



# **Product Placement on Instagram: the Power of shaping Consumers' Attitudes and Intentions?**

Marie Althoff

ANR: 583584

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Communication- and Information Science

Business Communication and Digital Media

Tilburg School of Humanities

Tilburg University

Supervisor: dr. A.P. Schouten

Second reader: dr. L. Janssen

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## Abstract

Instagram has become a legitimate platform for endorsing fitness products online. Through word of mouth marketing, Instagram bloggers promote fitness products with their personal recommendations by placing products in their storylines. However, prior research did not yet focus on absence or presence of a blogger in combination with the fit of a product in an Instagram post and the effect of these different combinations of advertising on the credibility of a blogger, which might influence attitudes towards the ads, products and purchase intention in different ways. This study made use of a 2 (type of blog post: presence vs absence of a blogger) x 2 (fit vs non-fit of a product) x 2 (blogger Jen vs blogger Pam) mixed-design with blogger as a within-subject variable and presence/absence of blogger as between-subject variable. Furthermore, it was expected that self-esteem had a moderating effect on the relationship between type of blog post and credibility of the blogger, while credibility was expected to play a mediating role in the relationship between type of blog post and the dependent variables attitudes towards the ads, attitudes towards the products and purchase intention. A total of 253 participants attended the experimental questionnaire. The most important results showed that a product is better endorsed directly in an Instagram product placement and that the type of blogger promoting a product plays a highly important role when engaging in product placement on Instagram.

*Keywords:* product placement; Instagram; blogger; credibility; advertising; purchase intention; product fit; word of mouth

## Introduction

One of the most successful social media networks is Instagram. The online platform is one of the fastest-growing photo sharing networks (Djafarova, & Rushworth, 2017) with millions of monthly active users worldwide. Statistics prove that the monthly use of Instagram increased from 90 million active users worldwide in January 2013, to 700 million active users in April 2017 (Statista, 2017). Therefore, it is no surprise that Instagram is one of the seven most successful social networks worldwide right after Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, Facebook Messenger, WeChat and QQ (Statista, 2017). Most of the mentioned social media platforms are used for connecting with other people via text messages (Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, QQ), while Instagram offers primarily the possibility to share pictures and to exchange information on topics like beauty, fitness, fashion or travel destinations through pictures, videos, and subtexts underneath the posts. As people are spending 1.72 hours on social media platforms every day, which makes up 28% of all online activity (Bennett, 2015), social media platforms became increasingly important for users.

This online interaction can influence the perception of brands and products. Woods (2016) found that 74% of consumers are relying on social media to form opinions of products, which makes the online environment a potential powerful channel in influencing users' purchase intentions. Thus, the blogosphere has become a legitimate platform for marketing activity (Lahav & Roth-Cohen, 2016) and cooperations with popular bloggers can benefit organizations as they are able to influence a broad audience with personal reviews of brands or products, which they present in images or videos. Consequently, the revenue generated from paid ads and paid sponsored content on Instagram is expected to reach \$2.81bn in 2017 (Vizard, 2015). Thus, marketing on Instagram has become a highly relevant channel for marketers.

Especially fitness bloggers have become very popular on Instagram in the past years. With the statement "strong is the new skinny" the recent wave of "Fitspiration" (*fitness* and *inspiration*) demonstrates a new understanding of beauty and attractiveness by inspiring people to pursue a healthy lifestyle through exercising and healthy eating (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). Thereby, the pictures of fitspiration posts on Instagram show mainly thin and toned body types (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), eventually influencing the self-esteem of the viewer.

Fitness bloggers are considered role models or idols who try to convince their followers with recommendations for products that help to idealize their own body-image.

Other users get influenced by these profiles and try to get as close to the perfect image as possible since consumers have the motivation to act in a way that enhances the ideal self (Choi & Rifon, 2012). However, these bloggers are not only seen as role models but also as girls next door who are recommending their ways of how to reach a fit and toned body. In this respect, fitness bloggers recommend products to their followers just like a friend would do, and place products into their picture storylines, creating word-of-mouth (WOM). The creation of effective WOM is also described as influencer marketing (Woods, 2016) and the promotion of a product within a storyline can be understood as product placement.

Liu, Chou and Liao (2015) consider product placement on social media as one of the most valuable marketing strategies in order to address specific audiences instead of broad brand audiences by mass media. The product is not connected with the company as an explicit attempt to persuade, since the brand is “placed in the context of a story, and it may be that this context is important for the placement’s success” (McCarty, 2004, p.50). Therefore, the consumer does not experience product placement on Instagram as unwelcome advertisement, but as informative content.

Although product placement is considered as important marketing tool, not much is known about the best way that bloggers can promote products, since scientific research on influencer marketing and online product placement on social media is still scarce. However, in the past years research on Instagram and influencer marketing has increased. Studies have focused on the uprising of influencer marketing online (Thornton, 2016; Woods, 2016; Zietek, 2016) and made especially the differences between the long-established celebrity endorsement and the arising blogger endorsement topic of discussion (Ewers, 2017) or the effects of blogger endorsement on users’ attitudes and purchase intentions (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016; Wnent, 2016).

In this context Korotina and Jargalsaikhan (2016) consider three different ways of promoting products on Instagram: with product placement, discount offering, or advice giving. However, the strategy of product placement can be more diverse (Russell, 1998) and must therefore be discussed in detail. Thus, the aim of this study is to find out which approach of product placement on Instagram is more effective, since there are several ways of promoting a product online. Especially the absence or presence of a blogger in a sponsored Instagram post can be highly important. It is expected that it makes a difference if a product is solely presented as product shot, as it resembles a traditional sponsoring and might therefore not be perceived as good. In contrast, the presence of a blogger and the interaction

with a product lets the product become part of a blogger's storyline - a subtle way of promoting a product as the observer might not automatically assume an advertising strategy behind it but rather focuses on the blogger.

Therefore, this study investigates if there is a difference in perception of the same product promoted in two different ways of product placement. First a picture of the product, uploaded on a blogger's account can serve as a simple product placement, second the blogger can post a picture wearing or interacting with the product. Thus, this study investigates direct Instagram product placement with present bloggers (IDP) compared to Instagram product placement with absent bloggers (IPP). Hence, the first research question of this study is:

*To what extent does the type of Instagram post influence consumers' perceived message credibility, attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the product, and purchase intention?*

However, the effect of a product placement always depends on the fit of a product to the content and the endorser, which Russell explains as "The Need for a Good Match" (Russell, 1998, p. 360). The match-up hypothesis proposes that product endorsement is more effective when there is a good fit between the endorser's appearance/personality and the endorsed product/service (Till & Busler, 2000). Even though there have been several researches on the topic of product placement in combination with product fit (Carroll, 2009; Russell, 1998; Till & Busler, 2000) these concepts were never discussed in the context of Instagram.

Therefore, this research will additionally compare product fit to product non-fit on Instagram in order to understand to what extent it influences the effectiveness of an advertisement. Thus, the second research question is:

*To what extent does the fit of the product to the context of an Instagram post influence consumers' perceived message credibility, attitude towards the advertisement, attitudes towards the product, and purchase intention?*

## Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical framework goes into detail about the social network platform Instagram, the nature of Instagram bloggers, and different product placement strategies (IDP and IPP) within influencer marketing. The overall credibility of product placements will be discussed, as it has a possible mediating effect on the attitude towards the advertisement ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude towards the product/brand ( $A_b$ ) and purchase intention (PI). The fit of a product to the content of a blogger's page will be discussed further, as it also has possible impact on the message credibility. Additionally, the focus will lay on the topic of Fitspiration and self-reported self-esteem, as low or high self-esteem can have a possible moderating influence on the perception of blogger's product placements.

### Social Media: Instagram

The use of social media has become a very popular leisure activity across the world over the past few years (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Having an online profile on a social media site, also known as social networking site or SNS (Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Davis & Giulietti, 2017), enables individuals to share personal information, photos, videos and text messages with friends or strangers (Powell, 2009). As an interactive space, SNS have become an immensely important tool to communicate with other people anyplace and anytime, facilitating the sharing of information and experiences online (Abzari, Ghassemi & Vosta, 2014).

One of the most popular social networking sites is Instagram, which was the first platform particularly created as an application for smartphone use (Miles, 2014). It makes the direct sharing of images and videos from a phone possible (Dubovik, 2013) and by following other users, posts of friends or strangers can be viewed in the Instagram news feed. Every user can follow anyone as long as a profile is public, otherwise it is possible to "request" access to a private profile. With the "like"-button in a heart shape, users can favor posts, which are then saved in a separate storage in the personal profile to look them up later, for example to remember a certain blogger or brand in a picture.

Instagram grew very quickly since it was launched in 2010, making their mission "strengthen relationships through shared experiences" work: the mobile application was able to register one million users within the first two months (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). Today, Instagram is recording 600+ million monthly, and 400+ million daily active users (Instagram, 2017), with one third being emerging adults in the age between 18-29 years (Dumas et al., 2017).

Youngsters in this age group are using Instagram more than any other SNS since they experience the platform as more fun and entertaining as Facebook or Twitter (Pittman, 2015). Therefore, marketing on Instagram could be very lucrative, in particular when it is about reaching hard-to-get target groups like young people.

### **The Power of Social Media Influencers**

Social media enables people to interact with one another in an online sphere, sharing opinions and product experiences. This exchange of information is called electronic word-of-mouth (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011). Through word-of-mouth (WOM) consumers share their personal opinions with other people on brands, reviews about products and services. In turn, WOM has a high impact on consumers' decision making process (Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2009). The study by Cheung and Thadani (2012) found that WOM is experienced as more persuasive and trustworthy than traditional media. In line with that, Wu and Wang (2011) proved that product opinions in form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) are trusted more than other corporate messages, and Chih, Wang, Hsu and Huang (2013) state that positive perceived eWOM credibility directly influences purchase intention. Therefore, Instagram can be understood as a platform for eWOM, as users are able to create their own content in form of pictures, videos and subtexts, sharing experiences and potentially recommending products on their profiles.

A professional marketing strategy that contains WOM is celebrity endorsement. In the past decades, the use of celebrities for promoting products in advertisements has become very frequent, as they are well known and therefore draw consumer attention in the busy clutter of advertising spots (Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005). A celebrity is understood as a person who is "widely known to the public for accomplishments on domains that are unrelated to the product class" (Sertoglu, Catl, & Korkmaz, 2014, p. 67), which includes actors, sport figures and entertainers. Most important when engaging in celebrity endorsement is the relevance and broad appeal of the celebrity, as well as the fit of the product to the celebrity, to make them appear as plausible consumers (Gupta & Verma, 2013). Therefore, good celebrity endorsement has the power to influence consumers, as they attribute expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, familiarity, and likeability (Ohanian, 1990; 1991) to the celebrity. The viewer perceives the endorsed product as a recommendation of the celebrity, and thus, trusts the expertise of him/her. Moreover, companies expect that these attributed qualities are transferred to the promoted product (Erdogan, 1999), which means that the

consumer experiences the product as trustworthy, attractive, and likable as the celebrity in the advertisement.

Nowadays, becoming well-known and, thus, gaining influence can be much easier achieved than before. It is not only connected to public status or being a celebrity anymore, but rather to power and reach on social media (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016). Online platforms made it possible for regular people to become noticeable among a group of users within a particular channel (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). As Instagram serves as a platform for self-presentation and promotion, it is primarily used to document one's life to others and to increase the popularity among peers (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

However, getting followers and likes is also a prominent factor on Instagram, since profiles with more followers are considered as more likeable, mostly because of higher perceptions of popularity (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2016). The most followed and liked profiles usually belong to Instagrammers (Latiff et al., 2015) who have millions of followers on their profiles. According to Marwick (2011), Instagrammers can be understood as micro-celebrities since the audience is acting as a fan base. Thus, if an Instagrammer is wearing a specific brand, or recommending a product, this performance of WOM can be highly influential to their followers. Consequently, Instagram bloggers can be understood as micro-celebrity endorsers.

Studies found that users experience bloggers as approachable, for example like a long-distance friend (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016), as followers see a new Instagram post of the blogger (usually) every day, which makes them familiar and gives them a feeling of knowing the person. Other studies found that users experience bloggers as peers (Isosuo, 2016), since bloggers tend to address their followers in Instagram posts, which connotes a certain closeness. Furthermore, bloggers are usually young and on top of the latest trends, which leads to other young people identifying with them. The reason for following Instagram bloggers is, thus, connected to the combination of admiration on the one hand, and the feeling of connectedness to the blogger on the other (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014).

Therefore, micro-celebrity endorsement might be even more effective than celebrity endorsement, as it is more likely that someone identifies him/herself with a peer, than with a celebrity or model (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). Peer communication is highly influential as it motivates other peers to buy a certain product or even to avoid other products to be more like them (Lueg & Finney, 2007). Weimann (1994) argues that interpersonal communication is more powerful when it comes to affecting attitudes than mass media. Instagram bloggers



connect with their followers through interpersonal communication and are usually experts in a specific niche, such as the fitness community. Moreover, when the followers are also part of this community, it has an additional impact on their buying decision (Forman, Ghose & Wiesenfeld, 2008). This means that users who are active in the fitness environment experience products a fitness blogger presents as more appealing compared to users who are not familiar with this environment. Moreover, Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) found that bloggers seem trustworthy because by posting about certain brands they demonstrate that they have tried the products themselves. Thus, a blogger's WOM can shape the opinion of the target audience by influencing their attitudes, perceptions and purchase intentions towards products.

Next to the fact that bloggers are relatively inexpensive compared to other advertisement types (Hajli, 2015; Zarrella, 2009), companies can face several benefits by using micro-celebrities as influencers for their products. First of all, bloggers promote products in a subtle way through WOM, which increases the belief of authenticity and trustworthiness among online communities (Uzunoğlu et al., 2014). Further, bloggers are approachable and likeable as they let their followers be part of their (Instagram) life. Moreover, since bloggers are interacting with their followers, peer communication emerges. These main factors converge into a very personal form of WOM which puts social media influencers in a powerful position as they can be highly influential with their actions.

### **Influencer Marketing on Instagram**

The interaction of consumers among each other, the creation of WOM and the massive extensions of communication channels facilitated by the internet opens up new possibilities for marketers. One of these new possibilities is influencer marketing. Micro-celebrity endorsement is one type of influencer marketing (Hesse, 2015). An influencer in marketing terms is someone who is involved with a product or service and consequently creates an opinion based on their experience - which the influencer voices either online or offline (Gould, 2016). In turn, this influencer must have a certain reach to really affect other people's opinion. Thus, influencer marketing on Instagram can be understood as micro-celebrities placing products in their storylines, influencing their followers with their opinions on products or brands. Due to the favorable results advertisers see (Woods, 2016), such as a 11 times more annual return on investment than other forms of traditional advertising (Kirkpatrick, 2016) influencer marketing became a very popular marketing technique.

