For Better or for Worse?

A qualitative study of the connection between a sole proprietor and its respective brand.

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Abstract

The emergence of influencers establishing their own brand has become a common phenomenon today as a result of the benefits that brands can leverage through influencer credibility. This study aims to investigate the connection between the *sole proprietor* and its respective brand during the time of a scandal caused by one of the parties. This study provides insights from three different cases namely, Paolo Roberto (Paolos), Bianca Ingrosso (Caia Cosmetics), and Katrin Zytomeirska (Clean Eating). To obtain insights for the report, a qualitative study was conducted. Firstly, two interviews were conducted with a sole proprietor that has been a part of a scandal, as well as a brand expert. Secondly, third-party data was gathered through the usage of the platform Meltwater. Meltwater provided a data collection of different measures related to mentionings of search words during the time of the scandals. As a result of the two qualitative methods, insights into the relationship between a sole proprietor and its brand during a scandal were revealed. According to our data collection, the mentionings related to the sole proprietor and the brand were similar, and the trend mentionings carried a relation between the use of the sole proprietor and the brand. Moreover, the interviews provided additional insights that further deepened the understanding of the connection.

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1. Introduction

"But what happens when the only person around whom you have built your brand completely fails? The fact that Paolo Roberto's brand is dying is one thing, but when a well-functioning company crashes, it does not only cause Paolo, but it also affects those who built up and created the company. From one day to the next, a person has destroyed what they have built up over several years."(translated from Swedish)

- (Resume, 2020)

The influencer marketing phenomenon has, during the last century, experienced a dramatic change, and the role of the influencer has adjusted accordingly (Rundin and Colliander, 2021).

Influencer marketing started as a joke to most companies that underestimated the power influencers possessed. It took a while before the corporations understood that the influence these people obtained over their followers could benefit the business by increasing their sales and revenue correspondingly (Land of Web, 2018). Eventually, the companies began to take influencers seriously, and they started sending them gifts and asking them to promote their products on social media. The second step in the evolution of influencer marketing was when influencers began to demand some additional compensation for displaying the products. The next step followed with influencers starting to become co-designers of the company's products, and the culmination of the phenomena, where we are right now, is when influencers start their own brands. This culmination of the phenomena makes the market even more fierce and the competition for the customers even harder. However, as conveyed by the initial quotation, the culmination of the influencer phenomena appears to come with certain consequences and one can wonder if it is *for better or for worse?*

1.1 Background

Traditionally, top management has been advised to avoid being present in the public's eye since the reputation of the face of the brand can affect the brand they represent (Malone and Fiske, 2013). This means that the future of a brand can be damaged by the actions of the face of the brand and vice versa. Thus, unfavorable publicity around the influencer or its brand in connection to wrongdoing can affect the other party (Bergman, 2021). However, in

correlation to the evolution of influencer marketing and the boredom of ordinary ads, the approach of hiding the founder behind the logo has started to decrease (Winberg, 2021).

Today, the retail landscape is rapidly developing and the competitive market is fierce. Under these challenging and profound conditions, customers have difficulty seeing the difference between products based on attributes, and thus brand value and awareness are crucial to stand out and gain market shares. Thus, brands want to create as much personality as possible. Several brands use celebrity endorsements to create a better recall and stand out. Celebrities have a greater impact on the customers' shopping attitudes and draw more attention to advertisements (Singh and Banerjee, 2021). The phenomenon of celebrity endorsement and influencer marketing makes the interaction between customers and the brand more frequent. It creates connections similar to a friendship, something that is referred to as a parasocial relation (Cohen, 2014).

Influencers/celebrities are now taking their own power and recognizing the value they can provide for a brand. Thus, many brands have been created by influencers/celebrities; these are also called *"Sole proprietors"* (Rundin and Colliander, 2021).

Aside from personalization, these brands also have a head-start since they can be promoted and leveraged by sole proprietors. Thus, it seems like the perfect way of building brands. Yet, when you are the face of a brand, you have a lot of power, and power comes with responsibilities. One step wrong can result in criticism, hatred, or even cancellation. Because sole proprietors are public figures, people will have opinions about them.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the report is to examine the relationships between a sole proprietor and its respective brand during the time of a scandal. The report aims to provide insights into this relationship and investigate the impact the two parties have upon one another. The insights are based on three cases when a sole proprietor and its corresponding brand participated in a scandal that received great publicity in mass media. Qualitative methods have been used to obtain results to provide valuable insights. First, interviews were conducted as additional insights to gain a deeper understanding. Secondly, we retrieved an external aggregation of data from the time of the scandal connected to the sole proprietors of the brand. The report's purpose is to provide insight into the following research questions:

- *How strongly are the sole proprietor and their respective brand connected during the time of a scandal?*

- *Is there a difference in the connection between the sole proprietor and brand depending on how severe the scandal is?*
- *Is there a difference in the connection depending on which party caused the scandal?*
- *What are the pros and cons of being a sole proprietor?*

1.3 Research Gap & Limitations

Due to the evolution of the role of influencers, there has appeared a research gap that this report aims to fill and provide useful insights on the topic.

For the report's purpose, the cases selected and the interviews conducted have only covered the relationship between Swedish sole proprietors and their respective brands. This limitation was made to focus on how scandals are perceived in Sweden since the cultural aspect might provide different insights into the question.

The selection of the cases has been limited to three contrasting cases that all cover different revivals of a scandal. The brand itself caused the first scandal, the action of the sole proprietor caused the second scandal, and the third was caused by the sole proprietor and the brand together. The selection of cases has been made with the limitation that the scandal must have occurred within the last three years.

1.4 Definitions of Words

Cancel Culture - *The definition of cancel culture is the tendency of participating to a great extent of canceling as a way to share one's dissatisfaction and drive public pressure* (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Social Media Influencer - *Social media influencers (SMIs) are identified to be online characters that influence the people following the person in question on social media channels* (Rundin and Colliander, 2021).

Fashionable Friend - *A person you follow on social media that gives you inspiration. Can in some situations be referred to as an influencer in broader terms* (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011).

Sole Proprietor - *As a sole proprietor, an influencer can establish a brand that would be an integrated part of a strongly associated extension of the influencer's own digital image and credibility* (Rundin and Colliander, 2021).

Brand - *"a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors"* (Kotler 1997; Keller, K. L, 2008).

Credibility - *The believability of an entity's intentions at a particular time and is posited to have two main components: trustworthiness and expertise* (Erdem and Swait, 2004).

Scandal - *An action, or a series of unethical actions, that creates indignation* (Sims, 2009).

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2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Brand Building and Consumer Relationships

Brand building is crucial to the long-term success of a company and its image is essential to all of its success. There are three fundamental functions that make the brand image effective. A brand should, first and foremost, have a clear message that establishes its promise and character in the minds of consumers. Second, the clear message should not be confused with the perhaps similar messages of competitors in the market but be unique. Finally, the message should evoke emotions and mental associations in consumers' minds (Kotler, 1997).

Keller (2008) describes the brand-consumer relationship as a type of bond or pact due to the importance brands encapsulate. The strength of the relationship can be considered stronger or weaker. In return for the consumers' trust and loyalty, they expect the brand to perform in certain ways and provide value back (Keller, 2008).

2.2 Brand Credibility and Celebrity Credibility

A high degree of credibility means that the brand can be trusted to consistently deliver what it promises in its product information. The cumulative impacts of past and current marketing strategies and activities determine a brand's expertise and trustworthiness. Credibility is one of the most essential characteristics of a brand, as it represents the product's positioning (Erdem and Swait, 2004).

For a brand to create credibility, it needs to use authentic and trustworthy knowledge passed through various marketing activities. Many brands use a credible celebrity to enhance brand credibility (Singh and Banerjee, 2022).

It has been argued that celebrities facilitate the recognition of brands, create favorable attitudes, and aid in branding (Chan et al., 2013). A celebrity usually has some personal associations that can be connected to a specific brand, and it is shown that the celebrity's credibility is transmitted to the brand (Singh and Banerjee, 2022); what is valid for the celebrity is valid for the brand (Keller, 2013). The celebrity becomes an additional node beyond the brand node, resulting in better brand recall and recognition (Tripp et al., 1994). This relationship becomes even more powerful when the celebrity is perceived as a credible source (Singh and Banerjee, 2021). Celebrities additionally provide a range of cultural meanings to products or brands by appearing with them in advertisements. The meaning is transferred to the customer as he or she uses it to achieve an ideal or aspirational image of

oneself that is congruent with that of the brand's celebrity (McCracken 1989). Consumers are likely to have a higher purchase intention when the endorser has a high level of credibility (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 1999).

2.3 The Living Embodiment of the Brand

Social psychologists call the tempting aspects of interacting with legitimate emotions expressed by faces behind the normally faceless corporations "concreteness." In the majority of interactions with brands, concreteness is absent, leaving the consumer to interact with the brand based on abstraction which guides the consumer to a general behavior of making a purchase but misses out on arousing genuine loyalty. The celebrity becomes an emotional reassurance as the face becomes a living embodiment of the brand's trustworthiness. The public is compelled to judge brands as if the brands were existing human beings. The judgments are based on what the public can deduct from the actual people behind the brands (Malone and Fiske, 2013).

