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Instagram as an asset for sport brands

and how to apply it correctly

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'Social media is not a media. The key is to listen, engage, and build relationships.'

David Alston

I would like to thank my tutor, Meritxell Fontelles Galera, for sharing her knowledge with me throughout our tutor sessions.

Furthermore, I would also like to thank Adriana Blanc for giving me the opportunity to do my internship at her company ('We Are Capable') and thus allow me to gain more first-hand experience on how Instagram can be used as a marketing tool for sport businesses.

SUMMARY

The main aim of this thesis is to **inform and convince sport businesses** that **Instagram is a great marketing opportunity**. I noticed that still for a lot of small sport companies, and also some bigger brands, their Instagram pages are maintained because ‘they need to’ instead of making full use of the power of this social media platform.

In the first half of this thesis, I will give a some more information about the **history of Instagram** and why specifically this social media platform is interesting for sport businesses.

In the second part I will be diving into the **different functions** Instagram offers its users and also how to **follow-up if a marketing strategy is working well**. Furthermore, I will explain the **four fundamental pillars** that are included in every successful social media profile. Later I will **compare three well-known sport brands** (ADIDAS, ASICS and NIKE) and see how they applied these pillars into their marketing strategy.

The last part is **more practical**, since I had the opportunity to conduct an **interview with the owner of ‘We Are Capable’**, where I am also doing my internship.

Keywords: *social media marketing, digital marketing, branding, influencers, sport business strategy, consumer relationships.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In our daily life, social media is getting more and more important. The amount of people that register keeps rising and so do the **opportunities for marketing purposes**. Nowadays, people don't always notice it, but social media is full of advertising. Sometimes it is obvious, such as a commercial that shows you a new product you 'must try' but other times it is not that clear. Influencers for example are being paid to show certain products in such a way that it doesn't seem like advertising, although it is (and actually a really effective one too).

The interest of writing this thesis with as main theme how Instagram can be an asset for sport brands mainly comes from my own daily life activities. One year ago, I was offered a collaboration with the sport brand ASICS and during this year I noticed what a **powerful marketing tool Instagram can be**. Because of this partnership, I have been offered some amazing opportunities and I have been able to grow my own following tremendously which made me start thinking: "if Instagram can help growing a person his/her following, why can't it be done for a sports brand?". And so, the idea to investigate this further and even write my master thesis about it was born.

My **internship** will take place at the company of an **influencer**, Adriana Blanc, which she was able to establish and grow thanks to her own personal Instagram page. She has a following of 69K followers and this allowed her to **start an online personal training business**. Combining my internship with her and writing my thesis about this subject will hopefully allow me to gain the needed knowledge to later enter in the job market with sufficient skills to find a job in this relatively new area.

Furthermore, is **the aim of this research** to offer sport brands a report and guidelines on how they can implement Instagram into their marketing strategy. Since this is a relatively new field, more investigation should be conducted.

The main tasks of this investigation are:

- Define why particularly Instagram is an interesting marketing tool
- What types of marketing can be done.
- Comparison between different sport brands in the same field.
- Case study based on my internship.

Research methods:

- Primary sources:
 - o Quantitative: market study among the users of the social media platform Instagram
 - o Qualitative: in-depth interview with the influencer, Adriana Blanc, with whom I will be doing my internship
- Secondary sources: literature about (sport, digital, social media) marketing, social media, reliable websites and official statistics.

This thesis is divided into five main parts:

1. History of Instagram
2. Instagram marketing
3. Sport marketing on Instagram
4. Case study 'We Are Capable'
5. Findings

In this first part, I will look into how Instagram became the blooming platform it is today and also perform an analysis why this social media tool could be **more interesting than others**. Later I explore more in depth how marketing on Instagram can be done and next how this can be applied to sport brands. To have an in-depth inside into how sport brands could use Instagram, I will conduct some interviews with the owner of We Are Capable, where I will do my internship, as well as with her clients and other users of social media. In the last chapter I will go over my findings and put together what I have learned during this investigation.

2. OBJECTIVES

With my master thesis I hope to show that Instagram is a **potential powerful tool** for companies, and especially those who are **selling sporting goods or organising sport events**. Many companies are still with the belief that Instagram is merely an entertainment app of the youth, however, it is seriously on the rise and is becoming more and more interesting for businesses regarding marketing purposes.

Moreover, it is a great platform to **share content such as photos and videos**. Sport is very visual, which is a huge benefit when creating content for marketing for social media platforms. A picture says more than a thousand words and the **emotions of an athlete** captured during the last meters of a sprint say even more.

For those reasons my aim is to write in the first place a thesis that **convinces sport companies** to include Instagram in their marketing strategy. Furthermore, I will investigate the **best practices** for sport brands and explain how these types of companies should market their products and/ or events on this platform.

I will also conduct a **study among the people who are using Instagram** to see what catches their attention on the platform and which activations have been proven powerful and why certain others have had less success.

3. WHY INSTAGRAM AS MAIN FOCUS POINT

Over the years digital marketing has changed tremendously because of the technological revolution and more specifically the evolution of internet. In the beginning, the internet seemed like the new goldmine for marketers and more specifically e-mail, website tracking and the gathering of big data. Later on, the introduction of **social media sites became the real breakthrough**, because it offered an easy way to people to share information, stories, photos, etc. with each other. (Simon, 2016) Therefore, for 2022 and years to come, marketers are focusing more on social media. In 2020 over 3.6 billion people have used social media worldwide and this number is believed to increase to 4.41 billion in 2025. (Statista, 2022a)

In January 2021, Instagram had been used by 78% of social media marketers to promote their business and inform/ entertain their (potential) clients. (Statista, 2021) The website is the most popular among people aged between 18y and 35y old and has a huge appeal to billions of active users. It is **easy to share content** with other people, to **grow fan loyalty or brand awareness** and also to increase social proof through the use of influencers. (Chi, 2021) Cristiano Ronaldo for example has a following base of 401.2 million followers and an average post from him is worth roughly 880 EUR. (Statista, 2022b). Brands nowadays work with influencers who will showcase the products in their daily life. This is especially interesting for sport brands, since many people look up to athletes and follow them online for inspiration and admiration. When they see their favorite athlete wearing, eating, doing, ... something, they will be more prone to believe that the athlete themselves also likes the product and therefore, by purchasing it themselves, they will feel a closer connection to the athlete. Therefore, Instagram is a very interesting marketing channel for sport brands to promote their products.

During my internship, I will be closely working together with a fitness influencer, Adriana Blanc. She started 4 years ago with posting photos of her fitness journey and now has a following count of 63 thousand people. 2 years ago, she founded her own company, We Are Capable, and it has become a huge success. Throughout my internship I will conduct an **in-depth study of how influencer marketing helped her grow** her own brand and also the specific reasons why people chose to buy her products and follow her. I hope to gain a deeper understanding and more knowledge of how influencer marketing works in practice and how this can be further investigated to apply to also sport brands.

3.1. HISTORY OF INSTAGRAM

Instagram was launched by two friends who wanted to share their love for photography. The first picture posted was one of a dog sitting next to a taco truck in 2010.



Figure 1. First picture on Instagram / Sources used: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-45640386>

Within the first couple of months Instagram gained an audience of one million users and kept growing exponentially. Its main goal was to combine two things that were trending back then: **photo editing apps** (due to the increasing popularity of mobile photography) and social sharing apps (such as Twitter and Facebook). One of their biggest advantages was the feature '**filters**' that the app offered. All of a sudden people with low resolution photos could add some layers (better known as filters) on their pictures and upload high quality pictures. (Qadri, 2021)

Another important feature became 'stories' where people could upload something on their profile that would only be visible for 24 hours and later disappear. As noticed, Instagram its success lays in **looking at their rivals and using their best features** (they took the story idea from Snapchat) but giving them a little twist. (Evans, 2018)

As more and more people started using the app, also more celebrities signed up. This again caused a boost in users because all of a sudden, fans could have a better insight in the lives of their idols and also the celebrities had more freedom in posting content that they wanted to share. Companies saw the advertising opportunities this platform offered and jumped on the band wagon by contacting people that had a large number of followers and asked them if they wanted to become their **ambassadors, later referred**

to as influencers. This became Instagram's primary source of revenue and up until today, every time a new feature is developed and introduced (Explore Tab, IGTV, Reels, ...) it is designed in such a way that companies can easily use it to promote their products or services.

In 2012 Instagram had proven its worth and caught the attention of its two prior rivals: Twitter and Facebook. Whilst Twitter made a reasonable money offer, the latter offered something more: independence. (Frier, 2021) Initially it seemed odd why such a big company as Facebook wanted to buy Instagram so badly (which at that time only had 25 million users). However, businesses had already started using Instagram more and more to showcase their products due to the **interaction and engagement** it allowed them to have with their clients. After the acquisition, Instagram had access to the engineering tools of Facebook and grew to 1 billion monthly active users in June 2018. However, not long after this, the initial founders of the app (Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger) left Facebook which made Instagram merge with its initial rival and be under total control of its new owner, Facebook (nowadays better known as Meta).

3.2 PROMOTING CHANNEL

But why did Instagram become such a good channel to use for the promotion of products and services? To start with, Instagram is the **7th most visited website** in the world and the 4th most-used social platform (McLachlan, 2022) with 91% of online adults using Instagram regularly (Funk, 2021). 58% of users say that after seeing a brand on Instagram they are also more interested in it and **1 in 2 people have used the app to discover new brands**. Consequently, brand stories have an 86% completion rate (stories being watched until the end) and the average business account grows monthly 1.69% in total amount of followers. (McLachlan, 2022)

Another interesting aspect of Instagram is the content display. It is much easier to build a **brand image and create interaction** with (potential) clients on Instagram than on, for example, Facebook or Twitter. Research has shown that people are 85 times more likely to like, comment or share content on Instagram than on the other sites. Although there is also the possibility to post photos and videos on Facebook and Twitter, there is a lot of clutter such as sidebars, links etc to get through if you only want to see pictures and/ or videos. This is a huge advantage of Instagram, since it doesn't show this kind of clutter. (Zejnivic, 2018)

To showcase meaningful, captivating and interesting content is very important in today's digital world. It needs **to invite people to comment, share or like** a post and this can be easily done by including some kind of narrative, which is one of the most basic human forms of communication (Romney & Johnson, 2018). People that are good

in creating metacommunicative¹ images are called content creators and their influence on Instagram is huge.

3.3 BRAND AMBASSADORS OR INFLUENCERS

Both terms are used interchangeable, but there are some important differences between them. A **brand ambassador** is someone who **loves your brand** and actively promotes in on their social media or through word-of-mouth advertising. They are passionate about your product and will help you promote it without asking for much. Many brand ambassadors receive products for free and are more likely to be long-term relationships.

Influencers are people who have a **big following count** and ask money to feature a product on their feed. Most of the time, these kinds of relationships are a **onetime thing** and therefore short-term. Influencers will also only promote a product if they actually like it and if they think it aligns well with their own brand. (Huhn, 2021) Influencers represent a more effective form of digital advertising due to their large following count and high engagement rate, hence why 75% of marketers are using influencers. (De Veriman, Cauberghe, Hudders, 2017) They are more 'real' and **people easily identify with them**. The influencer seems like a friend and whenever they promote a product it will be perceived as **mouth-of-mouth advice instead of real advertising**. (van Diel, Dumitrica, 2020) However, there is also the risk of losing their authenticity when they start sharing too many advertisements.

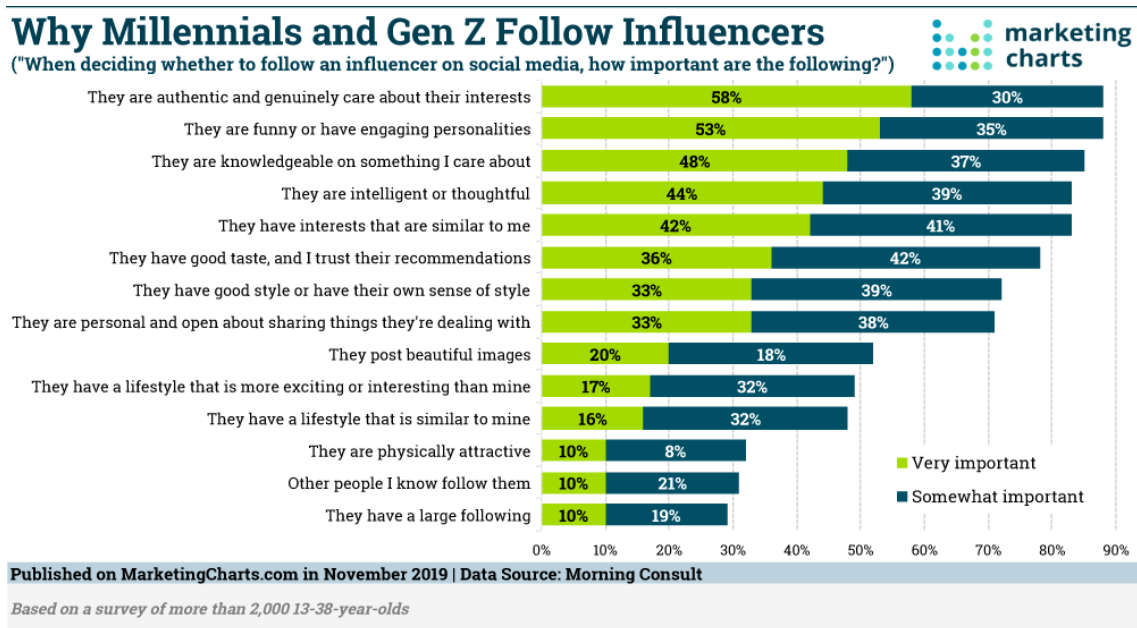


Figure 2. The reason why people follow influencers / Source: <https://www.marketingcharts.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MorningConsult-Why-Millennials-Gen-Z-Follow-Influencers-Nov2019.png>

¹ when the combination of the story and photo is used to share a story beyond the primary message

People with a following of over 10.000 are seen as interesting for brands, although this is open for discussing since not a lot of research has yet been done around this number. Also, for brands it might be even more interesting to work with ‘less known’ influencers if they want to **target a niche market** or **reduce their marketing budget** (influencers with more followers maintain higher rates). Another factor that should be sought after when using influencers for a brand is how their interaction is with their followers and how they are being perceived. (De Veriman, Cauberghe, Hudders, 2017)

3.4 OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The biggest age group on Instagram are people between 18 and 34y old, as shown in the table. People of this age are more **prone for impulsive buying** and that’s why brands prefer to focus their strategy on them (Zejnilovic, 2018). Instagram came up with some functions to make it easier for people to actually buy something directly from the site². It is known from traditional marketing that if the customer does not need to overcome obstacles throughout the purchase process, that there is a higher chance of them actually buying the product. Thus, if a brand knows how to position their product in an attractive way on Instagram and improves the checkout process, there is a higher likelihood for impulsive buying.

