MODUL VIENNA UNIVERSITY
WKO WIEN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

# The impact of influencer marketing in the fitness industry on consumers' trust

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

Bachelor of Science in

Interactive Marketing

Submitted to Kristof Tomej

Rebecca Baranow

1621022

Vienna, 6th May 2019

# Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

6th May 2019

_____                    _____

Date                                           Signature

# Abstract

With health and fitness being huge topics over the last couple of years, increasingly more people try to profit from that trend by covering it on their social media sites, especially on Instagram. As this situation could benefit all involved parties – influencers, the companies, and the end consumers – it is important to know how to win the trust of the followers by being aware of the most influential factor of trust overall. While there are several studies covering trust in e-commerce, not a single one has managed to analyze the situation regarding influencer marketing, even more specifically fitness-related influencers on Instagram. In order to tackle this problem, the three most commonly mentioned dimensions of trust in the literature were taken under the loop, benevolence, integrity and competence. Each factor was assigned three related, Likert-scaled questions that were used in an online questionnaire, which then helped in conducting a multiple regression analysis. The analysis showed that Instagram users very much appreciate transparency, leading to the conclusion that influencers as well as companies who work with them should be one hundred percent raw, honest and selfless in order to win the consumers' trust.

# Table of Contents

# List of Tables

# List of Figures

# 1    Introduction

The trend of living a healthy and fit lifestyle has a long history, but especially over the last decade, the interest for health and wellbeing has been increasing at an even higher rate (Neumaier, 2002). While people have always been striving to be the best version of themselves, eating wholesomely and exercising regularly is often motivated by social media platforms. There is currently a huge hype around fitness and health on social media (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016), which is why a great number of people use social media to tell stories about their lifestyle and give advice to others (Koch & Luu, 2015). This motivates and encourages their audience, especially teenagers, to improve themselves by living a similar lifestyle (Koch & Luu, 2015).

Health and fitness are just one field, where the use of social media marketing and its use for commercial settings have also been an intensively discussed topic over the last couple of years (Grimm, 2013). Worldwide, there is a total of 2.62 billion people using social media, of which 2.23 billion people are actively using Facebook (Statista, 2018b), and about 1 billion active users on Instagram. The latter can be characterized by a dramatic growth of influencers.  Influencers are known to have a large following of which everyone has similar interests, making it possible to have an impact on their consumption patterns (Charlesworth, 2018). Due to the fact that influencers are perceived as "normal people" and not celebrities, it is simple to build a connection and trust basis between follower and influencer (Charlesworth, 2018). This development urged global companies to shift their marketing strategies to embrace online – and more specifically influencer marketing, particularly on Instagram.

There are a number of reasons as to why Instagram has been experiencing such a great success over the last couple of years. Its mobility makes it possible for users to access the app wherever and whenever they want to (E. Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). Another factor that has to be considered when talking about Instagram's success is narcissism, because the app thrives in an environment of narcissists who have complete control over self-presentation and value superficial relationships (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Lastly, Instagram appeals to most people due to the fact that it is easy-to-use and provides affective content such as images and short videos (E. Lee et al., 2015).

Despite the high number of influencers covering the whole fitness topic, and the increasing investments of businesses in this industry into influencer marketing (Woods, 2016), there is little research done regarding the connection between the rising fitness trend, the growth of Instagram and the increasing number of influencers. In order to assess the impact of Instagram influencers on customers, the main focus will lay on the topic of trust and how trustworthy Instagram users with exercising as a hobby find influencers who they follow. At the end of the research, it will be clear as how authentic an influencer is perceived by the audience in general; subsequently it will be possible to tell if influencer marketing is successful, whether it is seen as unauthentic to do a great amount of sponsored posts and lastly, if followers should trust every influencer on social media platforms. The goal is to answer to following question:

> *"What are the factors that affect the trustworthiness of fitness influencers the most as perceived by Instagram users."*

In order to answer that question, a quantitative research approach will be used. A questionnaire-based survey distributed among people who are exposed to influencer marketing on Instagram on a daily basis will allow identifying the main factors that affect the trustworthiness of fitness influencers as perceived by Instagram users.

The remainder of the thesis unfolds as follows. It continues with a literature review, explaining the recent growing health and fitness trend, conceptualizing a definition of social media marketing in general and describing its most common types. Influencer marketing is described in more detail, given the research question of the study. At the end of the literature review, the concept of trust is explained in more detail. The subsequent methodology includes a brief declaration of the research design that was chosen for this paper, the construct measurement, an explanation of how the data was collected and an analysis of the data. Then, the findings of the research will be summarized in a short manner and those will be discussed. Afterwards, some managerial implications will be proposed and lastly, the paper will be closed with conclusions, limitations of the study and propositions for future research.

# 2 Literature Review

## 2.1 The Fitness Trend

The fitness trend has a long history. Since the modernization in the end of the 19th century, people laid importance on a balance between the body, the mind and the soul. Around that time, women started to feel pressured by society and therefore strived for a thin body, which they achieved through calorie-counting and regular training at home (Koch & Luu, 2015). Koch and Luu found that during the Second World War, the ideal of beauty – especially for men – was to have an athletic and healthy body which was a sign of power and military strength. The pictures of men shown in various media back then strongly resemble with today's bodybuilding. The real boom of health and fitness started in the 1970s in Europe, when jogging became trendy and being fit became a lifestyle for an increasing number of people (Neumaier, 2002).

The fitness philosophy continued over the decades, and especially bodybuilding became very popular (Hoffmann, 2002). From that point on, even women went into the "men's section" of a gym, which made it possible for fitness centers to identify a new target group (Haemers, 2016). Over the years, new factors like health, fun and communication became important for people when they thought of gyms and they did not just focus solely on their figure anymore (Hoffmann, 2002). In the 1990s, people had the mindset of having a strict workout plan – which they called the input – and therefore getting their dream bodies – which they called the output (Haemers, 2016). Nowadays, people mainly go to the gym because of the whole "wellness" factor, which does not only include working out but also manifests in activities like going to the sauna afterwards, doing aerobics classes and eating a protein bar before heading back home (Hoffmann, 2002).

According to Kelc (2002), people adapt a healthy and fit lifestyle, because of its impact on both the physical body and the psyche of human beings. The author emphasizes that the positive effects of fitness are especially high for people who suffer from diseases such as high blood pressure or diabetes. In general, people who move their bodies regularly are also more likely to eat healthily and get sick less often (Kelc, 2002). That is why fitness has been a huge topic for the last couple of

decades – people are not only becoming more aware of their well-being, but also of their health, which is caused by social media websites (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016).

The hype around health and fitness on social media basically has been present as long as they have been co-existing (Koch & Luu, 2015). More and more people who live a "fitness lifestyle" – which includes eating healthily, working out regularly and often also taking care of one's mental health – share vlogs or pictures on social media about it (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). They typically share tips which evolve around diet and training, with the goal of helping their followers reach their ultimate goals (Koch & Luu, 2015). While on the one hand it can be quite motivating for some people, others might mistake all of that information and just compare themselves with other people on social media, especially young women (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). According to a study which was conducted by Cohen and colleagues (2017), the level of body surveillance – which stands for body objectification and body image concerns – of Instagram users is significantly higher than that of non-users of Instagram. This can happen due to excessive posts of very thin – and often unhealthy – bodies on Instagram, which adolescent women set as a goal (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2017).

Even though people tend to compare themselves on the internet and therefore often have a low self-confidence and wrong self-perception, social media can also be very helpful and motivating if having the right role models. Apart from motivation and inspiration for private persons, social media is an adjuvant tool for businesses in order to conduct marketing (Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

## 2.2   Social Media Marketing and its Types

Social Media Marketing is a form of marketing in which social media technologies, channels and software are utilized in order to create value for customers and satisfy their wants and needs (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Compared to traditional ways of marketing which follows a top-down strategy, meaning that the initiative is always taken by the company itself, social media marketing has a bottom-up approach, meaning that it is much easier for consumers to interact and engage with brands

(Armstrong, Kotler, Harris, & Piercy, 2013). Customers communicate, contribute and collaborate with the brand and with other consumers of the company, which creates a feeling of community (Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

Kotler et al (2013, p. 5) define marketing as a "process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships to capture value from customers in return". It is all about understanding the consumers' needs, creating products that provide value, finding an adequate pricing strategy, a suitable distribution channel and a promotion strategy (Armstrong et al., 2013). Social media marketing has the same goal as marketing overall, but the main difference is that it is carried out online, and more specifically on social media platforms (Gay, Charlesworth, & Esen, 2007). This includes all web-based software and services that make it possible for users to get together online and communicate, discuss, exchange and take part in many forms of digital social interaction (Ryan, 2014).

There are many different types of social media, depending on their primary focus. So called social networks provide an interactive platform, where people are able to find their friends and add them, comment on profiles or pictures, have discussions and join groups (Kotler, Keller, & Brady, 2016). Today, the most frequently used social networks are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube (Statista, 2018a). A specific type of social media site that is getting more popular nowadays are so called social photo and video sharing sites (Ryan, 2014). Those allow the users to share photos or videos and comment on other media that has been posted. YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram, Flickr and Pinterest are the best-known social photo and video sharing sites, of which many large companies that dominate the market in their industry make great use (Elliott, Rundle-Thiele, & Waller, 2014).

Overall, social media enables people to perform many tasks, including sharing and documenting events using videos, creating blogs in order to share recipes or other ideas, sharing infographics with friends, finding people and connect or reconnect with them and much more (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). It also provides marketers the opportunity to directly interact with customers of the organization, rather than having a middleman (Neti, 2015). According to Neti (2015), the main reasons for companies using social media as a marketing strategy is that it is not as expensive as

most other types of advertising, and more and more people have access to the internet and therefore the probability of generating revenue is increasing steadily. Also, the ability to share expertise and know-how can be appealing to customers, as well as consumers helping other purchasers, for examples through comments on Instagram and Facebook (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012).

