



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and
Agricultural Sciences

The Practice of Influencing

– How Zero Waste YouTubers Try to Influence the
Reduction of Waste Through Online Communities

Emelie Oldensjö

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Supervisor: Hanna Bergeå, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Department of Urban and Rural Development,
Division of Environmental Communication

Examiner: Sara Holmgren, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Department of Urban and Rural Development,
Division of Environmental Communication

Assistant Examiner: Lars Hallgren, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Department of Urban and Rural Development,
Division of Environmental Communication

Credits: 30 HEC

Level: Second cycle (A2E)

Course title: Independent Project in Environmental Science - Master's thesis

Course code: EX0431

Programme/Education: Environmental Communication and Management – Master's Programme

Place of publication: Uppsala

Year of publication: 2018

Online publication: <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

Keywords: Zero waste, netnography, YouTube, online community, practice theory

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Abstract

The huge generation of waste has become one of the world's most crucial environmental issues, due to consumption, massive use of resources and short life-spans of products. As a response to this, the waste management industry has started to implement zero waste strategies, striving for reduction of waste to lessen environmental impact. The idea of zero waste has during recent years been transformed into a lifestyle by individuals striving to live more sustainably. Some of these individuals have turned to social media to spread their way of life, contributing to the creation of online communities for environmental dialogue. This study investigated how the video sharing social media platform YouTube is used to spread awareness about reduction of waste in individuals' everyday life through video blogs. These individuals can be seen as influencers, as they can influence others by being a source of information, inspiration and ideas. The empirical data in this study was collected by using netnographic methods, with the aim to gain the perspectives of the participants in the online communities. Participatory observations of eight zero waste YouTubers' channels and structured online interviews with two of them were conducted. Through the theoretical framework of practice theory, it was possible to highlight important aspects of the elements *materials*, *meanings* and *competences* that constitutes the practice of influencing regarding reduction of waste. The findings showed that materials that are part of the practice are technology, zero waste products, accessibility and time. Meanings related to the practice are spreading awareness, community and feelings. The competences that are necessary are how to use technology, knowledge about zero waste and mentorship. By understanding the practice of influencing regarding waste reduction and its elements, it opens up for insights about how to get more individuals to improve their waste practices.

Keywords: Zero waste, netnography, YouTube, online community, practice theory

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Hanna Bergeå for being my supervisor for this thesis and Sara Holmgren for being my examiner. Further, I would also like to thank Maria Cavinato and Emma Hansson for being my opponents. I also want to highlight my gratitude to all of my wonderful classmates. I am so grateful to have met you and been able to make friends from all over the world. Lastly, but most important, I want to thank Emmy Hadd Danielsson and Sandra Nilsson for being my rocks these past two years.

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1 Introduction

There is an increasing global environmental problem, which is the huge generation of waste (Malinauskaite et. al, 2017; Song, Li & Zeng, 2015; Zamand & Swapan, 2016). The reasons for the increasing amount of waste are many, for example societies grow wealthier which enable consumers to buy more products (Malinauskaite et. al, 2017, Song, Li & Zeng, 2015), there is a mass consumption of resources (Lehmann, 2011; Song, Li & Zeng, 2015; Zaman & Swapan, 2016) and the lifespans of products are designed to be short (Malinauskaite et. al, 2017). Sustainable waste management can therefore be considered as one of the most important modern environmental issues (Zaman & Swapan, 2016), and if efforts are not taken the global generation of waste will continue to increase (Zaman, 2016).

As a response to this, during recent years there has in the waste management industry been a development of an emerging philosophy called zero waste (Lehmann, 2011; Song, Li & Zeng, 2015; Zaman & Swapan, 2016; Zaman, 2016). Zero waste can be seen as a contrast to the current dominating linear economy in which products, materials and resources are taken, produced, consumed and disposed of, and rather emphasises a circular economy, where products, materials and resources are maintained as long as they can (Malinauskaite et. al, 2017; Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). The aim is to transform waste management systems, so that extraction, production and consumption become more reduced from waste (Zaman, 2016). However, zero waste remains difficult to achieve and is complex (Lehmann, 2011; Song, Li & Zeng, 2015), and it is not only industries that has to act to reduce waste but everyone has to (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). Lehmann (2011) stresses that in order to achieve behavioural change among individuals, public education aimed at zero waste participation is a key to success. It is also stated by Pietzsch, Ribeiro and de Medeiros (2017) that there is a need for more empirical studies about zero waste implementation and practices designed towards changes in behaviour.

Starting first as a term for the industry, zero waste has also been and keeps being embraced by individuals globally (Zaman, 2016) and has become for many a way of living to reduce their environmental impact. According to Cox and Pezzullo (2016) social media and Web 2.0 technology has enabled individuals to advocate for change, spread awareness, engage others and connect with like-minded through digitally mediated social networks. Social media has become a public space where especially young people can make, exchange and share meanings about ethical as well as political issues (Andersson & Öhman, 2016). In a study by Rokka and Moisander (2009), it is shown that online communities can have an important part for environmental dialogue and can work out an agenda for sustainable consumption practices as well as sustainable lifestyles. Discussing, commenting and writing about environmental issues can enable the first steps for individuals to take action (Luck & Ginanti, 2013).

This thesis focuses on the video sharing platform YouTube as a social medium, which can offer a community for development, learning and interaction (Chau, 2010). YouTube is also seemingly the platform many uses to spread knowledge about zero waste as well as to learn about it. Since these individuals are sharing their zero waste lifestyles online they can

act as a source of information and inspiration within this community, and be considered as influencers for increased sustainability awareness (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017).

1.1 Problem formulation

To decrease waste is necessary because of its negative environmental impact (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). During recent years people have embraced the idea of waste reduction in their everyday life as a response. Some of these individuals have turned to social media to raise and spread awareness around the issue, acting as influencers advocating for waste reduction through the zero waste lifestyle. Former studies have shown that influencers have a role in individuals' sustainability awareness (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017) and that social media can offer a network for knowledge sharing that institutions might not provide (Gorbis, 2013, in Kozinets, 2015). It is therefore crucial to understand the connection between the use of social media and how it might result in increased environmental awareness potentially leading to necessary waste behaviour change.

1.2 Aim and research questions

The aim for this study was to understand the practice of how individuals try to influence others to reduce their waste with the zero waste lifestyle, and how they attempt to do this through YouTube as an online community. The expectation with this study was to contribute to the lack of research regarding the topic, hoping to give new valuable insights how it can be possible to work more sustainably with waste and lessen its negative impact on the environment.

In order to meet the aim, the following research questions was formulated:

- What characterizes the practice of influencing through YouTube, regarding zero waste living?
- How are these YouTubers trying to influence others to participate in the reduction of waste?

2 Background

In this chapter, background information and previous research related to waste and social media is given. First, waste as an environmental problem is presented, followed by how individuals can act as influencers for sustainability.