	Instagram	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	Pinterest	TikTok	Snapchat	Youtube
# of monthly active users	1 billion	3,5 billion	187 million	738 million	400 million	100 million	265 million	2 billion
Age group	18-34y	25-49y	30-49y	46-55y	30-49y	18-24y	13-34y	15-25y
Gender	57% female, 43% male	44% female, 56% male	32% female, 68% male	51% male, 49% female	78% female, 22% male	59% female, 41% male	58% female, 40% male	72% female/ male internet users
Time/day	60 min	38 min	3,53 min	22% weekly	14,2 min	45min	26 min	41,9 min

Figure 3. Comparison different social media platforms / Source used: Barnhart, 2021

As explained before, digital marketers are in favor of using influencers to promote their products. **87% of people say that an influencer has influenced** them to buy a product and **70% of those people say that they use Instagram for product discovery**.

² Shoppable posts: brands can tag their products in a post on which the viewer can click and receives the option to also buy the product immediately, without being redirected.

(Barnhart, 2022) In another study that was conducted with more than 16,000 respondents aged 15 or more in the US, **36% of them said that they use Instagram to follow brands.** (Lashbrook, 2020)

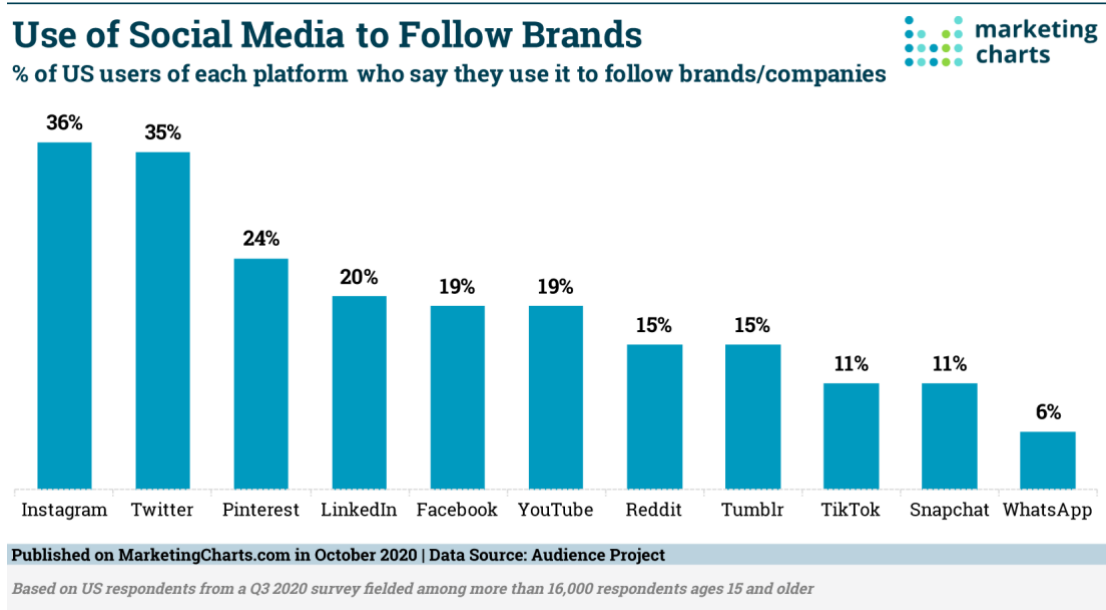


Figure 4. Use of Social Media to Follow Brands / Sources used: <https://www.marketingcharts.com/digital/social-media-115153>

Thus, influencers and brand ambassadors can be of great help to **promote products** online, but it should also be considered with **what kind of person a brand** wants to work with. Brand ambassadors do not require an additional cost and can be anyone meanwhile influencers have a bigger following and ask for a reimbursement. The benefit of working together with them is that they have a higher likelihood of reaching more people and that those reached followers are more likely to buy a product when they see them using it.

4 INSTAGRAM MARKETING

Directing marketing to social media channels is nothing new and is being done more frequently due to its effectiveness. However, when choosing the right social media tool for a business, taking into **consideration the demographics** that a company want to attract is very important. TikTok for example is interesting for companies that mostly are working with teenagers, meanwhile Instagram has been proved to be very effective especially for people of Generation Z.

People of this generation are **born between 1996 and 2010** and of their most prominent characteristics is that they are **always 'on'**. They are used to **multitasking** (and use up to 5 different screens daily), like to be **connected with each other** and their main way of communicating is through the **use of social media**. (Hendrikse, 2021) However, this does not mean that posting something on Instagram that attracts their attention will automatically turn them into fans or clients. Some more in-depth tactics need to be used, which will be discussed in the next sections.



Figure 5. Characteristics of Generation Z / Source: <https://willowmarketing.com/2019/03/27/what-we-love-about-gen-z/>

4.1 ENGAGEMENT

Some more characteristics of Generation Z is that they are eager to **provide active feedback and/ or comment** about brands that they feel passionate about, they have a strong tendency for **online communication** and have a higher preference for social interactions online than the previous generations. (Gyan, Jyotsna, 2020)

Knowing this and combining it with the knowledge gained through research³ that social media contributes to the **improvement of customer relationship management** through social interaction between (potential) customers and brands (Simbolon, 2021), make this generation an interesting social demographic for social media marketing.

Thanks to the interface of Instagram (less options than Facebook where you can also check-into locations, groups, events, ...) , users can easily comment/ share/ like content with each other. A company nowadays need to understand that customer engagement plays a vital role for its future lifespan. It helps with **customer loyalty and understanding the wants and needs** of their clients which is particularly important to maintain **long-term relationships** and to empower and motivate customer contributions. (Ting et al., 2020)

Customer engagement is also a marketing strategy that includes several disciplines such as social psychology, organizational behavior, and education according to (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018). Their research showed that customers who are activated emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally are proven to be more brand loyal with a long-term commitment. It also showed that **highly engaged** customers spend 60% more in each transaction, make 90% **more frequent purchases** and are four times more likely to advocate for the brand. Thus, it is worth considering focusing on the interaction of a company their followers on social media, especially on Instagram because the algorithm will pick up on it and will automatically boost the posts of the company, so it gets more views.

4.2 CONTENT

Instagram is all about content. In comparison to, for example, Twitter where you can post a status, photos and/ or videos, Instagram is rather 'limited'. The site allows you to post **videos, photos and reels** (short videos with most of the time music in it) so that other people can like, comment or share it. However, this can be turned into a huge advantage for brands. If a brand knows how to create **interesting, good-quality and captivating or entertaining content** then it will be more likely to gain and retain customers. Especially the latter is important for brands since users of Instagram are using the website to be entertained rather than being 'forced' to buy something. When they are intrigued by a product due to its verbal and visual stimuli that is being shared through stories or publications, they are more likely to **undertake actions such as following**

³ The research was conducted at Bina Nusantara University (Binus) with a sample of 100 students from Generation Z

the brand, sharing its content and eventually buying something. (Sanchez-Cobarro et al, 2020)

4.2.1 Types of content on Instagram

As explained previously, it is important to have quality content in order to capture the attention of the users of Instagram. Instagram has four main features that can be used to share content (videos, photos, stories and lately also reels) and two less known, but also powerful, tools (guides and shop).

4.2.1.1 Videos

According to McGranc (2021) 'this type of media offers brands new opportunities for **generating and capturing leads, building brand awareness and converting paying customers.** Consequently, in 2020 58% of marketers invested in Instagram videos and those who did incorporate this into their strategy saw an increase of 81% in their return on investment.

However, why exactly does video score so well on Instagram? It is fairly easy; Instagram prefer them over static posts, and they are also more likely to be shared. The more interaction that happens with a post, the more likely it will be to catch the attention of the algorithm⁴ and to be pushed before other posts. (McGranc, 2021)

4.2.1.2 Reels

After the success of introducing the video function on Instagram, the website introduced another similar function: reels. These are short videos (between 5 and 12s on average) with some trending music and are derived from Instagram's competitor TikTok. Nonetheless, these types of short videos are currently being pushed the most by Instagram's algorithm and thus offer brands the possibility to 'go viral'⁵ in no time.

The most important thing when making a reel is trying to share **information** in it (whether it be tips of what to visit/ where to eat, ...) or to **entertain your fans.** By doing this, the probability of the reel being shared, saved or commented on will increase significantly and Instagram will reward to maker by being shown to more people. (Ormos, 2021)

4.2.1.3 Photos

The type of content that made Instagram big. All of a sudden people with low-quality pictures could make them look like high-quality through the use of filters. A study done by the online source Curalate showed that high brightness generates 24% more likes and that people prefer low saturation and higher levels of texture in photos. (Kinzinger) Another important aspect is consistency in the kind of photos someone posts and also

⁴ The program behind Instagram that analyses how people interact with each other to see what is perceived as interesting and thus good to be pushed to be shown to more users so they stay entertained

⁵ Term that is being used whenever a post suddenly is seen by a large amount of people

the timing of posting the photos. If a brand shares content related to its services, it will help to **get more attention, build loyalty, deliver vital information and improve overall engagement.** (Farid, 2021) However, if a brand decides to wait too long with sharing new content or overdoes it one week and nothing the next month, customers will be likely to unfollow the account, which should be avoided by all cost.

4.2.1.4 Guides

This feature is a little bit less known, since it won't really affect Instagram's algorithm. Nonetheless, this tool should not be forgotten because it is an excellent way to give a brands audience **fast access to your best posts and products in an easy-to-digest format.** (Worb, 2022)

Guides are made by the owner of the profile and can be used as mini blogs. Once someone has created a guide, a shortcut will appear on the profile so it's easy for his/her followers to find it back. Someone's own posts can be added to the guide, but also posts of third parties. A little description to capture the reader's attention is highly recommended since it helps people directing to what they are looking for.

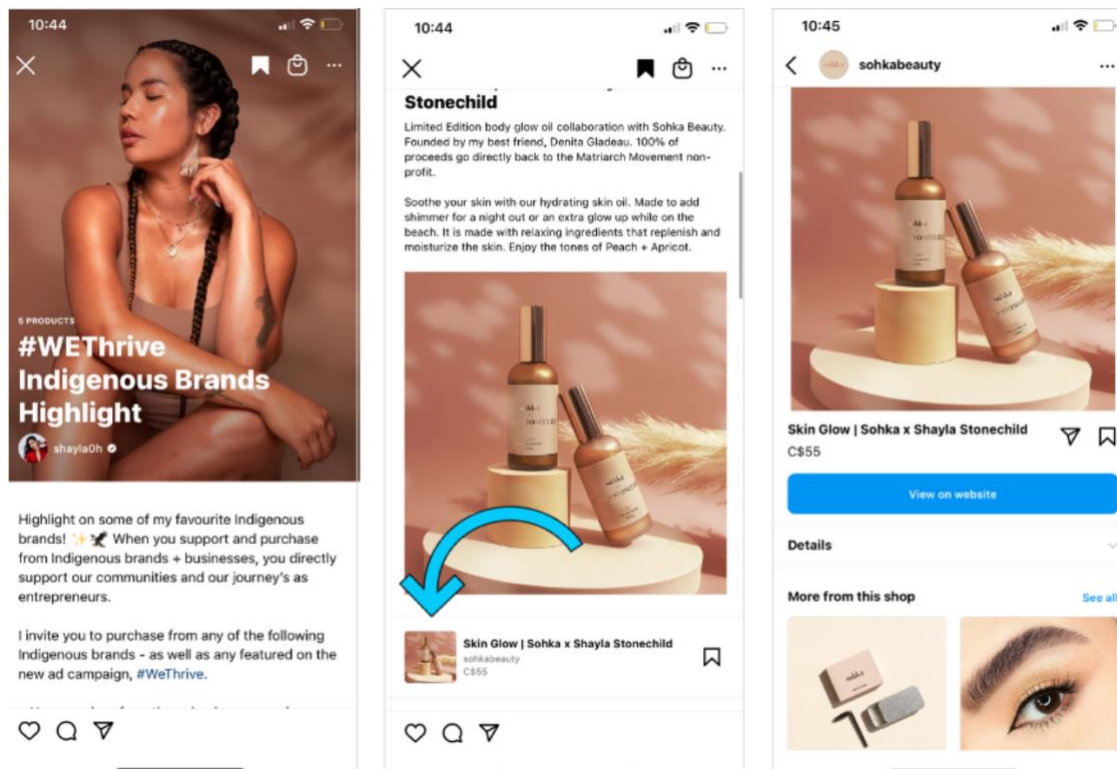


Figure 6. How a product guide on Instagram looks like / Source: <https://later.com/blog/instagram-guides/>