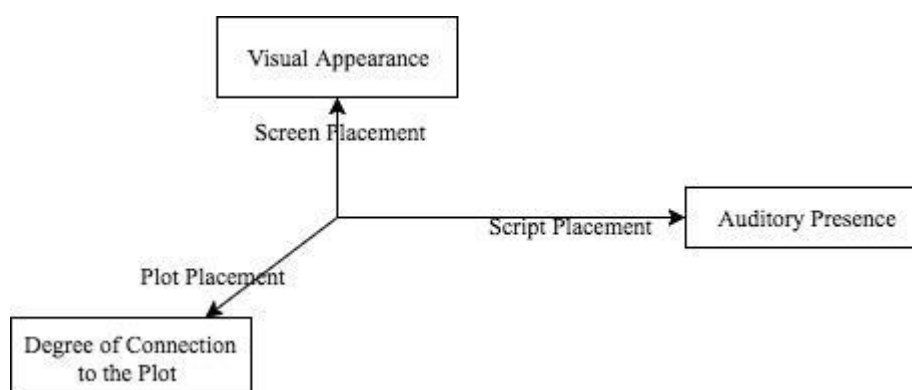
However, there are certain rules the endorser and the company have to follow when

they start talking business, as determined by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2009. First of all, the company has to educate the endorser regarding the guidelines, second the endorser has the duty to write an honest review, and furthermore the company is allowed to monitor the endorser's blogs and online outlets. Most important is that the endorser must disclose if there is a material relationship (payment or free products) between the company and the endorser (Forrest & Cao, 2010). This means, if the promotion of the product is paid the endorser needs to label it in the post. When the prerequisites are discussed, the blogger can think about placing the product in the storyline with the strategy of product placement.

### Product Placement on Instagram

Traditionally, product placement is a strategy used in the entertainment industry. The idea is to implement products or brands covertly into movie, or TV show plots in order to generate brand awareness. With his three-dimensional construct of product placement (Fig.1), Russell (1998) elaborates on three relevant approaches to product placement, namely "screen placement", "script placement", and "plot placement". In this respect, screen placement can be understood as a purely visual placement of a product or brand in the background of a show or movie. Script placement is the auditory or verbal dimension, which refers to a brand being mentioned in a dialogue. Lastly, plot placement describes the event when a product becomes part of the plot. This dimension consists of any combination of visual and verbal components, which establish a connection between the product and the plot.

*Fig. 1: A Three-Dimensional Construct of Product Placement.*



Using two of his three definitions, they can be put on a level with Instagram product placement. Screen placement, as pure existence of a brand in a plot, can be compared to

product placement on Instagram (IPP). In the current study, IPP is understood as a product captured in an image, without the blogger interacting with it. Further, Russell (1998) understands plot placement as the product becoming part of the plot, “taking a major place in the story line or building a persona of a character” (Russell, 1998, p. 357). This concept can be applied to a blogger’s direct promotion of a product on Instagram (IDP), as the endorser interacts with the product by holding or wearing it which leads to the product becoming part of the blogger’s Instagram storyline.

Russell argues further that the effectiveness of the kind of product placement depends on how the information will be processed by the observer. He assumes that plot placements, which rely on both visual and audio information, will produce higher levels of brand recall than pure screen or script placement. This is due to the fact that people identify with the person interacting with a product and experience a product through their eyes. However, Russell refers to product placement in TV-shows, which means he includes the verbal component. This is not given in an Instagram product placement. Nevertheless, even though there is no verbal component, it still can be argued that product placement with a person interacting with a product is more effective than simple product placement as, according to Russell, emotional identification with the protagonist is the most important part of product placement.

Russell’s (1998) three-dimensional construct of product placement shows, that plot placement and the accompanied identification with the actor is the most effective way to promote a product. Therefore, it can be argued that IDP is more effective than IPP because in a direct product placement the observer is able to identify with the blogger. Moreover, the observer experiences the product while looking at the blogger, which automatically stimulates the personal attitudes towards the ad, attitudes towards the product and future purchase intention.

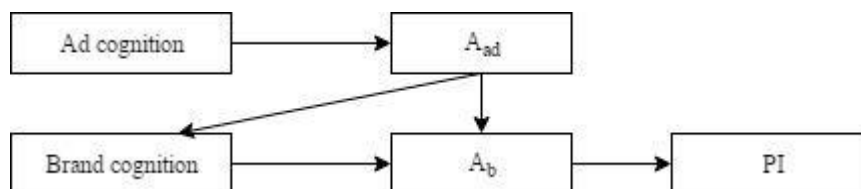
### **Customer Purchase Intention**

Several researches have already focused on the relationships between attitudes towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitudes towards the brand/product ( $A_b$ ) and purchase intention (PI) (Karson & Fisher, 2005; Lutz, McKenzie & Belch, 1983; Lutz, 1985; Homer, 1990; Yoon, Laczniak, Muehling & Reece, 1995). In all studies the main focus lies on the Dual Mediation Hypothesis (DMH) model which has proven to be a useful explanatory tool in understanding consumers' advertisement processing tendencies (Yoon et al., 1995).

Originally elaborated by Lutz (1985), the DMH model (Fig. 2) proposes a direct and indirect effect of  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$  on purchase intention. The direct one-way causal flow from  $A_{ad}$  to  $A_b$  describes the immediate influence on brand attitude, while the indirect causal flow from  $A_{ad}$  to  $A_b$  is carried out through brand cognition. This means that consumers' reactions to ads influence their tendencies to accept message content (Homer, 1990). Furthermore, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) propose that attitude determines a set of behavioral intentions leading to specific behaviors with respect to the object. Thus, a direct effect of  $A_b$  on PI can be expected.

The DMH states that  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$  have influence on consumers' purchase intention of an advertised product. However, the cognition people get from looking at an advertisement beforehand influences  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$ . The current study proposes that the credibility of the source serves as important ad cognition that has an impact on  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$ , and subsequently consumers' purchase intention. This means that a more credible blogger will lead to more positive attitudes towards the ad, which will subsequently lead to a better attitude towards the product and finally evolve into a likelier purchase intention. The concept of source credibility will be discussed in the following.

Fig. 2 Dual Mediation Hypothesis (DMH) model.



### Perceived Credibility

Credibility can be defined as believability, trust, reliability, accuracy, fairness or objectivity (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008) but the overarching view across definitions is believability, as credible people are believable people and information of these people can be trusted (Tseng & Fogg, 1999). Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, and McCann (2003) discuss three perspectives on credibility: medium credibility, message/content credibility, and source credibility. In this respect, medium credibility is the perceived level of credibility that users have of a specific medium, such as a blog. Message credibility can be understood as the perceived credibility of the communication strategy itself, such as information quality and accuracy. Finally, source credibility focuses on the expertise or trustworthiness of the source

to provide credible information. As this study focuses on users' perception of bloggers, only the concept of source credibility will be taken into account.

Source credibility consists of two dimensions, namely trustworthiness and expertise - two concepts that most researchers evaluate as key dimensions of credibility (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953; Ohanian, 1991). A person is perceived as trustworthy when he/she is an honest person, who passes on reliable, unbiased, and fair information. Furthermore, expertise is "the perceived knowledge, skill and experience of the source" (Fogg, 2002, p. 124), which leads to the observer attributing the ability to provide accurate information to the source. This means that when a source, such as a blogger, is perceived as an expert, people are likely to judge the information he/she distributes to be trustworthy.

However, usually credibility is assessed through personal interactions. Therefore, the assessment of credibility is much more complex in an online environment due to "the multiplicity of sources embedded in the numerous layers of online dissemination of content" (Sundar, 2008, p. 74). Reichelt, Sievert and Jacob (2014) state that online interactions show characteristics of personal communication but online users do not interact in personal meetings to experience typical clues of a person's credibility. Therefore, other hints are required to assess eWOM on social networks. In this respect, a person is experienced as credible if he/she demonstrates a broad knowledge and experience with the topic (Feick & Higie, 1992) and especially if this person shares these information honestly (Tseng et al., 1999).

Thus, when a fitness blogger presents herself as knowledgeable and experienced in the fitness industry, this leads to the observer attributing expertise and trustworthiness to the blogger. A review of the blogger is only then plausible, when the product fits to the content of the storyline. Therefore, a fitness blogger presenting sport shoes will most likely rather be perceived as an expert than a fitness blogger presenting a pizza. When a fitness blogger recommends something that is in accordance to what she stands for, she will be perceived as an expert in her field. This attribution of expertise will then lead to the expectation that she will also provide accurate information about the product, which leads to trust towards the distributed message (Fogg, 2002).

Moreover, the three-dimensional construct of product placement (Russell, 1998) poses that the combination of a blogger interacting with a product triggers the development of identification, which in turn intensifies the wish of having the products the blogger recommends. According to the DMH model, credibility serves as ad cognition that has a

positive impact on  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$ , and subsequently consumers' purchase intention.

Subsequently, when a blogger is present in the picture and interacts with a product, the ad will be perceived as credible, which will lead to positive attitudes towards the ad, positive attitudes towards the products and finally purchase intention.

Because it is expected that IDP leads to a higher perceived credibility than IPP, it is expected further that IDP will result into higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$  and purchase intention, mediated by credibility. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H1: IDP will be perceived as more credible, and therefore has a more positive effect on attitude towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude towards the product ( $A_p$ ) and purchase intention (PI) compared to IPP.*

### **Product Fit vs. Product Non-fit on Instagram**

One of the most essential criteria in influencer marketing is the match between the brand and the blogger. Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) state that the fit between blogger and brand is one of the most important criteria since the “blog's relevance to the brand has a supportive role in increasing the intimacy of brand communication” (p. 595). Therefore, a blogger is likely more credible when there is a product fit.

Several studies have focused on the match-up hypothesis when discussing the effectiveness of product endorsement (e.g. Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till, & Busler, 2000). The match-up hypothesis proposes that product endorsements are more effective when a good fit between the endorser's appearance or personality and the endorsed product or service is guaranteed. As an explanation for the effect of the match-up hypothesis, Till and Busler (2000) discuss the associative learning theory and state that it is “a mechanism by which links or relationships between concepts can be established” (p. 3). Referring this to influencer marketing, the blogger and the product both represent concepts that are connected to other concepts based on our experiences with the brand and the blogger. These connections build the association set for the promoted product and the blogger. By repeating the pairing of the blogger and the product, both become part of each other's association set. The nature of the concepts play an important role because the more similar two concepts are, the more likely the concepts will assimilate within an associative network (Hamm, Vaitl & Lang, 1989). Thus, if a product fits to the blogger, the concepts have a higher chance to assimilate which is congruent to the assumption of Till

and Busler (2000) that the associative link between endorser and the endorsed product drives the predicted endorser effects.

Moreover, the effect of fit can influence the credibility of a blogger. A study by Bower and Landreth (2001) proved that by enhancing the perceptions of the endorser's expertise about the product, the effectiveness of an advertisement was improved. These findings are in line with the study by Fink, Cunningham and Kensicki (2004). They examined the characteristics of an athlete endorser and how this affects the perceived attitude towards an athletic event and the purchase intentions for buying a ticket for this event. The results of the study show that the endorser-event fit positively relates to the the expertise of the athlete.

Thus, it can be assumed that a product fit within an advertisement will lead to more credibility than a product non-fit. It is expected further that a product fit will result into higher  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and purchase intention, mediated by credibility. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed.

*H2: A product fit within a blog post will be perceived as more credible, and therefore has a more positive effect on the attitude towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude towards the product ( $A_p$ ) and purchase intention (PI) compared to a product non-fit.*

### **Interaction Effect of Advertising Type and Product Fit**

As proposed in H2 a product fit within an advertisement will be perceived as more credible compared to a product non-fit, since congruent combinations of advertisement type and product fit could lead to a higher perceived message credibility, product attitude and subsequently, purchase intention. Garretson and Niedrich (2004) explain congruence as the degree to which stimuli are matching to each other. Stimulus congruency can, thus, facilitate the impression formation and consequently positively affect consumers' responses (Van Rompay, Pruyn & Tieke, 2009).

This congruence effect was demonstrated by Sato, Ko, Kaplanidou and Connaughton (2016) who proved in their study that the expertise of an endorser increased when the endorser represented the same brand category but that the perceived expertise decreased when the endorser did not represent the same brand category. In line with this, Knoll and Matthes (2017) found that the most positive attitudinal effect appeared when the endorser matched well with the endorsed product, but that the most negative effect was found for endorsers not matching with the endorsed object.

These findings suggest that a blogger should directly promote the product as long as it fits to the storyline, but that the blogger should renounce the direct promotion of a product if it does not fit to the storyline. Referring to the previous example, a fitness blogger promoting sport shoes leads most likely to more credibility than a fitness blogger promoting a pizza. However, if a non-fit product should be promoted it is best to do this with simple product placement because then the observer does not necessarily recognize that there is no link between blogger and product. More precisely, the missing link between the fitness blogger and the non-fit product (pizza) is more obvious with direct product placement, which can lead to a lower degree of congruence between blogger and product, and thus, possibly to negative impression formation (Van Rompay et al, 2009).

Consequently, the best attitudes towards ads and products, as well as purchase intentions can be expected through IDP with a blogger matching the product, but when the product does not fit it is better promoted with IPP. This leads to the third hypothesis:

*H3: If a product does not fit within a blog post, IPP has a more positive effect on credibility, attitude towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude towards the product ( $A_b$ ) and purchase intention (PI) compared to IDP.*

### **Fitspiration and Self-esteem**

Fitness has become a very popular topic on SNS in the past years. The cultural ideal presented in the Fitspiration (*fitness* and *inspiration*) movement on Instagram is being thin, but at the same time toned and strong. Posts of fitness bloggers demonstrate, however, that self-esteem is tied to the appearance and that social feedback is, in turn, based on that appearance, which can be “triggering material for women experiencing eating and/or exercise disorders” (Stover, 2014, p. 32). It is not surprising that unrealistic images of beauty result in low self-esteem among women (Kannappan, 2017) and that, when confronted with fitspiration posts, the level of self-esteem decreases, with an increase in body dissatisfaction and negative mood (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; 2016). According to the study by Clay, Vignoles and Dittmar (2005) on body image and self-esteem of adolescent girls, girls being confronted to images of models show significant lower body satisfaction and self-esteem than girls not being confronted to these images.

However, when we can expect that people’s self-esteem is affected by these images, it is also possible that self-esteem changes the way how people perceive advertisements. When



people with low self-esteem are confronted with ads that expose good looking, toned and fit women, this could lead to a better evaluation of the ad, as consumers have a self-esteem motivation to act in a way that enhances the ideal self (Choi & Rifon, 2012). In this respect, celebrities are inspirational figures consumers want to imitate. Since Instagram bloggers are experienced as micro-celebrities, and thus as role models, it can be said that users are affected by the Instagram bloggers' looks.