With the growing use of e-commerce when shopping for commodities, customers have become more cautious and less loyal toward companies and brands whose "leaders" remain hidden behind the logos. Thus, the need for a human visualization representing the brand has never been greater. A key component of building an entrepreneur image is cultivating consumer admiration. To evoke consumers' admiration, entrepreneurs must build both their capabilities and virtues in order to enhance their brand attitudes towards their firm. Additionally, entrepreneurs need to increase consumer attainability by engaging them emotionally in order to attract more consumers (Wei et al., 2018).

If the entrepreneur can convey their worthy intentions in their company's communication instead of increasing the buying intention, customers will appreciate it more. It leads to a better perception of the person and, thus, the brand (Malone and Fiske, 2013).

Customers demand more transparency and accessibility from the sole proprietors which can be achieved through storytelling. Storytelling is commonly used to convey the personality of the sole proprietor. Usually, a story about their journey and background is told, which transmits insights into where the person is coming from and in which direction they are headed (Malone and Fiske, 2013).

2.4 The Parasocial Relationship

Parasocial interactions are often closely-knit relationships between influencers and their followers. These relationships are powerful as well as influential when it comes to word-of-mouth. As a friendship develops, credibility and trust are established. However, the relationship may be frail, and because of this, it is essential that the influencer is perceived as unbiased and credible (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011).

When using a sole proprietor, customers can become loyal to the person rather than loyal to a brand. It has been shown that customers sometimes even purchase a product simply because a celebrity endorses it (Verma and Kapoor, 2004). Sole proprietors can take advantage of their earned legitimacy and credibility to advocate their own business. By being the exclusive owner, the influencer essentially possesses complete creative control over communication and product creation (Rundin and Colliander, 2021).

2.5 Scandals

According to Banerjee (2018), one of the reasons for the occurrence of brand scandals is that brands fail to interact with customers at the time of the wrongdoing. Customers expect the brands to respond to the criticism; otherwise, they will view the radio silence as if the brand is trying to hide something or that they do not care (Taylor and Perry, 2005). This can lead to a negative brand perception (Banerjee, 2018). On the other hand, if the brand responds to the criticism, the trust in the brand can be rebuilt (Xie et al., 2017). Customers with a stronger brand/sole proprietor identification usually become more disappointed and thus show stronger feelings during the scandal (Ma, 2020). The critique against the brand can obtain consequences in the form of changed shopping behaviors (Richins, 1983). Bozic and Kupelwieser (2019) state that customers who did not feel personal affection for the scandal have an easier time forgiving.

3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of the method

To conduct this study, we interviewed a famous brand owner and a brand expert and collected data from three scandals that have occurred within the last three years in Sweden. Common for all three scandals is that they all gained great publicity when they occurred and that they were caused by the sole proprietor or their respective brand.

A qualitative research design was used in this study as it aims not to generalize to a whole population but to develop an in-depth understanding of one central phenomenon (Creswell, 2011). Thus, it suits our research objective as it aims to explore the phenomenon deeply.

Interviews were conducted as a part of the study, one interview with the sole proprietor Paolo Roberto and one with the brand expert Eva Ossiansson. Ideally, these types of interviews are preferred to gain a deeper understanding and allow for personal experiences and feelings. Furthermore, Ekström and Larsson (2007) support that interviews suit well when studying perceptions about phenomena through representative persons for the chosen phenomenon.

Out of nine composed standard questions (Appendix 1), the two interviewees obtained the possibility to speak more personally and in-depth on the topic, which allowed them to be more open and honest (Milena et al., 2008). Qualitative interviewing makes room for flexibility as one can consider the manner in which interviewees respond during the interview and perhaps adjust the focus accordingly. The interview with the sole proprietor, Paolo, was conducted over Teams, which allowed for observation of his facial expressions and thus a better understanding of the emotions created while answering certain questions. (Bell et al., 2018). Ossiansson did not have time to have a face-to-face interview but chose to answer questions in a written manner and provide her professional expertise on the subject.

Furthermore, data was gathered through the company Meltwater. For this qualitative research, a deeper perspective of three different scandals was obtained. Meltwater offers third-party data compiled from multiple sources, depending on the period of the event. There are limitations in how far back certain sources can be tracked due to the tool's capacity. Moreover, the most significant advantage of third-party data is that it offers a much larger scale. This third-party data collection is a good combination with our first-party data collection (interviews) as it increases the scale of the insights gathered (Lotame, 2021).

This report is a pioneer in its data-gathering tool due to its usage of the platform Meltwater, a tool that has not been used frequently in previous research reports. With these two qualitative data collection methods, the report will provide insights into the unexplored topic of the sole proprietor and its brands' connection during the time of a scandal.

3.2 Selection of Cases

Three different cases have been selected to investigate a scandal affected by either the sole proprietor or their brand. These three cases are Katrin Zytomierska and her brand Clean Eating, Paolo Roberto and his former brand Paolos, and Bianca Ingrosso and her brand Caia Cosmetics. Ingrosso and 'Caia Cosmetics' will identify the perspective of when the brand caused a scandal that affected the sole proprietor. Roberto and 'Paolos' illustrates the view from which the sole proprietor causes a scandal that impacts the brand. Further, Zytomierska and Clean Eating shows the perspective of when the sole proprietor, together with the brand, caused a scandal.

Furthermore, an interview with Paolo Roberto was conducted to gain a deeper perspective on one of the cases and gain insight from the perspective of the sole proprietor. The case connected to Roberto is also one of the cases with the most distinct consequences attached to the scandal. Eva Ossiansson, the brand expert, provided another more objective perspective, and as an expert, she offered a further analysis of this phenomenon. Eva Ossiansson is an assistant Professor/Dr at the School of Business, Economics and Law, Gothenburg University. Ossiansson is one of Sweden's foremost brand experts and the most known brand researcher (Lära för livet, 2019). The two other sole proprietors, Katrin Zytomierska and Bianca Ingrosso were contacted for an interview but could not be reached.

3.3 Case presentation

1. Paolo Roberto and 'Paolos'

Paolo Roberto is a 53-year-old Swedish restaurateur, entrepreneur, TV host, and a former professional boxer from Stockholm. Paolo Roberto previously ran the restaurant chain 'Pane Fresco' and worked actively with the conference hotel 'Körunda'. He also had his own brand 'Paolos', where he manufactured and sold pasta, olive oil, and kitchen utensils. He released his first cookbook in 2007 called "Mina fastrars mat" (My aunties food) and has released

three more cookbooks since, including some books about health and training (Wikipedia, 2022).

Paolo Roberto was caught buying sex on the 14th of May 2020. On the 15th of May, he confessed to what he did the day before on the Swedish television show "Nyhetsmorgon" on TV4 (Dagens Nyheter, 2020). This resulted in many abrupt canceled collaborations with the entrepreneur. Paolo Roberto had several lucrative managerial jobs on TV4 but was fired directly from the channel and lost several other jobs; Primarily, he lost his own company 'Paolos .' After the Swedish grocery company Coop announced that they would stop buying 'Paolos' products, Paolo was cut loose from the brand 'Paolos' completely by the other co-owners who bought him out for a meager price (Expressen 2020). After the scandal, several other grocery stores also 'canceled' the brand 'Paolos' (Aftonbladet, 2020).

2. Bianca Ingrosso and Caia Cosmetics

Bianca Ingrosso is a 28-year-old Swedish influencer, media personality, and entrepreneur. With over a million followers on Instagram, Bianca is one of the most influential influencers in Sweden (Nyheter 24, 2021). Her interest in makeup grew during her childhood when she spent a lot of time in TV or theater lodges around Sweden as the daughter of Pernilla Wahlgren. This interest later became a million SEK company as she founded the makeup company Caia Cosmetics year 2018. At Caia, she is the company's creative director and owns a big part of the company (Caia Cosmetics, 2022).

At the end of October, Caia Cosmetics launched their Christmas calendars and the calendars were sold out within the first hour. The calendars were sold for 1795 Swedish crowns and limited to 20 000 sold items (Nilsson Larsson, 2020). When the customers later received their Christmas calendar at the beginning of November, people turned out to be very disappointed and angry. By the 3rd of November, 24 customers had accused Caia of false marketing (Granstedt, 2021). The products within the calendar did not represent the expectation of the customers, nor the price paid for them (Nilsson Larsson, 2020). Several customers were upset that it was travel-sized products and were not satisfied with the calendar (Metro mode, 2021). Many customers stated that they felt fooled by Caia and Bianca and that the calendar could not be worth 3595 Swedish crowns, which was the price that the company said the products were worth (Lindahl, 2021). The result of the disappointed customers led to angry comments and personal attacks on Bianca. Additionally, Ingrosso did also receive severe threats during the same time frame (Preutz, 2021). Bianca responded to

the critique and expressed "First of all, I just want to say how incredibly sad it is and how sad I get that so many people think that I really should have deliberately tricked you" (Translated from Swedish) (Granstedt, 2021).

3. Katrin Zytomierska and Clean Eating

Katrin Zytomierska is a 45-year-old Swedish influencer, author, and entrepreneur. She has released several books about healthy eating and diets. After her first pregnancy, Zytomierska lost over 30 kg with a strict diet with food that tasted "exactly as good as less healthy food." Which also was the beginning of Clean Eating and its concept. Clean Eating offers healthy products on its website and around grocery stores in Sweden (Clean Eating, 2022; Wikipedia, 2022).