4.2.1.5. Shop

As shown in the picture above, people nowadays have the opportunity to do their online shopping directly from Instagram. It helps companies with **shortening the buyer journey** so that consumers don't have enough time to rethink their purchase. Once they see the visual, they can immediately buy the product directly from the photo by simply

clicking on it (as shown below). As explained previously, nowadays people tend to **trust authenticity** and trust influencers they follow. Brands can showcase their products in a natural environment or by the use of influencers. By doing this, the advertisement will seem more 'real' and spur the interest of the consumer to buy the product. (Samosa, 2020)

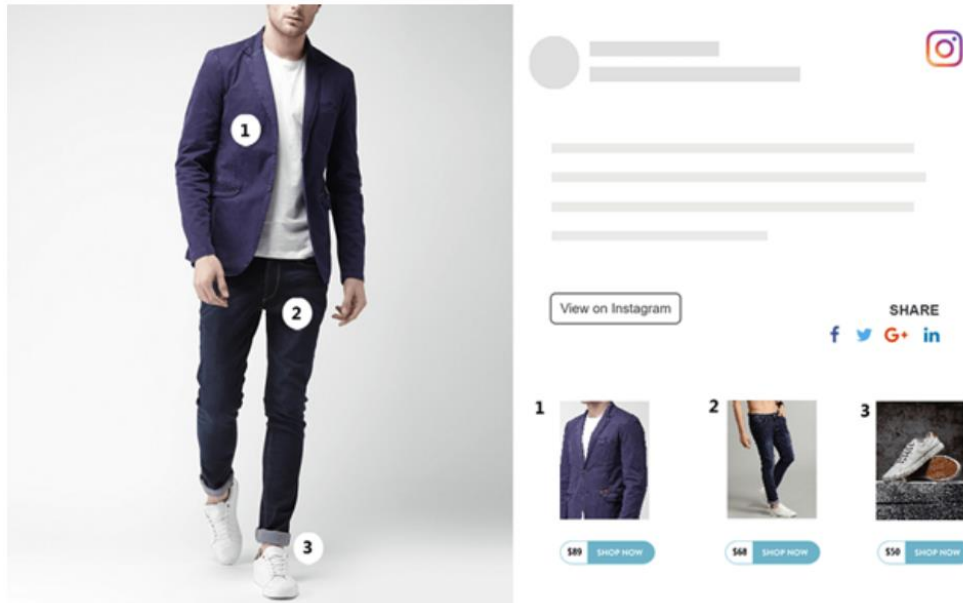


Figure 7. Shop on Instagram where a consumer only needs to click the dots to buy the product / Source: <https://www.socialsamosa.com/2020/01/7-benefits-of-setting-up-an-instagram-shop/>

4.2.1.6. Stories

Last, but surely not less important tool to share content on Instagram is the feature 'stories'. This piece of content is **showcased on top** of the page **and automatically updated** once someone posts something new. Therefore, new stories will appear first and once they are viewed, they will be directed to the back. Thus, the more a brand can **maintain its position at the top** of the feed, the more often it will also reach its audience. Brands that know how to use their stories properly have a completion rate⁶ of 75% (Erskine, 2018)

But there is more. One-third of the most-viewed stories are from business accounts and one in five stories gets a direct message. Thus, this is an excellent way to **engage a brands consumer and inform/ entertain them with their products**. (Barnhart, 2021a) Stories also allows brands to **interact more with their followers** by adding stickers, music, questions, polls, etc. to their stories. The more people that interact with a story (replying, answering a question/ poll, clicking on a link, ...) the more it will be pushed by Instagram to be on top of the page by more people. It also offers a brand the opportunity to share content of 'normal' people that use their products, so potential customers can see a **product in a real environment** rather than in a commercial on TV or as an AD on another website.

⁶ When a story is being watched until the last frame

4.3 COMMUNITY BUILDING

According to Golbeck (2015) the definition of a community is built upon “four major pillars: **membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection**”. Although membership might not be always applicable to Instagram, the other three pillars can be easily found back on accounts with a strong following and engagement rate.

The influencer *_emilysworld* has a following amount of 116K followers and she ticks all the four boxes mentioned before. She is a 24y old girl who lives in London and shares her everyday life with her followers. Her main focus is helping young (female) adults create a healthier body image through showing that it is okay to eat snacks, fast food, ... etc but that it is also important to understand the importance of regularly moving your body for the mental benefits of it.

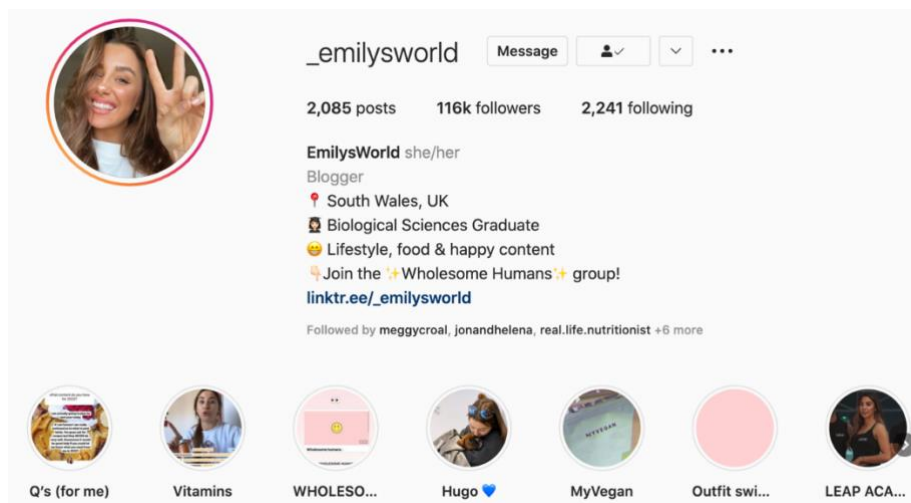


Figure 8. Example of good Instagram marketing done by an influencer / Source: https://www.instagram.com/_emilysworld/

1. As shown in the picture above, she has a link installed in her bio so people can join her **online community**. The aim of her profile is to help young (female) adults love their own body and learn that they shouldn't blame food. In her group, Emily (the influencer) will probably share extra information and try to be more actively responding towards her members. Access to information can provide a valuable resource to members and can create emotional assistance which can later lead to a stronger attachment to the brand. (Golbeck, 2015)

- If we further analyze her profile, we notice that she has a paid collaboration with the brand MyVegan. Through a funny video she shows her followers how to make a recipe with products of the sponsored brand and thus **influence** them to also try the brand. As explained previously, the more authentic a post seems, the higher the probability will be that people are being tricked in later also trying the product since their 'friend' shows how much she likes it.



Figure 9. Influencer sharing a post to promote a brand / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ84IncDbDP/>

- The post below shows Emily sitting on a beach during her holiday. The left photo is posted whilst photo on the right is a 'normal' one. After a brief analysis of her profile, it is clear that her aim is to make fun of so-called taboos around food (eg: *Should you eat today after eating too much food the day before?*). People that follow her are most likely inspired, intrigued or want to know more about how to get rid of those thoughts. Through sharing posts like this one, she **integrates and fulfills their needs** of looking for inspiration on how to improve their own body image.



Figure 10. Influencer Emily helping her followers to create a more realistic body image / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CaxU7DxPhzy/>

- The last pillar, the **share of emotional connection**, can be found in the video below. In the video she explains why she hasn't stepped on a weighing scale in the past 2 years and also the reasoning behind it. She shares her own thoughts and experiences to create a stronger bond with her audience for long-term following.



Figure 11. Emily sharing her own experiences and thoughts with her followers / Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ_2Os7jjdn/

However, not every brand can build an online community like Emily has, because it might not resonate with their brand message. Nonetheless, almost every brand can create a community through some simple actions. The first step is to look for **like-minded people** through hashtags. Use keywords that align with the brand and you will find people who share the same interest and can become potential customers.

To really engage people more to share content of a brand is to every now and then **share customer generated content**. This is a win-win for brands since they can use already quality pictures and customers will be more eager to share and tag the brand in aspiration to also be shared by their brand. (O., 2015)

Having a community on social media can be challenging for a brand since there are **multiple decisions** that need to be made at the same time; does a brand want to focus on one particular channel (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, ...)? Does it mostly want to entertain customers or rather inform them? And lastly, how will the marketing team design and implement this strategy? (Nayar, 2020)

Since **Generation Z** is coming at the forefront of audience and consumers, it is important to look at what **interest them**. They prefer **genuine business and brands** more than the previous generations and brands are being perceived like this when they show real-time posts and engage with their audience. (Stelzner, 2021) This generation is also, like mentioned before, **mostly active on Instagram**. Therefore, making a brands profile, stories and posts **interesting and captivating** for Generation Z on Instagram can easily boost engagement which later could be translated into sales.

4.2 DEFINING GOALS

4.2.1 KPI's to consider

4.2.1.2 Engagement rate

Equals the **amount of people that engaged with someone's content** put into percentage. There are different ways to calculate this number and they depend on what your social media goals are. (McLachlan, 2021) The engagement rate can be calculated by

- Reach (total engagement per post/ reach per post *100)
- Posts (total engagement post/ total followers *100)
- Impressions (total engagement post/ total followers *100)
- Daily engagement (total engagement in a day/ total followers *100)
- Views (total engagement video / total video views *100)
- Factored engagement (comment-weighted = (total comments x2) + all other engagement / reach per post *100)

A good rate is between **1% to 5%**, however, the more followers someone has, the more difficult it will be to reach a high engagement rate. (Sehl, 2021)

4.2.1.3 *Story engagement*

Stories can be photos or videos that are uploaded and are only visible for 24 hours (unless they are being saved to someone's highlights⁷). It is a great tool for brands to **increase brand awareness and create a stronger relationship with customers through interactive content** (such as polls, questions, tips, ...). If a brand posts up to 5 stories a day, it ensures a retention of followers of over 70%. (Cucu, 2022) To measure if a brand's story is successful or not can be done through different actions:

1. **Tap forward** to see how many people continued watching a story and clicked through to see the next one.
2. **Profile visits** shows how many people navigated to the Instagram profile of the story they just watched.
3. **New followers** gained through a story. Instagram will track down who navigated to the profile and then started following the account.

4.2.1.4 *Impressions*

Equals the **total number of views someone's content gets** (stories and posts). This does not show the amount of people who have seen the content (this is called unique impressions), but how many times the content is shown (thus also people who look repeatedly at the content). The more an account posts, the **more opportunities** they are for people to somehow get into contact with the account. However, it also depends a little bit on Instagram's algorithm, which can be slightly altered, but still is an unsure factor. Therefore, impressions are an important metric to track, but not that easy to improve rapidly. (Delfino, 2021)

4.2.1.5 *Trending or branded hashtags*

Posts with at least **one hashtag gain around 12,6% more engagement** than ones without them. (Bora, 2022) They are Instagram's own keywords that someone would use to find information through a search engine such as Google or Yahoo. One way to generate more impressions (described in the section above) is through making a brand specific hashtag. It will **engage more people to generate content** (which later can be used by the brand to improve fans loyalty) and thus **improve the impression and engagement rate**.

⁷ Function on someone's profile where people can save old stories so they are available to be viewed for more than 24h



Figure 12. A repost from a fan (*runwithmie*) who tagged the brand (*Polar*) with an unique brand hashtag (*#PolarCommunity*) / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CbZ7Hf2LRaf/>

4.2.1.6 Click-throughs from your bio link

In the biography of an Instagram accounts a unique link can be inserted that directs whoever clicks on it to the desired web page. The webpage can be chosen by the owner of the profile thus can be directly a sales page, a blog, a video, ... It is vital for digital marketers to keep an eye on **how many times this link is clicked** on, since it shows whether or not people **are interested** in knowing more about a brand. (Bora, 2022)

4.2.1.7 Follower growth

Although followers can be bought and a huge amount of following does not necessarily mean that an account is interesting for marketing purposes, the metric still stays an important one to cover. Especially the **growth that one sees in his/ her following**.

In first instance it might seem interesting to 'buy' followers, however, the algorithm will punish accounts that do this. These 'followers' are passive accounts and won't interact with someone's content. Therefore, engagement will most likely be very low and consequently the algorithm will not be pushing any posts forward.