The following types of social media marketing were selected for further elaboration after reviewing multiple books about social media marketing and its types. The adjacent table shows the books that were used for the research in the columns, and the different marketing strategies which are covered in this paper in the rows. The "x" shows which topic was based on which book.

|  | Principles of Marketing (Philip Kotler et al, 2013) | Follow me! (Grabs, Bannour & Vogl, 2016) | Digital Marketing for Dummies (Deiss, 2017) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Product Placement | x | x |  |
| Affiliate Marketing | x | x |  |
| Sponsorships | x | x |  |
| User-generated content |  | x | x |
| Podcasting | x | x |  |
| E-Mail Marketing | x | x |  |
| Influencer Marketing | x | x |  |

*Table 1 Types of social media marketing with their sources*

**Product Placement**

*Product placement* first got into the spotlight of public attention in 1982, when one of the children spread out Reese's Pieces in a forest in the Hollywood movie *E.T.*. Nevertheless, this form of marketing has been existing for much longer than that (Newell, Salmon, & Chang, 2006). Ever since motion picture has been invented at the end of the 19th century, brands and products were placed unintentionally in the background of the main scene (Newell et al., 2006). While it can be argued whether it can be called *product placement* if the placement of a product or brand was not

intentional, La Ferle and Edwards (2006) found that the customer does not notice a difference.

When using product placement, a firm has the main goal of including commercial content – such as brand names, products, logos or other typical characteristics of a brand – into non-commercial contents (Williams & Petrosky, 2011). It is mostly seen in television, movies or other commercial settings, which makes it possible for a brand to reach the mass market (Williams & Petrosky, 2011).

According to the literature (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006), customers often notice product placement and recognize brands in movies or on television, but most of the time they do not perceive it as annoying. This leads to a higher brand awareness, attention, recognition and in the best case it can cause a potential customer turning into a regular consumer (Williams & Petrosky, 2011).

Even though product placement is mostly seen on television and movies, it also appears on social media platforms, like YouTube. Especially Youtubers with a specific niche often talk about products they extraordinarily like, which basically is product placement (Döring, 2014). Not only Youtubers conduct product placement, but also influencers on other platforms such as Instagram, where pictures of random life activities are posted but a certain product is clearly visible in the background (Naik, 2016).

**Affiliate Marketing**

Ul Haq (2012) defines *affiliate marketing* as a performance-based type of online marketing, where a website or company choses so called "affiliates" who help them generate webpage traffic and increase sales. The author (Ul Haq, 2012) further explains that if a website or an influencer wants to join an affiliate program, a direct link to the affiliated website must be included on either the host's webpage, in a YouTube video description or in the biography of an Instagram page. The more customers click on that link and decide to purchase something through it, the more money the host website earns. Most of the time, the revenue that is generated through affiliate programs is a pre-determined percentage of the sales which were made through the affiliate link and usually ranges from 1% to 15% (Grabs, Bannour, & Vogl, 2016).

Affiliate marketing has three main actors – the merchant, the affiliate and the web users (Edelman & Brandi, 2013). The affiliate marketing merchant is the company or website – meaning offline or online - that wants to execute online marketing in order to increase traffic and sales (Snyder & Kanich, 2015). One of many ways for online retailers to use affiliate marketing is to outsource part of the marketing or the whole marketing process to another company or person – often influencers – and share a fraction of the profits generated through that third-party advertising with that particular business or person (Snyder & Kanich, 2015). While Amazon is the most successful affiliate marketing merchant to date, there are many smaller websites that profit significantly from it (Edelman & Brandi, 2013). The affiliate or publisher is the company or website that embeds a link to the merchant's website into their own webpage (Edelman & Brandi, 2013).

There are many ways for affiliates to share the affiliated link with potential customers, such as embedding the link on their website, putting it in the biography of their Instagram account or including it into the information box of a YouTube video (Snyder & Kanich, 2015). For example, when a YouTube video creator is talking about a specific electronic device in their video, they can put the Amazon-link to that product into their video description, so that subscribers who are interested in that device can view it through just one single click (Gregori, Daniele, & Altinay, 2014). According to Gregori and colleagues (2014), affiliate marketing is much more successful if the consumer trusts the affiliate. The third and last important actor in the affiliate marketing process are the web users who actually click on the affiliated link and eventually buy a product (Snyder & Kanich, 2015).

**Sponsorships**

*Sponsorship* is a type of marketing that is currently gaining a lot of popularity since it is used by a lot of large companies, including sports firms such as Nike, Adidas and Puma (Delaney, McManus, & Lamminmaki, 2016). It is known to be most efficient while being part of an integrated marketing communication activity, meaning that other marketing strategies should run parallel to the sponsorship activities (Delaney et al., 2016). According to Delaney et al (2016), sponsorship functions the best when there is a close collaboration between the various marketing components, including public relations, sales promotion, advertising and personal selling.

It is often counted as a part of public relations, and it is the process of an organization supporting a single person, an event, venture or others financially or in other ways ("Sponsorship," 2008). The most common form of appearance of sponsorships are logos on tricots of football players or on posters mentioning the cooperation ("Sponsorship," 2008). Sponsorships are known to be a quite expensive way of marketing, but overall, the benefits outweigh the costs (Madill & O'Reilly, 2010). The reason for its effectiveness is that logos or pictures that are seen frequently tend to stay in the subconscious minds of customers, making it possible to easily increase brand awareness (Madill & O'Reilly, 2010).

The amount of online sponsorships is increasing steadily at the moment, which happens due to the current growth of social media users and influencers. One of the currently fastest growing fitness related companies, *Gymshark*, is using sponsorships as a main source of marketing (Haemers, 2016). Gymshark exclusively sells workout clothing and experienced the majority of their growth through the help of Instagram and YouTube influencers (Haemers, 2016). They select influencers with a wide community of followers and of course with content that aligns with the company's brand (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). Then, they sign contracts with them which includes regular deliveries of the newest workout gear and events with the other sponsored athletes, as they are called (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). The ultimate goal of those sponsorships is that a big percentage of the influencers' audience will buy that clothing in order to look like their role models (Haemers, 2016)

**User-generated content**

*User-generated content* is a concept which marketers use for the purposes of increasing the brand awareness of a company. It stands for all activities in which customers engage and communicate with each other or with a company on social media websites through self-created content (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). Even though the content is posted by consumers themselves, user-generated content might be earned media but can also be owned or paid media (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). It can appear in many shapes, ways or forms, such as reviews on Amazon, pictures on Instagram or a status update on Facebook (Smith et al., 2012).

As Blackshaw and colleagues (2017), there is not just one driver for user-generated content, but four main factors – namely community, empowerment, co-creation and self-concept – as to why people are motivated to post user-generated content. Human beings tend to crave a feeling of community, which makes them connect and interact with other people online (Blackshaw et al., 2017). According to Daugherty and colleagues (2008), producers of user-generated content create it because they feel an inner wisdom and want to share it with other people. This includes personal values, beliefs and self-concepts (Daugherty et al., 2008). Also, the need for power, control and influencing other people is an important driver for user-generated content (Blackshaw et al., 2017). They basically want to feel better about themselves and about what they believe, which can be a consequence of personal insecurities and low self-confidence (Daugherty et al., 2008). While there are numerous of different personality types among people, the desire for being creative, expressing oneself and promoting oneself lies in everyone (Blackshaw et al., 2017).

One of the most popular and longest existing platforms for user-generated content to date is YouTube (Susarla, Oh, & Tan, 2012). The creation of a personal YouTube channel is quite simple and this immediately allows users to upload individual videos (Susarla et al., 2012). If regular video uploads are conducted and the subscriber number is steadily growing, members can monetize their videos in order to generate profits from them (Susarla et al., 2012). Another network that enables users to post content and is growing tremendously currently is Instagram (Manikonda, Hu, & Kambhampati, 2014). Just like on YouTube, people can share their personal content with the world, in this case it is pictures and short videos (Manikonda et al., 2014). Since the app is getting more and more users at the moment, there are a number of accounts with a fairly large following, which consequently gives them the opportunity to engage in sponsorships or other forms of online marketing, such as product placement and affiliate marketing (Manikonda et al., 2014).

**Podcasting**

The name *podcasting* is a composition of the words "broadcasting" and the famous MP3 player by Apple, called "iPod" (Beyer & Walter, 2008). They are virtual radio programs which can be saved and be listened to just like normal MP3 files, so once they are downloaded to a device, users can listen to it whenever they want

wherever they want (Beyer & Walter, 2008). While podcasts where introduced to the market as music files which could be assembled by each person, nowadays they are better known as sound files (Grabs et al., 2016). The act of advertisement on podcast is called "podvertising" and is used especially by a lot of music labels, which want to call the attention of potential listeners (Beyer & Walter, 2008).

While podcasting is seen as a more modern version of radio broadcasting, it is gaining use in the branch of education (Chan et al., 2017). Podcasting as an educational tool has been establishing over the last couple of years, since it provides lecturers the opportunity to record a lecture and students the possibility to listen to lectures which they were not able to attend (Chan et al., 2017). According to Sendag and colleagues (2018), the act of purely listening in a lecture can lead to students becoming bored and "switching off their heads". Since podcasting makes it possible for students to only listen until they reach the point of boredom, it is a very practical tool in an educational environment (Şendağ, Gedik, & Toker, 2018).