2.1 Waste as an environmental problem

The huge amount of waste in the world is causing several environmental problems. The very production of what will become waste in the end requires natural resources and needs energy as well as water (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). Waste can also pollute the air (Zaman & Swapan, 2016) and contaminate water and land (Malinauskaite et. al, 2017), which is a result from unsustainable management and waste disposal methods (Zaman & Swapan, 2016). Another problem is that industrialization has manufactured products that are not possible to or require a lot of time to decompose or digest in nature (Sing, Li & Zeng, 2015). An effect of this can for example be seen in our oceans, where thousands of tonnes of waste such as plastics can be found (Lehmann, 2011). The plastics are degrading slowly, causing problems and death for wildlife that consumes these pieces of plastics (ibid). Waste like this sort might build up in nature and become a threat to the future use of natural resources, such as drinking water (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). Therefore, the philosophy of zero waste is crucial to implement further to counteract these problems (ibid).

Dr. Paul Palmer coined the term of zero waste in 1973, for recovering resources from chemicals (ibid). Through the years the term has developed, and today zero waste:

“... is a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary, to guide people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use. Zero Waste means designing and managing products and processes to systematically avoid and eliminate the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources, and not burn or bury them. Implementing Zero Waste will eliminate all discharges to land, water or air that are a threat to planetary, human, animal or plant health.” – ZWIA (2009)

There is no comprehensive and strategic guide to reach zero waste goals, but one of these is the *waste management hierarchy* (see figure 1) (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). The hierarchy is a guide that can be used in order to prioritize waste management practices in a certain order, with the aim to achieve optimal environmental outcomes and resource utilization (ibid). For example, in Europe the waste management hierarchy is a directive that member states have to consider in their waste management plans and waste prevention programmes (EU, 2016). It is structured from what is most preferred to what is least preferred, in the following order: reduction, reuse, recycling, energy recovery and landfill (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). Reduction of waste means reducing waste by not producing it in the first place (ibid), which means that it is preferred to prioritize avoidance and minimisation of waste (Lehmann,

2011). Reuse refers to using an item again after it has already been used, and do not require as much energy as recycling does (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). Recycling is when to transform waste into new products instead of using fresh raw materials, which makes recycling an option that increases the efficiency of resources (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015; Zaman & Swapan, 2016). Recycling reduces environmental burdens (Zaman & Swapan, 2016), such as energy use, air pollution from incineration and water pollution that can come from landfills (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). Recovery is for example incineration of waste, which creates energy (Lehmann, 2011). Landfills is the least preferred alternative (Song, Li & Zeng, 2015). In connection to the waste hierarchy system, the zero waste philosophy is in line most of all with the first step, reduction of waste (Lehmann, 2011), which makes it the most prioritized one. Although there have been technological developments when it comes to waste treatment and management, we are still not close to achieving enough reduction of waste even though it is the fundamental sustainable waste management goal in the hierarchy (Zaman, 2016). The reason for this is that globally waste generation is rather increasing (ibid).



Figure 1. *The waste management hierarchy.*

Individuals' concern about their everyday habits and its impact on the environment has increased, and an important place for communication about environmental information is on the Internet and social media (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). However, no found studies about zero waste living among individuals have been found, and neither its potential relation to social media. There are studies concerning social media and environmental dialogue (see Luck & Ginanti, 2013; Rokka & Moisaner, 2009), however, these studies have focused on social media in form of blogs and other online communities. Therefore, this study can contribute to the lack of research regarding this. This leads us to the next section.

2.2 YouTubers as influencers for sustainability

Historically, Internet was once seen as something anonymous and not connected to us, but this has quite drastically changed the last years with the introduction of Web 2.0, also known as social media (Berg, 2015). Internet is nowadays a very fundamental part of everyday life, and the social course of events that is taking place on the Internet is no longer seen as something isolated but rather integrated in people's lives (ibid). Ever since the introduction of Web 2.0 the Internet "... became based upon a backbone of software that increasingly enabled and empowered people to use technology to interconnect in seemingly grassroots ways" (p. 7, Kozinets, 2015). Social media has changed our communication regarding change, since everyone can raise their voice and launch a social movement as long as they have a computer, mobile or tablet (Luck & Ginanti, 2013). Through social media we can learn about social behaviour, since it is possible to "learn about real concerns, real meanings, real causes and real feelings. We can learn new words, new

terms, new techniques, new products, new answers, new ideas” (p. 17, Kozinets, 2015). Since the Internet is such huge part of our lives nowadays, it is becoming more important to investigate it since our social interaction is so embedded with it (Berg, 2015), especially since young people’s use of the Internet is increasing (Andersson & Öhman, 2016).

Of all the social media that are available, the particular social medium that this study focuses on is YouTube. It is an online platform for video sharing, where users can share and view other users videos for free (Chau, 2010; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Scolari & Fraticelli, 2017). The website was officially launched in 2005 and bought by Google in 2006, and has since then become a broadcast platform, a media archive and a social network (Scolari & Fraticelli, 2017). Today, each and everyone can engage with the production of video that was not possible before, and unknown individuals has a chance to become known with their own produced content on YouTube (Berg, 2015) and virtually reach an unlimited amount of people (Kozinets, 2015). It serves as an arena for entertainment, but also a huge range of public perspectives on culture, politics, society and the perspective of human beings relationship to nature (Mörner & Olausson, 2017), including the subject of how to live a zero waste life.

Social media can create networks where individuals with shared interests, lifestyles and experiences can gather (Rokka & Moisander, 2009) and together create and share knowledge, services and products, that institutions such as corporations, governments and educational establishments are considered not to be able or not willing to provide (Gorbis, 2013, in Kozinets, 2015). These networks can inspire trust and interpersonal connections, and can have a role in decision making that before was only accorded to institutional actors (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Online communities can offer and play an important role for environmental dialogue and allow people to participate in the construction of sustainable development (Luck & Ginanti, 2013; Rokka & Moisander, 2009). Social networks such as YouTube has created and offer a participatory culture (Chau, 2010; Mörner & Olausson, 2017) where youth can develop themselves, learn and interact socially with other members of the community (Chau, 2010).

YouTubers, simply those who upload videos on YouTube, can take on an informal mentorship, which can be seen as opportunities for individuals to take on responsibility and have a larger role in the YouTube community (ibid). YouTubers can be seen as influencers, which are people who through online communities are diffusors of information, inspiration and ideas to their followers (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). In other terms, a YouTuber can be seen as a resource distributor towards a certain audience network, where they can transfer and also probably translate news and information (Kozinets, 2015). YouTubers share videos about for example products they use or details from their personal life with their viewers (Lee & Watkins, 2016), therefore, they have power and potential to promote ethical consumption and behaviour (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). Those who follow influencers might not have ethical consumption in mind from the start, but sustainability discourse might become normative for them through the socialisation process over time (ibid). It is not only the YouTuber who influence viewers, but viewers also affect the YouTuber through comments, which build a connection to the community (Chau, 2010). The influencer and the fan base exist because of each other (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017) and this affect what kind of content the viewers want and what the influencer produces (Chau, 2010). In their study of how influencers can promote sustainability towards millenials, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) stressed that future studies are needed to refine the understanding of how influencers can have a mediating role of a long-term sustainable change, and how young people are the co-creators of sustainable practices. This study aims toward to contribute to this understanding, by understanding how YouTubers might influence their viewers to reduce their waste and as a consequence their environmental impact.