To keep people on Instagram entertained it is important to **post regularly** so people have a reason why to follow a specific page. However, it stays important to don't spam followers and to provide them with valuable content that interests them. (Geyser, 2021 a)

To calculate the growth of an account, the following formula should be used:

$$(number\ of\ NEW\ followers / total\ number\ of\ followers) * 100$$

An average growth for a brand on Instagram is **around 6- 8% per month**, which is 3 times as much as on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. (Laurence, 2021)

4.2.1.8 *Brand monitoring tool*

This tool helps tracking down the **conversations** on the online web that are taking place about someone's brand. Therefore, it is a useful instrument to **measure a brands awareness**, when the best time would be to launch a new product or which keywords would be more successful in order to reach (potential) customers). The tool also tracks down **possible dangers** such as rapidly spreading complaints, but also what consumers are saying about the brand. Thus, a company can narrow down its marketing to what really appeals to its consumers and also better identify where to find them. (Chan, 2021)

Since every brand has a different reason why they are using social media for marketing purposes, the **outcomes they are looking for also differ**. Some brands might only want to inform their clients about their products and then they don't need to track down the 'click throughs from the bio link' but they will focus more on their following growth for example. Thus, every brand should think of **what they want to achieve** with their strategy (informing, captivating, entertaining, connecting, ...) and look for the **adequate metrics** to track down if they are performing well.

5. SPORT MARKETING ON INSTAGRAM

A **visual communication will capture more the attention** of people online than a written one. Sports, and especially athletes, are very visually and thus eye catchers for people scrolling through social media. The reasoning behind this is simple: a picture says more than a thousand words and the **preferred way** of human beings to communicate, or to be informed, is through **story telling**. An image with a lot of expression in it is also more susceptible to interaction which will lead to an increase in engagement on social media. (Romney, Johnson, 2018) For these reasons, social media and then especially Instagram are great marketing channels for sport brands. Through these platforms **people can easily engage with their idols** and favorite brands through commenting, sharing and liking posts. In a study conducted by Facebook, 49% of the participants said that they use Instagram to discover sport news and highlights from their team and 54% said they use it as a window into the lifestyle of their favorite players. (Creative Review, 2018) From the point of view of the sport brands, this also includes a lot of opportunities since they can **showcase their products in their 'natural environment'**, attract more (potential) customers through storytelling, do live streaming during events and the use of athletes of their brand ambassadors or even influencers. (Blunt, 2021)

In this chapter I will explain the **different types of sport marketing** that already exist and how it is applied as marketing strategy on Instagram. Later I will conduct a **comparison between three well-known sport brands** (ADIDAS, ASICS and NIKE) that sell the same type of product to investigate if there are similarities in their marketing strategy and which brand is performing the best. However, it must be added that my focus will be solely of their marketing on Instagram and thus the outcome of whether or not their marketing is successful, might be biased.

5.1 TYPES OF SPORT MARKETING ON INSTAGRAM

The combination of sports and social media is a match made in heaven, because they both are **narratives that help building human connection**. Social media helps fans to engage with teams and players but it also offers sport brands a tool to connect more with their (potential) customers and consequently receive a **higher ROI**⁸. Nonetheless, there are different types of marketing that can be done on Instagram and one might be more suitable for a specific product than the other one. (Arkansas State University, 2021)

⁸ Return On Investment

5.1.1 Branding

'Branding' means, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, the act of giving a company a particular design or symbol in order to advertise its products and services. It is an important part of a company's marketing strategy because it is how **brands distinguish themselves from the competition**. Moreover, it helps consumers building an expectation about what they can expect from a company and recognition towards its products. (Gridan, 2021)

In recent years, the way consumers evaluate products is not solely through physical interaction with the products but also through **verbal and visual incentives**. Therefore, Instagram is the ideal channel for brands (and especially sport brands due to their visual nature) to transmit their brand image to their market. However, **not all content is necessarily for promotional purposes**. (Sánchez-Cobarro, 2021) Some of it is also to increase engagement and to entertain or inform consumers, which is very important to create long-term relationship, as explained before. Through a study conducted by Anagnostopoulos et al (2018), a matrix of product-related and non-product related attributes were identified that can help a sport brand establishing its image across social media.

	Brand attribute	Description	Example Instagram post
Product-related	Team Success	Success of the team, quality/style of play of the team	The team in action or celebrating a goal
	Star Player(s)	High quality and/or highly recognisable players	The player in action during the match or in training
	Head Coach	Successful, charismatic or iconic head coach	Coach giving orders during the match or at the training
Non-product-related	Brand Mark	The logo, mascot, colours and uniforms of the team	The logo or the shirt of the club
	Management	The executive management of the club	Pictures or announcements of executive management
	Club's History and Tradition	Winning records, past success, tragedies, legendary matches, past players and coaches	Pictures of past players, coaches or matches
	Club's Culture and Values	Values/culture of the team, its role in the community	The players visiting a hospital or a charitable event
	Event's Image	The image of a particular competition or the opponent (rivalry)	Announcement of the next match
	Sponsor	The image of the main sponsor, its association with the club	Usually information about a contest organised by the teams' main sponsor
	Fans	Not just customers, essential part of a unique product	Pictures of fans in various occasions such as celebrating, in front of the stadium etc.
	Stadium	The arena, facilities, concessions at the stadium	Views of the stadium

Figure 13. Product related and non-product related attributes to establish the brand image of a sport brand / Source: [st/10.1080/16184742.2017.1410202](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1410202)

Product-related content will have higher rates of engagement, because fans will be more likely to comment on these kinds of posts. When used well, social media **can help shape a brands image** in a positive way and consequently attract more potential collaborations with other athletes but also more sales from a consumer point of view. (Anagpostopoulos et al, 2018)

When brands use athletes to showcase their products and develop their brand image, they should be very cautious with whom they want to collaborate. The image an athlete

has will unconsciously be mixed in the mind of the consumers with the perception a brand carries but also vice versa. Research done by Na et al. (2019) showed that content generated by solely athletes is seen as less trustworthy than that of third parties (such as sport brands). Thus, to build a strong brand image of an athlete and sport brand it is fundamental to have a **well-functioning collaboration between the two parties**.

5.1.2 Live streaming

Another way of marketing sports on social media is through live streaming. If a fan for some reason cannot attend a planned event, following a live streaming of the game is the perfect solution. It also helps brands **reach a wider audience** and without having to pay a lot of money for advertisements. Or to do a **live interview** with a sponsored athlete after a game is a good way to **increase engagement** of a sport brands Instagram account. (Londergan, 2018) According to Nielsen (2019) there are a few 'rules' to be considered when going live:

1. Make sure the WIFI connection is good
2. Allow the live stream to be shared to reach a wider audience
3. Interact with viewers when they are commenting during the live stream
4. It is possible to add additional accounts in the live stream (only recommended if it is a big event and two separate parts of the event need to be covered)
5. Save and share the video after the live stream

Thus, live streaming is a great way to connect more with fans and to offer them the chance to get into connect with their favourite athletes.

5.1.3 Fan engagement

Any athlete will say the same: that their **performance is important but also their fans**, because they give them the support, they need in difficult times but also cheer them on whenever they need to perform. Therefore, an **engaged fanbase is crucial** to the success of an athlete and/ or organization. Brands that sponsor athletes so that their products are made visible throughout games, trainings and events are also relying heavily on this. (Chen, 2022) In a study conducted on Instagram to see what kind of posts score the **highest engagement, sports came in second place** as shown in the graph below.

Instagram engagement

Engagement rate / post (by follower)

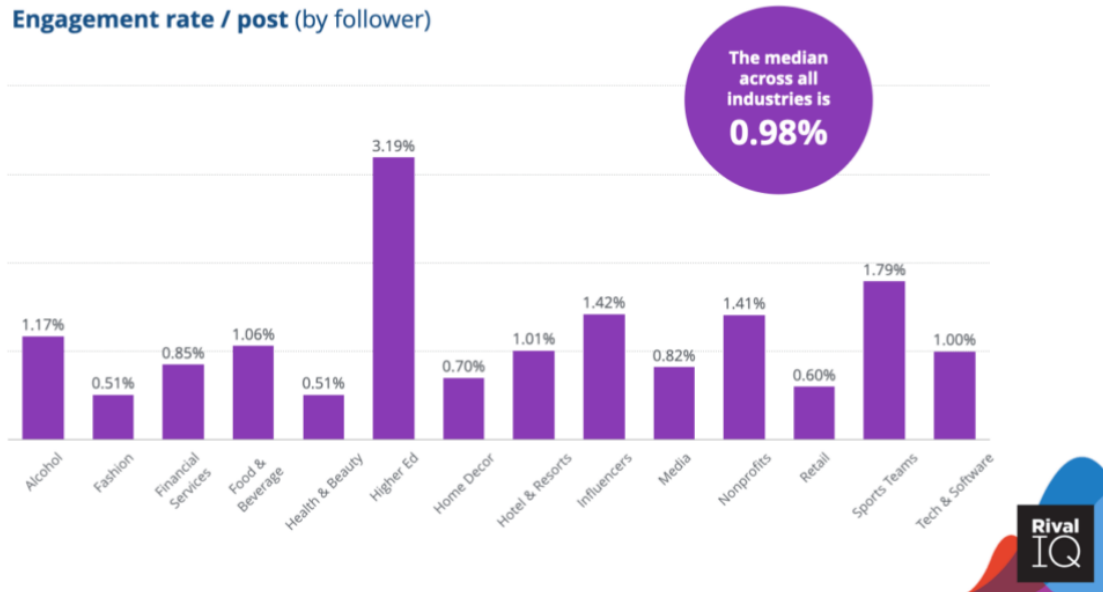


Figure 14. Average Instagram engagement rate per sector / Source: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/instagram-stats/>

There are a lot of ways to increase fan engagement on Instagram. I will briefly discuss the ones that are the most interesting from a brands point of view:

5.1.3.1 *Share trainings, competitions and/ or events*

If brands would **only use models and influencers**, they would not be looked as authentic anymore. Since this is one crucial factor of any success story on Instagram, it is important to integrate it into the marketing strategy. If brands can **show athletes** using their products whilst training, celebrating victory or loss, getting emotional, ... people will feel a **stronger emotional connection** towards the brand. (Copperman, 2016)

5.1.3.2 Highlight the company's products

Whenever a post is published, this one can be found again at the profile or newsfeed of the publishing account. Brands can **easily turn a post into a great marketing campaign**. As shown in the picture below, the top athlete Joel Embiid is clearly wearing an Under Armour shirt. Thus, proves that **top athletes are fan of this brands** attire and consequently, fans will be more intrigued in also buying these products. (Chen, 2021)



Figure 15. Instagram post as part of marketing campaign featuring a top athlete/ Source: <https://yoyofumedia.com/blog/sports-marketing-strategy/#Instagram>

5.1.3.3 Stories and highlights

As previously mentioned, stories are actually a feature 'stolen' from Snapchat that allows people to publish a photo or video for 24h and after that it disappears. However, Instagram added the function to save those stories and put them under a tab called 'highlights' on someone's profile. For brands, this is a great opportunity to **group together their products** in the same highlight, so their fans have an easy access to watch those stories again.

Another great function of stories is that brands can create polls and ask questions on this feature which creates **more engagement** and potentially **more brand loyalty** as well. (Chen, 2021)

5.1.4 Influencers

As explained before, influencers are interesting to collaborate with from a marketer's point of view. However, when it comes to sport brand there are two types of influencers: the top athletes themselves and people who post about sports with a large following.

5.1.4.1 Athletes

In the past, athletes were merely focused on the competitions they were doing, but over the past years this has changed. More and more athletes are becoming **more influential on Instagram** and some have even a bigger following the A-listed actors



Figure 16. Tom Brady, professional athlete, sharing a wedding picture with his wife on Instagram / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CadRgSSrWpu/>

(Cristiano Ronaldo has 420 million followers on Instagram whereas Selena Gomez ‘only’ has 308 million followers). 94% of fans say they like to see their athletes posting content about their daily life, thus behind the scenes. (Creative Review, 2018)

Although very important when working with top athletes is considering **if they have enough time to be really working with a brand**. Some of people rarely post on social media and thus are not always worth the investment for a brand. (Geyser, 2021b)

5.1.4.2 Influencers

Instead of only working with top athletes, brands can also work with **sport influencers** (also referred to as fitfluencers). These are people with a large following account that are **posting about fitness, sports, health etc**. Their followers look up to them because they were once **‘just like them’**. Most of the time, these influencers are happy to give advice on how to become ‘just like them’ through the help of sponsored products. In the picture below fitfluencer pau_inspirafit (she has a following of 127K people and focuses on yoga and mindfulness) is drinking a protein shake of YoPro after her workout. The video is made in such a way that a lot of people can relate to it and thus it does not feel like a real advertisement. Nonetheless, it is a paid collaboration.

Figure 17. Content of a fitfluencer on Instagram/ Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CbkkGxXqf51/>



Something important to be considered when working with fitfluencers is **the image that they are transmitting**. Even more so than with athletes, because these types of influencers are very parochial and collaborating with the wrong ones can seriously harm a brand's image. (Geysler, 2021b)

5.2 COMPARISON BRANDS

Applying all the gained knowledge through the previous investigation of research papers, news articles and blog posts about using Instagram as a marketing tool and more specifically for sport brands, in this part of my master thesis I will make a comparison of three well-known sport brands (ADIDAS, NIKE and ASICS) to see if there are similarities. First, I will look at the brand globally and then dive deeper into one specific discipline they all have in common: running.

As discussed in the previous parts, in order to make a sports **brand successful** on Instagram it needs **four pillars: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection**. I have decided to change the second pillar, influence, slightly to 'influence on their environment' (if they participate in sustainability programs), since this is also an important factor for consumers whether or not they buy a product. Finally, I will first investigate every brand separately and put my findings in a table to have a clear view of the similarities and distinctions of their marketing strategy on Instagram.