Consequently, it can be argued that seeing a direct product review of a fitness blogger affects people with lower self-esteem more and subsequently increases their product interest compared to people with higher self-esteem. Especially women with a low level of self-esteem want to identify as much as possible with the fitness blogger as they also stand for body change and a transformation process. Therefore, they believe in the reviews the fitness blogger distributes and trust in the product she recommends. Additionally, it can be expected that people with a low level of self-esteem can identify better with a girl-next-door Instagrammer compared to a model with rather unrealistic body conditions when reacting to an endorsed product. This is due to the fact that a fitness blogger was an ordinary person herself and thus, the users experiences the blogger as reachable and trustworthy (Korotina et al., 2015). Compared to that, women with high self-esteem are less influenced when exposed to images with thin women (David & Johnson, 1998), which leads to the assumption that people with high self-esteem and strong personalities are less impressionable.

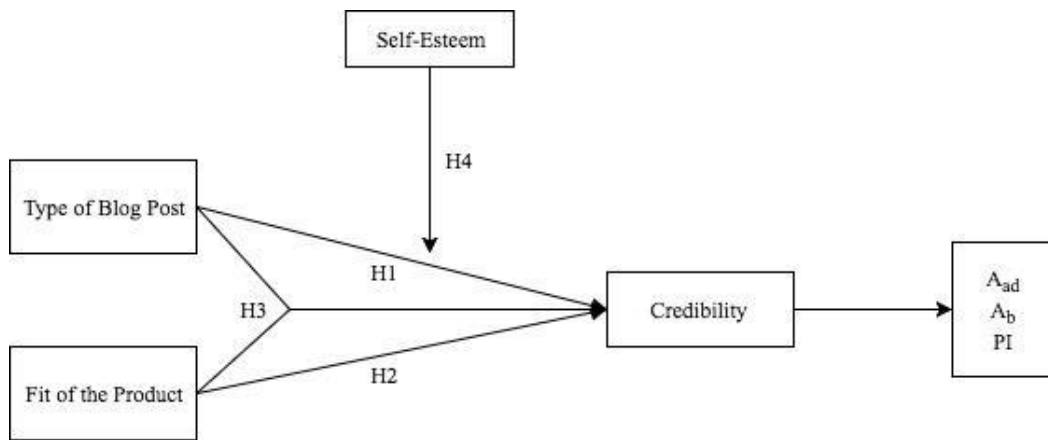
Thus, it can be expected that people with a low level of self-esteem exposed to a fitness blogger are rather influenced by the direct product placement, as they perceive the toned blogger as ideal and automatically identify with her. When the user sees the fitness blogger interacting with a product, this product could be experienced as a means of realizing the ideal self, which will subsequently raise the level of self-esteem. Thus, it can be expected that for people with low self-esteem, IDP leads to more positive evaluations of attitudes towards the ads and products, and subsequently purchase intention compared to people with high self-esteem. However, there is no difference expected for people with high or low self-esteem when exposed to a simple IPP, as the fitness blogger is not present in the picture and there is no possibility for identification.

Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

*H4: Instagram users with a low level of self-esteem will have more positive attitudes towards the ads ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitudes towards the products ( $A_b$ ), and purchase intentions ( $PI$ ) for IDP*

*compared to Instagram users with a high level of self-esteem.*

*Fig. 3: Conceptual model.*



## Method

### Design

Based on the theoretical framework and the developed hypotheses a 2 (IDP vs IPP) by 2 (product fit vs product non-fit) by 2 (blogger Jen vs blogger Pam) mixed-design was created with blogger as a within-subject variable and IDP and IPP as between-subject variable. As each participants was exposed to two different bloggers, an experiment with four different conditions for each blogger was prepared.

The dependent variables of this study were the attitude towards the advertisement  $A_{ad}$ , the attitude towards the product  $A_b$ , and purchase intention PI. Source credibility, which consisted of trustworthiness and expertise, was expected to mediate the relationship between the independent (type of blog post and product-blogger fit) and dependent ( $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI) variables. It was anticipated that a more credible blog post would lead to more positive attitudes towards the ads and products and a higher purchase intention. Moreover, we posed that type of blog post and product fit would interact so that IDP and product fit would lead to the highest, and IDP and product non-fit to the lowest credibility evaluations.

Furthermore, self-esteem was expected to have a moderating effect on the relationship between type blog post and the attitudes towards the ads and products, as well as purchase intentions. In particular, this means that the relationship between type of blog post and the dependent variables is influenced by the level of self-esteem (high or low). It is anticipated that people with low self-esteem are more affected by direct product placement compared to people with high self-esteem, as they can more likely identify with the fitness blogger and therefore experience the direct advertisements and the products as good, which might lead to a higher purchase intention. The conceptual model of the study is presented in Figure 3.

### Participants

A total of 253 people participated in this study. First, participants were asked about their Instagram use, to filter out those who are not familiar with the online platform. Five participants indicated to not use Instagram and were therefore excluded from the data set. Furthermore, incomplete responses were deleted, resulting in a final sample of 188 participants. The average age was 26.06 ( $SD = 7.65$ ). More than half of the participants, 61.6% were German and 17.4% were Dutch, due to the fact that the survey was mostly distributed among peers in Germany and fellow students at Tilburg University. The remainder of the participants were from the United States of America (3.2%), Austria (3.2%),

Greece (2.1%), Italy (2.1 %), Brazil (1.6%) France (1.1%), Russia (1.1%), Bulgaria (1.1%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (0.5%), Belgium (0.5%), Curacao (0.5%), Ecuador (0.5%), United Kingdom (0.5%), Iran (0.5%), Namibia (0.5%), Sweden (0.5%), Slovakia (0.5%), Turkey (0.5%), and Ukraine (0.5%). The survey was mainly addressed to female Instagram users, but male Instagram users were not excluded, as the promoted products (sport shoes, fitness drink, phone, and pizza) are unisex and could be interesting for both genders. However, the female participation was higher with 84.2%, compared to the male participation with 15.8%.

Most of the participants were well educated: 88 people have, or are currently undertaking a Master's degree, 58 people a Bachelor's degree, and 27 participants had a high school degree. Two of the participants have, or are currently undertaking a PHD/Doctor, 9 a vocational training and only two participants have no educational qualification.

## **Materials**

Two bloggers were chosen for the online experiment, namely the American fitness blogger Jen Selter, and the German fitness blogger Pamela Reif. Both bloggers are famous on Instagram, promote fitness products, offer personalized online fitness programs, and have millions of followers. With 11.3 million followers\* (state: May 2017), Jen Selter's net worth was \$1 million in 2016 (Gabriel, 2016), as she had a weekly income of \$10,200. In comparison to that Pamela Reif has 3 million followers\* (state: May 2017), is addresses as "The German Instagram Queen" (Gardt & Peterson, 2016), and with every paid post, she earns between \$5,000 and \$15,000.

Since the current study focuses on German and Dutch participants, Pamela Reif is a prime example for a fitness blogger, as she is well-known among Instagram users in Germany and in the Netherlands. To have a counterpart and to control for differences in blogger perception, Jen Selter serves as global example for a fitness influencer. Thus, both Instagram bloggers are fitting examples, due to their reach and popularity.

In the experiment, the fitness bloggers were introduced by means of two short descriptive texts:

### ***Jen Selter: @jenselter***

*Jen Selter is a 23-year old American fitness Instagram blogger, who became famous through the fitness focus on her voluminous backside. Today she can count about 10.9 million followers on Instagram. Moreover, she was mentioned in several lifestyle and fitness magazines (Elle, FHM, Muscle & Fitness, Vanity Fair, Maxim) and was voted 82 in the top 99 Most Desirable Women 2014 by AskMen. Jen has her own workout app called*

*“FitPlan”, in which she gives tips on fitness and nutrition.\**

***Pamela Reif: @pamela\_rf***

*Pamela Reif is a 20-year old German fitness blogger on Instagram. Since she started her Instagram profile at the age of 15, Pamela counts about 2.8 Million followers today. In 2016 she started her online fitness program “PAMSTRONG” and fitness magazines worldwide addressed the fitness blogger, calling her a “fitness idol” (Myself), “fitness inspiration” (Grazia), and that she “inspires and fascinates a whole new fitness generation” (FitForFun).\**

*\*Note: the number of followers increased within the period February - May 2017.*

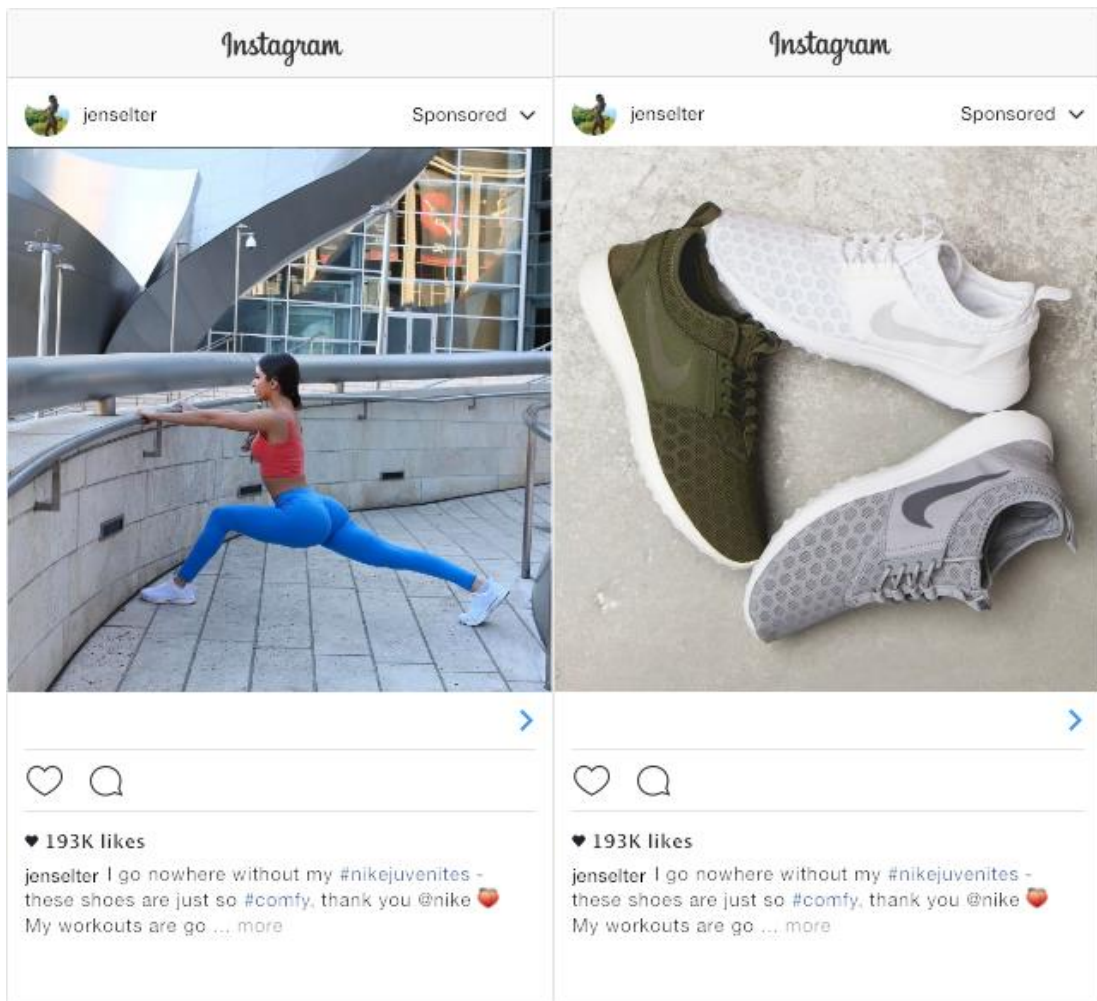
After the descriptive text, the participant was exposed to a manipulated Instagram post of the blogger. To keep the posts as real as possible, the mockup generator AdParlor was chosen to create the Instagram posts. On this platform, the user is able to upload a picture, add a fictitious subtext and Likes to a fake Instagram post.

Type of blog post was manipulated as follows. In the Instagram direct product placement condition (IDP), the blogger directly advertised the product. This means that the blogger was present in the picture. In the simple product placement condition (IPP), the blogger indirectly advertised the product, which means she was not present in the picture and the post showed a picture of the product only.

Product fit was manipulated by a product that matched the blogger’s image, and by a product that did not match the blogger. For Jen white “NIKE Juvenile” sport shoes were the fitting product, while the unfitting product was a pizza of the brand “Speedy Romeo’s”. For Pam the fitting product was the detox-tea “SkinnyMint”, while the unfitting product was the Huawei P9 smartphone.

Therefore, the manipulated posts for each blogger consisted of four possible conditions to test the developed hypotheses: IDP with a product fit, IDP with a product non-fit, IPP with a product fit and IPP with a product non-fit. To keep the stimuli as comparable as possible, the fictitious subtexts underneath the pictures, as well as the number of likes remained the same in both product fit conditions (IDP/IPP), and in both product-non-fit conditions (IDP/IPP) for each blogger. Two sample conditions can be seen in Figure 4: the fictitious posts display Jen Selter promoting a product fit with IDP and IPP. However, all manipulated Instagram posts are shown in Appendix 1.

Fig. 4: Jen Selter, IDP (l.) and IPP (r.) of the fit-condition.



**Measures**

To measure the participants’ attitudes towards the advertisement and attitudes towards the product, as well as purchase intentions, an adaption of the scale by Spears and Singh (2004) for measuring attitudes towards brands was used. The participants’ attitudes towards the ad and product was measured with, in each case, five 5-point semantic differential scales: *appealing - unappealing*, *good - bad*, *pleasant - unpleasant*, *favorable - unfavorable*, and *likable - unlikable*. For the attitudes towards the ad, we asked “What were your overall feelings of the Instagram post you just saw?”, while for attitudes towards the product, we asked “How do you experience the product in the Instagram post you just saw?”. Both scales were highly reliable (Cronbach’s  $\alpha_{Ad} = .95$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha_{Product} = .96$ ). For future purchase intention, we asked participants how likely they would buy the product shown in the

Instagram post with three 5-point semantic differential scales: *definitely - never*, *very high purchase interest - very low purchase interest*, and *probably buy it - probably not buy it*. The reliability for this scale was also very high (Cronbach's  $\alpha_{PI} = .95$ ).

To measure the blogger's credibility, the source credibility scale composed by Ohanian (1990) was used. This scale consists of two sub-dimensions, namely trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness was measured with five 5-point semantic differential scales: *dependable - in dependable*, *honest - dishonest*, *reliable - unreliable*, *sincere - insincere*, and *trustworthy - untrustworthy*. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ). Moreover, expertise was measured with five 5-point semantic differential scales as well: *expert - not an expert*, *experienced - inexperienced*, *knowledgeable - unknowledgeable*, *qualified - unqualified*, and *skilled - unskilled*. (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ).