3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter of the thesis the chosen theory for the study will be presented. This study employed practice theory as its theoretical framework for understanding the practice of influencing through social media, aiming for waste reduction. More precisely, to understand the practice a conceptual framework based on Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012), which includes the three elements *materials*, *meanings* and *competences*, was used as it opened up for analysis and understanding of what characterizes and constitutes a practice. By understanding these three elements, insights how individuals are trying to influence others through online communities could be gained.

3.1 Introduction to practice theory

There is no coherent practice theory, meaning that there are different approaches on what a practice exactly is (Halkier & Jensen, 2011; Nicolini, 2012). Practice theory can be found in the work by several social theorists who has different definitions of what constitutes a practice. The theory can be traced back to the early work by Giddens (1984) and his theory of structuration, which revolves *"around the conclusion that human activity, and the social structures which shape it are recursively related. That is, activities are shaped and enabled by structures of rules and meanings, and that these structures are, at the same time, reproduced in the flow of human action"* (p. 3, in Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). Schatzki (1996) focuses on the sayings and doings which constitute a practice, for example the practice of cooking, and that these sayings and doings are linked in certain ways. In this study, influencing would be the practice and the sayings and doings would be what the YouTubers say, think and does in order to influence waste reduction. For Reckwitz (2002) a practice *"... is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge."* (p. 249, Reckwitz, 2002). Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) are practice theorists who, like Reckwitz (2002), focuses on the elements that constitute a practice and that these elements open up for analysis and understanding of the multiple dynamics of everyday life. However, unlike other theorists, they emphasises the importance of things and materials in everyday life which they argue is a gap in other approaches (ibid).

The common ground between these theorists is that they have searched for a middle level between agency and structure (Hargreaves, 2011). It is not the individuals who perform the practices or the social structures surrounding them that has the focus when analysing a practice, but rather it is the practice itself. The focus is on the everyday and routine performance, as in cooking, driving and shopping (ibid).

Practice theory has been used in several studies concerning environmental problems, with a focus on sustainable consumption (see Halkier & Jensen, 2011; Hargreaves, 2011; Røpke, 2009) and climate change (see Shove, 2010; Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012).

However, no studies with a focus on influencing through YouTube regarding reduction of waste with a connection to practice theory have been found.

3.2 A conceptual framework

Because of the different approaches to practice theory, the researcher has to show which starting point of practice theory the researcher has (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). This study has mostly adopted the framework by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012), which focus on three interdependent elements that create and maintain a practice: *materials*, *meanings* and *competences* (see figure 2). *Materials* refer to the necessary things, technologies, and objects to be able to perform a practice (ibid). *Meanings* focus on symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations of a practice (ibid). *Competences* include skills, know-how and technique necessary for the practice (ibid). People, that are the carriers of the practice, have to combine these elements actively to be able to perform it (ibid). In order for the research questions of this study to be answered, these elements were the foundation for the coding and analysis of the empirically collected data. Below is a more detailed description of the elements and how these were used in the analysis:

Materials – In this element it was investigated what the individuals needed in order to video blog and which objects as well as resources that are necessary when trying to influence others to reduce their waste. How could this be connected to how they can influence others?

Meanings – In this element it was investigated what the reasons could be why the individuals use YouTube as a channel to talk about zero waste, and what implications this could have on their viewers. What could be the YouTubers' motivations?

Competences – In this element it was investigated what skills and knowledge the YouTubers needed in order to use YouTube and talk about zero waste. What did they need to know?

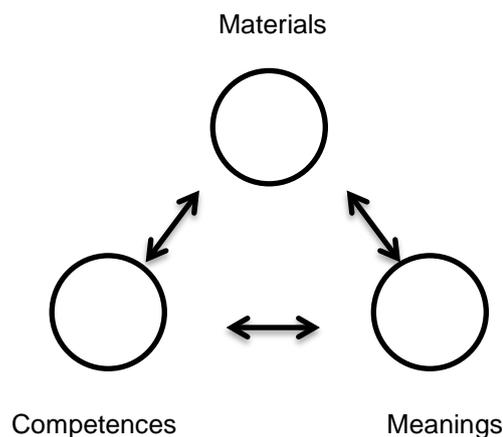


Figure 2. *Practices*.

According to Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012), "practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when connections between elements of these three types are made, sustained or broken" (p. 14). As an illustrating example, unsustainable waste behaviour is a practice in itself, and in order for this practice to transform into a more sustainable practice an element needs to shift or disappear. This could for example happen through the practice of influencing, the practice this study focuses on. Therefore it is essential to understand

practices and their emergence, persistence and disappearance (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012), since then it is possible to understand a practice itself, but also how to change it.

Individuals end up having practices for many reasons, such as accidents of birth, history, location, social networks and communities, which are all important for how and why individuals will participate in future practices (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). Social ties between people are important in order for practices to continue to exist (ibid). Participation in the practice is therefore of high importance: "Patterns of participation matter not only for who gets the opportunity to do what, but for who it is that shapes the future of a practice, and for how individuals are shaped by the experience" (ibid, p. 74). In connection to the practice of influencing, this means participation in the practice by the viewers is important for the influencers. Without this participation, the practice would probably cease to exist. Also, by their participation the viewers might engage in future practices like the practice of zero waste living.

Practice theory does not offer instant solutions to behaviour change, but has the potential for understanding it (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). By understanding a practice, it is possible to explore the implications and patterns reproduction and transformation of a practice has for consumption, institutions and infrastructures (ibid).

The framework can be argued to be suitable for environmental research since it has been proven to be useful in studies such as sustainable consumption (Hargreaves, 2011) as well as the example of climate change in the work by Shove, Pantzar and Watson themselves (2012). By using practice theory and this particular conceptual framework in this study, it might shed light on how YouTubers try to influence others to reduce their waste through an online community.

4 Methodology

In this chapter, it will be presented how the research was conducted. First, the research approach and research design is presented, followed by how the data was collected, the sample collection and how the data was processed. Lastly, the chapter ends with critical reflections.

4.1 Methodological approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, and netnography as its research design. Qualitative research refers to the exploring and understanding of meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to either a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). This is a contrast to a quantitative research approach, which focuses on numerical data (Bryman, 2008).

According to Creswell (2014) the researcher needs to know which philosophical worldview the research will be based on, since this will affect which approach you chose. This study has a social constructivist worldview, which refers to that constructivist researchers focus on individuals' meanings regarding a phenomenon, the interaction among participants and specific contexts (ibid), such as YouTube and reduction of waste in this study.

4.2 Netnography

Since the aim of this study was to understand how YouTubers try to influence their viewers to reduce their waste through an online community, an appropriate strategy for collecting data online was necessary. Therefore, this study was based on netnography as its research design.