5.2.1 ADIDAS

ADIDAS is a sports brand founded in 1949. They are focused on sports such as football, running, basketball and fitness and have **specific clothes and shoes for every discipline**. They apply the **latest technology** to ensure the best comfort for their athletes that helps them reach their goals. Their **mission statement** is the following:

“The Adidas Group strives to be the global leader in the sporting goods industry with brands built on a passion for sports and a sporting lifestyle. We are committed to continuously strengthening our brands and products to improve our competitive position.”

And their **vision statement** goes as following;

“to be the design leaders with a focus on getting the best out of the athletes with performance guaranteed products in the sports market globally”.

Thus, their **core values** that can be found back in both the mission and vision statement are the following: performance, passion, integrity and diversity (M., 2021). Below is a screenshot that shows the Instagram account of this brand.

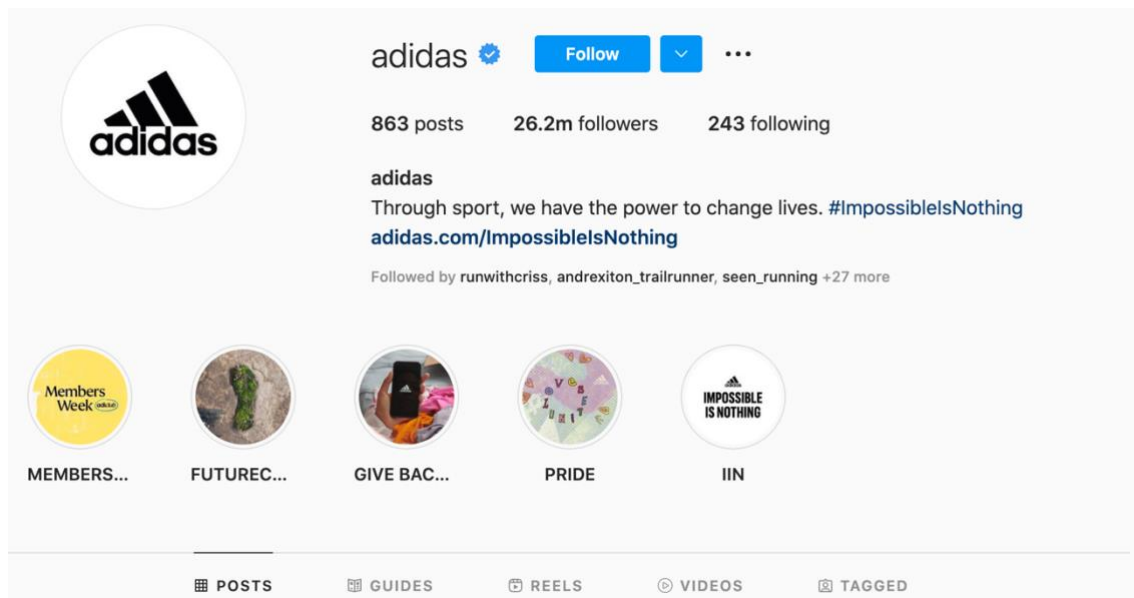


Figure 18. Official Instagram account ADIDAS / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/adidas/>

5.2.1.1 Membership

Shown in the photo above, the first highlight is called ‘**members week**’. If you click to receive more information about it, you will find that this is a relative new program (started last week of March 2022). **Fans are invited** to become part of a special club which grants them **special discounts, exclusive designs and events and also running plans**. To register is for free and every time someone makes an ADIDAS purchase, they will collect

points. It is a great incentive to attract new customers, but also to retain old ones. Through the collection of points, they will stay with the brand because of the **benefits** they receive.

They have also their own runners' **community** that people can join for free. People only need to register online, select a city nearby and they can participate in ADIDAS events. This a well thought of marketing strategy, because people will feel more welcomed by the brand and the community feeling will be increased which results in more brand loyalty.



Figure 19. ADIDAS running community / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/adidasrunners/>

5.2.1.2 Influence on their environment

Shown in figure 18, ADIDAS is involved in two **charity programs**: FUTURECRAFT which is focused on reducing their carbon footprint and GIVEBACK. A program in which people can return their used clothes and shoes so it can be resold or reused and in return people get points that they can use for future purchases.

5.2.1.3 Integration and fulfilment of needs

ADIDAS **core values are performance, passion, integrity and diversity**. As brand archetype⁹, ADIDAS belongs to the 'hero' group. This group is on a mission to make the world a better place through courageous, bold and inspirational products. (OVO)

⁹ Brand archetypes reflect the personality of brands and is a tool to align personality types with specific customer personas

When looking at the type of content that is being posted, it is clear that ADIDAS mostly **partners up with (top) athletes**. The aim is to inspire people to give the best of themselves and that this is made possible through brands products.

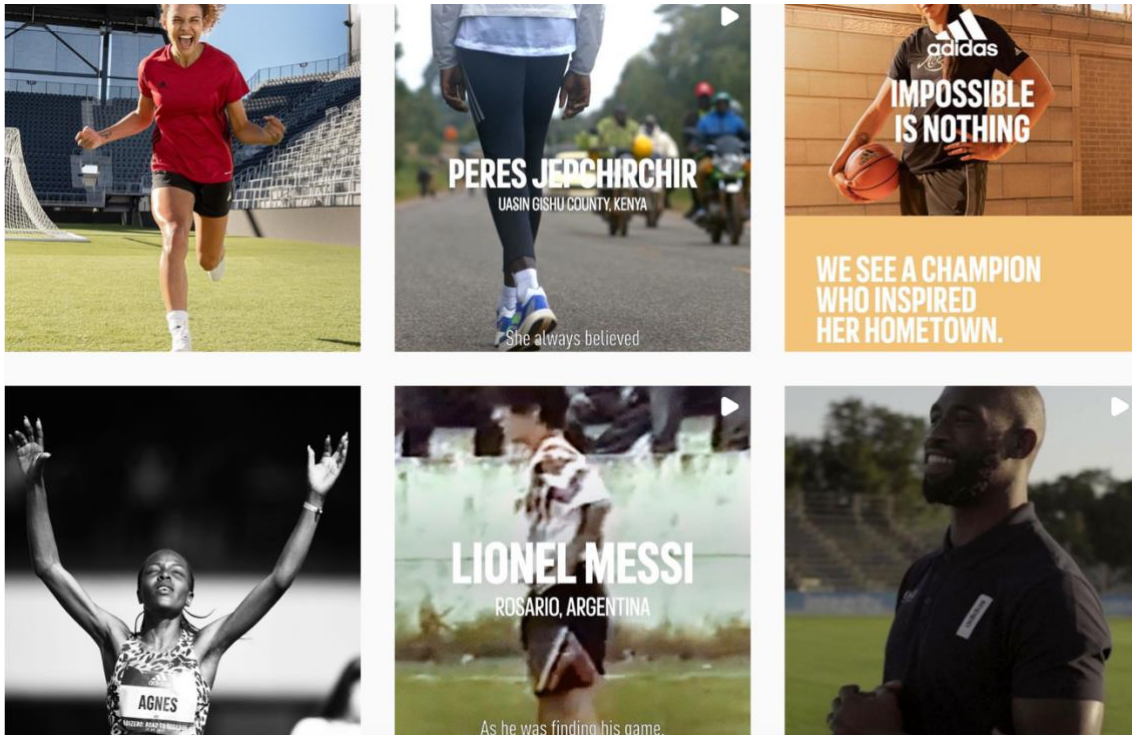


Figure 20. Content of ADIDAS Instagram page / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/adidas/>

5.2.1.4 Shared emotional connection

In their bio is their current **trending hashtag** (#ImpossibleIsNothing) so new (and old) fans know which hashtag they can use to **share their content with the brand**. At the moment, the hashtag has 445K posts and is being used by a variety of people: from professional athletes to normal people.

5.2.1.5 Other strategies

When searching for ADIDAS on Instagram, there are a lot of **different accounts** made by ADIDAS. There are different accounts focused on **countries** (adidas_de, adidascl, ...) and also based on **discipline** (adidasfootball, adidasrunning, ...) It allows consumers to follow the account they are **most interested** in and are thus also most likely to interact with. This means extra expenses for the brand, but it also rewards itself in offering their clients exactly the type of content they need.

5.2.2 ASICS

ASICS (acronym for Anima Sana in Corpore Sano, Sound Mind in a Sound Body) was founded in 1977 in Japan with as main aim selling running shoes. Later this got extended to other sports as well such as tennis, padel, netball, rugby, hockey and volleyball. The **mission statement** of ASICS goes as follows:

“Our mission is to become the number one brand for the sports enthusiast. To accomplish this, we pledge to continue to make the best product; striving to build upon our technological advances and pushing the limits on what we can learn from the body and its needs in athletic gear.”

And their **vision** is to ‘create quality lifestyle through intelligent sport technology’.

Because of their origin of founding, the core values are very much related to how Asian communities work: **respect rules, be courteous, be persistent, work as one team, be prepared and learn from failure.** (Henders, 2017) Below is the main Instagram page of ASICS shown.



Figure 21. Official Instagram page ASICS/ Source: <https://www.instagram.com/asics/>

5.2.2.1 Membership

On the website of ASICS there is a **special section for members** (called OneAsics) that offers **exclusive benefits** for people who register such as discounts and later it can also be used to apply to **become part of their Frontrunner program**. Frontrunners are the ambassadors of the brand and are normal everyday people who share one love: movement. Every day in February the application phase takes place where people can sign up through their OneAsics account to register to become a Frontrunner. Also, on Instagram they have their own account on which content of them is shared.

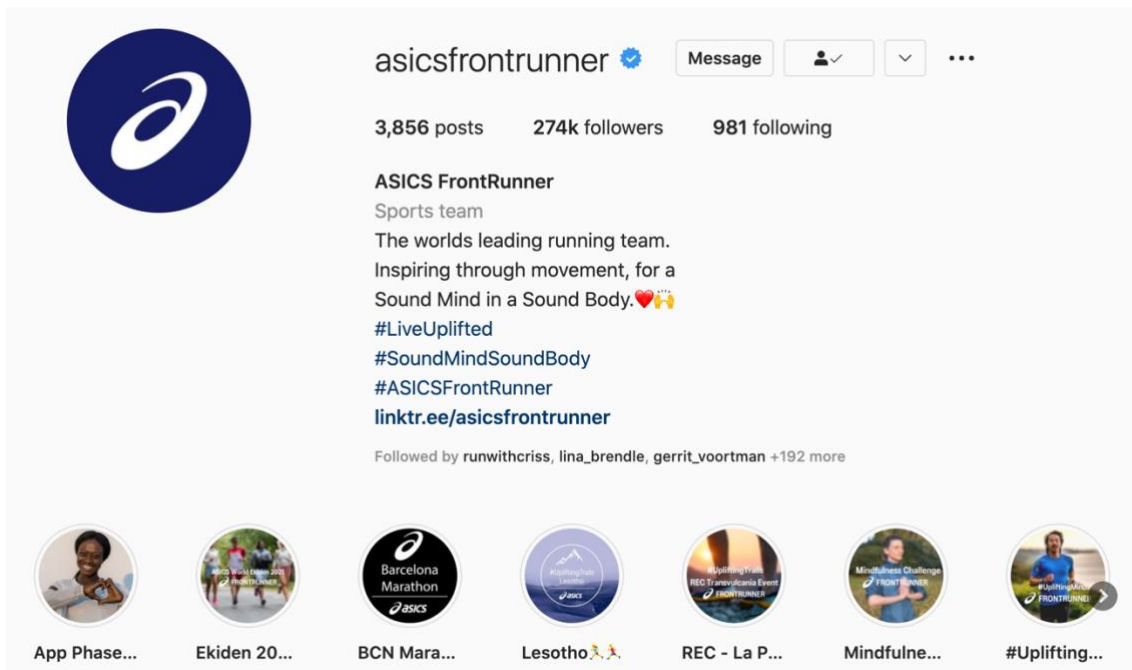


Figure 22. Frontrunner page on Instagram / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/asicsfrontrunner/>

This is a **good strategic move of ASICS** because people are keener to take advice from other 'normal' people than from advertisements. Furthermore, since they have the right to use the **content generated by their ambassadors**, it will come over **more natural** and might cut down in marketing costs as well.¹⁰ Finally, this page is also mainly used to inform their followers about special actions such as the Application Phase, Ekiden run, BCN Marathon, ...

5.2.2.2 Influence on their environment

Sustainability is for ASICS one of the main focus points. In 2021, 95% of their running shoes contained recycled materials, they started a special supply chain program focused mainly on the social impact the company is making, they donated 618 546€ to charities and have a 30,8% reduction in CO2 gasses since 2015. (ASICS Corp.) They are **very open about their impact on society** and what their actions are to help the environment. Not only are they concerned about the environment, but also about how to help society. In the post below is one example of an action they did recently to help people who are less able to enjoy movement to experience the joy of participating in a race.

¹⁰ Hiring a top athlete for a photo shoot or an average runner will be a significant difference in price.

