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WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING THROUGH INSTAGRAM, BY
PROMOTING FITNESS APPAREL, ON FEMALE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR?

DISSERTATION

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree
in Communication Studies- Communication, Marketing and Advertising

By

Carolina Carmona Jorge

Faculty of Human Sciences
January 2023



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Abstract

With the rise of influencer marketing, the fitness industry, especially regarding fitness apparel and fitness influencers due to a scarcity of studies surrounding this topic, more studies are needed. Therefore, this dissertation aims to be the beacon for brands to better understand the pertinence of influencer marketing and how to implement it to aid brand equity. Thus, the research question is “what is the impact of influencer marketing through Instagram, by promoting fitness apparel, on female consumer behaviour?”.

My research aims to fill the gap of research surrounding these types of influencers. The study utilized a mixed methods approach which included an online survey and five 30min individual interviews. Findings suggest that most people are using Instagram and for their individual needs. The more people admitted to following influencers the more they had a positive connotation of the latter. Furthermore, fitness influencers reveal to have a big impact on consumer attitude which follows into a behaviour change. For instance, fitness influencers influence consumers to want to work out more, and seeing them as real and honest people, the consumer ends up feeling more close to the influencer which leads to an influence in consumers’ decision making and a purchase intention. Not only fitness influencer’s relatability but motivational and inspiring content aids in the creation of a human brand leading more easily to a purchasing intention from consumers. Moreover, they are also decisive in consumers’ decision making process when purchasing fitness apparel by excluding other brands whom consumers’ favourite fitness influencers are not affiliated with. Hence, this study demonstrates that it is more likely that brand-micro-influencer collaboration increases the performance of the brand and thus brand equity compared to non-collaboration.

Key words: Instagram, Influencer marketing, Fitness industry, Fitness apparel, Consumer behaviour

Resumo

Devido ao crescimento do marketing de influenciadores da indústria do fitness, especialmente no que toca a roupa de fitness e os respetivos influenciadores e à falta de estudos à volta deste assunto, achei pertinente investigar acerca deste tema. Para além de um interesse geral respetivamente ao fitness, existe uma escassez de estudos. Deste modo, esta dissertação tem como objetivo ajudar marcas a compreender a pertinência do marketing de influenciadores e como o implementar de forma a que complemente o valor da marca. A questão de partida permite, então, guiar as respostas perante esta escassez de estudos. A questão é, qual é o impacto do marketing de influenciadores através do Instagram, quando promovem roupa de fitness, no comportamento do consumidor feminino?

A minha investigação permite preencher uma lacuna de estudos deste tipo de influenciadores. O meu estudo é composto por métodos mistos que incluem um questionário online e cinco entrevistas, individuais, de 30 minutos. Os resultados demonstram que a maioria das pessoas utiliza o Instagram para as suas necessidades próprias. Além do mais, quanto mais pessoas se registassem seguir influenciadores, mais se observava uma conotação positiva dos mesmos. Para além disto, os influenciadores demonstram ter uma grande influência sob a atitude dos consumidores que se transforma numa mudança de comportamento. Por exemplo, estes influenciadores influenciam consumidores a quererem treinar mais e estes, veem-nos como pessoas reais e honestas, o que por sua vez, fá-los sentirem-se mais próximos do influenciador em questão, o que influencia o processo da tomada de decisão do consumidor e a sua intenção de compra. Adicionalmente, não só a identificação, mas também o conteúdo motivacional e inspiracional ajudam na criação de uma marca humana que como consequência facilita uma intenção de compra nos consumidores. Ademais, os influenciadores de fitness também são decisivos no processo da tomada de decisão dos consumidores antes da compra, ao fazerem o consumidor excluir outras marcas, neste caso, com que a sua influenciadora preferida não se relacione. Como conclusão, este estudo evidencia que é mais provável uma colaboração entre uma marca e uma microinfluenciadora aumentar a performance da marca significativamente e, por isto, o valor da marca, do que uma campanha de marketing sem a colaboração da mesma.

Palavras-chave: Instagram, Marketing de influenciadores, Indústria do fitness, Roupa de fitness, Comportamento do consumidor

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Acronyms:

ROI- return on investment

PR- public relations

WOM- word of mouth

eWOM- electronic word of mouth

Introduction

Instagram started as a sharing platform and quickly became a host for a new type of opinion leader, the influencer. More and more brands are choosing influencer marketing due to its low cost in comparison to traditional advertising (Zubic, 2018). Consequently, it is important to look at the tactics implemented by influencers through these platforms, in order to understand how they are able to be so successful and how brands can recognize those traits. Gymshark, a fitness brand, was one of the first to ever implement influencer marketing back in 2012 (Verghese, 2020; YouTube, 2021). When looking at the influencer marketing of Gymshark, a difference is noticed because influencers are selected very carefully (Verghese, 2020).

Nonetheless, we see other brands like Nike or Adidas select influencers because of their reach on Instagram, rather than because of their identity or similar values. The influencer's values need to be aligned with the brand's in order for the influencer's communication strategy to be successful and retain long-term customers. Selecting macroinfluencers is good for an immediate profit but with this thesis I aim to demonstrate that what retains customers is a fitness influencer, macro or micro, holding similar values, interacting with the consumer and in the end establishing a relationship with the consumer which retains loyal consumers to the fitness brand that are willing to buy fitness apparel more often and pay more and as result, the market value increases, brand value increases and brand reputation through the impact of fitness influencers also increases. Knowing how and why influencers achieve a bond with their consumers is the purpose of this dissertation. It is known that if selected accordingly, they identify with their sponsored brand and consequently create a hype through digital platforms such as Instagram with each of the brand's new apparel releases and promote the products the brand wants them to promote, effectively (Podcast, 2020). Yet, how they do it so seamlessly, remains an unsolved mystery to be cracked.

These are not merely influencers but athletes that represent the brand with long-term contracts (Cook, 2020). This constant promotion can have a big impact on general fitness apparel consumers' consumption. The more the fitness influencers push a product, the more it influences consumer buying behavior (Cobain, 2019). And, it is this phenomenon that I aim to study. When looking at Instagram, and throughout my study, it is clear that there is a mass-consumption habit surrounding fitness apparel, even more so than regular clothing.

How can influencers impact consumer's attitude towards fitness apparel, their purchasing intention, decision making and ultimately, sales? For this reason, it is crucial to study and comprehend the influencer's relationship with the consumer to understand how the influencers effectively impacts and persuades the latter, one thing that brands struggle to do by themselves. Hence, the research question, what is the impact of influencer marketing through Instagram, by promoting fitness apparel, on female consumer behaviour? Thus, I also define three objectives. The first one is to demonstrate that fitness influencer marketing has an impact on consumer behaviour such as attitudes, purchasing intention and on decision making. The second objective was to illustrate the importance of fitness influencer marketing for brands.

My last objective was to show that Influencers are their own brand and their persuasiveness is linked to being credible, trustworthy, having integrity, interacting with the consumer, being relatable, inspiring and motivating unlike brands who struggle to be convincing or trustworthy enough for the consumer to purchase their products.

In order to understand this, the different puzzle pieces need to be put apart and then together in order to understand fitness influencer's impact as a whole. Thus, I decided to divide this dissertation into four chapters since three chapters could not suffice to analyse thoroughly the different paramount tools I selected.

The first chapter focuses on social media as a whole, why it has the effect it has on people and how it relates to this dissertation's topic. I decided to incorporate social media and not only Instagram to demonstrate how different each platform works and why Instagram is the top choice as the main operating platform for influencers. Moreover, the new digital platforms: Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, are taken into account due to the constant algorithm changes that suggest posts and possess a greater exposure than traditional media such as television, radio etc. hence audience engagement is also probed. In addition, studying the different networks, allows to better understand influencer's tools for their promotion strategies that would or not influence consumer behaviour in different platforms. I divided this first chapter into different sections, the first ones being the importance of the internet and digital marketing, user's sensory perception of the platforms, consumer behaviour on social media or due to social media, e-commerce on social media and why it is important for brands to adhere to social media and the role it played during the covid-19 which influenced consumption habits.

The second chapter focuses on Influencer Marketing. Firstly, it is important to define the term of 'Influencer' as to distinguish it from the typical opinion leader. Then, give a brief context of the influencers in the organizational context, this is, how they work with companies and brands cooperatively for the purpose of ROI. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate how PR, social media data, analytics work simultaneously. Afterwards, it is central to look at PR, social media data, analytics and influencers as a symbiosis. Next, the identification of the influencers' power towards brands is imperative to be studied, and, the analysis of the potential and relevance of influencers when it comes to consumers, too. Last but not least, it is supreme that brands are able to choose the right influencers according to their needs and values. Thus, specific tools are disclosed for brands to select the right influencer. At the end of the chapter I give an insight to WOM and eWOM which is one of the top skills influencers utilize when they interact with consumers and how consumers use this when interacting, as well, with each other. Notwithstanding, four types of influencers are defined, the 'snooper', 'informer', 'entertainer' and 'infotainer' a hybrid version of the informer and entertainer. These four influencers are what is seen currently on social media meaning that each influencer holds a distinct function from one another and thus audience. The last subchapter of Influencer marketing deals with Micro-influencers, its definition and importance in today's ages.

Consequently, chapter three focuses on explaining what is Instagram, its main users (generation Z), its different perks such as its features and its utilization characteristics, the growth strategy influencers use on Instagram, branding on Instagram, what is brand awareness and how it relates to Instagram and influencer marketing on Instagram, the explanation of the term 'Instafamous', viral content on Instagram meaning what is viral content and how does specific content become viral i.e. popular. Last but not least, besides its focus on the platform itself, this chapter also focuses on communication and influencer marketing for brands on Instagram.

The first three chapters encompass Social media, Influencer marketing, Instagram and the last chapter pivots around Fitness apparel. It is the largest chapter since there is a lot of literature around this topic and I wanted to focus my research not only on fitness influencers and consumers but also on fitness apparel, the most common product that influencers sell (Instagram, 2022). First fitness apparel is defined, then fashion. A discussion of psychology and fashion ensues such as body image, fashion as an identity generator, society standards

and thus wanting to be connected to current trends. The next subchapter of this sections focuses on how wanting to achieve a beautiful and healthy body aligns with wanting to look stylish while working out. Then, I give an insight to the current fitness apparel market, the different attributes importance in apparel for female and male consumers and how it differs. Then, specific important attributes of fitness apparel for female consumers are designated followed by the analysis of these female consumers for a better context. Subsequently, fitness influencers' relevance in communicating the values of the fitness apparel in question are also taken into consideration. Moreover, young female and male's perspective of the promotion of fitness apparel on Instagram was analysed, followed by the concept of body image, what is a positive body image, the current body image idealization taking place in society and body image for female consumers online. The last subchapter focuses on behaviour concerning body image in relation to insecurity on Instagram. Furthermore, the latest, 21st century ideal body image is explored with an insight to fitness culture and body image constructions on social media and how they relate. Nevertheless, body image is also observed for male consumers in order to be able to discern the two distinct gender attitudes and thus behaviours. On an ending note, this chapter closes off with the investigation of why there is such a large fitness apparel consumption.

To further study the insights of these chapters that make the literature review and the relationship between the fitness influencer and their target audience and thus their consumption, mixed methods will be utilized with references of fitness apparel brands.

I decided to conduct an online survey to gather data and explore this data in individual 30min interviews. Thus, the methodology section is made up of my research purpose, the research question of "What is the impact of influencer marketing through Instagram, by promoting fitness apparel, on female consumer behaviour?", my dissertation objectives, the research approach and strategy, data collection of the online survey, its sampling, the interview script, the individual interviews and their sampling strategy, data measurement and analysis of the interviews, the categories I defined and ultimately the data results of the online survey and of the interviews followed by a discussion taking into consideration the first defined objectives of this dissertation, other considerations and limitations of the study and, finally, the conclusion gathering information from the literature review the mixed methods and findings.

1. Social Media

Throughout the years, social media has evolved into generation Z's platform of choice (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2017). Understanding social media, what type of audience it attracts and why it attracts a younger audience, i.e. generation Z^{*1}, is paramount to comprehend how younger consumers are targeted and engaged in an information abundant era.

1.1. The importance of the internet and digital marketing

The emergence and rapid diffusion of Web 2.0 services during the first decade of the 21st century, allowed for a significant step forward in the social aspect of web use, as such that the internet and the world wide web have been known to aid social interaction, particularly Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Skype, Instagram, among many others which facilitate interpersonal communication (Obar& Wildman, 2015; Candrasari, 2019; Carr&Hayes, 2015).

Moreover, some authors consider social media to be a blend of mass and interpersonal communication (Neubaum &Krämer, 2017). This means brands communicate with consumers but consumers also communicate with each other.

Furthermore, the internet is a valued communication tool and its connection or channel reliability can be decisive for a consumer (Tchelidze, 2019). For instance, when connection is lost or social media's or web site's infrastructures are having technical difficulties, it provokes the loss of customers. Social media does not offer a barrier between brands which can make it difficult to gain a competitive advantage with the all-in competition (Tchelidze, 2019).

Therefore, despite its personal social use, social media also has surfaced as a business and thus marketing empire, acquiring 1.4 billion active users on Facebook and Twitter having acquired 288 million active users posting 500 million tweets daily (Obar& Wildman, 2015; Slattery, 2020). Facebook is thought to be the leading B2B^{*2} social media channel for content marketing followed by Instagram and then YouTube (Slattery, 2020).

By displaying a great amount of active users on Facebook and Twitter, it naturally means that there is a larger network diversity. A network diversity refers to and is often measured by an

¹ Defined as as individuals born between 1996 and 2012 (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

² Business-to-business communication (Jewels&Timbrell, 2001).

individual's access to various community members of different socio-demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, such as class, culture, gender, education, occupation, language, generation, race/ethnicity, and geographic location (Chen 2015; Erickson 2000). A diverse network has the advantage of wider access to information and resources. Social media is known to have network diversity which is fundamentally characterized by an individual's ability to communicate with other members of different socio-demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, such as class, culture, gender, education, occupation, language, generation, race/ethnicity, and geographic location (Hampton & Chen, 2021). Not only can you meet very different people yet also from around the world. In addition, a diverse network, that is social media, has the perk of a wider access to information and resources (Hampton & Chen, 2021) which basically means an interconnectivity, a globalization of information.

Social media is often mentioned as a new form of media that involves interactive participation. The development of media is divided into two stages, the broadcast age and the interactive age. We currently reside in the interactive age (Manning, 2014) which involves social media.

In the broadcast age, mass media such as a radio or television station, newspaper company, or a movie production studio, distributed messages to many people in a one-step flow (Bennett & Mannheim, 2006; Miller et al., 2016), which meant one sender emitting a message to multiple recipients. In support of this, many claim that the "Feedback to media outlets was often indirect, delayed, and impersonal" (Manning, 2014) due to its one-step flow type of communication (Bennett & Mannheim, 2006). Yet, this flow of communication changed into a two-step flow type of communication (Bennett & Mannheim, 2006) with the emergence of social media platforms where consumers also interact with the brand or opinion leader which precipitated a paradigm shift in online customer behaviour. Now, social media's interactions comprise a transformation of consumers that had previously been passive observers of content to active participants who, in current times, create vast quantities of content through their online conversations, interactions, and behaviours (Dolan et al., 2019). Additionally, brands and companies see the potential of social media communication because "Marketers and public relations professionals today are confronted with an astounding array of new communications channels (...) giving voice to the opinions of millions of consumers.", (Gillin, 2008) which means that consumers can have an impact on

a brand's reputation. Instagram and other social media platforms, not only allow for the consumer to give feedback to a specific brand but they also allow, in fact, for the consumer to give feedback to the influencers and other consumers (Almeida, 2018). In short, the individual was now able to hold a two-step flow, a conversation with other members of the media's community (Bennett & Manheim, 2006; Dolan et al., 2019).

Facebook, is denominated as one of the most used social media websites around the world. It is used as a meetup space, for sharing, interacting and discussing ideas and themes of interest in common. It involves an informal atmosphere where any individual person feels comfortable to communicate, share and interact (Patrício & Gonçalves, 2010)

Twitter, is described as "a micro-blogging platform that let the users broadcast short messages (called tweets) of up to 140 characters to their followers. Twitter users can also specify which users they want to follow and re-tweet (re-send) the tweets they receive to their followers." (Ansari & Sharma, 2017).

Although being a social but also an economic tool, social media enables users to express themselves, build relationships, play and share content in an environment that is networked and globalized. (Obar & Wildman, 2015). Social media also is described by some scientists as a technology that enables participation, connectivity but also user-generated content (Ansari & Sharma, 2017), content that is produced by the users themselves and distributed, and also collaboration amongst a community of users (Ansari & Sharma, 2017).

This participatory culture is believed to be controlled or regulated by companies that endeavor to harness rather than unleash consumer participation in a controlled manner. This participation is desired by companies when it comes to social media. In essence, this media participation is viewed as the convergence of both the production and consumption culture in the internet world but as well as in the corporate use of technology (Deuze, 2008). For instance, in a reputable brand's company, consumers often have a say in the production phase of a brand's product and always participate regarding the consumption culture on social media, this means after purchasing a product, they give feedback on social media and at times review it to inform other consumers. It is believed that consumer participation in the early stages of a product launch can increase product, financial, marketing performance which in turn leads to their successes (Chang & Taylor, 2016). To elucidate this phenomenon

of ROI³, customers are the ideal knowledge providers of their current and future own needs and desires. In consequence, they help expand the scope of information research beyond a company's existing markets (Chang & Taylor, 2016).

On another note, consumers have the need to share their own content and participate on social media's communities due to the fact that they exhibit a "hypersociality", a need to exhibit one's own individuality (Deuze, 2008). The author claims that this trait enhances the ability to build relationships on social media whether with consumers, brands or influencers. Additionally, public relations workers need to become cultural curators which means they must create meaning from audiences on social media and therefore encourage a true participatory ambience that puts cultural values shared at the forefront of social media's ongoing exchange process (Tomblinson & Wolf, 2017).

Nonetheless, not all consumers can have access to the internet. The inclusion of consumers in processes such as product production and launches or product feedback in the consumption culture depend on access to newer technologies that enable complete access to the internet. Even so, these consumers do not own the know-how and literacies required in order to successfully navigate digital and social media and the internet, in particular (Deuze, 2008).

1.2. Main platforms on social media

It is imperative that social media is a part of a company's overall strategy. Whether a business is small or big, its success will be owed within social media (Qualman, 2013).

Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter and so on, have differentiating roles which means that the way they interact with consumers and advertise services or products, differs.

Facebook is rather used for social networking, Snapchat is an instant photo messaging application, Instagram a photo-sharing application, Twitter a microblogging application, LinkedIn a business- and employment-oriented social networking service, Google+ an interest-based social and Pinterest is a catalog of ideas based photo-sharing website. All

³ ROI- Return on Investment: Marketing ROI is the practice of attributing profit and revenue growth to the impact of marketing initiatives. By calculating return on marketing investment, organizations can measure the degree to which marketing efforts either holistically, or on a campaign-basis, contribute to revenue growth. Typically, marketing ROI is used to justify marketing spend and budget allocation for ongoing and future campaigns and initiatives.; according to:

<https://www.marketingevolution.com/marketing-essentials/marketing-roi>

these platforms embody the different types of social media apps and uses with unique structures, cultures and norms (Voorfeld et.al, 2018).

1.2.1. Audience engagement

In fact, audience engagement differs and can be characterized by the amount of users who participate in a specific marketing initiative by commenting, liking and sharing content. Brands on social media with a big following can expect consistent and significant audience engagement and depending on user engagement, brands can adjust advertising, promotional content and activity accordingly (Lovett, 2011). To corroborate this, authors like Voorveld et.al (2008) theorize about how different engagement on social media, contributes to different social media advertising. To test this theory, they study the engagement of different platforms which are the following: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Snapchat, Instagram and Pinterest. They deduct from the results of the study that the engagement is dependent from each single platform. This has to do with the fact that each platform has a different interface, a different function to it which naturally translates into different consumer experiences (Voorfeld et.al, 2018). Fundamentally, “each platform is experienced in a unique way” (Voorfeld et.al, 2018, p.1). Thus, each platform holds a different engagement which is due to the unique consumer experiences. For instance, consumers experience Instagram and Pinterest differently than Facebook. Instagram is a light social media platform which means that it is not based on conversations and keeping up with the application is much more attainable when compared to a conversation-intensive platform like Facebook or even Twitter (Miles, 2013). Additionally, a study by Shahbaznezhad et.al (2021) also demonstrates how Instagram users characterized as “fans”, in deed, engage more passively than Facebook users who tend to be more active, by commenting. This can be simply due to the fact that Facebook is more commonly used on a desktop rather than through a mobile app which allows users to type a comment more easily and faster than compared to a phone, on Instagram (Shahbaznezhad et.al, 2021).

1.2.2. Online advertising

The effectiveness of online advertising is dependent on not only the content of the message, channel, type, product, purchasing stage and level of arousal but also on the format which is related to the platform’s interface (Brascan et.al, 2021).

The following study also reveals that it does play another paramount role. The relationship of the content format with the consumer behaviour translates into a need of understanding how and why the most appropriate social media platform for posting content varies on what type of content is being communicated to the platform users. For instance, if the content is on the rational side or emotional or even transactional (advertisement), (Shahbaznezhad et.al, 2021).

Voorfeld et.al (2018), explain why this happens. All platforms except for YouTube and Pinterest are used to keep up to date on other people's lives, for example. This means Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are used to interact with other people socially. Yet, Pinterest is used for innovation and as an inspiration for practical use. Having different purposes validates Shahbaznezhad's, Dolan's and Rashidirad's point of using the right format i.e. the right platform for specific content because each platform has not only a different interface but a different use to it and thus a different effect on consumer engagement depending on the posted content (Shahbaznezhad et.al, 2021).

One of the other implications different platforms have is the effect of the advertisement on the user. On one hand, advertising on Youtube, Facebook and twitter is most common and intrusive, specifically on YouTube. One has to wait several seconds to skip the ad on YouTube in order to view the video content. On the other hand, Instagram ads are found to be more entertaining in comparison to other platforms. Advertising on Google+ is found to be of practical use and advertising on Pinterest, as a matter of fact, stimulates users due to its topicality aspect (Voorfeld et.al, 2018). This to conclude that, not only does social media engagement differ across social media platforms but social media advertising engagement also does.

1.2.3. User's sensory experience

Moreover, if the user feels like they can control the course of interaction on social media, by manipulating its interface e.g. clicking, sliding, zooming, swiping and dragging on the screen in order to generate a vivid alternative reality, this leads to a greater engagement from the user. In addition, exploring user's sensory experience on social media, enhancing intrinsic motivation on users while they feel they are still maintaining their sense of autonomy also affects engagement. The sensory experience can connect with the experience of manipulating the interface as previously stated. Nonetheless, not every action or event

happening on social media leads to all of these engagement types simultaneously (Rodgers & Thorson, 2017).

Most advertised products and services trigger initial quick and easy judgements without much effort into a reflection from the consumer since they offer information to the user while driving a persuasive success that requires minimal to no mental effort to make a decision (Rodgers & Thorson, 2017). This, because it is easy to study these cognitive heuristics in order to produce an advertisement that is persuasive, in accordance (Rodgers & Thorson, 2017). Some ads can produce a sense of contingency i.e. responsiveness, a dialogue among users which can produce a sense of agency (user control, ...) and also self-determination, which gives the consumer a sense of autonomy and activates their intrinsic motivation (*Attachment 2*) (Rodgers & Thorson, 2017).

1.2.4. Social media's interactivity value for brands

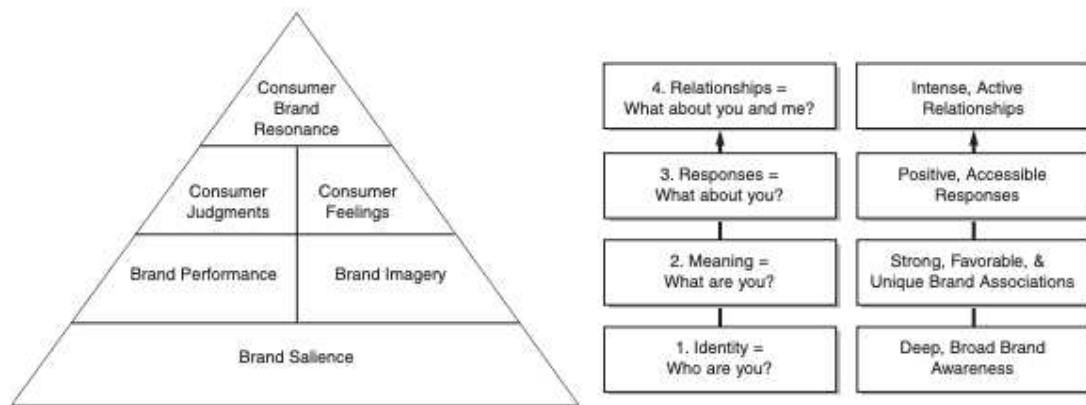
On another note, a study conducted by Bozkurt et.al (2020), reveals that social media interactivity adds value to brands. If a customer recognizes a brand to be extremely interactive on social media, they are more willing to purchase the products or services that the brand is offering, refer the brand (WOM) to others, share their experiences with peers and family, and thoroughly engage in the product development process by providing the brand in question with feedback or even with specific suggestions. To conclude, customers willingly contribute to brands through high levels of social media interactivity by either purchasing (directly) or by referring, influencing and suggesting (indirectly). This is also due to the fact that consumers obtain something in return from the brand they offer feedback or specific suggestions to, for example, a lower price, benefitting from interacting with other consumers, knowing that participating can improve the quality of products and so on (Gatautis et.al, 2020). Nevertheless, consumer engagement is mostly influenced by consumer satisfaction, commitment, trust (in a product or brand), social identity and consumer aims. Besides, awareness, role clarity and needed skills in a brand are also considered to influence consumer engagement (Gatautis et.al, 2020).

In the same line of thought, some authors suggest that brands, who are on social media, should therefore reply to customer's comments and provide them with information related to their requests in comments and general comments, in order to gain their trust and thus improve the engagement with them so that there is both direct and indirect interactivity

(Bozkurt et.al, 2020). As a consequence, customer engagement develops more loyal customer relationships which results in a higher brand value or equity. Brand knowledge (brand awareness and brand attitude), brand attitude (brand trust and brand affect), brand behavioural intention (purchase intention) and brand behaviour (brand loyalty, brand advocacy, and brand premium price behaviour) increase for engaged costumers (Addis, 2001).

1.2.5. Relationship between brands and consumers

In addition, according to Keller's customer-based brand equity pyramid (*Figure 1*), relationships between brands and consumers start with brand awareness meaning that a brand has a specific brand identity.



(Figure 1)

Then, consumers start searching for the brand's meaning, resulting in asking questions about what the brand offers and what the brand associates itself with which is embedded in the brand image, how does it perform or position itself compared to other brands? In the third stage from the bottom up of the pyramid consumers may feel the need to ask questions and obtain answers from the brand in question and if and how the brand responds will translate into brand reputation, and every so often value. Similar to brand image, reputation is the

former of brand image. Brand image rather expresses the feelings, perceptions and thoughts that come to consumer's minds when they first hear the name of the brand.

Brands and other institutions recognize the importance of the reputation concept. Reputation is rather the effect of product specification, quality, customer service on the customer. A brand can either have a good or bad reputation depending on how it communicates those characteristics. Usually, these concepts of brand, image and reputation tend to be confused with each other (Bozkurt, 2018).

The last stage and top of the pyramid is called "Consumer Brand Resonance" which refers to an intense, active and participative relationship between the brand and the consumer which ultimately translates into brand equity due to the nature of an existing valued long-lasting relationship between the consumer and the brand (Keller, 2001).

1.3. Main characteristics

Social media is also used by consumers in the first process of this decision-making that comprises purchase intention, namely the intelligence phase. The purchase intention is part of the decision-process, here, specifically in events before a purchase by explaining the way decisions were made (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). According to Simon's 1960 model, decision-making is broken down into the three stages of; intelligence, design and choice. The intelligence phase involves the classification of the problem, and the gathering and processing of information (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019).

The design stage refers to the generating and the evaluation of product alternatives from different brands, with a focus on specific product attributes that differ hence the classification 'design'. Finally, there is the final stage of the decision-making process, the choice. Here, consumers are propelled to make a final decision on the basis of their gathered information, product attributes and brand value differences and choose the brand's product that best corresponds to their needs, desires and values (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). During these processes, users rely on social media to better become informed before making a final decision since nowadays, they choose to utilize social media to gather enough information about a product or service (Ioanas & Stoica, 2014).

The main question must be asked, why do consumers steer towards social media for information-based decision making? Not only does social media like Facebook and Twitter offer search-determined information that applies to a decision but also, they are used for

experience-determined decisions (Bronner& Hoog, 2014). This means that the experience that consumers obtain from interacting with certain social media is itself a determinant factor for a purchasing decision besides the search-determined information (Bronner & Hoog, 2014). All in all, consumers obtain a better experience on social media besides obtained information (Bronner & Hoog, 2014). In addition, on social media there is a preponderance of positive comments or messages and rarely any use of negative information which can be a clear indication that multichannel management is important to market a brand and products effectively (Bronner & Hoog, 2014).

1.3.1. Consumer needs and desires

Many of these needs are comprised in different and ten categories: social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing and surveillance or knowledge about others (Whiting&Williams, 2013), derived from the fear of missing out (FOMO) (Abel et.al, 2016) since the more these people used social media, the more they obtained this fear (Sultan, 2021). The fear of missing out is characterized as a feeling that is uneasy and sometimes all-consuming that you are missing out on what your peers are doing or knowing about what they are doing (Abel et.al, 2016). This feeling is also one of the reasons people use social media. According to a study by Blackwell et.al (2017), evidence was established that fear of missing out is a new variable that has a positive relationship with social media use which means that the more FOMO people had, the more they felt the need to use social media.

Not only do users feel the need to use social media to avoid FOMO but as consumers, to use it as a research tool for product information prior to a purchase. To explain this, the consumer decision-making process can be defined as the behavioural patterns of consumers that precede, determine and follow the decision process for the purchasing of products, ideas or services that can satisfy their needs (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019).

There are different reasons as to why consumers decide to buy a specific product that can be explained through various models. For instance, the economic model describes how consumers follow the principle of maximum utility for the minimum amount of money for the maximum benefit (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). This means, buying the cheapest products for the highest value. The psychological model, nonetheless, explains how based

on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, individuals are motivated by their strongest needs and desires (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019).

1.3.2. Communication

Although consumers are most influenced by their needs and desires, social media communication can have a strong impact on how consumers perceive brands. Social media is a medium whereby information is disclosed (Ionas & Stoica, 2014) and a medium whereby consumers have an unmediated experience with a brand (Bronner & Hoog, 2014). Therefore, brand-created communication and user-generated communication, influence brand attitude and brand attitude influences brand equity while user-generated communication on social media generates directly brand equity (*Attachment 2*), brand attitude and brand equity lead to a purchase intention of the consumer, hence why it is so important to manage social media platforms whether one is a brand or an influencer (Shivinsky & Dabrowski, 2014).

1.3.3. Consumer behaviour pre and post purchase

There remains a guideline process of consumer behaviour pre and post-purchase. Most authors agree that there is a stage 0 where internal stimuli like hunger and external stimuli such as advertisements make the consumer realize there is a difference between their current state and their desired state. These advertisements promote their desired state of being, a specific feeling i.e. happiness, a product or service can provide the consumer. This is viewed as the trigger and precursor of a consumer decision process and thus purchases (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019; Puccinelli et.al, 2009) although not being considered in studies.

After this trigger, the consumer considers an initial set of brands based on his or her experiences with those brands (McKinsey, 2009). To add, brand awareness is crucial. Brands that reside in this first initial consideration set of brand, are up to three times more likely to be purchased from than brands that are not in it (McKinsey, 2009).

1.4. Relevance of social media for brands

Social media has, in fact, changed the power structures in the marketplace. A large power-migration has been shifting to a new type of consumer, powerful, sophisticated, difficult to influence, persuade and retain as a customer. Social media has a role of customer-empowerment and consumers are taking advantage of this (Constantinides, 2013).

1.4.1. Social media marketing strategies

There are two possible social media marketing strategies. The first one being a passive one where social media is used as the voice of the consumer and as marketing intelligence which is data collected by a brand or company about a specific market it wishes to enter. Those data are used to make a final decision on whether to enter a market or not which can also help improve brand positioning strategies (Constantinides, 2013; Vishnoi& Bagga, 2020).

The second social media marketing strategy is active, where brands engage on social media via direct marketing and PR channels (which could be instagram advertisements and influencers) and, moreover, brands use in this strategy social media as a tool of personalizing products but also as a co-operation from the customer and customer-generated innovation (Constantinides, 2013). This means, not only giving voice to the consumer but accepting their comments and feelings about a certain product and trying to improve that product based on customer reviews, opinions and comments. Thus, Constantinides (2013) identifies social media apps' roles as being part of the marketing toolbox of this generation of marketers from the twenty-first century.

In short, the author underlines the enlarging pressure on marketers to adjust their tactics in the marketing ecosystem since technology plays more and more an important role in the marketing business (Constantinides, 2013). For instance, technology is an important tool to increase the marketing strategy's efficiency and to stay on top of the competitors. Although the role of marketing has not changed due to technology, the corporate attitudes that the marketing function and approaches face have been impossible to separate from the change the evolution of technology brought about. This means, all marketing strategies are created in light of the current technology humans possess (Versatech, 2020). Furthermore, not only did technology impact the marketing industry but it is a major tool for marketers to be able to reach their target audience more easily. With the blend of technology and marketing, industries started to reap from the achievements that could have previously never been

achieved. Besides, a few decades ago it was thought that apart from print media, there could never be any other method of marketing. Nonetheless, it was proved wrong and since then marketing and its concept have changed and will keep on changing and what drove its change was the emergence of technology which can be classified as a new branch of change (Jain & Yadav, 2017).

Fundamentally, nowadays, even though the four P's (Product, Place, Price and Promotion) may still be relevant, one cannot market those without the right knowledge to guide the consumer to the right product, place, price and way of promoting which is why marketers rely on technology to do so (McCarthy, 1960; Newman, 2015). Using social media to listen, learn and have better interactions which leads to happier and more satisfied customers can be strenuous not to mention decoding Big Data and using it to a brand's advantage to nurture those relationships (Newman, 2015).

1.4.2. E-commerce and social commerce

Social commerce is the use of social media, in the context of e-commerce, to aid with buying and selling products and services online. It provokes the fusion of two big digital trends, e-commerce and social media. Social commerce is usually made up of consumer-driven online market in which most consumers' needs are arranged through a community Web site or media e.g. social media (Linda & Sauling LAI, 2010).

Briefly, social commerce is a trusted environment of which prospective consumers make buying decisions based on the advice of a network of friends and family, not strangers they do not know or trust (Linda & Sauling LAI, 2010). However, literature aforementioned reveals that reviews of a specific product written by strangers do influence the consumer journey process and even purchase intention (Ioanas & Stoica, 2014) as do reviews by influencers (Zak & Hasprova, 2020).

The trend of social commerce, as discussed earlier, arose from the merging of Web 2.0 technologies (Linda & Sauling LAI, 2010). Web 2.0 is also known as the wisdom web, people-centric web and participative web where people are not afraid to take part in other people's and brand's lives by sharing information, knowledge and experience and requesting opinions on products and services (Murugesan, 2007; Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Social commerce, hencewhy, generates opportunities to leverage this type of technology in order to engage users more effectively in favor of brands (Murugesan, 2007). Web 2.0 social

commerce relies on word-of-mouth marketing. This is where customers promote a product or service by conveying to others their positive experience with it. As a result, brands can form longer-lasting customer relationships and a deeper rapport with the consumer (Linda & Sauling LAI, 2010). In addition, social media content can have a significant effect on sales due to its active online community (Stephen & Galak, 2012; Voramontri & Klieb, 2019; Murugesan, 2007). Social media content can even accumulate to have a substantial long-term impact on sales (Stephen & Galak, 2012).

It is important to use both traditional and online media content but since traditional media content rarely influences consumers like online media content does, marketers hope to generate enough sales through social media and would be advised to focus on generating social media activity and WOM (Stephen & Galak, 2012). Another article suggests that communication, specially crisis communication is more effective on social media such as twitter, followed by blogs than traditional media, the least effective of the three. Results indicated that the medium matters more than the message (Schultz et.al, 2010). Besides online media reaching a larger audience and being more effective as previous authors demonstrate, a more recent alike perspective, unbosoms the reality of the threat of online media overtaking traditional media, especially the print media industry. Online media complement but also complicate the role of journalists through the inability of newspapers to line up their online endeavours (Auwal, 2016).

Moreover, purchases and referrals can also drastically impact a brand's equity and awareness, which means creating engagement with the consumer through social media, is essential.

For instance, Hutter et.al (2013), in their study, confirm that engagement with a Facebook fanpage has a positive effect on consumer's brand awareness, WOM and purchase intention. Additionally, results also indicated that a negative emotion e.g annoyance with a fanpage leads to negative effects to the commitment, interactivity with the fanpage and WOM of the consumer. The authors also conclude that, in fact, social media interactivity also affects the purchase intention and decision-making process.

Not only does brand interactivity with the consumer, on social media, have a positive effect on brand awareness but also on brand equity. The more brands engage on social media, the bigger the impact on brand equity (Lim et.al, 2020).

Since previous literature has shown that engagement varies across social media platforms, some brands choose to rather focus on engaging in specific social media platforms whereas other brands decide to engage in several social media platforms at the same time, hoping to generate sufficient engagement activity results. (Lim et.al, 2020).

Essentially, the different social media platforms can be used to develop a company's social media strategy and tactics to improve overall brand equity. Since brand equity is a critical indicator of brand success, companies should invest in these platforms which can contribute to the strength of the brand's equity (Lim et.al, 2020).

Furthermore, the author contests that "social media can be an important brand management and brand delivery tool for firms to influence brand equity and produce tangible financial returns" e.g. returns on investment (ROI), (Lim et.al, 2020). This also means that brands can make use of these platforms with the goal of ROI by making use of them differently for individuals who are at different phases of the buying cycle by focusing on generating awareness, engagement but also experience sharing, which in turn, is the foundation of several and distinct marketing strategies on social media (Lim et.al, 2020).

In order to be able to take in effect these strategies, brands need to consider using social media for specific goals, as a foundation, in order to influence consumer behaviour prior to the consumer's purchase by building a relationship with them in the process since social media provides an opportunity for brands to engage and interact with potential customers by building relationships with them which, in turn, influences their behaviour (Rohm et.al 2013:, McLure & Seock, 2020). These are the following, according to Rohm et.al (2013):

- "Communicating product information
- Staying on top of and addressing customer service issues
- Engaging consumers with fun and entertaining content relevant to the brand in question
- Providing timely and relevant information regarding discounts, promotions and other events
- Communicating new product launches; and
- Fostering consumer-generated comments and the sharing of experiences that perhaps are more credible to consumers as information sources than are brand-generated communications" (Rohm et.al, 2013).

Furthermore, these authors state that although consumer engagement generated by promotions and discounts in both the online and offline context can benefit brands with

short-term sales, it can also diminish customer value thus limiting long-term profitability (Rohm et.al, 2013).

All in all, companies and brands need to consider social media not purely as a platform for simply gaining “likes” and or “followers” but also for conveying content that is informational, functional, relevant, timely, entertaining and shareable with the objective of inducing positive consumer impressions, involvement as well as attitudes such as purchasing intention and then purchasing decision for a long-term profitability (Rohm et.al, 2013).

1.4.3. The social media effect

The current market resides in the marketing 4.0 era, the digital content consumption through content marketing, for Kotler (2016). There are three important shifts that mark the migration to the 4.0 marketing and one of them is called the social media effect (Kotler, 2016).

Social media have allowed for the birth of digital influencers^{*4}, digital personalities that influence behaviour and move products, brands and services forward (Kotler, 2016).

With that being said, all information about a business should be clear, up-to date in real time and straight to the point which would attract a consumer that is always being distracted with something new (Kotler, 2016). Why are consumers distracted? First and foremost, information overload is a key issue when it comes to distraction and consequently online decision-making. Information is abundant which has led consumers to a state of confusion, analysis paralysis and distraction which makes it difficult for consumers to comb through information (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). Additionally, consumer’s focus is diminishing more and more and changes rapidly. Being able to establish a rapport and generate newer generation’s attention loyalty is increasingly challenging for brands and companies. And, this challenge seems to be growing every year. In this way, social media, have, definitely changed and challenged the mass communication setting (Kotler, 2016).

Naturally, there is a limit to the amount of information that can be processed by individuals which makes it impossible to evaluate all alternative choices meticulously (Voramontri &Klieb, 2019).

⁴ I will dedicate chapter number two to this topic.

Additionally, e-commerce is too transparent and open, making the company's activities too visible to competitors, provoking a ferocious competition. Thus, instilling loyalty towards a brand is imperative since it plays a decisive role in increasing sales volume and therefore gaining a competitive advantage over other brands. This is why previously mentioned strategies are important, in order to ensure, as well, customer loyalty.

Contrastingly, although web 2.0 is proving to be profitable, companies should anticipate potential threats which may be generated when new technologies arise (Tchelidze, 2019).

1.5. Relevance of social media for consumer behaviour

Previously mentioned literature in this chapter has shown the different roles social media platforms can have on a consumer, on a brand and vice versa. With the expansion of the use of social media, understanding which communication strategies can be more effective with different levels of reputation, can be puzzling but imperative. There is no extensive research to support this topic of the use of social media communication strategies depending on companies' different reputational levels (Floreddu et.al, 2016) but it is important. Nonetheless, previous studies have demonstrated that in the formation of corporate reputation, communication is acknowledged in having a role in the dissemination of information, as well as in the promotion of genuine values of a company (Floreddu et.al, 2016).

After the consideration of brands, follows stage 1 of the consumer behaviour journey process which is called the information search. Here, the consumer determines if he or she has enough knowledge about a certain product or service to make a decision. If they do not hold that knowledge or that knowledge is not enough, they tend to investigate more about that product or service in order to be better informed before making a decision. Buying a more expensive product, for instance, requires a more extensive search from the consumer since the decision will have a bigger impact on the consumer's life (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019; Kotler, 2010). Research is usually initiated through personal sources such as family and friends' WOM, commercial sources like advertisements and salespeople and public media sources such as newspapers, magazines, television, social media and the internet (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Also, user reviews on the internet such as on Amazon.com, Aliexpress etc. are perceived as providing the consumer with a more complete and reliable product assessment before purchasing and the quality of these online reviews also has a

significant positive effect on consumer's purchasing intention (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019; Park et.al, 2014). However, if there is not enough information online about a product, it can limit the involvement of the consumer and thus their decision-making (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019; Park et.al, 2014). Nonetheless, other authors such as Mckinsey (2009) add this process of information search to the second phase, the "active evaluation" where consumers not only gather information but also subtract and add brands based on what they are looking for (*Attachment 3*). This is comprised into the second stage although for Voramontri and Klieb (2019) the information search belongs to the first stage which for Mckinsey (2009) instead of this initial searching process, as previously stated, the consumer first considers an initial set of brands, after the trigger which is stage 0 for Voramontri and Klieb (2019), and then McKinsey's second stage follows. Although Voramontri and Klieb (2019) separate the information search and evaluation of alternatives stages, the authors admit that these two stages are interconnected during decision-making since consumers move back and forth between them hence why Mckinsey (2009) decided to connect them both into a second stage or phase (*Attachment 3*). McKinsey's model is comprised of four steps. In the first stage of the 'initial consideration set', the consumer consider an initial set of brands based on brand perception and recent interaction with those brands. Then, they move along to the second step where from those brands, they add, evaluate and subtract brands to that initial set of brands by gathering information on social media and through shopping experiences. The third stage follows, the moment of purchase. Here, a consumer selects his or her preferred brand of choice and buys from it. Following the purchase, the consumer journey experience continues. The fourth and final step is made up of the postpurchase experience where after purchasing a product, the consumer builds expectations based on that experience for future purchasing intentions or as Mckinsey would say rather for their next consumer journey (McKinsey, 2009).

The second stage of the consumer decision making process is comprised of the active evaluation, evaluation of alternatives or evaluation (McKinsey, 2009; Voramontri&Klieb, 2019; Puccinelli et.al, 2009). This evaluation process is where consumers gather enough information, to use it to evaluate alternative products or brand choices and make a decision based on those (McKinsey, 2009; Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). Another study found that, for instance, the generating of a positive mood pushes consumers to think in a more abstract manner which can make them more open to try new products or/and services, especially

those that present long-term goals such as a gym membership. Positive mood can also invoke consumers to focus more on peripheral cues such as being persuaded by packaging rather than product attributes (Puccinelli et.al, 2009).

Once alternatives are narrowed down into a choice, it elicits the creation of beliefs, attitudes and intentions, leading to the next stage, the third stage, which is the purchase decision (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019), the moment of purchase (Mckinsey 2009) or purchase and post-purchase (Puccinelli et.al, 2009). Purchase decision refer to the final product choice made. After this decision, comes the last major stage for Voramontri and Klieb (2019) which is the act of purchasing. The consumer now has decided what to buy, where to buy and how to pay. The purchasing factor is merely the consumer's intentions, environmental influences and individual situations translated into a transaction. What can influence this factor is also the time the consumer has available for decision-making, information availability as previously noted and the retail environment. One alternative scenario such as the attitude of family and friends towards a product, unexpected circumstances such as product availability such as size and colour and stock-outs may also necessitate a re-evaluation of product choice from the consumer (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). Ultimately the consumer selects a brand at the moment of purchase (Mckinsey 2009). For Puccinelli et.al (2009), feelings may serve an informative function, if relevant by employing a weighing out of product attributes based on mood. For example, happy or satisfied consumers put a heavier weight on positive attributes. Having a good mood can also influence the purchase in the sense that it accentuates biases for preferred brands. When costumer obtain a positive feeling about a service or brand, they use this emotion-based information to influence their purchasing decision (Puccinelli et.al, 2009).The last stage encompasses the post-purchase behaviour (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019), the post-purchase experience (Mckinsey, 2009) and the purchase and postpurchase phase for Puccinelli et.al (2009). In this phase consumers evaluate their purchase's performance whether it be a product or service, based on the expectations they created for that product and are met with satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019; Mckinsey, 2009). The expectation confirmation theory describes the post-purchase satisfaction as an outcome of expectations, perceived performance and confirmation or disconfirmation of beliefs (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). This means that if products do not fulfill the consumer's needs or reinforce his or her beliefs about a notion or idea, he or she will not be satisfied (Maslow, 1943; Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). This subjective evaluation takes one of three different

forms: positive disconfirmation or satisfaction which means the performance of the product or service is better than expected, simple confirmation or neutral response which means the expectation of the performance of the product was met and the third one being a negative disconfirmation or dissatisfaction when the performance of the product was not worse than expected. A lot of times, when consumers invest a lot of time, effort and money in a purchase, they can experience a cognitive dissonance between their attitude and their behaviour, on whether the right choice was made (Sharma, 2014; Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). The consumer feels the need to break this psychological tension and bring harmony to their decision (Sharma, 2014) If this was the case, after the purchase, the consumer feels the need to search for supportive information of his or her decision in order to reduce the dissonance they may be experiencing, by either positively reinforcing the choice that was made or deducting that it was an unwise decision (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). This dissonance is known to surface in three ways. The first being that “any logical inconsistency can create dissonance” (Sharma, 2014). The second is created when there is an inconsistency between consumer attitude and behaviour and the third one reveals that dissonance can occur when one’s expectation about a product or service is disconfirmed (Sharma, 2014; Voramontri&Klieb, 2019).

For McKinsey (2009), the post-purchase experience also informs the next decision journey. Whether the consumer was pleasantly surprised, satisfied or negatively surprised by the performance of a product or service from a brand, it will impact his or her future consumer decision journeys by taking his previous consumer journey experience into account. All in all, consumer satisfaction is the result of the experiences by the consumers in all of the stages of the consumer journey process since the outcome in one stage can affect the experiences in the other stages (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019). Most studies focus on consumer satisfaction as an outcome and not as a process intertwined with the consumer decision-making journey (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019) which sometimes can harm a brand’s reputation if disregarded. These aspects make a notable impact on consumer’s overall satisfaction and that is why it is important to study and analyse not only the outcome of but the whole decision-making process (Voramontri&Klieb, 2019).

1.6. Social media role during covid-19 pandemic

More people expect to make a portion of their purchases online post-COVID-19 than before.

What does this imply for the use of social media during and after the pandemic?

With the looming of the pandemic, 60% of global consumers changed their shopping behaviour (McKinsey&Company,2020). If the consumers did not find their desired product at their preferred retailer, they would change their shopping behaviour by alternating between brands and retailers during the crisis. Nonetheless, the most impactful behaviour change was the way consumers started adopting covid low-contact and digital services to avoid covid-19 infection and spread. For instance, the global quarantine restrictions also forced consumers to go digital for their activities such as; online streaming, online fitness, videochats etc. instead of hangouts etc. On the whole, global consumers have replaced some in-person aspects i.e. their work and healthcare for professional videoconferencing and telemedicine (McKinsey&Company,2020).

Also, more people expect to make a portion of their purchase online post covid-19 than ever before which means covid-19 propelled consumers to shop even more online (McKinsey&Company,2020). In fact, the US and most European countries see the maximum growth in consumers who intend to keep using online channels even after the end of the crisis (McKinsey & Company,2020).

In addition, consumers have shifted to a more mindful type of shopping with stage 0 of the consumer journey process or the initial brand consideration set taking more place and impact than before (Mckinsey & Company, 2020; Voramontri &Klieb,2019; McKinsey, 2009). This mindset shift translates into them being not afraid to trade one brand down for another since brand value is more paramount now than before the pandemic. Thus, they research, more, brands before making purchases, stage 2 of the consumer journey process (Mckinsey &Company, 2020; Mckinsey, 2009).

All in all, covid-19 has affected consumer behaviour in five different ways. First, the shift to value and buying the essentials, since consumers are more mindful of their spending since they expect the pandemic to last at least four more months (as of 2020). They tend to spend most money on essentials such as grocery and household supplies and stock-up those due to a fear of another lockdown. Therefore, there has been a decline of sales in non-essential

items (Mckinsey &Company, 2020; Chauhan &Shah, 2020) and stock-out of non-essential items since these items had been either delayed due to the importance of distributing essential items like masks, hand sanitizers, food etc. or either were on shortage at stores from which consumers were trying to buy from (Chauhan & Shah, 2020).

Second, there has been a shift to a digital and omnichannel. There has been noted a 10% increase in sales and even stores opening means consumers will keep shopping online. In markets with a high online conversion rate such as the UK and the US, online shopping or e-commerce continues to soar on all types of products (Mckinsey &Company, 2020).

Thirdly, consumers were forced to change loyalty. Since certain products and brands during covid-19, caused supply-chain disruptions, consumers changed their shopping behaviour. Instead of picking their preferred product at their preferred retailer, they were forced to try new brands and stores out (Chauhan & Shah, 2020; Mckinsey & Company, 2020). Nevertheless, value was the key indicator of trying a specific brand or shop out (Mckinsey &Company, 2020).