Furthermore, self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and consisted of a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by using positive and negative feelings. Agreement with items on this scale, for instance *On the whole, I am satisfied with myself*, *I certainly feel useless at times* and *I take a positive attitude toward myself*, were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*. The reliability for this scale was high (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

At the end of the survey, the participants had to answer nine control questions. First, the participants had to indicate for how long they have been using Instagram (*3 - 6 months*; *7 - 12 months*; *12 - 18 months*; *18 - 24 months*; *more than 2 years*; *more than 3 years*). Furthermore, questions were asked about the regularity of different activities on Instagram the participants performed in the past three months, such as *post a picture/video*, *liked a post*, *commented on a post*, *visited a brand profile*, or *visited a blogger profile*. The participants could answer on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Never* to *Everyday* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ). The following questions targeted privacy on Instagram, such as if the personal Instagram account was private or public and if the participants accepted strangers to follow them, which could be answered with *yes* or *no*. We also asked the amount of followers the participant had: *less than 50*, *less than 100*, *less than 500*, *less than 1000*, *less than 5000* and *over 5000* followers, and which accounts participants the participants followed. Hereby, multiple answers were possible, such as *Friends/people I know*, *Prominent people (e.g. actors/actresses, models, TV personalities, etc.)*, *Companies (e.g. NIKE, MAC Cosmetics, Zara, etc.)*, *Fitness Bloggers*, *Fashion Bloggers*, *Beauty Bloggers*, *Food Bloggers*, and *Others*, in which the participants could propose other profiles that were not mentioned in the

list. To control for the interest and knowledge about the topic of the study, participants were asked if they had an interest in Fitness topics, and additionally if they were familiar with the introduced fitness bloggers Jen Selter and Pamela Reif. All three questions were answered with either *yes* or *no*.

### **Procedure**

The survey was mainly distributed via online networks like Facebook and Whatsapp, but also via e-mail over a period of 2.5 weeks. We use the online tool Qualtrics (version 2017) to program and distribute the experiment.

After answering demographic questions, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions for Jen, and afterwards to one of the four conditions for Pam. Moreover, because every participant was exposed to two manipulated experiments, the data had to be restructured in SPSS, so that each participant was two cases in the data set. This results in non-independence between observations which means the results have to be interpreted with care.

On the next page, the survey proceeded with questions about self-esteem, to find out if high or low self-esteem had an impact on the evaluation of the advertisements. After that, control questions were asked about the overall Instagram use to understand the participants' involvement with the online platform. When all questions were answered, the participants were redirected to the end of the survey in which they were thanked for participation.



## Results

### Control Questions

More than half of the participants used Instagram for a long time: 53.2% for more than 3 years and 18.9% for more than 2 years. Only 3.7% were new to the online platform and used it for 3-6 months, while 7.9% use Instagram for 7-12 months, 7.9% for 12-18 months, and 7.4% for 18-24 months.

Furthermore, a two-thirds majority, namely 127 participants liked pictures of other Instagram users daily. This indicates a high frequency of use among the participants. However, when it comes to posting pictures, most of the participants did this occasionally (44.2%), sometimes (23.7%), or up to 3x a week (16.8%), but only a few participants were posting daily (7.9%) - the same goes for never posting any pictures (6.3%). Commenting on pictures was not very popular either, since most of the participants were only commenting on other people's posts occasionally (33.2%). In this case, a minority of 4.7% were commenting on pictures daily, 21.1% did it regularly, and 29.5% sometimes. 10.6% of the participants indicated to never comment on other user's Instagram posts.

When comparing visitors of Instagram brand profiles to visitors of Instagram blogger profiles, the data showed that most of the participants were visiting bloggers' profiles regularly, which means up to 3x a week (24.7%) or even daily (22.1%), while other participants visited bloggers' profiles occasionally (23.7%) or sometimes (18.4%) but only 11.1% never visited a blogger's profile. Compared to these numbers, 12.1% of the participants visited brand profiles regularly, and the minority of participants visited brand profiles daily (11.1%). Most of the users visited brand profiles occasionally, which means up to 3x a month (33.7%), or sometimes, namely up to 1x a week (28.4%). In contrast to blogger profiles, more participants indicated to never visit any brand profiles (13.7%). This data gave rise to the assumption that most participants were familiar with bloggers and their way of posting pictures and presenting themselves to their followers.

Moreover, more than half of the participants (55.8%) stated that up to 500 users follow their personal profile on Instagram, while 11.1% had up to 1000 followers and 15.8% of the participants up to 100 followers. 8.9% of the participants had less than 50 followers and 4.7% had up to 5.000 followers or even more than 5.000 followers (2.6%). Almost all participants, namely 185, followed friends or people they know on Instagram. Prominent profiles are people like actors, models, or TV-personalities - 145 people indicated to follow

some of these profiles. Out of 188 participants, 105 people followed company or brand profiles. When it comes to bloggers, most popular to follow are fashion bloggers (51.1%), and fitness bloggers (40.0%). Furthermore, food bloggers (38.9%) seem to be more interesting to follow than beauty bloggers (33.2%). However, 33 participants also filled in the column to propose additional profiles they follow: 4 indicated to follow travel bloggers, 6 followed tattoo bloggers, 6 followed photographers, 6 followed arts, design and galleries, and 4 followed fun/meme accounts. Three were also interested in lifestyle accounts and one in pet bloggers, while one followed also a journalist's account.

Most of the participants of this study did not know the two Instagram bloggers Pamela Reif and Jen Selter. 55 of the participants knew Pamela Reif, while only 27 of the participants were aware of Jen Selter. This could be due to the fact that Pamela Reif is a prominent German fitness blogger and most of the participants (61.6%) were Germans. However, more than half of the participants, namely 56.3%, were interested in fitness topics on Instagram, which could have an influence on the general outcome of this study.

### **Mediation analyses of the effect of type of blog post and the effect of product fit on the dependent variables via credibility**

Credibility was hypothesized to be a mediator between the type of blog post and the dependent variables in H1, which proposed that IDP will be perceived as more credible, and therefore has a more positive effect on attitude towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude towards the product ( $A_b$ ) and purchase intention (PI) compared to IPP. Therefore, mediation analyses were performed.

For these analyses, the PROCESS macro in SPSS, written by Andrew F. Hayes (2012) was used (model 4 with bootstrap 50000). The dependent variables were the attitudes towards the advertisements, the attitudes towards the products, and purchase intentions. The independent variable was the type of blog post (present blogger (coded as "1") vs. absent blogger (coded as "0")) and the proposed mediating variables were trustworthiness and expertise.

The analysis showed that there was no significant effect of type of blog post on trustworthiness,  $b = .07$ ,  $t(374) = .75$ ,  $p = .45$  and no significant effect of trustworthiness on attitudes towards the ads,  $b = -.19$ ,  $t(374) = -2.62$ ,  $p = .01$ . Thus, trustworthiness was no mediator between the type of blog post and attitudes towards the advertisements  $b = -.01$ , 95% CI [-.0293, .0076]. Furthermore, there was no significant effect of type of blog post on

expertise  $b = -.20$ ,  $t(374) = -1.84$ ,  $p = .07$  but a significant effect of expertise on attitude towards the ads,  $b = -.31$ ,  $t(374) = 3.73$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, since type of blog post did not predict expertise, expertise cannot be seen as relevant mediator between type of blog post and attitude towards the advertisements,  $b = .06$ , 95% CI [.0001, .0685].

Moreover, the same applied to the relationship between the type of blog post and attitudes towards the products: trustworthiness did not seem to mediate this relationship as the indirect effect proves,  $b = -.00$ , 95% CI [-.0197, .0039], because type of blog post did not predict trustworthiness,  $b = .07$ ,  $t(374) = .75$ ,  $p = .45$  and trustworthiness did not predict attitudes towards the products  $b = -.04$ ,  $t(374) = -.59$ ,  $p = .55$ . The analysis showed also that expertise was no significant mediator between type of blog post and attitudes towards the products,  $b = .03$ , 95% CI [.0004, .0750] because type of blog post did not predict expertise,  $b = -.20$ ,  $t(374) = -1.84$ ,  $p = .07$ , even though expertise significantly predicted attitudes towards the products  $b = -.34$ ,  $t(374) = -5.80$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Lastly, there was also no significant effect found for trustworthiness mediating the relationship between type of blog post and purchase intentions:  $b = -.00$ , 95% CI [-.0192, .0042] because type of blog post did not predict trustworthiness,  $b = .07$ ,  $t(374) = .75$ ,  $p = .45$ , and trustworthiness did not predict purchase intentions  $b = -.04$ ,  $t(374) = -.50$ ,  $p = .61$ . Moreover, expertise had also no significant outcome as mediator:  $b = .02$ , 95% CI [.0012, .0551], because type of blog post did not predict expertise,  $b = .20$ ,  $t(374) = -1.84$ ,  $p = .07$ , even though expertise significantly predicted the attitudes towards the products  $b = -.23$ ,  $t(374) = -3.59$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Therefore, trustworthiness and expertise were both no significant mediators in the relationship between type of blog post and attitudes towards the ads, attitudes towards the products and purchase intentions.

### **Mediation analyses of the effect of product fit on the dependent variables via credibility**

H2 suggested that a product fit within a blog post will be perceived as more credible, and therefore has a more positive effect on the attitude towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude towards the product ( $A_b$ ) and purchase intention (PI) compared to a product non-fit. For this relationship, another mediation analysis was executed to find out if credibility, namely trustworthiness and expertise are mediators in the relationship between product fit and the dependent variables.

Again, the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2012) was used (model 4 with

bootstrap 50000). The dependent variables were the attitudes towards the advertisements, the attitudes towards the products, and purchase intentions, while the independent variable was the fit of the product (fit (coded with “1”) vs non-fit (coded with “0”)) and the proposed mediating variables were trustworthiness and expertise.

The analysis showed that trustworthiness significantly mediated the relationship between the fit of the product and the attitudes towards the advertisement,  $b = .02$ , 95% CI [.0024, .0560], because product fit significantly predicted trustworthiness,  $b = -.29$ ,  $t(374) = -3.28$ ,  $p = .001$ , and trustworthiness also predicted attitudes towards the ads  $b = -.17$ ,  $t(374) = -2.30$ ,  $p = .02$ . Moreover, expertise was also a significant mediator in this relationship:  $b = .06$ , 95% CI [.0233, .1061] as product fit predicted expertise,  $b = -.37$ ,  $t(374) = -3.35$ ,  $p < .001$ , and expertise predicted the attitudes towards the ads,  $b = -.35$ ,  $t(374) = -5.91$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Furthermore, the results demonstrated that for the relationship between the fit of the product and the attitudes towards the product, trustworthiness was no significant mediator:  $b = .01$ , 95% CI [-.0167, .0322], even though product fit significantly predicted trustworthiness  $b = -.29$ ,  $t(374) = -3.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, since trustworthiness did not predict the attitudes towards the products,  $b = -.04$ ,  $t(374) = -.55$ ,  $p = .58$ , the mediator was not significant. Moreover, expertise was a significant mediator in the relationship between product fit and product attitudes,  $b = .06$ , 95% CI [.0256, .1129], because product fit predicted expertise,  $b = -.37$ ,  $t(374) = -3.35$ ,  $p < .001$  and expertise predicted the attitudes towards the products,  $b = -.36$ ,  $t(374) = -6.24$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Furthermore, trustworthiness did not mediate the relationship between product fit and purchase intention,  $b = .01$ , 95% CI [-.0130, .0754], even though product fit predicted trustworthiness,  $b = -.29$ ,  $t(374) = -3.28$ ,  $p = .001$ , but trustworthiness did not predict purchase intention,  $b = -.06$ ,  $t(374) = -.78$ ,  $p = .44$ . However, expertise could be understood as a mediator between product fit and purchase intention,  $b = .04$ , 95% CI [.0127, .0803], because product fit significantly predicted expertise,  $b = -.37$ ,  $t(374) = -3.35$ ,  $p < .001$  and expertise significantly predicted purchase intention  $b = -.23$ ,  $t(374) = -3.65$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Thus, credibility could only be understood as a mediator in the relationship between product fit and attitudes towards the ads, as trustworthiness and expertise were both significant mediators. In the relationship between product fit and attitudes towards the products, as well as in the relationship between product fit and purchase intention, only expertise was a significant mediator, while trustworthiness was not.

### Direct- and Interaction effects of type of blog post and product fit on the dependent variables and credibility

A Factorial ANOVA was conducted to compare the main effects of type of blog post and product fit and the interaction effect between type of blog post and product fit on  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , and PI. An interaction effect was proposed in H3 which suggested that if a product does not fit within a blog post, IPP has a more positive effect on credibility, attitude towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitude towards the product ( $A_b$ ) and purchase intention (PI). A two-way analysis of variance was conducted for each dependent variable  $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_b$ , PI. The means and standard deviations of the interactions are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for the interaction of type of blog post (absence/presence of the blogger) and product fit (fit/non-fit) for attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand/product, purchase intention, trustworthiness, and expertise.

	Presence/Fit	Presence/ Non-fit	Absence/Fit	Absence/ Non-fit
Attitude towards ad ( $A_{ad}$ )	3.22 (1.14)	3.16 (1.02)	2.76 (1.00)	2.75 (1.19)
Attitude towards brand/product ( $A_b$ )	3.13 (1.02)	3.14 (1.04)	2.87 (1.02)	2.92 (1.18)
Purchase Intention (PI)	2.02 (1.17)	2.17 (1.02)	2.14 (1.07)	2.20 (1.10)
Trustworthiness	3.15 (.92)	3.48 (.75)	3.13 (.88)	3.37 (.91)
Expertise	2.82 (1.20)	3.26 (1.03)	3.10 (1.00)	3.40 (1.01)

The main effect for type of blog post was significant for attitudes towards the ad,  $F(1, 368) = 17.01, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ , indicating that the advertisement was perceived as better when the blogger was present ( $M = 3.20, SD = 1.08$ ) instead of absent ( $M = 2.76, SD = 1.10$ ). The main effect of product fit was not significant,  $F(1, 368) = .06, p = .81, \eta^2 = .00$ , between the fit ( $M = 2.99, SD = 1.09$ ) and non-fit conditions ( $M = 2.96, SD = 1.12$ ). The hypothesized interaction effect between type of blog post and product fit was not significant as well ( $F(1, 368) = .06, p = .81, \eta^2 = .00$ ).

For attitudes towards the product, the main effect for type of blog post was significant,  $F(1, 368) = 5.08, p = .03, \eta^2 = .01$ , indicating that a product was perceived better when the blogger was present ( $M = 3.14, SD = 1.03$ ) compared to when she was absent ( $M = 2.89, SD = 1.10$ ). The main effect for product fit was not significant,  $F(1, 368) = .09, p = .76, \eta^2 = .00$  indicating that the effect of product fit was not significant for fit ( $M = 2.99, SD =$

1.02) and non-fit ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). The interaction effect between type of blog post and product fit was also not significant ( $F(1, 368) = .05$ ,  $p = .83$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ ).

The main effects for the third dependent variable, purchase intention, were overall not significant: the main effects for type of blog post was  $F(1, 368) = .49$ ,  $p = .48$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ , while the main effects for product fit resulted into  $F(1, 368) = .86$ ,  $p = .36$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ . There was no interaction effect between type of blog post and product fit ( $F(1, 368) = .11$ ,  $p = .74$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ ).