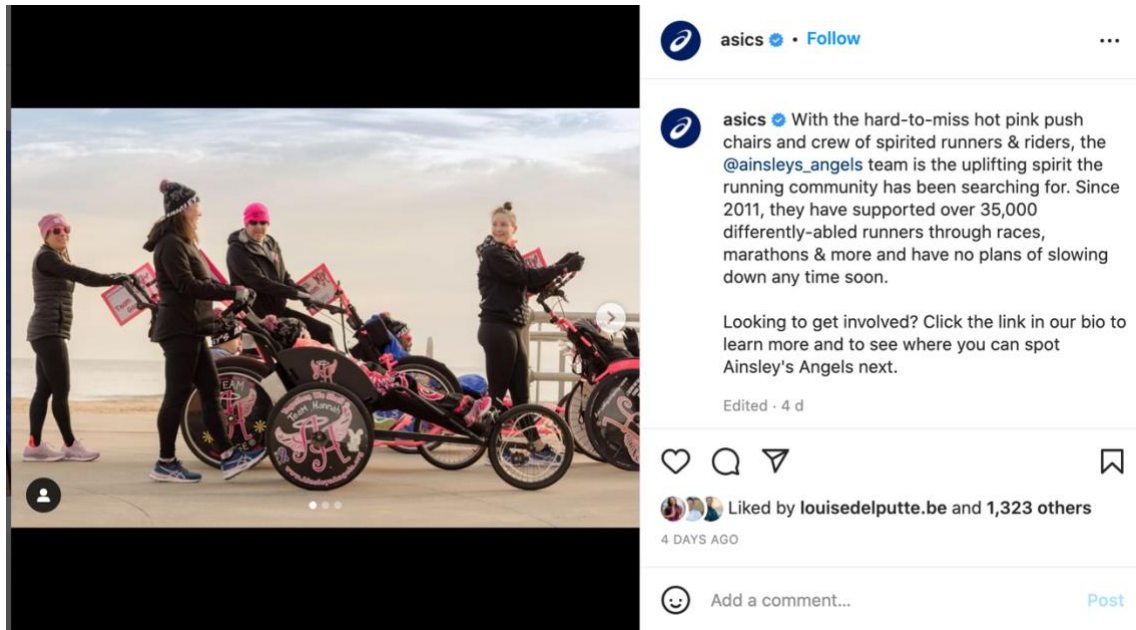


Figure 23. Action of ASICS to help the society/ Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcF9LiTOiP4/>

5.2.2.3 Integration and fulfilment of needs

The archetype ASICS belongs to is that of being a **'caregiver'**. Their name actually already says it: Anima Sana in Corpore Sano (Sound Mind in a Sound Body) and also in their mission statement can be found back that the **body itself and how someone feels** when they are working out is an **important aspect for the brand**. Furthermore, in 2021 ASICS undertook a global investigation of the impact on sport on mental wellbeing. (ASICS, 2021) Another argument as for why ASICS is perceived as being a caregiving brand.

5.2.2.4 Shared emotional connection

The shared emotional connection of ASICS can partly be found back in the first pillar, membership. Since they pick **average people** with a passion for movement to sponsor and to promote the brand, their (potential) clients are more likely to **feel a connection to the brand** since the shared content of the Frontrunners across their channels won't be perceived as advertisement. In the post below, ASICS shared the content of one of its Frontrunner members. The woman shown in the picture is not a model nor an influencer nor a top athlete and the picture is taken after going for a run. Many people will be able to **relate to this kind of feeling** (being sweaty, but left with a feeling of fulfilment) and because of the well thought positioning of the brand (ASICS logo on the sport brand) people will unconsciously make the connection between themselves and ASICS.

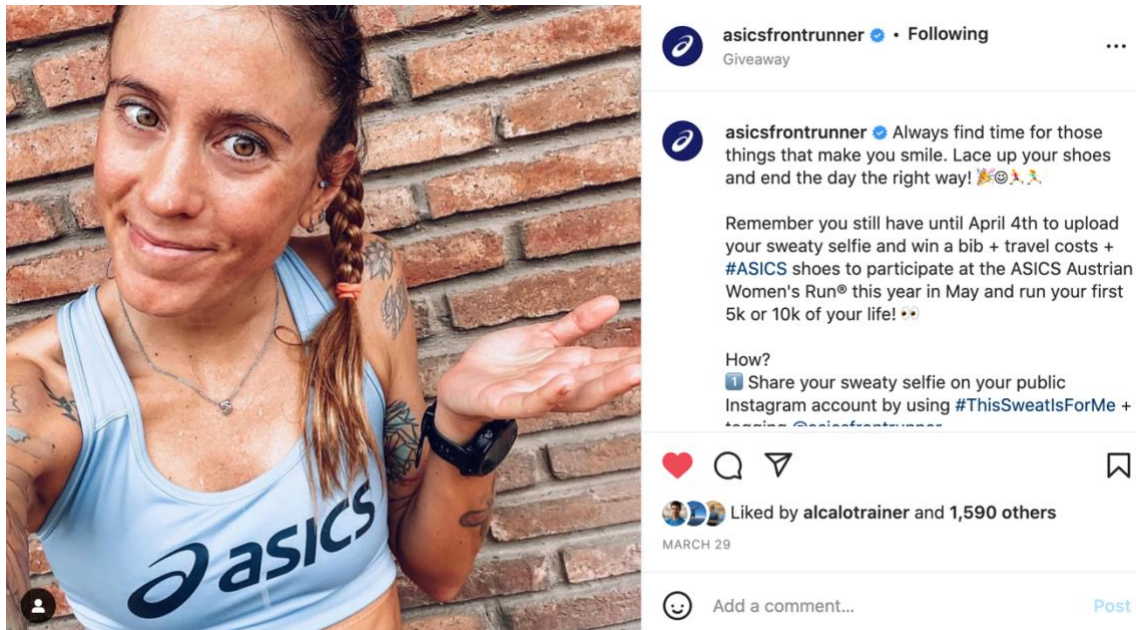


Figure 24. Content of a Fronrunner shared on ASICS profile / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CbswPddLex6/>

5.2.2.5 Other strategies

Since 2022 ASICS has started with **organising giveaways for races they are sponsoring**. Also shown in the picture above is the activation of what people should do in order to make a chance to win a bib number¹¹ for a 5 or 10K later this year in Austria. This specific activation is only meant for women and the goal is to make them feel comfortable sweating whilst working out. That they shouldn't be ashamed of it and enjoy the feeling of movement, thus the **core value of ASICS is found again in this activation** (Sound Mind in a Sound Body).

5.2.3 NIKE

Originally NIKE was called Blue Ribbon Sports in 1964 but in 1972 the first official NIKE shoe was launched. The brand focuses mainly on running and basketball attire, but it also has specific products for the gym, football, tennis, golf, dance and skateboarding. The **mission statement** of NIKE is stated as following:

“Our mission is what drives us to do everything possible to expand human potential. We do that by creating groundbreaking sport innovations, by making our products more sustainably, by building a creative and diverse global team and by making a positive impact in communities where we live and work.”

Their **vision statement** is to ‘bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world (*if you have a body, you are an athlete) and **core values** of this brand can be

¹¹ How the ticket for a running race is called

defined as: inspirational, innovative, every athlete in the world, authentic, connected and distinctive. The main Instagram page looks as following:

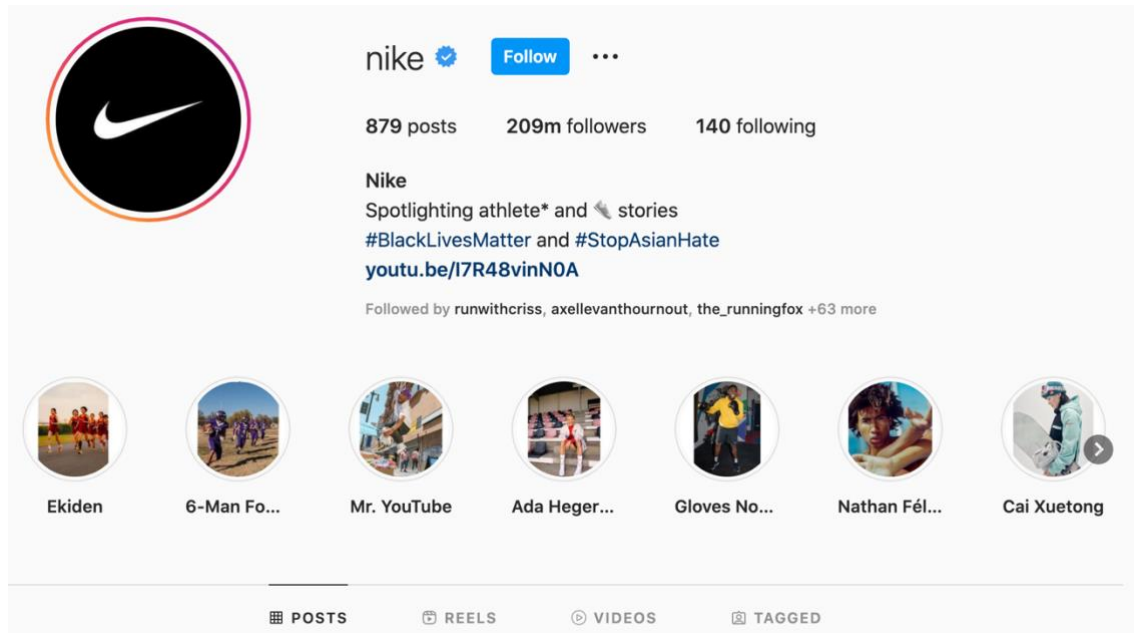


Figure 25. Official Instagram page NIKE/ Source: <https://www.instagram.com/nike/>

5.2.3.1 Membership

Just as ADIDAS and ASICS, also NIKE offers an **exclusive membership to their clients** which is free and in return they have access to a special member shop, free delivery, deals and also the use of their running and workout app. Once they have signed up, they can register their profile in the **apps owned by NIKE**, and they are ready to go. In the app they have the opportunity to go for a guided run (an athlete who is speaking during the run to keep you motivated), weekly/ monthly challenges, track their runs and progress and also share it with their friends in the app. It gives people and **incentive to stay loyal to the brand**, because NIKE offers them so many benefits in return for nothing.

5.2.3.2 Influence on their environment

On the Nike website you can find that they are focusing on 3P's: People, Plant and Play. Furthermore, on their website more information about their impact report and 2025 targets can be found.

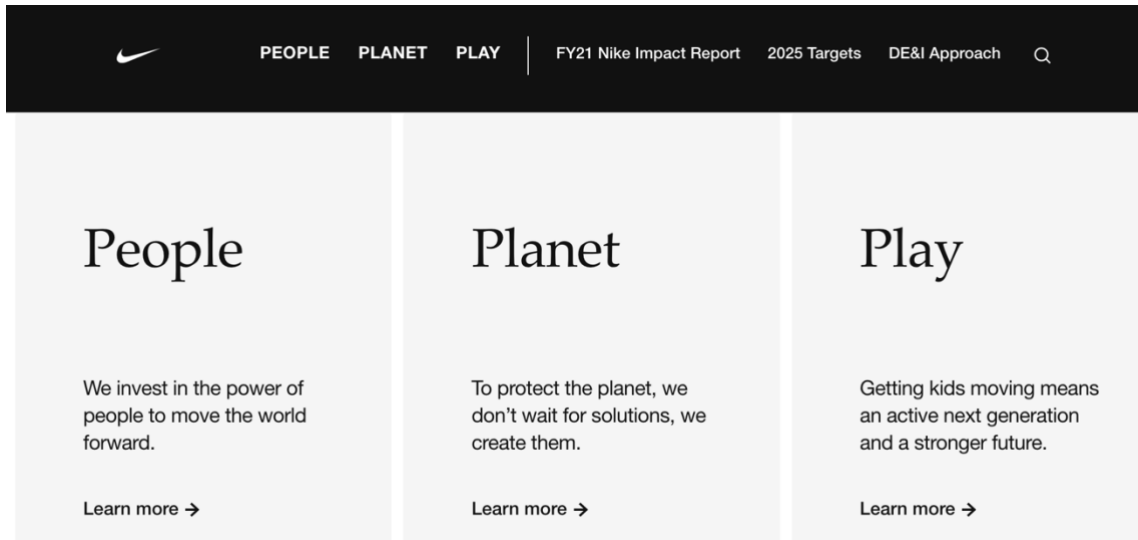


Figure 27. Actions of NIKE for sustainability / Source: <https://purpose.nike.com/>

However, on their **Instagram page nothing about these actions is mentioned**. The majority of posts shown are athletes in action wearing NIKE apparel.