On the 14th of March 2020, Katrin Zytomirska caused a scandal by suggesting that a new product from Clean Eating that contained fish oil would improve your chances of avoiding the Coronavirus. She went on to emphasize how important it was to stay healthy during covid-19 times and how Omega-3, which boosts the immune system, was contained in the new product. As a result, Zytomierska was heavily criticized since she used the Coronavirus as a sales argument to benefit her brand (Rågsjö Thorell, 2020).

3.4 Data Collection

Third-party data collection was gathered through the company Meltwater which provided data from different news articles. Due to the timeframe of the three scandals, the platform Meltwater was not able to provide data from any source other than news articles. This is a limitation, however, since the report only aims to provide insights on the topic the limitation is not determinant. Our data collection has allowed us to learn from scandals that have happened to brands, sole proprietors, or both - enabling us to examine how these scandals affected the two parties and the interaction between them. The data gathered consists of articles and statements that have been made during the period of the scandal. To narrow the search down, some words were excluded to retrieve relevant information for the sake of providing more insights into the research questions.

3.4.1 Meltwater

Meltwater is a company that offers "comprehensive media monitoring and analysis across online news, social media, print, broadcast, and podcasts, capturing more content and

conversations than anyone else in the industry." (Meltwater, 2022). However, since the cases chosen are up to about two years old, the platform could only provide media monitoring and analysis from online news.

Meltwater has been offering its services on the market for 20 years and provides corporations with useful information that can be used to make businesses stay ahead. It is not an ordinary data gathering tool used in research reports normally. However, due to its beneficial tools and intelligence, the authors saw it as an interesting research method suitable for the aim of the report.

The platform is "a pioneer of media intelligence (...)" (Meltwater, 2022) and can be used to stay on top of different conversations taking place online. From these conversations, pertinent insights can be drawn. Due to the media intelligence offered by Meltwater, the platform was an interesting fit for the report that aims to provide relevant insights into an unexplored topic. Therefore it was viewed as a suitable tool for this research purpose. The platform allows the researcher to set different filtrations to narrow the search down and make it more accurate. Meltwater mention on their website that by matching one's selected search word to online conversations the analyst can obtain insights into the perception of the search word.

Meltwater was mostly used for insights into the first research question; "How closely are the sole proprietor and the brand connected?" by providing the user with a dashboard containing various variables that can be compared between different search words to determine the relationship between their appearance in online conversations (Meltwater, 2022). By using Meltwater as a method time could be saved instead of having to calculate the mentionings and values manually.

3.4.1.1 Quotations from mentionings

For the measure "quotations from mentionings' ' one retrieves quotes that mention the selected search word. Additionally, the measure allows you to exclude specific words to receive optimized results depending on what is being searched for (Meltwater 2022).

3.4.1.2 Sentimental Value

This measurement displays the overall tone of the mentionings containing the search words selected and can give an understanding of the perception connected to the words.

Sentiment is derived from an algorithm that processes natural language. For the intuition mechanism in the platform Meltwater to classify a mentioning as negative or positive it needs to have strong evidence of the attitude, otherwise, it is classified as neutral. Due to the need for strong evidence of attitude to classify the sentimental value, the majority of the values provided is neutral (Meltwater 2022).

3.4.1.3 Trend Mention

Trend mention is a graph showing the number of mentions during a specified time frame. It identifies the amount of time the search word has been mentioned (Meltwater 2022).

3.4.1.4 Key Words

Keywords displays the most frequently used words in the mentioning that contains the selected searchword. The more frequent usage of one word is identified by the size of the word within the word cloud (Meltwater 2022).

3.5 Limitations of Research Methodology

A primary challenge we faced was finding interviewees: sole proprietors who were willing to participate. A total of 35 sole proprietors were contacted, but only one interview was conducted. Therefore, a data collection and analysis of three specific cases were retrieved to obtain results to our insights.

The platform Meltwater has certain limitations. This includes not being able to retrieve data from other sources than online news articles if the time frame is set over 2 years. For the case of two of the scandals (Paolo and Katrin), the period was over two years, meaning that only news articles could be obtained. For the case of Caia Cosmetics and Bianca, however, other sources could be obtained since it occurred within two years. Nevertheless, since we wanted all the cases to be as similar as possible when analyzing them it was decided to limit the sourcing to only be retrieved from news articles for Bianca as well. Additionally, data from sources such as Instagram and Facebook could not be retrieved due to the time frameset. In addition, because Meltwater gathered all mentions connected to the selected search word, there could be mentions referring to something other than the scandal. However, with additional filtration, mentions unrelated to the topic were greatly reduced.

One could question the reliability of the sole proprietor interviewed since the person might have an interest in forming the opinion of the public in a certain direction due to being

biased in the questions. Some people might argue that this sole proprietor should not receive any attention due to his previous action connected to the scandal. Similarly, several parties decided to cancel him and his brand, as they did not want to show any support for his behavior. However, we want to underline that the decision to interview this sole proprietor does not mirror any support for his action. His scandal is a clear example of what the report aims to provide insights into and thus the person was contacted. The questions were formulated in a way that focused on obtaining insights into the connection between a sole proprietor and its brand and not the scandal itself.

3.7 Strategy for Analysis

The data collected from Meltwater and the three cases were split up based on the different tools to retrieve the data. To analyze each data retrieval and connect them, the sole proprietors' data is placed next to the brand's data.

After presenting the data, the interviewees are presented to first provide readers with an overview of the three cases and then a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from the interviews. A thematic analysis was used for the analysis method. The two interviews conducted were translated and divided into themes. Based on our research questions and the theory, themes were developed for the interview presentation. Following the presentation of the interview, an analysis of the interview was formed to create the foundation for our discussions.
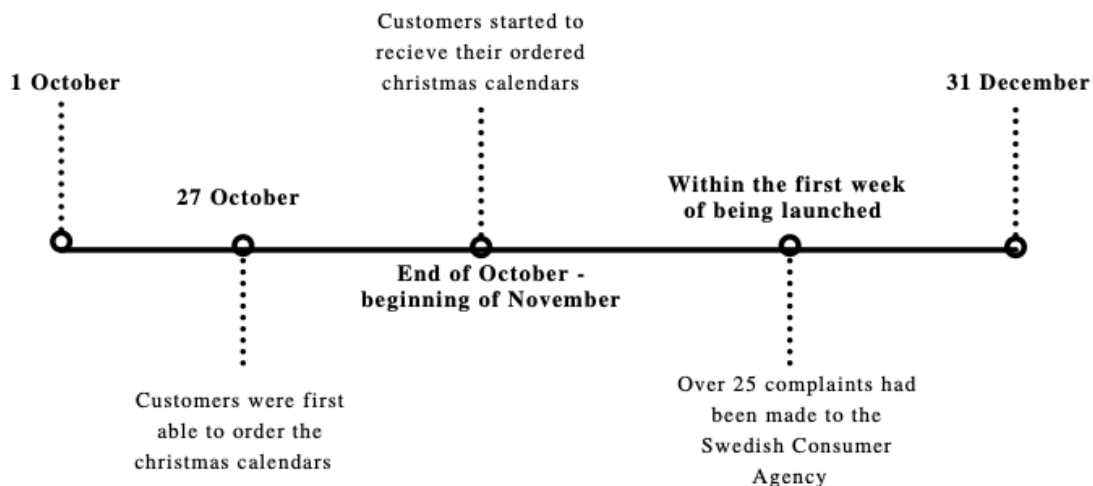
4. Result

4.1 Data Collection

4.1.1 Bianca Ingrosso and Caia Cosmetics

Bianca Ingrosso	Caia Cosmetics
To obtain accurate data from the Christmas calendar scandal connected to Bianca Ingrosso a test was first run through a search with 'Bianca Ingrosso' as the search word. To get accurate data for the purpose of the report the words 'Wahlgren's Värld'' and 'Phillipe' were excluded. The language and country were also set to be Swedish and Sweden. The time frame was set to be between 1/10/2021 - 31/12/2021.	'Caia Cosmetics' was then used as the search word to create a boolean code for the search engine to run. Mentions of "Wahlgren's Värld'' were removed to make it more accurate for the report's purpose. The time frame for the search was between 1/10/2021 - 31/12/2021.

Timeline of Scandal

4.1.1.1 Quotations from Mentionings

Bianca Ingrosso	Caia Cosmetics
Connected to our selected keyword 'Bianca Ingrosso' 461 mentionings from different news articles in Sweden was made. (Translated from Swedish)	Connected to our selected search word 'Caia Cosmetics' 406 mentionings from different news articles in Sweden were made. (Translated from Swedish)
"The commotion around Bianca Ingrosso and the Christmas calendar where even death threats were mentioned." (Resume, 2021)	*"The calendar generated outcry when consumers, one by one, reported CAIA to the Swedish Consumer Agency for false marketing after the discovery that the gifts in the calendar came in travel packaging. This in combination with a price of 1.795 SEK."* (Bark, 2021)
"Or when Bianca Ingrosso made a pricy Christmas calendar that did not keep what it had promised" (Lidström, 2021)	*"Caia Cosmetics' Christmas calendar sold out in no time. But when customers received the calendars, many were dissatisfied with the content. Bianca Ingrosso's make-up company has now been reported by several customers to the Swedish Consumer Agency, reports the news agency Siren."* (Expressen, 2021)
"The anger around the Christmas calendar towards Bianca Ingrosso and Caia Cosmetics still plays on. Now at least 25 accusations have been provided to the Swedish Consumer Agency in less than a week." (Demirian, 2021)	*"But the worst was the tone in social media. In connection with the delivery of the first Christmas calendars, criticism from dissatisfied customers began to fall on Caia Cosmetics and Bianca Ingrosso's Instagram."* (Lundqvist, 2021)
	"Within an hour, Bianca Ingrosso's company Caia Cosmetics sold out of its Christmas calendars. But now the content of the calendar is facing harsh criticism from upset customers. "Seriously, you piss on

	all your loyal customers," one person wrote on Instagram (Zabielski, 2021). *"A few weeks ago, she also ended up in a real storm after the launch of Caia's Christmas calendar* (Bark, 2021).

