

**The Role of  
Social Media Marketing Strategies of Gym Chains  
and the Creation of  
Customer-Based Brand Equity**

**Master Thesis**

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## Executive Summary

**Purpose:** This study intends to provide valuable insights into social media marketing strategies of gym chains and the consumers' motivations to engage with gym chains online. The key objective is to examine the extent to which gym chains can influence and create customer-based brand equity through their social media marketing strategies in order to stay successful. The gym chain John Reed serves hereby as an illustration.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study applies a qualitative research approach by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with a marketing expert of the fitness industry and 12 consumers.

**Findings:** The results indicate a high importance of social media for gym chains. Consequently, a successful social media marketing strategy is a competitive advantage to maintain a favorable industry position. Social media marketing can enhance the creation of customer-based brand equity, especially the brand assets of brand awareness and brand associations.

**Implications:** Marketing managers of gym chains should consider the importance of customer-based brand equity through social media in their overall marketing strategy. Thereby, individual brand assets can be enhanced through various social media marketing measures. However, a clear communication of unique selling points must be ensured with focus on the current values and needs of the consumers.

**Limitations/future research:** This study underlies limitations caused by external situations and the data collection method. While the Coronavirus crisis impacted the data collection, further limitations elicit from the abductive research approach allowing only hypothetical inferences and the applied research strategy. Future research can enhance the findings through analyzing a variety of gym chains including their offline experiences.

**Originality/value:** The study reveals that theories of consumer engagement (Belk, 2013; Islam et al., 2018; Tsai & Men, 2013) and the customer-based brand equity framework by Aaker (1991) are applicable in the context of the social media marketing of gym chains. Based on the findings, the study provides an initial understanding of CBBE creation through social media marketing by gym chains.

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## List of Abbreviations

CBBE.....	Customer-based brand equity
COBRA.....	Consumer's online brand related activities
eWOM.....	Electronic word of mouth
IHRSA.....	International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association
RQ.....	Research question
SQ.....	Sub question
SNS.....	Social networking site
UGC.....	User-generated content
USP.....	Unique selling point
WOM.....	Word of mouth

## 1. Introduction

Health and fitness are omnipresent topics in today's society. Especially younger generations view fitness more than a lifestyle choice and not as an obligation (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018). Social media supported the origin of this lifestyle and is contributing to its high relevance today. Through user-generated content (UGC), consumers are able to share every aspect of their fitness lifestyle, including nutrition, physique and exercise, with their social networks in a heartbeat (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), the health club industry had a revenue of almost 94 billion US dollar in 2019 (IHRSA, 2020). This demonstrates the economic significance of the fitness lifestyle apart from the societal impact of created beauty standards and improving health levels (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009).

Gym chains<sup>1</sup> represent a traditional business model in the fitness industry as its cultural roots can be traced back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Andreasson & Johansson, 2014). As of the 1960s, the fascination around bodybuilding led to the first drastic increase in gym chain members which put the business model into the center of attention. Gym chains come from a time where fitness was made available for everyone and where technologies had little impact on communication in business and personal life. However, the design of gym chains for enabling fitness for the masses is no longer congruent with the consumer needs today. Heavily influenced through social media, society is currently experiencing a second fitness boom (Millington, 2018). In contrast to the first wave between the 1970s and 1980s, socio-technical networks inform consumers on new fitness trends in real-time. This has led to a shift of the focus from pure muscle building to substantial body health and customizable fitness methods. Despite the evident change of consumer needs, gym chains have not substantially changed their look and feel in the last decades. Additionally, new fitness trends including virtual training and state-of-the art home equipment originate on a constant basis, often introduced to consumers on social media (Schmaltz, 2019a). As a result, the IHRSA strongly emphasizes the need of gym chains to advertise beyond their functionality and to use

<sup>1</sup> In the following, the term gym and gym chain will be applied synonymously for fitness centres or fitness clubs defining “a place where [people] go to exercise, for example by lifting weights or using other equipment” is consulted (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-a). Thereby, a chain is viewed as a “a group of similar businesses [...] which are all owned and controlled by the same organization” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-b).

social media as a marketing instrument. More specifically, gym chains ought to clearly communicate their USPs and offer individual experiences to customers in order to prevent them of pursuing other fitness alternatives (Schmaltz, 2019b).

Social media offers a platform for individuals to live out their distinct personalities and also to individually shape their consumption behavior (Brunskill, 2013). The demand for individuality by the consumers is mirrored in the differentiation of businesses, including gym chains (Holt, 2016). Since social media offers the same differentiation possibilities to companies as to consumers, social media marketing is vital to fulfill this requirement. Successful social media marketing needs a strong customer focus. Only if this focus is applied brands know what type of content consumers find interesting and how to create it (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The purpose of social media marketing is to create a brand presence that is favorable to develop customer relationships. Thereby, brands present their long-term focus instead of focusing on short-term marketing initiatives with immediate sales effect. They also acknowledge the role of customers as active creators and their added value to the brand through UGC (O'Reilly & Lancendorfer, 2014). The value that is added to a brand's products or services through being recognized by consumers is defined as brand equity, a principle after which a multitude of companies evaluates their marketing efforts. When brands obtain a customer focus on brand equity, brand equity is considered as customer-based (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). If positive, customer-based brand equity (CBBE) has a high impact on a consumer's purchase intention, which as a result, leads to revenue for companies and support in maintaining a successful position in the industry (Aaker, 1992).

As service providers, gym chains should satisfy current customer needs and learn from upcoming trends to adapt their business model to the 21<sup>st</sup> century to stay competitive in the industry (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Social media influences but also reveals the needs of gym chain customers. Its ambivalent role emphasizes that implementing social media as a tactical action within the marketing mix is essential for gym chains.

The relevance of the fitness lifestyle on social media and the requirement of brands to differentiate themselves from competitors further justifies the significance of examining the social media marketing of gym chains. Nevertheless, the intentions of the brand to create CBBE through social media marketing

is only one side of the coin. Implied by the notion that customers are the base on which gym chains' brand equity is created, consumer engagement is the starting point for CBBE (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Therefore, gym chains are required to understand and elicit consumer engagement on social media in order to yield the desired outcomes of their social media marketing strategies.

### **1.1. Study Motivation and Purpose**

This thesis' topic is positioned in the interface of our graduate program concentration of "Brand and Communications Management" as well as the field of Sports Management and Marketing. The focus on gym chains and their social media marketing efforts originated because of our interest in fitness related topics and social media. Especially as students, which implied several changes of residence and thus switching gym memberships, experiences with different kind of gym chains and other workout methods have been made firsthand. Being customers ourselves, we find it as well significant to investigate consumer behavior on social media, especially regarding fitness related content, as the own health and fitness efforts do not only represent personal and sensitive topics, but also highly popular topics on social media networks as a result of a constantly growing trend worldwide.

Through own experiences as customers of gym chains, a discrepancy of offline experiences at a gym and the gym's presence on social media networks such as Instagram has been identified on a continuous basis. This discrepancy derives from the fact that positive offline experiences were not congruent with the social media experience, because gym chains were unsuccessful in communicating their unique selling point (USP) convincingly. Additionally, social media and the existential influence it can have on customer-brand relationships has been investigated thoroughly over the course of the last two academic years. As a result, studying the effect of social media marketing initiatives implemented by gym chains on the brand's equity combines both our personal interests as consumers and our academic interests as Master students.

The overarching research question (RQ) for this master thesis is:

***RQ: How do gym chains implement social media marketing strategies in order to remain successful in the fitness industry?***

In order to answer the research question of this study, three sub questions (SQ) are set up. They are covering the three essential areas that enable answering the main research question. With the sub questions, the company view is enhanced through insights from the consumer perspective. Hereby, the expert's gym chain John Reed serves as an illustration and does not represent a case object for this study, as for this the scope of empirical data is not sufficient. Rather, observations from a specific company view and consumer view will be used in order to find explanations for the underlying problem identified above. This is aligned with the reasoning approach of abduction in qualitative research, where conclusions are built on the observations made in the most likely sensemaking way. However, these observations are based on the information available, which are therefore generally defined as incomplete and can only lead to hypothetical inferences.

**SQ 1:** *What role does social media have in gym chains' total marketing efforts?*

**SQ 2:** *What are the underlying motivations for consumers to engage with gym chains on social media?*

**SQ 3:** *How do social media marketing efforts of gym chains lead to potential CBBE?*

In the first SQ, the importance of social media for gym chains considering their total marketing efforts must be identified. With that result, it can be evaluated to which extent social media is intentionally used by brands in order to strengthen the brand's equity. After identifying the role of social media from the brand's perspective, the consumers' perspective is applied. These insights lead to a better understanding of the reasons behind using social media and engaging with brands on social media, especially with fitness related brands. Finally, the third SQ examines whether the efforts to support the creation of CBBE by gym chains are successful and how the social media presence of gym chains is perceived by the consumers. Here, the brand John Reed and the consumers' evaluation of the brand's social media presence are considered while answering SQ 3.

Through the findings and its sensemaking, it should be possible to create valuable managerial implications for social media marketing managers of gym chains on how brand equity can be enhanced by the efficient use of social media strategies which, as a result, has influence on successfully maintaining market positions.

## **1.2. Delimitations**

This research underlies several delimitations because of its limited scope in terms of time and resources. These delimitations influence the target market, the target group as well as the theoretical and methodological scope of the research and are elaborated on in the following subchapters.

### **1.2.1. Target Market and Group**

The present research concentrates on the fitness industry within Europe that constitutes the second largest fitness market worldwide (Statista, 2019a) behind North America (Statista, 2019b). This is based on a revenue of 27.2 billion Euro as well as 62.2 million gym members in 2018 (Deloitte, 2019).

In addition to the limitation of the target market, the present study only examines one specific customer segment in the European fitness market. There is a multitude of consumer profiles in the fitness industry, which can be best segmented by applying demographic variables. Here, the framework of demographic segmentation by Kotler and Keller (2016) is consulted as it considers the consumers' needs and wants. Accordingly, this study focuses on European consumers of an age between 24 to 28 years. The main reason for choosing this specific age group is based on the assumption that consumers of similar age show similarities regarding social media usage, consumption and fitness routines. Even though the chosen age group finds itself in the generation of millennials, this research is not supposed to be a generation study.

### **1.2.2. Theoretical Delimitation**

The theoretical framework of this research paper is divided into three parts. In the first chapter, the necessary foundations of social media are elaborated on. Here, literature on social media's origin and the development to social commerce as well as social media marketing is displayed. The chapter is concluded with insights into the social media marketing of gym chains.