The fourth aspect that affected consumer behaviour was paying attention to health and a caring economy. For instance, respondents disclosed that they buy more from brands that use hygienic and sustainable packaging and that care for their employees. Also, the actions brands chose to take during the pandemic are expected to have a long-term effect on consumer's minds (Mckinsey &Company, 2020).

The last aspect only refers to consumers not feeling comfortable yet, returning to their out-of-house activities which influences consumers to shop online rather than offline (Mckinsey &Company, 2020).

Other authors agree with Mckinsey & Company's view of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the consumer. Chauhan and Shah (2020), describe consumer behaviour as having changes due to a shift in what is considered to be essentials now. Hygiene products entered in this category, leaving, for example, apparel industries out since they are viewed as non-essential. Interestingly, their study showed that people used social media differently during the pandemic, in fact, it was concluded that the most used social media apps were Whatsapp, Facebook and YouTube. The average usage of these media was between 2-5 hours per day. Whatsapp and Facebook were mostly used to stay in touch with family, friends and relatives, whereas YouTube and Instagram were used mainly for entertainment. Applications such as

LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Snap-Chat, TikTok etc. were not as much used as the other apps (Chauhan & Shah, 2020).

To conclude, around 77% of respondents (8 out of 10) believed that the pandemic had significantly affected their shopping behaviour either willingly or forcibly and that they have adopted a mixed-mode of offline (or brick and mortar) and online purchases (Chauhan & Shah, 2020).

Moreover, information processing is not only affected by having too much information available on social media (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019; McKinsey, 2009) but also by stress and uncertainty (OHA, n.d.). The pandemic caused a lot of stress and anxiety in people which meant the way they processed information also shifted. Now, people may not hear, remember or may misinterpret information they receive. People may show “confirmation bias” which means looking for information that supports their claims or beliefs.

Moreover, the social context of communication also changed. For instance, the social context influences how messages are perceived and how decisions are made (OHA, n.d.). During the pandemic, people were under stress which meant people leaned towards herding behaviour, making decisions based on the actions of others such as panic buying and hoarding (OHA, n.d.). The way people engaged with family and friends was influenced by social norms but also by social media, e.g. using or not using a mask, gathering together during covid etc.

All in all, the pandemic caused a shift in consumer behaviour, making the consumer more impulsive, focused on essential items, forced to shift brands, more concentrated on brand value, less attentive to information, prefers to shop online and spends more time on social media applications (McKinsey & Company, 2020; Chauhan & Shah, 2020; OHA, n.d.).

Throughout this chapter, social media’s impact on consumers has been evident and transforming which implies marketing strategies need to be adjusted accordingly. Consequently, having consumers migrate from the television, radio and tv platform to social media and the internet channel means that these former platforms do not target effectively part of the younger audience. All things considered, brands are adapting to this issue and learning quickly to build new ways of gaining trust in newer communication channels such as social media: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter (Kotler, 2016).

2. Influencer Marketing

Marketing managers have known for decades now that communication seldomly follows a uniformed strategy. Since the 1960s and 1970s, literature has thus recommended the segmentation of markets, development of differentiated offers for specific segments, and that the younger generations, particularly require proper understanding and communication directed towards them (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Ultimately, influencer marketing is aimed at persuading these young consumers to purchase advertised products and services and purchase intentions are a critical predictor of consumer behaviour, of purchasing behaviour in this case. When the audience's brand perceptions are enhanced by the trustworthiness and attractiveness of an influencer, it leads to a positive and advantageous brand image. A positive brand image and brand satisfaction generated by influencers can make consumers, in the long run, intend to purchase or even purchase the advertised product or service (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). This means that brand image and brand satisfaction influence a purchasing intention (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). What can also influence a purchasing intention from followers is an opinion leadership (eWOM from influencers (Erkans&Evans, 2016)) and parasocial relationships with influencers (Farivar et al., 2021). An opinion leadership can be described as the extent an influencer is perceived to be an opinion leader for consumers and therefore offers useful and also interesting information through their eWOM(Erkans&Evans, 2016), (Farivar et al., 2021). Besides giving valuable information about products, an influencer is also someone you take advice from through a parasocial relationship. This relationship is described as a one-sided relationship an audience perceives with a media person, i.e. an influencer (Farivar et al., 2021). An Instagram follower, for example, may even perceive the influencer in question as a friend despite their limited interaction with the influencer. Both opinion leadership and parasocial relationship studies have demonstrated their pertinence to the influencer marketing field but have been both studied in an isolated way without including the other (Farivar et.al, 2021).

2.1. Definition of the term “Influencer”

According to the Miriam-Webster dictionary, an influencer is someone who inspires or guides the actions of others, someone who can generate interest in something by posting about it on social media (Miriam-Webster, 2022).

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term ‘influence’ as “to affect or change how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks” (Cambridge dictionary, 2022).

”by the means of “the coordinated, integrated, and synchronized application of national diplomatic, informational, military, economic, and other capabilities in peacetime, crisis, conflict, and postconflict” in order to “foster attitudes, behaviours, or decisions by foreign target audiences” (Wanless & Pamment, 2019:7).

Due to the extensive use of social media, influencer marketing became a very popular phenomenon. This widespread global use of social networks, in fact, has allowed for people or consumers to communicate with and influence other users’ perceptions and decision-making.

Some of these individuals “dedicate themselves professionally, semi-professionally, and altruistically, to sharing their opinions through social networks. In very recent times some of the more highly-successful individuals have been termed influencers.” (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021, pp. 4-5).

Moreover, influencers can also be described as individuals with the ability to shape attitudes and the behaviour of their audience since they originate from the term ‘opinion leaders’ (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021). Not only do influencers give their personal opinion to consumers but also since they achieve their fame and reputation through social media and thus it is easier for them to develop closer and broader relationships with their followers, that perceive them as a friend, influencers become more credible and honest which facilitates attitude and behaviour change (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021).

In addition, they are considered to have one or more of the following characteristics:

“

- (1) *Their opinions are well respected in one or more topics;*
- (2) *They are proactive members of a community*
- (3) *They frequently make important contributions to the community*
- (4) *Other users perceive them to have good taste in relation to the community theme (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021). ”*

Nevertheless, influencers are not celebrities. This means that unlike celebrities, influencers’ origins lie in social networks, whereas celebrities are famous for a specific doing such as

sports, music composition, singing, acting etc. influencers achieve their fame and reputation as opinion leaders directly through the medium of social media (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021). Since most people obtain information first and foremost from social media, its platforms tend to be viewed as the most desired field to complement influential tactics whether from politicians or influencers (Bergh, 2020).

However, influencing despite having its positive characteristics, can have detrimental aspects. One has to be able to distinguish from the acceptable parts of the influence industry and those that make use of manipulation or information intended to deceive often used for corroborating and influencing a specific candidate in elections or intended to deceive a target audience in favour of the influencer's own economic prosperity or wishes or desires (Wanless & Pamment, 2019; Bergh, 2020).

What has been preconceived in the notion of the term 'influencer' is significantly different from ten or even twenty years ago. To highlight this disparity, authors like Wiedmann et al. (2010) propose that social influence is related to the identity of oneself, one's knowledge and one's circle or connections. The identity of an individual and their knowledge can affect the individual's social capital that also results from several demographic, psychographic, and personality variables. The importance of having an inner circle was included into the idea of accessibility, for instance, "an individual may be influential not only because people within his group look to him for advice but also because of whom he knows outside his group" (Wiedmann et. al, 2010).

Other authors undergo the conviction that influencers retain the authority that allows a message to be conveyed quickly and reliably through WOM techniques (Kiss & Bichler, 2008). Furthermore, influencers are inquisitive and hold multiple interests, hence why they tend to be early adopters in markets or trends, they are trusted by others, and have a large social network (Kiss & Bichler, 2008).

Contrastingly, around 20 years ago it was believed that the ability to influence a large number of individuals, the minimal effort required to influence, and the flexibility to deploy a variety of influence strategies through information technologies are a powerful combination, making influence in online social networks substantially more persuasive and pervasive than in conventional interpersonal interactions (Subramanai & Rajagopalan, 2003). This goes hand in hand with the notion of mass media advertisements' effects of pervasiveness at the time this article was written. Some authors also argue that this

intrusiveness of advertising may strengthen the ability to influence television viewers (Mastro & Stern, 2003).

2.2. Influencers in the organizational context

In order to better understand the need for influencers, one has to analyse how influencers and brands relate to and work with each other and why nowadays brands resort more and more to influencers for product promotion. It is believed that the parasocial interaction^{*5} between the influencer and the target audience/consumer mediates the relationship between the product or brand placement type and the overall corporate credibility of the brand in question (Jin & Mugaddamn, 2019). Therefore, influencers are essential to further promote brand awareness^{*6}, equity^{*7} and reputation^{*8}. To corroborate this, it has been proven that influencer-brand collaborations on social networks increases the effectiveness of the brand message tried to be conveyed (Ibáñez-Sánchez et.al, 2021). For instance, by embodying more knowledge about a target audience than many advertising agencies, influencers are able to convey more engagement to a brand-related message in a more effective and personal matter than brands can do. Not only do influencers own a high engagement rate but their marketing is also a cost-effective marketing and they generate more exclusive brand awareness (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

In comparison to non-renowned brand-influencer collaborations, renowned brand-influencer collaborations enhanced consumer's attitude towards the brand message, the perceived credibility of the influencer and also influenced consumer purchase intention (Ibáñez-Sánchez et.al, 2021). In addition, it was deducted from this study that influencer-brand collaborations, specifically on social media platforms, increase the effectiveness of the commercial and brand's message (Ibáñez-Sánchez et.al, 2021).

⁵ describes the one-sided relationships that can occur between a media user and the media being consumed. Used to understand the process by which individuals form attachments to media personae, the theory may also help explain the behaviour of those consumers who use Internet-based online communities (Ballantine & Martin, 2005).

⁶ defined by OxfordLanguages (2022) as the extent to which consumers are familiar with the qualities or image of a specific brand of products or services.

⁷ an added value that "is attributable to the brand name itself which is not captured by the brand's performance on functional attributes" (Sikri, 1992).

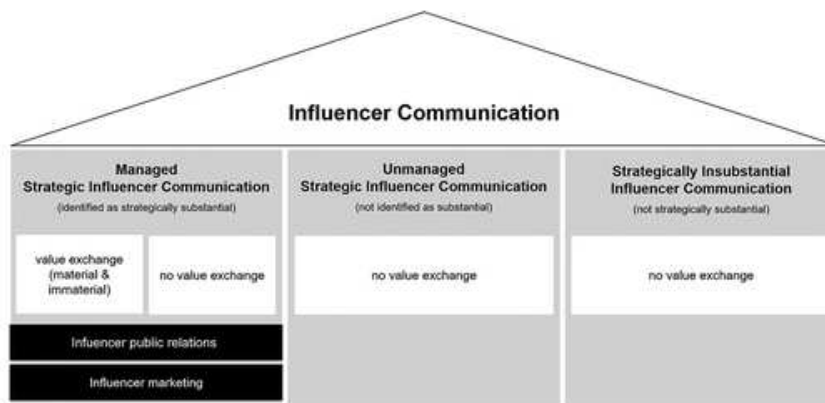
⁸ classified by the Collins dictionary (2022) as being known or remembered by something, whether positive or negative.

Influencer and brand collaborations involve strategic communication which is understood to be a comprehensive concept that covers all communication activities with a purpose and significance to an entity's objectives e.g. the brand. The authors coin the term 'strategic SMI (social media influencer) communication to define all communication processes where influencers are involved (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Strategic social media influencer communication can be considered a tool in strategic communication (Enke & Borchers, 2019). This, because influencers can affect and be affected by marketing and public relations objectives. In addition, social media influencers are not restricted to one specific platform type such as a blog but can be encountered in a lot of platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitch.

Additionally, this type of communication is not limited to corporations or organizations since it also includes strategic communication endeavors of SMIs with individual objectives. Furthermore, strategic communication management is defined as an attempt to manage the communication that holds strategic significance from a specific entity whereby strategic significance refers to the importance of specific issues (Enke & Borchers, 2019).

Before passing from the organization to the influencer, a marketing plan and the strategic communication in place are construed by the organization in question. It identifies which issues are substantial and thus significant enough to be approached which then become subject to management processes in the organization and thus managed within (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Management processes suggest that the organization has to take a stance on the issue in order for it to be managed. These processes can take various forms, from the attempt to actively tackle the issue at hand to merely acknowledging that the issue exists and is relevant to the respective audience but not taking any action towards this newly presented information (Enke & Borchers, 2019).

After managing the brand's strategic communication, the organization reaches out to several marketing channels, one of them which includes influencers and relays its strategic communication plans to them. The strategic communication plan type of social media influencers can take place in three different paths (Enke & Borchers, 2019), below (*Figure 3*).



(Figure 3)

The first path corresponds to the previously mentioned strategic communication plan relayed from the organization to the influencer which then follows into a relevant and planned marketing plan for and from the influencer to their target audience (Enke & Borchers, 2019). The second path defines that in an unmanaged strategic influencer communication plan there is no value generated or exchanged with the audience, specifically no correlation with the brand's values and the influencer's own since it is not planned. The planning of strategic communication involves the creation of relationships present in the different social media platforms (Enke & Borchers, 2019). These include flow, affinity, the aspect of being representational or symbolic, semantic, affiliation and the planning of activity on Instagram (Connor & Shumate, 2018) such as posts, stories and reels in accordance to the brand's goals (Enke & Borchers, 2019).

The third and last path reveals that a strategically insubstantial influencer communication plan, with no goals, objectives and targets in mind is not only not strategically significant or substantial but no value is also derived from it nor to the brand nor to the consumers on social media (Enke & Borchers, 2019; Yesiloglu & Costello, 2020).

This leads to the role influencers have for organizations or brand equity which translates into a definition of strategic social media influencer communication as being an asset to brands. It is an asset to brands since this is the purposeful use of communication by social media influencers where social media influencers are approached by brands to execute marketing

plans^{*9} that hold strategic significance in the long-term to organizational goals which briefly means that the influencer's strategic communication aligns with that of the organization (Enke & Borchers, 2019) and thus generates brand equity (Jun & Yi, 2020). This definition includes both managed and unmanaged strategic social media influencer's communication since although unmanaged, it can still be substantial to organizational objectives. For instance, viral marketing is a type of communication that is both random and unmanageable. Also, the use of specific social media platforms plays a decisive role in the spread of a viral message (Bampo et.al, 2008). Nonetheless, this definition excludes the third path; of objectively insubstantial communication of influencers for the organization in question (Enke & Borchers, 2019). This means that both manageable and unmanageable strategic social media influencer's communication is insignificant for the organization in question (Enke & Borchers, 2019). This usually occurs when the selected influencer for the brand's marketing campaign does not meet the criteria for a successful marketing campaign with specific objectives in question. Hence, particular criteria are defined in the selection process of the influencer. These criteria relate to the fit between influencers, brands and marketed products, influencer's popularity, self-branding and reliability, influencer's audience composition, the tone of the influencer's posts and in the case of a paid promotion, the prices the influencers charge for that brand's product promotion (Borchers & Enke, 2021; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). All in all, the careful selection of influencers can enhance the effectiveness of influencer campaigns (Borchers & Enke, 2021). Other authors also reveal the importance of other selection criteria such as an evident influencer content and brand match. The content's relevance has a reassuring role in the increasement of the intimacy generated by communicating the brand through products, for instance. The brand's objective by employing influencer marketing is to reach the right target audience through the most suitable medium whether through offline or digital marketing while having the regard that the target audience needs to match the influencer's followers (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

⁹ (e.g. posts and stories on Instagram, engaging with consumers in the comment's section on Instagram posts; explained in the next subchapter, videos on YouTube and interacting with consumers on videos' comment section as well. (Patel, 2022).

2.2.1. PR, social media data, analytics, and influencers

In the mid to late 1990s a shift in PR was observed, which was coined as PR 2.0. by Brian Solis. This shift took place due to the recognition of the impact that the Web would have on PR and how the communication industry would be forced to connect to consumers directly not only traditionally but also through New Media influencers. PR 2.0 was therefore inspired by the Web 1.0 boom (Solis & Breakeyridge, 2009). Due to these early Web days, Google and Yahoo were, for example, the catalysts of social media (Solis & Breakeyridge, 2009). Social networks, online videos and blogs are currently the most popular social media tools, however, PR and corporate communications professionals are still using a vast variety of means to reach their respective audiences (Gillin, 2008). Influencer marketing, for instance, is the fastest growing and most popular tactic that applies a similar strategy to public relations (Glucksman, 2017). People known as influencers are now representing brands through branded content on their personal social media accounts such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Youtube. Consumers turn to other consumers that might or not be influencers to inform their purchasing decisions, mostly through eWOM (Glucksman, 2017; Park & Lee, 2009; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

The top criteria to determine the relevance of the potential influence of an influencer, blogger or podcaster is; the quality of content, the relevance of content to the company or brand they are collaborating with, page views and search engine rank, nonetheless, new metrics are always emerging which means these criteria could rapidly change (Gillin, 2008; Glucksman, 2017).

Moreover, the main criteria for the evaluation of a person's influence in social networks and online communities are their participation level such as replying to followers' comments, their frequency of activity such as how many times a week they post and how much prominence they possess in the market or in this case, in their community (Gillin, 2008; Glucksman, 2017).

In terms of measurement of their social media marketing effects, only about half of the influencers measure them. Their main goals are to enhance relationships with key audiences while improving the reputation of the business/brand, drive customer awareness of online activities which can include brand awareness as a significant goal of influencer marketing and soliciting customer comments and feedback (Gillin, 2008; Glucksman, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Brand knowledge refers to brand awareness, which plays a crucial role in

purchasing behaviours (Lou & Yuan, 2019) since it measures brand recall in the memory of the consumer (Keller, 2001). The more a brand is recalled, for example, the name of the brand, the logo, the slogan that gives detailed information about that brand, in different contexts, the more it can affect the decision-making of a consumer about a product. In the act of purchasing or in the intent of purchasing, the consumer considers a set of brands that they recall (McKinsey, 2009; Shahid et al., 2017).

Since the number of users on social media platforms continues to rise, so does the need for brands to monitor and use social media to their advantage (Fan&Gordon, 2014). Social media analytics is a way of monitoring social media and can therefore be defined by “the developing and the evaluating of informatics tools and frameworks to collect, monitor, analyze, summarize, and visualize social media data” (Zeng et al., 2010), generally driven by social media platform’s app requirements (Fan&Gordon, 2014; Zeng et al., 2010). Social media analytics research assures the facilitation of conversations and interaction between online communities and the extracting of useful consumer pattern and intelligence to relay to companies. Moreover, social media analytics can help companies improve their reputations and thus can result in brand performance (Fan&Gordon, 2014). This beneficial outcome has granted the creation of data services, software tools used for data analysis and social media analytic platforms (Batinca &Treleaven, 2015).

These social media analytic platforms allow for specific techniques for the analysis of unstructured text. Natural language processing (NLP) is one of them. NLP is inserted in the artificial intelligence and linguistics field in regards to the interactions between computers and human languages. It is a process whereby a computer extracts meaningful information from a natural language input, on social media for instance, and decoding that language (Batinca &Treleaven, 2015). In addition, opinion mining and sentiment analysis play an important role. Opinion mining deals with the attempt of making automatic systems to determine human opinion from text in their language. Sentiment analysis suggests the application of language processing and text analytics to identify and collect subjective information about social media users (Batinca &Treleaven, 2015).

Social media analytics research faces several challenges (Zeng et al., 2010). Among these challenges is the notion that today’s big data differs from traditional analytics by its: volume and the storage space it requires, velocity which means the speed of data creation alongside the perk of analysing data in real time, variety (the fact that data takes several

different forms, is often unstructured or specific to the data source) and veracity (the uncertainty in regards to data quality (Stieglitz et.al, 2018). Consequentially, the nature of such data and their size pose serious challenges to computing in general but mainly to semantic computing (Zeng et al., 2010; Stieglitz et.al, 2018). All in all, this measurement problem represents a difficulty in judging social media's return on investment (ROI)^{*2} which leads to modeling struggles as well (Zeng et al., 2010). Other challenges include data access and privacy concerning users (Toivonen et al., 2019).

In addition, social media contains an enriched set of data or metadata which have not been treated in data- and text-mining literature (Zeng et al., 2010). One of the examples would be tags or hashtags; user-expressed subjective opinions, insights, evaluation, perspectives in ratings and in user profiles. Also, social media applications are a noteworthy example of human-centered computing with a unique focus on social interactions between users (Zeng et al., 2010; Batrinca & Treleaven, 2015). Moreover, social media intelligence inherently constitutes a unique set of problems with a specific need for efficient data-driven, dynamic decision making, uncertainty and subjective risk analysis and modelling and optimization over large dynamic networks. With the maturing of social media intelligence research and applications, researchers will, most likely, need to develop new analytical and computational frameworks and methods to analyse vast amounts of social media data (Zeng et al., 2010) with the aid of existing services, tools and applications to do so (Batrinca & Treleaven, 2015). There is still an ongoing debate about the applicability of conventional metrics to these new media and a lack of precisely defined best practices for measuring social media marketing outcomes. This issue of metrics will likely remain moldable until the marketing industry settles on broadly agreed-upon defined standards (Gillin, 2008; Glucksman, 2017).

2.2.2. Power of influencers towards brands

Social media influencer marketing has successfully changed the way that brands interact with consumers (Glucksman, 2017). Having this in mind, influencers now have the responsibility of establishing a relationship with their target audience, which by doing that, they obtain power over their behaviour (Glucksman, 2017; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021) which can be beneficial for brands. It can be beneficial for brands because influencers are like a glue between the brand and the consumer, it is the only way a brand "sticks" easier to a consumer's mind, hence they are the ultimate connection between a brand

and a consumer (Glucksman, 2017). They are the ultimate connection or glue between the brand and the consumer since although influencers receive a monetary compensation for their product endorsement, they are able to remain a trusted and authentic source to their followers. This is due to the fact that they can apply a branded product into their real life which persuades followers or consumers to view that product favorably since it is used by someone they strongly admire, trust and most important of all that they can relate to. As a consequence, the returns on investment are unprecedented if the influencer marketing plan is well executed (Woods, 2016).

Not only do influencers promote brand awareness, as previous literature in this chapter has revealed, but they own credibility since they promote brands through their personal lives which makes the average consumer able to relate more to them since they are upright, honest, real and relatable (Glucksman, 2017; Forbes, 2016; Martensen et.al, 2018, Leban, 2016). In addition, social media influencers are also more influential, credible and relatable than celebrities among females, according to a study by Lou and Yuan (2019) and Schouten et.al. (2020). Being more relatable, in turn, contributes to the increased efficacy of product endorsements by influencers in comparison to celebrities (Tafesse&Wood, 2021). Why and how influencers distinguish themselves from celebrities on social media, remains unsolved. Influencers had to and make use of the notion of self-branding or personal branding which means the developing of a unique public image for commercial gain and/or cultural capital in order to reach a wider audience. This idea of self-branding revolves around the assumption that these individuals called “influencers”, benefit from owing a unique selling point or a public identity, just like commercial products, that is both charismatic and responsive to the needs and interests of target audiences unlike celebrities (Khamis et al., 2016). Moreover, it is imperative that these individuals generate their own brand identity in order to stand out more easily in the labour market, that their image projection is dynamic and memorable and that they consistently provide consumers, employers and markets with value (Khamis et al., 2016). Transferring the ratiocination of branding from products to individuals is not only possible and desirable but also imperative and inevitable (Khamis et al., 2016).

By being more relatable, influencers develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with consumers (Farrell et.al, 2021) making them seem more trustworthy (Schouten et.al,2020; Wolf, 2020) than celebrities and seem alike the average social media user (Schouten et.al, 2020). Not only do consumers trust influencers more than the average celebrity, but they

also connect more with them on a deeper and more personal level than with celebrities and perceive influencers as more authentic than celebrities, as well. In addition, consumers can tell that influencers care about their content on posts and their audience which are two defining factors that makes them able to reach their desired target audience according to the type of content, they post (Wolf, 2020).

When brands want to partner up with influencers, they should do it by telling a story and through a relationship that needs to occur naturally. Producing social media posts that are creative and allusive to this brand-influencer relationship is key into being able to attract generation Z into their posts and mainly their feeds. Moreover, micro-influencers' accounts followers expect these influencers to be knowledgeable about the subject they are talking about. Overall, Gen Z wants to live an experience through influencers and they want it to be real. By being able to connect with an influencer through similarities and knowing that they are also real people, are important aspects (Wolf, 2020).

Thus, nowadays, advertising through an influencer is more effective than paying thousands of euros for a traditional advertising campaign due to this factor of 'relatable-ness' and hence higher credibility which translates into a higher engagement advertising content (Farrell et.al, 2021; Himelboim &Golan, 2019).This notion of relatability is present in advertising since disclosure continues to be a relevant issue in social media influencer marketing. Displaying that one is being paid shows honesty and transparency from the influencer which generates more trust from their followers (Lou et al., 2019; Baranow, 2019). Some consumers admit to feeling tricked or deceived and even state that online social network websites lack credibility as a medium, especially those that display bulletin advertisements (Kelly et.al, 2013). An influencer promotes products seamlessly and integrates them into their daily life without making the consumer feel like they are being bothered and annoyed or intruding their life with unwanted products since influencers by being themselves sell the value that they bring by being authentic through products incorporated into their daily lives (Hearn &Schoenhoff, 2016). This is what distinguishes traditional advertising from SMI (social media influencer) advertising. SMI advertising is remarkable by generating brand awareness, being personalized and also relatable contrarily to traditional advertising (Lawrence et.al, 2013).

Nonetheless the results of one study indicate that when consumers become cognizant of the fact that an influencer's branded post may have been motivated by an underlying financial

relationship between the influencer and the brand, they may start to evaluate the influencer as significantly less transparent if a more vague or ambiguous disclosure is used in comparison to a clearer disclosure of a paid partnership between the two. This transparency concern regarding perceptions of the influencer impact consumers' perceptions of product efficacy as well as purchase intentions (Woodruff et.al, 2020).

2.2.3. Potential and relevance of influencers to consumers

Influencer marketing has become an important decision-making factor in the minds of consumers and recent studies have started to investigate how influencers determine consumer behaviour^{*10}, nonetheless, there is still a scarcity on the evaluation impact of influencers on consumer behaviour (Pick, 2020) when it comes to their promotion of products.

The results of a study done by Pick (2020), reveal that influencer credibility amongst influencers is a significant criterion which can influence purchase intention, the attitude towards advertising and the product while also contributing as a tool for conveying convincing messages. This, increases the perceived connection with the influencer and psychological ownership feeling for a product and thus influencer credibility can, in deed, determine consumer's behaviour positively (Pick, 2020).

The psychological ownership towards a product is defined by Pierce et.al. (2003) as the state in which feelings of ownership towards a variety of objects whether material or immaterial are developed. Furthermore, consumers become invested in the sense of ownership due to the fact that it is a way of self-expression^{*11} and that to which they belong to (Pierce et.al, 2003). Essentially, the way a consumer perceives a product is closely linked to the self. More specifically, this state is caused by intraindividual motives such as efficacy, effectance, self-identity^{*12} and having a place to dwell (Pierce et.al, 2003). Consumers, also associate renowned brands with attributes such as quality and prestige which, in turn, they like to align their personal images to these brands to fulfil this sense of belonging somewhere (Aaker &

¹⁰ Consumer behaviour can be defined as an individual's responses to or subjective interpretations of factors particular to a time and place (Lutz & Kakkar, 1975).

¹¹ The same construct of self-identity happens in Maslow's pyramid of needs in the self-esteem step, the third step of the pyramid where a person has a need for a sense of belonging in their life. (Pierce et.al, 2003; Maslow, 1943).

¹² This information will greatly impact the proceeding of the empirical methodology later explained.

Keller, 1990; Maslow, 1943). It is almost as if brands serve as an extension of the consumer, of who they are while making them feel listened to (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

Where traditional marketing targeted mostly mass audiences, influencers have the unique ability to target niche audiences that have until now been unreachable (Glucksman, 2017; Matthew, n.d.). This is due to the fact that Instagram is a combination of both electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and product placement. In addition, this mixture, is a very subtle way of advertising and this is why it is so effective in targeting niche audiences that with traditional advertising were not able to be targeted before (Glucksman, 2017; Matthew, n.d.). Traditional advertising is perceived to be very overt and upfront (Lance & Guy, 2006) whereas influencer marketing is a form of stealth marketing taking place in a deceptive, illusive, covert, imperceptible, disguised and furtive manner to purposefully influence target audiences without them being aware of these actions (Matthew, n.d.).

The issue remains of why consumers follow social media influencers. Some authors argue that the solution lies in why consumers use social media. Users' selection and utilization of different media is a behaviour characterized by a goal to satisfy divergent social and psychological needs which successively predicts distinct types of media usage and recurring media use (Katz et al., 1974). The uses and gratification approach can provide a well-grounded theoretical framework to better comprehend why audiences gravitate towards social media influencers to begin with (Lee et.al, 2021). The theory has been used by various researchers to explore the motives behind social media usage since social media provides unique gratifications that are not accounted for when the original uses and gratifications theory first emerged (Lee et.al, 2021). Authors like Whitting and Williams (2013), name ten essential reasons behind social media usage which include: social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information seeking and surveillance or knowledge of others.

Moreover, Muntinga et al. (2011) reported an all-around spectrum of COBRA types (consumer's online brand related activities) of consuming (*Figure 4*), contributing to and creating content. Each COBRA type had different motivations. A more recent article around the COBRA suggests that, for instance, parasocial relationships and a wishful identification with the influencer are also identified as significant predictors of consumer online brand activities. Creativity and design quality of content produced by influencers are necessary requirements and relevant predictors of parasocial relationships and wishful identification

between the consumer and the influencer. Moreover, the type of content that is produced is also an important factor required to foster a COBRA and a deeper psychological connection with the influencer (Cheung et al., 2022). The authors conclude that it is paramount to prepare creative content with a good aesthetic to drive consumer's behavioural response in an era of information overflow (Cheung et al., 2022). Useful information is less likely to foster a consumer psychological connection with the influencer or their intention to follow the influencer's recommendations or WOM due to this overflow (Cheung et al., 2022). Also, content with humour and imagination can be effective in building consumers' emotional bonds with SMIs. Depending on how content is produced through texts, graphics, and video, social media influencers are able to build an intimate bond with consumers on social media (Cheung et al., 2022). This bond is viewed as a friendship that includes credibility and trustworthiness (Cheung et al., 2022; Pick, 2020; Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

Table 1: COBRA typology as a continuum of three usage types – consuming, contributing and creating

COBRA type	Examples of brand-related social media use
Consuming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing brand-related video • Listening to brand-related audio • Watching brand-related pictures • Following threads on online brand community forums • Reading comments on brand profiles on social network sites • Reading product reviews • Playing branded online videogames • Downloading branded widgets • Sending branded virtual gifts/cards
Contributing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rating products and/or brands • Joining a brand profile on a social network site • Engaging in branded conversations, e.g. on online brand community forums or social network sites • Commenting on brand-related weblogs, video, audio, pictures, etc.
Creating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing a brand-related weblog • Uploading brand-related video, audio, pictures or images • Writing brand-related articles • Writing product reviews

Note: this list of examples of brand-related social media use is not exhaustive – COBRAs come in countless forms. The examples mentioned are both literature (e.g. Li & Bernoff 2008) and author generated.

(Figure 4)

For instance, information, entertainment, and remuneration were considered critical for consuming content whereas contributing content was perceived as motivated by personal identity, integration and the desire for social interaction, and entertainment. Creating content contained the same motivations as contributing content although with the addition of the empowerment motive behind that same content creation. This new spectrum of uses and gratifications of different branded content gives marketers an insight on why particular consumers have different media usage and branded content usage in relation to others. For instance, Facebook allows for users to share post on the feed page with other users besides on stories. Nonetheless, Instagram does not have this same feature, meaning that on Facebook there is more contributing content and Instagram on the other hand allows more for individual content to reach audiences (Facebook & Instagram, 2022).

On top of that, a study by Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019) revealed that the perceived influential power of digital influencers not only helps to generate a higher engagement but also increases expected brand value and behavioural intention towards the recommended brands. Both variables of brand engagement and brand expected value affect the intention of purchasing from recommended brands (whether from eWOM or influencers).

On top of that, social media influencers, for consumers, possess an attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise that can influence consumer's purchase intention. To illustrate this, a study by Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020) revealed that social media managers wanting to implement a social media campaign should focus on and work with influencers' trustworthiness, first and foremost, followed by their attractiveness. These variables have an impact on how the brand is perceived by the consumers. Trustworthiness being the most important variable, has the strongest and most significant impact on a brand's image, brand trust and brand satisfaction. Attractiveness of influencers, although less important than trustworthiness, has a significant effect on brand image and brand trust while brand satisfaction is only minimally influenced by the level of influencer attractiveness.

The idea of influencer attractiveness and trustworthiness connects with influencer credibility since they are considered elements that constitute credibility among expertise (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Influencer credibility has shown to be relevant and sometimes imperative, for some authors, (Jin & Mugaddamn, 2019; Ibáñez-Sánchez et.al, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schouten et.al, 2020; Pick, 2020; Farrell et.al, 2021) in order to convey convincing messages

(Pick, 2020). Contrastingly, the level of expertise for Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020) is not relevant. 'Expertise' is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as someone who has a very high level of skill or knowledge about something which is inherently connected to influencer credibility, individuals who make a living out of their opinions (Ibáñez-Sánchez et.al, 2021). In fact, expertise has a small effect on brand satisfaction, however, it does not have an effect on brand image nor brand trust (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020).

Notwithstanding, there is an importance of the conveyed brand image in online relationships through influencers. Brands reflect the mediating effect influencers have on them which influences the consumer purchasing intention (Khodabandeh & Lindh, 2020). In addition, it is important for brands to strengthen their relationships with consumers in order to have a long-term or better, continuous relationship with them. Then, they can aim to find appropriate influencers to showcase the product (Khodabandeh & Lindh, 2020). Again, influencers serve as the glue or an intermediary that connects the relationship of the brand with the consumer, while trying to sell the brand's products since it is an easier way to achieve brand awareness through influencers, comparing to all the brands currently on social media, and ultimately influence consumer purchasing intention (Glucksman, 2017; Khodabandeh & Lindh, 2020).

According to Farivar, Wang and Yuan (2021), 409 followers of two different Instagram accounts confirm the positive effects an opinion leadership and a parasocial relationship can have when combined together in influencer marketing. However, the parasocial relationship established seemed to play a more prominent role than that of opinion leadership in influencing follower's purchase intention. To add, these factors were moderated by post characteristics. For instance, storytelling posts intensified both the parasocial relationship and the opinion leadership factor. The authors deduct that this social or consumer relationship aspect of influencer marketing is crucial to better comprehend influencer marketing's prominence and success.

Moreover, it can be argued that when influencers establish parasocial relationships with consumers (Farivar et.al, 2021) that consumers create an emotional attachment to them and value the information they disclose about products, services and brands (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). Thus, these two factors are determinants of the perceived influence influencers have, by followers, which in retrospective contributes to a purchase

intention and predicts follower's positive word-of-mouth (WOM) about recommended brands (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021).

2.2.4. Choosing the right influencer

Hardly any firm in the fashion, beauty, travel, food or beverage industries are organizing marketing campaigns these days that do not include, at least to some extent, a collaboration with popular users on platforms such as Instagram and the rising platform of TikTok. Nonetheless, many marketing managers still have little to no understanding of these platforms compared to their knowledge of more traditional media channels such as TV and radio and often find it hard to make the right decision in this fast-paced environment (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Most users on both Instagram and TikTok are individuals who use the platforms to either share content with their social circle or to enjoy content produced by others. Nonetheless, a smaller group stands due to the fact that they are followed by a significantly larger number of users, which results in the reality that content uploaded by them is spread to a substantially larger audience (Haenlein et al., 2020). This small group of users is what Ibáñez et al. (2021), describe as regular people that share their opinions and are highly successful and thus can reach a wider audience besides their small group of friends (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, when analysing TikTok closer, although it differs from Instagram but has a similar and top engagement (Mou, 2020), one study by Omar and Dequan (2020) revealed that similarly as on Instagram, TikTok is used due to user's motivations and not personality traits. For instance, results showed that user's motivations such as archiving, self-expression, social interaction with other users and peeking are significant and relevant predictors of TikTok usage behaviours but can differ in levels and influence on consumer usage behaviour of the platform. Another similarity between TikTok and Instagram is that both can display TikTok videos (Su et al., 2020) although Instagram does but in the format of Instagram reels, a post type (Bhatia et al., 2021). This content production type was released by Instagram, very recently, in August of 2020, in the form of 'reels'. They allow the user to create 15 seconds videos with easily accessible background music, video effects, slow motion and other vast creative tools (Yu & Sharma, 2021). Similar to highlights, reels are permanent fixtures on a profile's main page but are also given a dedicated space for users who search only by reels (Yu & Sharma, 2021). On the other hand, Tik Tok provides 15-to 60-second

long videos that grab the user's attention (Logrieco et al., 2021). Instagram and TikTok are very similar. They both display short video content that can be further promoted across established platforms such as TikTok videos on Instagram reels. Nonetheless, TikTok is not merely a permanent version of Instagram stories but generates viral content contrarily to Instagram (Su et al., 2020). Notwithstanding, TikTok videos' or reels' views on Instagram were higher than on TikTok (Yu & Sharma, 2021) and these reels maintain a higher level of engagement than TikTok videos. This can be due to the fact that Instagram is an older platform that also integrates sharing photos with longer videos and other content besides reels (Szeto et al., 2021).

Instagram and TikTok are not exempt from this norm. For instance, a picture that has success on a print advertising campaign may be inadequate for Instagram, and a video perfect for an Instagram story may barely reach any likes on TikTok (Haenlein et al., 2020). For instance, TikTok is mainly algorithm driven which makes it unique and distinctive from other social media platforms which revolve and operate around following users and followers (Anderson, 2020). This is why content production needs to be adapted to every platform (Doyle, 2010). Platform effects go beyond audience demographics alone and instead, firms must register that these platforms have their own culture, language, idioms, and styles and the content produced in those must reflect it (Haenlein et al., 2020; Doyle, 2010).

Having a platform-specific culture, has at the minimum three implications for companies that want to engage with consumers on Instagram and TikTok. The first implication being that of a careful selection of social media platforms they want to engage in. Albeit, content cannot be easily transferred from one platform to the other, hence why, each platform requires newly adapted skills and resources. Smaller firms may run out of time, budget and human resources in order to be present everywhere. Nonetheless, platform-based thinking, as the authors call it, such as thinking one needs to be present on a specific platform is not recommended. Companies and marketers should focus less on which platform to establish a presence and more on which target group to focus on and try to reach, with which idea or message and then in a further and sequential step try to figure out which channel is more appropriate to achieve that goal of targeting (Haenlein et al., 2020). This to say that, brands need to understand the user and which platform they tend to gravitate towards before establishing their own presence online, which tends to take a long time to comprehend.

Thus, instead of focusing on building a presence on a platform, brands should instead start working with influencers who know the platform better and learn from them. Influencers not only aid in the increase of reach and exposure but they are vital resources in order to communicate effectively and consequentially target the right audiences. Therefore, brands should only follow through creating their own content in a second step (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Another reason brands should work with influencers instead of focusing on building their own social media page is because brand awareness generated by influencers can lead to a purchasing intention by their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019) which is hard to accomplish as a brand only (Shahid et al., 2017).

One study by Brorsson and Plotnikova (2017) disclosed the importance of openness and honesty among influencers on social media. Moreover, another trait that was also characterized as paramount in influencer marketing was the activity level of the influencer, if they posted regularly on Instagram, for example. This to say that posts and ideas or messages that conveyed regularly (daily) are observed as being more interesting compared to those of inactive influencers. The frequency of posting is especially interesting in cases of certain projects that the influencer is involved in, i.e. a weight loss mission. All in all, it is suggested choosing an influencer related to the industry of the promoted product. For instance, choosing a sports person for sports products and the same goes for fitness influencers, choosing a fitness influencer to promote fitness apparel or supplements.

As previously stated, an influencer should not have a lot of other promotional posts since it can deteriorate their integrity and thus their trustworthiness. In addition, when it comes to the content posted by social media influencers, brands should request for the influencer to take the most natural, realest, convincing picture with their product as possible. For example, excluding a promotional hashtag or text related to the product in the post, might look like a real and personal recommendation of the product and not an advertisement of the product that can also be found in traditional media channels (Brorsson and Plotnikova, 2017).

Another aspect of influencer marketing to consider is storytelling. Storytelling can be broadly defined as the action of telling or writing a story. However, its meaning can also be

ambiguous since storytelling or digital storytelling^{*13} can mean the occurring of a social process (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018).

Since social media followers and potential consumers are interested in the influencer's lifestyle, they are also interested and curious in following an influencer's progress e.g. weight loss progress. Therefore, brands should consider publishing several posts with the same influencer that can transmit a story, weight loss transformation by way of illustration while including the regular usage of the promoted product in order to increase the interest in the brand among followers (Brorsson and Plotnikova, 2017).

An important characteristic of social media influencers to consider is the fact that their traits are perceived differently among different genders thus it is imperative to take this into account when choosing an influencer (Brorsson and Plotnikova, 2017). For instance, one study by Lokithasan et al., (2019) revealed that there is a difference in perception of university students towards male and female social media influencers. Both genders follow male and female influencers, however, there a difference in their purpose of following them and their perception of them. Male respondents follow female influencers that are attractive in order to admire them but follow male influencers for fashion or for video gaming streaming. Female respondents, nonetheless, follow female influencers to get obtain information on the latest beauty and fashion trends. Instead of gamers, female respondents are more likely to follow make influencer who post funny sketches as entertainment. Male respondents, however, are more likely to purchase video games recommended by male influencers since these provide information on the products after testing them out themselves. On the other hand, female respondents are more likely to purchase beauty products promoted by female influencers since they trust the information and recommendation given by these influencers. They “prefer more information along with entertainment as opposed to male respondents who prefer more entertainment value than information.” (Lokithasan et al., 2019:29).

¹³ Digital storytelling on the other hand, refers to the use of various tools to share narratives or stories, images and most important of all, experiences in multimedia in the form of audio, video and text which are published online and graphics, as well. It allows for users to use traditional storytelling but, instead, combined with various types of multimedia and platforms so that it can be easily played on a computer, uploaded to a website or to a DVD (Robin & McNeil, 2019; Lisenbee & Ford, 2018).

2.2.5. WOM and eWOM

WOM (word of mouth) or eWOM (electronic word of mouth) is the phenomenon or strategy used by influencers on social media, which can be described as an online interpersonal influence made up of information and opinions about one product or/and brand which is communicated through social media, emails, instant messaging, blogs etc. (Ghosh et al., 2015). The study by Ghosh et al. (2015) reveals how social media WOM influences the process of how consumers search information. It also concluded that non-sponsored WOM has a more significant impact on consumer decision making than paid WOM. This fundamentally means that the more people are genuine on social media, the more credibility they have and the more they can influence other users. For instance, disclosed paid WOM and non-paid WOM by an influencer can significantly impact follower's purchase intention (Al-Rubaiee & Lind, 2020) since followers perceive non-paid WOM to be more authentic than paid WOM by influencers. This also depends on the amount of promotions displayed by the influencers, if they still remain credible or not and the trustworthiness of the messages, as well as a sudden change in style of the influencer. The distinguishing between paid and non-paid advertisement was only made possible by a 2016 marketing regulation created to make consumers aware of the content on social media that is regarded as a paid partnership which has thus changed how people perceive influencer marketing (Grafström et al., 2018). In support of this claim, user-generated communication on social media has a strong impact on the hedonic brand image that can be created which becomes clear when looking at the content of positive brand-based statements on social media platforms. On these platforms, consumers refer to the general attractiveness or desirability of the brand in question (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

Often, face-to-face communication or WOM can alter the way credible information is interpreted and conveyed since it is retold by another intermediary which can alter or distort information and decrease the credibility of the WOM review as being a trustworthy and credible source of information. This, puts more emphasis and strength on comments and reviews, such as eWOM, which can reduce the risk of the loss of information credibility and increases consumer confidence, when deciding to purchase a product, for instance (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

One feature that is able to distinguish eWOM from traditional WOM is the speed at which it can spread and its easy access. On this matter, when consumers need information about a specific product or service, they turn to online media's eWOM for two reasons. The first one being that they can obtain information more quickly since there is no need to wait for a friend's or family member's opinion on a brand's product. Secondly, in the case of having already received reviews on a product through traditional WOM, they can use eWOM to corroborate the information they received. In conclusion, credibility, speed and ease of access are the main characteristics that distinguish the two media and influence consumer behaviour (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

Although having more credibility, easier access and greater speed, when comparing the offline with the online environment, it can be deducted that the online environment is characterized by greater uncertainty due to the lack of cues for information processing (Park & Lee, 2009). This means that sensory knowledge or information about a product is non-existent, which in turn increases consumer uncertainty all the more. Hence, why eWOM serves as a tool to reduce product sensory uncertainty by compensating in information and knowledge abundance about a specific product for those considering a purchase (Park & Lee, 2009).

In addition, the brand's website reputation can also have a significant impact on the eWOM effect since better established websites' reputation influence more consumers than those that have yet established reputations. A website's reputation could, in fact, serve as an external indication for evaluating eWOM's information quality or veracity (Park & Lee, 2009).

Moreover, it is proven that consumers pay more attention to a brand's name and therefore depend more on brand awareness than intrinsic cues about a product's quality since it is more difficult to analyse its attributes in an online environment (Park & Lee, 2009).

Similarly, although the influence of eWOM information on social media is dependent on quality and credibility (due to more reputable people or influencers), it also depends on the consumer's behaviour towards received eWOM information (Erkan & Evans, 2016). For instance, it is notable that the media are the most able to influence consumer behaviour and are the most used to obtain information before, during and after a product or service purchase (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). This, does not mean that a product's quality is the most important thing but rather the image generated around it just like influencers produce that image as well (Park & Lee, 2009; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

The authors point out several examples that represent eWOM, one being about the brand Starbucks on Facebook. Bruhn et al., (2012) state that many consumers were caught confessing their admiration and love for the brand on its Facebook profile by commenting “Starbucks is awesome” or “I love Starbucks”. This incident can be explained through the degree of consumer involvement, meaning that the more the brand engages consumers, the more they feel the need to express their feelings towards the brands through comments (Bruhn et al., 2012).

As an example, one can point out the numerous consumers who confess their love of brands like Starbucks on its Facebook profile (e.g. “Starbucks is awesome” or “I love Starbucks”). Although social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, allow for a duality of public/private accounts, they can be negotiated while allowing user’s sociality to become labor for the platform controllers. Companies like Facebook do not seek profit by the use of its platforms, it rather turns user’s sociality, through surveillance, into free labor, almost like a commodity that is being sold to third parties i.e. advertisers (Jordan, 2015).

All in all, empirical research suggests that “social media are associated with networks that are more diverse than in the recent past. However, what remains unclear is whether this relationship is a result of increased size and diversity, or simply improved information flow and new opportunities for relational maintenance.” (Hampton & Chen, 2021).

2.2.6. Four types of influencers

According to Gross and Wangenheim (2018), there are four types of influencers. The first type is comprised of “Snoopers” which are classified as explorers of social media platforms. Their motivations behind creating content on social media are to self-express, share, and to experience with other users. Their goals behind content production lie in pleasure and fun from making and sharing content online. This is their hobby or passion which they like to share with a like-minded audience. Another motive behind content creation could be to build and manage a social network of friends and contacts, a community (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018).

“I followed many people and then I felt that I would like to try it myself.” “Originally, it was an additional hobby. [...] We did it out of fun. [...] We started because we were up for it.” “My motivation or the reason was the uplift of [platform], which originated. [...] I just kept going as a hobby (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018, p.32).

The second type of influencer is the “Informer”. Informers rather aim to share their knowledge on a specific area to fill gaps in that domain, on social media. When faced with issues relevant to the influencer’s field of knowledge, their audience resorts to asking for advice and help. Their goal is to provide informational, educational, and supportive content that is searched and looked for. Informers are extremely competent, exhibit a high-level expertise and field knowledge such as drawing, baking, medicine etc. Thus, these type of influencers satisfy their audience’s needs, curiosity and interests with their content (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018).

“There was no one dealing with [domain] topics and spontaneously [...] made and uploaded my first video.” (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018, p.33). Answers to comments are often pieces of advice and suggestions on how to deal with field-related issues. “I really do bother to read every comment and to answer it.” “I have always exchanged, always written back. Partly very detailed. [...] I try to give an advice or a tip [...] I am very present, really answering everything, very diligent and fast.” (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018:33).

Informers want to be perceived as a trustworthy and credible source of information. They are aware of their responsibility and appreciate audience feedback regarding content quality. In addition, high quality content is carefully investigated, prepared, and finalized. Informers demand a great deal of themselves, also aiming to constantly improve themselves, almost like perfectionists (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018).

The third type of influencer is the “Entertainer”. The Entertainer provides their audience with amusement, enjoyment and relaxation by creating fun and entertaining content. This content can extend over music, drama, acting, horror or comedies. Nonetheless, content varies depending on influencer creativity, innovativeness, visions, and narrative storytelling. Contrarily to Informers, Entertainers give their audience a good time and often attach a personal touch, connection, and insight to their content (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018).

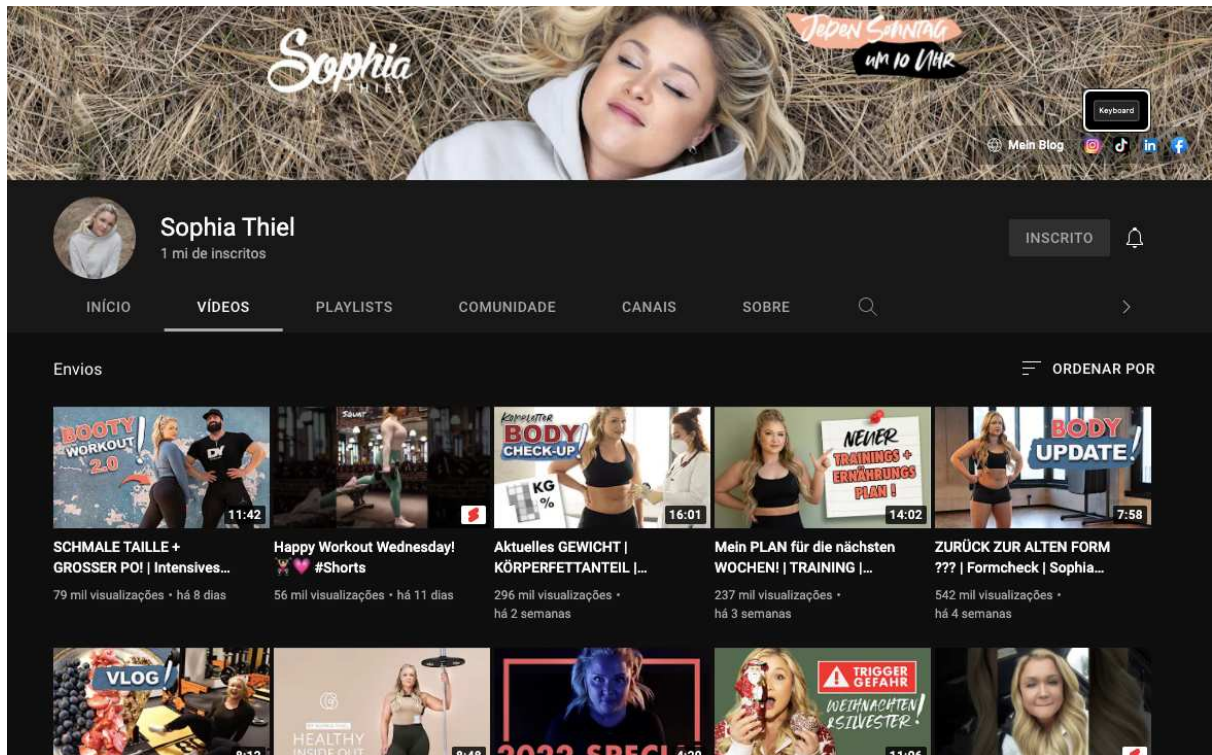
“I also want to put a smile in people’s face or make someone laugh. [...] I am very creative. [...] There are no limits.” (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018:34). In fact, “Entertainers are often influencer-entrepreneurs who have teams in the background supporting them in content creation and maintenance (e.g. cutting, filming, managing social media).” (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018:34).