Even though podcasting is a separate form of digital marketing, it is highly related to Influencer Marketing, since a lot of influencers introduce their own podcasts when reaching a sufficient number of followers (Beyer & Walter, 2008). Also, companies that just focus on podcasting use influencers as a "push" in order to be associated with well-known names in the industry (Hogan, 2018). Therefore the main goal should be to attain special guests in the podcast, which eventually will lead to a higher number of clicks, downloads and of course a good reputation (Hogan, 2018). According to Beyer and Walter (2008), podcasting has a huge potential in digital marketing, for example for doing audio seminars and presentations of new products, customer interviews, personal messages from the management of a company, customer support, tutorials and Q&A's, self-help content and many more (Beyer & Walter, 2008).

**E-Mail Marketing**

*E-Mail Marketing* is a form of Direct Marketing in which companies send offers, announcements or other information to customers or potential customers via e-mail (Armstrong et al., 2013). This form of marketing allows personalization, a well-selected target market and direct one to one communication (Grabs et al., 2016).

Compared to the more traditional form – Direct Mail Marketing – e-mail marketing allows a much higher speed of distribution, lower costs overall and it is more sustainable (Armstrong et al., 2013).

Although many customers perceive e-mail marketing as annoying, the probability of reaching potential future customers can be quite high (Armstrong et al., 2013). E-mail marketing can be successful when sending them to people who have given the company permission to do so; otherwise it will be perceived as spam, which can lead to a negative association with the company (Gay et al., 2007).

E-Mail Marketing provides a great opportunity for influencers – including bloggers, YouTubers and Instagrammers – to send out content-related newsletters to their followers (Georgieva, 2012). Those e-mails can be very personalized, which makes the customer feel more connected to the brand or person (Mogoş & Acatrinei, 2015). One of the most common contents of an e-mail is informing the target audience about newly uploaded content (Grabs et al., 2016). This can be a new blog post, YouTube video, Instagram picture or a new entry on their website (Georgieva, 2012). The goal is to stay in the top of mind of the receivers (Georgieva, 2012).

## 2.3  Influencer Marketing

Even though "Influencer Marketing" sounds like a very modern and  new form of marketing, it has been existing for a very long time (Charlesworth, 2018). Charlesworth (2018) explains, that in the early days of mankind, it was not conducted through the internet and social media platforms, but through word-of-mouth. The author further emphasizes, that in every society, there is a small percentage of people who carry an influence over the rest of the society, nowadays a big part of those people are so called "influencers". Influencer Marketing is basically just a sub-type of word-of-mouth marketing and is commonly used nowadays, because of the increasing number of influencers on the internet (Lagrée, Cappé, Cautis, & Maniu, 2017).

Social media influencers are people with a large following on one or more social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube or others (Woods, 2016).

The name originates from their main purpose, namely influencing other people, or more specifically their followers (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). According to Charlesworth (2018), influencers are "just like us", and that is why many people – especially the younger population – trust them completely with regards to their opinion on a product or service. The author also claims, that as the number of followers of influencers increases, the larger the barrier between them and their followers. Social media influencers usually have an influence over a specific segment in the market – e.g. people who are vegan or people who are interested in fitness and so on – which makes it easy to have an impact on consumption patterns (Charlesworth, 2018). Juhlin and Soini (2018) claim that influencers are seen as celebrities in their specific segment or industry. Since followers highly trust certain personalities on the internet, they follow their advice on products, companies or brands (Charlesworth, 2018).

What many conservative organizations do not realize is that Influencer Marketing can be a very low-budget yet quite effective marketing strategy (Haemers, 2016). Since they are not identified as famous personalities – at least in most cases – digital marketers came to the conclusion that they can be hired for much lower costs (Charlesworth, 2018). Those costs can vary a lot, depending on the size of their following, the amount of engagement and many other factors by which an influencer's impact can be measured (Charlesworth, 2018). The way it works is that a company contacts an influencers via e-mail and either offers a certain sum of money, free products or other compensation in order to be promoted by the influencer (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). Even though this type of marketing is cheaper than many others, it is not free (Woods, 2016). As influencers are aware of the fact that companies are willing to give them something in return for advertising the brand, they often demand or expect certain rewards (Charlesworth, 2018). The most common type of remuneration is keeping the product or material that was used to advertise the brand (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). Many influencers ask for exclusive information that is kept from the public, and often also expect monetary rewards (Charlesworth, 2018). Apart from those, influencers are sometimes invited to events, which in the best case scenario they share on their social media (Charlesworth, 2018). The presentation of the content varies a lot depending on the social media platform (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). For example, influencers on Instagram will most

certainly post a photo that includes the promoted product or service, an influencer on YouTube will probably upload a video describing the product or reviewing it (Juhlin & Soini, 2018).

No matter how much a company collaborates with an influencer or how high the payment is, this type of marketing will not be successful unless the end consumer, namely the followers, trust the influencer and their opinion (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). Initially, customers just consider the influencer's number of following and attractiveness, but what turns out to be the most important factors in the end are trustworthiness and knowledge (Gustavsson, Nasir, & Ishonova, 2018).

## 2.4    Consumer Trust

### 2.4.1    Defining consumer trust

Every single purchase of a product or service requires the consumer trusting the company to some extent; and while customers rely on providers of goods and services for their know-how, their skills and their capabilities, they actually are not really able to evaluate the quality of the job that was done due to a limited understanding (Dasu & Chase, 2013).

Trust is an important word when it comes to dependency and dubiety. In the offline world it means reliability, taking care of responsibilities and having no fear of consequences (Aljazzaf, Perry, & Capretz, 2010). According to Aljazzaf et al (2010, p. 3)

> *"Trust is both an emotional and logical act. Emotionally, it is where you expose your vulnerabilities to people, but believe they will not take advantage of your openness. Logically, it is where you have assessed the probabilities of gain and loss, calculating expected utility based on hard performance data, and concluded that the person in question will behave in a predictable manner"*

In the online world, trust surrounds less around emotions and openness, but more on the readiness of someone to be vulnerable to the act of another person or organization (Aljazzaf et al., 2010). This means that the one that

trusts someone does not have control or influence on the behavior of the other party (Aljazzaf et al., 2010). While the principle of trust is the same in every setting that involves human interaction, Mukherjee and Nath (2007) emphasize the differences between trust in an online setting rather than a face-to-face situation.

The main differences are the physical distance and that the customer and the seller are not interacting in person (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). This makes giving feedback, human networking and the social aspect of a purchase much harder (Chen & Dhillon, 2003). In order to counteract the missing human interaction in online retailing, more and more brands and companies make use of social media platforms to create an interactivity between buyer and seller (Dahlqvist & Preiksaite, 2018).

## 2.4.2    Dimensions of consumer trust

While there are many attributes that contribute to consumer trust in an online setting, such as availability, know-how, consistency, loyalty, integrity, reputation, size, promise fulfillment, receptivity, openness, goodwill and many more (M. K. O. Lee & Turban, 2001), Chen and Dhillon (2003) found that integrity, benevolence and knowledge are the most important factors when it comes to trust in e-commerce. Integrity stands for the trust that the customers have towards the company or brand with regards to honesty and morals (M. K. O. Lee & Turban, 2001). The reputation of a company plays a great role in the perceived integrity, since buyers will not judge the mistakes of a company with an amazing reputation as much as they would one that is not very well-known (M. K. O. Lee & Turban, 2001). Chen and Dhillon (2003) define benevolence as the goodwill and again, honesty of a company. In this context honesty is referred as to whether the company wants the best for the consumers or it just wants to maximize profits (M. K. O. Lee & Turban, 2001). Competence is the third dimension of trust in e-commerce and this refers to the skills and know-how the company has (Chen & Dhillon, 2003). This knowledge should be sector-specific (M. K. O. Lee & Turban, 2001).

### 2.4.3 Advantages of building consumer trust

The higher the level of trust customers have towards a brand, the higher the brand equity. Of course, brand equity is highly correlated with the brand name awareness, but there is also other factors that make up for the value of brand equity (Dasu & Chase, 2013). A high level of consumers' trust is directly correlated with increased customer loyalty, which results in word-of-mouth marketing and this finally leads to a better reputation (Pappas, 2016). Trust basically helps a company to build a good customer relationship which also increases willingness to pay and the customer lifetime value (Dasu & Chase, 2013). The more a consumer trusts a company, the more the organization gets away with making mistakes such as failure or bad advice (Pappas, 2016). Oliveira and colleagues (2017) conducted a study in order to find out whether most online purchases were performed on the basis of a high level of trust. The conclusion was that 57.5% of all online purchases can be explained through overall trust in the company. This proves that a high level of consumer trust in a company can be very beneficial for generating profit and new potential customers.

### 2.4.4 Sources of consumer trust

The most trustworthy source of information before doing something for the first time or travelling to a city for the very first time is the people that someone personally knows and cares about, in other words word-of-mouth (Dasu & Chase, 2013). For example, if you fly to New York for the first time, you will initially ask your friends and family whether they have been there before and have any recommendations for you. An augmented version of that would be going on blogs or rating websites, such as tripadvisor.com, because here the information is not collected through persons you personally know, but through other people who have actually made the experience that you want to know more about (Dasu & Chase, 2013). According to the literature, detailed descriptions that someone was told personally have a bigger influence on customer decisions, which means that on average it is more important what your acquaintances tell you rather than what a person on the internet says (Oliveira, Alhinho, Rita, & Dhillon, 2017). Nevertheless, many people – especially the younger audience – trust in what their favorite influencers say (Dahlqvist & Preiksaite, 2018).