The second chapter of the theoretical framework focuses on consumer engagement theories. Here, Tsai and Men's (2013) motivations and antecedents of consumer engagement in social media establish base principles of social interaction and information search. Further insights into the reasons for consumer engagement on social media are provided by Belk's revisional framework of the Extended Self in a digital environment (2013). The chapter concludes with the congruity theory, which was firstly developed by Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) and later on adapted and applied in a business and social media context (Islam, Rahman & Hollebeek, 2018).

The third and last chapter of the theoretical framework covers Aaker's theory on CBBE (1991). The aim is to extend the framework by introducing literature that investigates respective brand equity components in either a social media or fitness context (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer, 2012; Castillo-Rodríguez, Onetti & Minguet, 2019; Kim & Ko, 2012).

The goal of this research is two-fold, which is why the theoretical framework contains chapters on consumer engagement theory as well as on brand equity theory. The first goal is to gain in-depth expertise and knowledge on the fitness industry and the relevance of social media from a gym chain's perspective. The second goal is to build a wider understanding of consumers' use of social media, their perception of the fitness lifestyle spread on social media and finally their evaluation of gym chains' social media marketing efforts.

### **1.2.3. Methodological Delimitation**

In order to explore the nature of social media marketing of gym chains in the context of CBBE, a qualitative research method is chosen for the study at hand. Accordingly, the study is of exploratory nature and based on secondary and primary data. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted as

the primary data collection method. Insights into the social media marketing strategies of a European gym chain are gained with one expert interview. 12 consumer interviews are conducted in order to investigate not only the motivations behind their engagement with fitness related content on social media platforms but also their evaluation of the illustrated gym chain's Instagram presence. The underlying research approach for this data collection and analysis is characterized as abductive. This entails that all information available is observed and explanations for observations are formulated through abductive reasoning.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The following subchapters address the origin of social media (marketing), relevant consumer engagement theories and Aaker's model of CBBE (1991). Further literature is considered in order to view the theories in the context of gym chains.

### **2.1. Foundations of Social Media**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the underlying theories of social media marketing. Therefore, it is divided into subchapters in order to structure the origin of social media and the resulting opportunities for gym chains.

#### **2.1.1. Social Networking Sites and Social Media**

In the last two decades, the internet and the development of powerful devices with smart applications have revolutionized the communication between people and how messages are sent and received. Hereby, Web 2.0 is characterized as the underlying technological infrastructure which made this development possible (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Instead of a unidirectional flow of communication, receivers could now react and reply to messages through multidirectional interaction due to Web 2.0



(Wyrwoll, 2014). As a result, the boundaries within the world have vanished and power has been shifted from the brand to the consumer (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger & Shapiro, 2012). Based on this incisive development, social networking sites (SNSs) and social media have originated and grown continuously to be a ubiquitous part of people's daily life. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) mark the development of the SNSs MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004 as the time of origin of the term social media. Especially people who either grew up with the rapidly advancing digital opportunities or were young enough to learn the new digital competences are heavy users of social media nowadays. The definition of SNSs has been widely accepted as:

“web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.211).

This definition is in line with the culture of participation that originated alongside the development of social media and SNSs (Wyrwoll, 2014). In the context of SNSs, social media can be viewed as “the technologies or applications that people use in developing and maintaining their social networking sites.” (Albarran, 2013, p.2). Figuratively speaking, social media is thus creating new habitats for markets, in which companies can directly communicate to customers but also in which customers can interact between themselves. Aral, Dellarocas and Godes (2013) regard social media as more than new technologies and applications and define it as “fundamentally changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume and create” (p.3). This is aligned with Berthon et al. (2012), describing it as a content, that represents the “function of the technology, culture, and government of a particular country or context.” (p.261).

The origin of SNSs and social media has affected every individual's life as well as every economical sector, including the fitness industry. There is hardly any single gym, gym chain, personal trainer or fitness influencer without representation on social media. For brands, creating a SNS account offers essential advantages compared to traditional advertising channels such as TV and print. The first radical benefit of SNSs is that they are representing an efficient and affordable method for brands to create a

network and ensure its maintenance (Donath & Boyd, 2004) while simultaneously allowing easy access to consumers and fans (Pegoraro, 2010). Alongside, marketing a brand with SNSs is cheap. Hence, the company's marketing budget can be used more efficiently when they engage in social media (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006).

### **2.1.2. Social Media Platforms**

Through social media, websites and mobile applications offer different communicative purposes. These so-called social media platforms, also defined as social media channels, are highly popular in use and change with time and technological developments. Despite their high popularity and usage by estimated 3.1 billion people worldwide in 2021, the share of social media platform applications in the Apple App Store has been 2.24% by the end of November 2019 (Statista, 2019c; 2020). This is because only a few social media platforms are extremely successful while the majority fails after a short amount of time. However, even once highly popular and used, technological and societal change lead to many platforms failing with time (Routley, 2019).

To participate on a social media platform, a user creates a personal profile. This profile is filled with information about the user, such as demographic characteristics, pictures, as well as hobbies and interests. These profiles are curated carefully, as they should represent the user in the best way possible and serve as his digital personality.<sup>2</sup> In 1997, the first social media platform called SixDegrees has been developed and incorporated all at the time known technological features such as communicating with friends online and surf through the friends' friends lists (Wu, Stewart & Liu, 2015). With 3.5 million people registered, SixDegrees has been heavily used by that time. Today, Facebook and Instagram are the most used social media networks, with respectively 2.2 and 1.1 billion monthly active users in 2019 (Routley, 2019). However, social media platforms differ in their purpose and usage and thus their shared content. In fact, the authors Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga and Bronner (2018) state that the context, i.e. the platform type, has a higher influence on the spreading of a message than the content of the message itself. Facebook and Instagram obtain similar features and are interlinked as the company Facebook bought

<sup>2</sup> In the following, gender-specific terms may be used in order to ease the text flow. Whenever a gender-specific term is used, it should be understood as referring to both genders, unless explicitly stated.

Instagram in 2012. For instance, targeted advertising campaigns can be set up and organized for both platforms via one tool (Shumaker, 2018). As Instagram is a rather new social media platform founded in 2010, it is predominantly used by younger generations than Facebook which was developed in 2004 and which has a significant number of users older than 65 years (Jackson, 2019; Shumaker, 2018). Because of their similarity, Instagram is also called “the new Facebook” for younger and future generations (Shumaker, 2018). What is striking is that content shared on Instagram generates a significantly higher level of engagement than content on Facebook. This can result in a 200 times higher engagement for the same post as it has been examined in the Social Media Industry Benchmark Report from 2019 (Feehan, 2019). One reason for this is a generally higher engagement rate for images posted on Instagram, as Instagram has a dominant visual focus on the editing and posting of images and short videos. However, longer written texts and detailed information on a specific topic or product work better on Facebook, which is more suitable to create online spaces for communities and extensive personal profiles than Instagram (Shumaker, 2018).

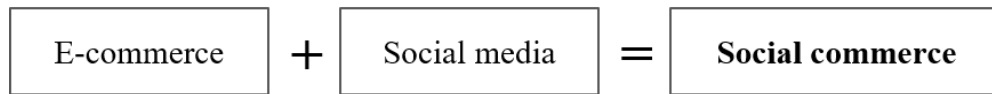
The development of new social media platforms is always supported by a rising societal trend of communication. It is because of the strong desire of users to communicate in a low text but highly visual way that Instagram reached its high level of popularity (Lee, Lee, Moon & Sung, 2015). A similar situation is currently occurring regarding TikTok, a Chinese social media platform that was developed in 2012 but introduced to the global market in 2017 (Shea, 2019). Today, it is the fastest growing platform in the world with 500 million active users worldwide and over one billion videos watched daily (Asquith, 2020).

Besides the importance for users as means of communication, social media platforms have become an increasingly important tool in scientific research. One important research approach is data mining where existing information in form of brand pages on social media or user posts are used as research subjects. In addition, social media can serve as means to promote a research, e.g. through sharing a survey link on social media. Most importantly, however, do social media channels offer the possibility to identify and contact suitable study participants more easily (Quinn, 2020). As users share their personal preferences on social media channels through indicating, liking or following them, members of specific interest groups can be targeted group wise in a low-cost and geographically unrestricted way. Additionally, social

media platforms serve as optimal locations for behavioral and social science studies since distinct dynamics of social interaction are evoked on each channel. Li (2019) argues for the significance of behavioral studies with the interconnectivity between social media networks and offline networks through which user behavior on social media platforms influences their offline social behavior largely.

### **2.1.3. Social Commerce**

Social media has caused the creation of social commerce as a part of e-commerce (Hajli, 2015). Primarily introduced as a term in 2004 with the development and popularity of Facebook and Twitter, social commerce proves the great influence that social media exerts on consumers' purchase intentions and general consumption behavior (Bürklin, Henninger & Boardman, 2019). In fact, Tuten and Solomon (2018) dedicate one out of their established four zones of social media to social commerce. According to the authors, the process of shopping and purchasing, offline as well as online, is characterized through social interactions of several kinds, such as the consultation with a friend, family member or the contact with sales staff. Social commerce combines both e-commerce and social media. It refers to online shopping and the usability of social media platforms via the consumer's social media profiles to interact and exchange opinions about the shopping experience during the shopping process itself (Lin, Li & Wang, 2017). Further, social commerce enables consumers to shop over social media channels since ads market products and offer links to the online shop (Bürklin et al., 2019). Thereby, the utilitarian motivational factors for online shopping such as convenience, selection and information availability defined by Ha and Lennon (2010) are enhanced even further. Nevertheless, social commerce also addresses the hedonic consumer needs. Next to being able to find the comparatively best offer for a product's or service's best price while saving time, the consumer is motivated to engage in social commerce because of informational support and community engagement (Blazquez, Zhang, Boardman & Henninger, 2019). Informational support consists of advice, personal opinion and factual information and helps consumers to identify problems and make decisions. Community engagement is based on the user's tendency to browse more in an online shopping context when there is a strong feeling of commitment towards a specific online community, e.g. evolving around a specific product or brand. The hedonic consumer needs that can be satisfied through social commerce is also the main difference from social commerce to e-commerce, which does not necessarily involve such high level of interactivity (Busalim & Hussin, 2016).