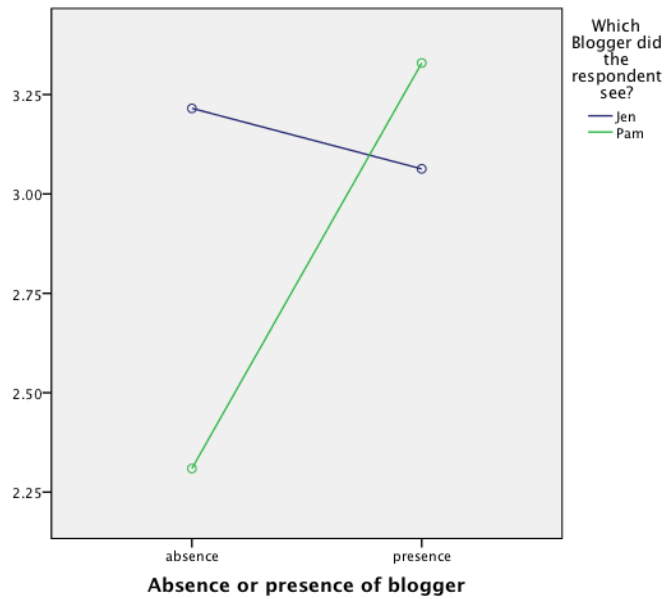
Moreover, for trustworthiness the main effect for type of blog post was not significant with  $F(1, 368) = .51$ ,  $p = .48$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ . However, the main effect for product fit was significant,  $F(1, 368) = 10.70$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ , indicating a surprising difference, as trustworthiness was perceived as less good with a product fit ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .06$ ) compared to a product non-fit ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .06$ ). Again, there was no interaction effect between type of blog post and product fit ( $F(1, 368) = .24$ ,  $p = .63$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ ).

Additionally, the main effects for type of blog post and product fit for expertise were analyzed. Type of blog post had a slightly insignificant outcome ( $F(1, 368) = 3.67$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ), while there was a significant main effect for product fit ( $F(1, 368) = 11.60$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ). There was again a rather surprising difference, as expertise was perceived higher with a non-fit product ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) compared to a fit product ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). However, as well as in the previous analyses there was no interaction effect found for type of blog post and product fit ( $F(1, 368) = .43$ ,  $p = .51$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ ).

Therefore, H3 cannot be supported, as there were no significant interaction effects found between type of blog post and product fit for any of the three dependable variables, or trustworthiness and expertise.

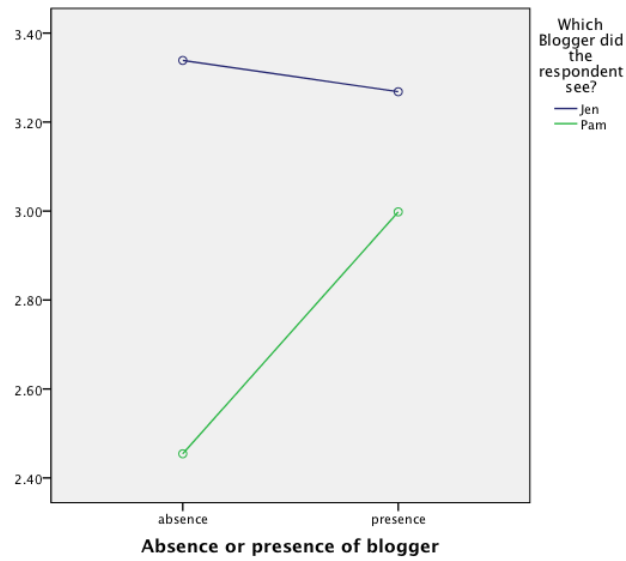
However, when taking blogger (Jen or Pam) into account as factor in the analyses, results showed a number of interaction effects between blogger and type of blog post and fit. First there was an interaction effect between blogger and type of blog post for attitude towards the ad,  $F(1, 368) = 31.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$  (Fig. 5), indicating that for Jen it does not matter in which way she endorses a product, since there was no difference in attitudes towards the ad for IDP ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ .) and IPP ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .90$ ). However, for Pam the way of product placement mattered a lot. The results show that the attitudes towards the ads were significantly better when she directly promoted the product ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) compared to when she indirectly promoted the product and was absent in the image ( $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ).

Fig. 5: Interaction effect between type of blog post\*blogger for attitudes towards the ads.



Furthermore, for attitudes towards the product the interaction effect between type of blog post and blogger was significant:  $F(1, 368) = 8.55, p = .004, \eta^2 = .02$ . This interaction effect was in line with the results for attitude towards the ad. Again, Pamela's post was evaluated most positively when she was present in the post ( $M = 2.99, SD = .99$ ), however, the lowest score on attitude towards the product resulted when she was absent in the post ( $M = 2.45, SD = 1.04$ ). For Jen's post there was not much of a difference if she was present ( $M = 3.27, SD = 1.04$ ) or absent in the picture ( $M = 3.34, SD = .97$ ), but overall her posts scored higher. A presentation of the interaction effect between type of blog post and blogger for the attitude towards the products is presented in Figure 6.

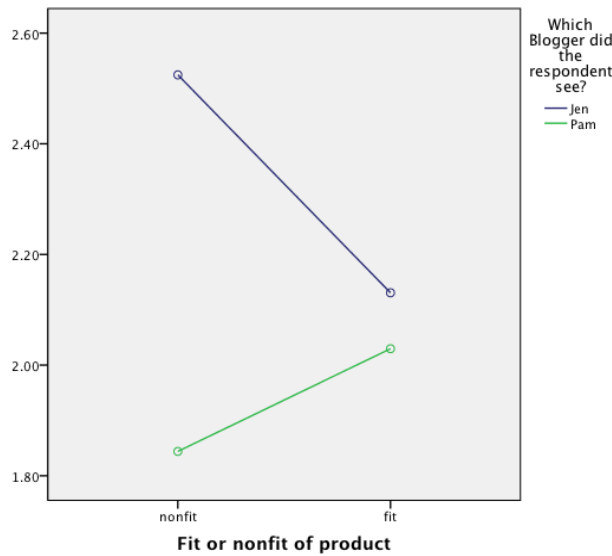
Fig. 6: Interaction effect between type of blog post\*blogger for attitudes towards the products.



Another interaction effect was found for purchase intention, namely for product fit and blogger ( $F(1, 368) = 6.63, p = .01, \eta^2 = .02$ ). This result indicates, that a non-fit product presented by Pamela would be the least product that participants would buy ( $M = 1.84, SD = .93$ ) but that, on the other hand, a non-fit product presented by Jen would be the first product participants would buy ( $M = 2.52, SD = 1.17$ ). A fitting product presented by Pamela is still less desirable to buy ( $M = 2.03, SD = 1.13$ ) than a fitting product presented by Jen ( $M = 2.13, SD = 1.11$ ), even though this scores low on purchase intention. A presentation of the interaction effect between product fit and blogger is presented in Figure 7.

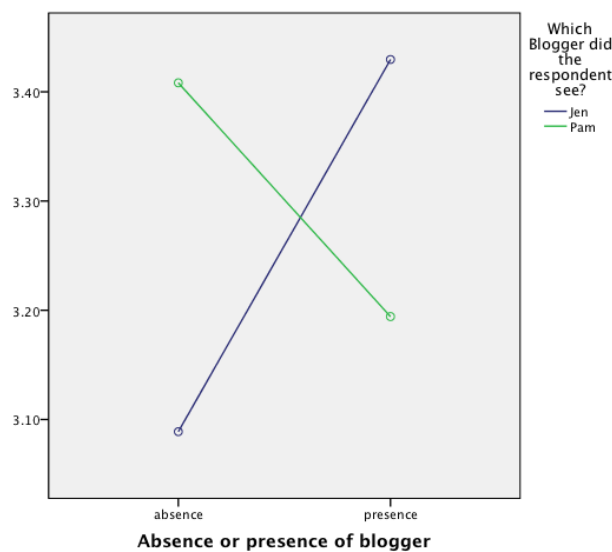


Fig. 7: Interaction effect between product fit\*blogger for purchase intentions.



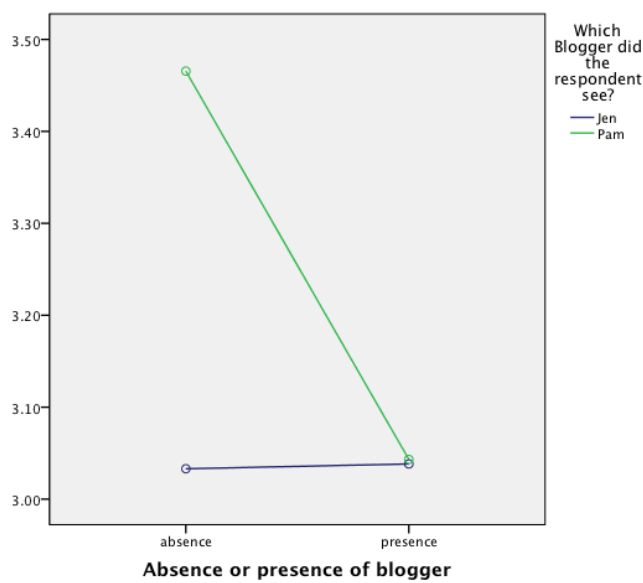
Moreover, there were also interaction effects found for trustworthiness and expertise. For trustworthiness, there was a significant interaction between type of blog post and blogger ( $F(1, 368) = 9.82, p = .002, \eta^2 = .03$ ). That indicates, that participants evaluated Jen as least trustworthy when she was absent in the picture ( $M = 3.09, SD = .83$ ) but observers trusted Jen most when she was present in a blog post ( $M = 3.44, SD = .77$ ). In contrast, Pam was experienced less trustworthy compared to Jen when she was present in the picture ( $M = 3.20, SD = .92$ ) but Pam was almost as trustworthy as Jen in an IDP, when she was absent in the post ( $M = 3.41, SD = .95$ ). The interaction effect for trustworthiness is presented in Figure 8.

Fig. 8: Interaction effect between type of blog\*blogger for trustworthiness.



Furthermore, there was also an interaction effect found for expertise between type of blog post and blogger. It did not make much of a difference if Jen was present in a post ( $M = 3.05, SD = 1.14$ ) or absent ( $M = 3.03, SD = .94$ ) when it was about evaluating Jen’s expertise. However, for Pam it differed a lot again. Pam was attributed with significantly more expertise when she was absent in the picture ( $M = 3.46, SD = 1.04$ ) compared to when she was present in the picture ( $M = 3.05, SD = 1.14$ ). This interaction effect is presented in Figure 9.

Fig. 9: Interaction effect between type of blog\*blogger for expertise.



### **Moderation analysis of the effect of self-esteem on the relationship between type of blog post, the dependent variables**

A moderation analysis was conducted to verify H4 which proposed that Instagram users with a low level of self-esteem will have more positive attitudes towards ads ( $A_{ad}$ ), and products ( $A_b$ ), as well as purchase intention (PI) for IDP compared to Instagram users with a high level of self-esteem.

For this analysis, the PROCESS macro in SPSS written by Andrew F. Hayes (2012) was used (model 1 with bootstrap 50000). We conducted three separate analyses for each dependent variable: attitudes towards the ads, the attitudes towards the products, and purchase intentions as well as two more analyses for trustworthiness and expertise. The predictor variable was the type of blog post (absent blogger (coded as “0”) vs. present blogger (coded as “1”), and the moderating variable was self-esteem of the participants.

The analysis showed that self-esteem was a significant moderator for the relationship between type of blog post and attitudes towards the advertisements:  $F(3, 368) = 9.89, p < .001, R^2 = .07$ . Thus, for people with a low level of self-esteem there was a strong relation between the type of blog post and attitudes towards the ads,  $b = .73, t(368) = 4.65, p < .001$ , while the effect was a little less strong for people with an average level of self-esteem, as the results show:  $b = .41, t(368) = 3.69, p < .001$ . Compared to that, there was no significant relation for people with a high level of self-esteem:  $b = .09, t(368) = .56, p = .58$ , which indicates that they did not evaluate the advertisements as good. Since a present blogger in the post was coded as “1”, and an absent blogger as “0”, people with low self-esteem were more affected by IDP than people with high self-esteem. That means that product placement with a present blogger had more effect when the observer had a low level of self-esteem.

However, self-esteem had no significant moderating effect on the relationship between type of blog post and attitudes towards the products:  $F(3, 368) = 4.34, p > .001, R^2 = .03$ . The same applied for purchase intention: self-esteem was no significant moderator for the relationship between type of blog post and purchase intentions:  $F(3, 368) = 1.31, p > .001, R^2 = .01$ .

The outcome suggest that people with low-self esteem perceived a direct product placements better, which leads to more positive attitudes towards the advertisements compared to people with high self-esteem. However, self-esteem had no moderating effect on the attitudes towards the products or purchase intentions, which means that people were not affected by the way of how fitness bloggers promoted a product when it was about evaluating

the product or indicating purchase intention. Therefore, H4 was only partly supported.

## Discussion and conclusion

The current study examined the difference between direct product placement (IDP) and simple product placement (IPP) on Instagram in terms of product fit (fit vs non-fit) and how this affected the credibility of the blogger and subsequently the attitudes towards the advertisements, attitudes towards the products and purchase intentions. Furthermore, this study analyzed whether there was a moderating influence of self-esteem on the relationship between type of blog post and the dependent variables. The goal of this study was to find out which of the proposed product placements would be the best advertising strategy for endorsing products on Instagram.

*Direct effects of type of blog post and product fit on trustworthiness, expertise, attitudes towards the advertisements, attitudes towards the products and purchase intention and the mediating effect of credibility*

The first hypothesis (H1) stated that direct product placement (IDP) would be perceived as more credible and would therefore lead to more positive attitudes towards the ads and products and purchase intentions compared to indirect product placement (IPP).

The results indicated that there was no direct effect of the type of blog post on trustworthiness and expertise. Thus, the absence or presence of a blogger did not influence the evaluation of trustworthiness and expertise of the blogger. However, there was indeed a difference of absence and presence of the blogger when forming attitudes towards the advertisements. Participants had more positive attitudes towards the advertisement, as well as more positive attitudes towards the products when the blogger was present in the picture. This is in line with the findings discussed in the theory. As Russell (1998) stated, the best way of placing a product into a storyline is the interaction with the product. Thus, the observer is able to identify with the protagonist and emotional identification is the most important part of product placement. Moreover, the attributions that the viewer holds against the blogger might be subsequently transferred to the endorsed product (Erdogan, 1999), which in turn leads to a better evaluation of the product. Therefore, the attitudes towards the products were better with a blogger in the picture. Moreover, purchase intention was not affected by the absence or presence of a blogger which leads to the assumption that people are not easily influenced in their purchase intentions. However, if participants would follow one of the bloggers in the future and are then exposed to more pictures of the blogger endorsing the product in different settings, purchase intention might be stimulated after a

while. Consequently, even though H1 is only partly confirmed, these results indicate that a product is better endorsed directly in an Instagram product placement.

The second hypothesis (H2) proposed that a product fit within a blog post would be perceived as more credible and would therefore lead to more positive attitudes towards the ads, attitudes towards the products and purchase intentions compared to a product non-fit.

