - 5.000 likes (Appendix figure 8.1 & 8.2). These results are not in line with the results from experiment one where the participants prefer 1.000.000 followers and 15.000 likes (table 3). However, fish is a high involvement product, and therefore consumers might need more social proof to have faith in the promotion.

When viewing the results of the attributes related to fish products, the place of origin has the highest impact on participants. The place with the highest utility score is Alaska. The participants of the study were all located in America and Alaska is the only place that was offered in the survey with close ties to the participants local country. These results are in line with previous studies. Consumers prefer shorter transportation which drives the preference of local produce (Sigurdsson et al. 2018). The attribute of price demonstrates that consumers prefer fish produce at a lower price which is in line with previous research portraying high price barriers when buying fish (Verbeke & Vackier, 2005). The last fish attribute is the procurement method of the fish, and even with declining fish stocks worldwide and rise in fish farming; consumers choose wild fish over farmed. This is in accordance with studies portraying consumer preferences for wild fish and its health benefits (Claret et al., 2014). The results from the fish attributes are in line with the previous study on these same attributes by Sigurdsson et al. (2018).

The attribute of the highest importance is the influencer type. This indicates that the aspect of influencer type is the most important attribute in the study. This is in line with the product match up model, i.e., the fact that promotions are more effective when consumers feel there is a congruence between the product advertised and the advertiser (Kanungo & Pang,
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

1973). This is a clear indicator of the importance of choosing an influencer who best fits the product or promotion. These results are significant for companies, especially now when Instagram is experimenting with removing the visual social proof attribute of likes (Fitzgerald, 2019). If removing likes becomes the norm, the attribute of influencer type will be of even more importance, since influencers cannot rely entirely on their popularity as signaled by likes. According to an informal survey, 73% of participants either somewhat or strongly approve of the idea of Instagram removing the like counter (Appendix figure 8.3). With this in mind, businesses should plan ahead and find ways to work to their advantage.

For a better understanding of what different importance scores can mean for businesses, a simulation scenario was run. The simulation was performed with the Sawtooth Discovery software on the preexistent scores from the study. In the scenario, two influencer promotions were defined. Both promotions are the same in all ways except for the attribute of influencer type and price. Both profiles have the maximum number of followers and likes, that is 1.000.000 followers and 15.000 likes. Both promote wild Alaskan fish. A beauty blogger promotes the product in promotion one, and the price of fish is 9 dollars. A food blogger promotes the second promotion, and the price is 22 dollars. Have in mind; price is one of the main barriers for consumers buying fish (Verbeke & Vackier, 2005). The results from the simulation show that about 60% of the participants are willing to pay 22 dollars for the fish product that is 13 more dollars for the fish when promoted by a food blogger (figure 2). These results indicate that using a relevant influencer can help overcome barriers when selling fish.

Figure 2: Product simulation based on influencer type and price.
5. Experiment 2: Conjoint analysis

5.1 Survey methodology: Attributes
This chapter contains three surveys built upon the previous study. In the previous study, there were three influencer attributes measured up against three fish attributes. Each study contains the three fish attribute paired with one of the influencer attributes. In every other aspect, the studies were the same. By replicating the study this way, it is possible to provide further confirmation of the results. This replication is vital for the study as individual attributes of influencer marketing have not been studied extensively, and little is known about how they interact with each other.

5.2 Study 1: Number of followers
The CBC survey collected information from 145 participants from the age of 19-74. This study focuses on the influencer attribute of followers. In total, the study contains 4 attributes and their corresponding levels, constituting a 3x2x5x3 design (table 4).

Table 4: Attributes and levels used in the conjoint analysis design for number of followers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of followers</td>
<td>1) 1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) 100.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) 1.000.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method</td>
<td>1) Wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Farmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of origin</td>
<td>1) Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>1) $9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) $15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) $22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All attributes are independent of one another and have no order preference and no prohibitions or conditions. The survey has 9 choice-based questions, and each question presents the participants with four choices and a “none” option. Each question presents the participant with four choices.
Each choice is a selection of attributes and levels that make up a model of an influencer product promotion. These promotions mimic actual influencer promotions as can be seen on Instagram.

### 5.2.1 Results

Table 5 shows the utility estimates of the different levels of each attribute. The price of fish has the highest importance score of 29.4% followed by the place of origin (27.1%), Procurement method (22.7%) and finally the number of followers (20.8%) (table 5).

Table 5: Conjoint utility estimates and attribute importance scores for number of followers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Utility Estimates</th>
<th>Importance score (%)</th>
<th>Importance Score Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of followers</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-31.78</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>10.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.000</td>
<td>26.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.000.000</td>
<td>32.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method of fish</td>
<td>Wild</td>
<td>38.81</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>11.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmed</td>
<td>-38.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>$9</td>
<td>50.56</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>11.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>-48.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Origin</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>-15.17</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>11.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>35.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>-19.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>-2.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Study 2: Number of likes

The CBC survey collected information from 135 participants from the age of 19-69. This study focuses on the influencer attribute of the number of likes. In total, the study has 4 attributes and their corresponding levels, constituting a 3x2x5x3 design (table 6).