*Figure 1: The Creation of Social Commerce. Source: Authors' own Depiction.*

Through social commerce, individuals do not necessarily retain the role of the buyer but can also easily become a seller of products. This development led to the existence of influencers, who are defined as “individuals who influence the buying decisions for themselves and others.” (Fletcher, 2019, p.6). As an influencer, a wide fan base and successful strategies in growing one’s social media account are necessary to receive “respect for their knowledge, experience or abilities around a topic” (Fenton, Mohamad & Jones, 2019, p.208). Once the status of being an influencer is achieved, brands are interested in cooperating by providing the brand’s products which the influencer presents and tests on his social media account. A deep understanding of consumers’ interests and the formation of online communities is necessary in order to choose the most relevant influencers that can introduce the brand to the desired target group (Fenton et al., 2019).

However, many influencers also begin to market their own name as a brand, develop own products and become entrepreneurs themselves. Consequently, they might turn into competitors instead desired cooperation partners. This is a viable threat in the fitness industry, as fitness influencers are developing their own fitness programs and advertise them via their social media channels. Thus, influencers represent strong competitors for gym chains as they encourage potential users of gym chains to work out at home or that workout equipment provided by gym chains is not required for great results. For instance, the SWEAT-App of the popular fitness influencer Kayla Itsines has been downloaded 300,000 times in March 2020, declaring the program and its evolving community as the “world’s largest digital gym” (Kayla Itsines, n.d.).

#### **2.1.4. Social Media Marketing**

The promising business opportunities and the increasing popularity of SNSs convinced companies to extent their marketing activities to social media (Wu et al., 2015). By that, companies’ strategic marketing was slowly extended to social media marketing, which is defined as “the utilization of social

media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholder." (Tuten & Solomon, 2018, p.18). Through social media marketing tactics, brands put great effort into their social media presence by creating meaningful and interesting content to ultimately increase the brand's awareness and liking in the consumers' minds. As such, companies can achieve conversion rates through social media platforms that are up to eight times higher than through other online advertising (Shumaker, 2018). This is greatly attributable to the strategic targeting of consumers on social media. Social media users voluntarily share demographic and psychographic variables on which basis they are exposed to ads that algorithms evaluate as relevant to them. This results in a higher likelihood of converting a visitor into a customer (Hart, Bond & Hendricks, 2013).

Tuten and Solomon (2018) advice to carefully plan and organize social media marketing strategies within the marketing plan, consisting of product, pricing, distribution and promotional elements. The use of social media marketing strategies often applies within the promotional aspect of the marketing mix, as the brand's products and services can be well presented through created content as well as coupons and other promotions which can be communicated to a broad audience. In the beginning of social media, companies were observed to create content that was completely detached from the companies' offline marketing strategies and communications. However, marketing strategies executed on social media need to be aligned with and support the brand's entire marketing strategy. To include social media platforms in the existing marketing strategy thus represents a great challenge for brands (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). The main task is to convert the content so that it is effective on social media, since existing offline content cannot be simply posted on social media (Wu et al., 2015). Rather, the content must be tailored to the platform's distinct characteristics in order to reach the goal of consumers' engaging in brand-related "word of mouth" communication (WOM). Once achieved, WOM can lead to a rippling effect and serve as a valuable support for brand's marketing initiatives. Other users are perceived as reliable sources of information and can thus reduce a potential customer's doubts about a product through positive WOM (Wu, Fan & Zhao, 2018). Although the term WOM often refers to online WOM activities, some literature differentiates between traditional, offline WOM that happens face-to-face and eWOM, an abbreviation for electronic word of mouth (Zhou, McCormick, Blazquez & Barnes, 2019). Although any kind of positive WOM is beneficial for the brand, the focus of marketing initiatives on social media lies on

eWOM, which is defined as one of the most important communication touchpoints between consumers before or after their purchase experience (King, Racherla & Bush, 2014).

In order to achieve positive eWOM, brands have the option to engage with opinion leaders, the previously mentioned influencers (Zhou et al., 2019). Often, brands are clear in the message they would like to share but lack the knowledge in communicating it to its customers. Opinion leaders have often reached a status of being an expert for a certain area and thus have a large group of followers and admirers. Not only is communicating via an influencer an easy way to target a large group of consumers sharing similar interests but it also favors the perceived credibility of the marketing message once it is communicated by the influencer. As a result, the influencer serves as a brand ambassador and forms a bridge between the brand and potential consumers through his authentic connection to his followers (Backaler, 2018). Thus, the consumers are more likely to engage in eWOM that in turn, leads to a higher likelihood of purchase, as many studies have affirmed the positive influence of eWOM on purchase intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Yusuf, Che Hussin & Busalim, 2018). The importance of eWOM stems from the constantly shrinking control that companies can exert on firm-related information that is shared online (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Hence, great efforts must be performed to avoid negative eWOM and support the spreading of positive brand-related user experiences. Further, social media marketing strategies are iterative processes according to Stoychev (2019). Through social media, brands receive feedback on marketing campaigns, services and products in real-time, which gives them the chance to react immediately with improvements and updates (Bradbury & O'Boyle, 2017).

#### **2.1.5. Social Media Marketing of Gym Chains**

Using social media for marketing measures offers new possibilities of communicating with the consumer. It is thus affecting traditional marketing channels such as TV strongly and often leads to a decline of traditional marketing approaches (Rothschild, 2011). This applies to all players in the fitness industry including gym chains. According to Thompson, Martin, Gee and Eagleman (2014), it is crucial for sports entities to directly communicate to their consumers in order to expand their reach and awareness. Successfully reaching the target group with similar interests, however, proves challenging through traditional offline and online advertising channels. In contrast, direct and targeted communication with the consumer represents one of the main advantages of SNSs and social media for gym chains. Through

social media, gym chains can post images and videos of the studio facilities as well as the equipment and convince potential customers to become a member. Additionally, they receive direct feedback from existing and potential customers in form of likes and comments (Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

However, there are several challenges gym chains are facing when implementing social media marketing strategies. Holt (2016), who examines the use of social media from a brand's perspective, opinions that only few brands manage to create meaningful content successfully in the highly dynamic environment of social media. One reason for this phenomenon is the countless number of brands being present on social media as this decreases each brand's significance. Hence, only brands who are successful in establishing and communicating their unique culture can prevail in this competitive setting. This is applicable to gym chains, as there is a high number of competitors present on social media. Additionally, gym chains are facing the challenge to differentiate themselves from each other because their services and products offered are similar in nature. Consequently, it is important that brands create their own, memorable culture through its branding activities. Consumers, referred to as digital crowd, are participating in this culture creation. Supporting the active participation of the digital crowd is beneficial as it reduces the risk of social media content to be perceived as clutter, which is a common pitfall. Consequently, brands are advised to focus less on the social media platform itself and more on crowd cultures and the exploitation of opportunities they expose. For almost any topic, a crowd culture can be found on social media. Nevertheless, brands find it hard to create content that addresses consumers' emotions and that keeps them authentically interested in the brand and what it has to say.

The fitness industry entails a highly passionate crowd culture on social media (Wong, 2017). Topics around health, well-being and fitness have developed to a fitness lifestyle movement that is shared by many users. The movement originated when famous people such as actors or musicians began to promote their own healthy lifestyle (Arnold, 2018). Consequently, their fans began to admire the lifestyle and began to pursue it as well. Nowadays, users are focused on presenting themselves as health-focused, fit and self-confident. The strong presence of fitness-related content on social media platforms has been the subject of studies in the past. For instance, Burke and Rains (2019) found out that users who are constantly exposed to fitness-related content are increasingly concerned of their own weight. This behavior was supported through the belief of users that other people that shared the content were fitter



than they were. Hence, the fitness lifestyle movement has also faced heavy criticism for creating unrealistic physical expectations and body images through social media, leading to dissatisfaction of users with themselves (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). However, this criticism does not diminish the huge crowd of fitness worshippers who are constantly focused on presenting themselves as fit and healthy on social media.

Because of its popularity, gym chains benefit of the opportunity to support this movement by posting content that is not only motivating but also content that points out the distinct advantages of becoming a customer of a specific gym brand. According to Wong (2017), companies can best differentiate themselves from competitors through connecting the most to big online communities. As the high popularity of a fit and healthy lifestyle is an opportunity for all players in the fitness industry, each gym chain must convincingly market itself in order to win over the most users. Customers who remain loyal and engage with the brand on social media serve as brand ambassadors who advocate for the brand. Through positive eWOM encouraged by customer brand ambassadors, the gym chain's online community can be enlarged with little effort effectuated from the brand's side (Zhou et al., 2019).

The question of how to win the largest user group over for the own brand has been answered differently in literature. According to Smith (2017), the biggest competition on social media is not about posting the most relevant content, but which gym chain succeeds in connecting the brand image with the consumer's identity, values and needs. Yet, Bradbury and O'Boyle (2017) opinion that brand trust as well as loyalty can only be reached on social media if the content is relevant and engaging. Apart from struggling to become the gym chain with the strongest bond with specific online communities, new fitness trends, which are marketed on social media may hinder a gym chain's reach and awareness (Schmaltz, 2019a). Especially on Instagram, certain influencers have achieved a large group of followers and admirers. Through sharing details from their private life, they connected to their followers on an emotional level, which is hardly possible for gym chains to do due to their functional nature as facilities with fitness equipment. Already highly popular fitness influencers like Kayla Itsines become entrepreneurs through creating a fitness program that can also be accomplished at home with no or only basic equipment such as dumbbells (Kayla Itsines, n.d.). Compared to gym chains, these fitness influencers or fitness entrepreneurs have their origin on social media, which gives them a competitive advantage in terms of

emotional identification and strong customer relationships. Not only are they professionals in using social media for sharing private information, but they are also well-trained in using social media platforms as marketing opportunities. Hence, they represent a threat to gym chains, which increases their necessity of including social media platforms successfully into their overall marketing strategy.

## **2.2. Consumer Engagement**

The following subchapters contain theories on the unconscious and conscious motivations of consumers to engage with gym chains on social media and how brands can further drive consumer engagement.

### **2.2.1. Motivations and Antecedents of Consumer Engagement**

Consumer engagement has been found to be one of the most desired objects of a social media marketing strategy and a widely researched area within the last decade (Pansari & Kumar, 2018). It is defined as “the level of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions” (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 790).