Although Entertainers might have a team supporting them with audience management, they are perceived as one entity and the audience relates mostly to the one in front of the camera. Thus, audience contact is less frequent and close. The contact happens on an aggregate level through Q&A videos, live-stream videos, meet & greet, or asking for content feedback “The

stupid thing is, you do not want to be rude, but you cannot answer everyone. [...] I do my best, I try to do as much as possible.”(Gross and Wangenheim, 2018:34).

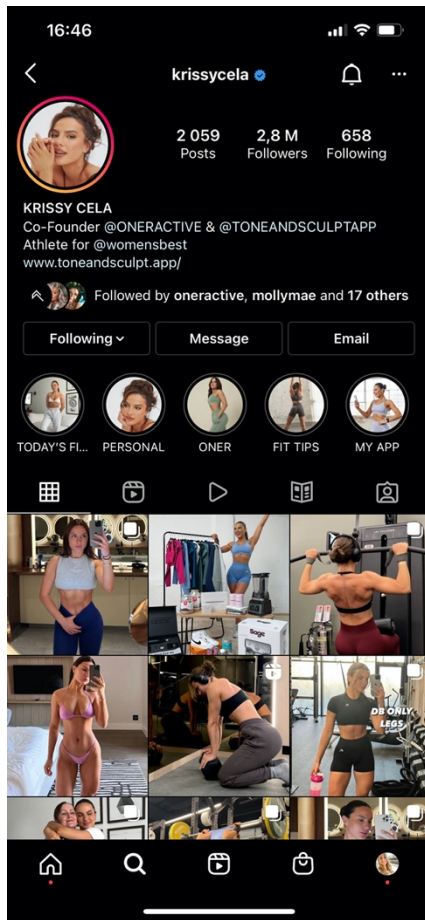
The fourth and last type of influencer is the “Infotainer” which is a hybrid version of the Informer and the Entertainer. They create solely informational content, entertaining content or also content containing both components. Infotainers are well-informed experts in their field.

Nevertheless, domain-related topics are secondary in the sense that their content includes a higher proportion of entertaining components. Entertaining topics include personalized and emotionalized elements, such as video blogging (i.e. vlogs). Despite this, entertainment remains always connected to their field of knowledge i.e. fitness. Moreover, the proportion of informational posts in relation to entertaining posts depends on each single influencer. Field-related and entertainment-related content attracts a more diverse audience whereby some can relate more to the influencer as an expert in his or her field and others can relate to them on a more personal level. When it comes to contact with the audience, infotainers’ contact with the audience is also limited and less frequent since they tend to opt to do meet and greets, livestream, Q&A’s, it is more on an aggregate level. An example of an infotainer is Sophia Thiel, a german influencer who focuses her content production around body building and dieting. Additionally, her channel offers entertaining content of the bodybuilding lifestyle as well as a personal insight into her journey, workout regimen and fitness tips (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018:34; Thiel, 2022) (*Figure 5*).

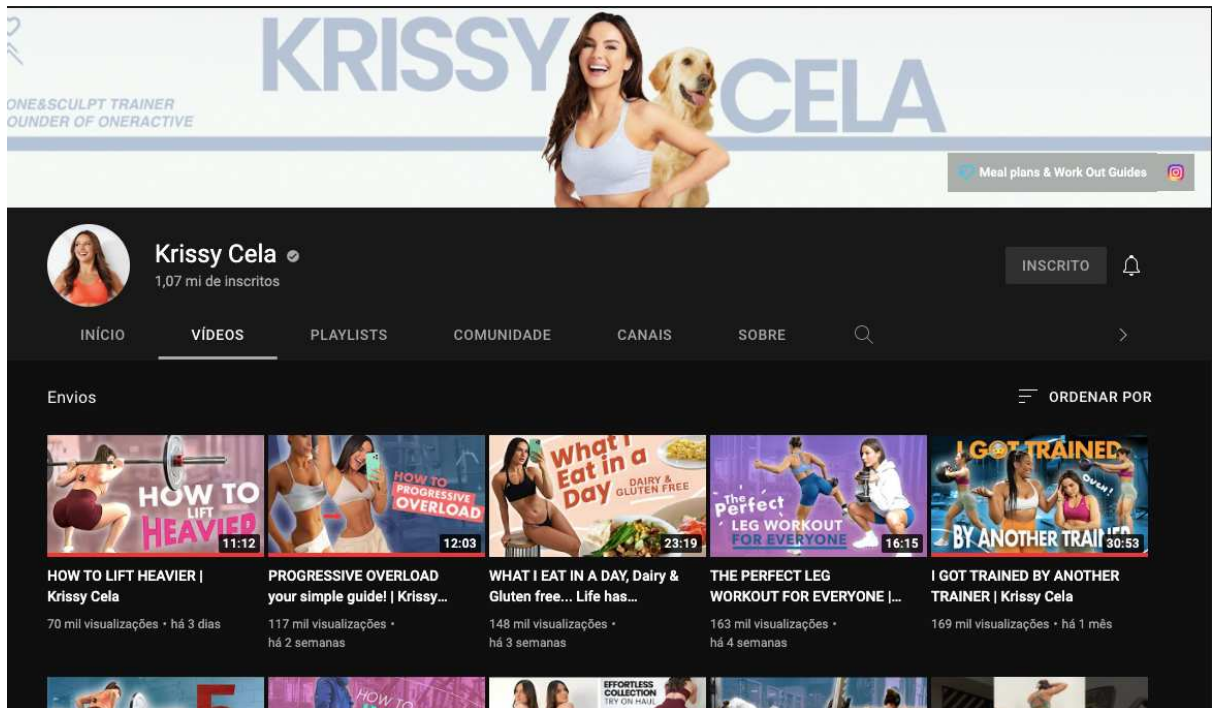


(Figure 5). Although Sophia's main channel's previous videos were in English, she has diverted her focus towards a niche only German audience (Thiel, 2022).

Another example of an Infotainer would be the influencer Krissy Cela. Krissy is known for her Instagram (2,8M followers) (Figure 6).



and Youtube channel (1,07M followers)
(Figure 6).



(Figure 7)

She is more specifically known for inspiring her followers with her knowledgeable and certified information around weight training such as through workout exercises tips, healthy meal ideas, macros and tracking around food, and fitness apparel reviews or recommendations while maintaining her witty and fun personality on her videos which translates into her ‘daily vlogs’, ‘Q&A’ and ‘girly chats’ videos (Cela, 2022; Figure 7).

In total there are four influencer types; *the snoopers*, *the informers*, the entertainers and the infotainers and each of them displays different motivations, content goals and audience contact. The chart below depicts those traits accordingly (Figure 8).





Type	Motivation	Goal of Content	Audience Contact
 Snoopers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovering social media platforms • Creating and sharing content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual & frequent
 Informers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing knowledge and expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information & education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual & frequent
 Entertainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving people a good time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment • Personal insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate & moderate
 Infotainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing knowledge and expertise • Giving people a good time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information & education • Entertainment within focal domain • (Personal insights) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate & moderate

Figure 8. Gross and Wangenheim, 2018.

Furthermore, there are different types of influencers when it comes to their follower base, which was briefly mentioned in this chapter. Nonetheless, those influencers are categorized into two different groups; micro-influencers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers and mega-influencers or macro-influencers owning more than 1million followers (Park et al., 2021; Klijnsma, 2020; Kay et al., 2020).

Other authors, nevertheless, such as Zhou et al., (2021), define influencers only as two types. The first one being a fast-only influencer and the second one a final-only influencer. The former can be defined as an influencer who is able to reach a lot of users at an early stage but then loses their influencing power or superiority later on, and the latter refers to influencers that find it demanding to grow their following base and reach a lot of those followers at an early stage of their influencing career but then can influence a very large group of their followers later on once they create more, obtain more followers and more engagement (Zhou et al., 2021).

Similarly to the four types of influencers, authors like Soares et al. (2018) define three types of influencers. The opinion leaders, the informational influencers and the activists. The opinion leaders influence their audience through social capital which is through what they post, their beliefs, culture, political views etc. and would be parallel to the snoopers that create and share content of their personal lives and these opinion leaders tend to influence their target audience. Informational influencers resemble the infotainers and the activists resemble the informers (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018; Soares et al., 2018).

2.2.7. Micro-influencers

Micro-influencers are more persuasive than macro-influencers since brand endorsements by micro-influencers, versus macro-influencers, convey a higher perceived authenticity of the endorsed brand due to the conveyed brand image through micro-influencers' authenticity than macro-influencers. However, this effect only occurs when the promoted product is viewed as hedonic and not as utilitarian. To add, consumption type is also as important as influencer type which relates back to types of products. Products that serve to please, excite, cheer etc. and are not essential are more difficult to cause a purchasing intention whereas products that serve an utilitarian purpose are easier to be sold by micro-influencers. Hence, it is important to take into consideration not only the different influencer types but also the different consumption contexts and message production styles (Park et al., 2021).

Marketeers, when they select micro-influencers, they classify them as any YouTuber, Instagrammer, Snapchatter, or Blogger with a small follower base of less than 100,000 followers. These micro-influencers are perceived as: more cost effective, generating higher social media engagement with their followers and being savvy and knowledgeable in their promoted products' domain. This is why they are considered to be more trustworthy than celebrity influencers. They are the best fit and thus choice for influencer marketing (Gan et.al, 2019).

Recently, micro-influencer marketing has become an important element of social media marketing. Still, pertinent micro-influencers are difficult to discover. Increasingly, content creation and follower expansion on social media makes finding the right influencer for an E-commerce company, paramount. This is why 75% of brands feel that identifying the right micro influencer is the biggest challenge. In addition, the lack of open data for social influencer marketing analysis is, too, a barrier for research, to finding the right influencer, in this field (Gan et.al, 2019).

Although micro-influencers have a humble number of followers, they are often thoughtful about their audience and retain a lot of trust, authority and authenticity which is the perfect combination for a powerful influence and thus targeting (Alampi, 2019).

3. Instagram

Although Facebook and Twitter are greatly established, Instagram is the one that presents itself more visually and thus attracts more users. Instagram was first launched in October of 2010 as an online photo sharing and social networking platform to stay connected with people around the world (Jensen, 2013). The app allows for people to take photos, apply filters, take videos and share them with their followers on Instagram but also on other social media networks such as Facebook or Twitter. People can give their feedback through likes and comment. Later on, in June of 2013, the platform allowed for the sharing of video sequences of up to fifteen seconds (Jensen, 2013). Instagram allows for the consumers to connect with the shared content and with people that have the same interests as them since user participation is conceded. Instagram is known for its employment of the hashtag. It has a multiple function as a categorizer, as a way to collect photos and as a means to facilitate the communication around the captured photos (Jensen, 2013). Only in 2017, it had 800 million monthly active users more than half between 18-29 years of age. This social network is a crucial marketing tool due to its visual nature and high user engagement rate which is the perfect platform for influencer marketing (Almeida, 2019; Fiorante et al., n.d.). Brands are investing ever more in a younger audience (Almeida, 2018) since when younger people seek fashion inspiration, they turn to social media with the number one platform being Instagram (Fiorante et al., n.d.). It is important to delve into generational differences before looking at the characteristics of Instagram in order to understand why it is imperative to focus on a younger generation as the main users of Instagram.

3.1. Main users on Instagram/ generation Z

Human beings are wired to possess an intrinsic social interest since humans want to feel connected to other humans (Turner, 2015). Having this in mind, it is paramount to comprehend how this innate desire for connection translates into Generation Z.

A generation is defined as a “set of historical events and related phenomena that creates a distinct generational gap” and when defining a generation, one has to consider the social proximity that this group inherently has to shared events or culture (Turner, 2015).

There are countless definitions of Generation Z, one of them being that people living in the same period and thus sharing the same conditions and similar experiences can be influenced

by each other. This is the case since individuals that are born, grew up and were brought up at the same time have more similar characteristics than those who were not (Berkup, 2014). Individuals belonging to Gen Z are loosely defined as people born from 1995 to 2010 who are true digital natives. Since their very young age, they have been exposed to the internet, to social networks, and to mobile systems. (Mckinsey & Company, 2018). Also, they likely spend their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones and all the other toys and tools of the digital age (Prensky, 2001).

These young people can be defined as digital natives (Mckinsey & Company, 2018; Prensky, 2001). Although some call them N (for Net)- gen or even D-[for digital]-gen, the most appropriate and useful designation for them is Digital Natives. This occurs on the basis of the fact that “Our students today are all ‘native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (Prensky, 2001).

This makes previous generations like Generation X and Generation Y (millennials) that were not born into the digital world but started adopting it at some later point in their lives, become fascinated and thus adopt most aspects of the new technology and are known and compared to the Digital Natives as Digital Immigrants (Prensky, 2001).

In order to understand why Generation Z differs from previous generations, one has to analyse the impact of technology on previous generations versus Generation Z that was previously discussed. Digital Immigrants learned and learn to adapt to this new environment that includes technology. Nonetheless, Prensky (2001) states that they always, to some degree, retain their “accent”, characteristics that make them be perceived as their specific generation. For example, this digital immigrant accent can be recognized when previous generations turn to the internet for information but only as a second rather than as an initial choice or choosing to read the instruction manual for a program rather than assuming that the program will itself teach them how to use it in the case of Gen Z. When it comes to the Boomers and Generation X, these older people had a different socialization from their kids and consequently are now in the process of learning a new language, the technological language. And, according to scientists, a language that is learned later in life, goes into a different part of the brain i.e. is not used constantly and as efficiently (Prensky, 2001).

There are countless examples that defines these previous generations that are not as technologically savvy as Generation Z.

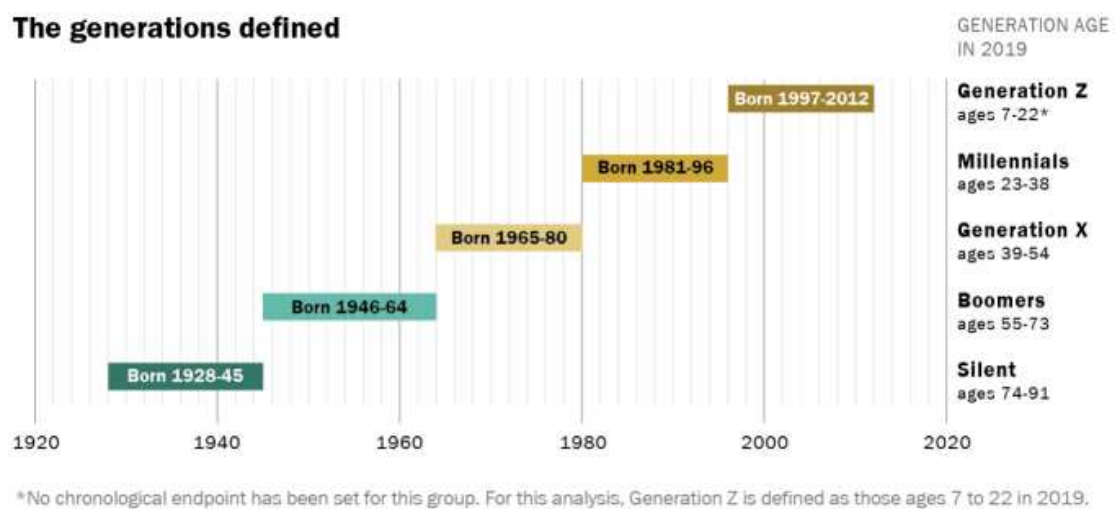
“They include printing out your email (or having your secretary print it out for you – an even “thicker” accent); needing to print out a document written on the computer in order to edit it (rather than just editing on the screen); and bringing people physically into your office to see an interesting web site (rather than just sending them the URL). I’m sure you can think of one or two examples of your own without much effort. My own favorite example is the “Did you get my email?” phone call. Those of us who are Digital Immigrants can, and should, laugh at ourselves and our “accent.”” (Prensky, 2001, p.2).

When comparing previous generations such as Generation X and Y (Millennials) to Generation Z, instead of watching TV, Generation Z watches streaming services such as Netflix. Instead of listening to the radio, they listen to Spotify. And instead of reading magazines, they rely on Reddit, all due to the existence of technology (Haenlein et al., 2020). This is due to the fact of this language apprenticeship. Gen Z adapts more easily to a technological environment and is curious and soaks new language information in a more effortless way. This is why with newer platforms, Gen Z follows its development accordingly (Prensky, 2001) and this is why they migrate to new released platforms.

Other authors define Generation Z as the generation born in 1990 or after in more developed or technological countries. The people that fit into this category were born at the same time as the World Wide Web, the Internet of today. The World Wide Web was created by Tim Berners-Lee in 1990, which is essentially a system of hyperlinks which was later on introduced to the public in 1991. In 1993, the internet started to become more visual since users could visualize how they navigated the Web due to the introduction of the Mosaic Web Browser (Geck, 2007).

However, other authors believe Generation Z to have only been born in 1996 (*Figure 9*) or later for a number of reasons that include key political, economic and social factors that define the Millennial generation’s formative years (Dimock, 2019). For instance, although Millennials are tremendously racially and ethnically diverse, Generation Z is even more diverse (Dimock, 2019). In addition, social media, constant connectivity and on-demand entertainment and communication are innovations that Millennials adapted to as they came of age but for Generation Z, born after 1996, these were ingrained into their life already (Dimock, 2019). In fact, they have never known a world without the constant interactivity, the conversation with anyone, anywhere and at any time and the reality that Generation Z users are able to leverage this connectivity to their advantage (Tulgan, 2013).

The generations defined



(Figure 9)

Nonetheless, managing generation Z requires mastering the tools of social media, specifically in order to be able to target its members accordingly. The solution to this aspect is for brand managers to take control by using social media with objectives that include a better understanding of it and thus Generation Z (Tulgan, 2013). This means understanding all of social media's features and adjusting communication strategies in accordance to how Generation Z thinks and feels (Tulgan, 2013). Generation Z is the largest user of social media and is the most probable generation to be influenced by social media pressures which can lead to misbehavior (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020). Brands should try to "encourage inclusiveness, emphasize the importance of being unique and attempt to reduce the need to fit in, or be like everyone else." (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020).

Understanding the connection between Generation Z and Instagram requires a full comprehension of Instagram on a consumer reaction level. Instagram was found to be the social media network that most affects impulse purchasing, mainly due to the importance of the visual aspect in promoting fashion. The latter connects with Generation Z in a specific way (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). It has the ability to visually influence consumers which, according to one study, can influence female consumers' impulse purchases (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Moreover, not only does it influence purchases due to its high visual element but, Instagram, is also the main platform for fashion inspiration and current trends (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Looking past the visual element, social media is also considered a new way of advertising for generation Z (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Prensky, 2001), owing to the fact that

Generation Z favours subtle marketing messages Instagram is most appropriate for that, since these consumers prefer fashion brands or influencers who post creative content, as opposed to those brands or influencers who advertise their products excessively in a blatant and intrusive manner (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021) in the same way Tv advertising does (Neale & Corkindale, 2022; Mastro & Stern, 2003).

Some authors believe that Generation Z that aged in the 2000s concurrently grew up too fast and never grew up at all. They are savvy of everything from an alarmingly young age through access to information, ideas, images and sounds virtually (Tulgan, 2013). Furthermore, research reveals five key trends that are shaping Generation Z. The first one being that social media is shaping the future as aforementioned (Tulgan, 2013). The second deals with the notion that human connections today are more important than ever, for example relationships between parents and children and teachers and students accelerated in a fast pace by which Generation Z individuals are less likely to resist these figures of authority (Tulgan, 2013). The third aspect to be considered is the aspect of 'skill gaps' which according to the author means that there is a group of highly skilled and unskilled Gen Z's. Although the technical skill gap is enormous, the nontechnical skill gap is even more predominant. The fourth detail to pay attention to is that although Gen Z is conscious of the world they live in, e.g. online world, yet the most efficient way to engage with them is by focusing locally (Tulgan, 2013). The fifth and last trend that is shaping Generation Z is the infinite diversity that they portray. In comparison to Generation Y, they exhibit an entire new way of thinking about difference.

“They are less likely to fall into previously recognized categories and much more likely to be mixing and matching various components of identity and points of view that appeal to them.

They are ever creating their own personal montage of selfhood options. “(Tulgan, 2013, p.7). Moreover, the consequences of growing up in an always technological environment are only now becoming the centre of attention. A dramatic shift in youth behaviors, attitudes and lifestyles has been noted from which both positive and concerning aspects have been derived from those for these young people, coming of age in this era. What is still unknown is whether these effects will impact this whole generation or if this is merely an adolescence characteristic that will turn to ashes once it reaches adulthood and naturally during the course its adulthood, as well (Tulgan, 2013; Dimock, 2019).

In spite of these definitions, it is important to remember that generations are merely a lens through which to understand societal change rather than a label that oversimplifies differences between groups (Dimock, 2019).

3.2. Perks of Instagram

Instagram, is a platform focused on aesthetic visual communication. It is one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide with a larger proportion of geolocate posts than other platforms (Bronsvort & Uitemark, 2021). It is one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide. It is also more geared to 'aesthetic visual communication' (Manovich, 2016: 41) and features a larger proportion of geolocate posts than most digital platforms. In addition, the main users of Instagram are the youngest generations (generation Z and Y) between 18 and 29 years old. Brands are investing ever more in a younger audience (Almeida, 2018).

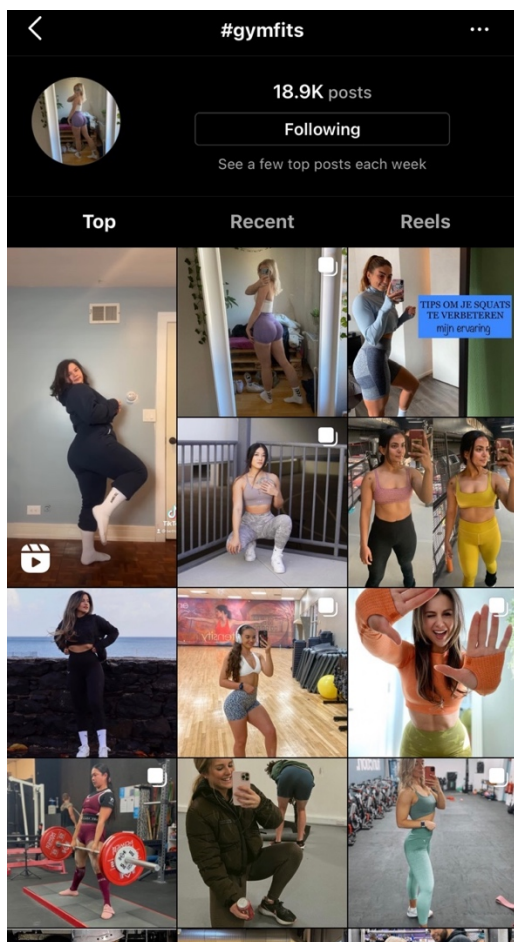
Youtube on the other hand is defined as a video sharing platform. "YouTube users can upload, watch and download videos, rate and comment on them. "(Ansari & Sharma, 2017). It was originally founded in May 2005 and allows for billions of people to discover, watch and share their authentic and individual videos. Altogether, it offers a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the world. Not only can it be used for original home-made videos but it can also act as distribution platform for content creators and advertisers, large or small, making it a big and successful business and job for advertisers and creators (Çolaklar & Aras, 2015).

Social capital is a very remarkable concept. While it is difficult for small apparel retailers to compete against larger companies on the basis of price or differentiation due to their inability to achieve economies of scale and scope, they can differentiate themselves by leveraging the unique experience they can provide with a unique customer service philosophy, community building or through the brand's personality. This is what social capital is all about, generating value to consumers through actions such as fostering a community, answering questions, responding to feedback, interacting with consumers and much more (McKneely et al., 2020). This is one notion that is able to be generated on Instagram through influencer marketing and that connects to the concept of ownership, linking consumer needs, with social capital, value generated through interactions and posts by influencers with that of a material possession of fitness apparel products promoted by the latter such as leggings, sportsbras, hoodies, shorts etc. (McKneely et al., 2020; Ross, 2019; Aaker & Keller, 1990; Zak Pierce et al., 2003).

Social capital is aligned with other concepts of financial capital, physical capital, and human capital, yet, embodied in relations among persons (Coleman, 2010). Some authors construe

social capital as emotive social relationships in a particular group (Robison, 2002). In addition, there is an agreement on social capital being derived from the belonging to a certain social group (Robison, 2002; Recuero, 2012).

Still, these relationships may only take place in the practical state in material and/or symbolic exchanges which ensure their maintaining. They can also be socially instituted and assured by the application of a common name e.g. the name of a family, a school etc. (Bourdieu, 1986). In light of the hashtag #OOTD, for fashion outfits, one could even apply the hashtag of #GYMFITS (*Figure 10*), daily fitness apparel outfits photos which more easily allows for the influencer to maintain a transactional relationship with their followers, on the basis of this labelling by promoting brands through endorsements or not (Bourdieu, 1986).



(*Figure 10*)

Furthermore, the establishment and maintenance of these material and symbolic relationships presupposes the recognition of proximity whether physically (geographical) or in an economic or social space (Bourdieu, 1986).

It is important to distinguish the source behind the existence of social capital, such as posts of influencers while interacting with their audience, with what it does, its function or services e.g. what effect it has on consumer behaviour. In addition, one must therefore ask if the reality of social capital, of value for consumers is due to trust and participation generated by influencers? (Bourdieu, 1986).

In regards to previous literature (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 2010; Robison, 2002; Recuero, 2012; McKneely et al., 2020), social capital is indisputably relevant for social media influencers. Nonetheless, the magnitude of social capital possessed by a particular agent depends on the size of their network e.g. followers, user engagement, generated sales etc. that they can manage and on their capital volume (economic, cultural or symbolic) in regards to their audience. In addition, social capital is never fully independent from those types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1986) comments on the fact that niche communities are simpler when it comes to the concentration of social capital. Therefore, niche influencers like fitness influencers, can derive a full benefit from the multiplier effect that takes place in this concentration of social capital. The multiplier effect is defined as the accumulation of cultural and social capital which multiplies the chances of success and profit (Crul et al., 2016). Moreover, a complete benefit from this multiplier effect through material profits, such as monetary compensation, occurs due to relationships and symbolic profits from belonging to a coveted community or group (Bourdieu, 1986). Network connections, for instance, on Instagram, are essential in order to produce and reproduce long-lasting relationships that can ensure symbolic and material profits (Bourdieu, 1986). This is to say that, these online relationships are the product of investment strategies, individual or collective while consciously or unconsciously aiming at establishing or reproducing social relationships in the short and/or long term (Poder, 2011) such as those one would have with a close friend called parasocial relationships (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). These relationships imply obligations subjectively felt such as feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship etc. and these feelings are endlessly reproduced in gifts and through the exchange of words (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, these acts and feelings nurture the relationship between influencers and their followers which

assumes and produces mutual knowledge and recognition between both parties (Bourdieu, 1986; Ballantine & Martin, 2005).

Other aspects that need to be taken in account are the values, benefits and risks on Instagram. Values can be determined as Instagram being a platform where it is easy to share opinions, giving a voice to consumers and making it more possible of valuing their feedback (Apiraksattayakul et al., 2017). Benefits of utilizing Instagram would be that it is viable for consumers and sellers to generate content and for both to interact with each other at any time and from anywhere (Apiraksattayakul et al., 2017). The risks would be that the medium's material constraints and affordances as well as social norms and pressures to get as many likes as possible can be prejudicial and transmit inauthenticity. It can relay how users trade the value of likes in one mode of Instagram for the value of authenticity in another (Ross, 2019). It is important to understand how Instagram works in conjunction with influencer marketing since both can have an impact on consumer behaviour e.g. purchasing intentions. Instagram offers a lot of features and a specific interface that supports influencer marketing. Thus, Instagram is a hub for influencer marketing (Biaudet, 2017) and paying a closer attention and analysing influencer strategies on Instagram of how influencers make themselves more visible in an array of information and millions of users and implication of algorithms on Instagram is paramount. On the subject of strategies, Instagram ads show themselves to be a very effective tool based on the calculations for the dimensions of empathy, persuasion, impact and communication (Tripiawan et al., 2019). Furthermore, Instagram allows you to post pictures with different hashtags and the #OOTD is a popular hashtag used on social media posts, where users share pictures modelling their clothes (Abidin, 2016).

3.3. Growth strategy influencers use on Instagram

The paper by Bellavista et al., (2019) reveals a generalized growth strategy on Instagram, arising influencers use, in eight steps:

- 1) Follow engaged and active followers: users that click on “like” many times, comment and that follow many profiles. It would be pointless to engage with passive profiles because they cannot bring any benefits;
- 2) Adopt a Follow/Unfollow Strategy: the user must follow a consistent number of new users and unfollow those users that after a certain period of time are not following back the user;

- 3) Publish new content frequently: this will help diffuse the profile content all over Instagram. Another element that could help the diffusion process is by tagging in the post influential pages related to the published content;
- 4) Good quality content and relevant hashtags: it is mandatory to use hashtags to scatter the post around Instagram. However, it is important to choose a relevant hashtag and content to optimize the post diffusion
- 5) Liking, commenting and posting on “instastory”: the user must stay active and engage with other profiles. This will be recognized by the Instagram algorithms and will have positive effects and outcomes on the post diffusion over Instagram.
- 6) Share the Instagram content: this will help other people or accounts be aware of the user’s content
- 7) Stay consistent: these activities must be done for a long period time (i.e. some months) to be really effective
- 8) Use analytic tools (i.e. ninjalitics and Instagram business account): this step is important to receive feedback on profile growth. This way, the user can change or improve the strategy if results are insufficient.

By using strategies like this one on social media and social media in general, allow for anyone to become a successful influencer (Bellavista et al., 2019; Gross & Wangenheim, 2018).

Although the acronym OOTD suggests that photos are taken daily as the hashtag means: outfit of the day, “prolific users such as influencers have been known to organize photography sessions to document several different OOTDs at once before queuing the posts and selectively publishing them over the ensuing week or month.” (Abidin, 2016). The use for OOTDs posts is to state the brands that one is wearing through hashtags as a fashion diary in order to showcase one’s social capital or engage with potential consumers through Instagram posts (Abidin, 2016). “Some OOTD users may even publish the price of the individual pieces of apparel for the convenience of followers who wish to make a similar purchase” (Abidin, 2016).

Since influencers or rising influencers compete for attention (Abidin, 2014; Abidin, 2016) , some often adopt hashtags to deviate attention from competitors’ followers to them. Unique hashtags circulate their posts with different categories. For instance, if someone called Marie hashtags her photograph with #ootd #brunch #girl #mariepix’, users who explore the feeds

of any of the first three globally popular hashtags will also see Marie's own posts. On her posts, they will notice her unique '#mariepix' hashtag and will be enticed to click into her personal hashtag that archives all the posts hashtagged this way. However, creating unique hashtags is "only personal and 'exclusive' to the blogger until they become appropriated or 'hijacked' by other users who 'piggy-back' on the success of others' hashtags." (Abidin, 2014).

Anyhow, being able to distinguish a brand or a self-brand in a sea of competitors is a difficult challenge. From an economic perspective, having a social media plan and strategy in place is becoming a must. Nevertheless, becoming popular on social media is not so easy (Bellavista et al., 2019).

The topic of social media marketing, has brought profitability, due to sales, to online businesses since it is a way of obtaining advantages over other competitors. Social media also allows the consumer to interact directly not only with influencers but with brands too, which helps brands understand the consumer behavior of their consumers better and interact with them as more than just a brand. Consumer behavior also shows how important it is for the brand to connect with consumers through social media marketing through their own page and through influencers that review the brand's products (Ming & Yazdanifard, 2014).

Instagram can also contribute with psychological benefits. For instance, people can benefit from the disclosing of negative emotions or stigmatized details of their identities. For psychologists, the self-disclosing can be aided through imagery, i.e. on Instagram, which is an effective medium for expressing often sometimes difficult emotions through images. At times expressing images through images can be more comfortable than through words (Andalibi et al., 2017). Authors analysed the responses sensitive self-disclosures attracted on Instagram. They found considerable evidence in Instagram comments of social support, a sense of community and little aggression or support for harmful or pro-disease behaviors (Andalibi et al., 2017). In addition to the positive responses, the study concluded that personal narratives, food and beverage, references to illness, and self-appearance concerns are more likely to attract positive social support. Also, posts that seek support attract remarkably more comments (Andalibi et al., 2017).

Furthermore, interpersonal disclosure goals were interpreted as being of social approval, need for intimacy and social control whereas the intrinsic goals were of identity clarification and distress relief (Andalibi et al., 2017).

3.4. Branding on Instagram

Branding holds different definitions such as referring to brand name decisions. Also, it is characterized by the developing of a firm's brand equity that appeals to overseas target customers' positive attitudes about the brand. It is also encompassed by the standardisation of products, packaging and communications (such as marketing). Moreover, there is also another type of branding called 'cross country branding' which is defined by an advertising strategy and a unique character a brand possesses, internationally (Whitelock &Fastoso, 2007).

All in all, the notion of 'branding' essentially includes not only the brand essence, which is defined as the positioning statement and the brand name, but also by the brand execution, which is implicitly defined as a marketing mix decisions, more precisely what type of marketing the brand chooses to engage in and how it decides to position itself (Whitelock &Fastoso, 2007).

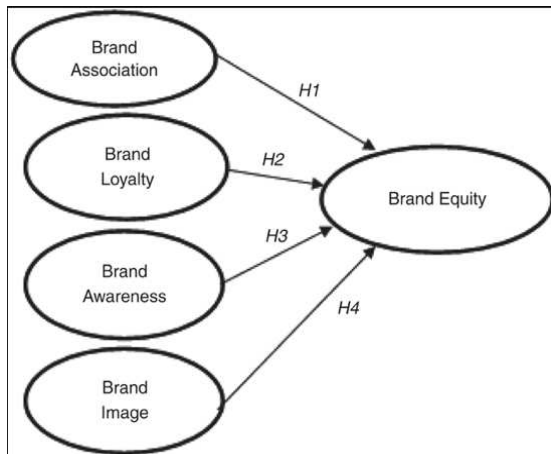
All the definitions have one thing in common. Branding generally defined contains the brand name, brand positioning, brand execution elements such as the implementation of what the brand stands for in terms of the marketing mix strategies (Whitelock &Fastoso, 2007).Furthermore branding is what makes a brand stand out from other brands, what makes it special and unique, i.e brand personality, within the marketing field such as the brand name, its visual (e.g. logo, colours) and sound elements (e.g. jingles, music) (Whitelock &Fastoso, 2007). Brand connection is initiated through influencers. A brand connection is crucial since consumer behaviour reveals the pertinence of the brand connecting with consumers through social media marketing, through their own page, and through influencers that review the brand's products (Ming & Yazdanifard, 2014).

3.4.1. Defining brand awareness

Brand awareness is a part of a managerial process called 'branding' according to Rossiter (2014). Branding requires a marketer to establish in the consumer's mind two communication effects, brand awareness and brand attitude. Moreover, the author expands the recognized model of two typer of brand awareness such as brand recognition and brand-name recall to a three type of brand awareness model. Now, brand recognition, brand-name recall and brand recall-boosted recognition while also expanding brand attitude from three levels of brand attitude to five levels. These five levels are comprised of: reject, unaware,

acceptable if on special, one of my preferred brands and my single preferred brand (Rossiter, 2014).

Nonetheless, for Kotler et al. (2010) there are four stages of brand awareness; 1. Brand Unawareness: consumers are not aware of the existence of the brand thus is necessary to make efforts to remind the consumers of the brand. 2. Brand Recognition, brands begin to be introduced so that consumers remember the brand again. 3. Brand Recall, the stage of determining the main choice of a brand without the need for additional information which is the opposite of Brand Recognition. 4. Top of Mind, is a brand that is already attached to the consumer's mind. It is a brand that is recalled and therefore on the consumer's mind when they already have a definite choice on a brand of a product type and thus a purchase intention. Other studies' results (Bilgin, 2018) have demonstrated that social media marketing activities have a significant effect on consumer's brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty. Nonetheless, the effect social media marketing has on consumers mostly translates to brand awareness (Bilgin, 2018). For instance, social media marketing aids as a significant awareness tool when it comes to reminding consumers of a brand and staying in their minds (Bilgin, 2018). However, findings reveal that brand awareness does not reflect on brand image nor brand loyalty perceived by consumers. Research suggests that brand awareness has a low effect on consumers, nevertheless, brand awareness and brand image are both significant elements for consumer's brand loyalty (Bilgin, 2018). Still, brand awareness does not reflect on the brand image and brand loyalty of a chosen brand because consumers follow brands on social media they are already familiar with (Bilgin, 2018). Although brand awareness does not impact brand image and brand loyalty directly, a substantial amount of authors believe that brand awareness, indeed, mediates the effect of brand image and brand loyalty on brand equity and a congruent brand image, in relation to the the brand's products, influences a purchasing decision (Shabbir et al., 2017; Sasmita & Suki, 2015), (*Figure 11*).



(Figure 11)

3.4.2. Brand awareness and influencer marketing on Instagram

Social media influencers on Instagram have become an asset for certain products and services which can give enormous revenues for brands. Apparently, for social media influencers who have a large follower base are more valuable which guarantees the amount of viewers that will see their content through Instagram and thus their message reaches more people. Similarly, content marketing can boost brand awareness if the number of “likes” on the influencer posts increases. Still, the quantity of likes does not translate into a higher user engagement (Agam, 2017; Sultan, 2021). Sometimes a small audience of engaged users is worth more than a large audience of less active users since they comment, give feedback etc. (Agam, 2017; Sultan, 2021). However, having thousands of followers on Instagram can be itself a factor for the increase in likeability of the products by the audience (Agam, 2017). In addition, influencers with a high number of followers are considered more likeable and have higher chances of transforming a potential customer into a loyal customer (Agam, 2017). Furthermore, this study’s findings also reveal that the ratio of followers and the way that certain products are promoted on Instagram does, in fact, create awareness of the product. Along with that, with a competent, engaging and reachable Instagram post, brand awareness is easily generated (Agam, 2017). Moreover, one study by Usman and Navari (2020) found that brand awareness, as a matter of fact, markedly influences purchasing decisions. Other branding outcomes such as brand equity and brand loyalty also influence purchasing decisions on Instagram (Usman & Navari, 2020). In addition, promotions on Instagram such

as marketing strategies involving product promotion also influence purchasing decisions of followers or potential consumers (Usman & Navari, 2020).

3.4.3. Instafamous

Instafamous stands for the ability for a “social interaction and aesthetical presentation, which allow users to build personal narratives and showcase identities that attract audiences.” (Jin et al., 2019). Nowadays, employing influencers that are Instafamous for branding has become a defining element of social media marketing campaigns (Jin et al., 2019).

To become instafamous, a study examined the self-presentation practices, of three fashion bloggers on Instagram. It was argued that to gain popularity on Instagram, bloggers utilize the features of formality and informality in the construction of an authentic and likable self-image. The characteristics of formality and informality are construed. For instance, formality can be discerned in the photographs the blogger takes which relate to their professional life hence belongs to the formality attribute. These photographs are perceived as distant from their audience’s reality. Thus, they are usually accompanied by a textual caption that serves as an informality attribute which balances the overall message the image is trying to convey. The caption holds the informality aspect which connotes to linguistic immediacy, such as instant user feedback and comments, due to its emulation of an intimate conversation with the respective audience (Kováčová, 2022).

Instafamous pertains to the notion of what followers recognize as Instafamous qualities. They believe high-quality pictures and engaging photo descriptions to be essential elements constructing appealing Instagram profiles. Also, Instagram filters are distinguished positively by users and are integral when using this type of social media platform since users want to see attractive images, despite knowing that more than often they are not a true representation of the influencer’s self and their surroundings, all in all, real life. Moreover, although Instagram users considered profiles with a large amount of followers as Instafamous, they did not always trust the way these followerships were achieved. Some participants paradoxically proposed that this achievement was accomplished in an dishonest way i.e. by paying for the followerships (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018).

Other authors, for instance, disclose that the pictures posted on Instagram as well as the written content under the pictures, generate brand awareness and also aid in a user’s evaluation of goods and services before making a purchase. Even though Instagram is not

mapped out as a shopping platform itself users and brand's social media accounts often add hyperlinks under the description of their pictures which directly lead to a brand's website to purchase the desired good or service which facilitate the purchasing intention (Wilbert, 2017). For instance, Instagram holds no functions of an online shopping environment and experience such as a shopping cart, drop-down lists of size, color, or amount, nor do payment settings exist. However, many people use the world wide web or internet to search for information about goods or services (Jin et al., 2019; Wilbert, 2017) before making a final purchase and social media, Instagram, enables the gathering of information about products, services, or brands which influences an individual and can potentially lead to purchasing intentions. This is only feasible due to the willingness of online consumers to create and share product and brand related content (Wilbert, 2017).

3.4.4. Viral content on Instagram

The advancement of communication technology has encouraged marketers to keep up with the latest trends in ICT (Information Communication Technology) which means that, today, viral marketing is used to not only keep up with the trends but to empower electronic word of mouth that occurs when consumers transmit a message to others through social media (Yanuar & Nurrahmi, 2021; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Viral marketing, essentially, is a method that can be used to promote products in a marketing communication activity (Yanuar & Nurrahmi, 2021).

This approach can influence people to happily recommend the products to other people by choice since it raises brand awareness. For instance, a study by Mustikasari and Widaningsih (2018) revealed that viral marketing applied to a certain brand on Instagram was able to increase brand awareness by 38,7%. Also, brand awareness generated was able to influence consumer purchasing decisions on the brand's products by 39% (Mustikasari & Widaningsih, 2018).

Additionally, by adopting viral marketing, a business can allocate a low budget to promote products because they can rely on customers' word-of-mouth. This promotional activity is conducted to raise brand awareness. This will make customers inherently prefer a product that is stuck on their mind rather than unfamiliar products (Yanuar & Nurrahmi, 2021). Viruses are like diseases that will spread and impact many people. Messages are similar in

a way that they can be spread quickly and at a low cost but can also have a big effect for marketers (Yanuar & Nurrahmi, 2021).

3.4.5. Communication and influencer marketing for brands

The last aspect included in this chapter of 'Instagram' is the advice to firms who want to engage in influencer marketing but do not know where to start as well as advice on identifying the right influencers to collaborate with (Haenlein et al., 2020) since through a brand-influencer collaboration, brands can generate a positive brand association in the consumer's minds (Ketrin & Szilárd, 2020).

First, brands should understand that each platform has its own user culture and language since social media platforms' culture codifies interactions between users tailored to their respective platform's online contexts (Haenlein et al., 2020; Pearce et al., 2020).

Secondly, companies need to understand the user before they can establish their own presence, and developing such an understanding requires time (Haenlein et al., 2020). For instance, social media presupposes user migration, a phenomenon where users migrate from one platform to the other e.g. Facebook to Instagram and analysing this might be relevant to understand users better (Kumar et al., 2011). In addition, instead of focusing on expanding the brand from the first day, it is advisable for brands to start working with influencers who understand the platform better, learn from them and only then engage in own content creation. Influencers not only help to increase reach and exposure but they are also vital resources when it comes to learning to speak the right language. Subsequently, brands need to give Instagram users a reason to engage with them. Merely being a well-known brand may often not be sufficient (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Moreover, it is crucial to comprehend that influencer marketing is more than just a simple post. Companies should leverage the content produced by influencers to their advantage. For instance, using influencer's post content in other forms of marketing communication such as print advertising, billboards or emailing. The objective of this strategy is to allocate the authenticity of social media influencer marketing and advertising into the offline space (Haenlein et al., 2020).

When brands obtain access to and leverage influencer resources including their followers' networks, personal positioning, communication content, and follower trust, they likely reach more targeted customer segments, create a positioning with greater market acceptance and

relevance, and generate more creative and trusted content than they would otherwise achieve without influencer marketing. These benefits in all probability translate to favorable customer attitudes and behaviours, impacting brand performance (Leung et al., 2022).

On top of that, a common issue marketing managers are encircled by is whether they should work with one influencer who has 8 million followers (e.g., Jamie Oliver, *@jamieoliver*), 16 influencers who have 500,000 followers (e.g., Brad Lau, *@ladyironchef*), or 160 influencers with 50,000 followers (e.g., Molly Tavoletti, *@mollytavoletti*) (Haenlein et al., 2020). While smaller influencers will raise less brand awareness, they tend to have higher engagement rates, due to their relatability, relative to the total number of followers and a more homogenous follower base than macroinfluencers (Haenlein et al., 2020; Kay et al., 2020). For example, macroinfluencers with between 5.000 to 10.000 followers produce this higher engagement rate (6.3%) from their target audience than those with more than 10.000 followers did (3.6%) (Britt et al., 2020). Hence, there is no doubt that niche, micro-influencers are critical due to their relevant community building, authentic content and consequentially their higher engagement rate (Haenlein et al., 2020).

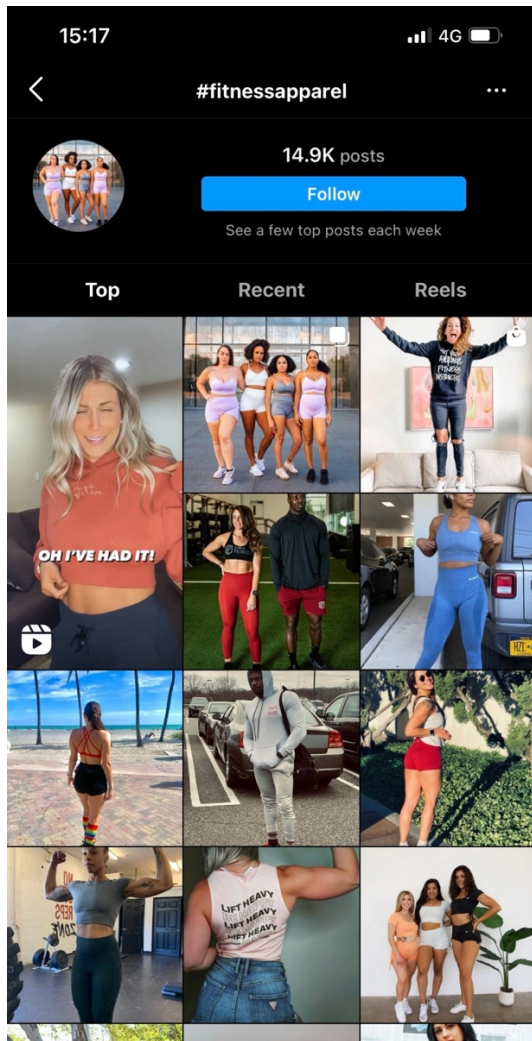
In spite of this, brands need to choose the right influencers in regards to the brand's influencer marketing campaign's objectives. For example, if a national or international brand wants to raise awareness for a new product then macroinfluencers are the best choice (Haenlein et al., 2020; Britt et al., 2020; Alampi et al., Gunawan & Iskandar, 2020). Not only do they ensure enough reach but they also allow for associating the brand with a face or image that is recognizable (Haenlein et al., 2020; Gómez, 2019). Nevertheless, if a brand aims at reaching an audience in a specific geographic location (e.g. national brand) or creating content that is considered highly relatable, then micro-influencers may be the greater choice (Haenlein et al., 2020; Britt et al., 2020; Alampi et al., Gunawan & Iskandar, 2020).

The last aspect to consider is the cost of managing multiple influencers. When working with dozens or even hundreds of influencers for one campaign, these need to be briefed and managed (Haenlein et al., 2020; Nandagiri & Phillip, 2018). Although software may be of aid in automating tasks, this is usually not achievable nor advantageous for all cases or tasks involving influencers at hand. Another cost referent aspect to consider is the fact that microninfluencers may be less experienced in the production of high-quality content, which limits the ability for brands to reuse that promoted content in another context. Also, they

may lack creativity which leads to the production of very similar posts and post content by multiple influencers which does not facilitate brand awareness (Haenlein et al.,2020). Nonetheless, micro-influencers besides being perceived to be more of an ally to consumers, disclose a positive impact on their target audience (Rodrigues, 2021).

4. Fitness Apparel

Fitness apparel is a type of performance clothing promoted on Instagram. Not only does it enhance performance but it enhances the aesthetics of the trained human body (*Figure 12*). Moreover, sports apparel has always been innovative and that is why it allows to fulfil the performance needs of athletes, by using fabrics and techniques in unusual ways (Fowler, 1999).



(*Figure 12*)

4.1. Fitness apparel definition

Fitness apparel is defined as clothing that fits and conforms well to the human body and therefore has an adequate ease of movement, has no wrinkles or excess fabric, which has been cut and manipulated in the way that implies that it is a part of the human body hence why it enhances the human body form since it is like a second skin. This type of apparel is

also characterized through five factors, ease, line, grain, balance and set (Shan et.al, 2012). Ease is defined as the ease of care (Fowler, 1999).

Also, this type of clothing should fit not only the consumer smoothly and be barren of wrinkles but allow the respective to move easily (Shan et.al, 2012). Thus, fabric is also a critical component of fitness apparel. It affects not only the clothing fit for the consumer, but specifically mechanical qualities of the garment such as bending rigidity i.e. how stretchy it is can lead to fabric resistance or not depending on the quality of the textiles which consequently influences performance (Shan et.al, 2012).

In this industry there is still a disagreement on the aspects that affect the consumer's perception of and satisfaction from fit apparel. However, it is broadly agreed upon that these garments' benefits play a role in the consumer's minds when it comes to physical comfort, psychological comfort and appearance of the fitness apparel in question which can translate into a satisfaction from fit apparel (Shan et.al, 2012).

Also, fitness apparel has different uses to it. It can be utilized for both sports or fitness or even as casual wear. In fact, one study reveals that fitness apparel is more frequently used in sports or fitness activities yet combined with its utilization as casual wear and with the second preference being that of only casual wear (Fowler, 1999). This takes place due to the incorporation of current fashion trends into the marketing and thus consumption of activewear brands. Due to this fashion phenomenon, apparel is used not only for casual daywear but also for workwear, sleepwear and evening wear (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). Moreover, authors believe there is a relationship between the context or possible ways in which fitness apparel or activewear can be used with that of purchasing intention (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

When it comes to female fitness apparel, a woman called, Hinda Miller sewed two athletic supporters together creating the first ever sports bra in 1978 (Fowler, 1999). Since then, fabrics have developed and thus changed the fitness but also fashion industry.