Table 6: Attributes and levels used in the conjoint analysis design for number of likes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>1) 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) 15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method</td>
<td>1) Wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Farmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of origin</td>
<td>1) Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>1) $9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) $15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) $22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All attributes are independent of one another and have no order preference and no prohibitions or conditions. The survey has 9 choice-based questions, and each question presents the participants with four choices and a “none” option.

5.3.1 Results

Table 7 shows the utility estimates of the different levels of each attribute. The attribute of highest importance is the place of origin with 30.3%, following the price of fish (27.7%), procurement method (22.3%) and the number of likes (19.8%) (table 7).
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

Table 7: Conjoint utility estimates and attribute importance scores for number of likes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Utility Estimates</th>
<th>Importance score (%)</th>
<th>Importance Score Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likes on Post</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-30.54</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>10.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>27.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method of fish</td>
<td>Wild</td>
<td>39.19</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>13.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmed</td>
<td>-39.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>$9</td>
<td>48.02</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>11.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>-47.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Origin</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>-23.31</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>13.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>38.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>-22.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>-16.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Study 3: Influencer type

The CBC survey collected information from 130 participants from the age of 19-70. This study focuses on the influencer attribute of influencer type. In total, the study has 4 attributes and their corresponding levels, constituting a 4x2x5x3 design (table 8).
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

Table 8: Attributes and levels used in the conjoint analysis design for influencer type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influencer type</td>
<td>1) Fitness and health blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Beauty blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Food blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Travel blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method</td>
<td>1) Wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Farmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of origin</td>
<td>1) Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>1) $9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) $15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) $22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All attributes are independent of one another and have no order preference and no prohibitions or conditions. The survey has 10 choice-based questions, and each question presents the participants with four choices and a “none” option.

5.4.1 Results

Table 9 shows the utility estimates of the different levels of each attribute. The attribute of highest importance is influencer type with 37.3%, following the price of fish (22.9%), the place of origin (23.2%) and procurement method (16.5%) (table 9).
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

Table 9: Conjoint utility estimates and attribute importance scores for influencer type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Utility Estimates</th>
<th>Importance score (%)</th>
<th>Importance Score Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influencer type</td>
<td>Fitness and health blogger</td>
<td>19.15</td>
<td>37.31%</td>
<td>12.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beauty blogger</td>
<td>-62.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food blogger</td>
<td>58.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel blogger</td>
<td>-15.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement method of fish</td>
<td>Wild</td>
<td>30.06</td>
<td>16.49%</td>
<td>12.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmed</td>
<td>-30.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of fish</td>
<td>$9</td>
<td>38.27</td>
<td>22.86%</td>
<td>11.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>-37.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Origin</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>-11.56</td>
<td>23.34%</td>
<td>10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>20.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>-6.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>-6.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>-3.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5 Discussion
The studies were replicated with different participants every time; therefore, a comparison between individual results is not applicable. However, by using different participants each time and obtaining very similar results, an important validation of this study is obtained. It is evident from the replications that the fish attributes are of great importance to consumers, as they are always rated very high. The popularity cues, on the other hand, the number of likes and followers, always fall in the least important category. Even so the importance score for all
attributes is very similar. It is important to note that even when presented uniquely, the number of followers had the importance rate of 20.8% and number of likes 19.8%. These numbers suggest that even when consumers can only view one social proof aspect, it still is of great value to them.

The price of fish and place of origin are always among the highest rated attributes in all studies. The participants prefer fish from Alaska and choose the lowest price of 9 dollars. These results are in line with previous research on these attributes (Verbeke & Vackier, 2005; Loureiro & Umberger, 2007; Schnettler, Ruiz, Sepúlveda, Sepúlveda, 2008).

In study three, the attribute of most importance to the participants is influencer type. When excluding the followers and likes attributes, influencer type is still rated of the highest importance. It is noteworthy that the stand-alone attribute of influencer type is rated of higher importance than extrinsic attributes about the product itself. This indicates the unique value of the influencer type attribute.

6 General discussion and conclusion

6.1 General discussion
Modern consumers want healthy options and actively seek out fresh and natural foods (Nielsen & Food Marketing Institute, 2018). Even so, consumers have a hard time letting go of their unhealthy eating habits. One of the reasons is that the marketing of unhealthy foods has successfully utilized social proof heuristic to persuade and influence consumers. These methods have not been used to the same extent in the health food sector (Salmon et al, 2015). This thesis proposes the potential of utilizing the popular social media outlet Instagram to promote fresh fish.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether social proof techniques and attributes of influencers could effectively be used to influence purchasing decisions when promoting fresh fish products online. The attribute rated of the highest importance in the study is the influencer type. The attribute has five levels. The level with the highest utility score is food blogger, and the level of lowest utility score is makeup blogger. Clearly, makeup bloggers do not resonate with the participants, understandingly as their ties to fish products are minimal. The consumer puts his trust in an opinion leader who has demonstrated expertise within the product realm. Even when
excluding the followers and likes attributes, the attribute of influencer type is still rated of the highest importance.