Netnography is a development from ethnography, that derives from anthropology and sociology in which researchers study such things as shared patterns of behaviour and actions of a culture and its members in a natural environment (Creswell, 2014) and collects empirical data through for example observations and interviews under an extended period of time (Bryman, 2008). The difference from ethnography is that netnography is focusing on cultural and social contexts online in order to understand what happens offline and vice versa (Berg, 2015; Kozinets, 2015). Robert V. Kozinets coined the term in 1997 as a response to those researchers that did not know how to use ethnography online in order to understand social interactions (Berg, 2015), since the Internet was not considered a place (Bryman, 2008). Nowadays, it is harder to draw a line between people's lives offline and online (Berg, 2015). Netnography helps the researcher to understand Internet as an artefact, tool and a space for interaction but also the cultural and social life that is taking place at, with and in relation to the Internet (ibid). When working with netnographic research, it is not only words that are important but also images, edited audio visual presentations like videos and other digital artefacts (Kozinets, 2015). Netnography can contribute to the understanding of the social phenomenon that networks are, where billions of individuals'

experiences are reflected and revealed (ibid). Social media and the Internet are connected to social life (Berg, 2015; Kozinets, 2015), and the technologies we chose and adapt, alter our practices, behaviours and lifestyles (Kozinets, 2015). Therefore it is of high importance to give social media research attention, especially since a lot of young people are turning to it (Andersson & Öhman, 2016; Kozinets, 2015).

Netnography is used for example in the fields of sociology and media studies in order to study technologically mediated social behaviours through online communication (Kozinets, 2015) but there is a lack of research concerning environmental issues. Rokka and Moisander (2009) applied netnography in their study in order to gain more research possibilities about environmental consumption practices, but otherwise the environmental field is rather empty of netnographic research. To combine netnography with the theoretical lens of practice theory, can help to give more attention to cultural practices and therefore give more understanding regarding how a culture is adopted (Kozinets, 2015). Thus, the combination of using netnography as the research design and practice theory in this study can give new insights about how individuals try to influence others to reduce waste.

4.3 Data collection

In order to gather empirical data, two methods commonly used in netnography were applied: participatory observations and structured online interviews. Participatory observations was the main method for collecting material, since this made it possible to study the YouTubers and their channels, which are their natural setting. By acting like the YouTubers' followers, such as in having a private YouTube-account, looking at videos and liking videos as well as comments, it was possible to become part of the online culture and gain insight about what is being said and done (Berg, 2015). When being an observer, you should present yourselves for the members of the context that is studied (ibid). The YouTubers were informed that their videos was being a part of this study after addressing this to them through their e-mails, although not all of them replied to this. However, none of them protested. When observing the YouTubers, detailed field notes about what the YouTuber said and did were made. Kozinets (2015) stresses that the experience of someone talking in front of a camera and the transfer of this into a platform like YouTube can be captured as qualitative words and coded into field notes by a human listener and watcher. The videos was watched twice in order to reduce the risk of missing important details. The description of each video was noted since valuable information could be found there. Also, the comment section of the video was observed. Due to the time frame, not all comments could be observed but the most popular comments by viewers were skimmed through to get a grasp of the overall expression. If there were particularly interesting comments, these became part of the field notes. It was important to observe the comments in order to get an understanding of the relationship between the YouTubers and the followers, and to see the viewers' responses to the video. The other method used in order to collect empirical data was asynchronous structured interviews with two of the YouTubers, meaning they were not conducted in real-time (Berg, 2015; Kozinets, 2015). The questions were formulated with a stance in order to get a personal view from the YouTubers and their relationship with the online platform and the zero waste lifestyle. The participants were contacted by e-mail, with an explanation of the study and a request to participate in the study by answering the structured questions in written form. Structured interviews can according to Berg (2015) be suitable in order to get deeper understandings and descriptions of social phenomena since there is room for thought for the participants. However, a structured interview does not allow improvised follow-up questions from the researcher (ibid). The participants were asked during the first interview for permission, if necessary, to be sent follow-up questions in order to tackle this. The structured interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. The field notes and the interviews resulted in 40 pages of text to be processed and analysed.

4.4 Sample collection

For the empirical data, eight YouTubers and their channels was observed. The selection of the YouTubers was based on several criteria:

- Zero waste was one of the main topics for the channel.
- English had to be the spoken language in the videos.
- They were some of the most popular regarding zero waste.
- The YouTuber had to be a private individual and not a media channel or company.

In order to find the most popular videos about zero waste, a search was made using YouTube's search function. This resulted in how many views each video had. In the next step, the videos were checked in order to conclude that the YouTubers fulfilled the criteria. According to Berg (2015), the Internet provides a lot of information and data, which for the social science researcher is easy to collect but has to be delimited. This meant that the amount of YouTubers that would be observed and interviewed and how many videos that would be studied had to be restricted. At first ten channels were chosen, but this turned out to not fit into the time frame of the thesis and therefore eight channels were chosen in the end. After collecting data from the eight channels, it was also considered that no particularly new insights were conducted, which according to Creswell (2014) is a sign of when to stop collecting data.

4.5 Processing the data

In order to process the collected data from the participatory observations and the structured interviews, it had to be coded. The process was in line with an abductive approach. An inductive approach does not have a chosen theory beforehand but evolves from findings, and a deductive approach is focusing on hypotheses based on theories leading to findings (Bryman, 2008). An abductive approach can therefore be seen as a mix between induction and deduction, since it means moving between the chosen theory and the collected data (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008) that was the case for this study. The coding for this study was based upon the framework of Creswell (2014) and the three elements from Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012). A combination of emerged and predetermined codes was used. First all of the data was read through in order to get a general sense and idea what it was all about (Creswell, 2014). Then, the data was coded by organizing it into different *in vivo* terms, meaning the emerging codes became based on the actual language of the participants (ibid). The emerging codes became *technology, zero waste products, accessibility, time, spreading awareness, community, feelings, how to use technology, knowledge about zero waste* and *mentorship*, after concluding that these were the recurrent topics and terms found in the data. These emerging codes were then categorised into the predetermined codes from the three practice elements, namely *materials, meanings* and *competences* (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012), therefore following the abductive process. The data was read through several times trying to make sure no important details were missed.

4.6 Critical reflections

4.6.1 Ethical considerations

To work with netnographic research means that material is easy accessible, and that all that is published online can be considered to be used as empirical material (Berg, 2015). In ethical terms, this access to material can make it difficult to get informed consent by participants in a study, which normally is easier in offline studies (ibid). According to Kozinets (2015), public data can be collected through observations and can be done

ethically as long as identities are not described if consent has not been given. Ethical considerations have to be adapted to the actual research being made (Berg, 2015). Since not all of the YouTubers gave their consent to be part of this study this resulted in all of them being anonymous to keep it coherent and ethical. This was not considered a problem, since the focus of the study was on the practice of influencing and not on the individuals themselves. What can be mentioned without giving away their identities is that all of the YouTubers were female. None of the most popular individuals regarding this subject was male. This can be of interest for future studies focusing on gender.

4.6.2 Validity and reliability

According to Creswell (2014) multiple approaches is recommended to assess the accuracy of the findings in a research project to add validity. In this study, two validity strategies were applied; triangulation and clarifying the bias a researcher brings to a study. Triangulation refers to the use of several methods or sources of data (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2014), which means that collecting data from participatory observations and structured interviews validate the findings. Creswell (2014) states that when a researcher is self-reflecting upon the bias doing qualitative research, s/he provides comments about how the background shapes the findings. This study might have been affected by the author's academic background in environmental studies as well as in a personal interest in social media and sustainable lifestyles. It is not possible to state how this might have had an affect of the interpretations of the findings, but there is a possibility that some aspects of the findings were considered more of interest than others unconsciously. By clarifying this, validity is added to the study as well.