Men, women, and children used to purchase the same merchandise, such as shorts, T-shirts, sweatpants, licensed apparel. Consumers from the avid sports participant to the couch potato purchased sports apparel that now fall into specific categories depending on gender and age or height (Fowler, 1999).

4.2. Fashion definition

Fashion is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “a popular style of clothes, hair etc. at a particular time or place; the state of being popular” (OxfordDictionary, 2022).

Psychologists like Ross define it as “a series of recurring changes in the choices of a group of people, which, though they may be accompanied by utility, are not determined by it.” (Sproles, 1974).

A broader definition defines ‘fashion’ as more than a material trend but rather a non-material and consumer behaviour phenomena itself (Sproles, 1974). Thus, fashion is not only an object but also a behavioural process. For instance, it can also be a process of social influence and diffusion of a set of ideas or standards in society (Sproles, 1974).

Looking past the distinguishment of fashion as an object or process, the simple definition of ‘fashion’ is characterized by the prevailing style of dress or behavior at any given time, with the implication of change since fashion trends and even fashion itself, are known to change naturally through time (Steele, 2022).

Fashion can translate to not only clothes but other materials as well in the day to day life. There are fashions or fads^{*14} in furniture, automobiles and other objects although most attention is paid to tailores clothing fashion, most likely, due to its intimate relationship with the physical body and thus with the personal identity of the individual (Steele, 2022).

The 1920s were a decisive mark in the history of fashion, especially for women and their self-expression (Lamkin, 2015). This was only possible since a woman’s appearance was inseparably connected to her success both in the social circle and the professional field. For instance, a woman wanting to get ahead in life needed to use her looks to her advantage in order to move up the professional field. As a consequence, magazines being sold idolized women’s appearance and urged them to improve the latter. Readers were constantly reminded of the fact that people passing them on the street can not possibly know their smart without looking the part. Women would be overlooked for a job position if their appearance did not correspond to their aptitudes (Lamkin, 2015). Also, looks were very significant in the case women wanted to find a romantic partner, since beauty overruled other qualities women might have had, in order to keep a husband ”Attractiveness had become the central

¹⁴ A Fad, according to the Oxford Dictionary, something that people are interested in only for a short period of time (OxfordDictionary, 2022) or “a style, activity or interest that is very popular for a short period of time” (CambridgeDictionary, 2022).

component of a woman's ability to attract a man" (Lamkin, 2015). To the contrary, generations of the nineteenth century grew up believing that inner beauty was the only beauty that mattered. Anyone paying too much attention to his or her appearance was judged to be ostentatious and frivolous. Contrastingly, by the 1920s, it was considered careless and unfitting to neglect your appearance (Lamkin, 2015). The 1920s was also the time society discarded the corset and the concealing dresses and thus greater value was put on a woman's body since it was more or less on full display for the foreigner's eye to critic (Lamkin, 2015). Some research suggests that women's fads and fashions in the 1920s were manifestations of freedom whereas western literature proposes that women's fashions were an apeing of men "as minority groups have always done ... to the so-called superior group." (Freedman, 1974). After the war, women obtained the egalitarian status towards men in the working field, in spite of this, women turned from a search of political and economic equality to one for sexual and social identity (Freedman, 1974). The 1920s influenced not only society's values and equality but also put a big weight on issues surrounding female identity and women's proper role while also highlighting the family versus work life (Freedman, 1974).

4.2.1. Psychology and fashion

Fashion is known to be creative, exciting, dynamic and because of this close relationship with the human body, many issues such as body image affect the individual psychologically, society and globally as well (Mair, 2018).

Fashion and psychology are interconnected due to how clothes not only have an intimate relationship with the body but also with the creation and portrayal of the identity of the individual, the personality or even the soul. Clothing is our second skin and that is why it becomes part of our identity. Vision and touch are sensory aspects that aid in describing what the fashion garment conveys to the individual. Other senses are also important in fashion. The sense of smell, for instance, is paramount for the fragrance and beauty industries as well as for items made from leather. Sound may not be as imperative, yet, one should consider the sound of heels on pavement since through the psychological phenomenon of perception of what heels sound like, this sensory input is processed in the brain and symbolized through the perception of a specific object or material, in this case, heels (Mair, 2018). Notwithstanding, this process does not take place without the required attention from

the consumer. Paying attention to these types of detail allows for people to draw on memory, creativity and communication when thinking of fashion items (Mair, 2018).

4.2.2. Fashion trends

Being aligned to fashion trends is crucial to the success of several companies in many industries. Fashion trends can be detected fairly easy if the marketer is aware of precise factors that help determine if a particular will go on to become an accepted fashion trend (Reynolds, 1968).

When it comes to fashion trends, the average successful trend lasts only about six to twelve weeks (North et al., 2003). A new trend can sometimes turn out to be no more than a fad and in that case retailers and manufacturers would lose profit. Other trends turn out to be classics, where the demand grows and stabilizes (North et al., 2003). In order for fashion trends to be detected, both the designer and the businessman have to contribute and thus work together to distinguish the latter (Reynolds, 1968). On the same note, it is not too difficult to keep up with current fashion trends, they manage to be very apparent to the naked eye (Reynolds, 1968).

Nonetheless, there are other factors that need to be considered during the evaluation of the popularity of a new fashion trend such as: its functionality, comparing it to long-term trends that are running at the same time, what the nature of past fashion cycles are, if there are trends taking place at the same time yet in other industries, if it is limiting; can be adopted easily, and what inside informations around that trend are available (Reynolds, 1968).

Athleisure has only been gaining popularity as both a functional and fashionable clothing trend, particularly among women (Brice & Thorpe, 2021). This gendered trend has been analysed in some literature inserted in the fitness clothing phenomenon by scholars (Brice & Thorpe, 2021) and which will be further delved into in the next subchapter.

4.3. Fitness apparel as fashion

All sorts of fitness apparel can be seen as the embodiment of an active and fashionable lifestyle (Fitness and fashion combined) that is achieved through self-discipline which is symbolized through the pleasure in the attainment of a healthy and fit body by wearing fashionable activewear outdoors or to the gym (Horton et.al, 2016).

Fitness apparel has been started to be used not only for sports but also as a casual daywear type of clothes (Watts & Chi, 2017) and there have been large numbers of luxurious high-end brands that are developing activewear using the newest design features of performance clothing while branding this type of apparel as casualwear made uniquely for their own luxurious brand (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). For instance, several renown high-fashion designers such as Giorgio Armani, Donna Karan, Ralph Lauren, Prada and Gianfrano Ferre have, not many years ago, started to offer lines of activewear or even sports apparel to their consumers (Fowler, 1999). Armani entered the activewear market in 1997 with golf and ski lines for men and women, Donna Karan launched sports apparel under the DKNY label in the spring of 1999, Ralph Lauren introduced sports specific apparel and footwear and Prada a line of beach wear and sailing apparel (Fowler, 1999). Hence why, people still want to look and feel their best while sweating. These brands noticed an important truth of the desire of the incorporation of more fashion into the design of apparel for women who are more serious about their active lifestyle or sports participation (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

Keeping up with fashion trends e.g. incorporating fitness into daily wear, alludes to the fact that the younger audience pays more attention to current trends or brands that keep up with current trends and vice versa thus this younger generation tends to define what will be in style, what consumers will be wearing in the future (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

4.3.1. Fitness apparel market

Moreover, the annual growth of the sport and leisure clothes has increased in 1% to 4% in recent years and with over a 30% demand increase in 2010 (Krzywinski et al., 2003). For an efficient production of close-fitting garments, the authors believe that 3D modelling can be developed to supply the 2D cutting patterns needed for efficient production of close-fitting garments (Krzywinski et al., 2003). Like many other items, apparel products are composed of many physical characteristics, which are perceived differently by various consumers (North et al., 2003).

4.3.2. Attributes for female and male consumers

For instance, female consumers, attribute preferences first emerged when they understood that women do not need to dress like men to take part in the masculinised world of sport and as a response the running skirt emerged (Figure 13) (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

Fitness brands need to reflect the desire for a healthy lifestyle from female consumers and athletes into their products and marketing in order to demonstrate that they understand and resonate with the lifestyle habits of their female consumers (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). In fact, it is predicted that the trend of a healthy living is growing and will even grow more through the next thirty years (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). Healthy lifestyle behaviours include weight management through a healthy diet, regular exercise and smoking cessation (Demark-Wahnefried&Jones, 2008). This health trend will thus continue to influence women's activewear needs and consumer behaviour towards fitness apparel (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).



(Figure 13).

A major change in today's society is the expanded role of female consumers as more and more woman enter the labour market, resulting in higher disposable income for female consumers. Consequently they are recognised by apparel marketers as a sought after target market (North et al., 2003).

In order to be able to cater for women's fitness apparel and activewear needs, it is imperative that brands understand the patterns and trends in female participation in sports or general physical activity which in retrospective influence their behaviour and needs (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). Having observed the fashion trend in fitness apparel and vice versa (Fowler, 1999) it is translated into not only the consumption of activewear brands but also into the marketing

of the activewear line of the latter. The marketing can be integrated with different purposes of activewear usage such as casual daywear, work-wear, sleepwear and evening wear (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

In addition, apparel attributes such as functional design, colour, and size and fit and non-product attributes such as price and model imagery lead to benefits pursued by female activewear consumers (Zhou et al., 2018). Moreover, another study reveals that the style of the apparel is the most important attribute considered by women when making purchasing decisions, with price being the second most important attribute (North et al., 2003). There is, however, a lack of male attributes' evaluation in fitness apparel before making a purchase (North et al., 2003).

4.3.3. Attributes for consumers

For many consumers, it is imperative that not only their activewear is stylish, but also that it is practical and functional for its intended purpose. Since activewear is designed with the intention to be worn during working out, it must have design attributes that aids its purpose to function a specific way and aid the consumer's performance (Stoller, 2021). It is important that designers conduct enough research, in order to find a compromise between style and performance, by involving consumers in the process, and as a result candidly comprehend what consumers are looking for in a product (Stoller, 2021).

Specific fitness apparel attributes that are sought after are the design the apparel displays while having a particular function, the colour, size and the fit. Moreover, two non-product-related attributes that also influence the fulfilment of four benefits are the price and how brands use models to display their activewear (Zhou et.al, 2017). The four benefits that are fulfilled by these product related and non-product-related attributes are mood enhancement, exercise facilitation, healthy and active lifestyle and a physically fit body image (Zhou et.al, 2017).

One study allowed women and men to rank fitness apparel attributes as the most and least important. Attributes being ranked were the following: comfort, fit, style, colour, good value, durability, brand and ease of care. Women ranked the attribute 'fit' as being the most relevant when selecting apparel than men (Fowler, 1999). This can be explicated due to the lack of availability of active apparel designed for the feminine body when this article was written which started to be incorporated more in the 00s through the understanding of women's body

changes whether it be weight gain or loss (Alexander et al., 2005). A well-fitted garment independent of the wearer's body shape, contributes to their confidence and comfort when wearing it (Alexander et al., 2005). Nonetheless, there are other subcategories for these attributes. For instance, fit ease aids body movements and it prevents fabric from gathering or tying up. Style ease, on the other hand, adds plumpness to garments in order to generate a visual effect. The 'fit' or snugness/ease look varies depending on the consumer. It is rather tied to their personal preferences, attitudes or the look they desire to achieve with that fitness apparel product (Alexander et al., 2005).

Taking this into consideration, the most important criteria for the purchase decision were related to aesthetics (Eckman et.al, 1990). Nonetheless, different criteria had main effects in two distinct decision-making stages. During the first stage of the information gathering or interest phase, colour/pattern, styling and fabric were most critical in the selection process of garments from the display racks. Fit, styling and appearance on the body were more important in determining the rejection or adoption of the garment during the trial phase in the dressing rooms (Eckman et.al, 1990).

4.4. Female consumers

Most literature exploring the consumption of activewear or fitness apparel, fails to take gender into consideration or investigate unique female consumer profiles. Furthermore, there are no studies that explore the specific impact of the decisive shift in women's activewear patterns on the activewear industry. Also, women's age and generation are an influenceable factor towards their activewear consumption (O'Sullivan et.al, 2017).

Female consumers are the consumers that are taking activewear into other sections of their day to day attire. This is due to the fact that they place more value on fashion even when it comes to looking good while working out (O'Sullivan et.al, 2017). Moreover, studies have found that it is important for activewear brands to not only consider lifestyle as a major factor influencing consumer behaviour but also personality and emotional characteristics or triggers of consumers (Demark-Wahnefried&Jones, 2008; O'Sullivan et.al, 2017).

There are some things to consider in order to reach brand recognition among female consumers. It starts out with stories and user generated content such as mentions and tagged photos of users wearing the brand's fitness apparel on stories for instance or the encouragement for users to share photos wearing the apparel of Gymshark as an example,

on their Gymshark66 challenge journey (*Figure 14*) which is a challenge where consumers set goals they want to achieve to better their health and lifestyle (Kantola, 2020; Gymshark, 2022). Thus, to reach brand recognition, brands post compelling educational authentic content, and build a community around the brand's values which tremendously supports engagement and brand awareness among female consumers (Kantola, 2020). In order to attract this consumer segment in the first place, brands post high quality, visually appealing photos while utilizing a few, relevant hashtags and user generated content in their Instagram feed (*Figure 15*) (Kantola, 2020). However, Instagram is constantly evolving as a platform and these techniques might have been useful at the time the study was conducted in 2020 but might change overtime (Kantola, 2020). In addition, companies admit to try to abstain from overwhelming their followers and posting too frequently but they are still forced to publish content daily in order to raise brand awareness (Kantola, 2020). They raise awareness by providing the user with content that supports their brand communication and awareness goals while aiming at educating followers about wellbeing, fitness, nutrition, and sports topics or issues (Kantola, 2020). Nonetheless, to abstain from excessive advertising, fitness brands choose to employ user-generated content, posting educational content on their brand page (*Figure 16*) and also visually engaging compelling images to increase brand awareness. Also, another alternative for brands is to use for advertising, a collaboration with influencers while building the community around their brand through shared values (Kantola, 2020).



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- You will overcome this
- You must believe in yourself first
- It's okay not to be okay
- Stop wondering if you are good enough. You are. Now act like it.
- Strive for progress, not perfection

I believe in you + I have faith in you. Now, believe in yourself and watch how much you can achieve 💕

💪 save for the day you need a little motivation + send to a friend who needs that little push today 💕 Happy Wednesday!

Wearing: @gymshark
Top: Training long sleeve crop top
Shorts: Training Cycling shorts

6 d

steffitt_ I loveee this! Great reminders babe 🥰❤️

628 likes
6 DAYS AGO

Add a comment... Post

(Figure 14)

(Figure 15)



gymshark • Following
Original audio

gymshark 🌊 The kinda bestie we all need 🙌
@bresocker + @kpfit11
#Gymshark #UnitedWeSweat

4 w

anthonyhenson8.12.00 When she said "Do more" that right there is a true bestie

4 w 396 likes Reply

View replies (3)

body_npwr Sometimes we don't know what we are capable of but our besties rnt! 🙌🔥 Awesome inh

Liked by nathaliehelmer and 107,786 others

APRIL 12

Add a comment... Post

(Figure 16)



4.4.1. Consumer needs

Previous literature has demonstrated that consumers associate renowned brands with attributes such as quality and prestige (Aaker & Keller, 1990) thus they like to align their personal images to these brands.

The psychological ownership towards a product is defined by Pierce et.al. (2003) as the state in which feelings of ownership towards a variety of objects whether material or immaterial are developed. Furthermore, consumers become invested in the sense of ownership due to the fact that it is a way of self-expression and that to which they want to belong to, to the values such as prestige and quality, here, that the fitness apparel conveys (Pierce et.al, 2003)

Studies have exhibited that consumers assume that brands with good reputations are willing to make greater marketing efforts as a symbol of their brand quality (Ibáñez-Sánchez et.al, 2021).

4.5. Female and male activewear consumption

Previous literature has demonstrated that female and male consumers take into consideration different attributes during a purchase of a fitness garment (Eckman et al., 1990).

There are key factors that influence the purchase intention and purchase of activewear for female consumers previously discussed such as the function, the colour, size and the fit (Zhou et.al, 2017; Watts & Chi, 2017). Also, two non-product-related attributes influence the fulfilment of four benefits such as the price and how brands use models to display their activewear (Zhou et.al, 2017). The four benefits that are fulfilled by these product related and non-product-related attributes are mood enhancement, exercise facilitation, healthy and active lifestyle and a physically fit body image (Zhou et.al, 2017). The ‘fit’ aspect of fitness apparel is, nonetheless, the most relevant and impactful attribute of activewear for female consumers whereas it is not as pertinent for men (Fowler, 1999).

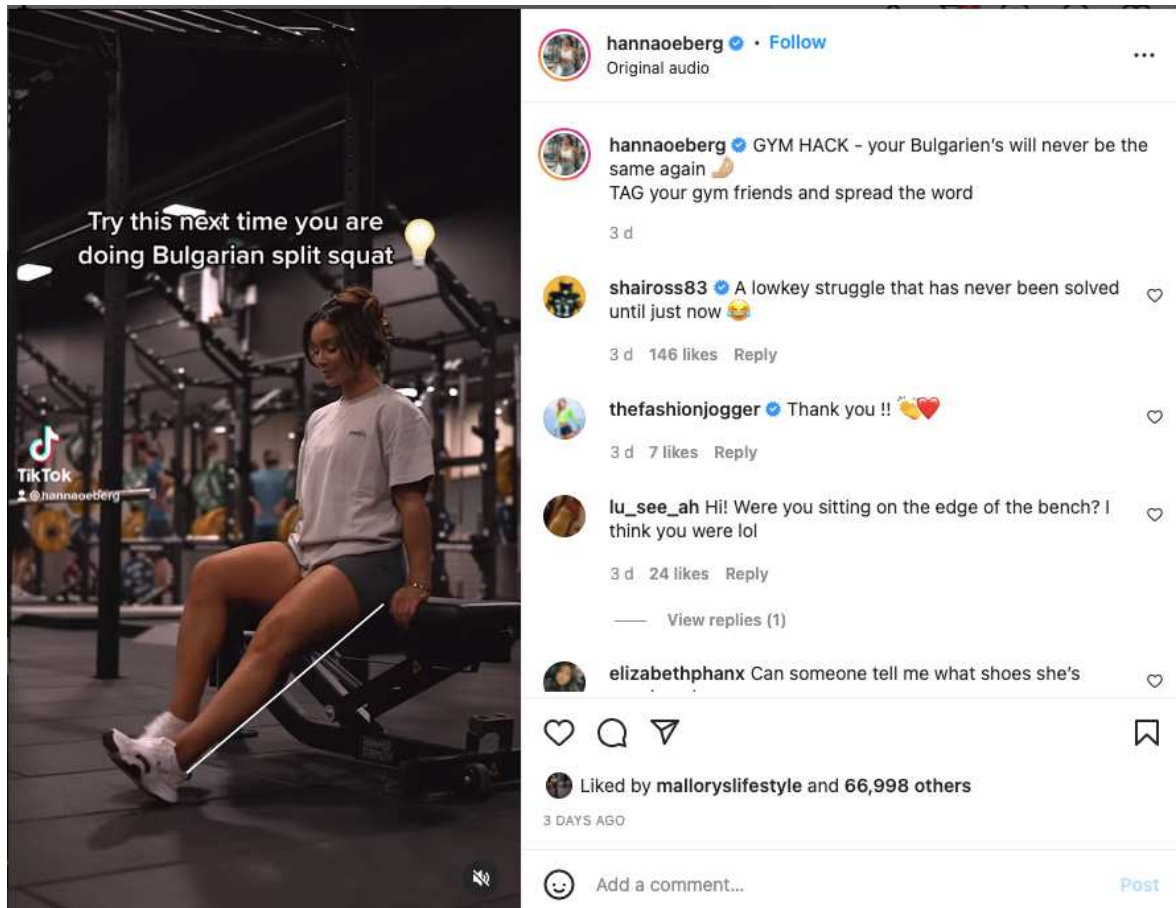
In addition, both genders utilize activewear as casual wear and many brands such as Nike, Adidas, Under Armour, Athleta, and Lululemon, have responded to this growing demand (Watts & Chi, 2017). Due to this higher demand in activewear’s versatility, there has been an increase in products, product variety, and retail locations made available for them (Watts & Chi, 2017).

4.6. Relevance of social media influencers in communicating brands’ fitness apparel values

Since social media’s uprising, many social media influencers built their existence around fitness topics which allowed them to start profiting from giving fitness and nutrition advice by selling workout or coaching programs or wellness apps (Kirvesmäki, 2021).

One example is Hanna Oberg and her fitness advice on Instagram (*Figure 17*), posted through Instagram reels. Hanna gives specific tips on how to perform exercises better or more effectively and her workout programs’ app called ‘OWNU’ which alludes to the fact that the

consumer can build their own version of an aesthetic body (HannaOberg, 2022). Nonetheless, there is still the issue of who is truly certified to give health information on Instagram and why young consumers believe these non-certified individuals (Kirvesmäki, 2021).



(Figure 17)

Another concern for fitness influencers who are promoting fitness brand's apparel and also their values is what makes them able to easily foster parasocial relationships with their followers and if this relationship changes when an influencer becomes affiliated with or sponsored by a brand. A study by (Neal, 2017), demonstrated that out of 100 influencer's posts and respective comments (7,716), significant changes in follower engagement and sentiments were found between sponsored and organic content. Consequently, interviews with ten Instagram fitness influencers took place and unveiled that influencers notice these decreases in engagement and differences in sentiments and thus take steps to mediate them (Neal, 2017).

4.7. Young female's and male's perspective

In one study by Haaksluoto (2020), for young female consumers, visual appeal of Instagram posts was one of the main aspects evoking positive emotions to interviewed females, revealed by the showing of images of endorsed products to the latter. Due to the visuality of Instagram, many of the respondents mentioned that they first look at the image in a sponsored post and if the image is attractive or interesting, they may read the caption or description (text under the image), which highlights the importance of aesthetics in influencer-brand partnerships (Haaksluoto, 2020).

For male consumers, it is similar. Fitness influencers act as facilitators of brand credibility despite promoting unrealistic standards where having a low body fat percentage and a prominent muscle mass is achievable naturally, without the abuse of synthetic substances, which gives a distorted achievable body image for male consumers and the twisted notion of their body type being merely the reflection of these male fitness influencers leading a healthy life (Aguilar & Arbaiza, 2021).

4.8. Body image

“Body image is a multidimensional mental process focused on the way one physically looks or how one feels about their perceptions of themselves” (Duncan, 2017). Fundamentally, body image and self-esteem are linked to each other and in combination with fears and insecurities of not being good enough, are issues the majority of people face throughout their life. These fears can have a great impact in the relationships established between family members, with friend groups and also romantic relationships that emerge and grow. Contrastingly, it is those same relationships that can have an impact on how one perceives their own body and generate fears and insecurities surrounding the latter (Duncan, 2017).

4.8.1. Positive body image

A positive body image is characterized as the all-embracing love and respect for the body that allows individuals to:

“ (a) appreciate the unique beauty of their body and the functions that it performs for them; (b) accept and even admire their body, including those aspects that are inconsistent with idealized images (c) feel beautiful, comfortable, confident, and happy with their body, which is often reflected as an outer radiance, or a “glow;” (d) emphasize their body's assets rather than dwell on their imperfections; and (f) interpret incoming information in a body-protective manner whereby most positive information

is internalized and most negative information is rejected or reframed” (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).”.

4.8.2. Body image idealization

Until recently, the body image that was idealized was a slim figure which lead to the popularization of several products and methods to reach this objective. This was possible also due to the media’s role in perpetuating ideals through films, literature and advertising including young and attractive Hollywood stars you alluding to this skinny figure ideal (Lamkin, 2015).

The media propagated the notion that beauty is essential to a woman, making her appearance an especially important aspect of her social and professional status (Lamkin, 2015). The twentieth century experienced an unmatched obsession with vanity. If beauty products, to combat aging and blandness, did not enhance a woman’s beauty, women would and turn to cosmetic surgery to transform their appearance in order to reach society’s perfection standard (Lamkin, 2015).

4.8.3. Body image for female consumers online

Appearance-focused accounts on Instagram were associated with the idealization and thus internalization of being thin, body conscience and thus surveillance and the drive and strive for thinness whereas appearance-neutral accounts, accounts that did not focus on posts with a body, were not associated with any kind of body image outcomes (Cohen et.al, 2017). For instance, users that follow mostly appearance-focused accounts such as models or fitness bloggers or influencers may be more preoccupied about their appearance than users following appearance-neutral Instagram pages such as travelling, family life etc. (Cohen et.al, 2017).

Also, recently, the role of social media and its networking sites in body image concerns has been inquired. Combined factors such as the accessibility to mobile technology, peer interactions, and the popularity around sharing photos in these social networking platforms, determine self-objectification, the internalization of the ideal of thinness and the seeking of engagement in comparisons with peers (Cohen et.al, 2017; Baker et.al, 2019). Moreover, this investigation has demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between the use of social

media and body image issues that lead to eating disorders (Cohen et.al, 2017) whereas previous research unveiled that appearance-focused traditional media, instead of overall media consumption, predicted body dissatisfaction (Cohen et.al, 2017).

4.8.4. Body image behaviours in relation to insecurity on Instagram

Concerning body image, three topics surfaced in one study by Baker et al. such as, trying to respond to beauty ideals, comparing oneself with others and displaying of oneself on Instagram in order to adhere to beauty standards. Some participants admitted to experiencing dissatisfaction with their appearance when trying to measure up to beauty ideals. The behaviour encountered relating to this latter need translated itself into effortful posting, promoting oneself and seeking engagement from users, on Instagram. This effortful posting can be characterized by the careful selection of the best images of themselves and placing also a lot of importance on obtaining likes and comments (Baker et.al, 2019). Additionally, when posting photos of oneself, participants took an audience perspective, expressing concern with how others perceived their appearance (Baker et.al, 2019).

4.8.5. New 21st century ideal body image

Recently, the discussion around the new ideal body type for women, has started. Muscularity has become the main notion of the ideal surrounding women's body (Bell, 2016) instead of it being the previous skinny body (Lamkin, 2015). This is due to the fact that western society has begun giving emphasis to physical exercise as a part of the ideal lifestyle to go along with the flawless body (Bell, 2016). Muscularity is often associated with masculinity, so, the ideal female body is shifting slightly towards a more masculine look by promoting muscular or toned bodies (Bell, 2016).

“Since physical exercise has become a more important and pressing part of this new type of ideal body, there is increased pressure for women to work on their fitness. Women feel as though they need to spend more time focusing on their physical fitness and join gyms/fitness centers” (Bell, 2016).

This new type of ideal body has been developed from just being thin to being both thin and muscular (Bell, 2016). With this shift from thin only to muscular and thin gave rise to the popularity in fitness blogging and vlogging on social media that have been connected to this new notion of 'ideal body' (Bell, 2016). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary,

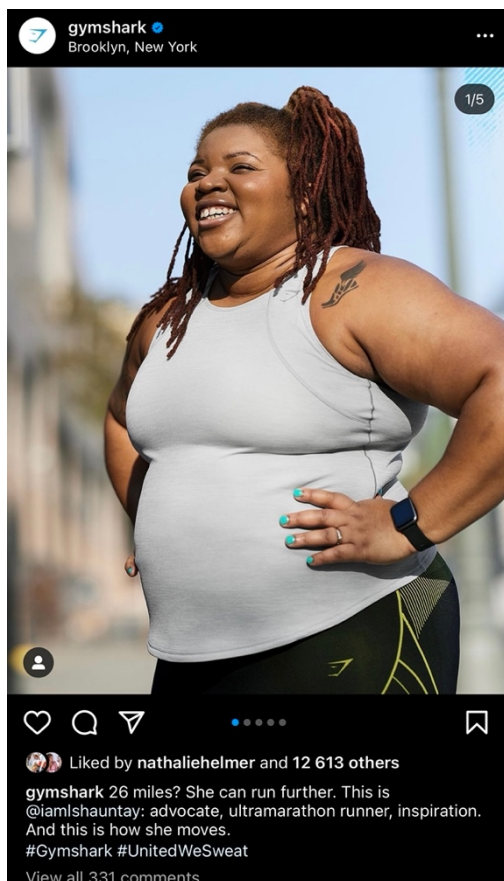
blogging refers to “1. A website that contains online personal reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks, videos, and photographs provided by the writer; contents of such a site” or “2. a regular feature appearing as part of an online publication that typically relates to a particular topic and consists of articles and personal commentary by one or more authors” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Vlogging, nonetheless, signifies video blogging and many creators have begun creating videos surrounding health and fitness, and how to get the perfect fit body (Bell, 2016). Videos about fitness have become an increasingly popular part of social media. These types of videos and blogs (informative content about fitness) can be found all over the Internet. Yet, they have become the topic of discussion by researchers as to whether or not they promote healthy living or the unattainable ideal body (Bell, 2016).

4.8.6. Fitness culture and body image on social media

In society, there are still divergent ideals for how women's and men's body should look like. For instance, in the fitness industry, fat is feared by both men and women, nonetheless, the way fitness magazines portray fat reduction is different for each gender (Norton, 2017). On one hand, men are not as pressured to diet in order to reduce fat but instead are encouraged to eat more so that they can grow their muscles. Cutting fat, here, is masculinized since it enables the revelation of manly striations and cuts. On the other hand, for women, the reduction of fat bears the goal of gaining a toned physique, free of cellulite (Norton, 2017). The common trend around the perfect body lies in the notion that men should be bigger than women and strive for a more muscular look whereas women should decrease the size of their bodies (Norton, 2017).

Despite these differences in ideal body image for both genders, media portrays a fit physique as the standard of notion of 'health' and as a product of social responsibility and participation in society (Norton, 2017). This is why there is pressure to look a certain way and social media's appearance focused pages promote this need of belonging through participation e.g. also being 'fit' even more on Instagram and thus in society (Cohen et al., 2017; Norton, 2017; Maslow, 1943). It is like a vicious cycle and even though fitness culture can promote a healthy lifestyle, with a rise in the number of overweight or obese people specially Americans, “it becomes even more socially harmful when a major form of media teaches the public that certain physical features symbolize that a person is morally inferior” (Norton, 2017). Not only do Instagram posts promote a healthy lifestyle but also body conscience but

also consumerism which means minimizing flaws such as body fat by purchasing what health and fitness magazines are selling (Norton, 2017). However, Instagram functions differently. Although magazines utilize ideal fit bodies (Norton, 2017) and social media in the beginning as well with the idealization of being thin with the trend of ‘thinspiration’ and then later on moving to fit with ‘fitspiration’ (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; Tiggeman&Zaccardo, 2018). Nowadays, the trend is to incorporate all body types in fitness apparel brand’s Instagram pages including fitness influencers with regular distinctive bodies in order to be more inclusive and thus body positive (Cohen, 2021) and attract a broader audience with regular lives and different bodies (*Figure 18*), (*Figure 19*), (*Figure 20*) and not only with the ideal muscly (*Figure 21*) or toned (*Figure 22*) physique (Gymshark, 2022).



(*Figure 18*)



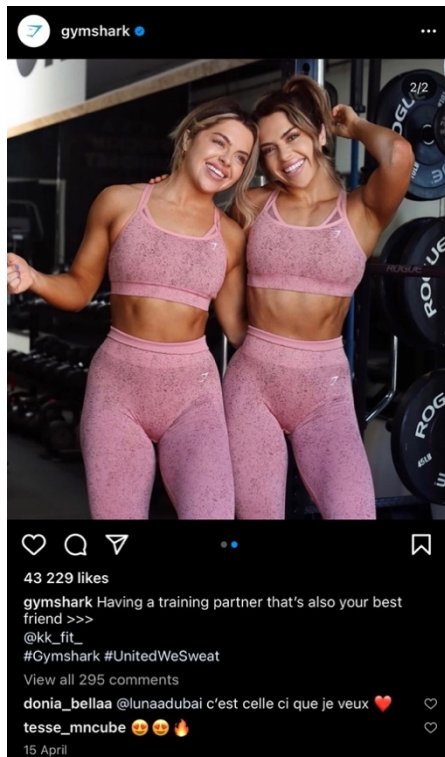
(Figure 19)



(Figure 20)



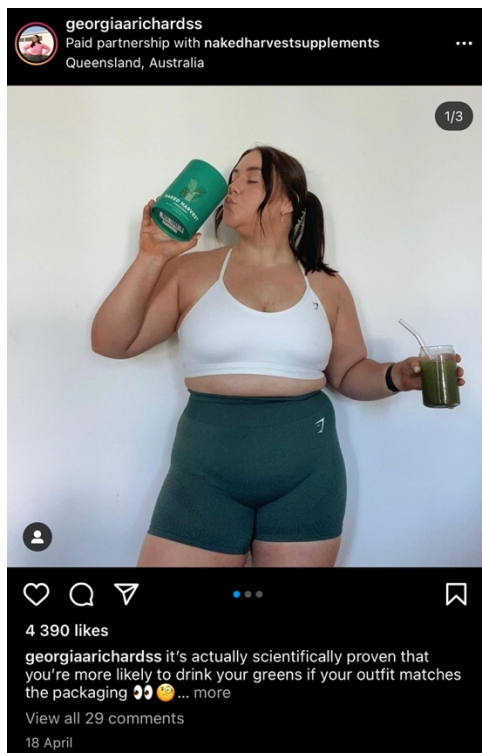
(Figure 21)



(Figure 22)

Fitness influencers (Figure 18; 19; 20; 21; 22) encompass both fit and regular-looking people as opposed to before, thin and fit idealization of bodies (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; Tiggeman&Zaccardo, 2018; Instagram, 2022). All types of looking fitness Influencers post photos promoting fitness apparel by wearing it to demonstrate users that fitness apparel can give you more confidence to go to the gym since it enhances the body independently of body type or condition (Figure 23), (Figure 24) but also due to society's fit idealization (Norton, 2017) to motivate users to look like that influencer (Figure 25), (Figure 26) by purchasing those fitness apparel products such as shorts, leggings or sports bras. Consumerism alludes to the latter, it infers that all people should minimize their flaws (e.g. body fat) by purchasing what different health and fitness medias such as magazines and fitness influencers on social media are selling (Norton, 2017). Nevertheless, advertisements in general and social media advertisements give customers a sequence of moral decisions that produce a dichotomy of 'right' and 'wrong' (Norton, 2017). For example, if a person eats healthy foods or follows an exercise in a magazine or fitness influencer's page then they are doing what is morally

right. However, if a person is not eating the predetermined ‘good’ foods or not working out, they will be stigmatized by society and therefore experience the guilt or depression of being an outsider (Norton, 2017).



(Figure 23)



(Figure 24)

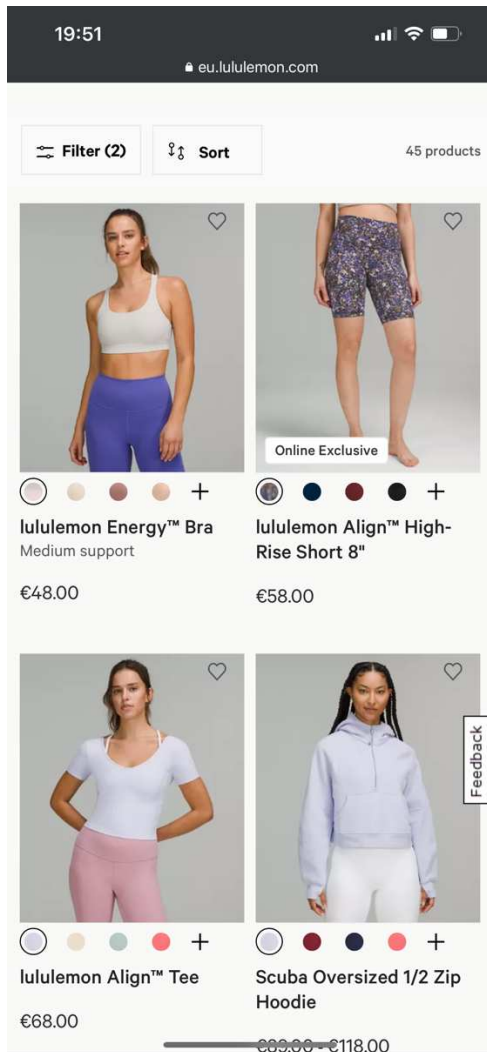


(Figure 25)

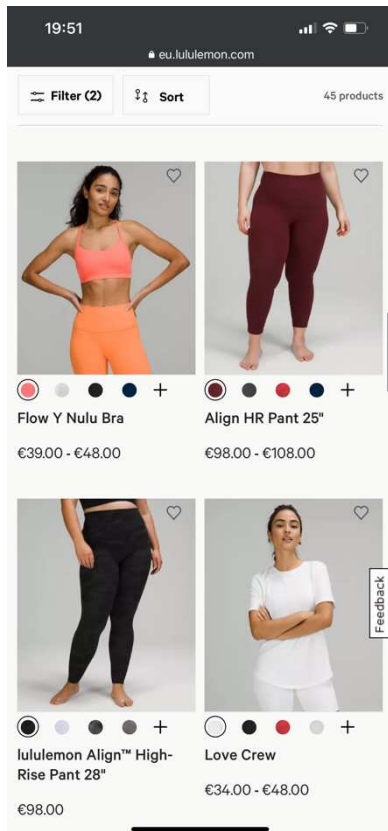


(Figure 26)

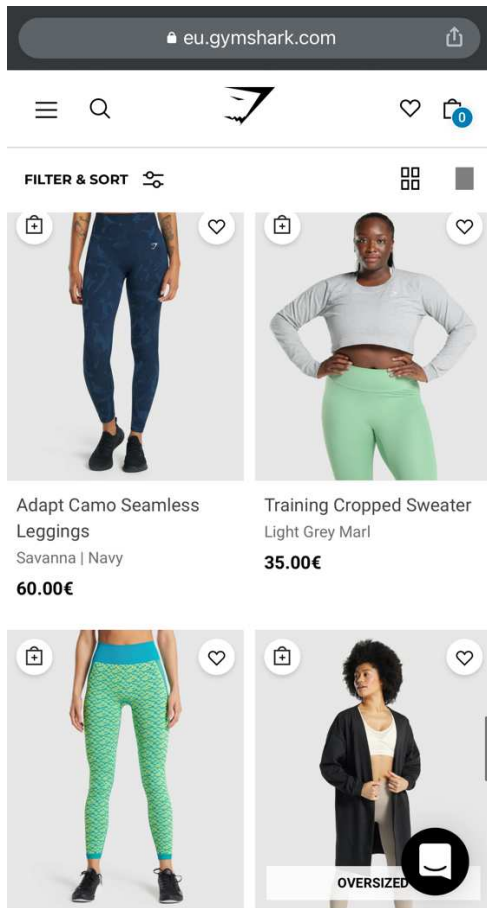
Despite this attempt of body positivity and inclusion, there still exists an incongruence between consumers' self-concept and the image and lifestyle some fitness brands signal through thin models on websites (Figure 27) (Lululemon, 2022; Zhou et.al, 2017). Although Lululemon (Figure 28) is starting to follow the footsteps of Gymshark (Figure 29;30) in terms of including large-sized website models , they only include very few different sized models and models are mostly excessively thin (Figure 27).Although Gymshark's success partly grew through the brand's adaptation to real people and thus inclusion of different sized models on their website (Figure 29;30), their Instagram page still mainly focuses on unachievable overly fit bodies of influencers (Figure 31).



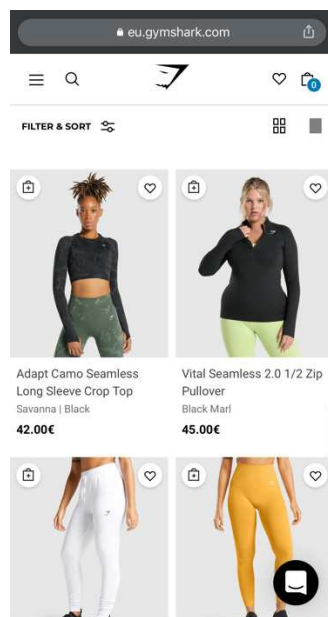
(Figure 27)



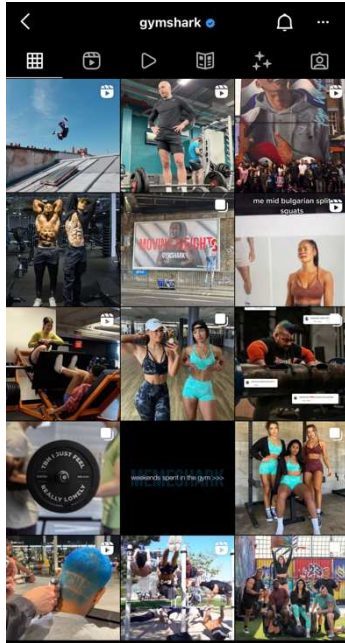
(Figure 28)



(Figure 29)



(Figure 30)



(Figure 31)

Nonetheless, the results of one study indicated that different cultures and thus body perceptions influence fitness apparel's attributes' preferences (i.e., function, design, quality) and impact purchase intentions of fitness apparel, online.

It is therefore important for brands to utilize segmentation approaches with culture, body image and thus satisfaction, and fitness apparel consumption, in mind (Nam et al., 2018).

4.8.7. Body image for male consumers

In spite of the fact that men are not as vulnerable to Instagram images than women are, they are affected by the display of photos including bare chests and muscles. This is especially relevant since Instagram advertising has increasingly included the depiction of bare chests in fitness-related posts on Instagram (Tiggeman & Anderberg, 2020). Although this has become the norm, research shows that the exposure to bare-chested and muscular images

results in lower body satisfaction in relation to viewing clothed people or influencers on Instagram (Tiggeman & Anderberg, 2020). Although men are vulnerable to some images, results obtained from women's vulnerability to images cannot be generalized to men (Tiggeman & Anderberg, 2020).

4.9. Fitness apparel consumption

In the last step of purchase and recurrent consumption (McKinsey, 2009), even though modern consumers are rational, they are looking for aestheticism, hedonism, an escape, social connection with the piece of apparel and for spiritual, authentic and thus extraordinary experiences (Hesham et.al, 2021) and the influencer is the perfect intermediary for those experiences since they establish the connection between the brand and these values (Hesham et.al, 2021) they are trying to convey to their target audience (Glucksman, 2017). Also, during the shopping experience, for instance, an extraordinary experience is valued. Therefore, shopping online can be considered a response or a subjective reaction to an interaction between the consumer and the influencer which previously generated knowledge and feelings (Hesham et.al, 2021; Glucksman, 2017). This to say that, this shopping experience takes place before, during and after a transaction is made, it is a never-ending experience made memorable either with an associated positive or negative evaluation (Hesham et.al, 2021).

In addition, one study consisting of 100 analyzed posts from Instagram influencers related to Gymshark, also found that influencers' personal brands^{*15} affect the realized brand associations with the fitness apparel's brand (Juhlin & Soini, 2018) before, during and after a purchase. Also, gender has an affecting role on both, intended and naturally developed brand associations (Juhlin & Soini, 2018).

Moreover, health and fitness online communities on social media are large and influential networks that hold an importance on personal, social and product-related behaviours. Bearing this in mind, identification with online community and subsequent engagement significantly increase the sensitivity around health which results in an increased engagement in fitness training and healthy product choices (Dessart & Duclou, 2019). Understanding the

¹⁵ This can be categorized in a subset of the brand theory. The human or personal brand would be defined as being a person, name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these with the aim of identifying the products (and thus raising awareness) of a brand or group of brands in order to differentiate those from other competitors' products and/or services (Hughes et al., 2008).

factors that lead to more active and healthy lifestyles is not only important from a managerial and consumption perspective but also from the standpoint of individuals' well-being and societal efficiency (Dessart & Duclou, 2019).

5. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology for this study will be introduced which entails the purpose of this study, the research question, research objectives, approach and strategy, followed by data collection and data results of mixed methodologies.

5.1. Research purpose

The main purpose of my dissertation is to contribute knowledge by exploring the relationship between the impact of fitness influencer marketing by promoting specific products, fitness apparel, through Instagram on consumer behaviour.

Further on, I analyse if fitness influencer marketing promotion can be a positive indicator of consumer purchases of fitness apparel through an online survey and five interviews.

With this research I aim to add to scarce existing literature surrounding the fitness industry topic. Also, this dissertation can be used by rising fitness brands in order for them to better understand their consumers and better apply influencer marketing to their brand and therefore social media pages.

5.1.2. Research question

“What is the impact of influencer marketing through Instagram, by promoting fitness apparel, on female consumer behaviour?”

This question aims to serve as a guidance while separately studying the variables in question, in order to be able to compare them and better understand the impact of fitness influencer marketing on consumers. By studying variables individually, one is, likewise, able to correlate two different variables by using the individual variable in question as a fundament. After careful analysis of the different tactics of fitness influencer marketing on Instagram through literature reviews, the main variables focused on to be analysed in this methodological section are that of fitness influencers, their followers and non-followers. This is, in order to be able to compare the two distinct cases and evaluate if there is any fluctuation in consumer behaviour, by keeping up with fitness influencers or not, on attitude followed by purchase intention.

5.2. Dissertation's objectives

When it comes to this dissertation's objectives, my first objective was to illustrate that influencer marketing is today's marketing choice by contemporary brands and it should be by all brands. Some brands find it difficult to understand why and how influencer marketing is so successful and my intention was to evidence this through my literature review and my mixed methods approach.

Moreover, my second goal was comprised of wanting to reveal the considerable impact fitness influencer marketing has on consumer behaviour: such as attitudes, purchasing intention and finally on decision making (where consumers rule out brands from others and the act of purchasing.)

My third objective was linked to how influencers are their own brand and how their persuasiveness was linked to being relatable, inspiring, motivating, credible and trustworthy unlike brands who struggle to be convincing or trustworthy enough for the consumer to purchase their products, in this case, fitness apparel.

The last objective was to understand whether being fit was, at all, correlated to the need of being stylish through matching or non-matching workout outfits when it came to the purchase of activewear and if people choose to wear fitness apparel excluding for working out.

For a clearer and all-encompassing understanding of the impact of influencer marketing through social media i.e. Instagram, by promoting fitness apparel, on consumer behaviour, the study utilizes mixed methods, while using fitness influencers such as Krissy Cela, Sophia Thiel, Gymshark and other fitness apparel brands as a reference.

5.2.1. Research approach and strategy

In order to gather data correctly and analyse it, I approached it in a Postpositivist manner by having collected data from an online survey that reveals the causes behind the positive or not impact of influencer marketing in the promotion of fitness apparel for consumers and what specifically that impact is with concurrent individual interviews. This is only possible due the development of digital technologies such as the Internet, less people turn to physical surveys to collect data and collect data from the websites themselves or even through online surveys. Through the world wide web, it is just easier to collect data from websites, or other online sources, themselves and do it more efficiently (Birnbaum, 2003).

For Creswell, the postpositive view is reductionist since it helps in reducing ideas to small ideas that are easier to test later on (Creswell, 2003).

Briefly, the first part of the study is comprised of an online survey to understand who regularly consumes athletic wear. Concurrently, individual interviews were held with the aid of existing literature. Thus, the study was cross-sectional, not only to save time but this way, specific categories from all interviews and survey could be compared and coded at the same time.

Conducting a study involves the risk of not clearly knowing you are a part of an actual experiment and not having a debriefing of an experiment, can have negative repercussions (Smith & Richardson, 1983). With that being said, conducting this online survey and interviews needed to bear this ethical concern in mind. Participants stayed anonymous throughout the entire process of this study.

An online survey was distributed to understand if there is a connection between being fit and wearing fitness apparel or not and to see if influencer marketing has any influence on that outcome. To better complement and explore data collected from the online survey, individual interviews were held. In addition, they took place as a means of exploring the connection between the fitness influencer and their followers and how the latter responds to their marketing and tactics and the resulting effect of the two. As an ending note to my strategy, this second part of the mixed methods approach, individual interviews, is made up of randomly selected respondents, due to time and convenience matters, who work out regularly, in this case, at least three times a week.

5.3 Data collection

A purposeful stratified sampling from the 109 respondents of the survey was fulfilled through a Qualtrics survey (*Attachment 4*). Data was gathered and transformed through an Excel sheet and analysed through SPSS and manually.

I managed to collect data from 109 people. I first gathered data from the online survey to analyse a broader sample of females and males. This was done to test any incongruences between the two genders to better support the results of the female oriented interviews and to be able to better justify those results.

The online survey was shared on SurveySwap.io, an online website that provides the respective researcher with respondents in exchange of their response for the respondents'

survey. I described the dissertation topic in order to attract the right respondents, however, without using gender descriptive pronouns. The survey was online from the 28th of July until the 10th of September of 2022.

I also shared the online survey on Instagram stories, shared with acquaintances of mine from the Gym that have an Instagram account, from the University, on WhatsApp and WhatsApp varied groups as well, and fitness communities on Instagram despite there being no close relationship with most of the surveyed people. The survey was also available to take on Facebook's feed and through a Facebook group of a fitness community created by Gymshark.

5.3.1. Online survey

The reason behind the use of these specific questions (*Attachment 4*), was to analyse the correlation between being fit, following fitness influencers on Instagram and also to study the correlation between the latter and purchasing fitness apparel in order to identify what type of impact fitness influencers have on Instagram users and if being fit has any correlation to purchasing fitness apparel or not. In sum, specific categories can be identified. The first being the gender, followed by social media, Instagram, by physical activity, following fitness influencers on Instagram, relationship with fitness influencers, fitness influencers' Instagram pages, sponsored products, fitness apparel purchase and timeframe (how often people purchase it), fitness apparel brands and the last being age.

5.3.2. Sampling

The adequate sample size is correlated to the inhabitants of a capital city like Lisbon. Although respondents from the survey are both national and international, the following statement serves as a guideline. Currently there are 2.986.000 people living in Lisbon, as of 2022, and the population is increasing each year (macrotrends, 2021). This year only there was an increase by 0,47% since 2021. Taking this into consideration, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin error of 5%, there need to be at least 385 respondents for the survey to be singly reliable. Despite the mere 109 respondents, I combined this data with individual interviews in order for them to be able to support the survey's information and explore further why participants decide to follow fitness influencers so that their impact can be fully studied.

For the sampling of the online surveys I decided to include both the participation of females and males in the online surveys to get a broad understanding of what active people value and if and how fitness influencers connect to their followers. By including both genders, the data has more validity and more veracity when compared to single individual interviews of females only, which also can aid in identifying gender discrepancies and thus gender specific interests in the fitness community.

5.3.3. Individual interviews

In order to better compare and sustain results, five random selected individuals participated in semi-structured interviews. Despite being randomly selected participants, for better exploring the relationship between the influencer and the follower, the participants were selected from local gyms, a university (UCP- Universidade Católica Portuguesa) or online fitness communities while fitting to specific criteria. Criteria for the selection of these are established further along in this section. The aim, here, was to select and transform the respondents that correspond to the criteria mentioned further on, in interviewees. This technique is to ensure that the selection of respondents is not personally selective or biased (Gerhard, 2008) in order to then be able to conduct interviews with those respondents that do correspond to the selected variables.