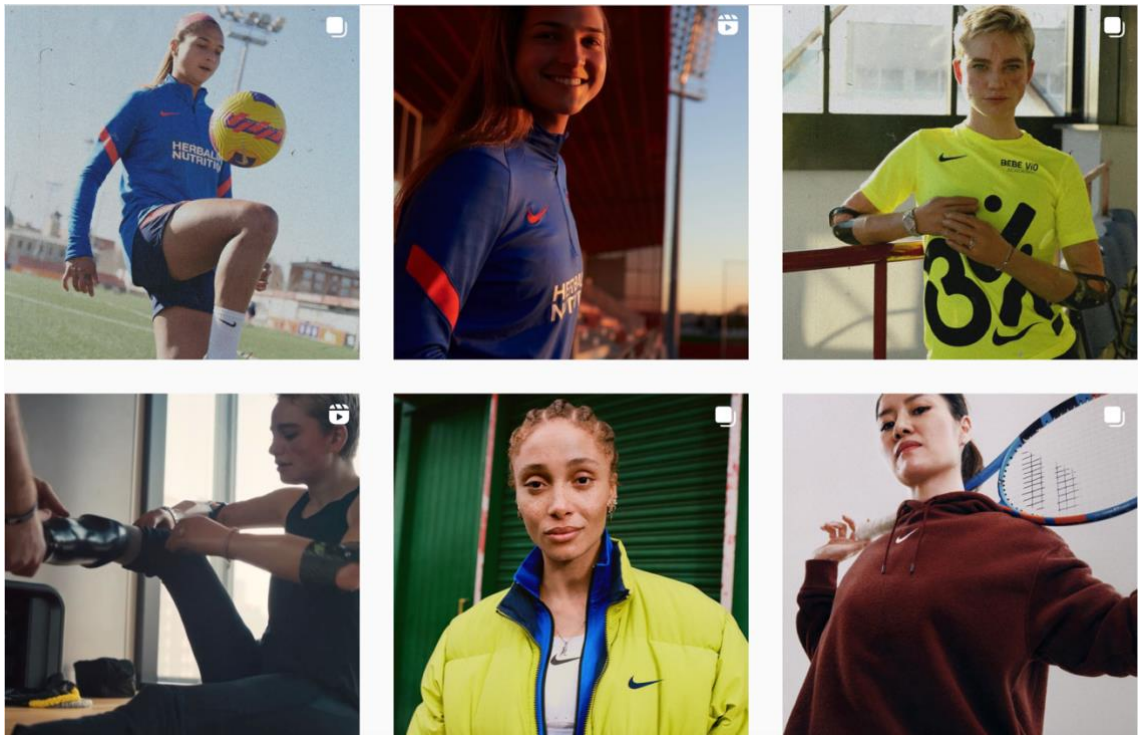


Figure 26. Majority of posts of NIKE's Instagram page / Source: <https://www.instagram.com/nike/>

This is a distinctive difference with the other brands since their programs for society are clearly shown and shared on their Instagram page. The only action of NIKE that could be found back are the two hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #StopAsianHate (fig 25), however, there is no link mentioned to any program nor activation behind it.

5.2.3.3 Integration and fulfilment of needs

The archetype NIKE would be best classified upon is without doubt the **'hero' type**. When looking at the Instagram page, mostly athletes or people with a story that made a huge impact are used for content purposes and also in the highlights only people who are known by a large audience are showcased. Furthermore, NIKE teamed up with the marathon runner Eliud Kipchoge to go below the famous 2h marathon mark. The project was called 'Breaking2' and the main focus was to show that **no human is limited and that every person can 'change the game'**.



Figure 28. Kipchoge in full NIKE attire with behind him other NIKE athletes / Source: <https://www.nike.com/gb/running/breaking2>

5.2.3.4 Shared emotional connection

As mentioned before, NIKE is mostly using (top) athletes for their content on Instagram. These are **heroes that people look up to** and when buying the brand, they hope that one day that can be at the same level as their idols. Wearing NIKE shows that a person has the same dedication and perseverance as those top athletes who are sponsored by the brand. Clients are not really relating with the people shown in the content but are merely looking up to them.

5.2.3.5 Other strategies

Like ADIDAS, NIKE has **different accounts based upon sports** and also location, although the latter accounts are not that big. The main focus is clearly on sports. NIKE has accounts solely dedicated to running, basketball, yoga, football, ... and also one **particularly dedicated to women**. The page inspires women to bring out the best of

themselves and that it doesn't matter where you were born, what skin colour you have, etc. If you want to go achieve something, you just have to do it.

5.3 OVERVIEW COMPARISON

In the table below is a brief overview of the comparison that is discussed before:

	ADIDAS	ASICS	NIKE
Goal Instagram	Showcasing athletes	Inspire, motivate	Showcasing athletes to look up to
Reach INSTA	26.2M	966K	211M
Goal Facebook	Share new activations	Promote products	Inspire
Reach FB	39M	4.4M	35M
Goal Twitter	Entertain	Promote products	Entertain
Reach TW	4.1M	31.7K	9.1M
All four¹² pillars included	Yes	Yes	Yes
Extra strategies	Specific accounts for different preferences	Giveaways, specific accounts for different preferences, scientific research	Specific accounts for different preferences, scientific research

The first noticeable difference is the **amount of following** NIKE has in comparison with ADIDAS and ASICS. It clearly shows that a lot of people are interested in the content that NIKE is showcasing and that, as discussed, people are most likely to follow the **account to be inspired**. ADIDAS is merely showcasing athletes and not doing any other special kinds of promotions meanwhile ASICS is using 'average' people for their content.

One thing the three brands have **in common** are the different accounts for specific purposes. They all have an account solely dedicated to running for example. It allows their members to only **follow the content they are interested in** and this will also result in a **higher engagement rate** for the brand (more interest = higher probability for interaction)

¹² Membership, influence on their environment, integration and fulfilment of needs, shared emotional connection

Average people	Strength		Athletes
		NIKE	
	ASICS	ADIDAS	
	Caregiving		

Figure 29. Positioning of ADIDAS, ASICS and NIKE based upon used content

In the table above I used four variables that were dominantly used by the three brands and that helps to position them clearly amongst each other. **ASICS** is mainly using average people for their content and is more concerned about sharing the image of being a **caring brand** than people who wear ASICS should be the best of the best. They collaborate with a wide variety of charities and so does ADIDAS. Although the archetype of **ADIDAS** is classified under 'hero', the brand is also **concerned about society** and shows this clearly on their Instagram profile. Therefore, I classified them more under that of being a caregiving brand than of only thinking about performance. Nonetheless, they mostly use **athletes on their social media channels**, hence they are more looking into inspiring their followers.

NIKE makes almost solely use of **top athletes** for their content and their main goal is to inspire people and to make posts with people that **their followers can look up to**. This is also noticeable in the amount of following they have on social media.

All three brands have their **own way of marketing** their products on social media, however, it is clear that they all **start from the same four pillars**. Thus, we can conclude from this that for a sport brand to be perceived successful on social media, it is important to **follow this structure** and to **clearly identify** how **those four pillars** can be combined with the mission, vision and goals of what a brand wishes to achieve across social media and then mostly Instagram.

5.4 QUESTIONNAIRE

Furthermore, to see if the conclusions drawn from the held investigation of secondary sources are correct, the objectives of the investigation is to formulate a more precise answer on the following questions:

- Why are Instagram users interested in following sport brands?
 - Do they interact with these accounts?
 - What is the main reason they unfollow sport accounts?
- Is Instagram perceived as an (trustworthy) advertising platform?

5.4.1 Methodology

5.4.1.1 Technical fiche

Objective: gain a **better understanding** into the behaviour of Instagram users with regards to accounts that are sport related.

Title of the Study	Instagram marketing for sport brands
Universe	Instagram users
Sample size	130 unique answers (54.6% male, 44,6% female and 0,8% prefer not to say)
Sample error	With a level of 95,5%, $p=q=0,5$
Collection method	The use of Google Form consisting of 15 questions (open and closed questions)
Period	25/04/2022 until 7/05/2022

5.4.1.2 Method

The questionnaire consists of first two general demographic questions (general and age) and is followed with two more specific questions (how many different sports people practice and which).

After the general section comes a section of 5 questions about the Instagram usage of the respondents. The questions are a much of multiple choice, scale and opinión.

The last section consists of 6 questions and have as main theme sport marketing on Instagram. Again, in this section is a mix of multiple choice and open questions.

5.4.2. Results

5.4.2.1 Why are Instagram users interested in following sport brands?

The most common reasons why people follow sport brands (or any account related to sport) on Instagram is for **inspiration** (35,9%), information (31,3%) and motivation (30,5%). Other reasons why people are following these accounts are: learning new skills, a sense of community and following their favourite athletes.

What is the main reason you follow these accounts?

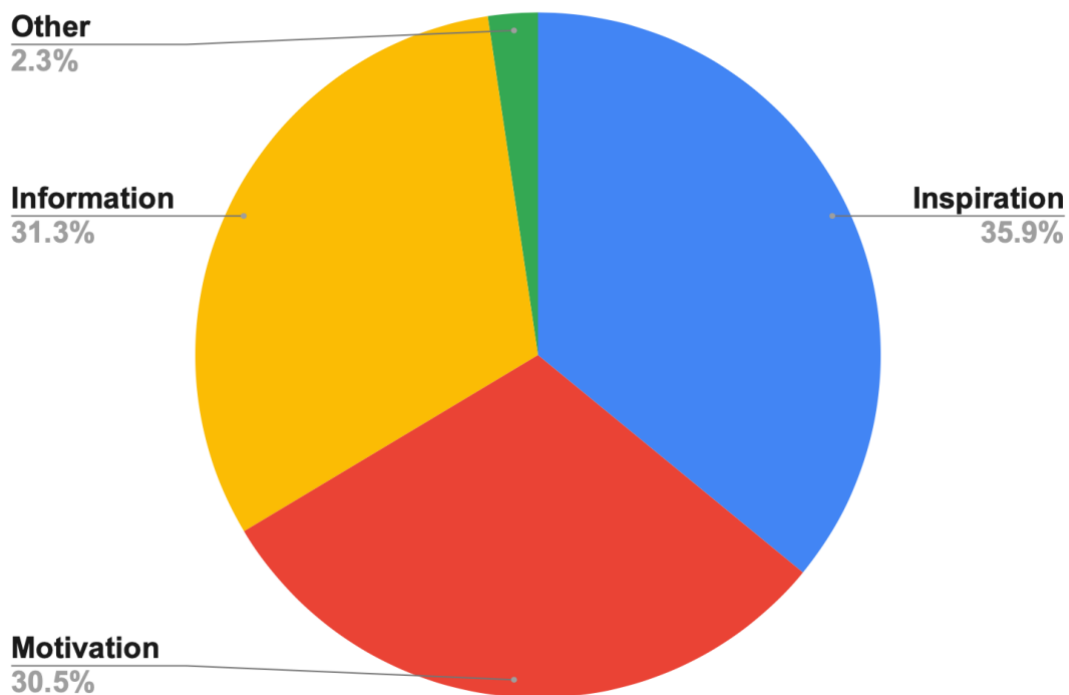


Figure 30. What is the main reason you follow these accounts? -graph / Source: own investigation

5.4.2.1.1 Do they interact with these accounts?

When asked if Instagram users also interact with sport related accounts, the following results came out of the investigation: 62,4% says **to like a post**, 27% likes and/ or saves, shares or comments on the post and 10,7% has no interaction with the content.

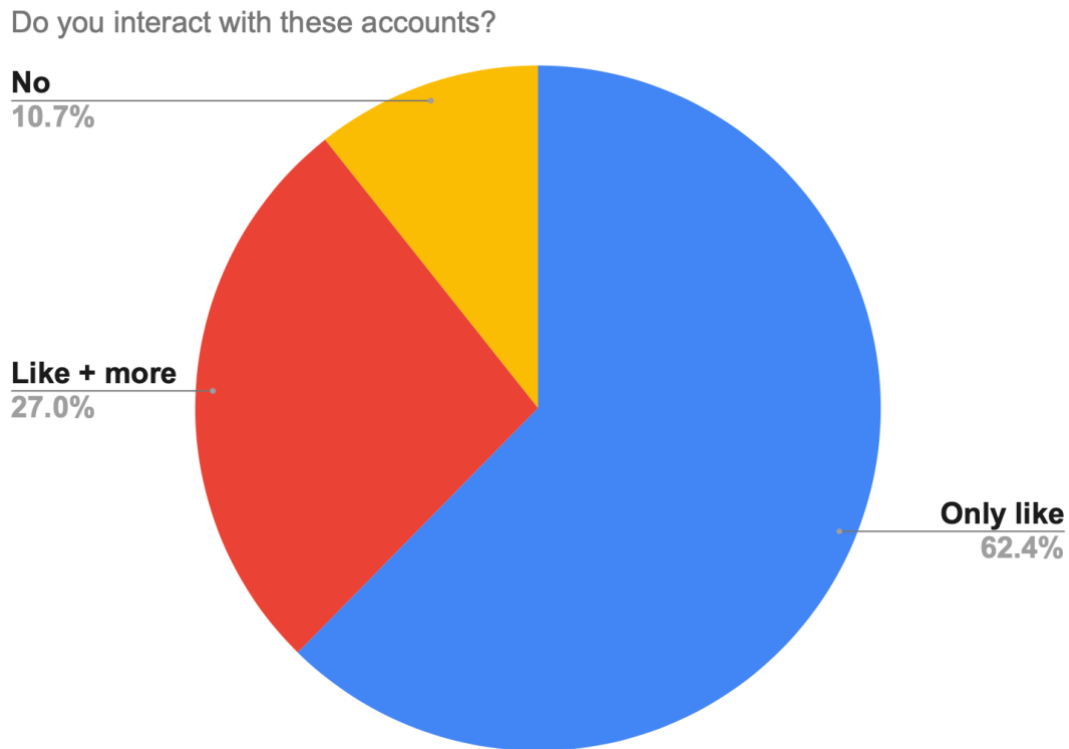


Figure 31. Do you interact with these accounts? - graph / Source: own investigation

5.4.2.1.2 What is the main reason they unfollow sport accounts?

To receive a wider variety of answers, I made this an open question. Although remarkably is that 50 people (38,46%) gave as number **one reason why to unfollow** a sports account is when it **becomes 'too promotional' or 'too much advertising'**. Other common reasons why people would stop following a sport account are the following:

- content is not related (anymore) to the account
- boring
- if the brand/ athlete does something unethical (drugs, political opinion, ...)
- wrong information.