By studying the key mentionings in both cases, it is apparent that they are similar. When having 'Bianca Ingrosso' as a search word 'Caia' is frequently mentioned and vice versa. It appears that the word 'Bianca Ingrosso' is tightly connected to' Caia Cosmetics', and Bianca is for the majority mentioned when the article regards 'Caia Cosmetics'. Blame for the scandal was given to Bianca which can be identified with the quotation *"she also ended up in a real storm after the launch of Caia's Christmas calendar"* and *"But the worst was the tone in social media. In connection with the delivery of the first Christmas calendars, criticism from dissatisfied customers began to fall on Caia Cosmetics and Bianca Ingrosso's Instagram."* even though Caia was behind the scandal.

4.1.1.2 Sentimental Value

Bianca Ingrosso	Caia Cosmetics
The sentimental value connected to 'Bianca Ingrosso' resulted in 6% positive mentionings, 6% negative mentionings, and 86% neutral mentionings.	The sentimental value of the mentioning connected to 'Caia' shows that 11% of the mentionings were negative, 6% of the mentionings were positive and 81% of the mentions were neutral.

Negative: 6% Positive: 6% Neutral: 86%

Negative: 11% Positive: 6% Neutral: 81%
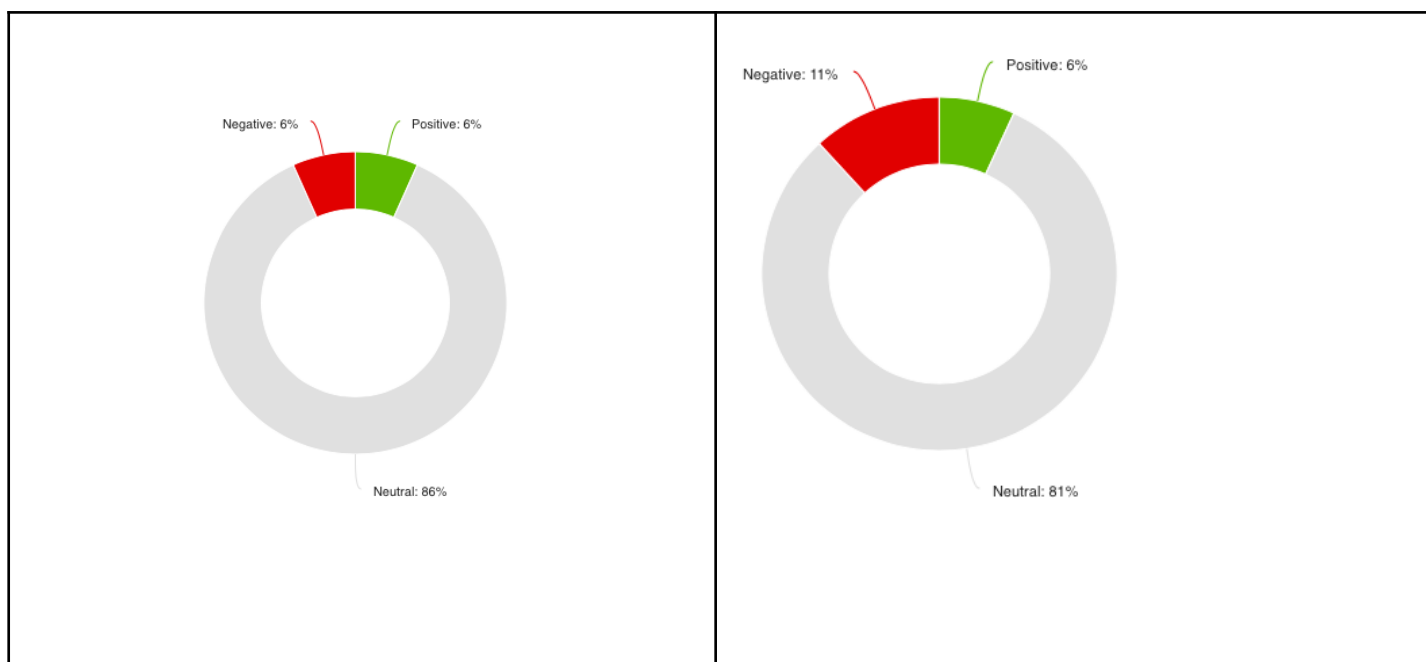
The sentimental value for the search word 'Bianca Ingrosso' gave an equal negative as a positive outcome of mentions - while the majority is neutral. 'Bianca Ingrosso' is mentioned in more articles and news than Caia Cosmetics, thus the sentimental values can become more spread out as all her mentions are not only regarding the scandal of Caia. Sentimental values for 'Caia Cosmetics' during the launch of the Christmas calendar have a bigger share of negative values, indicating that people expressed less favorable attitudes towards the calendar. As can be read out of the two diagrams, the negative mentionings spotted for 'Bianca Ingrosso' is probably mentionings together with her brand during this time.

4.1.1.3 Trend mentioning

Bianca Ingrosso	Caia Cosmetics
Trend mentionings of 'Bianca Ingrosso' during the time period between 1/10/2021 - 31/10/2021. Mentionings peaked during the time period 27/10 - 6/11, as shown by the spikes in the graph.	The graph below displays the spread of the total mentions related to 'Caia Cosmetics' from 1/10/2021 - 31/10/2021. Mentionings peaked during a time period beginning from 27/10 - to 6/11, with the highest peak during 27/10.
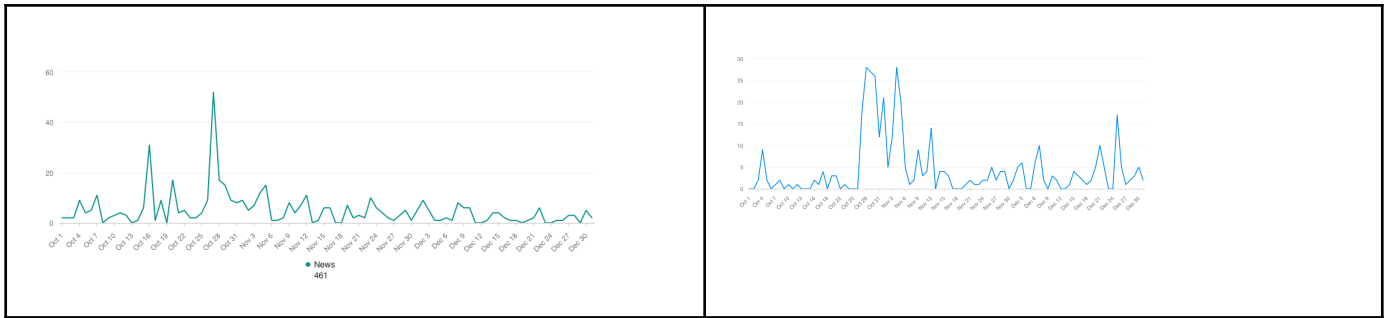
When the calendar launched, on the 27th of October, one can observe a spike occurring in both of the graphs above, although the spike received from the search word 'Bianca Ingrosso' experienced a higher peak. Furthermore, when the consumer received their calendars (at the end of October, beginning of November) and the scandal was a fact, one can see a rising spike appearing again for 'Caia Cosmetics' and the word 'Bianca Ingrosso'. However the spike for 'Bianca Ingrosso' during the scandal does not appear as high as the spike that occurred on the 27th of October (the launch), but 'Bianca Ingrosso' was still mentioned more than ordinary. This synchronized trend shows that Bianca is being mentioned when Caia Cosmetics is mentioned. However, when Bianca is mentioned, Caia Cosmetics is necessarily not mentioned as the graph connected to 'Bianca Ingrosso' continues spiking frequently at the same time as 'Caia Cosmetics' slowly smooths out.