Regarding reliability, this is usually something difficult to accomplish in a qualitative study due to that it is impossible to have the same setting as in the original research and therefore replicate it (Bryman, 2008). However, this might be possible for a researcher trying to replicate an ethnographic study if the social role is similar as in the original research (ibid). This can be interpreted to be the same as for netnographic research. If another researcher would like to replicate this study, it could perhaps be possible by studying the same YouTubers, the same video blogs and by interviewing the same individuals.

5 Findings

In this section the findings are presented and analysed through practice theory, mainly through the conceptual framework from Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012). The findings are structured according to the three practice elements *materials*, *meanings* and *competences*.

A selection of four of the most popular video blogs at each channel were selected, resulting in 32 videos in total. The length of each video differed from three minutes to 18 minutes. The views of the videos differed from around 4300 to 560 000, depending on the popularity of the video and the YouTuber. Regarding the amount of comments on each video, this ranged from eight to 1065 comments. The video blogs set-up was quite similar, either the YouTubers only talked in front of the camera or they filmed what they were doing. The themes that the chosen videos had were mainly guides for zero waste beginners, things helping to reduce waste, struggles and mistakes, making your own products and how to shop zero waste.

The empirical data from the participatory observations and the interviews resulted in 40 pages of field notes to be analysed. Quotes from the YouTubers' video blogs, both from what they were saying, writing in the description of the videos or what was written as comments, as well as the interviews, have in this section been used in order to highlight important and interesting aspects from the collected data.

It is important to have in mind that the three elements are connected to each other as well are shaping each other (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012), which is why some elements might have similar characteristics.

The YouTubers and the interviewees has been labelled as followed:

Table 1. *Labelling of the data.*

YouTubers	Interviewees
Y1	I1
Y2	I2
Y3	
Y4	
Y5	
Y6	
Y7	
Y8	

5.1 Materials necessary for influencing

When analysing the material elements of the practice, what the individuals needed in terms of resources and objects was investigated. From the data it could be observed that materials needed for the practice were *technology, zero waste products, accessibility* and *time*.

5.1.1 Technology

In order for the YouTubers to actually be able to try influencing others to reduce their waste at all, technology is a key material element. It would not be possible to do video blogs without a camera, and it would be impossible to upload these videos without a computer. Without the Internet there would not be something called social media, and the phenomenon of YouTubing would not exist. It is also necessary for the YouTubers that their viewers have some sort of device; smartphone, tablet or computer; in order for them to reach out. Technologies such as mobile communication do make a difference in how practices connect in everyday life and how co-existing practices shape each other (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). This can be interpreted that the use of YouTube as a technological material in the practice of influencing can connect with what happens offline in the everyday life, and that these can shape each other.

The following quote from one of the interviews is an example how YouTube as a technological material is of importance to make you heard and to reach others with the same access to the technology:

“YouTube is a platform I have enjoyed for many years, somewhere where you can be a voice without censorship which I do associate with mainstream media. You can be a normal person with your views unpoliced, and be able to reach others anywhere in the world.” (I2)

All of the YouTubers are mentioning in their video blogs different links towards their other social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook and webpages. They also share links directly to reusable products that they recommend can help avoidance of single-use products. Most of them also refer to other people on YouTube talking about zero waste, which is linked to the meaning of community in the practice.

5.1.2 Zero waste products

In order to be able to influence others, the YouTubers talk a lot about necessary things for zero waste living. In several of their video blogs, they are all showing all kind of objects that are considered to be more sustainable and what help themselves to reduce their own waste in their everyday life. Without these things, it would be difficult trying to influence others as well. This makes zero waste products an important material element of the practice. The most common things pretty much shown and mentioned by all of the YouTubers are tote bags, water bottles, cups, cutlery, containers, straws, jars, toothbrushes, menstrual products and safety razors. What all these objects have in common is that they are reusable in one way or another, and mostly made out of natural materials like wood, metal and glass. The material that you are suppose to avoid as much as possible in the lifestyle is plastics, especially single-use plastics, because of the huge negative environmental impact it has. As two of the YouTubers put it, “*every piece of plastic that you don’t use is one less piece of plastic!*” (Y1) and “*a tiny tiny bit of waste but it is one step towards the path of zero waste*” (Y3). This can be seen as encouragement towards the viewers that every little small step taken is a step towards the right direction, even though it might feel small. Another common theme is to talk about making things on your own, as for example deodorant in order to avoid unnecessary waste (Y1, Y3, Y4, Y7, Y8). Some of the YouTubers stresses that it is alright to use what you already have, even if this is made

out of plastic, since throwing away usable things goes against the mind set of the lifestyle (Y2, Y6).

Interestingly, many of the YouTubers stresses several times how easy it is to live zero waste, and how using reusable products and making things on your own is not as demanding as thought:

”So easy to bring with you.” (Y1)

”It’s so easy to make this change and be prepared with a bag to prevent plastic bag usage.” (Y2)

“I found that it was not as demanding as I may have thought and it was much easier to practice in real life than I may have thought in the first place.” (Y3)

”As I continue my zero waste journey, I realised I reduced more than 70% of my waste. AND IT WAS EASY! I had to share with you the steps I took and how they got me closer to having a zero waste lifestyle.” (Y7)

Another common theme that is connected to the zero waste products is the promotion of how much money you are able to save by living a zero waste life. One YouTuber mention that some things that you might want to buy in order to reducing waste and adapt to the lifestyle might be a bit expensive at first but “*it will save you money in the long run!*” (Y5). However, all of them except for one mention in different ways how the lifestyle has saved them a lot of money. Below are some examples:

”Zero waste is really not hard to do: as you aren’t adding things to your life, but getting rid of things you don’t actually need. This means your life gets cheaper.” (I1)

“I worked out that my savings are around a thousand pounds a year which is quite insane when you calculate it all together. So not only are you helping reduce your waste, you’re saving money.” (Y2)

“The best thing ever is my reusable pads. Used mine a lot of years now, they are comfortable and saved me a lot of money.” (Y7)

To save money seems to be a clear argument for the YouTubers to use when explaining the benefits of the lifestyle, and is consequently of high value for the YouTubers to point out since viewers believe living zero waste will affect their financials negatively. By pointing out the benefits, this might engage others to reduce their waste.

5.1.3 Accessibility

Accessibility seems necessary for all of the YouTubers in one way or another, meaning that in order to influence others they have to know where they themselves can for example “*buy in bulk*” in order to avoid packaged food, using glass jars and reusable bags (Y1, Y4, Y5, Y7, Y8) or buy items second hand in order to use what is already in the system (Y1, Y3, Y4). Therefore, this material element seems to be of high significance. They are aware that these kinds of stores are not common and not accessible for everyone (Y2), and that they are fortunate to get unpackaged produce where they live (Y8). As a response to the viewers that stresses the lack of zero waste stores in their area, some YouTubers (Y1, Y3, Y5, Y6,

Y7) show how to shop unpackaged at regular supermarkets where they live; *"many of you guys said that you don't have resources like that around you so I thought I would try to do it at Walmart"* (Y5) and *"I decided to go to Whole Foods because I feel like it's more of a universal store, it's located in a lot of different cities"* (Y6) are examples of this. Another alternative way for buying unpackaged food is mentioned by three of the YouTubers, which is to visit a *"farmers market"*, if there is one accessible (Y3, Y4, Y8).