Brand-related activities of consumers’ engagement on SNSs can be divided into three levels according to Muntinga, Moorman and Smit’s (2011) typology of consumers’ online brand-related activities (COBRA). The “minimal level of online activeness” represents the first stage and describes the most passive engagement of the customer. A consumer is within this stage, if he is only viewing the brand’s shared content. The first stage is followed by the “moderate level of online activeness” in which the consumer is more engaged. This can result in a customer reacting to content that is shared by the brand, e.g. by liking or commenting (Muntinga et al., 2011). The highest engagement is done by consumers who are in the “ultimate level of online activeness”. Here, user-generated content (UGC) is created by the consumer meaning that he actively shares brand-related content on his own social media accounts. Achieving a customer relationship in which a consumer is willing to offer UGC to a SNS on social media is extremely beneficial for a brand, as brand-related content can be consumed and contributed on by other consumers in return, all without the brand’s doing (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Thus, it can be inferred

that UGC is highly desired by gym chains. Hence, it is effective for gym chains to encourage their followers to post images of themselves in the fitness studio and using specific hashtags in order to connect the post to the gym and thus make it visible for other users.



Figure 2: COBRA (Muntinga et al., 2011). Icons by Freepik (n.d.-a,-b) & Pixelmeetup (n.d.). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

For consumers, social media is not only used to connect with friends but also for information search. In fact, Tsai and Men (2013) state that SNSs are used more during the search for information than corporate websites. When becoming a follower, the information search leads to an ongoing bond between a consumer and a brand since new content by the brand will be directly shared with the consumer from now on. Through this process, the consumer starts to engage with the brand. Aligned with the concept of social commerce, various studies affirm the positive relationship between customer engagement and purchase intention (Yusuf, Hussin & Busalim, 2018). Further, customer engagement not only increases the likelihood of purchase but also enables the formation of long-lasting and meaningful customer-brand relationships (Tsai & Men, 2013).

As Tsai and Men (2013) point out, consumers engage with brands on social media out of several motivations and antecedents. One of said antecedents is declared a media dependency that most users of social media are facing. In case that certain goals of a consumer, e.g. a search on a specific piece of

information, can only be satisfied through using media, this kind of dependency is present. Within the fitness industry, media dependency is essential as the majority of information can only be retrieved through the use of social media. Firstly, this is because of the international scope of new trends and movements around the fitness lifestyle (Andreasson & Johansson, 2014). Thus, many information would not be known to users without social media because of geographical and cultural distances. Secondly, social media is one of the main information sources for topics concerning health, which is an area into which many users have a great eagerness to learn (Raggatt et al., 2018).

Parasocial interaction is defined as the second antecedent (Tsai & Men, 2013). Compared to traditional media, a closer and intensified interaction between a consumer and a brand takes place. This is not only relevant for the active consumer but also for other consumers, who can be witnesses of their interaction. Parasocial interaction is highly applicable to gym chains' consumer engagement. When users follow a gym chain's request and label their post with a specific hashtag, they engage in metadata tagging, which refers to the visual bundling of all content which includes the hashtag on social media (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018). Therefore, the user engages not only with the brand but also with other consumers who are exposed to the posted content. Considering the fitness movement on social media, users want to demonstrate their healthy lifestyle to as many people as possible (Raggatt et al., 2018). Seeing fitness content from other people has a direct effect on the social media user (Arnold, 2018). Not only might the post inspire the user but it also triggers his motivation, as his sense of competitiveness is supported.

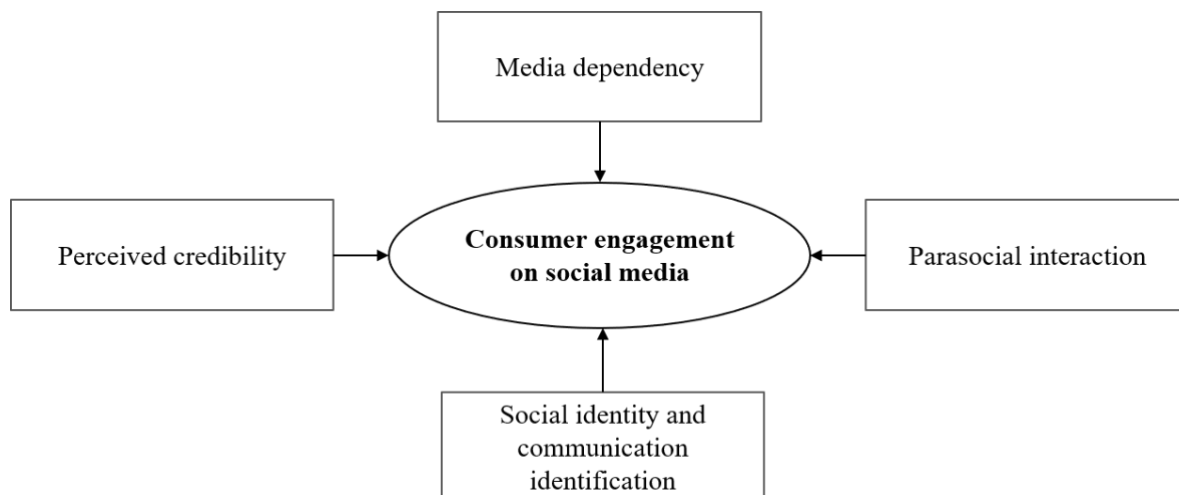


Figure 3: Antecedents for Consumer Engagement on Social Media (Tsai & Men, 2013). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

Thirdly, Tsai and Men (2013) name the perceived credibility of the brand's SNS as well as the identification with a brand community as important drivers of customer engagement. The possibility of reacting to content that is shared by the brand increases the perceived credibility of the SNS as a source of information. However, this also leads to a certain risk for brands, since UGC can also obtain critical or negative characteristics. Ultimately, social identity and community identification is named as the last antecedent of customer engagement. Accordingly, the process of customer engaging in social media and their identification with a brand community built on a SNS are interlinked processes where the level of identification serves as an indicator for the user's engagement.

### **2.2.2. The Extended Self in a Digital Environment**

Another fundamental literature on consumer engagement has been authored by Belk (2013), who focuses on the identification processes of social media users. In the article "The Extended Self in a Digital Environment" (Belk, 2013), the author's theory on the Extended Self from 1988 is revised under consideration of the digital environment consumers are positioned in. This revision has been necessary due to the drastic technological advancements through which the nature of consumption had changed substantially. The theory of the Extended Self is based on the belief that whether consciously or not, a consumer regards his possessions as part of himself. They are therefore contributing to an individual's identity, which enables the interpretation of a consumer's purchase intentions accordingly. The first change that has occurred after the original theory has been published is the dematerialization of possessions, as these nowadays often only exist in digitized form. Although the collection of products might lose its tangible and physical aspect in many ways, the dematerialization of products leads to the possibility to share a passion for said products with a bigger community than before (Belk, 2013). However, studies have confirmed that possessions in the digital realm are evoking less feelings of ownership and a lower perception of the product's authenticity (Petrelli & Whittaker, 2010) and have additionally found a positive relationship between this phenomenon and the consumers' age (Cushing, 2011).

Alongside with products losing their physical appearance in the digital age, consumers are also able to present themselves online without their physical self (Belk, 2013). This process called Re-embodiment often leads to a presentation of the ideal self on social media or through created avatars in online video

games. Creators of online avatars are likely to identify with them, and there are online games that are built around the avatars' created life, who can go to work, furnish their homes and have relationships. According to the psychiatrist Brunskill (2013), the concept of avatars is also applicable to social media, under the premise that human beings are perceived as social animals with the need for interaction and social relationships. Avatars on social media are derivatives of Belk's (2013) mentioned avatars in online games but refer to the personality manifestations that users create of themselves through their social media profiles (Brunskill, 2013). These manifestations do not only include the physical appearance of the user but also his psychological characteristics. This can be observed in the high ambition and enthusiasm many users communicate via their profiles when it comes to their fitness level and health. Of course, the concept of Re-embodiment is also applicable to fitness related content on social media. Although users who are sharing body images are commonly showing their own self, they are often representing themselves in an improved or beautified way. This is easily done through the use of photoshop or other photo editing software. Consequently, users being confronted with distorted images of a person has affected social media to an extent that unrealistic beauty standards for men and women originated (Raggatt et al., 2018). Creating a social media avatar that fulfills these beauty standards to a higher degree has not only implications on how other users perceive the person but also on the avatar owner's behavior in real life. The latter implication is supported by Blascovich and Bailenson (2011), stating that a physically fit avatar causes the avatar creator to work out more in real life.

The sharing of dematerialized possessions on social media is another evolvement that led to Belk's renewal of his Extended Self Theory (2013). Although the concept of sharing goes way beyond the origin of social media, it is a vital component on social media platforms. Whether it is knowledge through texts and shared information or entertainment through videos or music, sharing is facilitated through social media. A consequence of the extensive sharing of private information online is a disinhibition effect, through which users are more capable of showing their true selves online compared to face-to-face interactions in real life (Suler, 2005). Through this, fitness lifestyle followers are capable to share extensive information on their workouts and health online, which would have been perceived as awkward or unnecessary outside of social media (Belk, 2013). Gym chains benefit from extensive sharing of private information, as the group of potential customers increases with the exposure of a fit and healthy

lifestyle online. Additionally, gym chains can benefit from users sharing private information on social media platforms by interacting with them and thus building an emotional bond to them.

Belk (2013) also mentions the co-construction of self as a result of the social environment in which consumers are situated. Users are in constant search for affirmation by their peers on social media and offer affirmation to others. Like this, a cyclic process exists that leads to other users co-constructing one's self. This phenomenon can be linked to the behavior social media users who participate in the fitness movement show towards each other. The constant affirmation for reaching goals motivates the user to work out more. Consequently, the user achieves further goals, which are followed by more social affirmation.

Finally, the author mentions distributed memory, originated through the digital possibilities to archive and retrieve memories and data, as another significant development (Belk, 2013). This increases the motivation of users to share biographical information about themselves online, mostly in order to show a certain type of development or achievement. This is often done by gym chain customers and users who want to show their body transformation to their digital audience. Through two images in direct comparison from before and after, the so-called transformation picture is one of the most popular content types that exists concerning fitness related topics (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche & Young, 2015).