### 2.4.5 Trust in Influencer Marketing

Although most followers are aware of the fact that influencers are paid a certain premium in return for their marketing act on social media, very often they still trust them and view them as genuine role models (Haemers, 2016). The most successful influencers have established such a high level of trust with their followers that sponsored content is perceived as authentic and genuine even if it is known that they get paid for it (Woods, 2016). According to Dahlqvist and Preiksaite (2018), the level of trust between a follower and an influencer increases when it is communicated whether a post is sponsored or not sponsored. Another important factor is the type of collaboration, meaning the company that is promoted, and the amount of sponsored uploads (Dahlqvist & Preiksaite, 2018). Even if an influencer is at a point at which their followers trust them, by posting too many paid advertisements, that level of trust can be lost easily (Juhlin & Soini, 2018). It is not simple to obtain the audience's confidence to such a degree, but by posting personal and trustful content regularly, the followers feel as if they know the influencer personally and therefore trust them (Woods, 2016). In contrast to social media personalities, celebrities cannot attain such a connection with their fans, since they are not perceived as relatable but more so as a high class society that is very far out of reach (Woods, 2016).

## 2.5 Hypotheses

Before formulating the specific questions for the questionnaire, three hypotheses were developed based on the three dimensions of trust which were previously defined by Chen and Dhillon (2003):

1. *Integrity perceived through the interaction with an Instagram posting has a positive impact on the perceived trust in the fitness influencer on Instagram.*
2. *Benevolence perceived through the interaction with an Instagram posting has a positive impact on the perceived trust in the fitness influencer on Instagram.*
3. *Competence perceived through the interaction with an Instagram posting has a positive impact on the perceived trust in the fitness influencer on Instagram.*

According to Chen and Dhillon (2003), each of those components of trust have a positive impact on trust in general. However, the goal of this paper is to find out if the same principle applies to trust in social media influencers as well. A number of

authors, such as Dahlqvist and Preiksaite (2018), came to the conclusion that often times followers of social media influencers are skeptical of whether the advice that they are given is honest or just pretended, due to sponsorships or paid content. This is why this research focuses on finding out if fitness-interested users of Instagram trust the people that they follow, and which factors exactly are the most significant when it comes to perceived trust.

# 3    Methodology

## 3.1    Research Design

In general, there are three approaches to research: qualitative research, quantitative research and mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014).

The goal of qualitative research is to explore and understand phenomena, groups or individuals (Creswell, 2014). Especially when studying social relations, qualitative research seems to be the most appropriate design, since it provides the opportunity to dive deeper into the humans minds and emotions (Flick, 2006). When compared to quantitative research, qualitative research requires more time, a more distinct definition of goals during the early stages and it cannot be done or analyzed by a computer, meaning that it has to be reviewed and understood by human beings with emotions (Berg, 2001). Often times qualitative research is criticized because it might appear unscientific and therefore biased (Berg, 2001).  However, just like with every type of research design, it gets more representative, the more people are examined, observed or asked (Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative research focusses more on testing theories by analyzing relationships between two or more variables (Creswell, 2014). These variables have to be somehow quantifiable so that appropriate statistical methods can be used (Creswell, 2014). This can be achieved through the process of coding information, so that information can be presented and handled across many different kinds of software and multiple researchers (Moutinho & Hutcheson, 2011) The bigger the sample size of a quantitative method, the more representative it is for the whole population (Fowler, 2002). Quantitative research in general has two designs, namely experimental designs and non-experimental designs such as surveys (Creswell, 2014). In experimental designs, the researcher provides a certain treatment to one of two groups while retaining it from the other group, looking for a definite outcome of influence (Creswell, 2014). Surveys can range from questionnaires to interviews, having the goal of getting an explanation for the entire population (Creswell, 2014).

Mixed methods research involves both qualitative and quantitative designs, with the goal of collecting as much data as possible (Creswell, 2014). It was first used by

researchers who believed in both qualitative and quantitative methods and perceived both as being useful in answering their research questions (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Combining both types of research, a more robust conclusion for a question can be found, since the answer involves both statistical measures and interviews or other qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014).

Previously, the limited research on how consumers are evaluating influencers who communicate competing brands from the aspects of trust and relationship was conducted through qualitative research (Dahlqvist & Preiksaite, 2018). In order to provide generalizable conclusions on whether customers of the fitness industry perceive fitness influencers on Instagram as trustworthy, a quantitative approach was chosen for this study. The data was acquired online through a questionnaire-based survey, which included questions exploring whether consumers of fitness products trust influencers on Instagram.

Online questionnaires are one of the least expensive and most efficient ways of conducting research (Fowler, 2002). This approach is one of the more frequently seen strategies in the business, or more specifically, in the marketing sector, because questionnaires in general do not only have the benefit of less time and effort that have to be invested, but also that there is no potential impact of the interviewer. Additionally, questionnaire-based surveys are anonymous, which makes it more likely for respondents to be completely honest with their answers (Paier, 2010). One limitation of online questionnaires is that only people who have access to a computer and to the internet are able to answer them. In the context of this research, this limitation is negligible, given that the study focusses on internet and social media users (Paier, 2010).

## 3.2    Survey design

In order to measure trust as a variable, it was split up into the three dimensions, that had been defined by Chen and Dhillon (2003): integrity, benevolence and knowledge. The variable integrity was measured with questions concerning the degree to which consumers believe influencers to be honest and to act morally correct. This also involved questions about the influencers' reputations, since it is usually a factor for which customers get a preconceived idea of an influencer.

Benevolence was the second variable that was analyzed in the questionnaire. Again, a number of questions asked for whether the consumers perceived influencers as acting not only in their own interest but also in the interest of their followers. Honesty was another important factor here, but in the context of benevolence it was referring to the intention of the influencer. This could be either wanting the best for their followers or just wanting to maximize profits. In the case of influencer marketing, it is generally hard to achieve both at the same time (Chen & Dhillon, 2003).

Knowledge or competence was the third dimension of trust that was defined by Chen and Dhillon (2003). The questions measuring this variable asked consumers whether they thought that most influencers are knowledgeable and skilled in their specific sector. In the context of the fitness industry, this could be even proven by having a personal trainer certification, dietician certification or others.

**Likert Scale**

For the survey of this research, the so-called Likert Scale was used for most of the questions. The Likert Scale is the most widely used psychometric form of question type in the field of primary research (Barua, 2013). Especially when it is necessary to quantify the level of agreement, perception, ability and quality, it seems to be the best type of questioning for surveys (Joshi & Pal, 2015). While the very first version of the Likert scale had only three answer options, nowadays there are ones with five up to even ten options (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). This makes it possible for respondents to express their opinions or attitude towards the respective topics more accurately (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). Nowadays, the most commonly used Likert scale is one with a scale where the respondents have to specify their level of agreement or disagreement towards a certain topic. This is done by creating a symmetrical scale, where one end stands for "strongly agree" and the other end "strongly disagree" (Barua, 2013). And exactly that form of Likert scale was used for most of the questions in the questionnaire.

The Likert scale that was used for this research had five items, meaning that a neutral point did exist. There has been found evidence, that a middle point in a Likert scale often leads to bias and distortions of the results (Garland, 1991).

However, it is dependent on the type of research whether a neutral point makes sense. If discrete results are necessary, a middle point would just distort the research because people tend to choose the neutral point if they are not one hundred percent sure of what to answer (Garland, 1991) . In social sciences, for example, a neutral point makes sense, since it would make the research more representative, since participants of a study get the opportunity to express their truly neutral opinion.

## Choice of questions

Before prompting respondents to answer the Likert scale based questions, two so-called screening questions had to be answered positively in order to be able to continue the questionnaire (Malhotra, 2015). Those questions asked whether the respondent is an active Instagram user and whether they follow one or more social media influencers, whose content is evolving around fitness, including workouts and informational posts. The questionnaire only continued if both questions were answered with yes, because otherwise the person would not fit our sample.

Following the two screening questions, the Likert scale-based table with nine items came up. The format of the table and some questions were inspired by a similar questionnaire found online on surveymonkey.co.uk (Clarke, 2018). That questionnaire concentrated on the same target audience, namely fitness-interested Instagram users, and tried to find out how effective Influencer marketing was with regards to the consumers' buying decisions.

Perceived integrity, benevolence and competence are the three components of trust and the goal of the questionnaire is to find out which of the three has the strongest impact on the overall perceived trust in fitness influencers on Instagram and which one possibly has no influence on it.

In order to find that out, nine questions were developed in a closed format, namely in the form of a Likert scale, asking for either a strong disagreement, disagreement, not sure, agreement and strong agreement. Since the questions are easy to understand and formulated in way that can be answered quickly, respondents will not face any problems while answering the questionnaire (Leung, 2001). For each

dimension of trust, there were three questions developed in the I-form, so that respondents are able to understand the sentence easily.

After the table including the Likert scale, the researcher included two more closed-ended questions, asking for the overall perceived trust and for the importance of fitness in the respondent's life, in the form of a Likert scale again. This aids as a close-off, leading right into the demographic questions, such as age, gender and occupation (Malhotra, 2015).

## 3.3 Data Collection

Since there is a limited amount of research concerning consumer trust in influencer marketing, specifically in the fitness industry, an online questionnaire-based survey is conducted for primary research. This makes it possible to create direct contact – still anonymously – with the actual target group, namely people who use Instagram and are interested in fitness. Therefore, the sample of the questionnaire was determined through judgement sampling, which is a selection based on the researcher's belief and judgement that participants meet the requirements of the study (Paier, 2010). There is, however, a danger that comes with judgement sampling, namely that the researcher exercises judgement on the respondent's interests and therefore on the answers (Tongco, 2007). This means that the outcome data is biased in some way, since it did not come randomly (Tongco, 2007). Therefore, the outcome is not representative for the whole population, but it definitely shows a direction. Due to the predefined niche of the research topic, the researcher performs judgement sampling in order to save time and for practicality.