The questions of the interview (*Attachment 5*) were defined to complement the online surveys as questions like these are difficult to analyse through an online survey due to non-verbal communication that can transmit cues as to how consumers feel when they reveal anything. Non-verbal communication is a form of communication (Burgoon et al., 2021; Mehrabian, 2017; Phutela, 2015;) and should not be disregarded.

I wanted to connect the way fitness apparel makes these consumers feel to how fitness influencers make them feel and see if there is any connection between the two. Also, I wanted to see if there is any correlation between the fitness influencers these different people follow to the online surveys. Nonetheless, the most key aspects were that of analysing feelings and how they felt towards fitness influencer marketing and of fitness apparel brands. In addition, I included the athleisure trend (question 9, *Attachment 5*) in order to compare interview responses to that of the online surveys (responses of the correlation of ‘always’ buying activewear despite ‘never’ working out). Moreover, with the last question I could make the participants self-reflect on how they let themselves impact or not by influencers

and compare it with the responses they gave to how they feel towards fitness influencers. The interview's questions' objective is to probe extensively the way fitness influencers, fitness apparel and their brands make interviewees feel.

5.3.4. Sampling strategy

Respondents and interview participants are female and between the ages of 18 and 29. Five interviewees were selected for a brief 30 minute interview. The interview was conducted in the interviewees' native or second language which was either Portuguese, English or German. The interviews were either held through a Zoom meeting or in real life as most participants' schedule and location did not allow for the interviews to take place without the mediation of screens.

Further on, respondents fitting to specific criteria were selected for the interviews. The criteria were the following:

- - Active
- - Fitness/bodybuilding enthusiasts
- - Consumption of fitness apparel
- - Follow, used to follow or check on fitness/athlete influencers on Instagram regularly
- - Know about Gymshark or other fitness apparel brands and/or regularly consume their apparel (since Gymshark is a niche and arising brand known for promoting the fitness and bodybuilding lifestyle)

The following items from the literature review were taken into consideration for the conversation held in interviews:

- Social Media (Instagram and YouTube)
- Influencer Marketing (only Posts since reels cannot be replicated in a written document)
- Fitness Apparel (qualities)
- Consumer Needs

It was essential to use these same items that I also explored in my literature review to prevent any bias from happening in establishing questions for interviewees which was also applied by a similar study by Zhou et al (2017).

I lead individual 30 minute interviews in the respondent's language preference (such as Portuguese, German or English which was later translated and transcribed into English;

similar answers and completely distinct answers were also highlighted). The interviews were held in the 5th, 12th, 16th and 18th of August and on the 17th of September of 2022.

One interview was held in person and the other four, due to location and time constraints of the participants, via Zoom. Interviews were held between August and September of 2022. The interviews were held with women who regularly work out to explore the relationship between influencers and their followers who purchase activewear and to test whether fitness influencer's marketing of fitness apparel on Instagram has a positive impact or negative impact on consumer purchases. Moreover, in the interviews, I decided to explore both the influencer and the brand's relationship with the consumer as they may be perceived differently by the consumer or not and it is imperative to highlight these findings.

Nonetheless, I selected different types of consumption patterns to better test the relationship between fitness influencer marketing on Instagram and consumer purchases. This is to say that the interviewees ranged from women that purchase active wear regularly, every month and others every year. I decided to implement these criteria since including different patterns of consumption could better test if the relationship with the influencer had any type of influence on their fitness apparel consumption.

The first woman I interviewed, person A, as a reference, 23, is a portuguese female working-student in the social media marketing department of a brand and works out 5/6 times per week. She usually buys workout clothes every month or whenever there are new trends online. She admits her consumption habits depend. She can remain two to three months without purchasing any apparel.

The second interviewee is a German girl, person B, who is 24, a preschool teacher, works out 4 times a week and likes doing Yoga and meditation as well. She buys fitness apparel one to two times per year.

The next woman I selected was a 25 year old Hungarian woman, person C, works and studies at the same time and works out 4-6 times a week. She works with disabled people and has recently completed her certification as a personal trainer. C buys fitness clothes every three months but if she likes something a brand comes out with, she will buy it. However, not right now, she admits that prices have risen too much for her to be able to purchase every activewear trend.

The fourth woman that was selected is a Portuguese working girl from a local gym in Lisbon, Portugal. Person D, 25, working in informatic technology, works out 4 times a week and

buys quality activewear only when she needs it. This means that her clothes need to be ripped for her to buy new fitness apparel. This usually means every couple of years.

The last respondent, person E, age 27, a Portuguese resident, works out 5-6 times a week and buys fitness apparel three or four times a year. She happened to also raise interesting questions and point of views.

5.3.5. Data measurement and analysis

I recorded the four interviews and transcribed the conversation between the moderator, which was me, and the participant, always ensuring objectivity and not giving my own opinion before their answer. After transcribing all the interviews into a word document, I selected similar opinions and diverting ones with specific coloured highlights on Word while maintaining the participants' anonymity and gathering data into one unique text. Due to the small quantity of participants, this data collection technique was plausible and speedy.

5.3.6. Categories

Before data was collected and analysed, categories were defined. Literature review toppings that were previously defined, such as social media, influencer marketing, Instagram, fitness apparel and consumer needs are present in the codification of the followed categories. In addition, from collected data during interviews, new categories emerged, which were equally analysed. Below, the detailed categories and sub-categories ensue:

I. Reasons to follow fitness influencers on Instagram

In this category lie all and only female interviewees that mention a specific reason to following a fitness influencer.

a. Personality

In this subcategory, are all the participants included that mentioned the influencer's personality or lifestyle as a means of differentiation from other fitness influencers or other activewear advertisements not divulged by influencers that made them want to keep up with that influencer and purchase activewear.

b. Content

Here, anyone that mentions fitness influencers' content on social media for being the reason or one of the reasons for following fitness influencers, is included.

c. Lifestyle and health

In this subcategory are all participants included that mention lifestyle and/or health as one of the reasons behind following fitness influencers.

d. Field of Fitness/Bodybuilding

Here, is anyone included that mentions being interested in the field of fitness or bodybuilding and makes comments suggesting so.

e. Scientific content

In this subcategory is anyone included that mentions influencers' scientific content as one of the main reasons behind following or keeping up with fitness influencers.

f. Motivation

Here, every consumer of fitness apparel that mentioned fitness influencers are motivational, is included.

g. Inspiring

In this subcategory, are all the participants included that reveal influencers inspiring them is their motivation behind following them.

h. Role Models

In this subcategory is anyone included that refers directly or indirectly that they perceive influencers as role models.

i. Knowledgeable

In this subcategory is everyone included that refers influencers as being knowledgeable hence why they follow or keep up with fitness influencers.

j. Being Real and Relatable

Here, is anyone included that mentions indirectly or directly that the influencers they follow are real and human, relatable and that is something very positive.

k. Genuineness

In this sub-category, any participant demonstrating indirectly or directly the influencer is genuine is included.

l. Workout exercise ideas and performance tips

In this subcategory, are encompassed, all participants that reveal workout exercise ideas and performance tips are one of the main factors for following fitness influencers.

m. Interaction with the follower

Here, anyone that references the interaction of the fitness influencer with their follower as being something they value when following fitness influencers, is included.

n. Persuasion

In this subcategory, are all people included that admit to being persuaded or almost be persuaded by influencers to buy an item.

II. Instagram usage

In this category, are all women included that use social media around their areas of interest.

a. Areas of interest

In this subcategory is anyone included that reveals to using Instagram for their area of interest whether it be for traveling, fitness, food, fashion etc.

b. Entertainment

In this subcategory is anyone included that admits to using Instagram for entertainment purposes.

c. Boredom

Here, is anyone included that reveals using Instagram due to boredom.

d. Motivation

In this subcategory are the participants included that use Instagram for motivation or an extra nudge.

e. Inspiration

In this subcategory are the participants included that use Instagram for inspiration in all fields.

f. Daily routine

In this subcategory, all participants that vocalize using Instagram because it is part of their daily routine, are included.

g. Keeping up with Influencers

Here, are all participants included that mention using Instagram for keeping up with fitness influencers, following them and interacting with them either passively by watching their content and/or actively by commenting on their posts and reels and replying to their stories.

h. Social Relationships

Here, are all the participants that use Instagram for interacting with acquaintances, friends or family and to know what their up to in their daily lives.

i. Communication

This subcategory is comprised of the participants that reveal they use Instagram for communicating their personality and lifestyle with others.

j. Sharing Personality

Here, is any participant that revealed using Instagram for sharing their personality with others.

III. Fitness Apparel's consumption

In this category, all participants that purchase activewear for specific reasons are included.

Needs

In this subcategory are all participants included that reveal wearing fitness apparel for their individual needs.

a. Consumerism

In this subcategory is anyone included that admits directly or indirectly to being a high- consumption consumer.

b. Performance

Here, is anyone included that reveals, indirectly or directly, purchasing activewear for the basis of it enhancing or aiding with their athletic performance.

c. Athleisure

In this subcategory are all participants included that wear fitness apparel on a daily basis outside the gym.

d. Design and fits

Here, are all participants included that reveal purchasing specific fitness apparel due to innovative and new designs and proper garment fits to the body.

e. High Quality material

In this subcategory are all participants included that perceive activewear to have high quality and it being a reason for purchasing.

f. Comfortable

In this subcategory are all participants included that admit to buying activewear that is comfortable.

g. Price

In this subcategory are included all participants that reveal the price makes a big difference on their purchasing decision.

h. Different occasions

Here, anyone that admits to purchasing different types of fitness apparel for different occasions or moods, is included.

i. Confidence

In this subcategory are all participants included that declared that purchasing and wearing new fitness apparel makes them feel good and confident.

j. Motivation

Here, are all participants included that vocalized motivation to keep a fit and healthy body as being one of the factors for buying new activewear.

k. Relationship of fitness apparel with fitness influencer

In this subcategory, all consumers that present a relationship between purchasing fitness apparel and an influencer, are included.

l. Fitness influencers as reviewers of fitness brands

Here, anyone that admits or insinuates to having purchased fitness apparel from fitness brands based on the influencer's review of the apparel, is included.

m. Fitness influencers' weight on purchasing decision

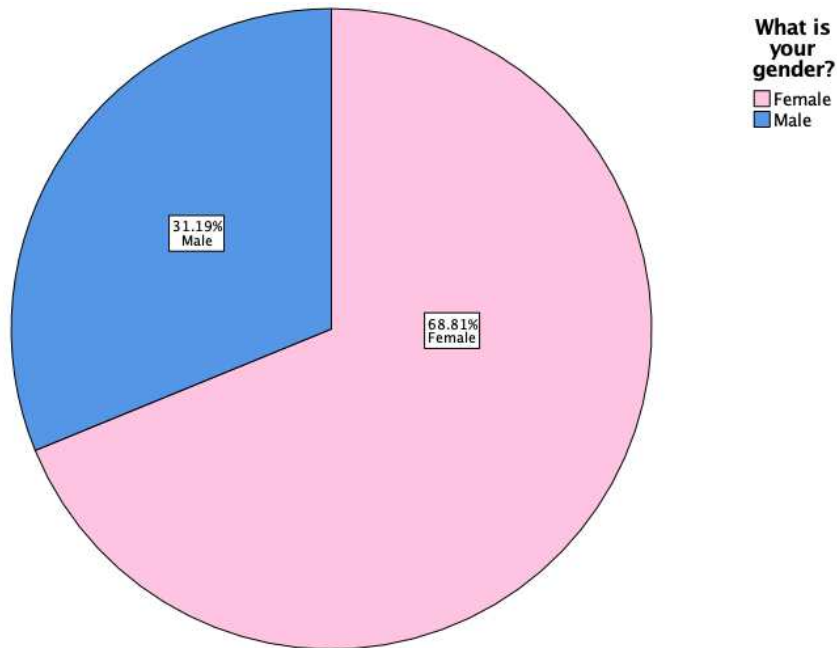
In this subcategory, anyone that reveals that they consider fitness influencer's opinions when making a purchasing decision, is included.

6. Data Results

6.1. Online survey

The data that characterize the respondents were obtained through the questions surrounding gender (*question 1, attachment 4*), age (*question 9, attachment 4*) and social media use (*question 2, attachment 4*). Data surrounding the respondents' connection to fitness influencers were also collected through questions four until six. This connection was fully probed through five individual interviews that will be analysed further ahead.

Graph 1 - Gender



Source- SPSS

Through the data analysis, it is possible to notice that the majority of the respondents are female (68,81%) instead of male (31,19%) although there is still a substantial number of male respondents.

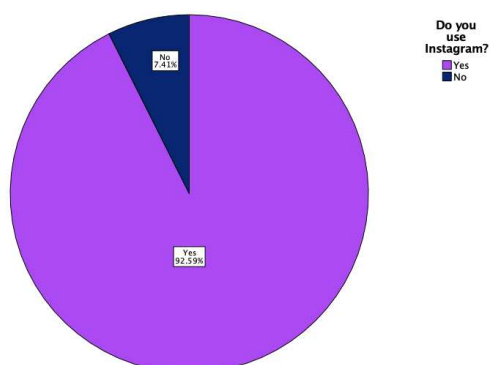
Table 1- Age

		Count	Column N %
How old are you?	18-25	58	53.2%
	26-30	25	22.9%
	31-40	18	16.5%
	41-50	6	5.5%
	51-59	2	1.8%
	60+	0	0.0%

Source: SPSS

When it comes to the age, despite there being respondents of almost all age groups (excluding the 60+ category), most respondents (53,2%) are between the age of 18-25 years of age. Consecutively, the age group of 26-30 year olds with 22,9%, 31-40 year olds with 16,5%, 41-50 with a mere percentage of 5,5% and 51-59 year olds with a very small percentage of 1,8%. Thus, it is possible to deduce from the data that more than half of the participants are between the ages of 18-23 and most are 30 or less years old.

Graph 2- Instagram Usage



Source- SPSS

With most participants using Instagram 92,59% with a deviation of 7,41% and with the previous reviewed literature, it can be said that in today's age, people turn to the use of social media to satisfy their needs which will be delved into, in the 'Discussion' section.

Table 2- Crossing age with physical activity

		How old are you?											
		18-25		26-30		31-40		41-50		51-59		60+	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you workout?	Yes	50	86.2%	23	92.0%	15	83.3%	5	83.3%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%
	No	8	13.8%	2	8.0%	3	16.7%	1	16.7%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%

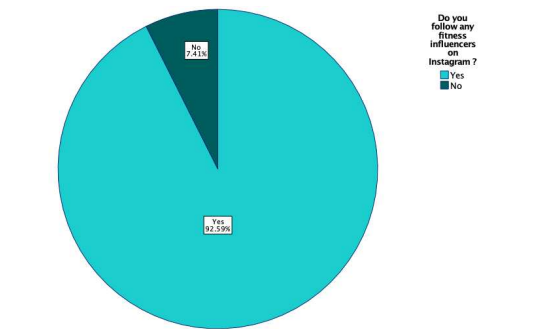
When crossing the data of the age variable and that of being active, one could identify that they are correlated. The tendency verified here is that people in the age group of (18-25) with presumably students with a 13,8% "No" answer do not find the time to workout due to their busy schedule and other priorities that lack financial stability to join a gym or a sport institution. For the 31-40 year old group with a 16,7% deviation, the situation is similar. This is usually the age when people start building a family of their own with children that takes time from their already very busy schedule. The 41-50 group are at the peak of their career and most likely also do not feel motivated and understand the benefits of working out. Last but not least, the 26-30 year old group is the group that is less career focused, financially stable and do not face the novelty of building a family.

Table 3- Crossing Instagram usage with physical activity

		Do you workout?			
		Yes		No	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you use Instagram?	Yes	89	95.7%	11	73.3%
	No	4	4.3%	4	26.7%

Interestingly, data reveal that, there is in fact a strong correlation between Instagram usage and physical activity, with 4,3% answer to not using Instagram from people that are active versus a 26, 7% "No" answer from people that do not work out.

Graph 3- Following fitness influencers



This graph demonstrates that the majority of people follow fitness influencers on Instagram (92,9%) with a slight deviation of (7,41%) that do not follow fitness influencers on Instagram.

When it came to the open-ended question: “Which influencers do you follow? (If you do not follow any fitness influencers, please specify)”, the most common answers were grouped by myself. Female respondents follow mostly Krissy Cela, Brittany Lupton, Hanna Oeberg, Libby Christensen, Whitney Simmons, Blogilates, Denice Moberg, Savanna Wright, Megan Grubb and @naturallystefanie (Attachment 9) which happen to be macroinfluencers some of them sponsored by considerable fitness brands such as Gymshark and others having their own brands (Instagram, 2022).

And, curiously, for males, Chris Bumstead was the most common fitness influencer to be followed, another Gymshark athlete (Attachment 9).

Table 4- Crossing frequency of physical activity with following fitness influencers on Instagram

		How often do you work out?											
		Never		Once a week		Twice a week		Three to four times a week		Five to six times a week		Everyday	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	4	26.7%	5	45.5%	13	68.4%	24	80.0%	21	77.8%	5	100.0%
	No	11	73.3%	6	54.5%	6	31.6%	6	20.0%	6	22.2%	0	0.0%

This table supports the previous interpretation that people who work out turn to Instagram fitness influencers to satisfy their psychological needs that will be delved into, further in this section. For instance, the majority of people who answered that they never workout, do not follow fitness influencers by 73,3%. In comparison to people that workout five to six times

a week, only 22,2% revealed that they do not follow any fitness influencers. The trend here is that the percentage of not following fitness influencers decreases the more people workout or the percentage of following fitness influencers increases the more people work out.

The reasons why people follow these influencers are the following (Attachment 6): due to Algorithms, apparel reviews, workout tips, authenticity, personality and hard work and discipline, for motivation and confidence, for being plus-size, inspirational mentally and through outfits, for meal ideas, workouts, positive messages towards society's standards, fitness content and knowledge, to aid in performance as a fitness instructor, due to an interest in bodybuilding, to see their fitness journey over the years, for being vulnerable with followers by sharing insecurities, their energy and style, for being funny, relatable, real or realistic with genuine advice, for being strong, and being transparent with body image and editing online, for sharing their daily life, being pretty, reliable, being a Gymshark athlete, juggling being a mom and working out, for being professional coaches, open about steroids use, posing, being interesting and flashy (Attachment 6).

However, the most common reasons for following influencers, which were repeated by the individual respondents, were being motivational, inspiring, in order to get great workout tips and meal ideas, outfit inspiration and reviews, for being relatable, their personality and being or having been a Gymshark athlete and to ultimately follow their journeys or lifestyle and being positive overall (Attachment 6).

Despite these uplifting reasons to follow influencers, a lot of people choose to not follow influencers and merely people they know outside of Instagram, two of the reasons were the fact of influencers not being trustworthy and some promoting anything just to profit in cash (Attachment 6).

Table 5- Influencers transmit a positive aura X Following fitness influencers on Instagram

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers -
Influencers transmit a positive aura

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	2	2.7%	4	5.4%	17	23.0%	32	43.2%	19	25.7%
	No	5	14.3%	7	20.0%	15	42.9%	6	17.1%	2	5.7%

People that do follow fitness influencers are rather consent with this statement by 43,2% or strongly agree with it by 25,7% while people that do not follow fitness influencers are either neutral by 42,9% or , disagree (20,0%) or strongly disagree to this affirmation (14,3%).

Table 6- I feel a deep connection with influencers X Following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – I feel a deep connection with influencers

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	14	18.9%	19	25.7%	22	29.7%	14	18.9%	5	6.8%
	No	19	54.3%	10	28.6%	5	14.3%	1	2.9%	0	0.0%

Surprisingly, data reveals that people that follow fitness influencer are rather neutral (29,7%), disagree with this affirmation (25,7%) or strongly disagree (18,9%) despite data being more spread out and reaching the agreement level (18,9%) in comparison to the responses of people that do not follow fitness influencers. People that do not follow fitness influencers revealed an even more negative response to this statement, 54,3% strongly disagreeing with this statement, 28,6% disagreeing, 14,3% being neutral while only one person answered “4”.

Table 7- Influencers are more than a brand x following fitness influencers on Instagram

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – Influencers are more than a brand

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	2	2.7%	13	17.6%	15	20.3%	27	36.5%	17	23.0%
	No	10	28.6%	11	31.4%	8	22.9%	5	14.3%	1	2.9%

The next variable of this Likert scale also exposed the torn answers towards this statement. People that do follow fitness influencers’ answers lie more towards number three (20,3%), four (36,5%) and five (23,0%) meaning that these people agree or strongly agree to this statement with a minority being more neutral (number 3) or disagreeing to this statement (17,6%).

In contrast, people that do not follow fitness influencers present expected responses. The majority selected number two from the spectrum (31,4%) meaning that they do not agree with this statement, a considerable number strongly disagreeing (28,6%) and some being neutral to this statement (22,9%).

Table 8- Influencer credibility X following fitness Influencers on Instagram

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – I consider influencers credible											
		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	5	6.8%	15	20.3%	23	31.1%	23	31.1%	8	10.8%
	No	12	35.3%	7	20.6%	12	35.3%	1	2.9%	2	5.9%

Most people that do not follow fitness influencers, do not find them credible or are rather neutral to this affirmation (35,3%), with 35,3% of the respondents, that do not follow these influencers, strongly disagreeing with this statement and 20,6% disagreeing with this affirmation. Conversely, 31,1% of the people that do follow fitness agree to this statement, 10,8% strongly agreeing despite there being a substantial amount of people disagreeing 20,3% and 6,8% strongly disagreeing with this statement.

Table 9- Influencer trust X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – I trust influencers											
		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	6	8.1%	12	16.2%	31	41.9%	20	27.0%	5	6.8%
	No	15	42.9%	11	31.4%	6	17.1%	2	5.7%	1	2.9%

Results show that, again, alike the credibility variable, trusting influencers is not generally agreed upon, revealing that even more respondents that do follow fitness influencers are rather neutral to the statement “I trust influencers” (41,9%) than that of the credibility variable, above, which was 31,1% (Table 8). Although some followers trust influencers (27,0%) or strongly agree to this statement (10,8%), the tendency is to be neutral for fitness influencers’ followers and to be negative for non-followers. Almost half, of the non- fitness influencers’ followers strongly disagree to this statement (42,9%), a good amount disagrees (31,4%) and a smaller amount are neutral (17,1%), leaning thus on the lower, negative side of the Likert scale.

Table 10- Influencer Reliability X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – I consider influencers very reliable											
		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	3	4.1%	23	31.5%	26	35.6%	18	24.7%	3	4.1%
	No	13	38.2%	10	29.4%	8	23.5%	2	5.9%	1	2.9%

Here, respondents that follow fitness influencers present rather a neutral response (35,6%) or a disagreement or strong disagreement towards this affirmation (35,6%) with a small minority (28,8%) agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement. For the non-followers, again, the response is mostly negative (57,6%) towards this affirmation.

Table 11- Sense of Belonging X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers - Influencers give me a sense of belonging

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	15	20.3%	19	25.7%	21	28.4%	14	18.9%	5	6.8%
	No	17	48.6%	7	20.0%	5	14.3%	4	11.4%	2	5.7%

Here, responses seem to be rather neutral and a little positive towards the variable of a sense of belonging (54%) than negative (46,0%) for fitness influencers' followers. The tendency for non-followers, remained the same, rather negative (68,6%).

Table 12- “Influencers are like friends to me” X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers - Influencers feel like friends to me

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	27	37.0%	18	24.7%	9	12.3%	14	19.2%	5	6.8%
	No	22	62.9%	6	17.1%	2	5.7%	4	11.4%	1	2.9%

The vast majority of followers disagree with this statement (61,7%) meaning that for them, their relationship with the influencers is not that of a friendship, despite some remaining neutral (12,3%) and some positive towards this affirmation (26%). For non-followers, the tendency of the answers was negative (80%) despite some neutral (5,7%) and even positive responses (14,3%).

Table 13- “Influencers offer honest advice that brands can sometimes not” X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers - Influencers offer honest advice that brands can sometimes not

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	3	4.1%	14	18.9%	22	29.7%	23	31.1%	12	16.2%
	No	12	34.3%	8	22.9%	5	14.3%	5	14.3%	5	14.3%

Almost half of the followers agree that influencers offer honest advice that brands can sometimes not (47,3%), 29,7% were neutral in relation to this statement with 23% disagreeing to it. Nonetheless, more than half of the non-followers disagree with this assertion (57,2), 14,3% are neutral, while some agree to it (28,6%).

Table 14- “I would be interested to buy fitness influencers’ recommendations X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – I would be interested to buy fitness influencers' recommendations

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	6	8.2%	15	20.5%	13	17.8%	25	34.2%	14	19.2%
	No	14	40.0%	9	25.7%	6	17.1%	4	11.4%	2	5.7%

Here, the trend is somewhat different. More than half of the followers agree to this utterance (53,4%) while 28,7% disagree and 17,8% are neutral. As a consequence of not following influencers, non-influencers are not interested in buying influencer’s recommendations (65,7%) although 17,1% are interested and 17,1% are neutral.

Table 15- “I really identify with fitness influencers” X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – I really identify with fitness influencers

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	10	13.5%	22	29.7%	20	27.0%	18	24.3%	4	5.4%
	No	21	60.0%	7	20.0%	5	14.3%	2	5.7%	0	0.0%

Only 29,7% of the followers agree with this statement, 27% are neutral and 43,2% disagree with this statement.

The trend of the non-followers also takes place in this variable. 80% disagree with this assertion, while solely 5,7% agree and 14,3% are neutral.

Table 16- Giving motivation to work out X following fitness influencers

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – Fitness influencers motivate me to work out

		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	4	5.4%	10	13.5%	11	14.9%	27	36.5%	22	29.7%
	No	17	48.6%	7	20.0%	3	8.6%	5	14.3%	3	8.6%

The majority of the people that follow fitness influencers agree to this statement (66,2%) while 14,9% remain neutral and 18,9% disagree. Again, the majority of the people that do

not follow fitness influencers, disagree with this utterance (68,6%), while 22,9% agree and 8,6% remain neutral, revealing a correlation between following fitness influencers with them giving follower motivation to work out.

**Table 17- “I recommend the fitness apparel I bought from fitness influencers’ referral”
X following fitness influencers**

On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers – I recommend the fitness apparel I bought from fitness influencers’ referral											
		1		2		3		4		5	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	10	13.5%	10	13.5%	16	21.6%	22	29.7%	16	21.6%
	No	20	58.8%	8	23.5%	4	11.8%	2	5.9%	0	0.0%

The last variable of the Likert scale was WOM of the fitness apparel from followers, which fitness influencers promote. More than half of the fitness influencers’ followers (51,3%) disclose that they do recommend this apparel from the influencer’s eWOM on Instagram, followed by 27% that do not recommend the fitness apparel promoted by fitness influencers and 21,6% that are neutral towards this affirmation. Once more, 82,3% of the non-followers do not recommend fitness influencer’s divulged fitness apparel, followed by 11,8% neutral responses and 5,9% conforming to this declaration, evidencing that there is a correlation between following fitness influencers and recommending their fitness apparel.

Table 18- ‘What do you find most appealing on Influencer’s pages?’

What do you find most appealing on Influencers' pages? Stories	What do you find most appealing on Influencers' pages? Posts	What do you find most appealing on Influencers' pages? Reels	What do you find most appealing on Influencers' pages? Highlights
Stories Count	Posts Count	Reels Count	Highlights Count
65	55	39	7

The next question with the options: Stories, Posts, Reels, and Instagram Highlights, revealed that people prefer each category in a descending order, meaning that Stories are the most appreciated between surveyed people and Highlights, the least. ‘Stories’ was selected 65 times whereas Highlights was selected only 7 times.

‘Why is that more appealing to you?’ was the followed question, in order to understand the correlation between the stories and posts being the most selected categories from the four

displayed ones. Despite the pertinent question, there was no option to select ‘none’ for those that do not use Instagram to select which might have biased results and thus these results might not correspond one hundred percent to the outcome, despite stories still being the favourite of an Influencer’s Instagram page.

Participants selecting ‘Stories’ as their favourite category of Influencers’ Instagram, exposed the reasons to be the following: “I see what they are doing live- I feel more close with them”, they are more personal and the respondents believe them more than edited posts as they confess. Moreover, they feel as though the influencer is speaking to them, stories are, more engaging, interactive and appealing, facilitate seeing outfits and reviews of online only sold products, not as scripted as posts, display moving graphics, more relatable and realistic and last but not least, they are quick to see and less time-consuming (Attachment 7).

Regarding posts, people revealed that they are: easy to read and ‘digest’, one can save them to read later because they are permanent, exhibit workout tips and diet tips quickly, are inspirational and are a complete type of publication that allows for more detailed information (Attachment 7).

Despite this information, some people were affirmative in the statement that they prefer YouTube over Instagram and that it is more informative than Instagram (Attachment 7) which might be something to consider.

Table 19- Buying sponsored products X following fitness influencers

		Do you buy sponsored post's products?			
		Yes		No	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	34	45.9%	40	54.1%
	No	2	5.7%	33	94.3%

The next question (question number 6.2) demonstrated that more than half of the participants that follow fitness influencers do not buy sponsored products (54,1%) even though some, in fact, purchase these (45,9%). Even less people in the group of the non- fitness influencers buy sponsored products (5,7%) while most do not (94, 3%).

The reasons people disclose for buying sponsored products were analysed manually. Respondents revealed influencers make the products look appealing, help followers

visualize how it will look on them and thus they want to buy it, give a good analysis or review from the perspective of someone who has these needs and have references for comparison. The activewear looks like good quality and fitness influencers also give out helpful taste recommendations. Moreover, these people trust in the content fitness influencers produce so therefore trust their judgement of the quality of the product and the discount code makes them decide on a final purchase. In addition, these respondents admit to buying sponsored products because of the brand 'Gymshark' or simply liking the brand, product and due to feeling inspired by fitness influencers. These people also admit to buying what they need, want, what is useful for them. Another trend marked in this response was the fact that if influencers are transparent about it being an ad, then participants are more likely to trust the recommendation. Another reason for buying sponsored products was merely that of curiosity of wanting to try the item. On top of this, the item being on sale was also a strong motivator for the purchase of sponsored products.

Despite these answers, still more than half of the participants do not buy sponsored products (54,1%). The most common reasons for that are amongst respondents are:

not needing it, not trusting the influencer since it is not an honest review since, it is sponsored which means paid and thus is misleading. One example, a participant uttered that fitness influencers show the best and most comfortable clothes to work out while creating a connection with their audience. In addition, more common reasons are due to these being expensive, an example for this is products coming from the USA, they prefer doing their own research, sometimes through YouTube, and not wanting to/ no interest in buying these products in general.

Table 20- working out X buying fitness apparel

		Do you workout?			
		Yes		No	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you purchase fitness apparel?	Yes	73	77.7%	4	26.7%
	No	21	22.3%	11	73.3%

The next question investigated if participants train, in order to be able to correlate training to buying fitness apparel and demystify or not the athleisure trend. Almost all participants that train, purchase fitness apparel (77,7%) although with the exception of a minority (22,3%). Despite not being active, a small minority does purchase activewear (26,7%), indicating that this can be a trend starting to take place in Europe.

Table 21- how often do you purchase fitness apparel X do you follow fitness influencers

		How often do you purchase fitness apparel?											
		Never		Once a year		Once every 6 months		Every 3 months		Every month		Every week	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?	Yes	14	43.8%	15	65.2%	19	82.6%	16	84.2%	9	90.0%	0	0.0%
	No	18	56.3%	8	34.8%	4	17.4%	3	15.8%	1	10.0%	0	0.0%

In order to better understand the impact of fitness influencer marketing on purchasing intention of the consumer, crossing these two variables is paramount. Results indicate that respondents that the more participants followed fitness influencers, the more they purchased activewear and the least they purchased activewear. For instance, ‘never’ for acquiring activewear and ‘no’ in regard to following fitness influencers was selected 56,3% of the times whereas following fitness influencers and purchasing fitness apparel ‘every month’ was selected 90% of the times, therefore there can be a correlation established. The correlation could also be the more one purchases, the more they follow fitness influencers, in fact, participants that do not follow fitness influencers witnessed a decrease the more constant the act of purchasing was. For example, the number of people that never buy fitness apparel (56,2%) and do not follow fitness influencers, decrease the more often the act of purchasing is, following from ‘once a year’ (34,8%) to every month (10,0%).

The last variable studied was fitness apparel brands. Gymshark, an arising brand, was recalled 46 times, followed by Nike (35 times), Adidas (26 times) and Puma (9 times). Other brands were also recalled such as Lululemon, Aybl, Prozis and more but not as often recalled (*manual analysis, SPSS, 2022*).

The most common reasons for participants to prefer those brands over others are the following:

Enhancing of physical features therefore the fit, beautiful designs and aesthetics, sense of belonging to a community, comfortable and functionable, good quality, quality versus price, long lasting, affordable, good material, nice colours, ethics/sustainability, good customer service and trustworthiness (*Attachment 8*).

For a reminder, the most preferred brands are: Gymshark, Nike, Adidas and Puma, by order. The most followed influencers are Krissy Cela, Brittany Lupton, Hanna Oeberg, Libby Christensen, Whitney Simmons, Blogilates, Denice Moberg, Savanna Wright, Megan Grubb and @naturallystefanie (*Attachment 9*). For males, it was Chris Bumstead.

Participants that selected ‘Gymshark’ as one of the main brands they recall, also selected the corresponding influencers such as Whitney Simmons who is currently sponsored by Gymshark and Krissy Cela who was previously sponsored by Gymshark, the same goes for Hanna Oberg and the remaining most mentioned influencers.

For contrast, in terms of the least mentioned influencers, one participant that recalled Grace Beverley, the founder of T/ALA, also recalled this influencer’s brand.

Other influencers such as @kk_fit_ , sponsored by Gymshark, Pe Science was also recalled, another brand, they are affiliated with, as well, which offer supplements.

The last question analysed the reason why fitness influencers’ followers prefer the brands they mentioned over others. The results demonstrated overall that there is a correlation between working out and purchasing fitness apparel. Discarding the notion of athleisure for most European people. Most people followed fitness influencers on Instagram, again, supporting the correlation between the latter and being fit. Also, between being fit and purchasing activewear and being more enthusiastic and motivated around the subject of fitness or at least wanting to become more motivated either through fitness influencers or by purchasing fitness apparel.

6.2. Interviews

Categories	Mentions
Reasons to follow fitness influencers	44
Instagram Usage	17
Fitness Apparel’s Consumption	57
Total	118

Table 22- Score on all items of all categories.

Source: self-designed

Table 22 presents all selected categories as being relevant to this research and contain the number of registries which adds up to a total of X mentions. The category with the greatest numbers of registries is ‘Fitness Apparel’s Consumption’ (57 mentions). The category that

followed is ‘Reasons to Follow Fitness Influencers’ (44 mentions) and ‘Instagram Usage’ (17 mentions).

All mentions of categories and subcategories are accumulated due to the fact that in this research the focus is the consumer as a whole and not the individual consumer. In order to understand fitness influencers’ impact on the consumer, the broader spectrum needs to be probed in order to be able to particularize results into a single stereotypical consumer of fitness apparel.

Consecutively, categories and subcategories are single-handedly analysed to better understand the mentions from the interviewees.

Subcategory	
Reasons and consequences of following fitness influencers	Mentions
Personality	1
Content	1
Lifestyle and health	1
Field of Fitness/bodybuilding	4
Scientific content	1
Motivation	8
Inspiring	4
Role Models	2
Knowledgeable	2
Being Real and Relatable	9
Genuineness	1
Workout Tips, Performance and Ideas	4
Interaction with the follower	1
Persuasion	2
Discount Codes	2
Inclusivity	1

Total	44
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Table 23- Score on items of “Reasons and consequences of following fitness influencers” category.

Source: self-designed

The category ‘Reasons and consequences of following fitness influencers’ is made up of 16 subcategories from which 7 are pre-established and 9 constructed from collected data- the subcategory ‘Lifestyle and Health’, ‘Field of Fitness’, ‘Scientific Content’, ‘Role Models’, ‘Knowledgeable’, ‘Interaction with the follower’, ‘Persuasion’, ‘Discount Codes’ and ‘Inclusivity’. In this category we can find a total number of 44 mentions. The subcategory ‘Being Real and Relatable’ (9) and ‘Motivation’ (8) displayed the most mentions out of all subcategories.

Interviewees referred to the subcategory of ‘Being Real and Relatable’ as indirect or direct mentions such as:

- “meaning that its content that it’s not always ‘perfect body’ , show more” (Attachment A)
- “ but I think they have to humanize it even more and you showing your human side, which is a little bit contradictory, end up gaining more credibility from people. (Attachment A)
- “ it looks more like she was really in the gym like you and I and just took a photo.” (Attachment B)
- “ and maybe people we-will stop idolizing them so much and just- see the things that are relatable? Yeah, I like that when- when you can see that they are real people with ral- real, problems but still give you like a little bit of an extra push or motivation or if they are really good at something-. (Attachment C)
- “ I feel like when you know something about them, it can as small as “oh they have a cute dog” or “Oh, yeah... they adopted a cat or something like that. It makes them - more human-“ (Attachment C)
- “It’s really- a raw picture and it’s not just a photoshoot.” (Attachment C)
- “For example, I know that Krissy Cela had a heart issue, needed to be operated on – she, uh...shared uh... all of the process, from going to the operating room, the recover and therefore she showed that besides the pretty side of social media that

is to show pose X and Y and show how the abdominal is pronounced, that she has an enormous glute, she also showed uh...a scar from post-surgery, a gradual increase in weight, a nutrition, in some way, unregulated uh..." (Attachment E)

- "It's... a distant- oh what's the word- not friend, someone you know. It's more comforting" (attachment C).
- "Ah, yes. I'm currently at the gym and am taking a photo and am writing something pleasant beneath it." (Attachment B)

In addition, Interviewees referred mostly to this to subcategory as direct mentions of "Motivation" such as:

- "They can either give me motivation on those days where I'm feeling good" (Attachment A)
- "They motivate me." (Attachment B)
- "Eh... one, because yes, again, for the motivation" (Attachment B)
- "and also as a motivation, I think I said it already" (Attachment B)
- "So- it's motivating." (Attachment C)
- "They can bring (...) sometimes some motivation (Attachment D)
- "The posts that they publish, with certain motivational texts eh...in some way, force me like to...get up from the couch and think- okay, like... let's train like, stop being lazy, let's do this and...and...like- it's one hour of training, it's no big deal, the day has 24h, so...you can do it." (Attachment E)
- "transmits a good and motivational energy" (Attachment E)

Subcategory	
Instagram Usage	Mentions
Areas of interest	3
Entertainment	1
Boredom	1
Motivation	2
Inspiration	3
Daily routine	1

Keeping up with influencers	0
Social Relationships	4
Communication	1
Sharing Personality	1
Total	17

Table 24- Score on items of “Instagram Usage” category.

Source: self-designed

The category ‘Instagram Usage’ is made up of 10 subcategories from which 5 are pre-established and 5 constructed from collected data- the subcategory ‘Entertainment’, ‘Boredom’, ‘Daily Routine’, ‘Communication’ and ‘Sharing Personality’. In this category we can find a total number of 17 mentions. The subcategory ‘Social Relationships’ (4), ‘Inspiration’ (3) and ‘Areas of Interest’ (3) displayed the most mentions out of all subcategories.

Interviewees referred to the subcategory of ‘Social Relationships’ as indirect or direct mentions such as:

- “I also use it to peek into other’s lives.” (Attachment A)
- “I also catch up with friends there. I mostly use it to keep track of friends” (Attachment C)
- “What I use is to mainly follow (...) people I really want to know what they are up to in their life.” (Attachment D)
- **“So, you use it for sharing your life with others, areas of interest, socializing and knowing what people are up to?”**

Yes, although with the notion that Instagram is not an accurate representation of real life.” (Attachment E)

Interviewees mentioned the subcategory “Inspiration” in a direct way, such as:

- - “a form of inspiration in all aspects like clothes, places, exercise, everything” (Attachment A)
- “for inspiration, motivation and boredom (laughs)” (Attachment B)
- “I mostly use it to (...) use some inspo from others.” (Attachment C)

In addition, interviewees referred to the subcategory of ‘Areas of Interest’ as indirect or direct mentions such as:

- “a form of inspiration in all aspects like clothes, places, exercise, everything” (Attachment A)
- What I use is to mainly follow things of my interest (Attachment D)
- **“So, you use it for sharing your life with others, areas of interest, socializing and knowing what people are up to?”**

Yes, although with the notion that Instagram is not an accurate representation of real life.” (Attachment E)

Subcategory	
Fitness Apparel’s Consumption	Mentions
Needs	5
Consumerism	3
Performance	2
Athleisure	10
Design and fits	5
High Quality material	1
Comfortable	9
Price	4
Different occasions	2
Confidence	5
Motivation	8
Fitness influencers as reviewers of fitness brands	1
Fitness influencers’ weight on purchase decision	2
Total	57

Table 25- Score on items of “Fitness Apparel’s Consumption” category.

Source: self-designed

The category ‘Fitness Apparel’s Consumption’ is made up of 13 subcategories from which 7 are pre-established and 6 constructed from collected data- the subcategory ‘Needs’, ‘Performance’, ‘Comfortable’, ‘Different Occasions’, ‘Fitness influencers’ weight on purchase decision’. In this category we can find a total number of 57 mentions. The subcategory ‘Athleisure’ (10) and ‘Comfortable’ (9) displayed the most mentions out of all subcategories. Nonetheless, ‘Motivation’ (8) ‘Needs’ (5), ‘Design and fits’ (5) and ‘Confidence’ (5) combined revealed, to also have a big impact on participant’s choice for consumption or how they perceive and feel while wearing fitness apparel, as well.

Interviewees referred to the subcategory ‘Athleisure’ as following indirect or direct mentions:

- “I think it’s good. I think that it’s like a-all of my dreams come true to go out (feeling) comfortable, therefore, I don’t have anything to point out. I love it.” (Attachment A)
- “ can be worn daily and as a... daily jacket” (Attachment B)
- “I find it cool, like, like I only run (laughs). I basically only run around in fitness clothes.” (Attachment B)
- “Well, it’s really like that, well... yes, I find it cool.” (Attachment B)
- “So, sportchic is how I would rather describe my style, yes.” (Attachment B)
- “I mostly wear gym clothes” (Attachment C)
- “When I’m out- I don’t know. Sometimes I’ll- go shop in my gym-clothes” (Attachment C)
- “Yeah... yeah, that’s what I like. It can- follow and pass as a, I don’t know, crab-croptop or like bralette or something.” (Attachment C)
- “I adopted the- habit. Sometimes, people look at me like I’m- weird.” (Attachment C)
- “A top and shorts or leggings doesn’t necessarily mean that it is correlated to the gym” (Attachment E)

In addition, participants mentioned the second most mentioned subcategory ‘Comfortable’ as indirect or direct mentions such as:

- “there are clothes that make me more comfortable than others” (Attachment A)
- “Well, comfortable.” (Attachment B)
- “Ah, it is so comfortable” (Attachment B)
- “My bras that I wear are mostly sportsbras and – because, comfortable.” (Attachment B)

My trousers that I'm currently wearing, most of the time, are sporty trousers (giggles) **(giggles)** because, comfortable" (Attachment B)

- "I think that everyone uses activewear at home to be more comfortable" (Attachment E)

- "Uh.. what I think is that as long as one feels comfortable, it can be worn casually or like to... to go run or to go train" (Attachment E)

- "I don't think it's a trend but yes what really makes you feel comfortable, wearing." (Attachment E)

- "Yes, if it leaves people comfortable at homes and they are not active, why no still buy it?" (Attachment E)

7. Discussion

To reiterate, my objectives for this dissertation were to reveal the considerable impact fitness influencer marketing has on consumer behaviour: such as attitudes, purchasing intention and finally on decision making (where consumers rule out brands from others and the act of purchasing.), to demonstrate the importance of fitness influencer marketing for brands, to illustrate how influencers are their own brand and how their persuasiveness is linked to being credible, trustworthy, having integrity, interacting with the consumer, being relatable, inspiring and motivating unlike brands who struggle to be convincing or trustworthy enough for the consumer to purchase their products, in this case, fitness apparel., and to understand whether being fit was, at all, correlated to the need for external motivation and of being stylish through matching or non-matching workout outfits when it came to the purchase of activewear, and if people choose to wear fitness apparel not mainly for working out but daily.

7.1. Research objectives

An analysis of the research results was made according to previously defined objectives by using collected data from the online survey and interviews.

A. Fitness influencer marketing has an impact on consumer behaviour such as attitudes, purchasing intention and on decision making.

Data reveal that, there is, in fact, a strong correlation between Instagram usage and physical activity, with 4,3% active people answering to not using Instagram versus a 26, 7% “No” answer from people that do not work out (Table 3). This indicates that, people feel inspired or motivated to work out due to seeing fitness posts of fit people on Instagram (Al-Eisa et al., 2016; Chaudhary & Dhillon, 2022; Peng et.al, 2019) hence, their attitude is changed based on what they see on Instagram or, better, the fitness influencer doing. Moreover, it is decisive to correlate the brands that participants prefer to the influencers they follow, in order to understand if the most mentioned brands have any correlation to the most followed fitness influencers, in order to understand if their eWOM has had any impact on the brand recall and thus decision making of their followers. Looking back to the open-ended

question: “Which influencers do you follow? (If you do not follow any fitness influencers, please specify)”, the most common answers were mostly Krissy Cela, Brittany Lupton, Hanna Oeberg, Libby Christensen, Whitney Simmons, Blogilates, Denice Moberg, Savanna Wright, Megan Grubb and @naturallystefanie (Attachment 9) which happen to be macro-influencers. Some of them are sponsored by considerable fitness brands such as Gymshark and others having their own brands (Instagram, 2022). And, curiously, for males, Chris Bumstead was the most common fitness influencer to be followed, another Gymshark athlete (Attachment 9). For instance, it seems the brands that participants prefer, are correlated to the fitness influencers that they follow which promote them on their Instagram pages. For instance, Krissy Cela, a fitness influencer who posts regularly on Instagram, has now her own brand, ‘oneractive’ and Hebe Hiom is an influencer that is associated with that same brand (Instagram, 2022). The participant who mentioned the latter two influencers and that does not follow other fitness influencers, who work with Gymshark, could only recall this brand, whom Krissy Cela and Hebe Hiom are affiliated with (Attachment 8; Attachment 9). This most likely has to do with the perceived value of a brand, generated by fitness influencers. The word of mouth and advice that these influencers give out tends to raise the value of the fitness product in question, which, in turn, initiates a purchasing intention regarding the recommended brand (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

Moreover, fitness influencers are mostly successful in generating a sense of belonging for their followers through their content. This could be due to the specificity of their content, their content being motivational (66,2%) (Table 16) and inspirational (Table 18; Attachment 6). By constructing a sense of belonging to a fitness community through motivational and inspirational content, fitness influencers are able to instigate a response and decision making from followers (Farivar & Yang, 2022).

Additionally, fitness influencers remain successful in recommending products and initiating a purchasing journey by 53,4% (table 14). Followers also reveal to be pleased with their purchase, recommended by fitness influencers by 51,3% (table 17) since they themselves, also recommend it to their peers (51,3%). Nonetheless, fitness influencers can become even more successful if they work on their parasocial relationship with their followers and try to be more relatable and create a sense of belonging through their content production (Abidin

& Ots, 2016; Belanche et al., 2021; Farivar & Yang, 2022) by being personal, realistic, and relatable^{*16} (Table 18).

B. The importance of fitness influencer marketing for brands.

As a deduction from the collected data, Instagram users, besides preferring to follow macro fitness influencers although with some exceptions, and after a manually analysis of the Qualtrics survey, prefer the brands these influencers are associated with (Juhlin & Soini, 2018).

As stated before, one survey participant recalled ‘Oner Active’ since she follows influencers associated with that fitness apparel brand such as Krissy Cela, a fitness influencer and the founder of Oner active and Hebe Hiom, another fitness influencer. This, generates a purchasing intention to that specific brand and a decision making, by ruling out other brands from the one fitness influencers use on a daily basis, making fitness influencer marketing a valuable asset for fitness brands. Moreover, it is hard for brands to feel like a friend like one participant stated it is important for her^{*17} since their social media page is not a person but a brand thus it is harder for them to individually humanize their brand or generating relatability that human beings are able to convey (Table 23). This means that the only way to create a parasocial relationship with consumers and to ‘get to their heart’ is by paying for a human brand, influencers (Ki et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2022; Malik et al., 2022). Brands are not able to be relatable like fitness influencers are because brands do not have the daily struggles and challenges that influencers face (Attachment C). In addition, brands cannot generate a community as easily around fitness like influencers can since for participants, throughout the survey and interviews, seeing the influencers perform the work out exercises and explaining them is not only beneficial for their knowledge (Attachment C and D) and to acquire new workout ideas (Attachment B; Attachment 6.) (a reason behind following them on social media) but also, participants admit to liking to be visually stimulated by the act itself of training. For example, participants admitted to liking seeing motivational pictures

¹⁶ “but I think they have to humanize it even more and you showing your human side, which is a little bit contradictory, end up gaining more credibility from people.” (Attachment A); “Yeah, I like that when- when you can see that they are real people with real- real, problems” (Attachment C); “I feel like when you know something about them, it can as small as “oh they have a cute dog” or “Oh, yeah... they adopted a cat or something like that. It makes them - more human” (Attachment C); “it looks more like she was really in the gym like you and I and just took a photo.” (Attachment B).

¹⁷ “It’s... a distant- oh what’s the word- not friend, someone you know.” (Attachment C).

and posts, seeing cute outfit ideas (Attachment A; Attachment 6; Attachment 7) and seeing the influencers live on stories due to its relatable nature (Attachment 6) which brands cannot replicate without a human being.

Asides from 'being relatable' being the most mentioned subcategory in the category "Reasons and consequences of following Fitness Influencers", in the interviews, the reason behind why survey participants follow fitness influencers (Attachment 6) is due to, "real advice", "realistic people with genuine advice", "addressing challenges of real life towards society standards" and "I think they are relatable, funny and inspiring" (Attachment 6). It is safe to presume that brands cannot achieve or replicate these findings as they do not have a realistic insertion into the fitness community like fitness influencers do as they cannot physically work out, motivate followers and be relatable in consumer's daily life. Brands are merely able to transmit values through storytelling (Diaz & Garcia, 2016) and must manage, nurture and control brand equity and that does not single-handedly entail transmitting core values but a conjunction of various factors that generate brand equity (Kapferer, 1994), such as fitness influencer marketing, while managing its effectiveness like Kapferer (1974) suggests through other means of the brand which raise brand equity. Hence, brands in itself are limited when it comes to promoting this call-to-action that influencers seem so able to do. For instance, the results of Table 7 ("Influencers are more than a brand" x "Following fitness influencers") bring to light that some people do form a type of connection that is more than brand-consumer, specifically those that do follow fitness influencers, hence why it is easier for fitness influencers to be persuasive in comparison to brands. Nonetheless, successful brands on social media like 'Control Portugal' seem able to achieve a proximity with their audience on Instagram due to their relatable nature and brand personality characteristic (Attachment 10) which, fundamentally, mimics the traits of a person or, in this case, a fitness influencer. The next objective enlightens the motive of how influencers are able to raise this brand equity, brand recall and how they influence consumer's decision making.