The direct effects of product fit on trustworthiness and expertise had a surprising outcome. The results indicate that a product non-fit leads to more trustworthiness towards the blogger, as well as to a higher perception of expertise compared to a product fit. This is against the theoretical background of this study. However, it is possible that participants were influenced by the looks of the stimuli, as both bloggers had thousands of likes underneath their posts, which could be attributed to the likeability of the blogger (De Veirman, et al., 2016). The likeability of the blogger could lead subsequently to the attribution of expertise and trustworthiness of the blogger, without taking the evaluation of product fit into account. Moreover, the presence of the blogger and the quality of the pictures could have also influenced the perception of trustworthiness and expertise of the bloggers. Since they do look professional and styled, it is possible that the outcome is not necessarily attributed to the products but rather to the overall picture and the appearance of the blogger.

However, there were no significant direct effects found for the attitudes towards the ads and products, as well as purchase intention for product fit. Again, this could be due to the fact that the fit of a product is not the dominant part in an Instagram post, but rather the appearance of the blogger. It can be assumed that on Instagram the focus is not necessarily on the product the blogger endorses but rather on the overall embodiment of the product placement. This could be explained with Russell's plot placement (1998), which suggests that a product becomes part of the storyline and subsequently defines the person. Fitness bloggers on Instagram present themselves as attractive and sexy, in which the product is part of their looks. Pam presenting the SkinnyMint Tea is a fitting example in which the focus is probably not on the small cup in her hands but rather on her styled hair and toned body. In contrary, her presenting the HuaweiP9 smartphone as a non-fit product, the focus is probably not on the phone in her hands but rather on her standing perfectly styled in Hamburg city. Therefore, it could be expected that the presence of a blogger distracts viewers from the actual product. In the observer's perception of the ad, a present blogger is more important than the product fit as the identification with the blogger is more dominant. Bloggers rather shine with their looks and rely on their followers' admiration which leads them to buy the product they endorse - if

it fits or does not fit. Moreover, if a fitness blogger promotes a product which has no connection to the topic, it could be even perceived as better than a fitting product, as it could be experienced as a lifestyle or leisure activity and therefore as true word-of-mouth, instead of the presentation of paid products which they are obliged to promote. Therefore, H2 could not be supported.

Furthermore, in both hypotheses (H1, H2), credibility was understood as a mediator in the relationship between the independent variables (type of blog post and product fit) and the dependent variables ( $A_{ad}$ ,  $A_p$  and PI).

The results demonstrate that trustworthiness and expertise were no significant mediators in the relationship between type of blog post and the dependent variables. However, trustworthiness and expertise has a significant outcome in the relationship between product fit and the attitudes towards the advertisements, which means that credibility was a valid mediator in this relationship. Furthermore, trustworthiness did not mediate the relationship between product fit and attitudes towards the products and purchase intention, while in both relationships expertise could be understood as a significant mediator. The results of the direct effects and of the mediation analysis demonstrate that a blogger with a non-fit product in a post is attributed with expertise, which leads to better attitudes towards ads and products, as well as higher purchase intentions compared to a blogger with a fit product. Again, this could be explained with the relevance of product fit in an Instagram post as well as the type of products in the posts. Especially because Jen promoted a pizza, which is very appealing to almost everyone, this condition could have influenced the overall outcome.

*Interaction effect between type of blog post and product fit on the attitudes towards the ads, attitudes towards the products and purchase intention and credibility*

The third hypothesis (H3) suggested an interaction effect in the relationship between the type of blog post and product fit on the attitudes towards the ads, products and purchase intentions.

Based on the results, H3 was not confirmed as no interaction effects between type of post and product fit for any of the three dependent variables were found. These findings are against a body of research (Knoll, et al., 2017; Sato, et al., 2016; Van Rompay, et al., 2009) which state that stimulus congruence can positively affect consumers and that the missing fit of a product to the endorser leads to more negative evaluations. As already pointed out, the presence of a blogger in a picture could be a more dominant factor than the fit of a product.

Moreover, it is also possible that there are no real boundaries in what to promote on Instagram. Since bloggers are perceived as normal people, as long-distance friends or peers (Isosuo, 2016; Korotina, et al., 2016) an endorsed non-fit product could still be perceived as positive word-of-mouth as the blogger is no endorser for a certain brand category or product. Thus, bloggers do not necessarily belong to a specific niche community but are rather lifestyle bloggers who share their personal experiences with all kinds of things. Pam and Jen both keep their focus on fitness topics in their posts, but for observers and followers it is not reprehensible if they post recommendations which are not connected to fitness. Moreover, as already suggested, a post which stands out in a storyline could be perceived as more credible, since it is not in line the fitness niche. Consumers realize that specific bloggers get paid for what they are promoting. If then a post appears that has nothing to do with the usual topics, this word-of-mouth could be perceived as even more trustworthy, as something the blogger really wants to share with the followers. Thus, future research should focus on the fit or non-fit of products in blogger posts to prove these suggestions.

However, other interaction effects were found for attitude towards the ads, products and purchase intentions. There was an interaction found between the type of blogger and the absence or presence of blogger for attitude towards the ad. As the results show, for Jen it did not really matter how she promoted a product, directly or indirectly. However, for Pam it differed a lot. The reason for this could be the different types of products both bloggers presented. Jen presented pizza and NIKE shoes and it could be assumed that the products were pleasant to look at, even though Jen was not directly promoting them. However, Pam promoted a detox tea and a smartphone. It is possible that the detox tea in the package without Pam promoting it, was experienced as uninteresting or boring. Moreover, the smartphone in the indirect product placement was presented as product shot in front of a white background, which was probably not that appealing to the observers. In contrary, Pam is a very attractive woman, which leads to the assumption that participants experienced the product placements with her interacting with the products as most appealing advertisement.

Moreover, another interaction effect was found between the type of blog post and attitude towards the product. These results are comparable to the previous interaction effect as, again, for Jen it made no real difference if she was present in the post or absent but overall her posts scored higher on attitude towards the product compared to Pam's post. However, Pam's post were evaluated lowest when she only indirectly promoted the products and higher when she was present in the picture. Again, this could be explained with the chosen products



for the manipulations. Since NIKE shoes and pizza are more appealing products, the attitudes towards these products was in general higher than for Pam's products. This could be also connected to the prestige of the products, since the evaluation of a detox-tea could be low due to the lack of effectiveness or taste, and the HuaweiP9 could be considered as not trendy compared to other smartphones. However, this could be a topic of future research.

Furthermore, an interaction effect was found between product fit and blogger for purchase intention. These results suggest that the non-fit product Pam presented would be the least product participants would buy. This in case was the HuaweiP9 smartphone. However, the non-fit product Jen presented would be the first product participants would buy, which was the pizza. This outcome could be explained with the type of product. A pizza seems more appealing than the smartphone, especially because the investment would be of significant difference. A pizza is a product that one could buy any day, while an expensive smartphone is a decision process that takes some time. Additionally, the presentation of both products could be another indicator for the more favorable outcome of the pizza, since it looks tasty and is presented in a fitting environment. The smartphone, on the other hand was presented as product shot in front of a white background or directly promoted by Pam who is simply holding it, while looking in another direction.

Moreover, there were interaction effects found for Jen and Pam on trustworthiness and expertise. Jen was perceived as very trustworthy when she was present in the picture compared to Pam who was perceived as rather untrustworthy when she was directly promoting a product. Furthermore, Jen was perceived as least trustworthy when she was absent in the picture while Pam was almost as trustworthy as a present Jen, when she was absent in a picture. This indicates, that there is a difference in blogger perception, since participants trusted Jen more when she was present than Pam. This could be due to the way how both blogger presented themselves. Jen was working out when she was wearing the NIKE shoes. Her overall body language shows that she was concentrated in her workout, not looking into the camera but squatting. Compared to that, Pam was simply taking a selfie in the mirror with the detox tea, presenting herself in pyjamas, with styled hair and make-up on. This appearance has not much to do with fitness, except that she presented her toned body. Moreover, Pam's self-presentation could be perceived as "fake" compared to Jen. In the fit and non-fit post, Jen presented herself as rather natural, either smiling at her friend while eating pizza, or working out in her NIKE shoes. Contrary to that, Pam presented herself rather unnatural with a lot of make-up on, either faking a kiss in the fit condition, or looking

away from the camera in the non-fit condition, not smiling but looking rather arrogant.

However, there was another interaction effect found for Jen and Pam on expertise. There was not much of a difference if Jen was absent or present in a post when participants evaluated her level of expertise, but there was much of a difference for Pam. She was attributed with way more expertise when she was absent in the picture compared to when she was present. This could be due to the fact that she has an unnatural appearance, as already pointed out, which could lead to attribution of less expertise since she appears unpleasant. However, especially the fit post in which she was absent was well thought out. The detox tea was presented nicely, with a little fitness booklet on the side, a tea bag on the other. This picture did not appear to be accidental but rather planned out. Subsequently, this could lead to attributions of expertise, since Pam seems to know exactly what she is doing.

*Self-esteem as a moderator in the relationship between the type of blog post and attitudes towards the advertisements, attitudes towards the products and purchase intentions*

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis (H4) proposed that there would be a moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between the type of blog post and the attitudes towards the ads and products and purchase intention.

Self-esteem can be understood as a moderator between the type of blog post and attitudes towards the advertisements as the results indicated. Thus, people with low self-esteem were more affected by direct product placement with a present blogger compared to people with high self-esteem. As people identify with the blogger in a product placement (Russell, 1998) they develop a self-esteem motivation to act in a way that enhances the ideal self (Choi et al., 2012). People with low-self esteem have, thus, a higher motivation to enhance the ideal self compared to people with high self-esteem. It can be expected that people with high self-esteem do not tend to compare themselves as much as people with low self-esteem, since they are confident with their body and life. Moreover, blogger make it more easy for people with low self-esteem to identify with them as bloggers are perceived as normal people, who turned out famous on Instagram through their transformation process - something, that the observer feels to reach as well if he/she puts effort into it.

However, against the expectations, self-esteem was no moderator for the attitudes towards the products and purchase intention. Therefore, H4 was also only partly confirmed.

## Implications and Future Research

### *Theoretical Implications*

Most research has focused on product placement in traditional media but research on product placement on social media platforms like Instagram is still highly limited. Therefore, this study adds up to the body of research on the topic of online product placement with first insights in the world of fitness on Instagram.

The results indicate that the presence of a blogger in a product placement positively influences the attitudes towards the advertisements and products. However, purchase intention only differed by the blog owner (Pam or Jen). This leads to the assumption that the attitudes and purchase intentions are possibly predicted by different processes. Purchase intentions could therefore be explained by affective responses towards the personal perception of the blogger or the product the blogger presents, while attitudes could be explained by cognitive responses towards the overall appearance of the blog post.

Moreover, contrary to what the large body of research on the match-up hypothesis suggests, product fit was no significant predictor for more positive attitudes towards the ads and products and purchase intentions. In the context of Instagram, it is possible that the fit of a product to a blogger does not have the biggest impact when evaluating a blog post. It is rather the type of blogger that is very important, as the interaction effects suggest. Jen for example appeared more trustworthy, because she was more natural in her posts compared to Pam. This indicates that the reputation and appearance of a blogger is of high importance and that the product fit is, in this respect, rather incidental. Moreover, the blogger presents products in a very personal context, connecting product to the overall story they are telling. Thus, if a product does not match to what they stand for, this recommendation might still be perceived as true and could therefore display an honest and very personal recommendation.

Furthermore, the three-dimensional construct of product placement by Russell (1998) was never discussed before in a context of social media studies and Instagram marketing. However, his concept should be extended to social media product placement, as his theory was very useful in the context of online product placement and in a modified way it was successfully used for this study. In this respect, plot placement was compared to direct product placement and screen placement was compared to simple product placement on Instagram. Thus, his theory could be used as basis for future research in the field of Instagram marketing.

Moreover, this study revealed that self-esteem was a positive moderator in the perception of advertisements. However, it would have been more clear to use “identification with the blogger” as possible moderator, as many theories suggest that identification is of high importance in the perception of blogger endorsement. Thus, the results would have been more precise if it was clear if the observer identified him/herself with the blogger. Thus, future research should take the identification with the blogger into account, as it could be an important predictor for the evaluation of a advertisements.

### *Practical Implications*

The findings of this study suggest that it is advisable for marketers to be aware of the type of blogger they are getting involved with. The prestige of the blogger has an immense influence on the perception of a product placement post on Instagram. The way of how the blogger presents herself is thereby of high importance. Pam was perceived as less good overall, compared to Jen. This could be due to her missing authenticity. Pam seemed more “fake” than Jen because Pam presented herself in a rather arrogant way. Apparently, observers did not like that and they seemed to be more happy with someone being authentic and real, like Jen working out or eating pizza with her friend.

Moreover, the study revealed that the fit of the product has not much of an impact on the attitudes towards ads and products and purchase intentions. Consequently, the image which the blogger represents could be more relevant, such as honesty, trustworthiness, authenticity and nonchalance. Thus, it is possible that the strict compliance of type of products is not of high importance but rather the authenticity and realness of the blogger.

However, when engaging in influencer marketing, the marketers should make sure that the product they want to endorse via the blogger is presented directly in a post. This study proved that the presence of the blogger in the post had a positive influence on the attitudes towards the ads and products.

Furthermore, since users with a lower level of self-esteem are more appealed by an Instagram product placement, it is possible that products/brands which focus on the enhancement of the body- and self-image are better promoted through direct product placement on Instagram. Moreover, especially start-ups with a young target audience could use Instagram bloggers as advertising strategy, as they are immensely lower in cost compared to traditional media (Zarrella, 2009) and because identification is high with micro-celebrities like bloggers.

*Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

The findings of this study provide an interesting base for future research on product placement on Instagram. Future research could take the perception of different kinds of text appeals into account, as this what not considered in the current research. The comparison of rather emotional and direct texts may make a difference compared to rather rational text appeals, with only mentioning the brand and saying nothing about the overall experience with the product for example. This would highlight the importance of subtexts in Instagram posts and could, thus, make a difference in ad perception.

Furthermore, the types of products for the manipulations were only chosen by fit or non-fit to the blogger. It would be important to distinguish between high- and low-involvement products and only compare products of a certain category to keep the results as comparable as possible. The results indicate a big difference in perception of the products of this study. Thus, the low-involvement product pizza was more appealing to the observer compared to the smartphone as a high-involvement product. A pizza is rather inexpensive and poses a low risk of the buyer if he/she makes a mistake by purchasing it compared to a smartphone. It would be better to compare either only low-involvement products or only high-involvement products to find out the impact of the blogger in a more distinctive way. Additionally, we only used two bloggers and two types of products (fit/non-fit). A repetition of the study with other bloggers in other segments, like beauty, fashion or travel bloggers with other products would be highly interesting.

Moreover, self-esteem was chosen as a moderator for the relationship between type of blog post and the dependent variables. Many theories underline the importance and impact of blogger identification. Thus, the identification with a blogger could be of high relevance for the perception of the advertisement. Therefore, future studies should rather focus on identification as a possible moderator between type of ad and attitudes towards ads and products and purchase intention, instead of self-esteem.