4.1.1.4 Keywords

Bianca Ingrosso	Caia Cosmetics
Top keywords connected to 'Bianca Ingrosso' are "disappointed customers", "Caias Christmas calendar", "harsh criticism" and "the products in the calendar".	Top keywords connected to 'Caia Cosmetics' is "biggest joke", "worst calendar", "small" "disappointed customers" and "harsh criticism"
(translated from Swedish)	*(translated from Swedish)*

Many keywords are the same for the two search words, which implies that 'Bianca Ingrosso' and 'Caia Cosmetics' are mentioned in the same articles. Both top words are "million sek" as identified by the size of the word. One of the top words for Bianca during this period is "Caias Christmas calendar", but also "disappointed customers' and "harsh criticism". These top keywords show that during this period, the majority of those who wrote about Bianca focused on the scandal and the customer's disappointment. Looking at the top words for 'Caia Cosmetics'' during this time, it can be seen that the majority of words are in regards to criticism of the calendar - similar to Bianca's top keywords.
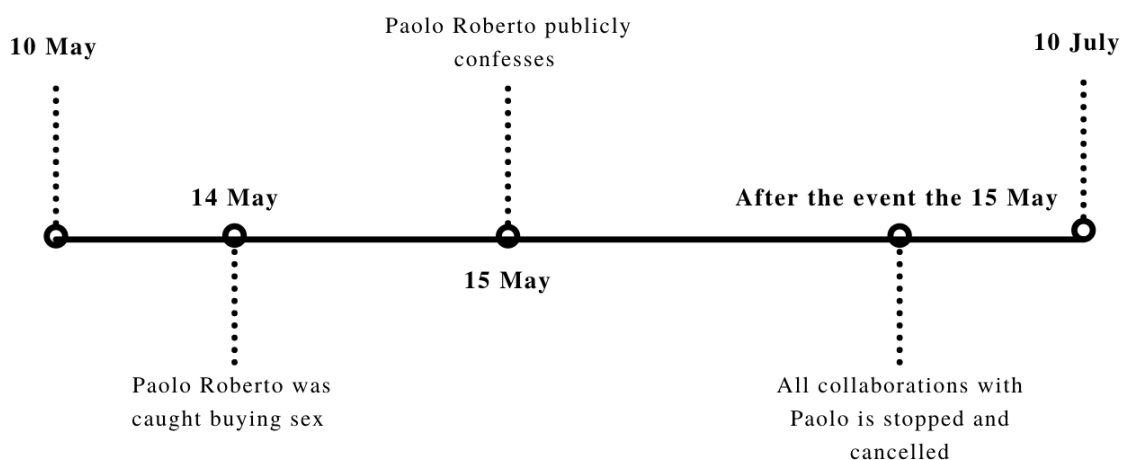
4.1.2 Paolo Roberto and Paolos

Paolo Roberto	Paolos
The data collected for the scandal associated with Paolo Roberto was retrieved by first running a search with the keyword "Paolo Roberto" as the keyword and selecting that all displayed mentionings had to be in Swedish. This enabled only relevant mentions to be obtained. The time frame was set between 10/05/2020 - 10/07/2020.	Word Paolos (brand Paolo Robertos) and selected that all displayed mentions should be in Swedish and from Sweden so that we could only obtain relevant mentions related to the topic. The word "familjetrauma" (family trauma) was also selected to be disregarded since these included data not insightful for the report. The time frame was set between 10/05/2020 - 10/07/2020.

Timeline of Scandal

4.1.2.1 Quotations from Mentionings

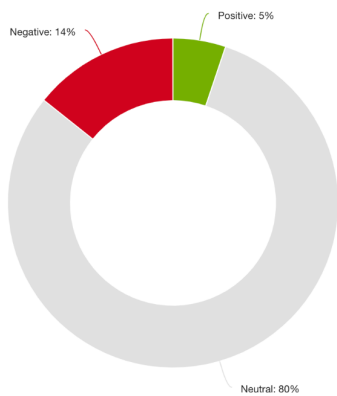| Paolo Roberto	Paolos
The following is a sample of quotations associated with the search word *'Paolo Roberto'*. In total, the keyword was found in 1,07K mentionings. The quotations came from various news articles in Sweden. *(Translated from Swedish)* *"On Thursday night, the TV star and entrepreneur Paolo Roberto was taken by police, after buying sex on Östermalm in Stockholm." - Expressen, May 15, 2020* (Malm et al, 2020) *"We terminate all collaborations with Paolo Roberto with immediate effect. He will no longer be a partner or active in the company from now on, says Dani Evanoff, CEO of Peoples Kitchen Concept AB and Evanoff Group."* (Nygren, 2020)	The following are a sample of quotations associated with the search word *'Paolos'*. Connected to our selected keywords 230 mentionings from different news articles in Sweden. *(Translated from Swedish)* *"When the products "Paolos" where removed from the supermarket's giant shelfs it became painfully noticeable what a disaster it can result in for a company to tie an influencer to its brand." - Resume June 24, 2020* (Yasar, 2020) *"The food brand "Paolos" has stopped all cooperation with its frontman Paolo Roberto. What the products will now be called is unclear."* (Westling, 2020)

It appears from the quotations for the two different search words that the mentionings have the same topic, which illustrates how the brand and Paolo Roberto seem connected. When looking at the quotations for 'Paolo Roberto' one can notice that the majority of the mentionings are concerning the effect Roberto's actions caused. A similar pattern can be observed when mentioning 'Paolos' and the fact that they pertain to Robertos' actions and how they affected the brand.

This conveys that 'Paolos' and Paolo Roberto seem to be linked to one another. When mentioning one of the parties, it appears that people tend to mention the other party as well.
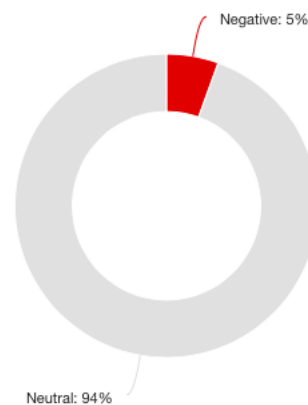
4.1.2.2 Sentimental Value

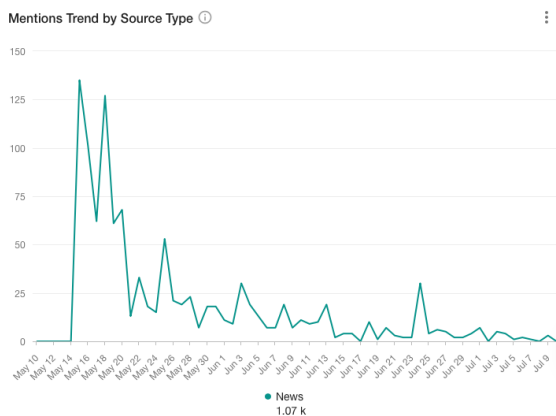| **Paolo Roberto**	**Paolos**
The sentimental value of the mentionings containing Paolo Roberto during the set time period showed that 14% of the mentionings were negative, 5% positive and 80% neutral.	During the set time period the sentimental value of the mentionings containing 'Paolos' was 5% negative and 94% neutral.

When looking at the sentimental values for 'Paolo Roberto' and his brand 'Paolos' one can derive that the negative sentimental values related to Paolo Roberto have a bigger share of negative mentions compared to the share of negative mentionings for Paolos. One might think that a share of 5% of negative mentionings is a relatively small share of the total number of mentionings, however, as can be drawn from the graph it is no positive mention at all. One could assume that the 12 negative mentions around 'Paolos' could be found within the 150 negative mentionings for Paolo Roberto. For mentionings with 'Paolo Roberto', people appear to express their attitude to a greater extent which is expected since it was Roberto himself that caused the scandal which led to effects on the brand. Again, one can see that the brand and the sole proprietor seem to be connected.

4.1.2.3 Trend Mentioning

Paolo Roberto

The graph below displays that during the 10/05/2020 - 10/07/2020 'Paolo Roberto' was mentioned 1,07k times in different Swedish news articles.

Mentions Trend by Source Type ⓘ

● News
1.07 k

Paolos

The graph below displays that during the 10/05/2020 - 10/07/2020 'Paolos' was mentioned 230 times in different Swedish news articles.

Mentions Trend by Source Type ⓘ

● News
230
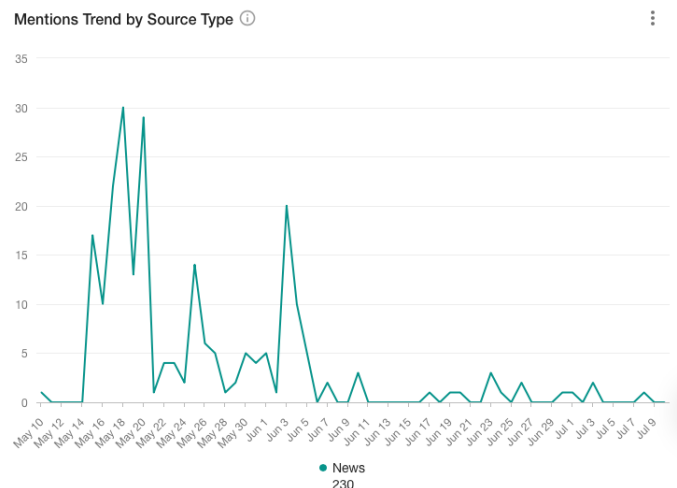
The timeline for the scandal connected to Paolo Roberto starts on the 14th of May which was the date he was caught buying sexual activities. Indifferent on which of the search words were used the graph starts spiking on the 15th of May (when he confessed) and keeps having frequent spikes until the beginning of June. The greatest spike for 'Paolo Roberto' occurred on the 15th of May, but for 'Paolos' the greatest spike occurred a bit delayed during the 18th of May. This identifies that at the time of the event the search word 'Paolo Roberto' is more frequently mentioned and the consequences for the brand occurred a bit later, thus the spikes for the search word 'Paolos' spike again later. However, it can still be seen that the brand was mentioned together to the sole proprietor of the brand on the day of the event already.