C. Influencers are their own brand and their persuasiveness is linked to being credible, trustworthy, having integrity, interacting with the consumer, being relatable, inspiring and motivating unlike brands who struggle to be convincing or trustworthy enough for the consumer to purchase their products.

The fact of more than half of the respondents that do not follow fitness influencers on Instagram strongly disagreeing with the statement of fitness influencers being more than a brand (table 7), has most likely to do with the fact that people that do not follow fitness influencers only recognize their job description and do not allow themselves to get to know them ‘personally’ and possibly feel associated with them through their relatability (Table 23) motivational and inspirational content, as previously mentioned (Table 16;18 & Attachment 6). Also, even the possibility of creating a para-social relationship with them is ruled out since they do not decide to keep up with them and thus do not think, generally, that they are more than a brand.

People that do follow fitness influencers’ answers lie more towards number three (20,3%), four (36,5%) and five (23,0%) meaning that these people agree or strongly agree to this statement with a minority being more neutral (20,3%) or disagreeing to this statement (17,6%) (Table 7), revealing that fitness influencers are not a brand but a brand of themselves (Thomas & Fowler, 2023), a human brand (Ki et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2022; Malik et al., 2022). What fitness influencers sell is their motivational and inspirational content through their community building (Noonan, 2018) making fitness apparel merely an additional product of their brand.

Conversely, 31,1% of the people that do follow fitness influencers agree to them being credible, 10,8% strongly agree, despite there being a substantial amount of people disagreeing 20,3%, and 6,8% strongly disagree with this statement (Table 8). As a consequence, table 8 and 9 indicate that fitness influencers need to work on improving their credibility and trust towards their audience to have an even bigger influence on their followers or audience. In fact, there are studies that explain how the fitness influencer can gain their consumer’s trust and how it impacts the relationship with their follower. Studies reveal that trust is more fundamental than expertise and that having integrity and interacting with followers aids in the build of that trust (Balaban & Mustăţea, 2019; Baranow, 2019; Leung et al., 2022; Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020). As a

corroboration to these studies, one interview participant, C, revealed that, in fact, for her, fitness influencers interacting with her is paramount “I try to follow people that interact with others” (Attachment C). In addition, trust mediated the the impact of expertise and authenticity (Kim & Kim, 2021) and as a consequence, the effectiveness of the product advertising (Schouten et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021).

Nonetheless, Table 13 demonstrates that almost half of the followers agree to influencers offering honest advice that brands can sometimes not (47,3%), 29,7% were neutral in relation to this statement with 23% disagreeing to it. Despite there being only a rather neutral trust amongst fitness influencers’ followers (41,9%), the honest advice, in fact, does reveal a trustworthy character amongst fitness influencers in follower’s eyes. Thus, for brands it is easier to build this trust trait that followers inherently look for by adding fitness influencers to their marketing strategy. To illustrate, the online survey revealed that people that already work out, turn to Instagram for inspiration or motivation to carry on with their active lifestyle in the response to ‘Why do you follow fitness influencers?’ in the online survey (Attachment 4) and ‘Why do you use social media, specifically Instagram?’ (Attachment 5). Using Instagram for a specific need is also correlated to the uses and gratification theory from Katz and Blumler (1974). People turn to social media and services to fulfil a need they have. Here, it is the search for motivation and inspiration that boost workout adherence (Attachment 6; Table 3) amongst survey and interview participants (Sokolova & Perez, 2021). Motivation, workout ideas and knowledge, inspiration and gym outfit posts and reviews were the most common answers between survey and interview participants of this study. By looking to fulfil their needs, consumers start to trust more fitness influencers than before as it becomes part of their daily lives (Attachment A, B, C, D and E). Therefore, brand-influencer collaboration when compared to non-collaboration increases the performance of the brand (Bauer et al., 2002; Wielki, 2020) as the most effective advertising has shown to be that which is intertwined with followers or consumers’ lives (Abidin & Ots, 2016). In this case, through the usage of fitness influencers which looks and is seamless (Abidin & Ots, 2016). Influencer reliability seems to be even more low for followers than credibility (Table 10). Here, respondents that follow fitness influencers present rather a neutral response (35,6%) or a disagreement or strong disagreement towards this affirmation (35,6%) with a small minority (28,8%) agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement. This illustrates, despite fitness influencers offering honest advice and being credible, followers do not consider

influencers very reliable meaning that they believe them (credibility) but they do not fully trust them (reliability). As previous literatures reveals, trust is fundamental. This lack of trust could be due to the association of influencers with paid products or advertisement since they admit to not buying sponsored products (54,1%) (Table 19), making their followers question the veracity of the influencers' reviews in those cases with sayings such as "Because I feel that is not a really advice" or "don't trust some product as it can be for promotion" and "if it is sponsored, it is advertisement. Not honest review" (Attachment 11). Participants consider their advice, nonetheless, with an exception to sponsored products, honest (Table 13). The reason for followers not liking sponsored products' posts or promotions is due to the fact that they start believing the influencer's product opinion is driven merely by commercial purposes, has been, and will always be which decreases influencer credibility, thus trust, as an information source for their audience (Belanche et al., 2021). Therefore, it is preferable, for fitness influencers, to not admit it is sponsored content and intertwine it with their daily lives (Abidin & Ots, 2016; Belanche et al., 2021) fundamentally through storytelling (Farivar & Yang, 2022) despite of the ethics concerns this can make surface for followers regarding the omitting of a paid advertisement.

Although there is this generated confusion of not feeling fitness influencers are close them, to the followers, like a friend would be (Table 12), Table 11 displays, candidly, a sense of belonging from followers.

Followers reveal the stories to be the most appealing feature on an influencer's page (Table 18). Following this statement, they reveal this to be due to their personal, realistic and relatable nature because of unedited, and live video clips of fitness influencers. To reiterate that of the results section, stories are also more engaging, interactive, and appealing, facilitate seeing outfits and reviews of online only products, are not scripted such as posts, exhibit moving graphics, and are less time-consuming (Attachment 7). Nevertheless, Influencers need to work on establishing a friendship with their followers since most of their followers do not consider them as 'friends' (61,7%), perhaps demonstrating a lack of a parasocial relationship due to lack of interaction that could onset more purchasing intentions from followers (Table 12) (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Lin et al, 2021). Also, being active and exercising more by seeing fitness influencers work out on social media (Sokolova & Perez, 2021) provides the follower with a sense of belonging to a fitness community (Table 11; 16;

18, Attachment 6). This successively facilitates the decision-making process and thus could further ahead generate a purchasing intention (Farivar & Yang, 2022).

Having this in mind, a population may be motivated by either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation which differs amongst individuals (Egli et al., 2011|). For instance, results from the online survey revealed that respondents that are physically active are mostly younger 18-25 (53.2%), 26-30 (22,9%) and 31-40 (16.5%) than older due to probably being more enthusiastic, motivated and energetic surrounding the topic. This, most likely, has to do with different motivations for different ages, as well (Egli et al., 2011|). For instance, studies show that men are more motivated to train intrinsically by strength, competition and challenge and women extrinsically by weight management, and appearance (Egli et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2014). In addition, younger females prefer to be motivated to work out extrinsically (Al-Eisa et al., 2016; Durau et al., 2022;) through Instagram likewise for males when they see fit people's bodies on Instagram, usually influencers', the so-called 'fitspiration' (Peng et al., 2019).

Once again, surrounding relatability, for interviewees, the prominent reasons to follow fitness influencers are for 'Being Real and Relatable' and for 'Motivation'. Throughout the interviews, consumers admitted to preferring influencers that are not the definition of perfection^{*18} but rather have their daily struggles and challenges that make them more able to identify with (Abidin & Ots, 2016; Belanche et al., 2021; Farivar & Yang, 2022) which goes hand in hand with their inspirational content from the results of the online survey (Table 18; Attachment 4; Attachment 6). Fitness influencers' followers, in the online survey, also reveal preferring fitness influencers' Instagram stories on account of their personal, realistic and relatable nature due to unedited, and live video clips. Thus, it can be inferred that consumers prefer fitness influencers to be real, relatable, essentially, a version of themselves, online, which are able to promote a sense of belonging for followers (Table 11), (Abidin & Ots, 2016; Belanche et al., 2021; Farivar & Yang, 2022). Moreover, the interviews also illustrated more mentions of 'Inspiration' (3) in the category 'Instagram Usage' than the other 8 subcategories of 10 which also signals a significant importance of being inspiring, as well as in the online survey results (Table 18; Attachment 6). When mentioning inspiration in the interviews and online survey, the exact word or the conjugation of the word

¹⁸ "meaning that its content that it's not always 'perfect body', show more" (Attachment A).

was always used by participants therefore identifying its prominence and thus its value for consumers.

Ultimately, followers follow fitness influencers for being relatable, real, honest (Table 13) and disclosing motivational and inspirational content, all resulting from the online survey's and interviews' answers.

Additionally, surveyed people revealed that they buy sponsored products for specific reasons and that there is a correlation between buying sponsored products and following fitness influencers (Table 20). The more fitness influencers people followed, the more they bought their sponsored products.

The reasons for buying these sponsored products are listed as follows. For them, the activewear looks like good quality and fitness influencers also give out helpful taste recommendations, they trust their judgement of the quality of the product and the discount code makes them decide on a final purchase.

These people also admit to buying what they need, want, and what is useful for them. Another trend marked in this response was the fact that if influencers are transparent about it being an ad, then participants are more likely to trust the recommendation. Moreover, the curiosity of wanting to try the item, most likely generated by the promotion of the fitness influencers, and the item being on sale or having a discount code was also a strong motivator for the purchase of sponsored products.

Similarly, the interviews disclosed that the most mentions of fitness apparel by participants are the easiness of wearing it not only for the gym but for feeling comfortable and for motivation. In the interviews, participants disclosed that fitness apparel fits nicely, has a beautiful design, interesting colours and, most important of all, they feel good about themselves and confident when wearing it and more motivated to go work out. For instance, one interview participant said that she decided to wear fitness apparel often because it makes her feel confident^{*19}. Moreover, another participant also revealed that besides confidence,

¹⁹ "I could wear the same thing over and over again but it makes me feel good- and powerful" (Attachment C).

wearing fitness apparel makes her feel more motivated to go the gym^{*20} (Attachment A, B, C, D, E; Attachment 6).

Some interviewees revealed some interesting aspects when it comes to athleisure and comfortability. They referred to athleisure as “cool”^{*21} and practical^{*22}. In addition, they referred to fitness apparel being comfortable enough to wear it daily^{*23} or at home^{*24}. Thus, athleisure is starting to hold its importance in the fitness industry sector. Notwithstanding, ‘motivation’ was also a big factor, for interviewees, when it came to deciding to buy activewear, as they not only feel more confident but also motivated with a beautifully designed piece of apparel.

²⁰ “It makes me feel more motivated...because it makes me feel beautiful because I feel confident eh...therefore, in some way, ends up giving a motivation and an extra push so that...I can achieve...ehm...better results” (Attachment E).

²¹ “I find it cool, like, like I only run (laughs). I basically only run around in fitness clothes.” (Attachment B).

²² I mostly wear gym clothes” (Attachment C).

²³ “My bras that I wear are mostly sportsbras and – because, comfortable” (Attachment B).

²⁴ “I think that everyone uses activewear at home to be more comfortable” (Attachment E).

8. Conclusion

In the beginning of this dissertation, it was crucial to contextualize social media, specifically Instagram, in order to understand how fitness influencers leverage this social network to their advantage. It was also important to understand this audience and how online advertising differs from traditional advertising besides user's sensory experience, social and psychological needs present that lead to the use of this app and the unique social media perks such as interactivity, for example, that are valuable for brands in order to be able to identify consumers' needs and desires. Moreover, communication and consumer behavior on this app also allow to better establish a consumer-brand relationship. Also, it was determinant to identify why social media holds a considerable relevance for brands. Factors influencing this relevance include the easiness of generating brand awareness and a consumer brand resonance. This, means that on Instagram, brands are able to intensely and actively participate in a relationship with the consumers which can translate into brand equity due to the nature of an existing of a valuable long-lasting relationship with the consumer. Nonetheless, this relationship presents its challenges with the competition between brands fighting for consumers' attention loyalty, marketing 4.0, and the short Gen Z attention span. The best way to break this barrier is through influencers, social commerce and e-commerce since the covid-19 pandemic that pushed online shopping to its peak , through Instagram. It presents multiple tools that facilitate the spread of messages through Instagram Stories, posts, highlights and the newest addition, reels which is similar to TikTok's interface.

In fact, findings from the online survey reveal that, Instagram is a great tool to generate brand awareness since 92,59% of surveyed people use Instagram. People turn to social media and services to fulfil a need they have. Here, it is the search for motivation and inspiration (Attachment 6; Table 3). In addition, there is in fact a strong correlation between Instagram usage and physical activity (Table 3). Moreover, the audience's attitude towards exercise and the influencer is also changed based on what they see on Instagram or, better, the fitness influencer doing. This means that the visual stimulation of watching influencers work out on Instagram posts, stories and other tools, influences consumers to work out besides the building of a fitness community by influencers. By looking to fulfil their needs, consumers start to trust more fitness influencers than before as it becomes part of their daily lives

(Attachment A, B, C, D and E). All these factors contribute to a purchase intention when recommended fitness apparel by consumers (Table 17).

Furthermore, Fitness influencer eWOM is related to brand recall and equity. Fitness influencers present the enhancing of the physical features thus the fit, beautiful designs and aesthetics, sense of belonging to a community for participants, comfortable and functional aspects and good quality of the apparel, quality versus price, being long lasting, affordable, having a good material, nice colours, being ethical and sustainable and trustworthy through eWOM and apparel reviews on Instagram and YouTube according to survey and interview participants. In addition, when fitness influencers offered a discount code or the item was on sale, survey and interview participants were more willing to buy the sponsored or promoted apparel.

Nonetheless, in order to achieve all of this through their eWOM, fitness influencers had to share personal, inspiring and motivational content. This allows them to be able to give their opinion or influence consumers without sounding like they are selling a product but rather a lifestyle, so to say, an immaterial product. They remain successful in recommending products and initiating a purchasing journey by 53,4% (Table 14). Followers also reveal to be pleased with their purchase, which was recommended by fitness influencers, by 51,3% (Table 17) and they themselves, also recommend it to their peers (51,3%). Brand equity generated by influencers is thus through a sense of belonging 54% through motivational and inspirational content that influences decision-making. Not only is their content one of the main aspects of why influencers are so successful, however, there is something more to this. Fitness influencers manage to be relatable (Table 23) and a human brand making it difficult for brands to raise brand equity by themselves making influencer marketing in general essential for raising brand value and equity. In addition, brands cannot generate a community as easily around fitness like influencers can. They perform the workout exercises and explain them showing they are knowledgeable which was one of other determinant factors for following influencers and to acquire new workout ideas for participants. Terms such as “real advice” “realistic people with genuine advice” “addressing challenges of real life towards society standards” (Attachment 6) were constant throughout survey responses and interviews. Despite human beings currently living in an information abundant era with several brand options, consumers are still looking for closeness despite everything.

For followers, fitness influencers are more than a brand (56,8%), Table 7, making them more persuasive than brands. Table 13 demonstrates that almost half of the followers agree to influencers offering honest advice that brands can sometimes not (47,3%), are credible, despite there being more of a lack of trust or unsureness amongst consumers with (41,9%) (Table 9) neutrality in comparison to credibility (31,1%) (Table 8). Thus, findings reveal that influencers' reliability is lower than credibility. This lack of trust is due to sponsored products with sayings such as "if it is sponsored, it is advertisement. Not honest review" (Attachment 11). In this case, consumers start believing the influencer's product opinion is driven merely by commercial purposes, has been, and will always be which decreases influencer credibility. Notwithstanding, the more fitness influencers people followed, the more they bought their sponsored products. The reasons for this are on account of the apparel's good quality and fitness influencers also give out helpful taste recommendations and followers trust their judgement of the quality of the product.

Moreover, the relevance of micro-influencers was displayed. Micro-influencers show themselves to be relevant due to their community building, authentic content and consequentially their higher engagement rate.

If a brand has the objective of reaching an audience in a specific geolocation, for example, if it is a national brand or they simply just want to relate to their consumers on a deeper level then selecting micro-influencers for their highly relatable content is the solution. They have the unique ability to target niche audiences effectively that have until now been unreachable. Further on, the impact of influencer marketing was studied which determined that influencers, in an information abundant era, utilize a form of stealth marketing. This type of advertising is not obvious and 'in your face'. In addition, they are competent enough to implement a decision-making factor in the minds of consumers. This is, to make their target audience rule out other non-sponsored and irrelevant brands to the influencer's profit from the consumer's mind. How they achieve this is by virtue of determining consumer behaviour through their eWOM of the product, workout ideas, outfit inspiration and motivational, inspiring, and relatable video clips. Besides this initial impact, influencers can influence a purchase intention by changing or amplifying the consumer's attitude towards advertising and the product also through their content or eWOM while contributing as a tool for conveying convincing messages.

Hence, what influencers sell is their content, making fitness apparel merely an additional product of their human brand. The most important attributes for female consumers regarding fitness apparel is most and foremost the fit. A well-fitted garment contributes to their confidence and comfort when wearing it which also eases movements and prevents fabric from gathering or tying up. Even though the fit is important for female consumers, they often buy rather what they need, want and what is useful for them as a combination from the results of this study. If influencers are transparent about it being an ad, then participants are more likely to trust the recommendation. The curiosity to try the apparel item is most likely generated by the promotion of the fitness influencers.

Although both genders use activewear casually, female consumers are the consumers that are taking athleisure into other levels. This is due to the fact that they place more value on fashion even when it comes to looking good while working out which is a major factor influencing female consumer values and behaviour. As a matter of fact, younger people, especially females, prefer to be motivated to work out extrinsically through Instagram's 'fitspiration'.

Yet, regarding personality and emotional characteristics, wearing a specific product is a way of self-expression and that to which they want to belong to such as the values of prestige and quality that the fitness influencer and apparel conveys. Nevertheless, the most important attributes for consumers in general are stylish design, practical and functional for its purpose, the price and how brands use models to display their fitness apparel. Do brands decide to use or sponsor people that are plus size, fit, thin or with a disability. It all plays a role for the consumer but in moderation.

Moreover, in literature, consumers reveal four benefits to wearing activewear. The benefits are, mood enhancement, exercise facilitation, a healthy and active lifestyle as a consequence and a physically fit body image.

Based on findings, choosing the right influencers needs to be aligned with the brand's values in order for the message to be easily conveyed and for consumers to not feel as though they are being sold a product but rather a human relationship with- or human brand of the fitness influencer. Stealth marketing needs to be a consideration and applied to the brand's fitness influencer of choice for consumers to be more likely to buy sponsored products, the brand's products. As a conclusion, what this study demonstrates is that fitness influencers have a big impact on consumer attitude which follows into a behaviour change to work out making it

more likely for fitness influencer's relatability, motivational and inspiring content to lead more easily to a purchasing intention from consumers. And, they also are decisive in consumers' decision making when purchasing fitness apparel by excluding other brands their favourite fitness influencers are not affiliated with. Hence, this demonstrates that it is more likely that brand-influencer collaboration compared to non-collaboration increases the performance of the brand and thus increases brand equity (Bauer et al., 2002; Wielki, 2020). To conclude, fitness influencers have a tremendous impact or effect on their target audience, by influencing consumer attitude, behaviour, purchasing intention and decision-making through stealth marketing. Thus, making this type of marketing valuable for brands marketing campaigns.

8.1 Future considerations

On an ending note, in order for influencers to create a deeper parasocial relationship with consumers and thus reach more people, they need to improve their credibility and trust amongst consumers (Table 8 and table 9). Trust is more fundamental than expertise and having integrity and interacting with followers aids in the build of that trust (Attachment C) (Balaban & Mustăţea, 2019; Baranow, 2019; Leung et al., 2022; Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021). Future studies are needed in order to deconstruct how fitness influencers can build this coveted trust more easily and what different tactics to use.

8.2 Other considerations or limitations

After reviewing the survey, I have come to the realization that the formulation of this declaration (Table 15) is to some degree biased with the use of the word "really". If I had removed this word, the answers would have been more reliable and not generated any confusion amongst participants. With that being said, I have realized that most of the answers of the followers are almost evenly distributed throughout all options of the Likert scale. This means that this question cannot be considered 100% reliable.

Moreover, the question regarding what consumers prefer to see on the interface of Instagram with the options of 'stories', 'posts' and 'highlights' was biased due to exclusion of the option 'none' for the people that do not follow fitness influencers. After a manually analysis,

what came to my realization was that some of these people randomly selected one of the three options leaving room for a truer interpretation of the results concerning this question. In addition, question 7.1 of the survey (Attachment 4) was not really needed as question 7.2 already fully probed consumers consumption habits.

Last but not least, there should have been an additional question regarding 8 and 8.1. Instead of “What fitness apparel brands do you know about?” followed by “Why do you prefer those fitness apparel brands?”, it should have been made clearer that not all brands consumers recall in 8 are affiliated with the response to number 8.1. For instance, there should have been a middle ground question asking what brands consumers prefer to not generate any confusion.

Moreover, having a mixed methods study entailed more time constraints for me, the researcher, which were unforeseen.

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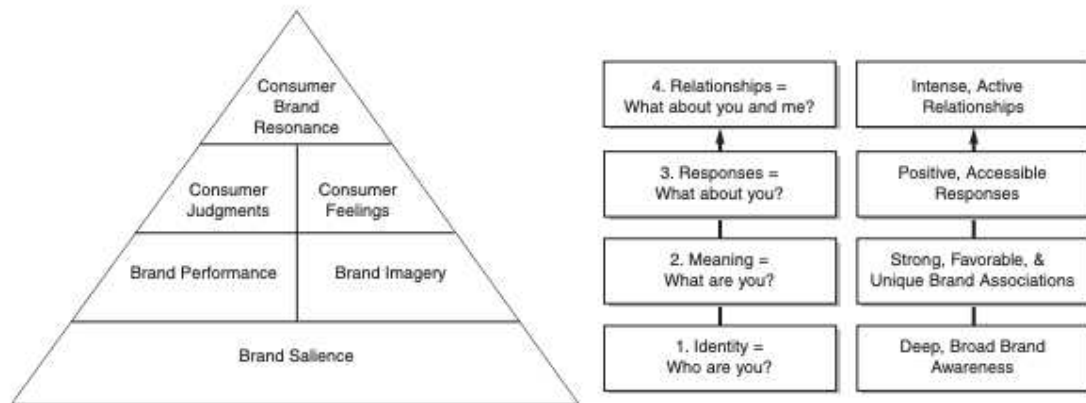
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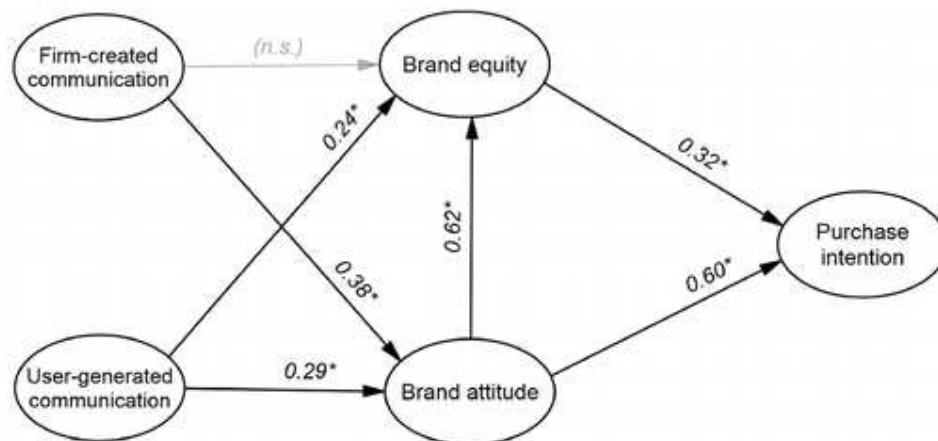
Attachments:

1. Customer-based brand equity pyramid (Keller, 2001)



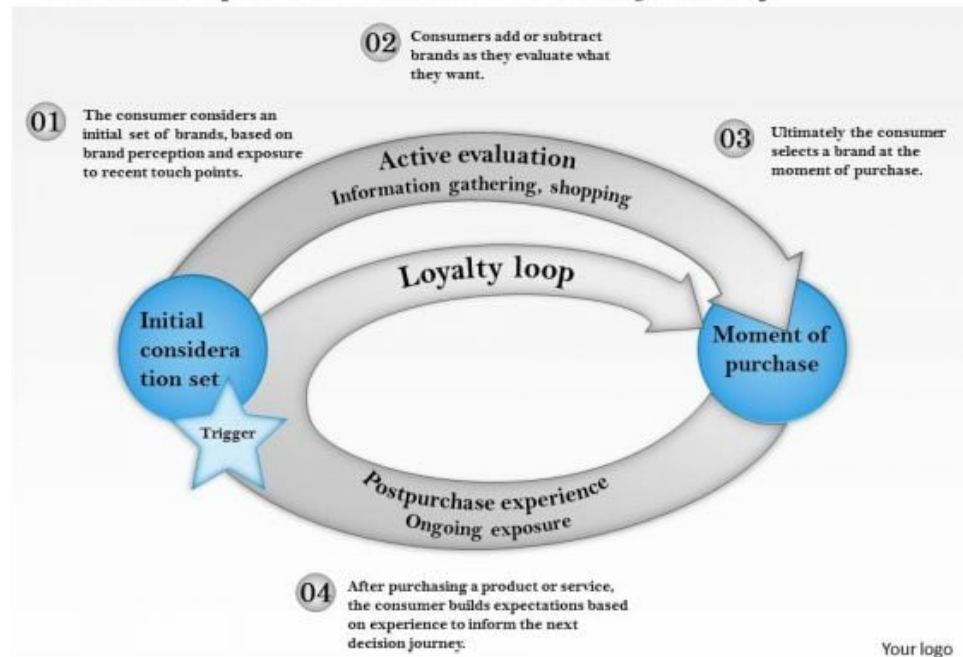
2. Purchase Intention Scheme

Figure 2 Standardized estimates for the model.



3. McKinsey's consumer journey (2009)

McKinsey's 'customer decision journey'



4. Online Survey Script

1. What is your gender?

☒ Female

☒ Male

2. Do you use Instagram? (Yes or No question)

☒ Yes

☒ No (If not, survey ends)

3. Do you workout?

☒ Yes

☒ No

3.1 How often do you work out?

☒ Never

☒ Once a week

☒ Twice a week

☒ Three to four times a week

- X Five to six times a week
- X Everyday

4. Do you follow any fitness influencers on Instagram ?

- X Yes
- X No

4.1 Which influencers do you follow? (If you do not follow any fitness influencers, please specify)

X _____

4.2 Why do you follow those influencers (If you do not follow any fitness influencers, please specify)?

X _____

5. (Likert scale) On a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, please indicate how you agree with the following statements when you think of fitness influencers

- Influencers transmit a positive aura
- I feel a deep connection with influencers
- Influencers are more than a brand
- I consider influencers credible
- I trust influencers
- I consider influencers very reliable
- Influencers give me a sense of belonging
- Influencers feel like friends to me
- Influencers offer honest advice that brands can sometimes not
- I would be interested to buy fitness influencers' recommendations
- I really identify with fitness influencers
- Fitness influencers motivate me to workout
- I recommend the fitness apparel I bought from fitness influencers' referral

6. What do you find most appealing on Influencer's pages?

- X Stories
- X Posts
- X Reels
- X Highlights

6.1 Why is that more appealing to you?

X _____ (If you do not follow any fitness influencers, please specify)

6.2 Do you buy sponsored post's products?

- X Yes
- X No

6.2.1

Why is that so? (If you do not follow any fitness influencers, please specify)

X _____

7. Do you buy sponsored posts' products?

X Yes

X No

7.1 Do you purchase fitness apparel

X Yes

X No

7.2 How often do you purchase fitness apparel?

X Never

X once a year

X once every 6 months

X every 3 months

X every month

X every week

8. What fitness apparel brands do you know about?

X _____ (If you do not recall any, please specify)

8.1 Why do you prefer those fitness apparel brands?

X _____ (If you do not recall any, please specify)

9. How old are you?

X 18-25

X 26-30

X 31-40

X 41-50

X 51-59

X 60+

5. Interview Script

1. How do fitness influencers make you feel?
2. Why do you use social media, specifically Instagram?
3. What influencers do you follow?
4. Why do you follow fitness/athlete influencers?
5. Why do you buy fitness apparel?
6. How does fitness apparel make you feel?
7. What do you think about fitness/athlete influencers promoting certain fitness apparel? (+images from influencers; Krissy Cela, figure 32, Brittany Lupton, figure 33, Hanna Oeberg, figure 34, VickyJustizfitness, figure 35, photo of a woman with prothesis legs, 36, overweight woman, 37)
8. What do you think of fitness apparel brands such as Gymshark, Alphalete, Nike, Lululemon, Womensbest, Oneractive?
9. How do you feel about the athleisure trend?
10. Do you think influencers have a certain impact on you, if yes, what type of impact?

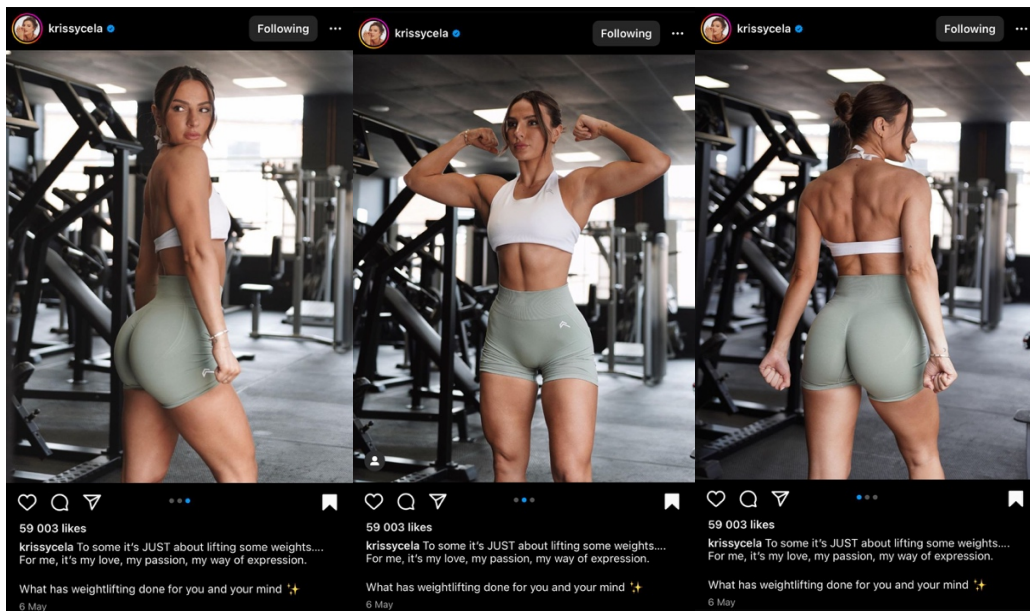


Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34

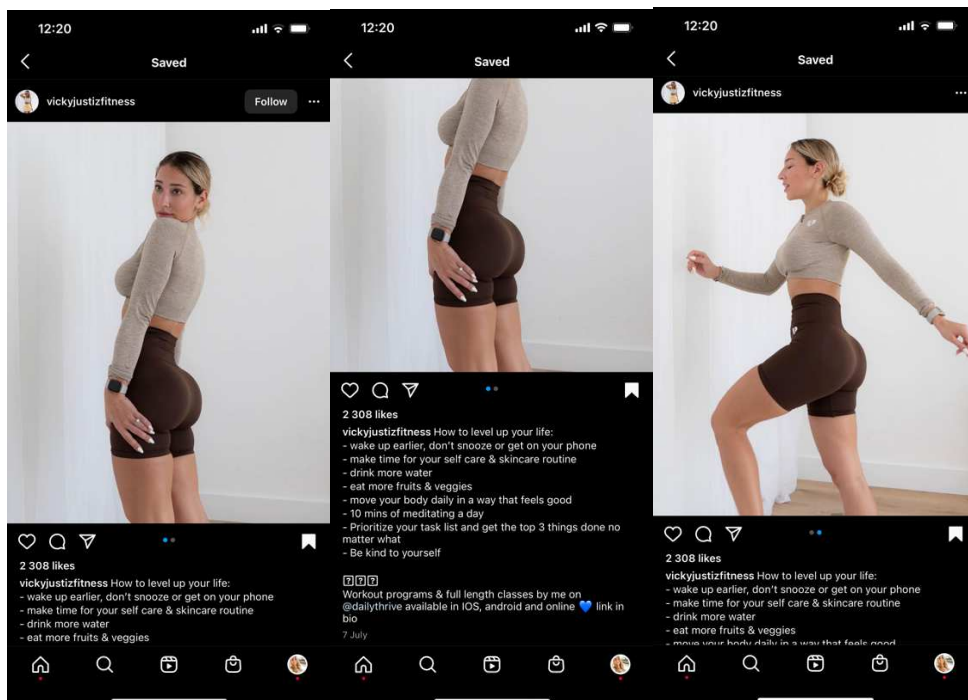


Figure 35



Figure 36

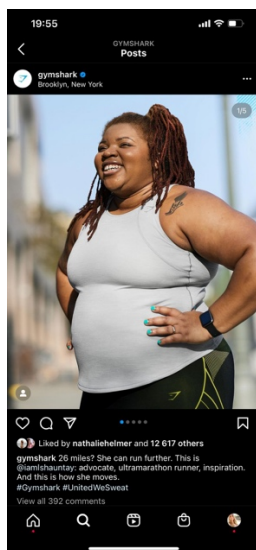


Figure 37

Transcription A.

The first respondent, A, a Portuguese female working-student , 23, revealed that she trains five to six times per week, due to her mental health and hired a personal trainer to ensure she's doing the exercises, the right way. She takes supplements such as bcaa's (Branched-chain amino acid), creatine and whey protein. She buys fitness apparel is very conscious of her money and thus purchases. She knows she really likes the expensive fitness apparel brands but will never spend a high amount of cash on that fitness apparel. She knows there are other more affordable fitness apparel brands that will do the job and admits to being a person who gets tired of things, here, fitness apparel items. She usually buys workout clothes every month or whenever there is a new trend. She admits her consumption depends. She can stay two to three months without any purchase.

Okay, so, how do fitness influencers make you feel?

So, it depends on my mood. They can either give me motivation on those days where I'm feeling good and with myself or either make me feel very down when I also feel down.

Okay, okay.

-because of the-all the stereotypes they create around the- everything that has to do with the female body.

Okay. Uhm, next question, uhm-why do you use social media, specifically Instagram?

So, I work with Instagram, with social media so it's inevitable for me to work- to check social media but I use it like – just as much as...a form of inspiration in all aspects like clothes, places, exercise, everything but I also use it to peek into other's lives.

Okay, okay. Why do you follow, no sorry, what fitness influencers do you follow?

Each time, less. What I do most of the time, them being fitness influencers or not, is not to follow them but when I feel like it, I go check their profile.

Uhum.

Meaning, I just snoop around but it doesn't appear on my Instagram feed. It's what I said in the beginning, it can generate a bit of anxiety for me, of seeing that in my-

In your feed-feed.

Okay.

So, I don't follow them, I simply just check their profile whenever I feel like it.

But then, for you, it's the same to follow them as it is to not follow them.

Exactly.

The only difference is that.

No, it's- the thing is I don't stop snooping around (their profile).

Yes.

Do you understand?-The thing is that it doesn't appear for me, I search for it.

Yes, and do you prefer it like that?

Exctly, it causes less stress.

And, do you think it has the same impact?

No, I think it would have a more negative impact if it would instantly show up on my feed.

Okay.

I could be having a really really down day, that show up and feel even worse, do you understand?

Yes.

When I go there (their profiles) maybe I know what to expect but it's different.

Okay. Okay, okay. Why do you follow fitness/athlete influencers?

I see it because I really like the field, I like to, sometimes, feel inspired – just as much for clothes as for workout exercises – for everything. You know? Since it's a field that interests me, everything that has to do with it, I like to follow. It's one of the things-imagine if I like something, whether it's fitness or whatever, I'm going to research it – and fitness is one more example.

So, it's because it's one of you interests.

Exactly.

Okay, next question. Uhm... why do you buy a good amount of fitness apparel?

Imagine, I buy because... first of all, because I'm a very consumist person. Secondly, since I feel I change tastes all the time and – imagine, I like to have clothes for when I feel good with myself and for when I feel bad with myself. Do you understand?

Yes.

I don't know, I like to have as much option for shorts and leggings as for larger trousers since it depends on that. This means that I buy because I'm a consumist and I buy because I

have many sensations throughout the day, therefore, I need to have several ways to dress myself.

Yes, it depends on your mood.

Mood, exactly.

Okay, uhm...next question. And, how does fitness apparel make you feel?

It makes me feel- its just like the influencers, it depends on my mood. Its much easier, visible me feeling bad with fitness apparel than with daily clothes. With daily clothes, it's much more easier to hide (that feeling). With fitness apparel, it's more obvious.

But, why do you feel it's more obvious?

Imagine, uhm... because imagine, they are tighter clothes. They are clothes ge-that are made and thought of for showing more of the body. Do you read?

Okay, okay.

And, I don't know like, daily clothes -also depends on what you're wearing but if you wear jeans and a top, you can easily disguise whatever, fitness apparel is what is and that's it.

Okay. Uhm...next question. What do you think of these fitness/athlete influencers promoting certain fitness apparel? Now, I'm gonna send you pictures, ugh- I mean, I'm gonna forward you them-

Okay.

the photos, through WhatsApp.- First off, Im gonna start with this one. It's a post.

Uhm... done. You should receive it now. (Figure 1- Krissy Cela)

I think it's good. Of course that, imagine, I have mixed feelings. I, as much as I find good that people with a worked-on body, promote fitness apparel, I also find that people with 'normal bodies', not that these people's bodies are not normal, should also show it (fitness apparel). To be honest, I prefer to see it here (the promotion) than see it in all the current campaigns that are being made surrounding normal bodies because now it's already super normal, every brand invested in making the campaigns with plus-sized people, do you see?

Uhum.

In other words, this (first Instagram post) influences me more to buy it but it can also have a more negative thought on me. Do you understand?

Ah, yes, yes. In the good days, it influences you to buy.

Exacly, exactly.

In the bad days-

I think it's much better that people do this (type of posts) than to include plus-sized models just to appear good. Do you understand?

Yes, exactly-

Because, now is good.

Okay. Uhm..now I'm going to send you another, I'm going to forward you- another photo of another post. – This post that I sent you. What do you think about it? Having in consideration, the same question. It's a slide of – a post like, slide of -of workouts. (Figure 2- Brittany Lupton)

I think it's very good but -imagine- for me to follow someone, she can post this and I think it's very good and this content I like but I also think that she has to make content -that doesn't also seem too perfect, do you see?- meaning that its content that it's not always 'perfect body' , show more- ,not that it's not her reality but that it's not- imagine, I think that a big problems is that we look at this and think: "Damn! I work so hard and can never get to this point (influencer's body figure)" Do you see?

Uhum.

-and maybe you see it and it's the angle, so- thiiiiis... I don't know, how does it make me feel? Confused. – but keep in mind, I like to follow (the posts) but (I feel) confused.

Yes, Yes. Ah, so-

For someone that has low self-esteem I think it is really a complicated issue. I think if they play with these photos and then with real photos, okay. But now, having a profile just with this...hm.

Yes. Ah, so you think- do you like those- that awareness of cellulite, those things.

Yes but imagine-**On Instagram.**

Not only it being that because that is also too much and is already forced into my head.

Yes.

-Now, you only see that.

It's a balance.

I'm like- after 5 minutes, I'm like that (makes confused/exhausted face). -Do you understand?

Yes.

It has to be a mixture of both.

Yes, okay, okay. – I’m understanding. So, next person- next influencer, I mean. Uhm...let me see which one it is...It’s this one. – Okay, did you receive it?

Yes, tell me.

What do you think of this one?Like- like, it’s also a post with a lot of slides- but it’s a different influencer. (Figure 34- Hanna Oberg)

Yes, I think that – I think that, once again-imagine, no one wants to look bad in a photo and I think this is good, it just cannot be only this.

Yes, yes. – Do you understand? I think that a content- it stops being attractive when it’s just this- but I think... I don’t think it’s bad.

And comparing the two descriptions? What do you think? Uhm...

Between which one? (Reads description out loud).

Like the other that is more...it’s- so it’s more simple. This, okay-Ah, yes. -I cannot be commenting but it’s - (Reads description out loud).Let’s say, I prefer more simple descriptions.

Yes, shorter?

Yes- because I also don’t read it (giggles). **(giggles)**- I didn’t even notice it- it was a question- I only saw the photo. I think that sometimes when there are big descriptions like “this is me, now”- keep in mind this is not the case- “this is me, now” and “although I look like this, I’ve already been through...” ugh-.

Uhum.

It’s not a social network for that. Do you understand?

Yes. So, what-

I like short descriptions- photos, it is what is -and yeah.

So, you think YouTube would be better for that.

Completely. -Or even the stories, you see? But- in posts, the people want to see the photo.

Yes, okay.

Do you understand? The image is 80%.

Okay, okay. -Ok, so now I’m going to send the before last, photo or post, right? Ah it’s missing here, need to send it from another place. – Uhm...wait, its better to go to the other, to the other chat. Wait just one second.

Okay.

Okay, it’s here.

Yes, what is the question?

It's the same, having in consideration the description and the photo-

I don't like this photo. (Figure 4- Vickyjustizfitness) I think this- imagine- I think- how should I explain you this?

Uhum.

The other photos, are photos of training, you see?

Yes.

This photo is "look at my ass".

(giggles)

Sorry to be using this expression but I- I don't think it's pretty, it doesn't minimally interest me like I think it's very forced. Do you understand?

Yes, yes.

They're completely different (the photos of the Instagram posts). It really doesn't appeal to me, the other ones, yes. Well- these ones I think are very- and this type of posts is what generates confidence issues. You see?

But then-

I don't know how to explain, it's completely different (the effect).

But then like-

Imagine, the first one that you sent me (Figure 1), compare it really to the last one you sent me (Figure 4). The ones from the middle- attract me more (Figure 33 and Figure 34).

The ones from the middle...Ah, yes, I understand now. Yes. -

Do you see? The first one, well, compare it to this one but now, the ones from the middle. I don't know- I think this is really "Look at how my body looks".

Yes. Don't-

I don't know how to explain it. It causes different feelings.

And when reading the description? Do you still think-

It's the thing, "Look, I have this because I wake up early, drink water-

True, true.

Eat more fruits and vegetables ". It seems that it's like "Do this to have everything" and then you do it and you become-

Depressed?

Even more discouraged. Do you understand?

Yes.- Yes, yes, okay. The last photo

By the way-

is

in the end of the description you even have “workout programs and full” something, in other words, all of this for the people to do what she says and then she even says to do her exercises.

Yes.

And this, causes desperation when people do all of this, go do her exercises and then, “But- I don’t look like the photo.

(long pause)

(giggles) True, true. People don’t realise that it is a little bit different.-

But, oh well...

It’s the light, the angle, everything.

It is, it is.

Okay, I’m going to send you the last photo. I thought this was the last one but it’s the one before the last. (long pause)

Yes?

What do you think of that Gymshark post (Figure 5)?

Mixed feelings because... on one hand, very good, I think one should show like every type of body etc.but on the other hand I think one is good and not fifty which was what I was previously saying about the plus-sized models.

Okay, okay.

You see?

Yes.

I think there needs to be a rational balance that like maybe - 10% of the population is like this, it can even be 40% of the plus size population but there is no point in saying “we’re super inclusive.” When it is too much inclusion, I also think it’s too much and it stops having- having credibility.

But if I told you this brand doesn’t post a lot of this type of posts very often it’s more like-.

If it's like that then it's all good, it's what I'm saying, there needs to be a balance. Like- eh..it's the same thing with the plus sized models. Everything looks right but it doesn't make sense to be constantly- uh-

Yes, yes.

Do you understand? What you see now is one post where you have a skinny girl and a plus-size one- and it's this, the campaign. The clothes fit both- and it's this that we see. Too much.

Yeah...Okay. Uhm... okay, the last...- I think it goes around the same thing that you already mentioned that is- is – a Gymshark post with a plus-sized model.

There you go. There you go. I think it's very good (that their doing that) if there is a balance between things and like – So, okay, let's accept people like they are, right. But also, it's not healthy, certain things. Do you get it? So, let's normalize while not normalizing.

Okay.

Do you understand what I mean?

I know, yes, yes.

Because when you give too much credibility -it's like -okay, you are like this, we're gonna accept you as you are. The thing is, it's not always about the physique but about being healthy.

Yes.

Do you see?

Yes, they don't have to-

And then it ends up being a little contradictory- because "ah, a fitness brand wants to appeal to health but ah let's accept our body but ah but you- "

Yes. It's not to try to promote to the point of it to stop being healthy.

I think it is- promoting health and not the aesthetic. -**Yes.**

Exactly. – It's this.

It's that, yes. – But to manage to have a balance for this, I understand that I cannot be easy.

Exactly, yes. I agree. Uhm...So and what- I don't know if you know but the girl from the first post uhm...so, she used to post these-this-these images and then she got a surgery because of a heart problem and then she started to post a lot, not a lot but sometimes she would post that.

Hmm...

Do you think that that helped in her credibility or-?

I think so... but also – there has to be a balance, it cannot be just that.

Yes, yes. No, she posted only sometimes and not only that.

No, but yes. I think it shows that – imagine, any brand – what I think and the- the influencers are a brand, represent a brand, the brand that is them, doesn't matter, but I think they have to humanize it even more and you showing your human side, which is a little bit contradictory, end up gaining more credibility from people. If you show everything is fantastic, perfect. -**True, true, yes.**

-No.

Uhm... okay, this is-was the last photo of the uhm...plus-sized woman. So, the question before last, I think so- let me check... Let me check which one is next. Okay, next one is, what do you think of the fitness apparel-no- fitness apparel brands like Gymshark, Alphalete, Nike, Lululemon, Womensbest and Oneractive. Oneractive is the-

I think they -

The brand of-

I think I know it.

Okay, okay.

I think that- imagine, it's all the same. The thing is that they start gaining credibility and the brand starts... - becoming huge and then the prices also change slightly due to that- but I don't see big differences between them. – Imagine-

Ah, between-between the brands?

How can I explain you this? Between what they offer. I think what they offer is a different status for you for using the brand. In terms of materials, it's the same thing. Get it?

Yes, yes.

There you go, I think it's all more of the same. There is no brand that I can say that I love.

Okay. And, if you were to compare them to Prozis?

I know I'm going to say something that is going to be super basic but since this mess with Prozis, I continue to buy but I am more skeptical.

Which mess?

The mess surrounding the CEO that is not CEO but said – ah I don't remember anymore, there was some type of scandal, I don't remember anymore. I'm tired.

Wasn't it because of the-the plus-sized people? Or what was it?

No, no. We'll talk about this later. But, basically, what happens is -imagine, maybe I prefer- clearly, maybe I would prefer to buy Gymshark's fitness apparel than from Prozis but Prozis is more- is easier...to acquire, you understand?

Yes...

It's cheaper, faster, more everything and maybe I reflect more when buying Gymshark because its more expensive than Prozis- maybe I buy ten times per year from Prozis and five from Gymshark. – I buy more often from Prozis because it's easier.

Yes, it's easier.

Okay, did you understand? It's, it's... it's like this but obviously I prefer Gymshark, Nike etc. Adidas than Prozis, it's obvious.

Okay, okay.

Because I think it's that which makes you feel. I don't know how to explain it.

Yes.-

When you buy something from a brand- like it's not even the item it's the brand itself.

Like, the community?

Exactly.

Okay, uhm... whatd do you think of the- athleisure trend?

I don't know what it is.

It's to use clothes... no, I'm gonna say it in Portuguese. What do you think of the trend of using-

Ah yes!

clothes-

The thing about incorporating clothes with ones that are sp-.

-sporty, yes. Sorry, I said I was sleepy.

Don't worry about it.

- I think it's good. I think that it's like a-all of my dreams come true to go out (feeling) comfortable, therefore, I don't have anything to point out. I love it.

Ah, okay- and would you do that? Do you think that it's a – a trend that is going to continue or that it is going to expand?

We're talking about, once again like I mentioned again- said in the beginning, there are clothes that make me more comfortable than others and if you ask me if I go out with a top and training shorts, I don't.- But that also has to do with other questions. You understand?

Yes.

The thing about going with leggings and etc. super agreed upon, continue doing it please, I love it. I think it's-it's fantastic. – but I also think that plays with...- but that is with any type of clothing, you wear what you feel good with, so...

Okay, okay. So it plays with body image issues? Do you think, it's that?

Exactly.

Okay.

Exactly, I think fitness has a lot of that power.

Okay, alright, alright. Uhm...-

I can even give you another example, wait.

Yes, yes, give me.-

I don't know if it happens to you but when I go to the gym, I sometimes think- well, I have a lot of concerns and so on- and then I look around and see women and men with tighter shorter clothes and I think this: come one, if they can wear this, why do I have problems wearing this?! You understand?

Yes.

I think that fitness apparel even in the gym is a problem that can cause some types of pressure...

Even in the gym?

Because it's very exposed- Th-the fitness apparel can be very exposed, do you understand?

So, the person becomes a bit –

And, and you haven't bought fitness apparel for being too exposed, for example?

Imagine, what happens to me is when but that is with clothes, tends to be with any type- when I'm more confident, I buy clothes that are more exposing but I'm going to be completely honest with you, the quantity of times I wear them...it's like 10% of the times that I wear the other (fitness apparel) one, that is more uncovering.

Yes.

Everything depends on my state of mind.

Yes.

I still buy it but only use it in specific situations – because it is exposing.

Or then when it is summer

Even when its summer, I have- it can cause a lot of issues.

Really?

I think so.

I only take of my summer clothes, sometimes I also stay- feel a little weird –

I'm going to give you a very simple example. You can be wearing shorts. Shorts and a t-shirt. You can be feeling extremely hot and there's no shame in just wearing a sportsbra but the amount of times you are going to do that is how many times? Inside the gym. You need to feel really good for that, with yourself.

Ah, feeling very hot with the sportsbra?

Yes. But not undressing yourself, wearing just the sportsbra and not just wearing a t-shirt, you don't think about it. You see?

Yes. No, I just do that in the summer- and only because I feel extremely hot and because my gym is very hot otherwise I wouldn't take it off-

But if you feel taking it off, great. I, it happens-

Yes, usually, I do. Usually, I do.

Okay, okay. But there you go, sometimes it's a problem for me.

Yes, I – I think its with time.

Yes.

Okay, the last question is if you think these influencers have any type of impact when they promote these clothes, yes.

I think so- because the person sees that list of things they are going to do in order to achieve that body and saw those exercises they're going to do to achieve that body, is going to buy those clothes.