### **2.2.3. The Congruity Theory**

The congruity theory firstly appeared in literature by Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955), where a significant increase in communication and persuasion means based on existing congruity has been identified. Congruity theory is rooted in the assumption that is also underlying for Belk's theory of the Extended Self (1988; 2013), which is that consumers purchase goods only partly because of their functional values but also because of their symbolic meaning which contributes to their self-identification (Hosany & Martin, 2012). Further, the congruity theory can be linked to neuroscientific literature, which examines consumption behavior under the premise of human's nature to avoid cognitive dissonance at all costs (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) Accordingly, humans are eager to avoid the inconsistency between their primary beliefs of a certain reality and their final perception of said reality (Lee & Jeong, 2014).

In consumption behavior research, there are two interlinked concepts within the congruity theory. Firstly, the concept of self-brand congruity and secondly, the concept of value congruity. According to Hosany and Martin (2012), a self-brand congruity is present if the individual image a consumer creates in his mind of a specific brand is congruent with the image, he has of himself. Through a self-brand image process, a consumer associates his self-image with the perceived image of a brand and evaluates whether a congruity exists or not (Moore & Homer, 2008). The second concept of value congruity applies if there is a resemblance between the values represented by a brand and the values that a consumer upholds (Lee & Jeong, 2014). However, this is not purely because of the real consistency of these values itself. Rather, the consumer has the desire to affirm his own perception and avoid cognitive dissonance. Therefore, he forms a positive attitude or reacts positively to the brand's shared content containing values and beliefs if he has a preexisting positive image of the brand (Islam, Rahman & Hollebeek, 2018). Consequently, a consumer might even support a potential value congruity by convincing himself of the consistency between his values and the values presented by the brand to avoid cognitive dissonance. However, brands do well in additionally convincing the customer of an existing value congruity since it can lead to long-lasting customer-brand relationships (Lee & Jeong, 2014).

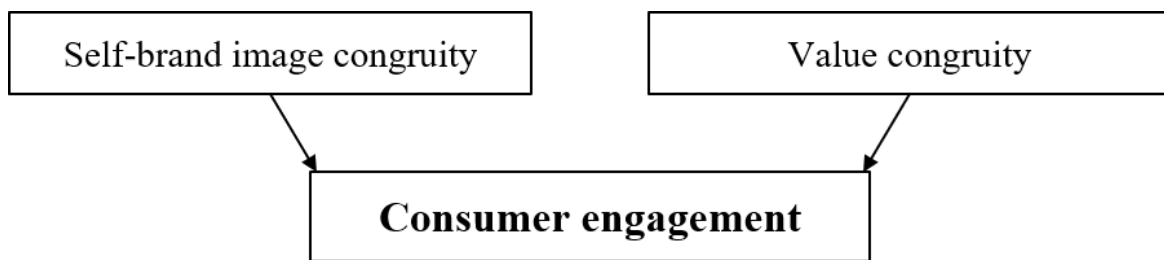


Figure 4: Congruity Theory (Islam et al., 2018). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

Both self-brand image congruity and value congruity have been affirmed to lead to positive consumer attitudes towards a brand (Islam et al., 2018). Further, the study by Islam et al. (2018) confirmed the positive influence of both concepts on consumer engagement in online communities. Underlying is the notion that the exchange and communication of feelings concerning the brand as reactions to brand-generated content is one of the key actions on social media. This creates dynamic relations between consumers as well as brands and consumers through which a multitude of values are presented and shared. However, the value congruity concept not only considers the values that a consumer intrinsically



upholds in real life at one point in time. Rather, values, which the consumer would like to uphold ideally, are considered as well. Consequently, published content on brand's and consumer's side can also communicate values that help the consumer to become closer to his ideal self-version. This also applies to the self-brand image congruity since customers tend to engage more actively and positively if the brand shares values that the consumer's ideal self-image wishes to obtain. Consequently, gym chains benefit from expressing values that are congruent with the consumer's ideal self's values because it has a positive effect on consumer engagement. In order to do so, extensive knowledge in the fitness industry as well as the desires and expectations of consumers is crucial. The fitness industry in general is predestined to offer consumers different possibilities to reach a certain goal, e.g. becoming healthier or transforming the body. Therefore, the notion of an ideal self that a consumer is striving to become is highly applicable to the industry.

When looking at values that are shared by followers of the fitness lifestyle as well as by players in the fitness industry, the word "fitspiration" needs to be considered. According to Deighton-Smith and Bell (2018), fitspiration is a type of social media content that includes texts, images and videos related to fitness and the inspiration of fitness to other users. Especially metadata tagging of the hashtag #fitspiration exposes users to fitspiration content every day. The range of fitspiration content is wide since users are sharing their individual fitness journey including goals and experiences. Further, fitspiration content has been assessed to have substantial influence on the attitude of social media users towards fitness. As Dutta-Bergmann (2004) points out, friends, family and media are acting as sociocultural agents who are fundamentally shaping a person's attitude towards fitness. What has once been achieved through traditional media types such as magazines has now extended to social media platforms (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018). Fitspiration content represents great support opportunities for gym chains as users are constantly motivated to pursue the fitness lifestyle and thus are more likely to become customers of a gym. In addition, fitspiration content is mostly UGC, which means that it is created externally and does not depend on the gym chain's resources.

### **2.3. Customer-Based Brand Equity**

The drivers for achieving and maintaining long-lasting success of brands has been focused in research ever since (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996a; Keller, 1993). Accordingly, a brand's success can be directly attributed to the attitudes of the customer towards a specific brand (Aaker, 1996a). Consequently, the concept of CBBE has been developed connecting these two variables. Brand equity represents a buzzword in marketing research and has been widely discussed and investigated in literature (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996a; Keller, 1993). The term brand equity describes, "A set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts) from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1996a, p.8). Thereby, research has mainly focused on the aspects of how brand equity can be developed, build and managed as well as measured in the end (Aaker, 1996b). Two of the most discussed and applied frameworks have been developed by the founding fathers of CBBE, David Allen Aaker (1991) and Kevin Lane Keller (1993).

The focus within the groundbreaking CBBE model by Keller (1993) lies on the emotions of the customer and is understood as a pyramid consisting of four stages, namely brand identity, brand meaning, brand response and resonance.

In contrast to Keller (1993), the brand equity model of Aaker (1991) focuses on the consumer's brand recognition instead on his emotions. According to Aaker (1991), brand recognition is responsible for making a brand successful and increasing brand equity (see Figure 5). Thereby, brand equity is conceptualized as a set of assets and liabilities, which are linked to a brand as well as the "investment to create and enhance these assets" (Aaker, 1996a, p.8).

Aaker (1996a) defines four fundamental components to control brand equity: (1) brand awareness, (2) brand loyalty, (3) perceived quality, (4) brand associations. For the sake of completeness, a fifth component called other property assets has been defined which includes assets such as channel relationships and patents. Every single brand equity asset is thereby creating value in various ways for the firm and its customers.

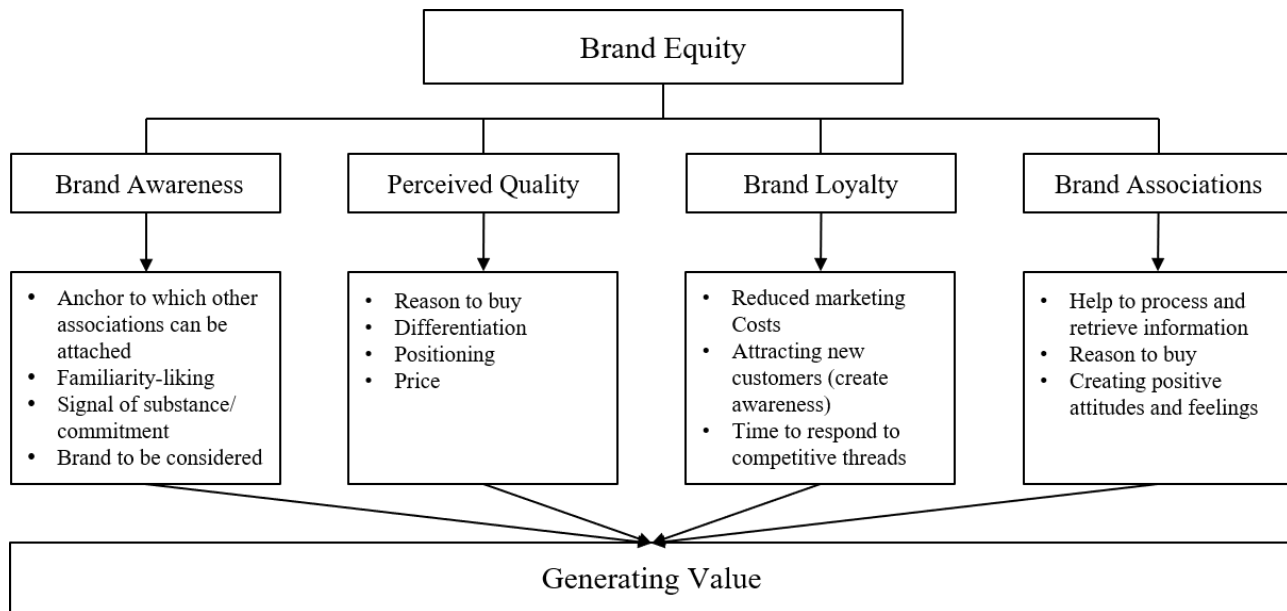


Figure 5: Brand Equity (Aaker, 1996a). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

The sports industry is characterized by an ever-changing environment with new fitness trends occurring on a constant basis (Schmaltz, 2019a). Especially digitalization creates new challenges for gym chains to stay competitive in the market and to compete against new trends. Thus, creating a strong brand equity is crucial for gym chains. Taking Keller's (1993) and Aaker's (1991) fundamental frameworks of brand equity into consideration, it can be concluded that gym chains benefit from considering the notion of brand equity during the planning and execution of their marketing strategies.

In the further process of this research, the focus will be on Aaker's brand equity model (1991). The framework proves more valuable for this research because the four brand equity assets, i.e. brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations, are believed as being fundamentally influenced by the social media marketing strategies of gym chains. Further, creating brand awareness is a major aim of companies using social media marketing within their overall marketing strategy (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer, 2012). In the following, the framework's four brand equity assets will be explained and discussed in the context of the fitness industry and gym chains. This contextualization is done through combining the theoretical framework by Aaker (1996a) with literature on the environment gym chains are situated in.

### **2.3.1. Brand Awareness**

Brand awareness is the starting point of Aaker's (1996a) framework and refers to the extent of the brand's publicity in the consumers' minds. In order to measure brand awareness, it is fundamental to look at the ways of how a consumer remembers the brand. The extent of remembrance is divided into four levels: recognition, recall, top of mind and the dominant remembrance.