What is important to take into consideration is that since 'Paolo Roberto' has named his brand after his name, some of the results connected to 'Paolos' can be misleading as they can refer to both the brand and Paolo Roberto himself. To avoid this to a great extent, the search words have been carefully selected to make it as insightful as possible.

26

4.1.2.4 Keywords

Paolos Roberto	**Paolos**
Connected to the selected keyword *Paolo Roberto,* the most frequently used word in the same mentioning is *Paolo* identified by the word cloud below. The additional keyword of interest for the report are "sex purchase" "arrested", "negligent rape", "crime" and "human trafficking" *(Translated from Swedish)*.	Connected to the selected keyword '*Paolos',* the most frequently used word in the same mentioning is *Paolo* identified by the word cloud below. The additional keyword of interest for the report is "sex purchase", "discountenance" and "decisions", and "Evanoff group" *(Translated from Swedish)*

Observing the keywords associated with the search terms, both search words have the word "Paolo" and "sex purchase" among the top keywords. Further, it appears that the keywords connected to 'Paolo Roberto' are more focused on the scandal and his action connected to the event. The keywords connected to 'Paolos' are more focused on the consequences of the event, identified partly by the keyword " discountenance".

4.1.3 Katrin Zytomierska and Clean Eating

Katrin Zytomierska	**Clean Eating**
'Katrin Zytomierska' was used as the keyword in a search to find accurate data of the scandal involving Katrin Zytomierska and her brand Clean Eating. The time frame was set between 1/3/2020 - 31/3/2020 and selected to only be shown the	The keyword 'Clean Eating' was used with the selected filtrations that all displayed mentionings must be in Swedish and from Sweden in order to get only relevant mentionings. The time frame was set between 1/3/2020 till 31/3/2020.

mentionings made in Sweden and in Swedish.	

Timeline of Scandal
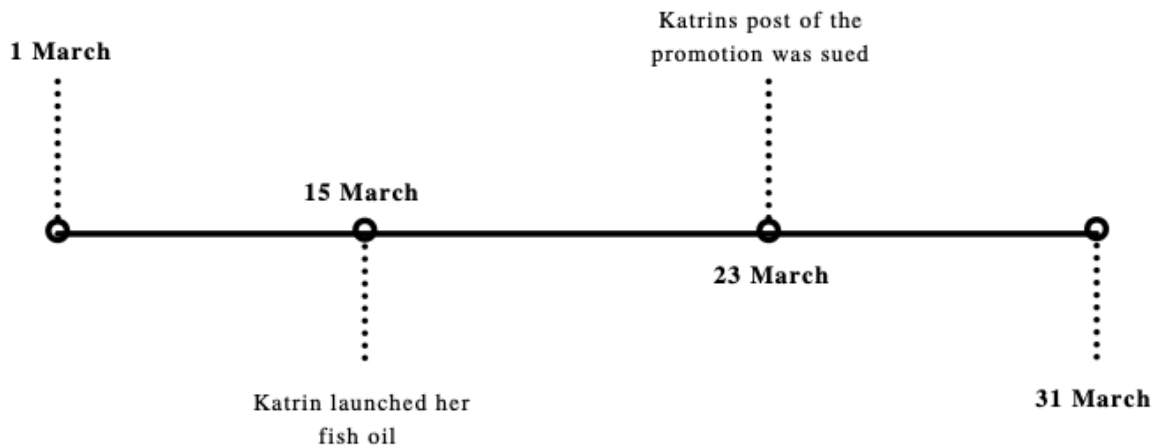
4.1.3.1 Quotations from Mentionings

Katrin Zytomierska	**Clean Eating**
Connected to our selected keywords 33 mentionings from different news articles appeared during the set time frame and below follows a sample of quotations being made during the time frame: (*Translated from Swedish*) *"But now Katrin Zytomierskas ad for Clean Eating, that she posted on her private Instagram, have been sued to Konsumentverket"* (Bielecka, 2020) *"The blogger Katrin Zytomierska and others try to make money on people's fear of the coronavirus."* -	Connected to our selected keywords 17 mentionings from different news articles appeared during the set time frame and a sample is shown below: (*Translated from Swedish*) *"According to the Swedish Consumer Agency report, the company Clean Eating markets a fish oil that is supposed to provide resistance to the coronavirus."* (Konsumentverket, 2020) *"In recent days, the Swedish Consumer Agency has made so many reports of the company Clean Eating for misleading marketing. Katrin Zytomierska*

Kristianstadsbladet.se · Mars 25, 2020 (Lernfelt, 2020) *"During the weekend Katrin Zytomeirska chose to market one of her companies Clean Eating's new products by stating that it is extra important to boost the immune defense now in times of corona, something that has upset many.* (Persson, 2020)	*herself disagrees with the criticism."* (Persson, 2020)

The search word 'Katrin Zytomeriska' has more mentions (33) than her brand 'Clean Eating' (17). Looking at the search mentions for 'Clean Eating' during this time frame, all of the articles are about the fish-oil scandal. Furthermore, in the mentions for 'Katrin Zytomeriska,' the majority also regard the scandal. One of the mentions says *"But now Katrin Zytomierskas ad for Clean Eating, that she posted on her private Instagram, have been sued to Konsumentverket"* This shows the connection people tend to draw when writing about the parties. Also, looking at the mentions for 'Clean Eating', Katrin is almost always mentioned.

4.1.3.2 Sentimental value

Katrin Zytomierska	**Clean Eating**
Sentimental value of the mentionings containing *Katrin Zytomierska* was 8% negative, 5% positive and 85% neutral.	Sentimental value of the mentionings containing *Clean Eating* was 25% negative, 12% positive and 62% neutral.
Negative: 8% — Positive: 5% — Neutral: 85%	Negative: 25% — Positive: 12% — Neutral: 62%

By analyzing the sentiment associated with "Clean Eating," it is apparent that Clean Eating has a higher weighted negative share 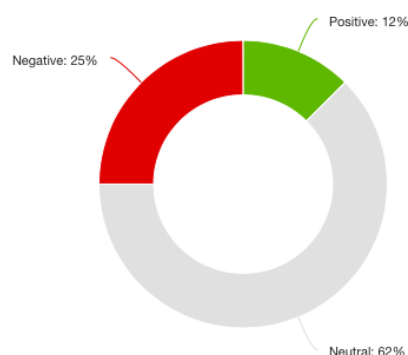of mentions than Katrin. It seems that Katrin is mentioned in more articles overall - thus, the distribution of positive and negative is more balanced. Based on the sentimental value of 'Clean Eating' during the same period, it seems that the majority is neutral, but the negative share is bigger than the positive share.

4.1.3.3 Trend Mentioning

Katrin Zytomierska

The graph below displays the spread of the total mentions related to 'Katrin Zytomierska' from 1/3/2020 to 31/3/2020.

● News
33
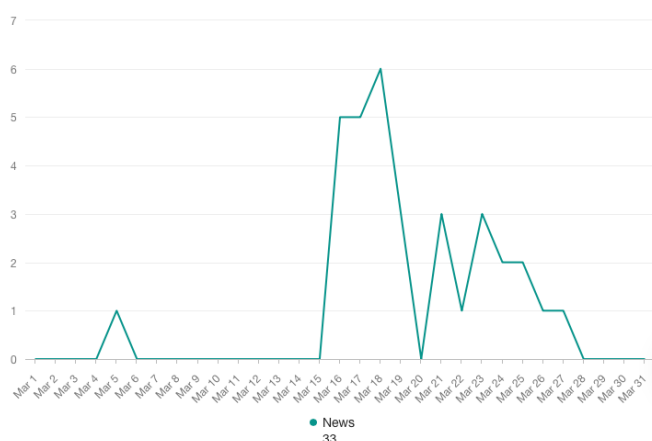
Clean Eating

The graph below displays the spread of the total mentions related to 'Clean Eating' from 1/3/2020 to 31/3/2020. During this time period, there were a total of 17 mentions of our search word.

● News
17
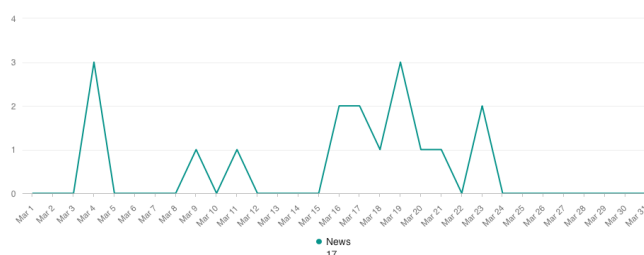
'Katrin Zytomierska' was mentioned 33 times during the period of two months from 16th March until 20th March, one can see a high spike of mentionings. Compared to the search word 'Clean Eating' which got 17 mentions during the same period.

Comparing their graphs, one can observe that spikes occur on 15th March for both search words, and the mentions during the period of the scandal are quite synced between the word 'Katrin Zytomeriska' and 'Clean Eating'. Accordingly, Katrin is mentioned along with her brand Clean Eating. In this case, the mention of the words together is perhaps just natural, given that Katrin made the statement in an attempt to promote her brand Clean Eating. Another spike that Clean Eating has is the 4th of May, whereas Katrin only has 1 mention of the same day. However, this mentioning occurs before the scandal, thus, it appears that when a scandal occurs for the brand, the sole proprietor is mentioned, but not necessarily when it is about

ordinary news.