Yeah, yeah... Yes, it makes sense-

It's like its another step for- imagine, it happens to me a lot and with every area (of interest). The influencers with- with whom I identify myself most with or that I like more or etc. if they buy something, I more likely reflect about buying it because it is a part of the lifestyle that I like. Get it?

You see them as role models?

Like inspirations- exactly. I think it ends up being like that, maybe now not that much in the fitness area but also, let's say.

Okay.- I think you already answered what the impact is, I think it's done.

It's complicated. It's a complicated impact. Everything done?

Yeah, thank you.

You're welcome.

Transcription B.

The next respondent, Lisa, 23, from Germany, works out usually four times a week, and buys fitness apparel one to two times per year.

How do fitness influencers make you feel?

They motivate me.

Okay, uhm...

-I don't know. (giggles)

Uhm...why do you use social media, Instagram, specifically?

(giggles) Uh... yes, for inspiration, motivation and boredom (laughs)

(laughs)- Okay... next question.- What influencers do you follow?

(clears throat) German influencers, that is. Oh, but fitness related, right?

Yes, yes. Fitness influencers.

Uh...- Uh, what's her name? Fitaudrey, uh... yes, Mady Morrison I also follow...then... what's her name? I need to check-

Trainingfabi?

Huh?

Trainingfabi?

Yes, trainingfabi eh... fitaudrey... yes, trainingfabi and I think that's it, everything else is Yoga-

I think, I think you told me about Madison Rose also

Oh, Hans Yoga

Hans?

Hans_Yoga, yes.

Ah, is that a man?

Yes.

Ah, okay. Uhm...-

Besides that, that's it.

Okay, next question. Why do you follow these influencers?

Eh... one, because yes, again, for the motivation and for... how do you say it? Yes, like for form tips like for ... for example, what types of exercises there are and how to apply them and... yes... and also as a motivation, I think I said it already.- and...yes...

- So, for like-like tips

Yes.

And like form, so... like when you train so that you train right.

Exactly. When you exactly- when you do it right- do the execution right.

Uhm... why do you buy a great amount of fitness apparel? Great or- how do you say it? How do you say it? Wait.- noteworthy amount of fitness apparel?

Why?

Yes.

Can you ask me the question in English?

Yes. (giggles)

Maybe then I can understand it (giggles)

“Why do you buy a good amount of fitness apparel?”

Okay... uhm...well, so that I feel good in my body...

And what does it mean, to feel good? For you.

Well, comfortable. Uh... that I can move good in them.

So, for performance, also?

Hm?

So, for performance, also.

Yes, so...yes.

Okay.

So, yes, so that one can... well, I cannot train in my jeans (giggles)

(laughing)

That...well, yeah

Okay.- and how do you feel when you wear that apparel? Well, how does fitness apparel make you feel?

The moment I put on fitness apparel then one is more motivated to train, I feel...uh...- Yes and when you wear apparel that you like and then, then having trained and then seeing your pump and having apparel that you like, well a positive self-esteem one could say.

Yes.

Do you know?

Yes, yes.- Okay, uhm... now the next question... wait a moment, it's here uhm...Yes, I will send you pictures now and you should comment- on them.

Ah yes, exactly.

And.... the question is, wait, I'll let you know in a second the question. I'll send you them first. Ah, wait, I need to forward them.- Okay.

Yes! Oh my god, wait.

Okay, I have sent you a post now. And, the question is what do you think (in german)- no, what do you think about fitness/athlete influencers promoting certain fitness apparel?(English). So, what do you think when she like promotes apparel, like in this post.

Ah, okay.

Fitness apparel.

Ah.

And like when you also read the description and so on.

Ah, yes, exactly, the description.- Well, the post, in my opinion, when we now fitness- when we, let's say promote the leggings or something – it doesn't have a lot do with an advertisement...

Yes.

But rather, her own... life for yes... hm...

Do you think it is an indirect advertisement? Because she is not saying "buy my clothes" but rather through her things that you mentioned,-

Yes.

promotes-

Yes, it is...-

the clothes?

Yes, true, it is an indirect advertisement. You- you can actually see the logo, for example, really big from the shorts, I would say- but in a first glance, I wouldn't, personally, look at- it's not really in focus like she shows rather more her body than the clothes but somehow it's also indirect advertisement.

Okay. -Okay, I think you answered the question. If you have any more comments, you can like – feel free to say them or something. Now, I will... send you another post... the

second post. (Figure 2) Well, this is a slide, a like- this is a post where she has a photo as a first slide and then the next slides are workouts. I can send you it

On Instagram?

also per Insatgram. Wait a second. Hopefully, I have it here.

I'm gonna go quickly and will be back immediately.

Okay, okay.

Did you send it per Instagram?

I couldn't find it but it's like a slide-

Yes –

-workout slides that is. You can say that like- it is the same question but like...

But I have looked at it.

Yes, yes, exactly, it's this post and what do you think? Of this influencer? Like, do you think it is an advertisement, her post, with the workouts?

But I have- you haven't sent it to me right?

I did, I did.

Through whatsapp or where?

Yes.

Somehow, I didn't get it.

I can send it again, wait.

-Or are you talking about the same one (post) we just had?

The one with the yellow shorts.

Ah okay, that I somehow didn't get it.

And now?

Somehow, I'm not receiving any message from you.

Wait- Wait...-Okay, I think it is sent.

Yes, now it's here. (reads the description of the post) but that for me is not an advertisement.

Okay.Uhm- so...

Except if I am searching right now for some ... shorts with a specific colour so that, do you know what I mean? I am currently like on the search for colourful shorts. If I liked yellow, maybe it would...could be that I allow myself to be influenced by that (Figure 33). Yet, it being a direct advertisement from her, I don't think it is the case.

No, not advertisement but rather promoting apparel.

Yes...

Do you know what I mean? Like, I would say, like this is like a promotion. So, it's not an advertisement but it is a promotion. Do you know what I... mean?

Yes, okay... because she wrote that "So, I'm ready. I'm fully dressed. I'm back" blah blah blah, do you know?

Yes, yes. – Yes!

She writes though: "Braids done, biceps done" and so on and on

(Laughs)

"Look at my outfit. I'm back in... business-

Yes.

- in sports business"

Exactly.

(giggles)

Then she also has the slides where she works out with the apparel. Don't you think it is a promotion?

Yes, okay that- yes... I think it's because one allows themselves to be influenced also when you are looking for something specific maybe, then it is possible that you allow yourself to get influenced by that.

Okay, okay. Good, uhm... okay, next, next post. – Hopefully you can get it, receive it by whatsapp. When not, then I'll send it to you per Instagram; but it's like, let's say, the same post, not same post but like like a similar post, like workout videos, a slide with workout videos and then influencer with fitness apparel and a description. Did you receive it it?

By whatsapp, somehow, I'm not receiving any message from you.

Okay, okay. I'll send it then –

Maybe if we stop the call but it's weird, the other one I also did get.

Wait... I'll send it to you per Instagram.

Yes.

Wait...- Okay, I have sent it.

Yup... (reads some bits of post's description out loud).

So, this is, this is a similar post. What do you think of it? Is there a difference to the other post or?

For me, it looks more like she- took the photo like. So, first of all it's – I don't know if the others are also selfies...I'm not sure...

Yes, yes.

I don't know right now.-

The other ones-

Ah, yes.- But I think the first one not, right?

No, the first one not.

But, here, it looks more like she was really in the gym like you and I and just took a photo.

So, that third post?

Exactly.

Okay.

Like, simply took a photo from herself and in the first one, for example, if I compare them, it is though. I think it was...uh... also not a selfie or something like that. That looks for me more like apparel promotion or maybe promoting herself – and it just looks for me- Obviously, like I already said, you could also let yourself get influenced from that when you are at the moment looking for something special but it looks more like “Ah, yes. I'm currently at the gym and am taking a photo and am writing something pleasant beneath it.”, I don't know... Yes.

Okay! Okay, next photo.

I'm listening.

Okay,- no problem.-Did you get them ?

These ones I did get, weird...yes... (Figure 4). – That ass!

(both laughing). So, that looks for me like an advertisement.

Okay. That is, from the apparel or from what? When you read the description.

Okay, wait, description also. Yes, “ how to level up your life”. As a first point should there be too, “when you buy this apparel, then you will have your life- levelled up”.

(Both laughing)

So, yes...- Yes, when you do all of this and buy this apparel that I'm wearing, then you will have the perfect life. – And I feel like, because again, especially the last slide where she is has the arms like so- I feel, looks like advertising and it's not a selfie type like at the gym but also with the white background, with pretty clothes in the spotlight and yeah...

Okay... that is why you think it is more of advertising -? Than like a selfie?

Yeah, somehow, yes.-

Okay.

because she- yes, somehow, presents there more the clothes than... yes, than all of the rest.

Okay.- Uhm....next photo or post.

Yes?

I will send it to you... the before last one and then it's the last one. I have sent it. – Did you receive it ? (Figure 5)

No... I don't know, it's so weird... why am I not getting it?

Wait, I can send it to you per Instagram, no problem. Okay.

Yes? (reads description).

She is para-paralympic or something.

Cool. -Okay, this is directly from Gysmhark, advertisement, right? Okay, the question is what I think of handicapped people?

No, the question is what, what you...-

Advertisement or?

No, this is already another question in the same question, it's just –

Okay.

-like...It's like what you think about the post – but this is a brand and not an influencer.

And, it's just like and- yes, what do you think about the post?

So, I find it cool...actually, that they uh... show, everyone can uh... do fitness and so on regardless of whether uh... with a handicap or not or if they are different. It's like everyone (included), right? – It also has to do with- how should I say it? How it is portrayed, ugh how should I explain it? For example, look, I'm reading right now what's beneath it, that what is written beneath that's what I basically said.

What?

So, that anyone can well...that anyone can train independent of what they are.

Okay.

It's almost exactly what's written beneath it. (giggles)

Okay, nice.

Yes, I find it cool, actually... yes...

Okay, last photo is, wait I'll send it to you. Did you receive it per whatsapp or not?

Wait a moment... somehow not, weird. Some, I get, others maybe I get.

I'll send it per Instagram.

I think I'll probably get them when we hang up or something.

Then you'll have a thousand posts. (laughing)

Could be. (laughing)

I have sent it now.

Ah, yes.- Ohh, she looks so happy...

So, and if you read the description and answer the question, so...

Yes, cool. Well, this is actually almost the same, that despite your body type, your problems, everyone can achieve it and also, referring to advertising or something... I find it cool that they are also showing it... because you do see more often like these skinny or fit girls and so on, they are showing that anyone can wear it and also look good in it and be happy, yes...

Okay, so, not only that those skinny girls wear it but also, let's say, everyone? Every, body.

Yes.

Okay. Uhm...

Well, I think it's very lovely that they are now making an ad and pick someone like that and not only and always those shredded and fit girls.

Yes, exactly.

Based on... okay, first, next question. Based on the photos and everything and all questions, what do you think of the fitness brands such as Gymshark, Alphalete, Nike, Lululemon, Women'sBest, Oneractive, that was the first, from the first post, the apparel from the first post. What do you think of these brands?

I have, somehow, no really understood the question.

It is, what do you think of fitness apparel brands such as Gymshark, Alphalete, Nike, Lululemon, Women'sbest and Oneractive? (in English) So, based on these posts from, as an example, Gymshark, for example and generally like videos that I sent you, like the the posts and generally what do you think of the brands- of these brands?

Well, I think...hm... how should I say it?- I think sometimes normal fitness apparel is enough. So, I'll say H&M as an example or something like that.Uhmm- I think, yes... they have actually also good quality, so, it's enough. I don't need to always look at expensive brands that...yes, that has the same function, I would say.

You are actually the second person that mentions H&M's sports apparel.I didn't even know that H&M had that great of fitness apparel.

Yes... well, all my sports things are, I think, no, not all from H&M but except – yes, everything except my shorts, that is from Nike.

Okay. Ah wow.

That's it?- Yes, but like sports shoes and so on are from Nike, or? Yes, from Nike. Yes.

Okay and-

But, let's say, what I think of the brands.

-Of the brands.

Yes...

Well...

You don't have to spend so much money for brands when you can also get something cheaper at H&M what actually- I don't know from the quality aspect, I don't know, but – if you are also satisfied, I don't know.

Okay. – And if I tell you that these posts with, well, this paralympic woman and obese woman are from Gymshark? Does it change your... opinion- of the brand?

Well, I can give you an example. I have an influencer that always wears Oace, I don't know if you recognize that brand...uhm... well, one, trainingfabi and fitaudrey, they both always do advertisements for it but also wear it, obviously. And, when I now- well, sometimes I almost let myself get influenced by it because I saw it somehow and found it cool and also the colours were somehow... special and then they also say: "Ah, I have a 20% discount code"-

Ah, yes.

-and blah blah blah-but yes...then I also thought to myself, no...

(giggles)

You have leggings and it's enough and if I ever need something, I don't know, a sportsbra or something, then I can always go to H&M and 20€ and not 40€...-

Exaclty-

-Yes, buy it. But, it is, you do let yourself get easily influencer, particularly when they always come with their discount codes and that jizz.

(both giggle)

Yes, exactly. You're right.

It's a combination-

From both- from chill clothes.

Privately. Do you know? They also wear it privately in working out but they also advertise it. It is always like that...yes...

Yes.

- It is...tricky.

Yes, exactly. And, so, I have actually written this question in Portuguese but , like, when the influencers use certain fitness clothes from brands, does it alter your perception, your opinion of the brand? Like, when they use it- specific people- like, fitness influencers

Hm...no, actually not.

So, you don't think it changes your opinion that the brand so and so is, for example.

I see- Well, they often talk about them, right? And then it can be that you let yourself get influenced by that. Here, it does change it. "Ah, it is so comfortable and can be worn daily and as a... daily jacket or-" I don't know. (giggles)

Ah, like a, a review?

Like a little bit...

A review.

Like a little bit.

Okay, it's like a review of fitness clothes. A Haul, a haul (giggles). No, a...a review. (giggles)

Exactly. Okay, before last photo is, what do you think of the athleisure trend? Like, wearing fitness clothes daily. What do you make of it?

Ah, that's funny, I've just now said it (giggles). I find it cool, like, like I only run (laughs). I basically only run around in fitness clothes.

(giggles)

Well, it's really like that, well... yes, I find it cool.

Okay.

My bras that I wear are mostly sportsbras and – because, comfortable. My trousers that I'm currently wearing, most of the time, are sporty trousers (giggles) **(giggles)** because, comfortable (giggles), no clue (laughing), yes.

Okay, that is good to know.

So, sportchic is how I would rather describe my style, yes.

Sport- sportchic? What you said?

Yes.

Okay. Last question is, do you think these influencers have any type of impact, not impact but like an impact (in English), like a mark, do you- is it called a mark? I don't know, like a...na effect when they like promote fitness apparel. Like, also that indirect promotion. And... yes, exactly. And, when there's a, like there's an effect, what, what type of an effect is it?

Okay...I don't understand the question.

(laughs) Okay. I think it is better if I don't translate it. I'll say it in English. Do you think these influencers have some type of impact when they promote this apparel? If yes, what?

Oh man, I cannot understand Caro. Yes, okay, you must repeat it (giggles), sorry.

Do you think these influencers have some type of impact when they promote this apparel?
If yes, what?

I see, what type of effect –

Yes.

it has on me when they –

Yes, exactly. Effect.

of the clothes, yes. Yes. Well, actually, what I've already said, that maybe, eventually you think "Oh, the clothes look really good on her." And so on, "I also want to have it" (giggles), for example. And then, they even put a code below **(giggles)** and then you are even more like- yes, triggered, I would say, maybe to buy it. I am telling you, they are really smart (laughing).

(giggles)

Yes...(giggles). Yes...that is actually the effect- in me.

Okay.

Did I answer, somehow, the question?

Yes, I think so... Yes, I think so. Well, if there is really a code, for example, there's a discount of the- those clothes, of these brands and then you see it in an influencer, then you would probably buy it?

Yes.

Okay. Well, this is- this is what you answered, more or less, right?

Yes... so, yes. (giggles).

Okay... Then I think it's done-

Nice.

-with the interview. Yup.

I am glad I could help a little.

Yes, a lot.

Transcription C.

The next respondent, C, is a 25 year old girl from Hungary, she works out four to six times a week, and buys fitness clothes every three months but if she likes something a brand comes out with, she will buy it. However, not right now. She comments that prices have “skyrocketed” and they are a little bit high for her therefore sales are the solution.

So, the first question is, how do influencers make you feel?

In general, or fitness influencers?

Fitness influencers, sorry.

It’s okay, it’s just because it’s a bit different because -just- in general, they sometimes make me feel insecure but I mostly follow fitness influencers that I personally like that don’t make me feel that way because I know their mindset is so much healthier and it’s not about just their looks- it’s about more personality and just the lifestyle and health, in general.

Yeah- Yeah, I understand. I feel that way too.

So- it’s motivating.

It’s more what?

Most of the time.

Motivating.

Mostly what?

Motivating.

Ah, its motivating, okay. Yeah it is.- Uhm (murmuring)

On good days, on bad days I feel a bit insecure but it’s just body image.

Yeah, I think everyone has that issue.

Yeah.

Uhhh, why do you use social media, specifically Instagram?

It’s a good question, I don’t know (giggles). I started because everyone was using it, I guess- and now- it’s just- I don’t know- it’s something everyone always does and its part of your- daily routine, I guess. I also catch up with friends there. I mostly use it to keep track of friends or-hmm (murmuring) use some inspo from others.

Yeah. Yeah that's-

-I only read reddit posts on here (giggles)

You, what?

I read reddit posts, I don't know why.

(giggles)

(giggles)

More than Instagram?

No, I read it on Instagram.

Ah, alright.

They screenshot it and I just- I read them, I read the funny comments. I don't know.

Ah okay, yeah.

It's a new habit, it's a bad habit because it can take hours.

Yeah, I should check it out too, it's probably funny.

It is.

And, uhmm, what fitness influencers do you follow?

I think a lot, let me check.

I know I follow- hmm who popped up first?- Hanna. She is an ex- Gymshark athlete.

Who?

I don't know how to spell her name, Oeberg, Oberg?

Ahh, she's not working with Gymshark anymore?

No, she quit -uhm- maybe a month ago?

Ah, wow, I didn't know that- Okay.

Hmuhum (chanting)- I'm scrolling through Instagram, trying to- find Influencers. I know I follow GainsbyBrains, Sophie.

Yeah.

Hmmmm- Oh then there are so many- where are they?- hmuhum (chanting) uhh- I follow- hmuhum (chanting)- Jessica, Jessica Ollie. I don't know.

Yes. Yes.

She's with Gymshark too. Hmmmm, the au...Australian sisters Emma and Rachel, Dillon, I guess. I don't know how to spell their last name.

Dillon?

Uh- yeah.

Okay.

Hmuhum (chanting) – hmm, Alex, Rice. Shes with Gymshark too. – Lisa Langsford, shes from the UK.

Lisa, what?

Theyre now living in Dubai, I guess.

Lisa, whay?

Langsford. She was with Gymshark too, for- some time.

Okay.

Hmmm- hmm- that's it! I thought – it's gonna be a longer list.

Okay...Why do you follow fitness/athlete influencers?

So, the reason is why I follow fitness influencers is that I find them inspirational and uhmm- I don't know, most of them are bodybuilders so I have something to work towards and- I usually follow girls and guys, or anyone in general, hmm- who I feel like are knowledgeable and like- know what they are talking about and I feel like I can learn a lot from them. And... hmmm- that's all! (giggles) I think that's all, really. Hmm, yeah.

Okay, and...next question! Why do you buy a good amount of fitness apparel? (giggles)

Hmmmmmm (ironically)

(giggles)

Because my mind tells me to- I don't know- because I feel like I need it (giggles).

-Why do you feel you need it?

-I don't really. I could wear the same thing over and over again but it makes me feel good- and powerful- (long pause) and I mostly wear gym clothes so, I need a lot.

Ah, okay-

-Oh!- and I got my- hmmm, hmmm- pt exam, so I'm now a pt too.

Oh, wow, nice! Congratulations.

Thanks (giggles).

I'm happy for you.

(giggles)

It's a- great way to- buy new gym clothes- because it's now work clothes (giggles).

Yeah, yeah (laughing)- (giggles)

A good, uhh, a good, excuse (laughing)

Yes (laughing)

To buy...

Yes (laughing)

Gym clothes.

Exactly!

Okay.- uhhm- next question is...it was- next question was how does fitness apparel make you feel but you already answered.

Oh, yeah.

(pause)

So, next question is- what do you think about fitness athletes/influencers promoting certain fitness apparel. So, I will show you now images of- uhhm- like influencers-uh- through WhatsApp. (Images attached below, shown.)

Like, the question was... uhhh- what do you think about fitness athlete/ influencers promoting certain fitness apparel. So, when you look at that post what do you feel - like- what do you think- about them promoting the fi- fitness apparel and what do you feel when you first look at it.

(Figure 1) First of all, I notice her muscles before the clothes.

(giggles)

I don't know why...I guess it's the back picture-

Yeah-

Because I love a good mus-muscular back.

Yeah (giggles), same.

I like this post. It's not too in your face. It's not just about the clothes. It's her showing off her- muscles, curves so it's not- I know it's an ad but I don't feel like it's- only an ad, just to make it- just to make money from it.

Okay.

But I know there are a lot of times when I saw someone post pictures and I feel like- yeah, you know its for the money-

Yeah-

and not because they are really affordable.

Yeah...and what do you think about her description, like on the post?

Oh, wait, I didn't read that.- ahh I agree-

Hmm.- I agree with her caption.

Okay.-

100%

Okay, now I'm gonna show you another picture from another influencer (Figure 2 shown). Okay, so this is- Brittany Lupton, I don't know if you know her but- what do you feel- like what do you think about her promoting that apparel and what do you feel when you see the- the post?

Hmm, I can only see one slide. Is that alright?

Yeah, yeah, its alright.

Okay, okay.

Hmm- I feel like it's not in your- that in your face either because I can see that there is a few slides, I don't know exactly how many, and the captions- the caption suggests it's gonna be -some type of video of her working out-

Yes, yes.

-So its not just an ad, she- really- did go out and went to workout in those clothes.

Yes, yes. Yes, it's supposed to be a- a, like- videos of the workouts-

Yeah, yeah.

But-

-I like

-because of my...

-when they, not only do like a photoshoot.

Yeah...

type of post but you can see the clothes, while they are moving.

Yeah, yeah-.

It's easier for me to decide if I really like it- or is just- great for a picture.

Yeah- yeah, exactly.-

-I have her bra! I have it on me (**giggles**), just in a different color (**giggles**) (**giggles**).

That's funny (giggles). I really like that color.

It's really beautiful.

-Oh... me too.

But Gymshark is too expensive for me now (giggles)

It is... for me, too. I wanted- more colours but it's not happening.

No... Uhm... Yeah it's not happening... only on sales, it's better-

Yeah.

Only on sales-uhm...yeah,uhm... yeah, I didn't show you videos because- my thesis, I need to put-put like the... the pictures- It's going to be word-

Yeah.

So, I cannot put like videos.But now I'm-

Oh yeah.

gonna show you- another picture... Okay, now you have this-

Did I send?-Oh yeah- yeah?

Is this new? No, it's an old post.

It's Hanna Oberg's post.

Yeah, yeah... Yeah, I remember this post (giggles)

What do you think about it?

Hmm... the same thing. I like that it's a- it's a real and raw, yeah yeah, I know, wait.

Cool.

Uh...I like that she shoowed- showed... it in movement, too. Hmm... and that's its- it's really- a raw picture and it's not just a photoshoot.

Yeah... I agree.

(Giggles)

I'm going to show you- now another one, another post (figure 4).Did you get it?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.- Wait, there is a caption...

Yeah, there is a caption.

Hm. I don't know how the caption fits the pictures. (giggles)

Did you read the caption?

Yeah... I like the caption. I'm not sure how they connect to the picture. – I like the pictures they are- a bit more in your face...and I'm not really sure how they- connect to the caption- but she looks good.

What do you think about the caption? – Does the-

I like the first part. The how to loo- level-up- becau- because they are- yeah they are- good tips, I guess.- and they're true but I- yeah that's the-the last part, the workout programs- stuff, the link in bio, that's a bit too much- too- hmm...feel- I know it's an ad.

Yeah...

-and she needs to write it like that but its'- yeah, it's an ad. It- it takes away for me, from the- hmmm... meaning or depthness of the caption.

Meaning or what?

Depth-Depth.

Ah okay.

Yeah.

So, her saying 'link in bio, for my program' actually- decinta-descenta- descenta...sives you- to... buy the clothes.

Yeah, it makes me roll my eyes, a bit- like...

Yeah...

Yeah. – She wrote that and then decided to make it an ad, it's just like- why?

Yeah- yeah.

I know it's her job (giggles)

Yeah, but still, yeah.

Yeah.

You need to know-

If it was a – it was- it was workout videos, of her, doing some kind of movement or showing the program...I would say, yeah, go ahead. Like- I don't know, for me you can sell it a bit better if you are really doing it and just like- not- like, just- posing-

Posing, yeah posing.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, exactly, doesn't seem... very fitting- to what she's saying,-

Yeah.

maybe.

Or vey genuine.

Now, the last two pictures...

It's one or two pictures?

Just one.

Just one.

The last one that I sent. – Have you received it?

Hmm, yes I'm trying to re- read the caption. I'm a bit blind today. (figure 5; disabled woman)

Ah, it's okay.

Yeah, yeah, yeah...I- I remember when Gymshark started this- I don't know if it's a trend now or not but I remember and- I honestly like it because it's- not only the shredded, perfect-bodies that workout, not only they can feel good so- I- I like it and I like it their idea of reaching out.

Not only, what?

I know it's not everyone's cup of tea.

Ah, okay.

But, I mean, why not?

Yeah.

Like, I- of course, I'm a bit biased because I study special needs education (giggles) but I'm- yeah, I'm all for inclusivity, not- in-clu-si-ti-vi-ty, it's a hard word.

Yeah, it is.

Honestly, she looks really good in this colour. I couldn't pull it off.

It's like- yellow, yeah. She does really good- look good.

Yeah. I'm not sure about the yellow, with the blue but that's just- that's just me.

I like it. (giggles) I don't know why.

Really?

Yeah (giggles)

(giggles)

Ah, it's good but it's- too much for me.

Yeah, yeah.

One colour is more than enough.

Yeah.

On me.

Yeah, true.

I'm not sure if, hmm, my problem is with- this type of posts, I really like them but I always question if it's- really genuine or they just want the- money and the views-from it because I know it's now, trendy to -include everyone- and I'm not sure if they are treating- her or the other persons-/people in this post, equal-

Yeah...

to the other athletes-

Yeah.

or just doing it for the photoshoot.

Yeah.

It's always a question for me.

Yeah, it's become a trend, so you never know.

Yeah! Yeah.

Okay, now the last one, the last photo.

Ah! Okay. - Where is it? Ah, okay, get it. (indistinct) Damn! She can run fast.

(giggles)

– Okay, I can't run- more than- I don't know, 2km (giggles)

(giggles)

so it's already very impressive.

Yeah.

(then speaks Hungarian) good, Jesus. – I like that she's happy with herself.

Yeah.

I would like to be that happy – I- and seem so carefree in my own way.

Yeaaaah.- Its so true. – Okay, so. Now, we can move on too...uhm, uhm, the next question which is: what do you think of fitness apparel brands such as Gymshark, Alphalete, Nike, Lululemon, Women'sBest and Oneractive - which is Krissy Cela's brand.

Oh! I didn't know that.

Yeah because influencers or- or just like- Oneractive -

In general?

As an example of fitness influencer brands, you know? Yeah.

Hm-hmm...I li-I like them, of course. I -buy a ton of them so -I must like it

(small giggle)

– but (ugh)- I fee- I know it's- hm- it's a trend now and everyone has her ow- his or her- her own brand – and I know a lot of people don't like that– but I think- hmmm... I don't know, I like it. It gives me more- option -and- and I feel like there are some people or, I don't know how to say them, entrepreneurs?

Yeah.

Who really- give you their all and trying to- I don't know, make the change, make it different. And not just- that they will fit more body types but if they're packaging is eco-friendly or -

they, only- I don't know, use materials that are, I don't know how they make it-but it's- it's less weight on the earth and economy.

Yeah.

Maybe, one day -people will stop buy- I don't know, fast fashion brands? And, if they can help it by promoting- these- new- more, I don't know-

sustainable?

Eco-friendly brands, I think that's great. And, sometimes- they are working, faster with the trends.

Yeah.

I mean if I- I don't know, go to H&M or something, the workout clothes are- a bit outdated for me?! or just workout clothes. I like my work out -workout, stuff to look like- I'm going out,

Yeah.

Not in a creepy way but if I wanna wear them on the street, I definitely can.

Yeah.

Because they, look good, they make me feel good and- just look different.

Yeah.

If you just- buy it somewhere and go to the gym, nobody will know or notice- but if you- wear like a- Gymshark type of outfit, everyone will know it's Gymshark.

Yeah, yeah.

It will- I don't know, is-it looks good.

Also in the gym or are you talking about like on the street?-That they will notice that it's Gymshark.

Uhh, they know it in the gym on, actually no sometimes-

Also like on-

When I'm out- I don't know. Sometimes I'll- go shop in my gym-clothes, yeah I know (giggles), and... I can see one of the young girls no-notice it -like you know just- the look "ahh yeah, yeah" I get it.

(laughing)

I have the same thing. (laughing)

Yeah... yeah, it's fun. I've- also seen a lot of people, not a lot- but like- a few people,

Yeah.

here in Portugal- like...tourists that like have like a Gymshark... bra

Yeah.

or croptop like, when it's super hot and-

Yeah... yeah, that's what I like. It can- follow and pass as a, I don't know, crab-croptop or like bralette or something.

Yeah, yeah...exactly. So...

It's easy -and it looks good!

Yeah.- How do you feel about the athleisure trend? I think you answered it.

Oh! Yeah.

I think you answered it, right? Like...

I think so.

It- it's like wearing- what do you think of wearing gym clothes to the- on the street?

I don't mind... I used to be- not against it but I thought I wouldn't do it. I felt, I don't know, weird, bit insecure like "why am I in my gym clothes?"-but, now I don't care (laughing). I went to Florida and now I don't care.

(giggles). Everyone there wears it, right? (small giggle)

Bikinis or- gym clothes.

(laughing)

(giggles) I adopted the- habit. Sometimes, people look at me like I'm- weird.

(laughing)

I don't care.

Yeah, it's important to not care what other people think.

Yeah.

Okay, now, do you think these influencers have some type of impact when they promote this fitness apparel? If yes, what? It's the last question.

I think, they do. I don't think brands would- promote with influencers if they didn't have an impact. They are smarter than that-

Yeah.

and... of course they are- bringing in the numbers, they are- making money for the brands so- I guess that's why they are doing it...

Yeah.

and- I-if-if I would be an influencer and I would promote something I'll def- I would definitely make sure that – what I'm promoting is- really, hm- good and inclusive and they are doing the right thing. They are paying they-their workers and stuff like that.- I know not every influencer does that or thinks like that...but its like, important for me- and...I hope I follow- the kind of people that do think the- the same way...

Yeah.

- and they would promote healthy and- good things.

Yeah. Uhm... Do you- like what's and- what type of impact does it have on you? Like, them, them like –

I just wanna buy gym clothes. (giggles)

Them like promoting -fitness apparel. You said you just wanna buy gym clothes? (giggles)

Well, yeah, first of all it makes me want to buy it but... -ugh- I don't know. Hm...- I don't know. Hm, maybe -ugh-

It's-

maybe a bit- it makes me think a bit- like what ar- what are they promoting and if- it's really thaaat good or- are they just making money from it.

Yeah.

You know? Stuff like that. It's a crazy (inaudible) false thinking or I don't know. (giggles)

Yeah, it's good- a good- a g-it's a good answer.Yeah. think that- I think that's- that's it, yeah. Yeah, maybe if you could talk about the relationship influencers have with their audience like- what do you think?

I think it's important- to have some kind of -connection, with your- audience. I know a lot of people – are just like out there and if they are, I don't know, famous enough, pretty enough, they don't have to -interact with others but I always feel like – I used to unfollow people because they just- they are just a face or like a – Agh... it sounds horrible but- just a body... that, I don't know, you wanna achieve because they are so shredded or good or that type of thing and I try to follow people that interact with others -like not necessarily answer DM's or like that or just anything like that but If you feel like you know them a bit- like you know their workout routine or... or Why are they promoting what they are promoting, it's like- I don't know. It's... a distant- oh what's the word- not friend, someone you know. It's more comforting and ugh- and it feels... less like I – it's something I have to achieve and

more like just a- motivation thing- and then you feel like- because I feel like when you know something about them, it can as small as “oh they have a cute dog” or “Oh, yeah... they adopted a cat or something like that. It makes them - more human-

Yeah, or they have- kids. -those influencers...

Yeah, Yeah.

and maybe people we-will stop idolizing them so much and just- see the things that are relatable? Yeah, I like that when- when you can see that they are real people with real- real, problems but still give you like a little bit of an extra push or motivation or if they are really good at something- I really like Sophie's , the uh- “GainsbyBrains”, her books and workout guides because she really puts in the work to make sure it's the best and, I don't know the- like-ugh. I read like-

Have you been doing them?

-two or three like and she gives so much information not just like “oh, this is the workout! You will get a great booty” and- I don't't know, “a muscular shoulder” but how much you should drink and the food and, and just- overall I think it's a great book and you can see how the work put int.

Are you- are you doing the workout?

Ughh...not now, I'm with- there's an app called “Movewithus”.

Ah, you're using it?

Yeah.

Okay-

Australian.

Do you like it?

Yeah, it's – uh- great. You can track everything, the food, they have food options and they can put-put together the meal plan for you- like to, how many grams of rice and things like that. You can- change the food if you don't like it, just swap out what you don't like- and you can, literally,check everything- and the workouts are great. I really like them.- I don't like to train my quads (giggles) and I can change it so- I only have to, I don't know, focus on-on the glutes more or something like that.

Okay.

-and its really easy to use.

That's nice. I think with that, the interview is ended. Thank you for participating in this interview, you don't have to worry, you will remain anonymous.

Oh, okay- good to know. Thank you for having me.

Transcription D.

D, a 25 year old IT female employee, works out four times a week. The interview was conducted in Portuguese.

How do fitness influencers make you feel? It's better to put it like this.

Yeah, like a microphone.

“Uhm...I feel like I don't take them very seriously like I don't mean what they do is not important, my motivation just doesn't depend on them but they can bring like new ideas to the table and sometimes some motivation but it's more... I'm not also going to say inspiration- inspiration in the sense of ideas one can implement during training but I don't need them to mot-to go do it (workout) but they bring like novelty.”

Okay.

The second question is, why do you use social media, specifically Instagram, also if you even use Instagram.

“Yes, I use Instagram. What I use is to mainly follow things of my interest and people I really want to know what they are up to in their life but I do not follow a lot of things because I like to focus on people I know.”

Okay.

What influencers do you follow?

Fitness ones? Actually-

Yes, fitness ones.

Honestly, I think that at the moment I don't think I'm following any but I can tell you the ones I followed that I stopped following.

Yes, yes.

Whitney Simmons, Natacha Océane- I really like her, she's really cool.

I also watch her on YouTube.

Yah.

-used to watch her on YouTube, now I don't watch as often.

One girl that I don't remember her name, she's called Stephanie but she has like- her @ is NuttyFoodieFitness.

Ah, yes! I also know her.

-and

On YouTube.

And Stephanie Buttermore, Jeff Nippard that is her boyfriend, too. Uh... I think that's it.

Did you used to watch those documentaries they used to make? Super scientific like –

Yeah, I liked that, like that and Natacha also does that that's why- but I- I really like Natacha. She's really cool... and I think I can't remember anyone else.

Yeah, I really like Jeff Nippard and Stephanie Buttermore

-because of that.

Okay, why do you follow these influencers ?

Well, okay, in this case I think it was more about the- the scientific content too and because of the – the workout ideas, this was more in the case of Whitney and Natacha because they made little workout videos at home also, during covid. I used to follow them a lot.

On Instagram or YouTube?

Both.

Okay. – Okay, uhm...fifth question, why do you buy fitness apparel?

Uh, uh... only because I need it to train- like I don't consume a lot of fitness apparel.

How often, a year or monthly do you consume it?

Like, less than one piece a year, honestly- like I buy things that I consider like cool and that are going to be of quality and then I keep them until... I can't no more.

Okay, so you prefer to buy apparel that is more.... of quality or ?-

Yes.

That you buy like once a year.

Yes, more or less.

Okay, and how does it make you feel ?

It makes me feel good, yeah. I think it motivates me, the clothes that I wear to train- like if I feel better in my body, with the clothes I am using, I feel more motivated to train because then there are also a lot of people at the gym and you see it...I think- I think that it motivates me, yeah.

Uhm... and like you think- you were talking about the – the people from the gym, I didn't get it. -Like seeing people with –

No, no like seeing myself – seeing how it looks on me like- usually fitness apparel is made for- the clothes usually... Nike, that depends, it depends on the range but, for example, Gymshark makes things (clothes) to really fit you well like...

Yes.

- like, I feel good seeing myself with the clothes on and it gives me more the urge to wear it more often. Do you understand? It's not for other people but it's also cool to see... other people's outfits.

Ah, okay, yes. Yes, that's cute. Uhm...okay, now I'm going to show you like, pictures.-
Okay.-

of influencers and you are going to tell me what you think of, these influencers.

Only based on photos? Okay.

They're like posts.

Okay, okay.

I'm going to show you the photos now, on- my cellphone. Where is it?

Did you manage to get more people from the gym (for the interviews)?

I haven't asked around, yet, because like I already had – other people-

Yeah.

so, I only need one more person from the gym.

Okay.

I had already like two friends/acquaintances that train a lot and that consume- like, another one also trains a lot but consumes a lot! Do you see? One of the three doesn't consume as much, another- the other one is more or less, depending on the trends and the other one consumes-

Okay.

-a good amount.

A good amount is like every month?

Yeah.

But like, what do you do with all of that?

She uses it as regular clothes as well.

Ah okay...in the United states they do that a lot but that in Europe is much less accepted.

Yeah...but she-

In the United States the folks go like with leggings to the supermarket –

Yeah, true.

- and there it's like normal.

Here not, like... (giggles)

Here it's like “are you going to train are you not going?” like-

Yeah... (giggles) are you like here a little bit weird (not very audible) or what?

Exactly.- even because the only time I wore leggings to the supermarket was when I was about to train right after but okay.

She's from Hungary, so it's different.

Ah, figures.

Ah no but she says there – when she went to the United States, to Miami, she stayed there a lot of time like a month or whatever- like the people didn't care.

Ah, I didn't know.

Yeah but like, Hungary- (the United States)

Yes, it's cool, it's a thing if you do it a little bit -but it's like since it's not in our culture, it's weird.

Yeah... yes. In Hungary (United States) like they walk around like that.

What?

It's not in the European culture. Okay but okay. Uh... what do you think of this- this is recording, wait a second, let me see if it's recording. Yeah, it is. What do you think of this post? Like, when you read it, tell me-

Ah, I have to read it, okay.

- so I can skim through. Yeah, yeah.

Okay, you can skim through.

Like these are just the photos, now. (figure 1)

Yes.- Okay, I think she's ... I think it's a post ,a little short, so she's only saying why she likes to train but she also only wants to show a little bit – making a post around her... fit- no, not her fit, yes it's also around her fit but more of her body. Uhm...and like justify herself, I guess...I don't know... like it's not very inspiring it's just like yeah okay, you have a nice body, congratulations.

(giggles) (giggles)

**What do you find about- think or feel when she's like- promoting...her clothes, it's
Oneractive.**

Okay.

She doesn't say that.

No.

Okay.

But is it her brand, I don't know?

It is, it is. It's hers.

Okay, then I think it makes complete sense and like I think- I think that now I understand the post better, then. Like she's like it's no-not just one part of her life, of leisure, she works in that, as well. Like, okay, I cannot also be saying that influencers are just leisure (giggles) but

(giggles)

–I understand now. She has like a product range. I hadn't understood that but-

Yes, a range.

I think it makes sense. – She's showing that it looks good on her, (giggles).

**Yeah, it's that. Uhm... so I'm going to show you another one. It's like a slide of a work
out. (figure 2)**

(reads the description). Okay, you can pass.

Ah, it's just this one.

Ah, okay.

What do you think of this post?

Like, seeing only that but knowing she will be doing a workout, I think, it's cool. I think it makes sense for a fitness influencer to do that type of posts.

**Okay. – Uhm... then I have ... this influencer. – I think it's similar to the previous one.
(figure 34).**

Okay, I also think it's- an informative post style without it being too taxing.

**Okay, uhm...now I'm going to show you another one, another post.- like read the
descripton as well and-**

Can I slide down?

Yes, yes. Ah, it's not down, it's sideways.

Ah, you took a screenshot.

Yeah, I took a screenshot. -

Okay...I think it's a lot like... promote her product, again. Uhm...-

Then you also have the sec-second photo.

Yeah, yes.

-Just at the end.

I think it's like more of a promotion, this case. I don't feel like she's that worried about like – like with the audience. Uhm...It's a bit, uhm... I don't think you can dictate what is good or bad for a person, I think she put it like in a very informative and not suggestive way- like the things you should do to feel better about yourself, uhm...

Do you think it's very subjective?

-Uhm, no. I think, or better, I think that post is too objective like maybe what works for her doesn't mean its going to work for everyone. Uh... exactly, I think it's more like... depending on the people, it doesn't seem like- it almost seems like a recipe that cannot be applied for humans, uhm... but yeah like -

Yes, no-

I also didn't' see her content, maybe she talks BETTER about that in what she's promoting and adapts it more to the necess- I don't know, it should be more suggestive.

Yeah, yeah.

-and not too bossy.

Okay, then I have this one...wait.

Okay.- It's only this one? Or do you want me to see more photos?

No, it's just this one, just this one...but it's like, it's...- a slide of the same thing. (figure 5)

I think it's- I think it's really cool. I think it's inclusive. – I think it's inclusive but at the same time I also think that- a lot of brands, not only Gymshark, the company in itself, take advantage of that, nowadays but also it is, there is, it is a very thin line- imagine, it's almost like being damned if you do and damned if you don't.

It's what?

Being damned if you do and damned if you don't.- Like, if you make an inclusive post it's like... it's cool but at the same time it's like- ah you're taking advantage of this to sell, to have compassion, do you get it?- But-

Yes, it's like, some people will like it and others won't.

Yeah, exactly.- but putting that aside, I think that- ah sorry, I think that, that it's cool and it's- it's good that that starts appearing- like, I think at this moment it's still a little bit...used- but I'm also thinking about more of LGBTQ things and stuff that companies use, a lot -like pretending "we're very like pride focused" and so on...uhm...but I think that... practical actions like, I don't know, doing an event where they would promote like athletes, uhm... I'm not sure what it's called, those people that have like mobility difficulties but-

Yeah.-uh...-

But I don't know like a thing more (giggles), a thing more...uhm...tangible. It would be cool but I think it's a good initiative-, doing those types of posts.

Like there like being a ...a culture? Like, a name.

Uh, hm, hm-

For those type of people?

- no, no. Doing anything, like, I don't know, like promoting their products, I don't know, like a...competition just for people with reduced mobility or- uh...uh... but I don't know if they already did it or not. Like, more tangible things.- like using their gear and so on but-

But they do events and stuff.

Yeah...

Like, for...-

Exactly so...(inaudible) it's cool.

Okay, I think the last photo, it's like- this girl. Like, what do you feel...like...or think when the brand is like promoting their apparel like through... this-this lady?

I think it's cool. I think bodies come in all possible sizes, so... I think it's- there is, - once again, like I feel that... still- it's that representativeness is super specific. Now they've put a person that is, right, is overweight, kind of, is not that much, uhm... but there are a lot of body shapes and I feel that... either you're one thing, a lot like...fit and so on or they're going to put a person with, with excess weight and there is not, they don't show a lot of variety.-

Yeah, yes.

Yeah. I think more variety should be included.

Yeah, it's extremes.

Yeah.

Yeah, I also think it's extremes... or it's super like fit-

Yeah.

-or is skinny.

Or like "we have like a fat person here

-obese, yeah.

- who uses our gear, like, we're inclusive." –

Yeah.

And like, like all-

What about normal people?

Yeah, exactly and everyone in the middle. Yeah.

Yeah.

Yes, a little bit of that is lacking. Uhm...okay, what do you think...of brands such as Gymshark, Alphalete, Nike, Lululemon, Women's Best and this one, of this influencer that is Oneractive, uh...what do you think of those brands?

I think like, as every brand like they want to obtain profit and like- they take advantage like of the consumption habits of people because now it is also more trendy like to be fit and consume that type of – and then they use Instagram a lot for...for promoting the products and...and right, I think their (fitness influencers) objective, more even than making like... clothes, uhm... that are useful, is to make profit but that is- everything, almost.

Yes. So, you think they use a lot of trends?

Yes.

Like, current or like, yeah current ones. Yes, trends are current.

Yes, current trends. Like they make use of- and use people, on Instagram, to spread- like, to create trends, I think, like also. Like, I think them themselves also create- uhm...the trends.

Yes. – Okay, (now)I think it's the before last, question -

Okay.

-or the last one. Uhm- before last, one. What do you think of the, of the athleisure trend? That is, to use sporty clothes for, going to the supermarket and so on, I don't know.

Okay.

Like, to go meet your friends, like, outfits.

My answer is really simple, that is, everyone wears what they want. I don't care. If you want to wear that, wear it. If I, if I want to wear it, I wear it. If I don't want to, I don't wear it, like, everyone like, literally. I am not, am not in any way, judgemental of what people decide to do like, with themselves as long as it doesn't-

Harm you?

Yeah. Like...

But like, you do- wear the clothes like -

No. Usually, not, like... because for me it's not- it's comfortable for training but for me it's more comfortable for daily to wear other types of clothes.Uh...

Yeah.

- like okay, also if I'm working at home, maybe I can be in a tracksuit but it's not even the tracksuit I wear at the gym, it's my tracksuit like... from home. Uhm...but so, to answer, no, I don't do like athleisure.

Yes.

-but if I/they do, it doesn't ick me.

Okay. If they wear it or if you wear it?

If I wear it, it also doesn't make me feel bad, like, I wear what I want.

Yes,yes.

I also already went to the supermarket in a tracksuit (**giggles**), like whatever.

Yes.

I don't, don't really care- honestly.

Uhm..., right, then the last question is if you think that...like, these influencers-

uh...like when I showed you or fitness influencers, in general, if they have any type of impact when they promote, th-the apparel? And if yes, why? Why do you think like the impact-

-in you.

Ah, in me?

Yes.

Ah, I think so, like as much as I don't want to, like I -I consider myself a person that is not very consumist- but, you live in a...in a world where you are constantly bombarded with that- and I think that yes, honestly- and I decided to buy Gymshark, initially, when it was

not a brand known in Portugal before- because I saw influencers wearing it and promoting and like, I thought it (fitness apparel) looked good on them and that it would look on me too and like, I like it but -but as I already said, I try... like, consume in moderation, right? I buy when I need it, if I don't need it-

You don't buy it.

- I'm not going to buy it.- but like when I will go buy more clothes, maybe I will research again, like- and I think these people have some weight on that, yes. -but I also think that there are many people that are much more influenced by that, like- that consume a lot just because. That, also causes confusion for me.

Yes.

But, anyone is like they-

Yeah.

Transcription E.

The last respondent, E, age 27, a Portuguese resident, who works out 5/6 times a week and buys fitness apparel 3 or 4 times a year revealed interesting point of views:

How do fitness influencers make you feel?

So, to answer this question, uh...how do influences make me feel uhm... I'm going to be honest, I follow two or three influencers that I think that...that are for me, the best, people, that somehow inspire me everyday to have motivation to go train so I'm not a person that searches for- an infinite number of influencers to follow, so, I have two or three that inspire me and that, in some way, the posts that they publish, with certain motivational texts eh...in some way, force me like to...get up from the couch and think- okay, like... let's train like, stop being lazy, let's do this and...and...like- it's one hour of training, it's no big deal, the day has 24h, so...you can do it. I think above anything else, eh... those people that I follow, in some way, inspire me uh... to be stronger, meaning, being my best motivation, so, knowing that I have my... weaknesses and my flaws, eh... and that I can improve, so, in some way, inspire me in the sense of- being able to be better, eh- physically, so, being my best version. I think that it's this...the answer that I think, sincerely, translates like the fact of...them inspiring me.

True, social media is a lot of a façade.

Yes, true.

Okay. So, on to the next question. Why do you use social media, specifically Instagram?

Ehm...I think that Instagram and social networks, in general, are a platform that besides allowing us to open doors for...other...areas of the world and allow us to obtain various information and is a communication tool, eh... is also is a way...of...eh... sharing a little bit of our story, a little bit of...our lives- and... of the person that we are, so, I think that besides being a...a... tool of socialization, let's say... and of sharing- eh... I think it can also be a tool of transmitting a little bit of our personality, of our way of being, eh- although sometimes I think it becomes a little bit...ehm...materialistic, ehm... in the same sense of the word, it seems that... we become too focused on ourselves, eh...and in sharing pictures of us, so, in some way I think that...social networks, although being a good tool of communication and of...eh- sharing, ideas, uhm...through reels, for example, eh, I think it ends up being a little bit...in some way, uhm...a façade because I think that...they end up

showing the person only in a prism, do you understand? In other words, you are not 100% of what is on Instagram, you're like 5% of what Instagram shows so, I think that... a- a lot of times, Instagram is just...eh, a tool ehm... for- for seeing a little bit of another person, although it's not the whole cake but just one fraction.

So, you use it for sharing your life with others, areas of interest, socializing and knowing what people are up to?

Yes, although with the notion that Instagram is not an accurate representation of real life.

True. The next question is, what influencers do you follow?

Ehm...I follow three -eh, two influencers that I really like, like. That is Krissy Cela and Caroline, Caroline Omahoa (Caroline Omahony). They are two bikini fitness athletes ehm... that... that really like inspire me ehm... to be the best version of myself, to go to the gym in those days I really don't feel like it. Eh...and in some way, they show me that it is possible to reach results if we believe in ourselves and are not- are not lazy. Then, in relation to uh... Portuguese, influencers, maybe I follow one eh...for example, Bárbara Torres. She is an influencer that I like to follow, (she) shares good content and – and, transmits a good and motivational energy.

Right...Krissy Cela is also one of the few influencers I follow. Could you send me Caroline's Instagram? I didn't really understand how she's called and I can't also find her Instagram.

(sends link) I really like her.

What a body! I had heard her name but I felt she was too fake, I don't know. I prefer Krissy Cela, especially because she shows that she has problems. She shares stuff like having discovered she has an illness but I think her YouTube channel is better. I don't like Insta, no one's Insta.

Well, it's different.-

-and she seems more real.

- because Caroline is from competitions so she's super extreme.

Ah... okay, makes sense then.

There is not really that 20% of trash food and 80% right (food). What is being more real on Insta? (laughs)

It's a 100% with her (laughs). The poor thing though...Does she have a YouTube channel?

Not sure.

I watch more there than Instagram.

I only know that she has her own apparel.- If i were to be myself on Instagram...it would be super futile (laughs) but since I don't give a damn...

So, you are yourself there?

If I want to, yes. Ehm...but usually I only post inspiring photos and stories.