Furthermore, Instagram is a fast-turning environment with constant new functions, which changes the way how bloggers communicate. In the past months, a new function started on Instagram, in which bloggers are now able to share live videos on their profiles, in which they can interact with their followers in real time. Thus, an even more direct form of word-of-mouth emerged, which might have an additional impact on the perception and likability of a blogger, since not only pictures are demonstrating for what they stand for. This

could have an impact on their credibility, and in turn also on purchase intention and attitudes towards products. Consequently, this would be an interesting path for future research.

### *Conclusion*

This study revealed that the presence of a blogger in a product placement is of high relevance for the overall perception of the advertisements and products, but that fit did not have an impact on the perception. It is interesting that the product fit does not have an impact when evaluating an Instagram product placement, but that the overall appearance of a blogger and the post is therefore of high relevance. Thus, the authenticity and personality of a blogger is more important than anything else. It depends on the blogger's appearance if the consumer sympathizes with the blogger. Therefore, it is explicitly important that companies and marketers confront themselves with the personality of a blogger, which means to get to know him/her in person before engaging in influencer marketing. Because consumers only trust authenticity, and only authenticity creates true word-of-mouth, which will subsequently have a positive impact on the effectiveness of product placement on Instagram.

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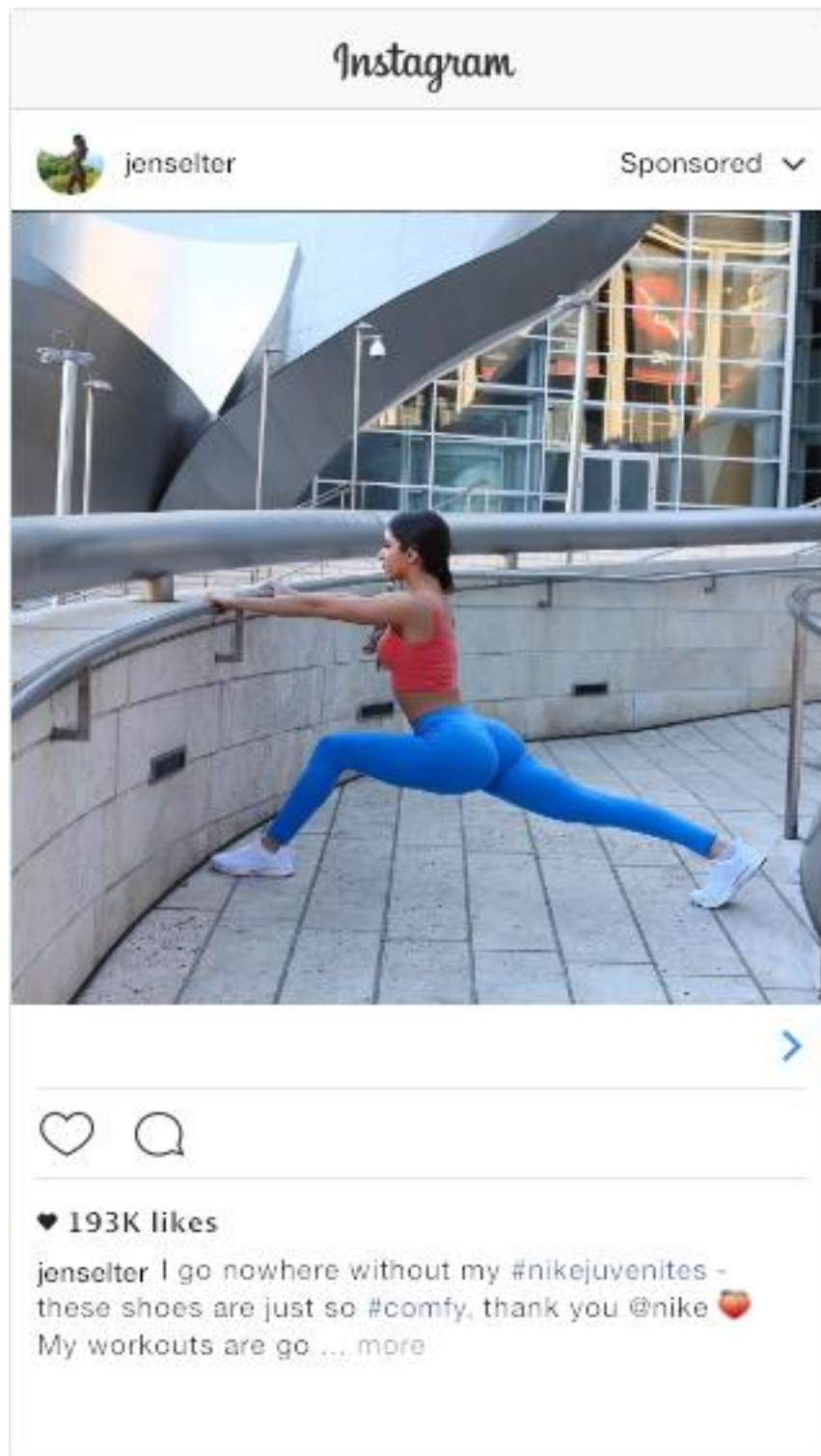
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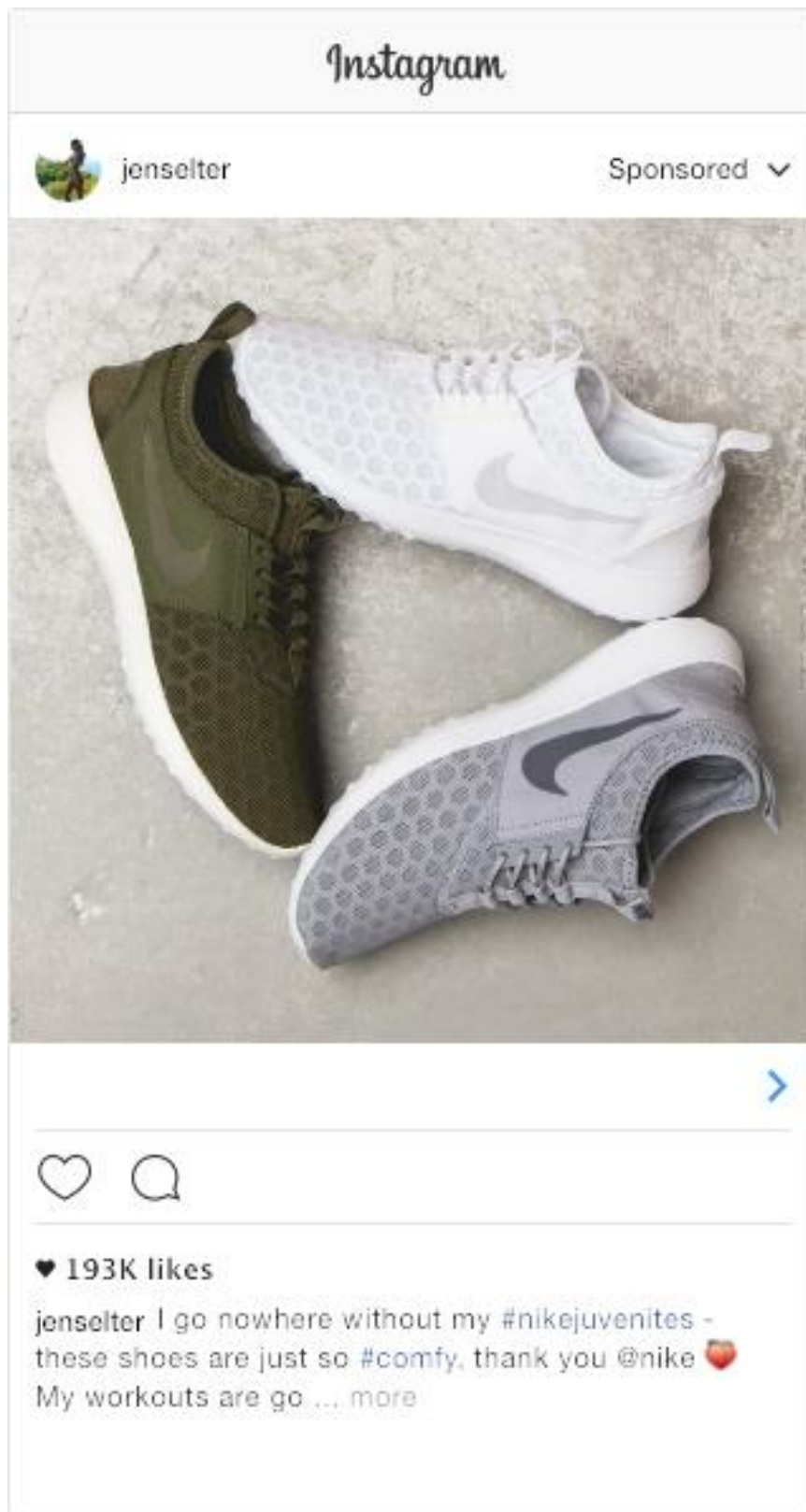
### Appendices

#### Appendix 1

1. Jen Selter: IDP + fit product



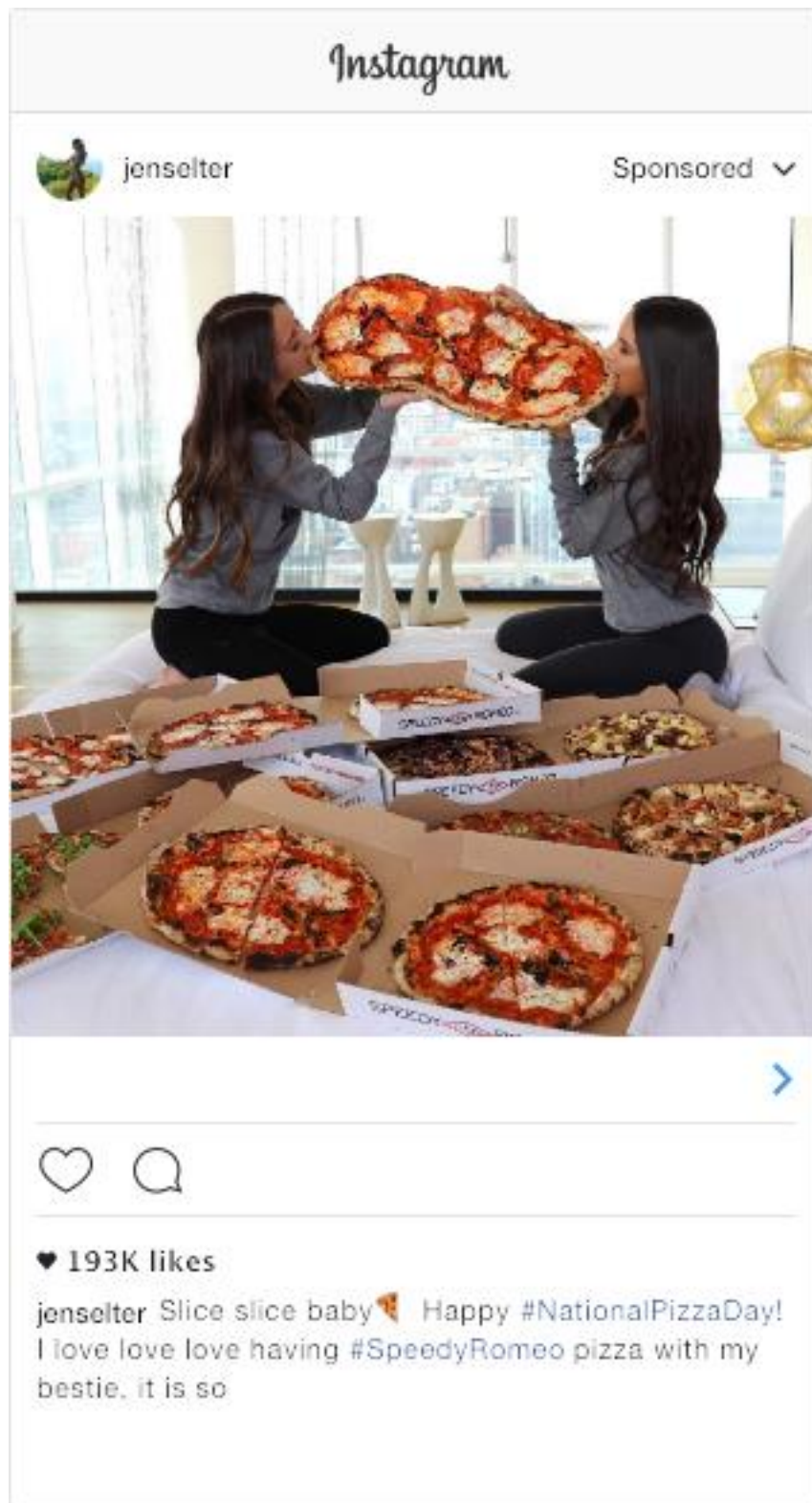
2. Jen Selter: IPP + fit product



The image shows a screenshot of an Instagram post. At the top, the word "Instagram" is written in its signature font. Below that, the user's profile picture and name "jenselter" are on the left, and the word "Sponsored" with a downward arrow is on the right. The main content is a photograph of three sneakers: one olive green, one white, and one grey, all with white soles. Below the photo is a blue arrow icon. Underneath that are icons for a heart and a comment bubble. The text below the icons reads "♥ 193K likes". The caption starts with "jenselter I go nowhere without my #nikejuvenites - these shoes are just so #comfy, thank you @nike 🍎 My workouts are go ... more".



3. Jen Selter: IDP + non-fit product




The image shows an Instagram post from the user 'jenselter'. At the top, the Instagram logo is centered. Below it, the user's profile picture and name 'jenselter' are on the left, and the word 'Sponsored' with a dropdown arrow is on the right. The main image depicts two women with long dark hair, wearing grey long-sleeved shirts and black pants, sitting on a white surface. They are holding a very large pizza between them, as if about to take a bite. In front of them are several open boxes of SpeedyRomeo pizzas. The background shows a bright, modern interior with large windows and a yellow pendant light. Below the image, there are icons for a heart and a comment bubble. Underneath these icons, it says '193K likes'. The caption reads: 'jenselter Slice slice baby 🍕 Happy #NationalPizzaDay! I love love love having #SpeedyRomeo pizza with my bestie, it is so'.