5.4.2.2 Is Instagram perceived as an (trustworthy) advertising platform?

For the following question, the interviewees were asked to give their opinion on a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Strongly agree) on what their perception of Instagram as advertising platform is. 6 people (4,6%) said that they do not think of Instagram as an advertising platform. 23 people (17,7%) find Instagram a little bit advertising, meanwhile 71 (54,6%) **do agree** with this statement and 30 interviewees (23,1%) **strongly agree** with it.

On a scale of 1 to 4: how do you perceive Instagram as an advertising platform?

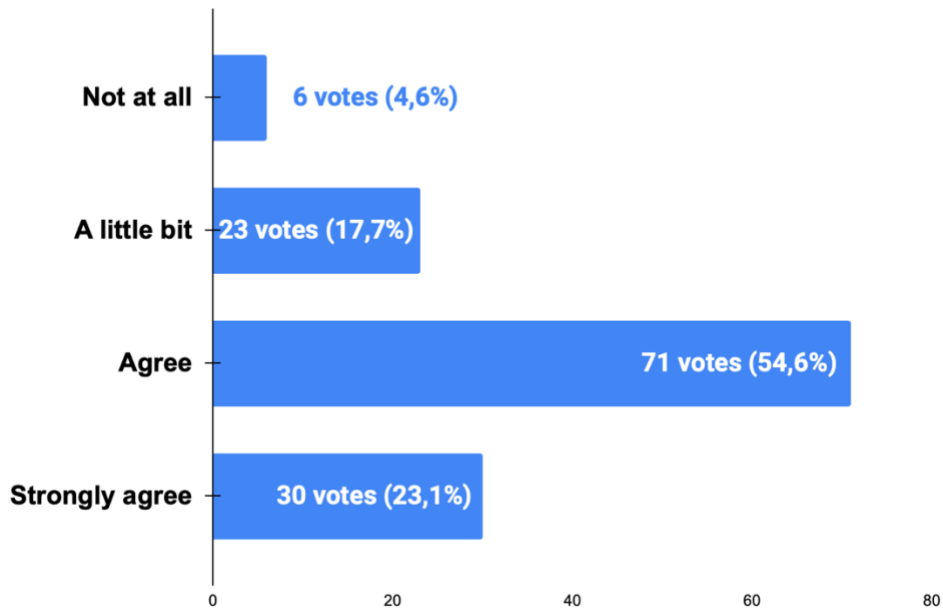


Figure 32. On a scale of 1 to 4: how do you perceive Instagram as an advertising platform? - bar chart / Source: own investigation

As per follow-up question, I also asked if the products that are promoted through influencers are **perceived as trustworthy**. 3,5% of the respondents (4) had not noticed any kind of promotions from influencers. 9 (8,0%) do perceive products promoted by influencers as trustworthy, meanwhile 53,1% (60) of the respondents thinks of these **products as too promotional**. 40 people (35,4%) has a neutral opinion about it.

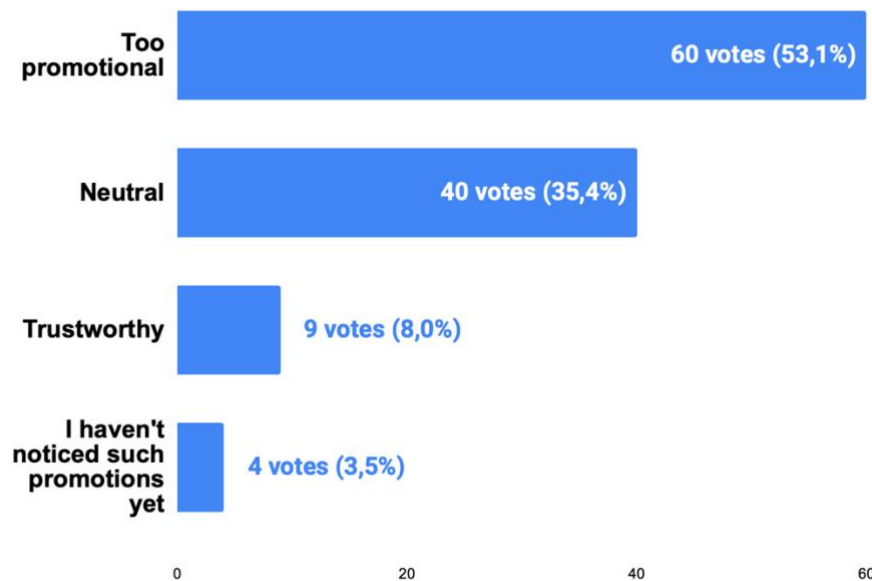


Figure 33. How do you perceive products promoted through influencers on Instagram? - graph / Source: own investigation

6. CASE STUDY 'WE ARE CAPABLE'

6.1 INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

'We Are Capable' was founded by **Adriana Blanc in 2020** with one goal in mind - to equip **young females** with the **tools and knowledge** to reframe their thoughts around **exercise, food, & their own capabilities to empower them in the long term**. Through an online Mindset-Based Fitness platform, Adriana offers a wide range of workouts and training styles that are hosted by herself and by other guest coaches.

6.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW OBJECTIVES

During the in-depth interview, I tried to gain a **better understanding of the following objectives**:

- How Instagram is being used by influencers for the promotion of certain sport brands or own their own brand.
 - What makes an influencer decide whether or not they want to work together with a brand on Instagram?
- How influencers see Instagram: as a marketing platform, for community building, purely for entertainment, ...?

6.3 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The whole interview can be found again at the back of this paper under 'Annexes in-depth interview Adriana Blanc'. Some drawn conclusions of this interview are the following:

- **Consistent posting** on social media is important, but so is **choosing quality content over quantity**.
- **Community building** helps with growing a good following base if you also interact with them (answer their messages, share your struggles with them, ...)
- Decide on what you want to post and also **stick with those themes** (she choose very specifically to create content about body image, healthy relationship with food and fitness and women empowerment).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The **first objective** of this Master thesis was to show that Instagram is a potential powerful tool for companies, and especially those who are selling sporting goods and/ or organise sport events. Throughout my investigation I found that if companies adhere to the **four fundamental pillars** of Instagram content (membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection) they are more likely to be successful in terms of **higher levels of engagement, long-term relationships** with their consumers and a **better branding position**. Because Instagram is mainly used for sharing photos and videos, it offers companies the opportunity to showcase their products in their natural environment and, if done well, the advertisement will not be perceived as much as when it would be shown as an ad on, for example, television. Therefore, my first objective, to prove that Instagram can be a powerful marketing tool, has been successful.

To continue with the **second objective** of this thesis, I wanted to show sport companies that Instagram should be included into their marketing strategy. Businesses that are related to **sport have an advantage** when it comes to creating content, since 'a picture says more than words' and people use Instagram **mainly for motivation and inspiration purposes**. They have the option to use influencers and/ or brand ambassadors that can help them **build their brand image** among social media. Later on, this can be converted into an **increase in sales** and, if done well, **higher levels of consumer loyalty**. Sport companies also have the option to use athletes for the promotion of their products and services and this will especially by the athlete's fans be perceived as more **trustworthy** in relation towards the promoted products. The fans will also be more likely to try out the products their idol is using, since they will feel like they are more connected to him/ her. Thus, sport companies that are not yet using social media for their marketing strategy should reconsider their decision and see how it could be fitted in.

Some **practices that sport brands** should consider when using Instagram as part of their marketing strategy, are the following:

- Make use of the **right influencers, brand ambassadors and/ or athletes** to improve their brand image;
- Invite **consumers** to tag the company into their publications and stories so it can be **re-shared** by the company (more trustworthy and 'free' content);
- Make use of **(live) events** to keep Instagram users interested;

- **Don't focus too much on advertising**, but rather on increasing brand image, engagement and consumer loyalty. If levels of these factors are high, it will automatically translate into more sales.

And lastly, I investigated what catches the attention of the users of Instagram. I did this through the use of **secondary sources**, but also through a **questionnaire** to which 130 people answered. The deducted conclusions are:

- People follow Instagram accounts to gain **more information** about certain topics (products, insights into athletes their lives, tips from experts, ...) and for **motivational purposes**;
- Advertisements that are **not too much pushed score the best**. Whenever a product is used in its **natural environment** and only showcased instead of being put in the spotlights is when it perceives the most attention and also perceived as **trustworthy**;
- Users of Instagram use this social media platform mostly to be **entertained** so if a business knows how to do this, it will be more likely to gain a large following and good engagement numbers. This can be done through **interacting** with the followers but also **livestreaming** events and/ or interviews with athletes.

As overall conclusion therefore can be concluded that Instagram is a **marketing opportunity for many sport businesses** with a **lot of options** on how to showcase their products. The use of **brand ambassadors, influencers and athletes** can also have a huge impact on their **brand awareness**, if the right people are chosen.

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ANNEX: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW ADRIANA BLANC

Introduction

For the following in-depth interview, I was able to have a meeting with Adriana Blanc, the founder of 'We Are Capable'. The interview was recorded and took place on the (date).

Warm-up interview

Dear Adriana, thank you for making the time for this interview. The reason why I would like to do this interview with you, is because for my Master Thesis I am investigating how Instagram can be used as a marketing tool for sport brands. Since you have your own personal trainer company, We Are Capable, with quite the following on Instagram, I assume you possess the knowledge and insights on how to brand your company on this social media platform. I would like to compare your answers with the investigation I did about this subject and see if there is some kind of correlation between the written theory about it and the actual practical part.

If it is alright for you, I would like to record this interview to later listen to it again to ensure that I am not missing any details. The duration will be around 30 minutes and during the interview you are more than free to comment on whatever you may think that might be useful for my investigation. If you don't have any more questions, I will start the recording.

Interview questions

- General questions regarding 'We Are Capable':
 - What is your mission, vision and core value?

"The mission of 'We Are Capable' is to help young females revamp their relationship with fitness. We help them feel energised, stronger, more body confident and, more than anything, more flexible with their approach to exercise. The vision goes as following; giving them a teaser of what is available in the fitness world and this with correlation to their relationship with nutrition and self-confidence. The aim is to offer a recurring service that is affordable for those who want to tip-toe into more compassionate exercise (relaxed, not only concerned about the outcome) starting with a beginner program (focused on a compassionate structure and mindset group coaching for those who need to heal their relationship with exercise and nutrition) from where the members can enrol into the 'normal' program.

Down the line, I would like to offer other coaches coaching courses to implement our values into their own fitness businesses to help client's adherence on their journey towards a better self-image and healthy relationship with exercise and nutrition.

Values that I (Adriana Blanc) value on my own account and that I try to translate into my company is self-compassion, anti-diet culture and empowerment of women."

- How do you translate them to Instagram?

"I translate them (mission, vision and values) more into my personal profile than the actual account of the company (wearecapable_lifestyle). On my personal profile I have more followers (83.8K) and I reached this number through consistent themes within the concepts that I share: relationship with food, body image/ relationship with body, exercise confident and self-compassion. On my stories I share more vulnerable/ everyday life things that makes people trust me, because it shows that I am a real person."

- Sport brands

- Do you think Instagram has offered you a lot of opportunities with regards to you being a personal trainer and influencer?

"It helped me 100% to get where I am now. By posting consistent for 3 years (particularly in the last year) and focusing on a few, but quality posts/ content, and creating a community I have been able to build up this following. Sometimes else that helped me a lot is engaging with the public in my decision-making and answering messages that I receive from my followers.

All my clients and collaborations come through Instagram and I have so far made no use of paid advertisement. My account has grown organically (not paying for ads) because I, to be honest, have no idea about it at all because I have never studied marketing or anything similarly."

- How do these collaborations go? What do they expect from you? And how did they approach you, or did you approach them?

"All the collaborations approached me, and they expect from me in return consistent deliverables in the form of content. They do not expect conversion (sales through her) from me but mostly that I help growing their brand (image) and in return I receive a set monthly salary.

If I would approach a brand on my own, I would already be a fan of the product and I would feel that my mission, vision and values align with their brand."

- Instagram

- Do you focus on the community feeling on Instagram? If so, how do you create this?

“Yes, I focus a lot on community building on Instagram. I do this by sharing vulnerable moments of my everyday life (struggles, relationship with family/ boyfriend/ friends) so my followers feel like they are my friend, rather than just one person following another one.”

- What is your main focus when creating content? Inform, entertain, motivate, ...

“I focus mostly on educating and influencing people, with focus on women when I am creating content. What helps me deciding whether or not I want to post something I ask myself the following questions:

- 1) Would someone benefit from it and;*
- 2) would they share it with someone?*

About hot media topics I try to distance myself a little bit. I believe I don't follow the news enough to have sufficient knowledge about certain topics to give my opinion about it and I notice that whenever I do engage in conversations about 'world problems', such as basic human rights problems, this is not really in which my followers are interested.”

- Do you perceive Instagram as an advertising platform for final users? If so, in what kind of way? And does this result into economic profit for your business (eg receiving money for promoting certain products, acquiring more clients, ...)

“100% of my profits come from Instagram, however I perceive as both: use it for work (my personal account and to extend my business) and to follow my friends. However, I don't use for looking at other people's lives.”

End of interview and acknowledgment

Thank you, Adriana, for all these remarkable insights. It was very interesting to learn more about the other side, the business one, of influencers on Instagram. This interview already helped me a lot with linking some theoretical parts with the practical side of using Instagram as a marketing tool. If you would be interested in the findings of my Master Thesis, I would be more than happy to send you a copy once it is finished. I want to thank you again for your time and all your information.