The only requirements for the survey are that the respondent has access to the social media website Instagram, uses it actively and is interested in fitness, and therefore follows influencers who post content related to this topic. The survey was created on Google Forms, which is a free online tool for creating questionnaires. The link of the survey was sent to the researcher's acquaintances who supposedly fit into the category of people who use Instagram on a regular basis, are interested in fitness and follow fitness-related social media influencers on Instagram. Additionally, it was posted to various sports related forums and Facebook groups, in order to reduce the bias and make the results more representative.

## 3.4    Data Analysis

After collecting the data, it was analyzed with the help of the statistical computer program SPSS. SPSS stands for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and is one of the most easy-to-use and effective statistical programs available on the market. The program specifies the scale type of variables and develops descriptive and inferential statistics for ordinal, nominal and interval scaled variables (Hatzinger & Nagel, 2013).  A wide variety of statistical tests can be conducted, such as t-tests, contingency tables, Mann-Whitney U-tests and many more (Baltes-Götz, 2006). In order to find out which statistical procedures to use for a specific research, firstly the questions for the questionnaire- based survey have to be defined in order to identify the scale types, which then determines the exact procedure that has to be conducted  (Hatzinger & Nagel, 2013). Due to the nature of the Likert scale – namely being ordinal scaled – a multiple regression procedure was conducted for this questionnaire and the results were confirmed by a ordinal logistics regression. The goal was to find out, which of the three dimensions had the strongest impact on trust overall, and which one possibly did not have an impact at all.

Before all the necessary data was collected, and enough people responded to the survey, every question had been given a scale type, which subsequently identified the statistical test that was going to be conducted. First of all, an Excel sheet for every question was created, listing all the different answer options and identifying the number of responds each option had got. Afterwards, all the results were copied into the statistical program, in this case SPSS, and the suitable statistical tests was conducted. This enabled the researcher to analyze the impact of every single sub-variable of consumer trust to overall trust, identified by Chen and Dhillon (2003): integrity, benevolence and knowledge. Finally, the data was interpreted and afterwards a conclusion was drawn as to whether consumers trust influencers in the fitness industry.

In order to ensure the reliability of the following results obtained through a multiple regression analysis in SPSS, a factor analysis was conducted. Factor analysis is often used in social sciences, where researchers are confronted with variables that cannot really be measured (Field, 2009). A huge field of use of factor analysis is

questionnaires and surveys, that try to measure sets of variables that usually are not quantifiable (Field, 2009).

The reason why it is called factor analysis is because the goal is to discover factors or variables that influence the dependent variable (Field, 2009). Field (2009) uses the example of popularity and the affecting factors. Those include social skills, selfishness, as how interesting people perceive them, their tendency to lie to others, how much they listen to other people and how much they talk themselves. All those factors can actually be described as "dimensions of popularity".

Due to the research question and nature of the variables, a multiple regression analysis was then conducted. Regression analysis is usually used for predicting events (Field, 2009). It is somehow connected to correlation analysis, since the correlation between two variables plays a critical role in predicting future events related to those variables. According to Field (2009) this future event is called the *outcome variable*, and it is dependent on the *predictor variable(s).* For this specific research, the outcome variable refers to the question "How much do you trust fitness-related influencers on Instagram?". The variable that is referring to this question is called "overall trust". As there are a number of predictor variables, in fact nine variables – namely the nine Likert-scaled questions that are adverting to the three dimensions of trust –, those were merged into just three variables. This will aid in making the regression analysis more clear and simple. Since there are multiple predictor variables, a multiple regression analysis was conducted, rather than a simple linear regression that only analyses two variables.

With regards to sample size for regression analysis, it is recommended to have at least ten responses or data for each predictor variable (Field, 2009). This means, that for each question related to the dimensions of trust – three questions each, making it nine questions in total – there should be at least ten pieces of data. This guideline was actually met, with a sample size of 136, making the analysis quite reliable. Of course, the larger the sample size is, the more representative the sample is for the whole population. However, sometimes the minimal sample requirement turns out to be the most practical for the researcher with regards to data collection (Field, 2009).

Another very important factor that has to be considered is whether multicollinearity exists. Multicollinearity indicates that two or more of the predictor variables have a strong or even a perfect correlation (Field, 2009). Multicollinearity makes it difficult to receive a distinct solution with regression analysis, since there is basically an infinite amount of possibilities as to which coefficients work best (Field, 2009). In order to assess whether multicollinearity exists in data, Field (2009) suggests having a glance at the correlation matrix and look for values above 0.80. Any value above that number would indicate a too strong correlation between variables and would therefore result in a wrong regression analysis (Field, 2009). Whether there is existing multicollinearity in these specific data will be evident a little later on in the findings, right after the descriptive statistics.

# 4 Findings

**Demographics**

Before diving into the main findings relating the research, the respondents have to be further analyzed in order to draw conclusions as to how representative the results of this research are.
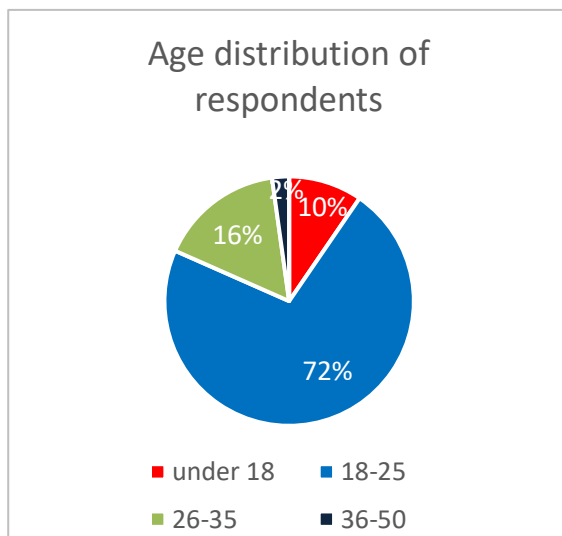


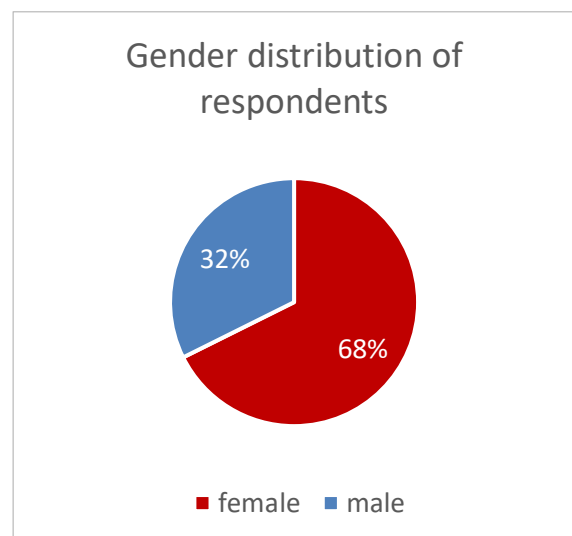*Figure 1 Age distribution of respondents*



*Figure 2 Gender distribution of respondents*

*Figure 1* shows that almost three fourths of respondents were between 18 and 25 years old. One sixth of responses came from adults between 26 and 35 years old and one tenth of answers came from teenagers under 18 years. The remaining two percent were people between 36 and 50 years old.

As can be seen from *Figure 2* the majority of responses came from females, which is mostly related to the sampling type the researcher chose, namely judgement sampling. And because mostly female Instagram users commented on fitness-related influencers' posts, mostly girls and women were approached in this research.

Those results do not come as a surprise, due to the general demographics of Instagram. According to Statista (2019), most Instagram users are aged between 18 and 34 years, which also makes up the majority of respondents of this questionnaire. Additionally, the dominant gender in the age group 18 to 34 is male, which makes

33

the gender distribution of respondents quite unrepresentative. However, it is not known whether more females than males are followers of fitness-related influencers, so no reliable judgement on the gender distribution can be made.
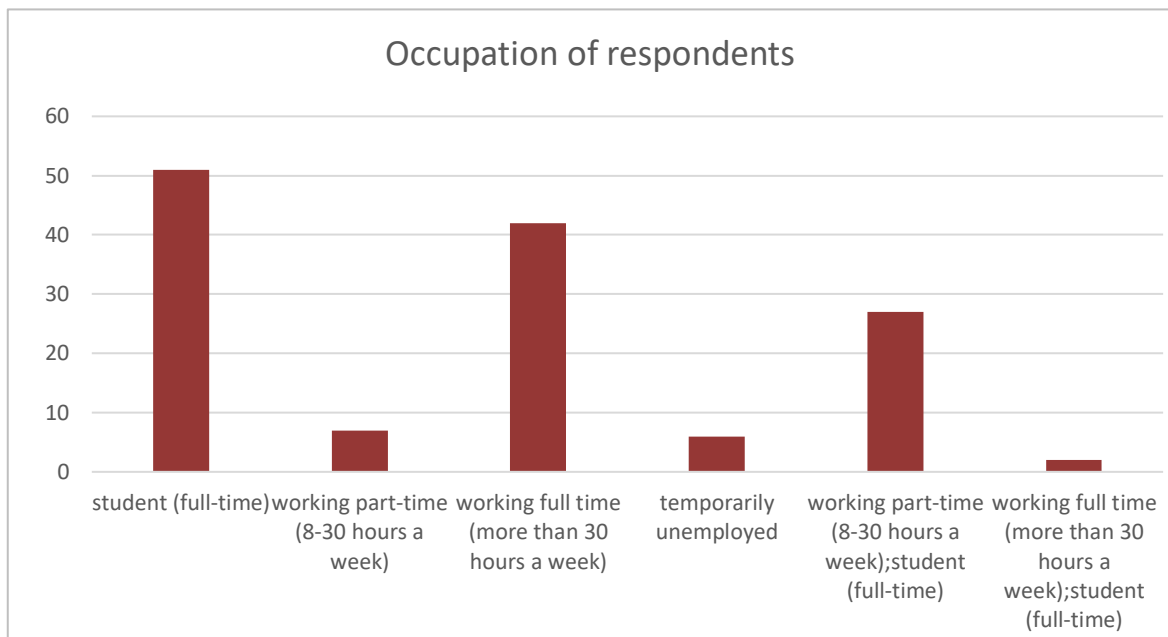


*Figure 3 Occupation of respondents*

Having seen the gender and age distribution of the respondents, the results of the occupation could have been expected right as they are. With the majority of people being aged between 18 and 25 years, most of them are also students, either solely that or working part-time or full-time additionally. A minority of the respondents work part-time, meaning 8 to 30 hours a week, and about a third is working full-time, more than 30 hours a week. Six people are temporarily unemployed.