And why do you follow these fitness or athlete influencers?

Me, following these girls that, in some way, are in-flu-en-cers, in the sense of the word, ehm...that being whatever it is, it's in the optic of inspiring me...In some way, I would like to be like them because I look in the mirror and I see that... I don't...don't have the, the aspect they have or...in some way, they inspire me to be able to believe, eh... that my body can change and can become a better version, therefore, above everything else, that.- It's in the sense of- if I believe in myself uh...maybe I can achieve, in the same way that they did. Eh...especially when I see before and after photos, ehm...I notice- notice that they inspire me, a lot.

You're the one motivating me right now, to be honest. (giggles)

That's sweet (giggles) but I do a lot of shit and they do too. It's part of the balance.

Exactly. Everyone does.Who doesn't? Even a pt gave me a reprimand for not training for almost two weeks...

Yeah but...tons of them (influencers) have a shitty life and have to be always happy and perfect.

Exactly...So, basically, they inspire you and, in some way, are role models for you ?

Yes. In the sense that eh...I can achieve what they did, for myself.

Yes, makes sense...uhm... thank you for the clarification. The next question is, why do you buy a good amount of fitness apparel?

I'm going to be honest. Most of the workout clothes I buy, are from Sportzone (a local portuguese store that sells activewear from several brands such as Nike, Adidas, Doone, Puma etc.). Ehm...I's not something that I feel, somehow, that I am incentivized by influencers or Instagram to buy.Uh... Basically, I have a notion of what I need, the money I have... and I think that...that it's mainly that, in other words, for the money I have and

the..uh... possibilities that I have, I buy a specific amount according to what I need. Therefore, in some way, although I think Instagram is, in some way, a very consumerist tool because it is always showing, items to buy, clothes uh...shoes, ehm... activewear... In my- in my point of view, I don't buy it.

Yes, okay. So, you buy activewear for your performance needs, only and for the money you can afford, at Sportzone only?

Yes.

How does this apparel make you feel?

Eh...obviously, I'm not going to lie, I, I uh...when I wear activewear or a sporty outfit that I feel that- that...is cute or that...a certain influencer would wear or that is very similar to a certain influencer, obviously, it makes me feel more motivated...because it makes me feel beautiful because I feel confident eh...therefore, in some way, ends up giving a motivation and an extra push so that...I can achieve...ehm...better results. In other words, I end going more motivated...for... for the workouts.

So, cute apparel gives you confidence and motivation?

Yes, basically that.

Okay, moving on to the next question, what do you think or feel about fitness/athlete influencers promoting certain fitness apparel?

I think that Instagram, really, only reflects 4% of what everyone is and we only show what we want, we only show our best angle, we only show our best- our best clothes, we only show that we have certain...abdominals. No one on Instagram is going to show that they have countless folds, cellulite on the legs, that....that doesn't wear 32 but wears 38 etc., etc. So, I think that a lot of times, the fact of certain influencers or...peop- other people on Instagram that don't- don't have as many followers uhm...showing pictures where they show sculpted bodies, in some way, it's them to, to continue a utopic idea that for being healthy, you need to have a certain look. In other words, for example, uh... people with anorexia- that believe that having x abdominals and being super shredded is a synonym for being skinny- or...being skinny and being healthy- what doesn't have to be correlated. For example, I know that Krissy Cela had a heart issue, needed to be operated on – she, uh...shared uh... all of the process, from going to the operating room, the recover and therefore she showed that besides the pretty side of social media that is to show pose X and Y and show how the abdominal is pronounced, that she has an enormous glute, she also

showed uh...a scar from post-surgery, a gradual increase in weight, a nutrition, in some way, unregulated uh... and that very often is proceeded from sports excesses, so, leads to compulsive eating situations, so, a lot of the athletes that share photos uh...perfect, let's say, behind that, have a lot of problems uh...so there is situations of anorexia, bulimia, eating disorders where one includes compulsive eating so, I think that...that Instagram only shows the pretty side.

In the heart? Wasn't it in her pancreas?

No, it was really in her heart.

Okay. Nonetheless, I think you understood the question wrong. It has to do with apparel and not really with their body.

Then, I didn't understand the question.

I think you kind of did, you basically think that there is a connection between fitness apparel and body image. Is it that? And that is how you connect the apparel to their promotion?

Yes, yes, exactly. It's intertwined.- I also agree, when we see a photo that shows, for example, uh... an athlete with a... steel leg because she has her leg amputated, in some way, allows us to see that reality uh... is not perfection on Instagram and that not everyone has to have 70/30/80, do you understand? The measurements of a model, so... The reality is that people live with the adversities that life has thrown at them and try to achieve results they established even if it's hard."

Okay, so, you think 'being real' is something very positive in the promotion of fitness apparel.

Exactly.

What do you think of fitness apparel brands such as Gymshark, Alphalete, Nike, Lululemon, Womensbest, Oneractive?

I'm honest, I... there are brands that I love and... and even though not being of activewear or sports shoes, I make sure to buy them because I know they have better quality. So, for example, in the case of shoes. I'm a person that wears size 41 and that...likes comfortable shoes and therefore I know that if I buy a...a pair of Nike or Adidas shoes, the probability of those shoes lasting longer, be more comfortable for daily use, is higher than buying sneakers that are going to be 30,40 or 50% cheaper. Nonetheless, when it come to activewear, I'm going to be honest, I've already bought a lot of apparel on websites such as

Shein and like Sportzone where supposedly they are cheaper clothes, more economic but that...that are good for their purpose uh...that...they have. In comparison to Gymshark, I think that it's absurd, the cost of some shorts or a top but obviously that if a fitness influencer uh... that I follow, promotes it and if there is a code (for discounts) maybe then I am the person that goes to the website to see how much that outfit will cost.- because it is a brand that is indirectly connected to fitness influencers, so...in some way, uh...I stay more... in, let's say which is stupid but- but it's true.

In fashion?

Yes.

How do you feel about the athleisure trend?

I don't think this is a trend like...sincerely, I think that everyone uses activewear at home to be more comfortable and... the fact of it being leggings or...shorts and a top considered to be sporty, doesn't mean that... that ...there is a direct relation to the gym. A top and shorts or leggings doesn't necessarily mean that it is correlated to the gym...Uh.. what I think is that as long as one feels comfortable, it can be worn casually or like to... to go run or to go train, so, I don't think it's a trend but yes what really makes you feel comfortable, wearing.

Okay, uh... so, do you think there are people buying activewear not to workout but just to wear it at home?

Yes, if it leaves people comfortable at homes and they are not active, why no still buy it?

Yes, true.- Now we are on to the last question and it is if you think these influencers have some type of impact when they promote this apparel and if yes, what?

If they have any type of influence... of course that yes... by promoting the clothes, they encourage the people that see them on the other side like-of the phone uh...to buy those clothes because if she has an x, y, z body, super curvy and she mega fit, therefore you also are going to be like her... and maybe those 5% that you- want to be like her are going to be through clothes- and I think that clothes are always...a...decoy uhm...and an incentive so that people buy the clothes that that running model is using, do you understand? Therefore, in some way, I think that...they have an impact because they promote clothes that they wear uh... so that other people also wear them.

Thank you so much, I think you just clarified the relationship between the fitness influencer and the promotion of their fitness apparel. Well, thank you for your availability for the conducting of this interview.

You're welcome.

6. Reasons for following fitness influencers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18	16.5	16.5	16.5
0	1	.9	.9	17.4
Algorithms (for nutritional advice)	1	.9	.9	18.3
Apparel reviews, workout tips	1	.9	.9	19.3
authenticity, easy to follow	1	.9	.9	20.2
Because I like her online workout classes	1	.9	.9	21.1
Because I really like their personality and respect their hard work and discipline. They are people I look up to in certain regards.	1	.9	.9	22.0
Because she gives me motivation when I don't have. She has good tips and makes me feel that I can do it to	1	.9	.9	22.9
Because she is a plus-size fitness expert, and as someone plus-size who only exercises for mental health, I find it useful and inspirational	1	.9	.9	23.9
Because they are like-minded people	1	.9	.9	24.8
Because they inspire me to be a better person and to just be myself in every situation	1	.9	.9	25.7
Because they post workouts and outfits that I get inspired from. Also meal ideas	1	.9	.9	26.6
Because they transmit positive and motivating messages which often relate to ways of addressing challenges of real life towards society standards.	1	.9	.9	27.5
Cause Arnold inspires me	1	.9	.9	28.4
Do not follow	1	.9	.9	29.4
Don't feel the need to use anyone as reference, nor I seek to be like anyone else other than me.	1	.9	.9	30.3
Don't follow	1	.9	.9	31.2
Don't follow any influencers, I don't trust them	1	.9	.9	32.1
don't follow influencers	1	.9	.9	33.0
fitness content and tips on fitness	1	.9	.9	33.9
For inspiration and obtaining more knowledge about fitness	1	.9	.9	34.9
for quick workouts	1	.9	.9	35.8
Good workouts advices	1	.9	.9	36.7
Gosto do trabalho e desenvolvimento que eles acrescentam todos os dias que ajudam a melhorar a minha performance enquanto instrutora	1	.9	.9	37.6
He is a doctor and knows a lot of fitness and he knows what he is talking about	1	.9	.9	38.5
her workouts and not giving up and telling people to be stronger	1	.9	.9	39.4
I am interested in bodybuilding	1	.9	.9	40.4
I do not follow any influencers	1	.9	.9	41.3
I do not follow any.	1	.9	.9	42.2
I don't	1	.9	.9	43.1
I don't follow	1	.9	.9	44.0
I don't know, I like her recipes	1	.9	.9	45.0
I enjoy their personality	1	.9	.9	45.9
I find their content motivational and inspiring	1	.9	.9	46.8
I follow those influencers because I love to see their journey over the years and for example Whitney Simmons is for me really inspirational as she is sharing a lot of her own insecurities.	1	.9	.9	47.7
I have fibromialgia	1	.9	.9	48.6
I heard that they give out good advice	1	.9	.9	49.5
I like the mix between everyday stuff, workouts, workout wear and meal inspiration	1	.9	.9	50.5
I like the posts	1	.9	.9	51.4
I like their content, I want to be/look like them, and I get outfit inspo	1	.9	.9	52.3
I like to follow their workouts that they post and they inspire me to reach my goals.	1	.9	.9	53.2
I like watching their training vids and also for clothes release they review	1	.9	.9	54.1
I love their energy and	1	.9	.9	55.0

her workouts and not giving up and telling people to be stronger	1	.9	.9	39.4
I am interested in bodybuilding	1	.9	.9	40.4
I do not follow any influencers	1	.9	.9	41.3
I do not follow any.	1	.9	.9	42.2
I don't	1	.9	.9	43.1
I dont follow	1	.9	.9	44.0
I dont know, i like her recepies	1	.9	.9	45.0
I enjoy their personality	1	.9	.9	45.9
I find their content motivational and inspiring	1	.9	.9	46.8
I follow those influencers because I love to see their journey over the years and for example Whitney Simmons is for me really inspirational as she is sharing a lot of her own insecurities.	1	.9	.9	47.7
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I like their content, I want to be/look like them, and I get outfit inspo	1	.9	.9	52.3
I like to follow their workouts that they post and they inspire me to reach my goals.	1	.9	.9	53.2
I like watching their training vids and also for clothes release they review	1	.9	.9	54.1
I love their energy and style and use their workout posts to inspire my daily workouts	1	.9	.9	55.0
I love to know more about fitness and training, they show how to train without getting injure and give food tips. I also follow them because they show and wear the new launch and help me buy things i really would like.	1	.9	.9	56.0
I only follow him because he shows funny videos of crossfit	1	.9	.9	56.9
I think they are relatable, funny and inspiring.	1	.9	.9	57.8
I watch videos of fitness influences on YouTube instead	1	.9	.9	58.7
Inspiration, reality and relatable!	1	.9	.9	59.6
Inspiring, strong women	1	.9	.9	60.6
just you, because I know you personally.	1	.9	.9	61.5
Knowledgable	1	.9	.9	62.4
Like the content they post and their transparency with body image and editing onkine	1	.9	.9	63.3
macw3rk	1	.9	.9	64.2
Motivation	2	1.8	1.8	66.1
Motivation and inspiration for training and outfits	1	.9	.9	67.0
Motivation, Inspiration, Fitness tips	1	.9	.9	67.9
My body image just got so bad	1	.9	.9	68.8
No bull, real advice/workouts and no preaching	1	.9	.9	69.7
No reasons specific	1	.9	.9	70.6
None	2	1.8	1.8	72.5
NONE	1	.9	.9	73.4
Outfit, motivation, workout inspiration	1	.9	.9	74.3
Pela partilha do dia a dia	1	.9	.9	75.2
Pretty	1	.9	.9	76.1
Reliable	1	.9	.9	77.1
She is relatable, her content is helpful	1	.9	.9	78.0
she's inspiring, has an amazing workout system that I love and she helps me to love and accept myself	1	.9	.9	78.9
She's fun	1	.9	.9	79.8
Sigo atletas de crossfit pela natureza da sua atividade e partilha de treinos e dicas	1	.9	.9	80.7
They are Gymshark athletes and I like their personalities	1	.9	.9	81.7
They are inspiring. And their lifestyle, life is interesting. They are not just about fitness	1	.9	.9	82.6
They are moms and also work out	1	.9	.9	83.5
They are people that	1	.9	.9	84.4

Workout tips	1	.9	.9	99.1
Workout Tips	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	

7. Instagram interface preferences

Why is that more appealing to you? (If you do not use Instagram, please specify)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	17	15.6	15.6	15.6
"still" posts: can be appropriately read	1	.9	.9	16.5
Actually I dont interact with influencers	1	.9	.9	17.4
Bc its more something u learn from	1	.9	.9	18.3
Because I don't have to look for it. It's easy	1	.9	.9	19.3
Because I get work out tips and diet tips quickly	1	.9	.9	20.2
Because I see what they are doing live	1	.9	.9	21.1
Because im buying online, and it help me see what the product is really. And because i like scrolling trough those pictures because it passionate me	1	.9	.9	22.0
Because in the storys i feel more close with de person and i belive more	1	.9	.9	22.9
Because it complements my day with knowledge and activities I don't do regularly	1	.9	.9	23.9
Because it is engaging and it gives me strength a lot of the times to take action about training or even healthy snacks	1	.9	.9	24.8
Because looking at posts is my favourite thing about Instagram and because I follow so many people that I don't see non-friends' stories that often	1	.9	.9	25.7
Because of the information	1	.9	.9	26.6
Better to come back and check again	1	.9	.9	27.5
Contains more detail info	1	.9	.9	28.4
Depending on the content of either stories or posts, stories usually give snippets of information which might interest me to investigate other things, and posts give more detailed information.	1	.9	.9	29.4
Do not use	1	.9	.9	30.3
don't use Instagram	1	.9	.9	31.2
dont follow	1	.9	.9	32.1
Ease of reference	1	.9	.9	33.0
Ease of use and accessibility	1	.9	.9	33.9
Easier to consume	1	.9	.9	34.9
Easier to follow the exercise steps	1	.9	.9	35.8
Easier to see	2	1.8	1.8	37.6
Easier viewing, more frequently viewed	1	.9	.9	38.5
Easy	1	.9	.9	39.4
Easy to digest information!	1	.9	.9	40.4
Easy to refer back to, always accessible	1	.9	.9	41.3
Easy to see	1	.9	.9	42.2
Emotional viduials	1	.9	.9	43.1
Faster	1	.9	.9	44.0
Follow their day to day and special events	1	.9	.9	45.0
I don't use it.	1	.9	.9	45.9
I don't have social media cause it was too toxic, too fake and absolutely obsolete for my mind health. Took me a while to realize that but once i did i became happier.	1	.9	.9	46.8
I dont follow any influencers, therefore I dont see their instagram stories	1	.9	.9	47.7
I like more content	1	.9	.9	48.6
I like stories for quick entertainment but posts that i can save and refer to later	1	.9	.9	49.5
I like Storys More cause the influencer is speaking to "me" i dont Reality care about posy pics	1	.9	.9	50.5
I like to read	1	.9	.9	51.4
I rarely look at highlights	1	.9	.9	52.3
I watch Youtube vidoes of influences as i find this more informative	1	.9	.9	53.2
If they talk you seem to connect	1	.9	.9	54.1
Im not a TIKTok fan and the new insta is just trying to be that, I find proper tutorials or lives engaging	1	.9	.9	55.0
It's more appealing than a single picture	1	.9	.9	56.0
it's more engaging and tells a bigger story	1	.9	.9	56.9
It's a more real moment in their day and doesn't seem as scripted as some of the posts	1	.9	.9	57.8
It's fast and efficient tips usually	1	.9	.9	58.7
Its short but with moving	1	.9	.9	59.6

I watch Youtube vidoes of influences as I find this more informative	1	.9	.9	53.2
If they talk you seem to connect	1	.9	.9	54.1
Im not a TIKTok fan and the new insta is just trying to be that, I find proper tutorials or lives engaging	1	.9	.9	55.0
It's more appealing than a single picture	1	.9	.9	56.0
it's more engaging and tells a bigger story	1	.9	.9	56.9
It's a more real moment in their day and doesn't seem as scripted as some of the posts	1	.9	.9	57.8
It's fast and efficient tips usually	1	.9	.9	58.7
Its short but with moving graphics. I like that more than a post/picture	1	.9	.9	59.6
Its the most complete type of publication, allow more information	1	.9	.9	60.6
Less reading and more videos so I can see techniques and actually hear what they are saying.	1	.9	.9	61.5
Mainly because of how they create the videos, it captures my attention, also the fact that, sometimes, the videos are amusing	1	.9	.9	62.4
More action	1	.9	.9	63.3
More dynamic, more planed (although not so spontaneous), longer than stories and we can save them on the archive for later.	1	.9	.9	64.2
more entertaining	1	.9	.9	65.1
More interactive	1	.9	.9	66.1
More interactive /they post more stories than actual posts	1	.9	.9	67.0
more often, more daily, you see it directly on the feed	1	.9	.9	67.9
More personal	2	1.8	1.8	69.7
More readily in front of you when you load Instagram	1	.9	.9	70.6
More relatable	1	.9	.9	71.6
N/a	1	.9	.9	72.5
NONE	1	.9	.9	73.4
On stories influencers post videos from that day, not somehow edited - so for me it's the "most realistic"	1	.9	.9	74.3
Pela quantidade de informação que nos podem transmitir através do texto com o complemento da foto/post onde fazem/utilizam/...	1	.9	.9	75.2
Permanent	1	.9	.9	76.1
Por se conseguir ver produtos com maior detalhe	1	.9	.9	77.1
Posts	1	.9	.9	78.0
Posts and stories are current life updates.	1	.9	.9	78.9
Prefer youtube	1	.9	.9	79.8
Quick access on IG	1	.9	.9	80.7
Quick and less time consuming	1	.9	.9	81.7
Quick to see	1	.9	.9	82.6
Quicker to look at	1	.9	.9	83.5
Reels are usually not genuine and I dont go back and look at peoples highlights	1	.9	.9	84.4
results	1	.9	.9	85.3
Short and quick	1	.9	.9	86.2

8. Fitness apparel brands recall

What fitness apparel brands do you know about? (If you do not recall any, please specify)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	.9	.9	.9
-	1	.9	.9	1.8
adidas is my go to	1	.9	.9	2.8
Adidas puma prozis	1	.9	.9	3.7
Adidas, Gymshark	1	.9	.9	4.6
Adidas, Nike, Decathlon, New Balance	1	.9	.9	5.5
Adidas, Puma maybe. I know about these. But I do not purchase from these.	1	.9	.9	6.4
Adidas, puma, Nike, oysho, fila, lululemon, fabletics	1	.9	.9	7.3
ALPHALETE GYMSHARK NVCTN	1	.9	.9	8.3
Armoured, nike, addidas, a lot of brands from decathlon and sportzone	1	.9	.9	9.2
Boots and t-shirts	1	.9	.9	10.1
can't recall	1	.9	.9	11.0
Crop Shop Butique, Gymshark, Alphatlete, Joja, Lululemon	1	.9	.9	11.9
Decathlon	1	.9	.9	12.8
Decathlon brands	1	.9	.9	13.8
do not recall	1	.9	.9	14.7
Do not recall	1	.9	.9	15.6
domyos	1	.9	.9	16.5
Domyos, nike,	1	.9	.9	17.4
Domyos, Nike, adidas	1	.9	.9	18.3
don't	1	.9	.9	19.3
Dupla, nike, alo yoga, oysho	1	.9	.9	20.2
fabletics, lulu, girlfriend collective, beyond yoga	1	.9	.9	21.1
Gym Shark, RISE, RYSE, Myprotein, Prozis - that's about it from the top of my head.	1	.9	.9	26.6
Gymshark	6	5.5	5.5	27.5
Gymshark-BO+TEE-aybl	1	.9	.9	28.4
Gymshark, shein	1	.9	.9	29.4
Gymshark, aybl, nike, adidas	1	.9	.9	30.3
Gymshark, Alphalete	1	.9	.9	31.2
Gymshark, alphalete, aybl	1	.9	.9	32.1
Gymshark, Alphalete, NVNC, KIW, Enya, Tala, Exercere, Lululemon, Glowmode, Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Puma, Hummel and more	1	.9	.9	33.0
Gymshark, alphaletez womans best	1	.9	.9	33.9
Gymshark, Aybl, Oceans Apart, Fabletics, Nike, Addidas, Womens Best, Under Armour	1	.9	.9	34.9
Gymshark, bluee, lululemon, Amazon	1	.9	.9	35.8
Gymshark, Born primitive, Vanquish, Hstl Made.	1	.9	.9	36.7
Gymshark, Echt, Rock Nation, no bull	1	.9	.9	37.6
Gymshark, gymking, Nike, under armour, adidas, puma,	1	.9	.9	38.5
Gymshark, Hoka, No Bull, Nike	1	.9	.9	39.4
Gymshark, ironstrong, Nike, adidas, underarmour	1	.9	.9	40.4
Gymshark, Lazuli Label, Rydewear, Aybl, Alphalete	1	.9	.9	41.3
Gymshark, Lounge, Aybl, Bo+Tee, Tala	1	.9	.9	42.2
GymShark, Lululemon	1	.9	.9	43.1
Gymshark, Lululemon, Athleta, Old navy etc.	1	.9	.9	44.0
Gymshark, lululemon, aybl	1	.9	.9	45.0
Gymshark, lululemon, aybl, womans best etc	1	.9	.9	45.9
GymShark, Nike	1	.9	.9	46.8
Gymshark, Nike, adidas, reebok and 100 more	1	.9	.9	47.7
Gymshark, Nike, NoBull, rawgear	1	.9	.9	48.6
Gymshark, Nike, reebok are my top 3	1	.9	.9	49.5
Gymshark, Oner Active	1	.9	.9	50.5
Gymshark, Oner Active, AYBL, Doyoueven, Alphalete	1	.9	.9	51.4
Gymshark, Rydewear, aybl, Crop shop boutique, Lorna Jane, Lululemon	1	.9	.9	52.3
Gymshark, Tala, Lululemon, Sweaty Betty	1	.9	.9	53.2
Gymshark, VQ, Persue Fitness, Rydewear, Glutewear	1	.9	.9	54.1
Gymshark, Women's Best, Ryder Wear, ASOS 4505, Puma, Under Armour etc	1	.9	.9	55.0
Gymshark.	1	.9	.9	

Gymshark, lululemon, aybl, womans best etc	1	.9	.9	45.0
GymShark, Nike	1	.9	.9	45.9
Gymshark, Nike, adidas, reebok and 100 more	1	.9	.9	46.8
Gymshark, Nike, NoBull, rawgear	1	.9	.9	47.7
Gymshark, Nike, reebok are my top 3	1	.9	.9	48.6
Gymshark, Oner Active	1	.9	.9	49.5
Gymshark, Oner Active, AYBL, Doyoueven, Alphalete	1	.9	.9	50.5
Gymshark, Rydewear, aybl, Crop shop boutique, Lorna Jane, Lululemon	1	.9	.9	51.4
Gymshark, Tala, Lululemon, Sweaty Betty	1	.9	.9	52.3
Gymshark, VQ, Pursue Fitness, Rydewear, Glutewear	1	.9	.9	53.2
Gymshark, Women's Best, Ryder Wear, ASOS 4505, Puma, Under Armour etc	1	.9	.9	54.1
Gymshark.	1	.9	.9	55.0
Gymshark, Fabletics, Nike, adidas, shein, my protein, lululemon, rydewear	1	.9	.9	56.0
Gymshark, prozis and lefties	1	.9	.9	56.9
I don't buy named brand fitness apparel, Decathlon is just fine	1	.9	.9	57.8
I don't know	1	.9	.9	58.7
I don't know if it applies but Adidas and Nike	1	.9	.9	59.6
I don't know any	1	.9	.9	60.6
I don't recall	1	.9	.9	61.5
I don't recall any	1	.9	.9	62.4
I don't know any	1	.9	.9	63.3
I don't know	1	.9	.9	64.2
Lifefitness, precor, techno gym	1	.9	.9	65.1
lululemon	1	.9	.9	66.1
Lululemon, gymshark, alphalete	1	.9	.9	67.0
Mainly for equine spirts	1	.9	.9	67.9
Myprotein, Gymshark	1	.9	.9	68.8
Myprotein, Prozis, Gymshark	1	.9	.9	69.7
New balance	1	.9	.9	70.6
New Balance, Uniqlo, Nike	1	.9	.9	71.6
Nike	4	3.7	3.7	75.2
Nike adidas	1	.9	.9	76.1
Nike and Adidas	1	.9	.9	77.1
Nike, Adidas, GymShark, Tala	1	.9	.9	78.0
nike, adidas, puma	1	.9	.9	78.9
nike, adidas, puma, nb	1	.9	.9	79.8
Nike, Adidas, Under Armour, Puma, Vrst	1	.9	.9	80.7
Nike, adidas,NB	1	.9	.9	81.7
Nike, Gymshark, LuLulemon, Adidas, Reebok, Under Armour	1	.9	.9	82.6
Nike, gymshark, oner active, under armour, adidas, puma, reebok	1	.9	.9	83.5
Nike, Puma, Adidas	1	.9	.9	84.4
Nike, puma, oysho, clothing brands that also produce workout apparel like Abercrombie	1	.9	.9	85.3
No	1	.9	.9	86.2
None	1	.9	.9	87.2
Oceans apart, Nike, Adidas	1	.9	.9	88.1
Oito um, pic, prozis	1	.9	.9	89.0
old navy , victoria secret	1	.9	.9	89.9
Oner Active	1	.9	.9	90.8
Prozis	1	.9	.9	91.7
Prozis, adidas, nike	1	.9	.9	92.7
Reebok	1	.9	.9	93.6
Reebok, Nike, Adidas, Lululemon, Gymshark, Prozis, Oysho	1	.9	.9	94.5
Reebok, NoBull, Nike, Picsil	1	.9	.9	95.4
Several brands. none specific	1	.9	.9	96.3
So many.	1	.9	.9	97.2
Suplements, protein, bcca from sasha fitness	1	.9	.9	98.2
There are so many, it's difficult to narrow down!	1	.9	.9	99.1
Tons! For example: Gymshark, AYBL	1	.9	.9	100.0

8.1 Fitness apparel brands preferences

Why do you prefer those fitness apparel brands ? (If you do not recall any, please specify)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	7	6.4	6.4	6.4
-	2	1.8	1.8	8.3
.	1	.9	.9	9.2
Alphalete because the amplify collection change my life, the material and the bootie it make, i never had legging that me feel confident like those. And gymshark for their sport bra, i love them so much.	1	.9	.9	10.1
Beautiful designs	1	.9	.9	11.0
Because it really works on me	1	.9	.9	11.9
Because of how they fit and because of the sense of belonging to a community.	1	.9	.9	12.8
Because they are made for sports	1	.9	.9	13.8
Because they bring sports and comfort close to the needs and all purposes of daily life	1	.9	.9	14.7
Better quality	1	.9	.9	15.6
Cheap and practical	1	.9	.9	16.5
Cheap, enough quality, easy access	1	.9	.9	17.4
Comfort, price, fit, materials	1	.9	.9	18.3
comfortable and have pockets	1	.9	.9	19.3
Comfy	1	.9	.9	20.2
Design, quality	1	.9	.9	21.1
do not recall	1	.9	.9	22.0
Do not recall	1	.9	.9	22.9
don't	1	.9	.9	23.9
From YouTube and family recommendations.	1	.9	.9	24.8
Functionality	1	.9	.9	25.7
Good experience with them and good quality	1	.9	.9	26.6
Good fit, long lasting	1	.9	.9	27.5
Good material, quality	1	.9	.9	28.4
Good quality	1	.9	.9	29.4
Good Quality	1	.9	.9	30.3
Good quality clothes, nice styles and colours	1	.9	.9	31.2
Good quality, can trust the brand, I like the designs	1	.9	.9	32.1
Great quality, style & affordable	1	.9	.9	33.0
Gymshark	1	.9	.9	33.9
Helps you become empowered and strong and fiercely	1	.9	.9	34.9
How it looks	1	.9	.9	35.8
I didn't say I preferred them? Just that I know of them. Gymshark is my preferred brand, mainly because of style and my boyfriend works there so I get a great discount	1	.9	.9	36.7
I don't have any preference towards these brands.	1	.9	.9	37.6
I don't have any specific preferences. I only own 2 lifting accessories for aid in my exercises, no brand clothing as I do not have the money to waste on that.	1	.9	.9	38.5
I don't know	1	.9	.9	39.4
I don't knows any	1	.9	.9	40.4
I don't like Oceans apart because of the poor quality, Nike & Adidas have better quality & price	1	.9	.9	41.3
I don't prefer them. I just know about them.	1	.9	.9	42.2
I don't really love them	1	.9	.9	43.1
I don't recall	1	.9	.9	44.0
I don't.	1	.9	.9	45.0
I don't know	1	.9	.9	45.9
I just preffer it design wise	1	.9	.9	46.8
I like the aesthetic and how they feel on me as well as how they're able to function during training	1	.9	.9	47.7
I like the design and material	1	.9	.9	48.6
I like the products and materials used	1	.9	.9	49.5
I like the way it looks on me, customer service is great, it's a good product	1	.9	.9	50.5
I like what is cheap and good quality	1	.9	.9	51.4
I only like Gymshark and Aybl as they are squatproof and are not greenwashing	1	.9	.9	52.3
I prefer gymshark because of their designs an quality	1	.9	.9	53.2
I prefer Gymshark for tight fit + aesthetics	1	.9	.9	54.1
I prefer only Gymshark as for me it's not just	1	.9	.9	55.0

I don't recall	1	.9	.9	44.0
I don't.	1	.9	.9	45.0
I don't know	1	.9	.9	45.9
I just prefer it design wise	1	.9	.9	46.8
I like the aesthetic and how they feel on me as well as how they're able to function during training	1	.9	.9	47.7
I like the design and material	1	.9	.9	48.6
I like the products and materials used	1	.9	.9	49.5
I like the way it looks on me, customer service is great, it's a good product	1	.9	.9	50.5
I like what is cheap and good quality	1	.9	.9	51.4
I only like Gymshark and Aybl as they are squatproof and are not greenwashing	1	.9	.9	52.3
I prefer gymshark because of their designs an quality	1	.9	.9	53.2
I prefer Gymshark for tight fit + aesthetics	1	.9	.9	54.1
I prefer only Gymshark as for me it's not just brand with fitness clothing but also a community of great people with amazing life stories.	1	.9	.9	55.0
I prefer to buy something useful and with a price according to its quality, no matter the brand	1	.9	.9	56.0
I trust the quality and style	1	.9	.9	56.9
It is the only one I recall	1	.9	.9	57.8
It's a store close to my house and it's cheap	1	.9	.9	58.7
Like the colours and design	1	.9	.9	59.6
Like the quality	1	.9	.9	60.6
look good and comfortable	1	.9	.9	61.5
Looks good + good to workout in	1	.9	.9	62.4
Love the fit and designs and the community	1	.9	.9	63.3
More reliable	1	.9	.9	64.2
My favourites are surf brand Roxy's fitness clothes & Sturdy by Design,	1	.9	.9	65.1
My Sports activities	1	.9	.9	66.1
N/a	1	.9	.9	67.0
Não experimentei todas mas das que uso gosto da qualidade da roupa, da diversidade e imaginação das marcas	1	.9	.9	67.9
Nike	1	.9	.9	68.8
No	1	.9	.9	69.7
price	1	.9	.9	70.6
Qualidade	1	.9	.9	71.6
quality	1	.9	.9	72.5
Quality	1	.9	.9	73.4
Quality and brand ethics	1	.9	.9	74.3
Quality and cost	1	.9	.9	75.2
Quality of product, functionality, feel, fit,	1	.9	.9	76.1
Quality vs price	1	.9	.9	77.1
Reliable	1	.9	.9	78.0
Several brands. none specific	1	.9	.9	78.9
style, comfort	1	.9	.9	79.8
Style, quality, fit, colours, influencers, ethics/sustainability	1	.9	.9	80.7
Stylish apparel and	1	.9	.9	81.7

The look, quality, community	1	.9	.9	84.4
They are all different but they provide different options for various types of bodys they are all inclusive	1	.9	.9	85.3
They are comfortable	1	.9	.9	86.2
They are comfortable and aesthetic	1	.9	.9	87.2
They are known to be expertised on fitness	1	.9	.9	88.1
They are stylish and comfortable	1	.9	.9	89.0
They fit my body well	1	.9	.9	89.9
They have good products, community and customer ssrvice	1	.9	.9	90.8
They have nice and appealing workout clothes that make me feel confident	1	.9	.9	91.7
They have nice things but gymshark is getting over priced	1	.9	.9	92.7
They look good	1	.9	.9	93.6
They offer nice fits and quality fits	1	.9	.9	94.5
They were given to me	1	.9	.9	95.4
Trust the product	1	.9	.9	96.3
Trusted and fairly cheap	1	.9	.9	97.2
Trustworthiness	1	.9	.9	98.2
Well known, good quality	1	.9	.9	99.1
Widespread adoption by the general public	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	

9. Influencers consumers follow

Which influencers do you follow? (if you do not follow any fitness influencers, please specify)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
@cbum @joesthetics @noeldeyzel_bodybuilder @moreplatesmoredates	16	14.7	14.7	14.7
@milky.gymacc	1	.9	.9	15.6
0	1	.9	.9	16.5
A lot lol ... Natalie Bally, Libby Christensen, Bex Hunter, Brittany Lupton, Whitney Simmons, KK fit, Yaya	1	.9	.9	17.4
Adds and popups only (except one instagrammer)	1	.9	.9	18.3
Amyrookes Kathryn_fit Bailey Stewart etc	1	.9	.9	19.3
Andreia miss	1	.9	.9	20.2
Andreia Salvador	1	.9	.9	21.1
Anna Lewandowska	1	.9	.9	22.0
Ashley gaita, amy rook, krissy Cela	1	.9	.9	22.9
Bakar Naviera, Daniela Fainus, fitness and crossfit pages	1	.9	.9	23.9
Big brands influencers (for example gymshark athletes)	1	.9	.9	24.8
bloglates	1	.9	.9	25.7
Bloglates	1	.9	.9	26.6
Bodybuilding influencers	1	.9	.9	27.5
Bodybuilding influencers (alissontestu, ashlynkaltwasser...) and fitness influencers (denice moberg, juju norremose...)	1	.9	.9	28.4
Brittany Lupton - Megan Grubb - Savannah Wright - Libby Christensen - KK twins	1	.9	.9	29.4
Brittany Lupton, Whitney Simmons, Kylie Ross.	1	.9	.9	30.3
Brittany Lupton, Joey swoll, Bradley Maryn, Courtney saracino, Camille for gymshark inspo	1	.9	.9	31.2
Cbum & Alex_euBank.	1	.9	.9	32.1
Chloe ting	1	.9	.9	33.0
Chris Bumstead, Joe Delayne, Jeff Nippard, Russel Orhil	1	.9	.9	33.9
Cortez	1	.9	.9	34.9
Do not follow any one on Instagram	1	.9	.9	35.8
Don't follow	1	.9	.9	36.7
Don't follow influencer, just some friends that happen to be in the fitness world.	1	.9	.9	37.6
don't follow influencers	1	.9	.9	38.5
Dutch gymshark athletes	1	.9	.9	39.4
Ebenezer Samuel	1	.9	.9	40.4
Gabriela Pugliesi, bodyking, etc	1	.9	.9	41.3
gainsbybrains, Hanna Oberg, Alex Rice, Aubrie Bromlow, Easter Ozzella, Jessica Olie, Emma Dillon, Rachel Dillon, Victoria D'Aviano, Don Saladino, Lisa Lancelford.	1	.9	.9	42.2
Hanna oberg	1	.9	.9	43.1
Hanna Oeberg, Libby Christ., Denise Moberg, Brittany Lupton, Savannah Wright, Krissy Cela, Whitney Simmons	1	.9	.9	44.0
I do not follow any fitness influencers	1	.9	.9	45.0
I do not follow any influencer.	1	.9	.9	45.9
I do not follow any.	1	.9	.9	46.8
I do not follow influencers, only real content creators	1	.9	.9	47.7
I don't remember their names	1	.9	.9	48.6
I dont follow	1	.9	.9	49.5
I dont follow any influencers	1	.9	.9	50.5
I follow one but i can't remember her @ !!!	1	.9	.9	51.4
Instrutores Les Mills (NZ)	1	.9	.9	52.3
Iulia, Brittany Lupton	1	.9	.9	53.2
Jeff Nippard, Jason Physique, Andrew Pap, Marc Fit, Cbum, Obi Vincent	1	.9	.9	54.1
Just you :)	1	.9	.9	55.0
KK fit twins, Whitney Simmons, Savannah Wright, Megan Grubb, Krissy Cela, Gousje, Notchli, Brittany Lupton	1	.9	.9	56.0
KKFIT, Britney Lumpson, Sav Wright, Nona Bryant	1	.9	.9	56.9
Krissy Cela	1	.9	.9	57.8
Krissy Cela, Ashley gaita	1	.9	.9	58.7
Krissy Cela, Hebe Hiom	1	.9	.9	59.6
Libby Christensen and Gains by Brains (Sophie)	1	.9	.9	60.6
Libby Christensen, Georgia Richards, Sophie Jayne Miller, Riley Fit, Whitney Simmons	1	.9	.9	61.5
Libby Christensen, Whitney Simmons, gains by brains, Brittany Lupton, Lucy Davis, Savannah Wright and others	1	.9	.9	62.4
Libby Christenson, Whitney Simmons, Brittany Lupton as well as a handful of others	1	.9	.9	63.3
Libby christisan, jade packer, tge dqlq and Lisa fit and many more	1	.9	.9	64.2
Linda Sun, bloglates, lily sabri, Holly dolke, boho beautiful yoga and yoga with adriane	1	.9	.9	65.1
Liver king, allbusinessfitness	1	.9	.9	66.1
madymorrison, itaudrey, trainingfabl, sarakathryns	1	.9	.9	67.0
Marcus Filly	1	.9	.9	67.9
Megan grubb, Whitney Simmons, Alex rice	1	.9	.9	68.8
Megan Grubb, Whitney Simmons, Millygift, Elora G	1	.9	.9	69.7
Myself and arnold swatchner (no idea how to write)	1	.9	.9	70.6
Natacha Oceane, Demi Bagby, Ross Edgley	1	.9	.9	71.6
Naturally Stefanie, Lucy Davies, KK fit twins, Whitney Simmons, Nat B, Jessica Olie, Libby etc	1	.9	.9	72.5
Naturally Stephanie, Sophie Butler, Sohee Fit, Nutty Foodie Fitness, Oyinda-Fitness, Ben Carpenter, James Smith, Katie Crewe	1	.9	.9	73.4
No	1	.9	.9	74.3
NOEL DEYZEI	1	.9	.9	75.2
None	3	2.8	2.8	76.1
NONE	1	.9	.9	77.0
Not of interest to me	1	.9	.9	77.9
ogustavocunha	1	.9	.9	78.9
Oliver Forslin, Chris Bumstead	1	.9	.9	79.8
Pamela Reif, dianaschmdr, keltieconner.	1	.9	.9	80.7
	1	.9	.9	81.7
	1	.9	.9	82.6
	1	.9	.9	83.5

Just you :)	1	.9	.9	56.0
KK fit twins, Whitney Simmons, Savannah Wright, Megan Grubb, Krissy Cela, Guusje, Notchli, Brittany Lupton	1	.9	.9	56.9
KKFIT, Brittny Lupton, Sav Wright, Nona Bryant	1	.9	.9	57.8
Krissy Cela	1	.9	.9	58.7
Krissy Cela, Ashley gaita	1	.9	.9	59.6
Krissy Cela, Hebe Hiom	1	.9	.9	60.6
Libby Christensen and Gains by Brains (Sophie)	1	.9	.9	61.5
Libby Christensen, Georgia Richards, Sophie Jayne Miller, Riley Fit, Whitney Simmons	1	.9	.9	62.4
Libby Christensen, Whitney Simmons, gains by brains, Brittany Lupton, Lucy Davis, Savannah Wright and others	1	.9	.9	63.3
Libby Christenson, Whitney Simmons, Brittany Lurton as well as a handful of others	1	.9	.9	64.2
Libby christisan, jade packer, tge qlqi and Lisa fit and many more	1	.9	.9	65.1
Linda Sun, blogilates, lily sabri, Holly dolke, boho beautiful yoga and yoga with adriane	1	.9	.9	66.1
Liver king, allbusinessfitness	1	.9	.9	67.0
madymorrison, ftaudreyy, trainingfabi, sarakathryns	1	.9	.9	67.9
Marcus Filly	1	.9	.9	68.8
Meggan grubb, Whitney Simmons, Alex rice	1	.9	.9	69.7
Meggan Grubb, Whitney Simmons, Millygift, Elora G	1	.9	.9	70.6
Myself and arnold swatchneger (no idea how to write)	1	.9	.9	71.6
Natacha Oceane, Whitney Simmons, Demi Bagby, Ross Edgley	1	.9	.9	72.5
Naturally Stefanie, Lucy Davies, KK fit twins, Whitney Simmons, Nat B, Jessica Olie, Libby etc	1	.9	.9	73.4
Naturally Stephanie, Sophie Butler, Sohee Fit, Nutty Foodie Fitness, Oyinda-Fitness, Ben Carpenter, James Smith, Katie Crewe	1	.9	.9	74.3
No	1	.9	.9	75.2
NOEL DEYZEI	1	.9	.9	76.1
None	3	2.8	2.8	78.9
NONE	1	.9	.9	79.8
Not of interest to me	1	.9	.9	80.7
ogustavocunha	1	.9	.9	81.7
Oliver Forslin, Chris Bumstead	1	.9	.9	82.6
Pamela Reif, dianaschmdr, keltieconner, lisadelpiero, mario.mlr, yasmin.denize, madeformefitness and many more	1	.9	.9	83.5
Paulo Muzzy	1	.9	.9	84.4
Polo, horses , lifestyle, travels	1	.9	.9	85.3
Prefer youtube	1	.9	.9	86.2
Raquel Henriques	1	.9	.9	87.2
Rich froning and other crossfit athletes, Gustavo cunha	1	.9	.9	88.1
Sasha fitness	1	.9	.9	89.0
Soheefit and littlefitness	1	.9	.9	89.9
Some gymshark/gymshark women athletes, Natacha Oceane, Hellah Shibde, Krissy Cela, Maddie Rogers, Kalia Lai, Obi Vincent, members of the USTF and Britain's TF, etc.	1	.9	.9	90.8
Too many to remember	1	.9	.9	91.7
Whiney Simmons, milliegit, QIQi Hill, Matt Morsia, Libby Christensen	1	.9	.9	92.7
Whitney Simmons	2	1.8	1.8	94.5
Whitney Simmons, Grace Beverley, Milly G fit, SO many	1	.9	.9	95.4
Whitney Simmons, Lucy Davis, Ashley Gaita, Libby Christensen, Demi Bagby etc.	1	.9	.9	96.3
Whitney Simmons, Lucy Davis, Ben Haldon, NRG Fitness, Beccie Dunn, Ally Lewis, Meg Brown & more	1	.9	.9	97.2
Whitney Simmons, Natacha Océane, pretty much all Gymshark athletes lol	1	.9	.9	98.2
Youtube	1	.9	.9	99.1
Yuliya Koffer	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	

10. Control Instagram Post



11. Why consumers follow fitness influencers

Why is that so? (If you do not buy sponsored products, please specify)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
-	1	.9	.9	.9
A like it	1	.9	.9	1.8
After seeing the videos I want to support the athlete/fitness influencer and use the same outfits.	1	.9	.9	2.8
Because I don't need them	1	.9	.9	3.7
Because i feel that is not a really advice	1	.9	.9	4.6
Because I find the pop ups annoying	1	.9	.9	5.5
Because I make my own choices	1	.9	.9	6.4
Because influencers make them look appealing	1	.9	.9	7.3
Because influencers often give a very good analysis from the perspective of someone who has these needs and has many references for comparison. Their knowledge is valuable and pragmatic.	1	.9	.9	8.3
Because influencers try to show the best and more comfortable clothes to work Out as they create a real connection with their audience	1	.9	.9	9.2
Because looks interesting	1	.9	.9	10.1
Because most of the time the influencers don't use those products again, meaning that it was just a paid advertisement.	1	.9	.9	11.0
Because they look like good quality and/or appealing	1	.9	.9	11.9
Depends on the product	1	.9	.9	12.8
do not buy	1	.9	.9	13.8
Do not buy	1	.9	.9	14.7
Don't appeal to me.	1	.9	.9	15.6
Don't buy	1	.9	.9	16.5
Don't need to	1	.9	.9	17.4
Don't trust	1	.9	.9	18.3
Don't feel the need	1	.9	.9	19.3
dont trust some product as it can be for promotion	1	.9	.9	20.2
dont trust the recommendation	1	.9	.9	21.1
Expensive	1	.9	.9	22.0
Faco pesquisa antes de adquirir produtos quaisquer que sejam	1	.9	.9	22.9
for exemple, i like to buy Alphalete Amplify its an addiction but its also pricy,. so i like watching amy review because she really say the truth about the product, so it made my buying things more sure. And when she wears thoses leggings or short it help me visualize them on me and made me want to buy them.	1	.9	.9	23.9
Gymshark	1	.9	.9	24.8
GymShark, PE Science	1	.9	.9	25.7
Haven't even tried their sponsor products yet but, want too.	1	.9	.9	26.6
helpful taste recommendations	1	.9	.9	27.5
I already know what I like	1	.9	.9	28.4
I bout 2 things - a lifting belt and lifting straps. I bought them from the brand both Jeff Nippard and Joe Delayne are sponsored by because by the type of content they put out I believe in them and in the quality of the product they talk about. + the discount code with their name.	1	.9	.9	29.4
I buy them if i like them	1	.9	.9	30.3
I buy what I know is good	1	.9	.9	31.2
I buy what I need :)	1	.9	.9	32.1
I buy what i want	1	.9	.9	33.0
I can see how it looks on them	1	.9	.9	33.9
I do not because most products come from the USA	1	.9	.9	34.9
I do not buy because I don't need them.	1	.9	.9	35.8
I do not buy sponsored Iroducts	1	.9	.9	36.7
I do not need the products	1	.9	.9	37.6
I don't buy	2	1.8	1.8	39.4
I don't buy anything I don't need	1	.9	.9	40.4
I don't follow influencers so they tell me what to buy, I do my own research	1	.9	.9	41.3
I don't spend cash on products	1	.9	.9	42.2
I don't think many influencers are reliable.	1	.9	.9	43.1

I don't buy for the brand I buy what I need or what I like / see fitting	1	.9	.9	46.8
I don't buy too much online stuff	1	.9	.9	47.7
I don't need	1	.9	.9	48.6
I don't trust it	1	.9	.9	49.5
I don't usually buy anything from a post but I do buy lots of gymshark and they are all gymshark athletes	1	.9	.9	50.5
I don't	1	.9	.9	51.4
I dont buy	1	.9	.9	52.3
I dont feel compelled to	1	.9	.9	53.2
I dont need any	1	.9	.9	54.1
I dont need it.	1	.9	.9	55.0
I dont want to	1	.9	.9	56.0
I have no need or it doesnt interest me	1	.9	.9	56.9
I like the brand	1	.9	.9	57.8
I like the product	1	.9	.9	58.7
I like to make an informed purchase regardless of any ad campaign	1	.9	.9	59.6
I mostly buy things friends advise me to buy	1	.9	.9	60.6
I only buy what I need, usually after lots of yt reviews	1	.9	.9	61.5
I sometimes like to do my own research before I buy a product as at the end of the day most of the time they are paid buy sponsor to advertise the product.	1	.9	.9	62.4
I trust their judgement	1	.9	.9	63.3
I try not to be influenced quickly by their opinion and make fast decisions.	1	.9	.9	64.2
I usually buy from stores.	1	.9	.9	65.1
I would only buy having done my own research	1	.9	.9	66.1
I'm inspired	1	.9	.9	67.0
If I like them and trust the influencer is being honest	1	.9	.9	67.9
If I think that product is useful, I buy it	1	.9	.9	68.8
If it is appealing to me and it is transparent that that is an ad I trust the recommendation	1	.9	.9	69.7
If it is sponsored, it is advertisement. Not honest review	1	.9	.9	70.6
It happened once because I liked the product	1	.9	.9	71.6
Its usually gymwear and I want to look for something that I found.	1	.9	.9	72.5
Just marketing....	1	.9	.9	73.4
Mostly clothing if I like the look	1	.9	.9	74.3
N/a	1	.9	.9	75.2
N/A	1	.9	.9	76.1
Never was interested	1	.9	.9	77.1
No money	1	.9	.9	78.0
No willingness in spending money	1	.9	.9	78.9
not interested usually or is expensive	1	.9	.9	79.8
Not interested. Sponsorship does not make a difference to me.	1	.9	.9	80.7
Not the habit of shopping	1	.9	.9	81.7
Only if I like it	1	.9	.9	82.6
Only when interested	1	.9	.9	83.5
Porque existe uma marca em específico com a qual me identifico e acho boa qualidade, apesar de um pouco cara	1	.9	.9	84.4
Purchase based on research rather than marketing budget	1	.9	.9	85.3
Se achar que tem qualidade e preciso	1	.9	.9	86.2
Sometimes and depending from whom. If it is something I would generally buy, I would use an influencer code either for discount or support to the influencer	1	.9	.9	87.2
Sometimes but I usually just go to the product online	1	.9	.9	88.1
Sometimes if it interests me	1	.9	.9	89.0
Sometimes it has discount codes	1	.9	.9	89.9
The clothing looks nice	1	.9	.9	90.8
They are overpriced	1	.9	.9	91.7
They can be quite misleading, sponsored products are often low quality	1	.9	.9	92.7
They use the product and show the result	1	.9	.9	93.6
To support the person (if I like the product)	1	.9	.9	94.5
Trust issues.	1	.9	.9	95.4
Usually if it's sponsored I feel like the opinion of the product is less real.	1	.9	.9	96.3
Usually no need	1	.9	.9	97.2

Whenever I like something or feel that it's necessary for me, I buy it	1	.9	.9	99.1
Would rather research before buying. Don't always trust it if I know they are being paid	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	