Even though many of the YouTubers have zero waste stores close to them, it is also common to buy things online in order to access certain things, both new things that are considered sustainable in some way (Y2, Y4, Y5) and second hand which should be used before buying new things (Y4). That the YouTubers stresses online shopping as something positive is highlighted through the following quote:

"It makes it so easy for anyone to get something so that they can make a better option. The last time I saw a bamboo toothbrush here was at Whole Foods and it was still in plastic packaging. I can get one plastic free from Amazon!" (Y5)

The YouTubers emphasise that you can always do something to avoid waste, either if there are stores close to you, or the Internet can help you. They are stressing that it is possible to participate in the lifestyle since there are different ways of getting access to the things you need. The importance of who has access to what regarding both production and transportation is confirmed by Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012). By telling the viewers how they can access things or locations in different ways, the YouTubers might inspire others how unnecessary waste can be avoided.

5.1.4 Time

According to Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012), time can be considered a finite resource that several practices compete about. That time is a finite resource and therefore a material element can from the data be viewed in two different ways. First, in order to be a YouTuber, Y4 stresses that she needs time in order to make videos while also trying to live an everyday life, in others words participate in other practices, which is perceived as a struggle.

Secondly, some stresses that living a zero waste life can require more time, which they are honest and transparent with towards their viewers (I1, I2, Y3, Y4). I1 said that you have to plan ahead *"to avoid having to use disposable products and producing waste"*. When asked about what the negative aspects of living a zero waste life could be, I2 answered:

"Definitely the fact that it does consume your life. Although of course I enjoy it, you absolutely have to be committed and dedicated to what you believe in. It entails a lot of preparation, and thought about every day actions and also living your life in a completely different way to those around you, can sometimes be tiring." (I2)

That it consumes your time is also stated through a video blog from Y3, but she puts this in a positive light towards her viewers, saying that the lifestyle is generated by curiosity and interest. Because of this, she means that if you find the lifestyle fun it will not be considered time-consuming but rather like a natural part of life. Y4 encourage her viewers to reduce their waste although it can feel time-consuming, by pointing out that they should not worry about perfection and give the required changed behaviour the time it needs, but is honest with that this can be hard.

5.2 Meanings for influencing

In the element of meanings it was investigated what reasons the individuals had for performing the practice, and the implications this could have on the viewers. The data showed that *spreading awareness, community and feelings* are important meanings for the practice.

5.2.1 Spreading awareness

One of the main reasons, therefore also one of the main meanings, all these individuals are on YouTube video blogging about zero waste at all is to spread awareness about the lifestyle and how to live more sustainable by showing how they live. By doing this, they hope they can make an attempt in guiding and influencing others.

"I've tried out and it worked for me so I wanted to promote it and pass it on." (Y3)

"Please share this video far and wide so we can really help other people to be educated in what it is to be zero waste and how to make really easy transitions in their everyday life. Every like, share, watch and subscribe, it makes a huge difference to really get that zero waste message out there so we can help bring more people to this movement." (Y4)

"I want to share this information with as many people as possible, I want to influence others not only in my real life but online!" (Y6)

"Maybe someone can learn from my experience!" (Y7)

Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) states that when individuals participate in a practice they locate themselves within society, and by doing this they reproduce specific schemes and structures of meaning and order. By stating that the YouTubers do what they do in order to spread awareness, is a way for them to locate themselves in society and reproduce the meaning of influencing others to live more sustainably. Some YouTubers bring up several different options and facts in order to spread awareness, such as the statement that the viewers should vote with their wallet (Y1), if something is in plastic packaging you should try to refuse it even if you are a beginner at reducing waste (Y3), addressing that you promote a circular economy rather than a linear one by using existing second hand items and by sharing with others (Y4) and explaining how a lot of waste ends up in landfills causing environmental problems (Y2, Y5). Another interesting thing brought up by Y4, is an alternative waste management hierarchy more suitable for the zero waste life, which is to refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and rot.

With the aim to spread awareness, this can be seen as connected to that unsustainable practices are challenged and have to break before individuals can participate in a more sustainable practice (Hargreaves, 2011). In this element it can be seen that the YouTubers try to do this by informing, which is confirmed by I1 when asked about how more people can live zero waste; "*watch YouTube videos, get inspired!*".

It can be seen that some of the YouTubers also stress the awareness not only about the lifestyle, but spreading encouragement and therefore making the viewers aware that "*if everyone did one of these things, the world would be a better place*" (Y1) and "*all of you out there who are trying to make a difference, a small change, a great change for a huge impact*" (Y4). This encouragement can be interpreted that the YouTubers see them as part of the zero waste movement as long as they try to reduce their waste and every effort matters.

5.2.2 Community

It is clear that the YouTubers see their channel and YouTube itself as a community, and that this allows for all of them to share and learn from one another. This meaning can be considered as one of the most important for the whole practice of influencing, since without a social platform with interaction with others such as what is possible with YouTube there would not be any possibility to influence others to reduce their waste. Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) stresses the importance of social ties between people in social networks and communities. The YouTubers create social ties by creating a sense of belonging and that what they do they do together, and that the community can offer guidance and help.

“I feel it is a more engaging medium than Instagram, blogs, Twitter, because there is more room to bring a human connection to what you are speaking about, which I think is demonstrated by the popularity of YouTube videos. In my mind, I thought, if normal people on YouTube can sell the things they love to their followers - surely a normal girl like me could maybe share my ideas on the environment with the YouTube community.” (I2)

“Just know that what you’re doing is really great and that we’re all here together, this is a community, we should be helping one another.” (Y4)

“What has been your biggest challenge? Tell me! Maybe we as a community can help each other out!” (Y6)

They openly ask for feedback from their viewers, with examples such as *“it would be awesome if you have any questions regarding zero waste”* (Y3), *“if you wonder how to do certain things, tell me”* (Y6), *“if you have any questions put them down below!”* (Y7) and *“if you have comments comment below!”* (Y8). By getting feedback as in comments, they get an idea of what their viewers want and can develop their content according to this. This is also shown in several video blogs in which many of the YouTubers clearly explains that the video was made because of the request from viewers (Y1, Y2, Y3, Y7, Y8). The comments are of importance for the YouTubers since that is how they get information what people might want to know. It is also in the comment sections there are clues if those who has watched the videos are influenced in making an attempt to reduce their waste or if they seem to have reduced it already. In general the comments on all the channels are emphasising how grateful the viewers are for the knowledge they have gained from the YouTubers and the inspiration they provide that they too can make a difference. An example of this is in one of Y5’s comment sections, where a viewer has commented that s/he loves the fact that Y5 uses YouTube as a platform to recommend how to make the world a better place.