**Analysis**

In the case of this specific research, factor analysis was used in order to confirm the three dimensions of trust, specified by Chen and Dhillon (2003), and to ensure that the questions formulated in the questionnaire reflect the relevant dimensions of trust.

| Component Matrix | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Component 1 | Component 2 | Component 3 |
| Q1 | .671 | | |
| Q2 | .565 | | |
| Q3 | .542 | | |
| Q4 | | .763 | |
| Q5 | | .759 | |
| Q6 | | .684 | |
| Q7 | | | .813 |
| Q8 | | | .786 |
| Q9 | | | .770 |

*Table 2 Component matrix*

As it can be seen in *Table 2,* the component matrix contains three components, which aligns with the questions, intended to measure the three dimensions of trust . With the intention of formulating three questions for each integrity, benevolence and competence – the three factors of trust that had been defined by Chen and Dhillon (2003) – the program SPSS actually also classified those questions into three categories. This means that in general, most respondents answered each questions within a category quite similarly or the same (Field, 2009). What SPSS did, was scanning all the responses of the collected data and comparing the correlation and similarity between questions (Field, 2009). Those results just confirmed, that the questions formulated in the questionnaire were appropriate to test the particular factor that it had been assigned to (Field, 2009). After having made sure that the questions were appropriate, the main test, namely a multiple regression analysis, was conducted.

| Descriptive statistics | | |
|---|---|---|
| Variable | Mean | Std. deviation |
| Trust overall | 3.05 | .744 |
| Integrity | 3.33 | .902 |
| Benevolence | 2.91 | .801 |
| Competence | 3.82 | .954 |

*Table 3 Descriptive statistics*

The descriptive statistics in *Table 5* show the means of the Likert-scaled questions from the questionnaire. After having recoded the answer possibilities – 1 for "strongly disagree" until 5 for "strongly agree" – it can be said that with a mean of 3.82, the questions regarding competence seem to have been agreed upon the most. Integrity has the second highest mean and benevolence the lowest. This however, is only a summary of the data and it is not sufficient to draw a conclusion as to which factor is the most impactful on trust overall.

| Correlations | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Trust | Integrity | Benevolence | Competence |
| Trust | 1.00 | .225 | .277 | .124 |
| Integrity | .225 | 1.00 | .323 | .537 |
| Benevolence | .277 | .323 | 1.00 | .299 |
| Competence | .124 | .537 | .299 | 1.00 |

*Table 4 Correlations*

The correlation table above shows the values of the Pearson's correlation coefficient between all the variables. All of the values that showed a significance ($p < .01$) are colored blue in the table. First of all, competence and benevolence seem to have quite a high positive correlation ($r = .537$) that show a relevant significance. Although this correlation is rather high, it is not above .8, meaning that the values do not show multicollinearity and are actually measuring different things (Field, 2009). Looking at the factor "overall trust" and its correlations to the other variables, it is apparent that benevolence shows the highest correlation coefficient. So, the probability for benevolence to predict overall trust the best out of the three factors is fairly high.

| Model summary | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| R | R² | Adjusted R² | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| .313 | .098 | .078 | .714 |

*Table 5 Model summary*

The model summary shows what percentage of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables (Field, 2009). In this case, 8% of the variability in trust overall can be explained by the independent variables – integrity, benevolence and competence. This value is considered very low, however, that is what the data is showing. With a larger sample size and other question types, this value could possibly have been higher. The standard error of the estimate tells how large the error between the actual values and the line of best fit is (Field, 2009). A value of around 0.71 means that the model is actually quite accurate at predicting the dependent variable.

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 7.335 | 3 | 2.445 | 4.795 | .003 |

*Table 6 ANOVA*

The ANOVA table is here to either reject or retain the null hypothesis. In every case, the null hypothesis says that the model has no explanatory power, which basically means that the model is useless (Field, 2009). This, however, would mean that the coefficients for all independent variables would be zero. With a p-value of 0.003, the F-value of the ANOVA table is smaller than 0.05 and therefore significant. This means that the R square value from the table above is significantly greater than zero. Hence, the predictors are able to account for a significant amount of variance in trust overall. In other words, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the regression model is significant.

| Coefficients | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
| Variable | B | Std Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| **Trust overall** | 2.064 | .310 | | 6.666 | .000 |
| **Integrity** | .139 | .082 | .169 | 1.685 | .094 |
| **Benevolence** | .217 | .082 | .234 | 2.645 | .009 |
| **Competence** | -.028 | .077 | -.036 | -.364 | .717 |

*Table 7 Coefficients*

One can see from a first glance at the coefficients table that the only variable that shows a p-value below 0.05, and therefore a significance, is benevolence. This means, that the factor benevolence accounts for a significant amount of unique variance in trust overall. So, benevolence explains something in trust overall, that neither integrity nor competence can explain. According to Table 9, a one unit increase in benevolence – of course, this is just a metaphoric explanation – means that trust overall will increase by 0.22 units. This just shows in what way the two variables are correlated. Looking at the other two variables, it is clear that none of them are significant for the model. However, since the goal of this paper is to see which dimension of trust has the greatest impact on overall trust and which one the least amount of influence, it is noticeable that competence has the smallest correlation to trust. Why this could be the case will be discussed in the next chapter.

# 5    Discussion

There were actually some quite interesting findings, made through a multiple regression analysis on SPSS. First, the questions that were formulated specifically for each of the three dimensions integrity, benevolence and competence were quite obviously classified into three dimensions by SPSS. This means, that the questions were defined in a way that the outcomes could directly be put into a certain category of output. Therefore, the average of the recoded answers was taken for each of the three dimensions, so that one can distinctly draw a conclusion.

Competence seemed to have gotten the highest mean regarding the Likert-scale, meaning that the majority of respondents agreed upon the statements relating to competence. However, it turned out to be the least impactful factor when it came to the trust in fitness-related influencers on Instagram. While no previous research concerning the competence as perceived by Instagram users has been found, it can be assumed that Instagram users would value knowledge of the influencers they follow highly, but they do not feel like that is what they are getting.

The most important factor with regards to trust in fitness-related influencers turned out to be benevolence. This had been defined by Chen and Dhillon (2003) as the goodwill and honesty of a person. Whether they looked out for someone's interests, they surpasses themselves in order to make sure their followers would not get harmed and whether the influencer cared what occurs to them (Levin & Cross, 2011). There is a simple reason why benevolence is the most impactful factor of trust. Levin and Cross (2011) found that people are selfish and ego-centered beings. As long as they themselves are not damaged and looked out for, they feel comfortable and safe. So, when they get the feeling of being in a "safe place" on an influencer's page and feel as if they are being treated well, they are pleased.

It was also found that benevolence is rather important when it comes to online communities specifically (Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). This is due to the fact that followers want to get advice, conversations in the comment sections and assistance (Ridings et al., 2002). Without reciprocity, an online community could not work properly. Especially with regards to fitness, including tutorials and recommendations, people want to and should feel as if their counterpart wants the best for them. According to Ridings and colleagues (2002), benevolence and integrity

in online communities can be seen as a united factor of trust, because of the behavioral patterns that both dimensions expect simultaneously. This also explains why integrity came out as the second most important factor regarding trust. Looking at the *correlation table 6*, the correlation between benevolence and integrity is indeed quite high, but not high enough for multicollinearity to exist.

Ridings and colleagues (2002) claim that benevolence is highly dependent on personal information someone shares. Receiving information about a person aids in understanding them regarding their beliefs and moralities, as well as their behavioral patterns. Due to this, trust expands automatically and subconsciously when the other person acts as anticipated (Ridings et al., 2002). This directly applies to Instagram, since influencers who hardly share any information about themselves and their personal lives seem quite distant to their followers. People appreciate content creators who share their highs as well as their lows, since it gives them the feeling of mutual trust and belonging.

On social media websites, where a lot of content is created for the end user, it is all about transparency. This applies for all industries, but the fitness and health industry is even more dependent on it, since Instagram users completely trust the influencers with their health. The statements and actions should be aligned with each other, and users should be informed in the case of a sponsored post. This would give them the opportunity to decide upon whether they actually want to trust that person or not. However, no one would like to trust somebody online to then find out that they were paid for saying something positive for a brand when in reality they did not like the product.

Also, human beings appreciate being treated well. They want to feel as if they are safe by trusting someone. Seemingly, most people lay a lot of value on receiving an honest opinion about a certain promoted product. As soon as the followers know that a post is sponsored or paid, they will think twice of whether they will trust that person's opinion and will see it more critically. Due to the fact that most humans are quite self-centered, they assume that other people are so too. That is why the majority of respondents would want fitness-related influencers to show them that they do not only act in their own interest, but mainly in the interest of their followers.

# 6    Managerial implications

Now that it is clear which factor is the most impactful with regards to trust in influencers on Instagram, specifically fitness-related influencers, some suggestions to the involved parties can be given. The main actors of fitness-related influencer marketing are of course the followers, the influencers who post content and lastly the companies that sponsor the influencers or provide compensation for posts.