4. Jen Selter: IPP + non-fit product

Instagram

jenselter Sponsored

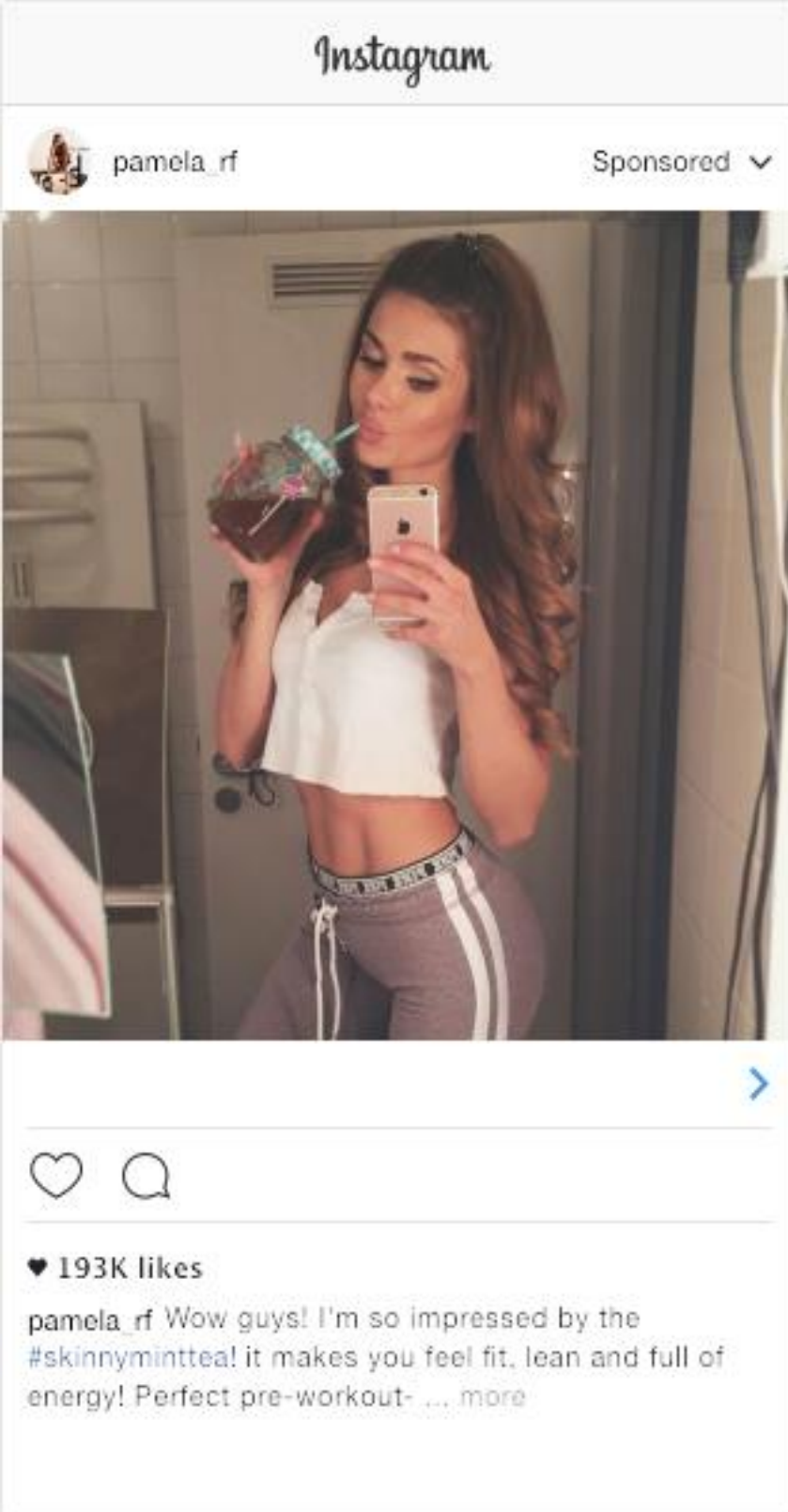


♥ 193K likes

jenselter Slice slice baby 🍕 Happy #NationalPizzaDay! I love love love having #SpeedyRomeo pizza with my bestie. it is so

The image shows an Instagram post from the user 'jenselter'. At the top, the word 'Instagram' is written in its signature font. Below that, the user's profile picture and name 'jenselter' are on the left, and the word 'Sponsored' with a downward arrow is on the right. The main content is a photograph of three pizzas on a wooden table. The top-left pizza is topped with green peppers and mushrooms. The top-right pizza is topped with clams and a slice of hard-boiled egg. The bottom pizza is topped with mushrooms and melted cheese. Below the photo is a blue arrow icon pointing right. Underneath that are icons for a heart and a speech bubble. Below these icons, it says '♥ 193K likes'. The caption reads: 'jenselter Slice slice baby 🍕 Happy #NationalPizzaDay! I love love love having #SpeedyRomeo pizza with my bestie. it is so'.

1. Pamela Reif: IDP + fit product



Instagram

pamel\_a\_rf Sponsored

Wow guys! I'm so impressed by the #skinnyminttea! it makes you feel fit, lean and full of energy! Perfect pre-workout- ... more


193K likes

The image shows a screenshot of an Instagram post. At the top, the word "Instagram" is written in its signature font. Below that, the user's profile picture and name "pamel\_a\_rf" are visible on the left, and the word "Sponsored" with a downward arrow is on the right. The main content is a photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a white crop top and grey leggings with white stripes. She is holding a large glass jar with a blue and green straw to her lips and drinking. She is also holding a white smartphone in her other hand. Below the photo, there are icons for a heart (likes) and a speech bubble (comments). Underneath these icons, it says "193K likes". The caption reads: "Wow guys! I'm so impressed by the #skinnyminttea! it makes you feel fit, lean and full of energy! Perfect pre-workout- ... more".

2. Pamela Reif: IPP + fit product

Instagram

pamela\_rf Sponsored



The image shows two packages of SkinnyMint 28 Day Teatox tea. The left package is labeled 'Flaming Boost' and '28 DAY TEATOX'. The right package is labeled 'Tangerine' and '28 DAY TEATOX'. Both packages mention 'THE ORIGINAL 3-STEP NATURAL TEATOX PROGRAM' and 'HERBAL SUPPLEMENT'. A motivational poster in the background says 'STOP WISHING START DOING' and features a woman in a white tank top. The post includes a heart icon, a comment icon, and a right-pointing arrow.

♥ 193K likes

pamela\_rf Wow guys! I'm so impressed by the #skinnyminttea! it makes you feel fit, lean and full of energy! Perfect pre-workout- ... more

3. Pamela Reif: IDP + non-fit product

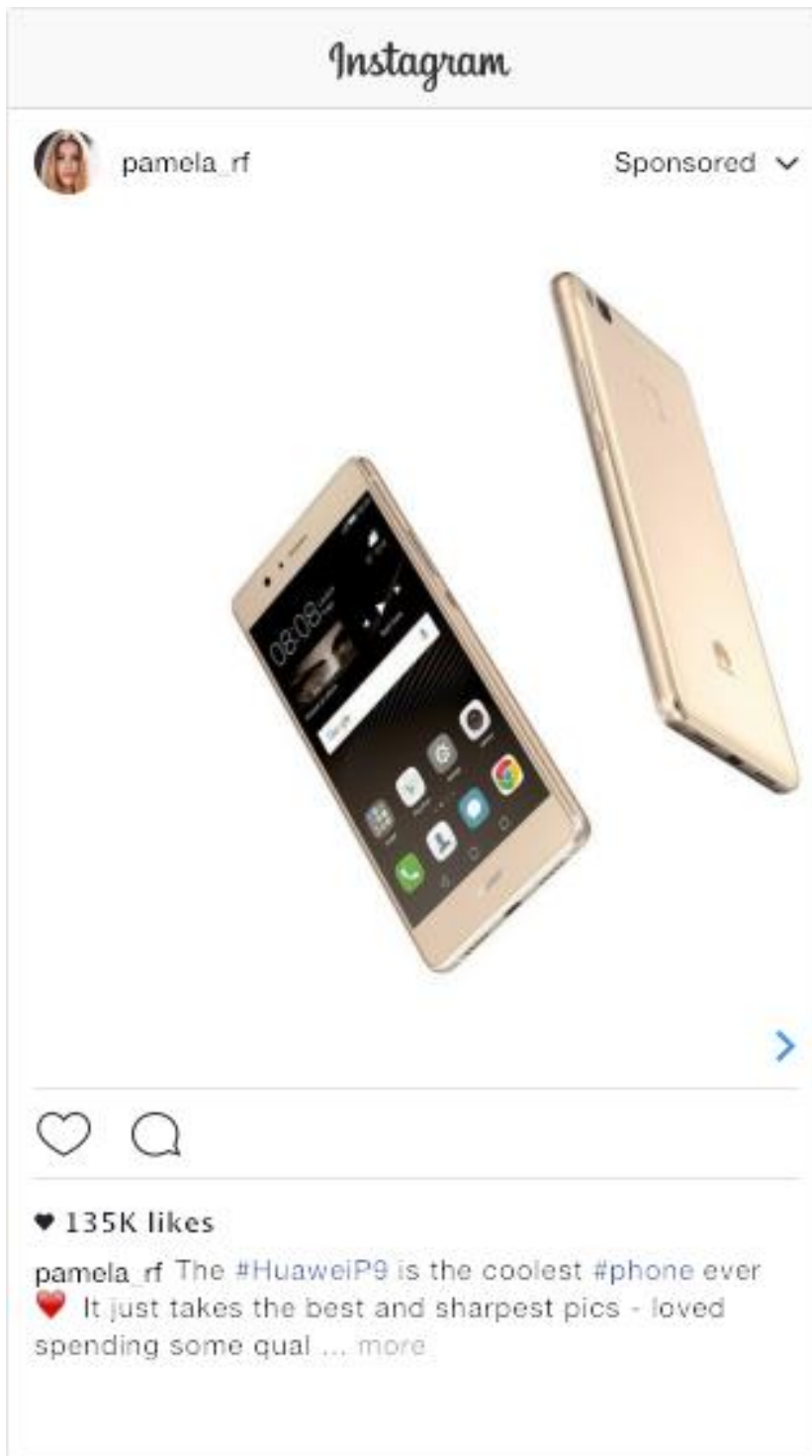
Instagram

pamela\_rf Sponsored

♥ 135K likes

pamela\_rf The #HuaweiP9 is the coolest #phone ever ❤️ It just takes the best and sharpest pics - loved spending some qual ... more

4. Pamela Reif: IPP + non-fit product





## Appendix 2

### Survey



Dear Instagram user,

Thank you for taking time to participate in this short survey for my master thesis at Tilburg University. My study aims to investigate product placement on Instagram, therefore your input is of high value.

Completing this survey will take about 10 minutes. All answers will be handled with care and processed anonymously. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at [marie.althoff@tilburguniversity.nl](mailto:marie.althoff@tilburguniversity.nl).

Please click the arrows to get started.

Enjoy,  
Marie Althoff

Are you using the online application Instagram?

- Yes  
 No

Unfortunately this survey is aimed at Instagram users only.

What is your age?

What is your gender?

- Male  
 Female



What is the highest level of education you have or are currently undertaking?

- No schooling
- Highschool
- Vocational Training
- Bachelor Degree
- Master Degree
- PHD/Doctor
- Other (please specify)

What is your country of origin?

Netherlands

In the following I will introduce two Instagram bloggers to you. Please read their descriptions carefully.

*Jen Selter @jenselter*

Jen Selter is a 23-year old American Instagram blogger, who became famous for her fitness focus on her voluminous backside. Today she can count about 10.9 million followers on Instagram. Moreover, she was mentioned in several lifestyle and fitness magazines (Elle, FHM, Muscle & Fitness, Vanity Fair, Maxim) and was voted 82 in the top 99 Most Desirable Women 2014 by AskMen. Jen has her own workout app called "FitPlan", in which she gives tips on fitness and nutrition.

Imagine you would come across her profile on Instagram. Please examine the following post carefully.

---

*\*After this one of the 4 conditions for Jen were presented.*

What were your overall feelings about the Instagram post you just saw?

unappealing	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	appealing
bad	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	good
unpleasant	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	pleasant
unfavorable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	favorable
unlikable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	likable

How do you experience the product in the Instagram post you just saw?

unappealing	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	appealing
bad	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	good
unpleasant	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	pleasant
unfavorable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	favorable
unlikable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	likable

How likely would you buy the product shown in the Instagram post?

never	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	definitely
very low purchase interest	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	very high purchase interest
probably not buy it	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	probably buy it

What do you think about the Instagram blogger?

dependable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	independable
honest	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	dishonest
reliable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unreliable
sincere	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	insincere
trustworthy	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	untrustworthy

What do you think of the Instagram blogger presenting the product?

expert	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	not an expert
experienced	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	inexperienced
knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unknowledgeable
qualified	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unqualified
skilled	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unskilled

*Pamela Reif @pamela\_rf*

Pamela Reif is a 20-year old German Instagram blogger. Since she started her Instagram profile at the age of 15, Pamela counts about 2.8 Million followers today. In 2016 she started her online fitness program "PAMSTRONG" and fitness magazines worldwide addressed the fitness blogger, calling her a "fitness idol" (Myself), "fitness inspiration" (Grazia), and that she "inspires and fascinates a whole new fitness generation" (FitForFun).

Imagine you would come across her profile on Instagram. Please examine the following post carefully.

*\*After this one of the 4 conditions for Pam were presented.*

What were your overall feelings about the Instagram post you just saw?

unappealing	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	appealing
bad	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	good
unpleasant	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	pleasant
unfavorable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	favorable
unlikable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	likable

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How do you experience the product in the Instagram post you just saw?

unappealing	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	appealing
bad	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	good
unpleasant	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	pleasant
unfavorable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	favorable
unlikable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	likable

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How likely would you buy the product shown in the Instagram post?

never	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	definitely
very low purchase interest	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	very high purchase interest
probably not buy it	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	probably buy it

What do you think about the Instagram blogger?

dependable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	independable
honest	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	dishonest
reliable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unreliable
sincere	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	insincere
trustworthy	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	untrustworthy

What do you think of the Instagram blogger presenting the product?

expert	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	not an expert
experienced	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	inexperienced
knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unknowledgeable
qualified	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unqualified
skilled	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	unskilled

After evaluating the Instagram posts, how likely are you agreeing with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At times I think I am no good at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to do things as well as most other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I certainly feel useless at times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I am a person of worth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I could have more respect for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take a positive attitude toward myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Since when are you using Instagram?

- 3 - 6 months
- 7 - 12 months
- 12 - 18 months
- 18 - 24 months
- more than 2 years
- more than 3 years

Please indicate how many times you did the following on Instagram in the past 3 months:

	Never	Occasionally (max. 3x/month)	Sometimes (1x/week)	Regularly (max. 3x/week)	Every day
Post a picture/video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Liked a post of other Instagram user(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comment on a post of other Instagram user(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visited the profile of a brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visited the profile of a blogger	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is your Instagram profile private?

- Yes
- No

Are you accepting strangers to follow your Instagram profile?

- Yes
- No

How many followers do you have on Instagram?

- < 50
- < 100
- < 500
- < 1000
- < 5000
- > 5000

What profiles are you following on Instagram? (Multiple answers are possible)

- Friends/people I know
- Prominent people (e.g. actors/actresses, models, TV personalities, etc.)
- Companies (e.g. NIKE, MAC Cosmetics, Zara, etc.)
- Fitness Bloggers
- Fashion Bloggers
- Beauty Bloggers
- Food Bloggers
- Others (please specify)

Are you interested in Fitness topics?

- Yes
- No

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Do you know the Instagram blogger Jen Selter?

- Yes
- No

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Do you know the Instagram blogger Pamela Reif?

- Yes
- No