Another interesting aspect of the comment section is that it opens up for discussion. The viewers can interact with each other, and the YouTuber as well as other YouTubers can interact with the viewers and with each other. For some YouTubers, not only do they try to influence others, but they are themselves within this community influenced by others, resulting in new knowledge (Y3, Y4, Y7). As an example, Y3 asks for others to leave tips in the comment section since she *“would love to read it and check it out”*. The comment section helps the YouTuber to answer questions in connection to the uploaded video, and does not have to create a certain video for answering questions. This is happening as well, and Y7 even said in one of her videos that she was *“thinking about doing a Q&A video soon”* because of the amount of questions.

The social ties that this community provides is important for the YouTubers in their attempt to influence others to reduce waste, since in order for the practice to strengthen it needs to continue to recruit (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). Without

loyal followers, or new viewers, there would not be any to influence and the practice would cease to exist.

5.2.3 Feelings

Some YouTubers talk about their feelings for living the lifestyle (I2, Y2, Y3, Y4, Y6) but most importantly all of them addresses their viewers' feelings in one way or another. Since this is brought up and mentioned from time to time this can be considered an important meaning for the practice.

Since a lot of the viewers say that they have bad feelings for not doing enough to reduce their waste, resulting with feelings of guilt, the YouTubers discuss this with their viewers through their videos. By doing this, it can be interpreted that the YouTubers make an attempt to influence their viewers with that every small step taken is good and that they *"are all still part of the zero waste movement"* (Y1). This can be seen that the YouTubers are claiming that the viewers are by all means participants in the lifestyle of zero waste no matter the effort. One YouTuber clearly addresses her viewers' feelings, after getting comments from people feeling bad:

"A lot of these things are out of your control! I feel bad that you feel bad because you could not make a better decision because to be honest the infrastructure from the companies is not set up for you to make those decisions." (Y5)

Some YouTubers try to identify with their viewers, by giving examples from their own life and their own struggles. Y3 explains in one of her videos that she can get a lot of critical comments, regarding that she only lives this way to get attention or that she is looked down at living an alternative lifestyle. She tackles this by saying that these critical comments probably come from people who have a bad conscience. Therefore, you should not be affected by other people's opinions. Y4 has a video where she states that she made the video because she did not want her viewers to feel alone with zero waste struggles, since reducing your waste is *"so much to change your behaviour and it's so much to unlearn all these little things that we learned throughout our lives"*. Y6 is tackling her viewers' negative feelings by answering that even though it is possible to feel small surrounded by *"trash and plastic"*, what they are all doing is about *"passion"* and this is valuable for making a change in the world.

Another interesting aspect is that a few YouTubers stresses the importance of feelings towards others. They mean that even though their viewers might be excited about the lifestyle, it is important to not *"force"* others who are not interested in it, instead you can educate and inspire (Y2, Y7) and *"build each other up with positivity"* (Y8).

5.3 Competences needed for the practice

For the element of competences, it was investigated what necessary skills and knowledge that was required for performing the practice. *How to use technology, knowledge about zero waste and mentorship* was considered necessary competences.

5.3.1 How to use technology

To know how to use technology is a key competence in order to be able to be on YouTube at all. You need to be able to use technology and plan what content should be in a video blog and edit it according to this. Without this competence, it would be very difficult to be a YouTuber and try to influence. One YouTuber responded in the interview when asked what a positive aspect being on YouTube could be, that:

“I have learnt video editing skills which I had absolutely none of when I started.” (I2)

By gaining and improving this competence, she can therefore participate in the practice of influencing. There are others of the YouTubers that are in one way or another even addressing technical problems concerning their videos, such as volume issues for Y6 and that she would be *“working to prevent them in the future”*. Y8 is in one of her video descriptions explaining how she planned to do a more *“fancy”* video but that it *“turns out camera angles are hard”*. Learning happens in everyday life all the time, and skills can be learned quickly or require more time (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). Even though they have these issues, they are still able to perform the practice and they strive to learn more skills to improve it.

5.3.2 Knowledge about zero waste

Knowledge about zero waste is necessary to be able to talk about it at all, and a reason for why the YouTubers talk about it in the first place and why people view their video blogs. Without knowledge about it, the YouTubers cannot try to influence others to reduce their waste. Therefore, this is considered an important competence for the practice. The knowledge is mostly concerning how and what to shop unpackaged or what reusable items that is good in order to avoid waste, most of all plastic waste. The knowledge is also considering more sustainable and natural materials like wood, metal and glass, or at sometimes even upcycled plastic as for example bags made out of old PET-bottles (Y1, Y2). How to make things on your own is also something that is stressed as something knowledgeable in order to avoid waste (Y1, Y3).

Interestingly, some YouTubers are pointing out that they are not *“experts”* (I2, Y4) and *“have no education”* (Y3) regarding the field but rather that they themselves are individuals who are learning and want to spread the knowledge on. One mention that it is important to do research in order to provide the viewers with correct and new information:

“I’m simply someone that has decided to do as much research as possible, and help share that message and help share the information, so you don’t have to do as much you know as much work as I had to do when I first was transitioning.” (Y4)

The wish to spread information that you have learned yourself is also confirmed by one of the interviewees:

“I hope they watch my videos to feel like they are talking to a friend who is just sharing their experiences, as I am not an expert in any matter just someone going through my own experiences with the hope they will help someone else.” (I2)

It is not only the knowledge about the zero waste living that is being spread, but the YouTubers also take the opportunity to spread facts about waste in different ways. All of them share links to either products or webpages where the viewers can learn more, but some give actual environmental facts in their videos, such as the problems with marine littering (Y1, Y2), the importance of reusing what already exists in the system (Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4, Y6, Y7, Y8) and problems connected to the waste management hierarchy such as the issue with landfills (Y2, Y5). Know-how is a competence that according to Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) is received by those who are already prepared to receive it. This can be interpreted that those who actually go to YouTube to watch video blogs about zero waste are ready to receive the knowledge provided.

5.3.3 Mentorship

In order for the YouTubers to be influencers, they take on the role of being mentors even if they consciously do this or not. The role of being a mentor can be seen both in what they are saying and doing in their videos regarding the lifestyle itself, but also in the comment sections of each video. Mentorship is therefore seen as a competence in order to influence others to reduce waste.

The YouTubers acts as mentors by providing comfort in form of saying that it is an *"individual journey"* and everyone struggles and does what they can in their own pace (Y1, Y3, Y4, Y5) and that you should not compare yourselves with others (Y2). The videos should be treated as how to see the benefits of the lifestyle and the movement (Y1) and it is considered great that others want to try the tips given in order to attempt reducing waste (Y3). One YouTuber makes a clear statement that even the most hard core zero waster is not perfect, which can be seen as a way for her to use her mentorship in order to make her viewers feel better and included:

"I don't think anyone is zero waste, even the biggest influencers out there having this one jar from the last seven years I call bullshit. A lot of things are out of your control!" (Y5)

One YouTuber is openly stressing that she feels responsibility towards what she tells her viewers:

"I feel this massive responsibility now, that is good, I should feel that responsibility. I want to tell you guys things that are good, useful, educational." (Y4)

Y7 stresses the importance of finding others who understands your lifestyle choice in order to get support, which implies that both feeling a sense of community but also having mentors in the field is encouraging.