4.1.3.4 Keywords

Katrin Zytomierska	**Clean eating**
Top keywords connected to 'Katrin Zytomierska' during the same time period that are worth highlighting for the purpose of the report are "Coronavirus", "People's fear", "Fish oil", "reports", "The Swedish Consumer Agency", "immune system" and "money" (*Translated from Swedish*)	Top keywords connected to 'Clean Eating' during the same time period worth to highlight for the purpose of the report are "The Swedish Consumer Agency", "Reported Katrin's advertising", "oil", "corona", "immune system", and "peoples fear" (*Translated to Swedish*)

Looking at the top words for search word Katrin Zytomeriska, one can derive that a majority of them regards the scandal of the fish oil; "Coronavirus", "Fish oil" "immune system" etc. This implies that her name was often mentioned in the scandal of the fish oil for Clean Eating.

The top keywords for Clean Eating during the same period also show words that regard the scandal; "Coronavirus", "product" and "oil". The top word that was mentioned was "Katrin" - which tells us that her name was frequently used for all these mentionings together with Clean Eating.

4.2 Interviews

For the purpose of this study, two different interviews were conducted with a well-known Swedish personality, Paolo Roberto, and a Swedish brand expert, Eva Ossiansson. In the following section observations from each interview will be presented in themes.

4.2.1 Being Well-known Before Starting a Brand

(*Appendix 1- Question 2, 3, 7, 9*)

The entrepreneurial journey for Paolo Roberto all started with Paolo's friend who started 'Eriks såser', and he got a proposal of having 'Paolo's såser'. Both of them got the same deal, but Paolo realized that he wanted to own the brand himself and have 100% control. Therefore, he invested all his money in starting 'Paolos'.

The foundation of his company was olive oil, as Paolo owns a lot of olive trees in Italy. Additionally, he describes that the level of control over the products he shares, with his followers over social media, is the determinant factor for why he wanted to start his brand, "I want to be able to stand for what I produce and sell, which I can proudly do with my brand."

Paolo Roberto expresses that the most prominent benefit of being a famous person before starting the business for him was the trust that people already had for him; "People trust me and that I would offer nothing but great products". The public knows his passion for food as he has been featured in several cooking shows and provided recipes.

Eva Ossiansson also points out the benefit of being well known before establishing a brand. She means that there is a distinct advantage to being famous before starting a brand. "It can be easier if you have already managed to create certain brand awareness." Ossiansson continued by writing in her answer that "There are many examples of older companies that have had names after their founders. This fulfilled a particular function as discernment." There is a benefit, and it can be seen in older companies as well. However, what Ossiansson points out is that the most important aspect of it all is what values you "attach" and associate your brand with, and also whether they are positive to the context or not. If instead, the case was that the famous person does something that can negatively affect the brand, it can have other effects.

This is something similar to what Roberto brings up during his interview and states "Well, I would say that it has both been a blessing and a curse - but when the scandal occurred, it was obviously a disadvantage…". He further mentions that due to this scandal,

his life's work was gone in seconds. However, he further describes the most distinct pros as "People know and trust that I produce and sell only great products."

4.2.2 Personality in the Brand

(*Appendix 1 - Question 2, 4, 9*)

Paolo has been using a lot of his personality throughout the whole process. He has always been personal and transparent with his brand, utilized his olive trees, and also taken advantage of his older relatives. "My first cookbook was written together with my aunts. As I was very controversial during that time, I believe that collaborating with my aunts for this cookbook resulted in 'salty meeting sweet,' which I believe was appreciated." Further, he means that he has always been good at showing his personality and that he believes that he has built a "genuine follower base" through just that.

"I still have loyal customers," Paolo states. As a result of his loyal customer base, he chose to use his name again for his new brand so that people can recognize it. Those who buy from Paolo's brand are customers who have great knowledge of the Italian food culture and also know that Paolo delivers high-quality products. In addition, he noted that his customer base is niched; people who value Italian cuisine and want high-quality products. The new brand 'Robertos' has been created with a niched target group in mind rather than a wide distribution strategy.

Paolo Roberto expresses that he feels connected with his brands. For 'Paolos' & 'Robertos' he has been transparent and personal when sharing the production process and creating overall content for the brand. Paolo has used storytelling behind both of the brands by sharing videos of when his relatives pick olives from their soil. During the interview, he says that "you can hear the old ladies yelling in the background" something he says contributes to the authority "it's not made up" he ends the sentence with.

4.2.3 Pros/Cons of Being Strongly Connected

(*Appendix 1 - Questions 3, 4, 5, 7, 8*)

People do strongly associate the face outwards with their brand. Eva expresses that "An outer face creates specific associations that can benefit the brand." By utilizing this strong association, the brand can be seen as more personal and real. Eva describes that "It can be perceived as more personal and genuine, and you can have a stronger relationship even if it is fake, i.e., you become a bit of a fan with all that it means." Having "a face of the brand

creates associations that can be of use for the brand" states Ossiansson. This is something that was realized by Paolo Roberto as well. Paolo explains that the reason why the brand became so successful is because of the strong relationship between himself as a person and the brand - that his personality lighted through. He has been able to combine his big interest in food and turn it into a business. Paolo concludes that the foundation of his brand 'Paolos' was his heritage, interest in food, and his personality.

"Using a specific personality can connect to feelings that your target group likes, which is why you can also be perceived as having a close friend relationship, even if it is not genuine." Ossiansson describes this as perhaps one of the disadvantages for people who buy the products, but an advantage for the influencer that can benefit from it. However, this relationship can also be a disadvantage for the influencer; "The downside is that when you play with people's feelings, there can also be reactions if you feel let down or abandoned as a friend." Ossiansson further states, "Suppose you do something that has a significant negative effect on your brand. Take, for example, Paolo Roberto and what happened to his brand." Whenever you are strongly associated with a brand, a person risks as much as they can win. The winnings are great, but the losses can be devastating.

Being strongly connected to a brand incurs the greatest risk. What Paolo does will affect his brand and vice versa. A successful company can disappear within a week if one step is taken incorrectly, according to Paolo. By building the company around your personality and interests, and using yourself as the face of the brand, it becomes harder to separate the face of the brand from the brand itself. Hence, when one step in the wrong direction has been taken, it impacts the brand too.

4.2.4 Analysis of Interviews

Paolo Roberto built his brand on his credentials and personality, and his brand is even named 'Paolos' - and this is also why he believes his brand became successful. He started his career within the food business when he released his first cookbook with his aunts, which contributed to building up storytelling; "My first cookbook was written with my aunts. As I was very controversial during that time, I believe that collaborating with my aunts for this cookbook resulted in 'salty meeting sweet,' which I believe was appreciated." Telling the story to let the customers follow along and tell the backstory and history of the person makes the brand more personal and intimate (Malone and Fiske, 2013). Paolo describes how "People trust me and that I would offer nothing but great products" - and this trust and credibility is

achieved by being transparent and letting them follow along on the journey. Eva expresses and applies to the theory of using your name and personality; "It can be easier if you have already managed to create certain brand awareness."

Furthermore, Paolo expresses that "I want to be able to stand for what I produce and sell, which I can proudly do with my brand." From the outset, he knew that he wanted to be 100% in control of the company. One can see this in the transformation between brands and influencers since they prefer to have 100% control and are less inclined to collaborate with brands (Rundin and Colliander, 2021).

Both Eva and Paolo acknowledge that having a face of a brand and leveraging a brand on a person and its personality is a big risk. Paolo expresses, "Well, I would say that it has both been a blessing and a curse - but when the scandal occurred, it was obviously a disadvantage…." When a mistake has been made, all the pros of the great tactics to build up a brand are torn down. Thus, many of the pros of leveraging a brand with a sole proprietor appear to become cons the day a big scandal happens. However, there seems to be a certain point that the scandal has to be, not to get "canceled". Eva expresses that; "Either some of your fans defend the influencer (e.g Bianca), or the criticism becomes too strong (Paolo) ." Thus, depending on the extent of the scandal, the parties (sole proprietor and the brand) have more extensive and smaller chances of regaining credibility with the customers.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Personalizing the Brand

As a result of the insights derived from the interview with Paolo Roberto, it appears that his choice to add his name to his brand was an active decision to increase brand awareness (Rudin and Colliander, 2021). Roberto explained in the interview that using his name will allow people to make the connection between him and the brand. Furthermore, it appears that Paolo has not only used his face and name, but also his personality, background, and interest in his brand 'Paolos'. It was a success factor for the company (before the scandal), as the need for human involvement in a brand is more significant than ever - as a face implies warmth and competence, conveying trust in the products it sells (Malone and Fiske, 2013).

Moreover, in the brand ´Paolos´, Roberto has leveraged storytelling and built the brand on his "personal story" to convey his personality and create authenticity (Malone and Fiske, 2013). Roberto describes in his interview that he had loyal customers and that his brand was strongly built on his Italian heritage, his aunts, and their knowledge. Thus, he created a story behind the brand that built brand equity and trust.

What is possibly dangerous in integrating much of your personality into a brand is that people have a hard time separating the brand from the sole proprietor, and vice versa. This can be noticed in the trend mentioned, along with the keywords, provided by the data gathering, where one can see the close connection people make between the two. Looking at the sample quotations from the data, one can see that both 'Paolos' and 'Paolo Roberto' contain the other party in the mentionings connected to each search word. Thus, at the time of Roberto's scandal, the brand was canceled together with him.