Since it has been found that benevolence is of high value for Instagram users, influencers in the fitness industry should be transparent with their followers. This means, in the case of a sponsored or affiliated post, there should be a short notice in the description of that picture. The least that an influencer could do to gain the trust of their followers is to write that their opinion is one hundred percent honest and raw. Transparency on Instagram is key to a good influencer-follower relationship. Also, minimizing the amount of sponsored posts would be ideal. Followers get skeptical if an influencer engages in a lot of sponsorships and paid contents. That is just a sign for the Instagram users that the influencer wants to maximize profits and actually do not care really whether their followers feel deceived or not.

It is very important for companies who engage in influencer marketing not to construct too strict contracts. What creates skepticism in followers is when influencers seem as if they just read off a screen telling them what to say exactly. The same applies to texts on Instagram, which should also come over as one hundred percent authentic. It is of utmost importance to leave the content creators enough freedom. Of course, it increases the risk of bad feedback or reviews. However, people appreciate honest opinions and transparency. In addition, bad reviews could help the company very much in improving their products. It is often rather appreciated when large businesses are listening to what the customers have to say and maybe even adapt products or services according to the consumers' feedback. This might even lead to a competitive advantage.

# 7    Conclusions, limitations and future research

In summary, this paper provided literature explaining the various different strategies for social media marketing, predominantly concentrating on influencer marketing. The main focus was the trust followers have in fitness-related influencers on Instagram, with the goal of answering the following research question:

*"What are the factors that affect the trustworthiness of fitness influencers the most as perceived by Instagram users."*

Overall, the results demonstrated the great importance of benevolence on the trust in fitness-related influencers on Instagram. The data showed that integrity also plays an important role when it comes to trust in influencer marketing. Competence turned out to be appreciated, but not many followers feel as if that is what they are receiving. This could be due to the fact that competence does not relate to trust very much in this context.

Needless to say, this study has some limitations as well. First of all, Field (2009) suggests that for multiple regression, ten answers per question is a sufficient goal as to sample size. While that guideline was achieved, it is known that the greater the sample size is, the more reliable the results are. With 136 respondents, the sample size is sufficient to conduct the research, however more responses would have shown a better representativeness for the whole population.

One must also keep in mind the measurement errors of the multiple regression analysis that was conducted. First of all, the questions that were used for the research were formulated in a Likert-scale, which makes it a lot harder to quantify them in the same way as metric-scaled variables. Furthermore, the questions could have given a certain direction of answer in the way that the sentences were expressed. The inconsistent results in the multiple regression analysis such as the low R squared could possibly be explained by this, at least partly.

Additionally, looking at the demographics of the respondents, a vast majority of 72% is aged between 18 and 25 years. However, Statista (2019) suggests that only 32% of Instagram users are that age. In order to have received more representative data, the age distribution on Instagram should have been kept in mind. This means, that

approximately one third of answer should have come from people aged between 18-25 years and another third from users aged between 26 and 35 years.

While all of the information mentioned above, of course, can be helpful for fitness-related influencers on Instagram and the industry, there is a great potential for an even deeper research in that field. Future research could quest for more factors that have an impact on trust in influencers. There are actually quite a few factors regarding trust that have been defined by other researchers, for example responsiveness, morality, predictability and many more (Mcknight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). Including some more of those variables could completely change the outcome, as well as bring some new suggestions as to how influencers and companies could act in order to gain the consumers' trust.

There is also quite a research gap regarding the correlation between perceived trust and actual sales. Especially in the influencer and Instagram era, this could be quite interesting. Another thing that could be studied is the psychological effects of certain postings and images, and how young adults in general deal with that display of "perfection" on Instagram, which is getting more and more frequent.

# Bibliography

Aljazzaf, Z. M., Perry, M., & Capretz, M. A. M. (2010). Online trust: Definition and principles. *Proceedings - 5th International Multi-Conference on Computing in the Global Information Technology, ICCGI 2010*, 163–168. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCGI.2010.17

Armstrong, G., Kotler, P., Harris, L., & Piercy, N. (2013). *Principles of Marketing* (6th ed.). Essex: Pearson.

Baltes-Götz, B. (2006). Kurzeinführung SPSS 13 für Windows. *Universitäts-Rechenzentrum Trier*, 1–31.

Barua, A. (2013). METHODS FOR DECISION-MAKING IN SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES BASED ON LIKERT SCALE. *Journal of Asian Scientific Research*, *3*(1), 35–38.

Berg, B. L. (2001). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Pearson Education.

Beyer, A., & Walter, N. (2008). Deutschland im Jahr 2020 – Neue Herausforderungen für ein Land auf Expedition. *Update*, *6*, 24–29. Retrieved from http://143.93.114.147/fileadmin/content/fh/pdf/Update/Update_6_08.pdf#page=26

Blackshaw, P., Lukyanenko, R., Parsons, J., Wiersma, Y., Wachinger, G., Huber, B., … Lewis, W. F. (2017). User-Generated Content Sources in Social Media: A New Approach to Explore Tourist Satisfaction. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, *17*(4), 2011. https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-52-1-000-000

Chan, T. M., Stukus, D., Leppink, J., Duque, L., Bigham, B. L., Mehta, N., & Thoma, B. (2017). Social Media and the 21st-Century Scholar : How You Can Harness Social Media to Amplify Your Career. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*, *15*(1), 142–148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacr.2017.09.025

Charlesworth, A. (2018). *Digital Marketing: A Practical Approach* (3rd ed.). Oxon: Routledge.

Chen, S. C., & Dhillon, G. S. (2003). Interpreting Dimensions of Consumer Trust in E-

Commerce. *Information Technology and Management*, *4*(2–3), 303–3018.

Clarke, L. (2018). The Impact that Instagram Influencer's have on Customer Purchase Decisions. Retrieved February 10, 2019, from https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/6C79RB5

Cohen, R., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2017). The relationship between Facebook and Instagram appearance-focused activities and body image concerns in young women. *Body Image*, *23*(October), 183–187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.10.002

Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design* (4th ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Croasmun, J. T., & Ostrom, L. (2011). Using Likert-Type Scales in the Social Sciences. *Journal of Adult Education*, *40*(1).

Dahlqvist, J., & Preiksaite, S. (2018). *How competing brands are being communicated through Influencer Marketing*. Jönköping International Business School.

Dasu, S., & Chase, R. B. (2013). *The Customer Service Solution: managing emotions, trust, and control to win your customer's business*. United States of America: McGraw-Hill Education.

Daugherty, T., Eastin, M. S., & Bright, L. (2008). Exploring Consumer Motivations for Creating User-Generated Content. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *8*(2), 16–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2008.10722139

De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. S. H. (2012). Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *26*(2), 83–91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003

Delaney, D., McManus, L., & Lamminmaki, D. (2016). The nature and effectiveness of sponsorship performance measurement systems. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *24*(1), 29–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2015.12.001

Döring, N. (2014). Professionalisierung und Kommerzialisierung auf YouTube. *Merz*, 24–31. Retrieved from http://www.lmz-

bw.de/nc/medienbildung/bibliothek/buecher-und-texte/autoren-a-z/autoren-single.html?tx_ptlmzmco_ptlmzmco%5Bcontroller%5D=Medium&tx_ptlmzmco_ptlmzmco%5Baction%5D=show&tx_ptlmzmco_ptlmzmcomedium%5Blibrary Medium%5D=1308

Edelman, B. G., & Brandi, W. (2013). Risk, Information, and Incentives in Online Affiliate Marketing. *Ssrn*, 1–32. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2358110

Elliott, G., Rundle-Thiele, S., & Waller, D. (2014). *marketing*. Australia: John Wiley & Sons.

Field, A. (2009). *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (3rf ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Flick, U. (2006). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. (3rd, Ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Fowler, F. J. (2002). *Survey Research Methods* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Garland, R. (1991). The Mid-Point on a Rating Scale : Is it Desirable ? *Marketing Bulletin*, *2*, 66–70.

Gay, R., Charlesworth, A., & Esen, R. (2007). *Online Marketing - a customer-led approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Georgieva, M. (2012). An Introduction to E-Mail Marketing: How to Executre & Measure Successful E-Mail Marketing. *HubSpot*, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511623806

Grabs, A., Bannour, K., & Vogl, E. (2016). *Follow me!: Erfolgreiches Social Media Marketing mit Facebook, Twitter und Co.* Bonn: Rheinwerk Verlag.

Gregori, N., Daniele, R., & Altinay, L. (2014). Affiliate Marketing in Tourism: Determinants of Consumer Trust. *Journal of Travel Research*, *53*(2), 196–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513491333

Grimm, F. (2013). *Soziale Netzwerke 2013 - Dritte, erweiterte Studie. Eine repräsentative Untersuchung zur Nutzung sozialer Netzwerke im Internet*. Berlin. Retrieved from https://www.bitkom.org/Marktdaten/Konsum-

Nutzungsverhalten/Social-Media/index.jsp

Gustavsson, A.-S., Nasir, A. S., & Ishonova, S. (2018). *Towards a world of influencers: Exploring the relationship building dimensions of Influencer Marketing*. Jönköping University. Retrieved from http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1212420/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Haemers, I. (2016). *Success Story of a Young Fitness Brand: Social media influence as an indicator of success in the fitness industry*. Universitat de Barcelona. Retrieved from http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/102484/1/TFM-DEE_Haemers_2016.pdf

Hatzinger, R., & Nagel, H. (2013). *Statistik mit SPSS: Fallbeispiele und Methoden*. Munich: Pearson Education.

Hoffmann, M. (2002). *Die Fitness-Branche im Wandel – Eine Expertenbefragung über die zukünftige Entwicklung der österreichischen Fitnessindustrie*. Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien.