Recognition represents the lowest level of brand awareness describing the familiarity with as well as the liking of a brand (Aaker, 1996a). Familiarity relates to experiences with a brand gained through past exposure. However, in order to like and choose a specific brand it is not required that details such as the place or the reason for encountering the brand are remembered. The aspect of being familiar with the brand already leads to positive feelings, which commonly evokes liking in the end. Brand recall describes a more involved remembrance level compared to brand recognition and is occurring as soon as the brand is the only one that comes to the consumer's mind when talking about a specific product class. Afterwards, the next level of recognition is achieved as soon as the brand is at the "top of mind". Finally, brand name dominance is defining the ultimate awareness level in terms of brand recognition. Here, the consumer is only naming this one specific brand. Even though this seems to be the most desired goal of a brand, it is simultaneously posing significant challenges for a brand. More precisely, if the brand name becomes a symbol for a whole product group it can represent a threat to the brand since it might lose legal protection.

As consumers are exposed to marketing messages countless times a day, creating brand awareness and standing out from other brands is crucial in order to successfully operate in the market (Holt, 2016). Therefore, generating recognition and recall can be achieved in two ways. Firstly, an enjoyable awareness level can be generated through a broad sales base with the available financial and human resources. As this is an expensive process, Aaker (1996a) proposes that brands should reduce their owned brands and focus on a few in order to use the given resources more efficiently. A second possibility is to operate outside of traditional media channels. More specifically, marketing measures such as sponsorship and event marketing are creating lots of attention and are considered successful ways to achieve brand awareness. Summarizing, brand equity can be enhanced if the consumer is able to recognize and recall a certain brand.

The sport industry is not just fast-paced but also characterized by strong competitiveness (Ratten, 2016). Thus, all players on the market, including gym chains, are forced to invest in achieving the customer's brand awareness. Looking closer at the used marketing tools in the sport industry, it becomes clear that sponsorships have entrenched to a commonly used tool to create brand awareness. Sponsorship relates to the "exchange between a sponsor and a sponsee whereby the latter receives a fee, or value, and the former obtains the right to associate itself with the activity sponsored" (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998, p.11). Therefore, the marketing of the association is the responsibility of the sponsor.

Sponsorships are a commonly used tool for brands within the fitness industry, which aim at creating brand awareness within their advertising (Cornwell, 2017). The first instances of sponsorships as dedicated marketing tool were low level, e.g. presenting the brand logo in a stadium to create brand awareness. However, the nature of sponsorships in the sports and fitness industry today has become more sophisticated and complex. Including influencer marketing on SNSs in the social media marketing mix is a common implementation, as it has been found to be not just a fast and cheap but also effective tool (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006).

### **2.3.2. Perceived Quality**

The second asset of brand equity is the perceived quality of a brand (Aaker, 1996a). The perceived quality can be defined as "the judgement of the consumer on the excellence or superiority of a product/service" (Zeithaml, 1988, p.3). Since the perceived quality of a brand highly influences a brand's financial performance, it has been found to be a crucial brand asset (Aaker, 1996a). Related thereto, studies have revealed that the perceived quality has more influence on a company's return on investment (ROI) due to its influence on customer satisfaction than the market share, R&D and marketing expenditures combined (Aaker, 1996a; Richard & Arnoldo, 1992).

Perceived quality can be considered from different angles and companies may use it as a strategic tool. For instance, companies gain insight into the perceived quality through strategic processes such as Total Quality Management (Aaker, 1996a). By defining themselves through their quality and using it as their major value and promise to their customers, companies are positioning themselves in the market.

Perceived quality is an effective tool to gain a competitive advantage on other companies in the industry as it acts as a fundamental distinctive feature.

Furthermore, the brand asset of perceived quality can act as measurement of customer satisfaction for companies (Aaker, 1966a). Although perceived quality might not be explicitly stated in a brand's identity, it is acting as a bottom-line measure since it represents the sum of all consumers' experiences. Thus, it has a crucial impact on the brand identity and can be more powerful than functional values of the products and services of a brand. Consequently, it is vital that positive quality perceptions are created by a brand. However, positive quality perceptions can only be evoked if the quality of the brands' services or products is justly. Thus, companies must identify their consumers' values and needs in terms of the quality of products. Nevertheless, creating a positively perceived quality product is only one of two essential factors. Of equal rank is to create quality perceptions as mentioned before.

In this context, four reasons might prevent consumers from recognizing the actual quality of products and services (Aaker, 1996a). Firstly, the consumer's individual past experiences of poor quality can cause doubts regarding the quality and thus falsify the perceived quality in the next experience by creating a bad image. In fact, it is challenging for brands to recover from a bad image due to selling poor quality products. Hence, actions against receiving a bad image should be a priority from the start by focusing on the products' and services' perceived quality. Secondly, it may be the case that the invested area of quality is not considered relevant for the consumer. Companies can overcome this issue by investing in the areas, which are actually reaching the consumer. Thirdly, firms ought to consider that consumers are not able to make rational and objective judgements in terms of quality, as they do not have access to all relevant information. Thus, consumers refer to uncompleted available information for their quality judgements. Lastly, each consumer has different quality expectations, which challenges companies to fulfil the wide range of diverse expectations.

Researchers have examined the perceived quality of the service in Spanish sports centers and are stating that this factor exerts a particularly important influence on a gym's success (Castillo-Rodríguez, Onetti & Minguet, 2019). Furthermore, perceived quality represents an indispensable tool in management models as it is directly linked to the values and needs of the consumers. Consequently, high quality is

associated with the user's satisfaction and loyalty. Baker and Crompton (2000) state that it is crucial to focus on perceived quality in sport services as it is leading to loyalty. Further, it is an essential decision factor for consumers towards a gym chain and in the end an indicator of success (Papadimitriou & Karteroliotis, 2000).

### **2.3.3. Brand Loyalty**

Brand loyalty is the third asset of Aaker's brand equity framework (1996a) and refers to the consumers' extent of loyalty towards a brand. It is crucial to consider this asset when implementing marketing strategies since it is significantly contributing to the brand value. Thereby, a loyal customer base is not only driving sales but also simultaneously representing a significant competitive advantage as it builds entry barriers for competitors in the market. In contrast, a brand without a strong and loyal customer base is vulnerable while changing loyalties drain marketing efforts and further resources. As such, the positive impact on the marketing costs is a major benefit of considering brand loyalty in the brand's key assets. According to Aaker (1996b), it is cheaper to retain customers instead of acquiring new customers.

To increase brand loyalty companies can consult segmentation, a frequently used tool in brand marketing. When applied, the so-called loyalty segmentation can provide strategic and tactical consumer insights supporting the creation of a strong brand (Aaker, 1996a). The author further states that all markets, regardless of the industry, can be segmented into five categories in terms of loyalty. First, noncustomers describe customers who are buying products from different companies. The second segment is defined as price switchers, which includes customers who are price sensitive. Passively loyal customers constitute the third category. These customers are loyal to the brand due to their buying habits instead of substantiated reasons, such as an emotional bond to the brand. Fourth, the fence-sitters are indifferent between two or more brands. Lastly, the fifth category, the committed customers, are highly loyal and committed to one single brand.

In order to take advantage of all loyalty segments and to avoid losing any customers, companies are in constant need of improving their brand loyalty profile (Aaker, 1996a). More precisely, companies can achieve this by increasing the number of the customers that belong to the price switchers segment compared to noncustomers. Additionally, the group of the fence sitters should be extended. The same

applies to committed customers who should be tied to the brand as their loyalty exceeds the price sensitivity, through which this segment group is willing to pay more for the brand's services or products. Even though brands are aware of the importance of investing in the consumer segments, the segment of the passively loyal as well as the committed customers are often neglected as they are easily taken for granted. This is a wrong and potentially dangerous assumption since investing in these two segments represents great opportunities for companies to increase their brand value. Besides, from potentially lost opportunities, neglecting loyal customers can lead to them being enticed away by competitors.

Following, it is fundamental for brands to create strategies which enhance the loyalty of all consumer segments instead of prioritizing the already loyal segments (Aaker, 1996a). For instance, the loyalty of the passively loyals and fence sitters can be enhanced by applying the assets of brand awareness and perceived quality within the marketing strategy. A clearly defined brand identity is a useful tool for developing and strengthening their relationship. If brands have managed to develop and strengthen the relationship to passively loyals and fence sitters, the focus should be on the loyalty of these groups. Loyalty programs are a common representation of marketing initiatives to tie customers to their brand and increase their brand loyalty. One of the most prominent strategies, for instance, is the use of frequent-buyer programs.

Brand awareness and perceived quality are the prior steps of brand loyalty (García et al., 2017). According to Kaynak, Salman and Tatoglu (2008), brand loyalty is the prerequisite for creating a company's brand value. Thus, the authors state that all players in the sports and fitness industry focus on this specific brand asset. Especially gym chains all over the world are taking advantage of tools to make customers loyal (García et al., 2017). Among other initiatives, gym chains are aiming at increasing the consumer's community feelings by offering group trainings and classes at different skill levels as it has been found that sport communities are an effective marketing tool for increasing brand loyalty (Popp & Woratschek, 2016). In fact, brand communities, defined as "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p.412) are representing a fundamental touchpoint between brands and their consumers. As a result, interdependencies between the consumer and the brand occur. While the brand relationship is getting strengthened, the consumer leads the nature of the relationship (Algesheimer, Borle, Dholakia



& Singh, 2010; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Brands can benefit of these communities as they have been found to positively effect not just WOM but also the creation of brand loyalty (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Popp and Woratschek (2016) have built on these findings by determining the term of branded communities. Accordingly, these communities focus on a common shared interest resulting in a strong loyalty towards the brand owning the community. Even though brand communities are representing the fundamental basis for creating a strong sense of belonging and solidarity to the brand (Lee & Youn, 2009), branded communities are more valuable for creating loyalty in the context of the fitness industry (Popp & Woratschek, 2016).