5.2 Shortcut to Brand Building, Shortcut to Disaster

According to Ossiansson, having a face behind a brand can make it feel more genuine and personal, which can build a stronger relationship between the brand and the customer. If you have a person who is strongly associated with a brand, the person risks just as much as they can gain. The benefits are great, but the downside can be devastating. Paolo Roberto is a prime example of a shortcut to brand building, but also a shortcut to disaster.

When a person's personality is used, customers feel more connected to the person, and feel as if the person is their "friend". While this may be beneficial for the influencer, since it helps them build their brand, it can also be disadvantageous if people begin to feel that the

friendship is not genuine (Ossiansson, 2022). As identified by the data collection of the three different cases looking at trend mentionings and sample quotations, people tend to associate the sole proprietor with the brand. In a sense, it appears to be a good thing since it helps an enterprise's products stand out in a competitive environment where product features are similar and differentiation is achieved through branding (Ossiansson, 2022). This is supported by Kotler (1997) who means that uniqueness is one of the basic functions that create an effective brand.

Similarly, since sole proprietors can "take advantage" of people's emotions, it is fragile because if they let their customers down, they will feel abandoned (Ossiansson, 2022). This can be applied to the case of Bianca during the Christmas calendar scandal where the customers appeared to be disappointed. "Disappointed customers" was one of the most frequently used words connected to Bianca during that time and hence indicates that her customers felt let down by her. This could further be explained by Keller (2008) who states that in return for being loyal customers expect the brand to perform according to expectations.

The extent to how much a sole proprietor chooses to share personal information is a blurred line since the expectations of transparency and accessibility are demanded by the customers (Malone and Fiske, 2013). Is Bianca too transparent with her life looking at the personal attacks she received after dissatisfaction with Caia's Christmas calendar? Instead of only providing constructive feedback to Caia separately, Bianca was involved and accused. In this case, it seemed difficult to distinguish between the brand and the sole proprietor. The fact that Bianca responded to Caia's criticism may make people connect with them even more. However, customers still expect brands to respond to criticism, or else they might think the brand does not care (Taylor and Perry, 2005). The sole proprietor becomes a living body of the reassurance of trust (Malone and Fiske, 2013). Therefore, when the embody of trust fails to reassure the customers of their trustworthiness the customers tend to be upset and disappointed - which seems to be the case for the three scandals.

5.3 The Downside of Establishing a Close Relationship with Followers

Looking further into the phenomena of sole proprietors being "fashionable friends", our result appears to show that disappointment seems to become strong if the brand can not deliver on the expectations held by the customers. This is particularly shown by the case of Bianca Ingrosso and Caias's Christmas calendar as the results obtained from the case data

present a connection between the sole proprietor and the brand. The peaks in the graph of the trend mentioned show that both Bianca and Caia were voiced during the same point in time of the scandal which seems to show interdependence between the two. Looking at Katrin and Clean Eating, the same interdependence can be seen as well. Furthermore, by examining the most frequent words connected to the sole proprietor and the brand, one can see the connection between them. For instance, when looking at the word cloud provided by Meltwater concerning Bianca Ingrosso one can see words such as "disappointed customers", "dissatisfied customers", "Caias Christmas calendar", "harsh criticism" and "the products in the calendar" are commonly used. Similarly, when looking at Katrin, one finds words like "Fish Oil" "Immune System" and "Covid" - and the same word can be found when looking at Clean Eating.

As Singh and Banerjee (2021) and McCracken (1989) state, many brands use celebrities to enhance brand credibility since these endorsers are prone to pass on their image and credibility to the brand they represent. This appears to be the case for all three sole proprietors. Bianca has a big interest in makeup, Katrin and her interest in healthy food, and Paolo and his interest in Italian cuisine. Thus, their credibility and competence are transferred to their brands and many customers use the knowledge and perception of the sole proprietors and simply apply the same features to their brand (Keller 2013). Without Bianca as the face of the brand, Caia would probably not have the same success as it has experienced thanks to Bianca's connection to the brand. Perhaps, Caia's customers become more loyal to Bianca rather than the brand. Bianca has made use of her customers' admiration in order to enhance brand attitude (Wei et al., 2018). This loyalty would explain why people feel let down by Bianca when Caia can not meet the expectations of the customers (Malone and Fiske, 2013). Thus, when Caia meets the expectations of the customers Bianca also gets blamed, which shows in our data where Bianca appears in the articles where Caia is criticized.

People seek concreteness (Malone and Fiske, 2013) which is obtained when a brand uses a real person as their interaction tool and that is also why people can not separate the two. The parasocial interaction appears to be strong, based on the insights from our information gathering, and when it is damaged by the fashionable friend, the customers feel like they have been let down by a true friend. The strong feelings connected to a betrayal were displayed by the severe threats Bianca received, shown in our results of quotation mentionings.

It is more appreciated by the customers if the sole proprietor succeeds in conveying his or her honest intentions in the brand communication rather than trying to increase the purchase intentions.

Since honest intentions lead to a better and more authentic perception of the brand (Malone and Fiske, 2013). This is something Katrin failed in doing when she posted about her newly launched fish oil. She went too hard with statements intended to increase the purchase behavior which made the customers react. Looking at the mentionings connected to 'Katrin Zytomierska' one can see how people thought it was wrong of her to take advantage of people's fear of the coronavirus to increase the sales of her product.

6. Summary of Insights and Addressing Research Questions

Our study has provided that sole proprietors and their brands appear to have a close connection, and thus the parties will affect each other. Regardless of how the scandal occurred and by which party, the connection between the sole proprietors and the brand appears similar for all three cases; *which party caused the scandal seems not to create a difference in the connection between the parties.*

However, the consequences seem to be dependent on how severe the scandal is - *the severity of the scandal does affect the consequences for the sole proprietor and the brand - the more severe, the worse consequences.* The relationship between a sole proprietor and a brand seems similar to a marriage. The brand becomes an extension of the sole proprietors, and the two appear tightly intertwined and aligned; *the connection between the sole proprietor and the brand during a scandal is thus substantial.*

Leveraging a brand with a sole proprietor is, in many ways, an advantage, and there are many pros. Building a brand on the sole proprietor's credibility automatically transmits credibility to the brand, which helps build brand equity. In today's highly competitive retail environment, leveraging a brand with a sole proprietor is a successful way to differentiate. In addition, storytelling is another vital element of building a brand since people now demand more transparency, which the sole proprietor can provide. The phenomenon of the sole proprietor is the next level for influencers, as they can have 100% control over the brand. *Pros; it gives fast credibility and a way to differentiate and create a more personal brand.* The concept of leveraging a brand on a sole proprietor seems like the best way of building a brand. However, when a scandal occurs, both parties are affected.

If the scandal is severe enough, you may see the sole proprietor or brand being canceled. The majority of what was once the pros became the cons. *Cons: Due to the close link between the sole proprietor and the brand, both parties suffer a negative spiral of harm when a scandal occurs.* Hence, when no scandal occurs, it is for the better, but it is for the worse when a considerable scandal occurs.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As part of this qualitative study, both first- and third-party data were gathered in the form of interviews and data obtained from the platform Meltwater. The insights from the interviews conducted provided the report with a deeper understanding of what the data gathering conveyed. Something that became evident for the authors of this research was that it can be immensely challenging to get in contact with a wider extent of sole proprietors. For future research, it would thus be interesting to interview a wider range of sole proprietors to obtain more perspectives.

Furthermore, an additional limitation of this research is the choice of a data-gathering platform. As touched upon earlier, Meltwater has certain limitations in terms of time and source. Thus, our report could only be based on mentionings found in different Swedish news articles. For future research on the same topic, it would therefore be interesting to obtain information from other sources such as comments, social media channels, and blogs for instance. The platform Meltwater additionally had limitations connected to the intuition mechanism that provided the sentimental value and it would thus be interesting to try to find another tool that could provide the values calculated in another manner to see if it differs.

Additionally, it would have been interesting to look further into the duration of the consequences of scandals connected to the sole proprietor and the respective brand. That is not something that has been investigated in depth in this report.

This report has touched upon the cancel culture and for future research, it would be interesting to look at if there exists any forgiving culture that makes customers oversee a scandal over time. Could this be the case for Paolo Roberto who already started a new company, 'Robertos'? Will customers be forgiving and forget what they have done?

To further gain more insights into this unexplored topic it would be interesting for future research to investigate the effect of a scandal and how the consequences can look for a brand ambassador instead of a sole proprietor. Will the effects be similar?

Lastly, it could be interesting to investigate the difference in cases depending on the geographic limitations. This report bases its insights on scandals and sole proprietors in Sweden but for future research, it would be interesting to investigate if the consequences would have been the same in a different market due to differences in culture.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Interview questions

Question 1 - *'Paolo Roberto'*

Can you tell us a little about yourself and your brand?

Question 2 - 'Paolo Roberto'

How come you started your brand?

Question 3

Do you feel that it was an advantage to be known before you started your brand?

Question 4

Have you used a lot of you and your personality in building your brand?

Question 5

Do you feel that your brand is part of your 'personal' brand?

Question 6

Do you find that people strongly associate you with your brand?

Question 7

What are the best / benefits of being strongly associated with your brand?

Question 8

What is the worst / risk of being strongly linked to your brand?

Question 9

(How come you chose your name as the name of your new brand?)