Hogan, C. (2018). How to Use Your Podcast as an Influencer Marketing Machine. Retrieved October 27, 2018, from https://mention.com/blog/podcast-influencer-marketing/

Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2007). Toward a Definition of Mixed Methods Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *1*(2), 112–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806298224

Joshi, A., & Pal, D. K. (2015). Likert Scale : Explored and Explained. *Current Journal of Applied Science and Technology*, (September). https://doi.org/10.9734/BJAST/2015/14975

Juhlin, L., & Soini, M. (2018). *How do influencer marketers affect brand associations?: a semiotic Instagram study in the sports fashion industry*. Högskolan Kristianstad. Retrieved from http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1223967&dswid=-9073

Kelc, E. (2002). *Fitness, Ernährung und Entspannung - Die Schlagwörter des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien.

Koch, A., & Luu, M. (2015). *Strong is the new skinny.* Zürich. Retrieved from http://allesoverjongeren.nl/jongerentrend-strong-is-the-new-skinny/

Kotler, P., Keller, K., & Brady, M. (2016). *Marketing Management*. Essex: Pearson.

La Ferle, C., & Edwards, S. M. (2006). Product Placement: How Brands Appear on Television. *Journal of Advertising*, *35*(4), 65–86. https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367350405

Lagrée, P., Cappé, O., Cautis, B., & Maniu, S. (2017). Algorithms for Online Influencer Marketing, 1–29. Retrieved from http://arxiv.org/abs/1702.05354

Lee, E., Lee, J.-A., Moon, J. H., & Sung, Y. (2015). Pictures Speak Louder than Words: Motivations for Using Instagram. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *18*(9), 552–556. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2015.0157

Lee, M. K. O., & Turban, E. (2001). A trust model for consumer internet shopping. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *6*(1), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/10864415.2001.11044227

Leung, W. (2001). How to design a questionnaire. *Student BMJ*, 187–189.

Levin, D. Z., & Cross, R. (2011). The Strength of Weak Ties You Can Trust: The Mediating Role of Trust in Effective Knowledge Transfer. *Management Science*, *50*(11), 1477–1490. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.1030.0

Madill, J., & O'Reilly, N. (2010). Investigating social marketing sponsorships: Terminology, stakeholders, and objectives. *Journal of Business Research*, *63*(2), 133–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.02.005

Malhotra, N. (2015). Questionnaire design and scale development. *Georgia Institure of Technology*, (December).

Manikonda, L., Hu, Y., & Kambhampati, S. (2014). *Analyzing User Activities , Demographics, Social Network Structure and User-Generated Content on Instagram*. Cornell University.

Mcknight, D. H., Choudhury, V., & Kacmar, C. (2002). Developing and Validating Trust Measures for e-Commerce : An Integrative Typology. *Information Systems*

*Research*, *13*(3), 334–359.

Mogoș, R. I., & Acatrinei, C. (2015). Designing Email Marketing Campaigns - a Data Mining Approach Based on Consumer Preferences. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Oeconomica, 17*(1), 15–30.

Moutinho, L., & Hutcheson, G. (2011). *The SAGE Dictionary of Quantitative Management Research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Mukherjee, A., & Nath, P. (2007). Role of electronic trust in online retailing: A re-examination of the commitment-trust theory. *European Journal of Marketing*, *41*(9–10), 1173–1202. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560710773390

Naik, S. (2016). *Der Einsatz von Product Placement in Modeblogs*. Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Recht Berlin.

Neti, S. (2015). Social Media and Its Role in Marketing. *Business and Economics Journal*, *07*(01). https://doi.org/10.4172/2151-6219.1000203

Neumaier, G. (2002). *Concept for the Development of Strategies for Changing the Scope of Activities of Gyms and for Improving Their Image*. Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien.

Newell, J., Salmon, C. T., & Chang, S. (2006). The Hidden History of Product Placement. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *50*(4), 575–594. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem5004_1

Oliveira, T., Alhinho, M., Rita, P., & Dhillon, G. (2017). Modelling and testing consumer trust dimensions in e-commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *71*, 153–164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.050

Paier, D. (2010). *Quantitative Sozialforschung - Eine Einführung*. Austria: Facultas Verlags- und Buchhandels AG.

Pappas, N. (2016). Marketing Strategies, Perceived Risks, and Consumer Trust in Online Buying Behaviour. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.

Ridgway, J., & Clayton, R. B. (2016). Instagram Unfiltered: Exploring Associations of Body Image Satisfaction, Instagram #Selfie Posting, and Negative Romantic

Relationship Outcomes. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *19*(1). Retrieved from http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=8&sid=35b3c96e-7b9d-4882-8c98-ed2bfefebe7a%40sessionmgr4006&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3D%3D#AN=112335534&db=buh

Ridings, C. M., Gefen, D., & Arinze, B. (2002). Some antecedents and effects of trust in virtual communities. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, *11*(2), 271–295. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0963-8687(02)00021-5

Ryan, D. (2014). Understanding Digital Marketing: Marketing strategies for engaging the digital generation (p. 151). London: KoganPage.

Şendağ, S., Gedik, N., & Toker, S. (2018). Impact of repetitive listening, listening-aid and podcast length on EFL podcast listening. *Computers and Education*, *125*(June), 273–283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2018.06.019

Sheldon, P., & Bryant, K. (2016). Instagram: Motives for its use and relationship to narcissism and contextual age. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *58*, 89–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.059

Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2012). How Does Brand-related User-generated Content Differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *26*(2), 102–113. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.002

Snyder, P., & Kanich, C. (2015). No Please, After You: Detecting Fraud in Affiliate Marketing Networks. *University of Illinois at Chicago*. Retrieved from http://www.econinfosec.org/archive/weis2015/papers/WEIS_2015_snyder.pdf

Sponsorship. (2008). Retrieved October 9, 2018, from https://www.mbaskool.com/business-concepts/marketing-and-strategy-terms/7230-sponsorship.html

Statista. (2018a). Most famous social network sites worldwide as of April 2018, ranked by number of active users. Retrieved October 12, 2018, from

https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/

Statista. (2018b). Number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2021. Retrieved October 12, 2018, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/

Susarla, A., Oh, J.-H., & Tan, Y. (2012). Social Networks and the Diffusion of User-Generated Content: Evidence from YouTube. *Information Systems Research*, *23*(1), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ahj.2008.09.006

Tongco, M. D. C. (2007). Purposive Sampling as a Tool for Informant Selection. *A Journal of Plants, People, and Applied Research*, *5*, 147–158.

Tuten, T., & Solomon, M. (2017). *Social Media Marketing*. (Matthew Waters, Ed.) (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Ul Haq, Z. (2012). Affiliate marketing programs: A study of consumer attitude towards affiliate marketing programs among Indian users. *International Journal of Research Studies in Management*, *1*(1), 127–137. https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsm.2012.v1i1.84

Williams, K., & Petrosky, A. (2011). Product placement effectiveness: revisited and renewed. *Journal of Management & Marketing Research*, *6491*(May), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1300/J057v10n01

Woods, S. (2016). #Sponsored: The Emergence of Influencer Marketing, 1–26. Retrieved from http://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3010&context=utk_chanhonoproj

# Appendix

## Questionnaire

**1. Are you an active Instagram user (use Instagram at least once a week)?**
☐ yes
☐ no

2. **Social media influencers are people with a large following on one or more social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube or others. They are known for creating content, interacting with and influencing their followers**.

   **Do you follow one or more social media influencers, whose content is evolving around fitness, including workout videos or informational posts?**
☐ yes
☐ no

_____
Continues if both were answered with yes

**3. From now on, influencers who post fitness-related content such as workout videos or informational posts about fitness and nutrition will be referred to as "fitness-related influencers".**
**After reading each of the statements below please indicate your level of agreement by using the following scale: "Strongly disagree", "Somewhat disagree", "Neither agree nor disagree, "Somewhat agree", "Strongly agree".**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree not disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| If my favorite influencer recommends a fitness-related brand on Instagram, I am more likely to try it. | O | O | O | O | O |
| The more followers a fitness-related influencer on Instagram has, the more trustworthy I find him/her. | O | O | O | O | O |
| Reviews by influencers who have already tried out a fitness-related product are more trustworthy than reviewers provided by the manufacturer or retailer. | O | O | O | O | O |
| Fitness-related influencers on Instagram have my best interest at heart. | O | O | O | O | O |
| Fitness-related influencers on Instagram will not purposefully endorse a brand that will harm me. | O | O | O | O | O |
| If I found out that a fitness-related influencer had been paid for a post on Instagram, it would not negatively impact my perception of their credibility. | O | O | O | O | O |
| If an influencer on Instagram has a personal trainer or nutrition certification, I am more likely to follow their advice. | O | O | O | O | O |
| Fitness-related influencers on Instagram who themselves achieved a great shape and health are the most authentic. | O | O | O | O | O |
| Influencers on Instagram who keep educating themselves by attending fitness-related courses are the most credible. | O | O | O | O | O |

**4. How much do you trust fitness-related influencers on Instagram (indicate your level of trust by choosing one of the following)?**

Not at all O Slightly O Moderately O Very O Extremely O

How important is fitness in your life (indicate your level of importance by choosing one of the following)?

**5. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not at all important and 5 being extremely important), how important is fitness in your life?**

Not at all important O Slightly important O Moderately important O Very important

O Extremely important O

**6. What is you gender?**
☐ female
☐ male
☐ other: _____

**7. What is your age?**
☐ under 18
☐ 18 - 25
☐ 26 - 35
☐ 36 - 50
☐ above 50

**8. What is your occupation?**
☐ working full time (more than 30 hours a week)
☐ working part-time (8-30 hours a week)
☐ student (full-time)
☐ temporarily unemployed
☐ retired
☐ permanently unemployed
☐ other: _____