#### **2.3.4. Brand Associations**

The fourth brand asset is classified as brand associations that describe “anything ‘linked’ in memory to a brand” (Aaker, 1991, p.109) These associations in the consumer's mind are triggered by being exposed to the brand. Brand associations can be diverse and can include, for instance, product attributes, feelings, services or brand symbols (Aaker, 1991). All associations have a level of strength and are driven by the overall brand identity. Thereby, the level of strength of the associations towards the brand depends on past experiences and exposures. In the end, brand associations are decisive for creating brand value. Among others, brand associations can be responsible for processing and retrieving information, creating either positive or negative attitudes towards the brand, and differentiating the brand from its competitors. Despite the diversity of brand associations, Kosslyn, Segar, Pani and Hillger (1990) argue that brand associations are caused by visual impressions in the first place because two third of the stimuli reaching the brain are visuals. Thus, brands should focalize on visual brand associations when creating marketing strategies (Aaker,1996a).

Even though it is often argued that brand associations are mainly caused by visual impressions, there are even more triggering sensations, such as smells and tastes (Kosslyn et al., 1990). Therefore, brand associations can be divided in different categories. Firstly, brand associations are based on attributes describing the visual brand appearance such as the logo (Aaker, 1996a). Depending on the individual values and needs of consumers, the visual appearance can be the reason for considering the brand. Secondly, brand associations can be based on benefits, either of functional or experimental nature. More specifically, beneficial associations describe the feelings of consumers while using the product. Thirdly,

brand associations can be of symbolic meaning, i.e. helping to achieve a social goal. Lastly, brand associations can further be viewed with respect to consumers' interests. Thereby, shared interests are used as an association factor by many companies for their consumers. This is supported by Popp and Woratschek (2016) arguing that sports-branded online communities with a shared interest not only evoke positive brand associations but also loyalty towards the brand.

### **2.3.5. Brand Equity and Social Media**

As outlined in the chapters before, social media provides outstanding opportunities for companies to improve brand communication and to reach consumers effectively (Godey et al., 2016). Due to the steadily growing importance of social media and digitalization, the creation of brand equity in the context of social media has been investigated by many researchers (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer, 2012; Godey et al., 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Kim & Ko, 2012; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015; Seo & Park, 2018). Thereby, the traditional CBBE model by Aaker (1991) and the framework by Keller (1993) have been examined in light of social media marketing.

Among others, Bruhn et al. (2012) have compared the influence of brand communication on social media and traditional media on brand equity. The findings reveal that both ways of brand communication have a major impact on the creation of brand equity. Whereas brand awareness is strongly influenced by traditional media, the authors state that social media brand communication is not just creating brand awareness but further influences the brand's image. In line with this are the findings of Seo and Park (2018) who have investigated brand equity and how it is influenced by social media marketing activities. Accordingly, social media marketing activities have a significant effect on brand awareness and brand image.

However, social media also represents a rather new opportunity for consumers to create and share content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Thereby, firm-generated and user-generated social media brand communication influence consumer-based brand equity differently (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). According to Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), both forms of social media brand communication have an influence on brand awareness and brand associations. Further, the authors argue that content created by social media users has a positive impact on brand loyalty as well as the perceived quality. This is

mainly reasoned by the fact that consumers place strong trust in their families' and friends' opinions, as they perceive it as being extremely credible. In addition, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) have further identified that social media content created by firms does not affect the brand assets of brand loyalty and perceived brand quality.

Kim and Ko (2012) have investigated brand equity and its creation through social media within the luxury fashion industry. According to their research, social media defines a new way of interactive two-way dialogue between companies within the luxury fashion industry and their consumers. Among others, entertainment, interaction and WOM have been defined as highly relevant social media marketing activities with a positive influence on brand equity. Godey et al. (2016) have revealed that social media has a significant impact on brand equity and its creation in the context of luxury brands. More specifically, social media marketing efforts of firms can positively impact brand equity and the brand asset dimensions of brand awareness and brand image. This again confirms the findings of Bruhn et al. (2012).

Yazdanparast, Joseph and Muniz (2016) have conducted one of the few studies investigating the impact of brand-based social media marketing activities on brand equity. The study examines the consumers' attitudes toward social media marketing activities of brands. The findings reveal that brand-based social media marketing activities have a fundamental impact on the consumer's attitude towards the brand, as they are positively associated with the perceived quality of the brand. Therefore, the authors propose the adjustment of the CBBE model for the twenty-first century by adding the notion of social media. Further it is argued that social media marketing activities should be considered as mediators of brand knowledge, for instance, brand awareness. Furthermore, Yazdanparast et al. (2016) claim that brand knowledge caused by social media marketing activities is shaping crucial brand-based associations. In fact, brand-based social media marketing activities are of great significance in terms of consumer-brand experiences on social media since they are shaping the consumers' brand attitude and following the elements of consumer-based brand equity.

Summarizing, the importance of social media marketing for building brand equity and creating communities around the brand has been scientifically acknowledged by a large number of studies (Goh,

Heng & Lin, 2013; Kim & Ko, 2012; Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Pham & Gammoh, 2015; Schau, Muñiz & Arnould, 2009; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015; Shen & Bissell, 2013; Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp & Agnihotri, 2014). While social media marketing activities have positive effects on brand equity (Kim & Ko, 2012) as well as brand attitudes (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015), they can also contribute to increasing a companies' brand awareness as well as strengthening brand reputation and trust (Kim & Ko, 2010; Laroche et al., 2012). Furthermore, social media marketing activities are found to improve brand loyalty (Shen & Bissell, 2013) and to fortify brand relationships (Trainor et al., 2014) through building communities (Goh et al., 2013; Schau et al., 2009). Overall, it can be concluded that social media interactions generate brand awareness. However, each social media platform creates unique brand associations in the the customers' minds and therefore has a different impact on the customer brand-based equity (Pham & Gammoh, 2015).

## **2.4. Conclusion of the Chapter**

One purpose of this chapter was to examine the milestones along the creation of social media and the implications that social media has on consumers' everyday consumption behavior. These aspects form a theoretical base knowledge for the present study but also underline the significance of knowledge on social media for brands. Each social media platform serves different communicative purposes, which have an influence on the way consumers are interacting with each other on the respective platform. Hence, a company must know the specific details of the platform in order to successfully reach them. However, the success of social media marketing is not defined by the reach of a marketing message but the consequences of it. Therefore, consumer engagement is of equal importance as the preliminary organization of social media marketing activities.

Consumer engagement is triggered if the social media marketing can elicit consumers' interest in a brand as well as a reaction to the content they are exposed to. It can take form of liking a post or following the account. Highly engaged consumers who post brand related UGC actively create eWOM. Their posts are available to all users within their social media networks and represent an influence on purchase intentions of their peers.

For gym chains, social media is crucial for success and business growth but also entails certain risk factors. For once, social media favors the entry of new competitors in the fitness industry in form of fitness influencers who are professionals in presenting themselves on social media platforms. Additionally, the hype around fitspiration content and the high interest of social media users in fitness related topics make it inevitable for a gym chain to be active on social media platforms in order to be successful. This, in turn, makes it difficult for a gym chain to differentiate itself substantially from other gym chains on social media. Next to a successful differentiation, gym chains need to be constantly aware of the motivations behind consumers' usage of social media and their engagement with brands. As scientific research shows the importance of a brand knowing its consumers' values and motivations, it is crucial to investigate whether gym chains are aware of the values that consumers deem the most important.

Although consumer engagement counts as one of the goals of social media marketing, the ultimate effect of reaching said goal is not always put in focus. Through consumer engagement, social media users are contributing to the brand's equity. Aaker's CBBE framework of 1991 incorporates the assumption that brand equity is built externally by the overall attitude of the customer towards the brand. The overall attitude is based on all interactions that happen between the customer and the brand and manifests itself in four brand assets: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand associations. However, although customer-based, CBBE is not solely created by the consumers without the brands doing. Instead, the brand benefits from implementing initiatives on social media that trigger the consumers to create CBBE.

Originally, Aaker's framework of CBBE did not consider social media but the influence of social media marketing on brand equity has been subject of various studies since then. However, there is a gap in the research on the application of this framework onto the influence of social media on brand equity of gym chains. It represents a relevant area of research due to two aspects. Firstly, social media is important for the fitness industry because it supports the appraisal of a fit and healthy lifestyle. User behavior on social media is thus relevant for gym chains because it can boost said lifestyle and therefore create a wider audience for gym chains, which support users in their fitness movement. Secondly, it is of interest to investigate how gym chains can effectively create emotional relationships with consumers on social

media, which is an important factor while supporting CBBE. From a pragmatic viewpoint, gym chains can be identified as facilities, with the exchange of money in turn for functional values at the business model's core. However, brands must be able to communicate emotional values over social media, since social media represents a digital space in which consumers are often more accessible for dialogue compared to offline touchpoints. Thus, it is the main research goal of this study to find out how gym chains are capable of marketing their functionality on social media, transmitted in an emotionally convincing way.

### **3. Methodology and Research Design**

This chapter depicts the entire methodology and decisions regarding the research design of this study. A research framework by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) is used in order to apply a visual structure to this chapter.

#### **3.1. Research Philosophy**

The previously outlined literature review forms the basis for the definition of the research philosophy of the present study. In this context, a research philosophy refers to the “development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.107). Reference is hereby made to two fundamental research theories in management research, namely ontology and epistemology. While ontology depicts the researcher's view of the nature of reality, epistemology outlines the researcher's view regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Research philosophies can be examined by means of research paradigms which are defining “a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.118). Further, concepts of research paradigms are guiding researchers in the choice of a method and are simultaneously affecting the way of how ontological and epistemological questions are answered

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994). All decisions in terms of the theoretical and practical research approach have been made in light of the topic of the present study, i.e. social media marketing of gym chains.

Taking the topic of this study into account, it is decided that a pragmatism research philosophy is the most suitable research philosophy. Pragmatism is a “logic of discovery” (Hansen, 2008, p.456) and is characterizing an observable phenomenon in which subjective meanings can result in acceptable knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009). This is supported by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) who suggest that researchers should conduct research in a field which they believe is interesting and that the data analysis should result in positive consequences for the researchers.

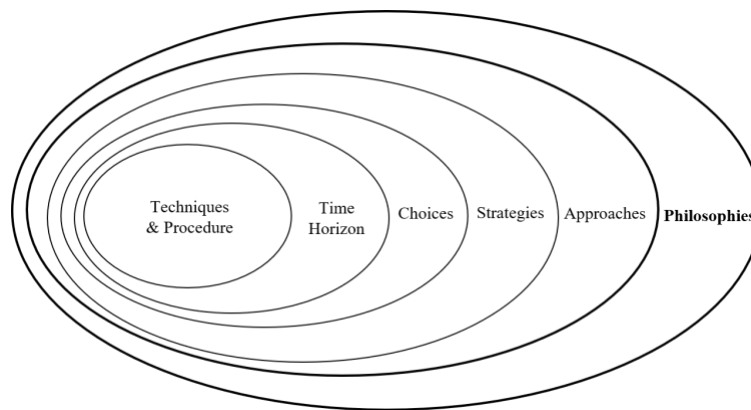


Figure 6: Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009), Philosophies Layer. Source: Authors' own Depiction.