The results indicate the importance of the product match up model; the need for coherence between what is being advertised and the advertiser (Kanungo & Pang, 1973). It is evident from the results that the extrinsic fish attributes, place of origin, price and procurement method are of more importance to customers than the social proof attributes of followers and likes. The attributes of followers and likes do have a measurable impact but are least effective when compared to the other attributes. These results portray the importance of not relying on the social proof attributes of influencers alone, which is notably, a very popular practice today.

Recall the discussion about removing the like counter on posts. If that happens, it will become even more critical for businesses to learn how not only rely on popularity but also content and relevancy. When using influencer marketing strategies, it is important to view all the factors such as the match between the product and the influencer but as well considering the extrinsic attributes of the product. The number of followers and likes are of less importance if the content and coherence are good.

The results of the conjoint analysis suggest that Instagram users prefer a high number of followers and likes when viewing influencers promoting fish. Most consumers like to physically examine seafood product before buying to assure its quality (Ghazali, Mutum, & Mahbob, 2006). This could be the reason consumers prefer high social proof. Fish is a high involvement product, and consumers do not get the chance to touch, smell and see the fish online and therefore need more extrinsic cues about the product. Thus, when consumers recognize that a large number of people follow and like the influencer and his or her content, they are more likely to trust the promotion because social proof reflects positive attitudes towards the product or the influencer (Myers., & Sar, 2011).

Relying solely on the popularity of influencers, the ones with a countless number of likes and followers is not the best solution when promoting a product (Veirman et al., 2017). The message will have a substantial reach but not as much impact and influence on the viewers. Research has shown that the number of followers and likes are often perceptions of popularity, but they do not always translate into authentic influence (Veirman et al., 2017; Cialdini, & Goldstein, 2000). When preparing a marketing campaign, it is of utmost importance to choose an influencer who matches the product being promoted instead of relying only on the volume of
followers and likes (Veirman et al., 2017; Kanungo & Pang, 1973). This does not propose that following and popularity have no effect, only that the factors are entwined, and should all be kept in mind when choosing the right influencer.

The fish attributes are of higher importance to consumers in the study compared with the social proof attributes. In every variation of the study, the price and place of origin are rated more important than the followers and likes attributes. This is most likely because online fish sales are still limited, and consumers are less trusting towards buying fish online (Campo & Breugelmans, 2015). Consumers put more faith in the attributes they know and trust, such as buying fish locally or only buying wild produce. The reason is that these choices will most likely ensure a successful purchase. Only the influencer type attribute was regarded as more important than the fish attributes in the study. Therefore, it is essential for companies using influencers to promote their seafood products to advocate preferable attributes in the promotions with the right influencers and the right message. With the help of a promotion by a relevant influencer, consumers can become less sensitive to price, origin and procurement method of fish.

This study provides important managerial implications as it aims to create a greater understanding of choosing the most relevant influencer marketing strategies when promoting fresh fish products online. This presents many opportunities for the fisheries industry since quality fish is a high-priced product which presents a barrier for many consumers. With the right influencer and promotion, it is possible to surpass these barriers and entice consumers to choose the healthier option.

6.2 Limitations and future research

The main limitation of the study is relying on artificial market decisions. All participants were presented with 15 choice questions based on predetermined attributes. Thus, there is always some error when using conjoint studies versus real-life choices. The participants might not make the same choices if presented in real-life situations. When using conjoint studies, it is always important to use real-life market data to come as close to real-life as possible (Feit, Beltramo & Feinberg, 2010). This study tried to do precisely that with short interviews with people about their thoughts on social media influencers to find relevant attributes.

The fact that social proof attributes of influencers have not been studied extensively yet generates a gap in knowledge. This study proceeds to add further knowledge in hopes of filling
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

in this gap. Further experimentation is most certainly required. More studies should be conducted on these attributes, and this conjoint study should be refined and deployed again. The repetition studies require more participants and need to be tested again. The attributes of followers and likes should have more levels, i.e. higher numbers, to examine whether the social proof has a limit. Fish is a high involvement product and requires thoughtful examination before buying. This thesis has laid the groundwork for further studies about influencer marketing. It would be of interest to see whether the results are different when promoting low involvement products. It could also be interesting to assess the different presentation of content, such as the amount of information regarding the product. Also, the effects of various types of content, such as videos, live feed, and Instagram stories. It is very exciting to see what further research will unfold.
7 References


Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish


Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish


Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish


Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish


Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish


Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish


Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish


8. Appendix

How many "followers" does an Instagram influencer have to have for you to consider buying a product promoted by him/her?

141 responses

Figure 8.1: Survey on preferences of number of followers.

How many "likes" does an Instagram promotion from an influencer have to have for you do consider buying the product being promoted?

141 responses

Figure 8.2: Survey on preferences of number of likes.
Social Proof of influencers in promotion of fresh fish

What do you think about the idea of Instagram removing the number of "likes" on posts?
141 responses

Figure 8.3: Survey on thoughts of removing the Instagram like counter.