It is reflected in each comment section that the viewers are showing gratefulness for the inspiration and guidance that the YouTubers provide them with. As an example, in one of Y1's videos a viewer commented that Y1 is an inspiration who have made the person trying to reduce waste. These comments is a sign of that the YouTubers can be seen as influencers for others to participate in reduction of waste, since they create social ties (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012).

6 Discussion

In this part of the thesis, the findings from the empirical material are discussed in relation to relevant literature and previous research from earlier chapters. The reason for doing this was to address the aim and the research questions for this study, as well as to set the findings in a broader context regarding achieving sustainable waste management.

To use practice theory as a theoretical lens in this study opened up the opportunity to analyse and understand what the characteristic elements that makes up the practice of influencing through social media could be. By finding out the elements *materials*, *meanings* and *competences* it was possible to understand how a carrier of a practice, in this case a YouTuber, performs the practice.

The findings demonstrated that several different aspects are needed for and affect the practice. Technology, which is both a material element and competence within the practice, makes it possible to perform the practice at all, and opens up opportunities for the YouTubers to connect to others interested in reducing waste. This is in line with previous research, which stresses that social media enables people to engage and connect with like-minded through social networks (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016, Rokka & Moisander, 2009). Zero waste products is an important material element for the practice, which is also connected to the material element accessibility. Without access to products and places that enables reduction of waste, the YouTubers could not possibly try to influence others. Also, it is difficult to influence the viewers to reduce waste if they do not have access to things and places as well. Access is crucial for the possibility to participate in a practice (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). One of the most significant elements of the practice is that the YouTubers try to create an online community. Through this community, the aim is to spread awareness, a meaning of the practice. Therefore it is necessary to require zero waste knowledge. By spreading awareness and knowledge, the YouTubers consciously or unconsciously obtain a mentorship towards their viewers, one competence element that can be considered necessary in order to influence. By being mentors, the YouTubers are acknowledging and discussing the viewers' negative feelings for not doing enough to reduce waste, a meaning of the practice, and are therefore maintaining important social ties (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). An important resource for some of the YouTubers was the material element time, both regarding having time to video blog but also being transparent with their viewers that reducing waste might take more time from your life. It is not possible to say how this affect the viewers, but what is possible to say is that different practices constantly compete about time, as it is a finite resource (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012) and the viewers apparently decide to engage their time in these video blogs.

If one of the elements in the practice would change, the practice itself would change as well. As an example, if viewers would no longer participate in the online community, there would not be any people to try to influence. In other words, this could mean that this change in an element would break the practice and it could cease to exist (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). The YouTubers can only try to influence others to reduce their waste as long as there is participation in the online community. Thus, it is of high importance that

the viewers exist, helping to reproduce the practice (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012).

The characteristic elements found in this study can be considered important when trying to influence others to participate in the reduction of waste. However, it is not possible within this study to state if the YouTubers actually are influencing others to reduce their waste. Nevertheless, the YouTubers open up the potential for participation in an online community and engage in environmental dialogue where all can learn from one another regarding waste issues, its negative environmental impact and encouraging actions to tackle these issues.

Since there is a need for behaviour change regarding waste reduction and educational implications to do this (Lehmann, 2011) the YouTubers' attempt to influence waste reduction can be seen as a way to do this at a grassroots level. Since social media can offer a network for knowledge that institutions might not provide (Goribs, 2013, in Kozinets, 2015), institutions in turn might learn from influencers and online communities how to more effectively work with waste reduction. This is in line with what Shove, Pantzar & Watson (2012) stresses, that those working with policy initiatives promoting sustainable ways of living should get a more understanding of the elements that form a practice. This is also confirmed by Rokka and Moisander (2009) who propose that computer mediated social networks can be an addition to formal public education and governmental policies, regarding achieving sustainable development. Institutions such as governments, corporations and educational establishments should then consider to understand how the practice of influencing can be used to reduce the generation of waste, especially since if not more action is taken, the amount of waste will continue to increase and the environmental devastation continue (Zaman, 2016).

6.1 Delimitations

Since only two of the eight YouTubers were interviewed, it is difficult to say if more interviews would have steered the findings and the discussion in a different direction or not. It would have by all means been preferable if all of the observed YouTubers had been interviewed to get all of their personal viewpoints. At least, the two interviews that were conducted did complement and confirm the participatory observations.

7 Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how individuals using YouTube as an online community try to influence others to reduce their waste through the zero waste lifestyle. By using netnographic methods as participatory observations and structured online interviews, it was possible to become part of the online culture and gain the perspective of the participants in the community. With practice theory as a theoretical lens, valuable insights were gained regarding what characterizes the practice of influencing waste reduction. These were 1) the material elements *technology, zero waste products, accessibility* and *time*, 2) the meaning elements *spreading awareness, community* and *feelings*, as well as 3) the competence elements *how to use technology, knowledge about zero waste* and *mentorship*.

The study consequently showed that it was not possible to come to the conclusion if people who are watching the YouTubers' videos actually are influenced to reduce their waste through the practice and if their behaviour regarding waste can be and has been changed. However, it can be stated that online communities such as YouTube can enable environmental dialogue and a space for learning and interaction about waste reduction. It can also be concluded that by understanding different elements of a practice, it opens up for insights how unsustainable practices could be more sustainable.

To change the waste management industry into zero waste is complex, likewise with individuals and their waste behaviour. The potential affect from influencers who advocate for sustainability change through social media should not be neglected, but be seen as a passage to tackle unsustainable waste behaviour.

7.1 Further research

There are several interesting aspects that were found through this study that can be of interest for future studies. As already mentioned in the methodology chapter, all of the YouTubers were female. Therefore it could be of interest to focus on gender and why specifically females video blog about zero waste living. Another recommendation for further studies would be to investigate the practice of zero waste living itself, which is an unexplored field. The power relations between the YouTubers and their viewers would be of interest to study as well. Lastly, since this study could not investigate if people actually are influenced to reduce their waste, it would be valuable to further investigate if and how people are affected.

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Appendix 1 – Interview questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where do you come from and where do you live now?
3. What does it mean to live zero waste?
4. What is zero waste for you?
5. For how long have you lived a zero waste lifestyle?
6. For what reasons did you start living zero waste?
7. What are the negative aspects of zero waste?
8. What are the positive aspects of zero waste?
9. How could more people live zero waste?
10. Is there a need for a zero waste approach in the society you live in? What is necessary to do in order to achieve zero waste?
11. Whose responsibility is it to deal with the waste problem?
12. What is YouTube according to you?
13. What is YouTube for you?
14. Why and for what do you use YouTube?
15. What are the negative aspects of being on YouTube?
16. What are the positive aspects of being on YouTube?
17. Zero waste is a subject you bring up on YouTube, for what and why?
18. How is the relation between you and your followers on YouTube?
19. Why do people watch your videos?
20. How do you relate to other YouTubers talking about zero waste?
21. What does environment mean to you?
22. What does sustainability mean to you?
23. What does a sustainable lifestyle mean to you?
24. What does sustainable consumption mean to you?
25. Is sustainable consumption and zero waste connected?
26. Is there something else you would like to add that I might not have asked?
27. Can I contact you again if I have further questions or need to clarify something?