### 3.1.1. Ontology

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define ontology as “the form and nature of reality” (p.108) which can be portrayed in two different positions: objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders et al., 2009).

On the one side, the objective position describes the way of how social entities exist independently from social actors (Saunders et al., 2009). Thereby, objectivism refers to the structural aspects of management contending that management is working in a similar way in all organizations. In contrast to the structure of the management, which may differ, the essence of the management function is believed to be similar in all organizations.

On the other side, the purpose of subjectivism is to emphasize the meanings of individuals attached to social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2009). More precisely, it determines that social reality is created by the perception and corresponding behavior of social actors. However, these can be different because every social actor interprets and evaluates situations differently based on his own view of the world. Thus, it is crucial for researchers to analyze the context of the situation as well as the reality behind it in order to understand every individual's actions (Remenyi, Williams, Money & Swartz, 1998). This assumption is linked to social constructionism, which is based on a subjective ontology, determining the motivations of social actors which are responsible for leading to their decisions and thus have to be extensively studied (Saunders et al., 2009).

In the study at hand, it is assumed that the nature of reality is perceived through a subjective ontology as the reality is socially constructed. Furthermore, the reality can change since it is depending on the subjective social actions of every individual (Saunders et al., 2009). This is also in accordance with the pragmatic research philosophy as the most important determinant within this philosophy is the opinion of consumers, which is a subjective term. In the present study, this opinion is linked to the users' perceptions and values caused by previous social experiences of social media marketing strategies of gym chains. Following, the subjective meanings motivating the actions of consumers, i.e. social media users, have to be explored and investigated in detail in order to be able to understand them.

### **3.1.2. Epistemology**

According to Saunders et al. (2009), the epistemological theory specifies the determination of acceptable knowledge and the way it is communicated. In that sense, the relevance of epistemology is more obvious than ontology and knowledge can be developed in three differing streams of thoughts. Namely, positivism, realism and interpretivism. While knowledge is based on facts that are considered as real within the positivist position, the realist position assumes that knowledge equals a scientific approach of knowledge creation. In contrast, interpretive epistemology acknowledges that individuals, i.e. social actors, interpret facts in different ways depending on circumstances and time. Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2009) argue, that different types of knowledge, e.g. numerical data, visual data, opinions, can be considered legitimate due to the multidisciplinary context of business and management. Despite of the contrary epistemological views, the specific epistemological assumptions have to be understood in the



context of the research method as well as the strengths and limitations of the research findings. Following, the researchers' own epistemological assumptions are determining what is considered legitimate.

In contrast to “resource” researchers, who are focusing less on the data collected, we position ourselves as “feelings” researchers (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, this study reflects an interpretivism epistemology justified with the focus of the present study lying on the individual social media user as well as the individual attitude towards social media marketing strategies of gym chains. Most authority is thereby put on the feelings and opinions of the research objects. As it is crucial to successfully point out the differences in the consumers' views in this context, it is required to adapt an empathic approach and consequently the consumers' perspective partially.

### **3.1.3. Methodology**

Within the epistemological view, methodological hermeneutics assemble a theory and method referring to the interpretation of human action (Saunders et al., 2009). The approach of methodological hermeneutics enables researchers to interact with consumers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, in order to successfully do so, experiential knowledge and engagement within the specific field of research is necessary. Therefore, the framework of the hermeneutic circle is further consulted, as it illustrates the researchers' process of developing understanding (Kezar, 2000). Accordingly, individuals are only able to develop an understanding by becoming more engaged and concerned about specific issues as soon as experiences and interactions are repeated and reflected.

As previously discussed, the present study is following a pragmatic research philosophy with a subjective ontology and interpretivism epistemology. For that reason, secondary and primary data is consulted. More precisely, secondary data is forming the basis of developing an understanding for social media marketing strategies of gym chains as well as social media users and their contribution to brand equity. In terms of primary data, a qualitative data collection technique is evaluated to be the most suitable method. Thereby, the term qualitative refers to any data collection and analysis technique that uses or generates non-numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009). Following, primary data is collected by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to supplement the acquired knowledge gained through consulting the secondary data. In this context, an interview refers to a goal-oriented dialogue

between two or more people (Kahn & Cannell, 1957). The qualitative interview ensures a precise observation of the expert and the consumers according to the pragmatic research philosophy as well the abductive research approach, which will be illuminated in the following part (Hansen, 2008).

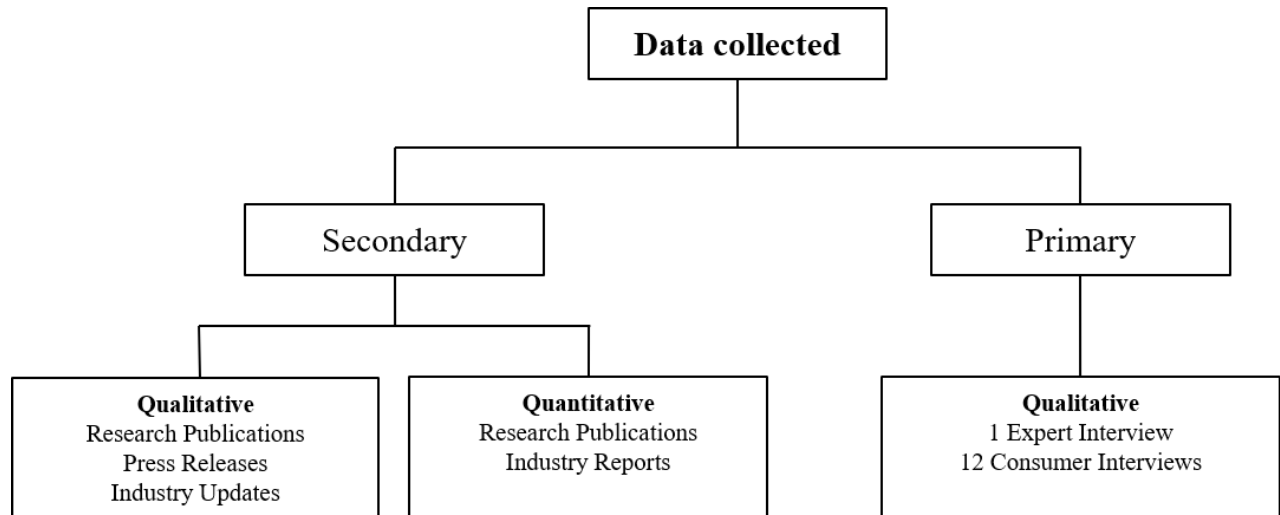


Figure 7: Overview of the Data collected. Source: Authors' own Depiction.

### 3.2. Research Approach

Based on the research onion model by Saunders et al. (2009), the research philosophy in the onion's outer layer is followed by the layer of the research approach. The research approach of a study fundamentally determines its structure as it specifies whether theories and hypotheses are established prior to the data collection, or if data collection is used in order to create new theories. Accordingly, it is generally differentiated between a deductive, inductive and abductive research approach, while the latter is the one that is applied in this research.

In contrast to a deductive research approach, induction and abduction both have the ultimate goal of creating hypotheses based on observations made (Hansen, 2008). Therefore, this study does not establish hypotheses regarding the relation of two variables before the data collection. Although knowledge on all the variables of social media marketing strategies, consumer engagement and brand equity has been

gained through literature, the final investigation does not have prior assumptions to the behavior that the variables show towards each other. Rather, the research approach of abductive reasoning implies “the creative act of constructing explanations to account for surprising observations in the course of experience” (Hansen, 2008, p.458). During this act, the best explanation possible is created for the observations made. As a result, the approach of abductive reasoning equals a “best prediction” approach, which implies to make the most probable conclusions of the information available. However, since information and, hence, observations, are perceived as generally incomplete, they can only be viewed as hypothetical inferences that are confirmed in their probability but not in their truth (Hansen, 2008).

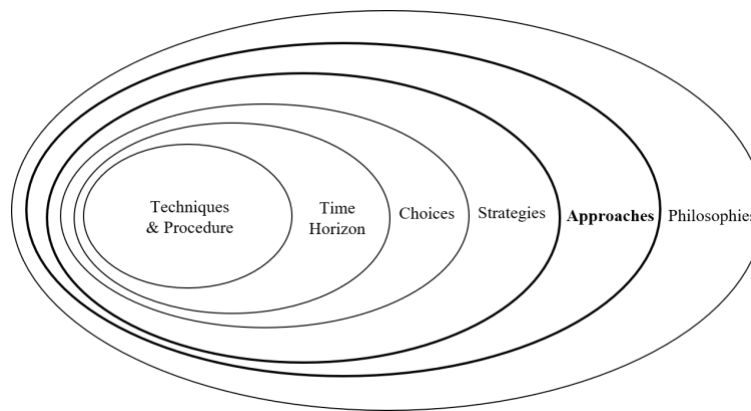


Figure 8: Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009), Approaches Layer. Source: Authors' own Depiction.

It can be differentiated between weak and creative abduction. While the first describes a situation in which researchers have known different elements of the hypotheses but put a new framework together resulting in new suggestions (Peirce, 1955), the latter refers to the process of creating a completely new concept and hypotheses due to a lack of existing knowledge structures and referent concepts (Hansen, 2008). Still, in both cases, new knowledge is created based on discovery and observations.

An abductive research approach is generally applied in the first stage of inquiry (Lorino, 2018). In a yet unknown field of research, it is the final goal to formulate plausible hypotheses on the relationships between variables that require testing. Although already established theories are forming the literature base for this research, their implications on variables such as consumer engagement with gym chains on social media are not previously assumed through the set-up and testing of hypotheses. This is because

the field of social media marketing strategies of gym chains in combination with CBBE has not yet been researched. The lack of research creates a doubtful situation, which elicits a need for explanation. In contrast to deduction and induction as research approaches, it is not required to try to find causality from the general to the particular (deduction) or vice versa (induction), but to create a new idea and knowledge around the existing information. More specifically, “abduction infers a cause from its effect” (Lorino, 2018, p.5). However, this has the consequence that abductive results are only accounted as valid until they are invalidated by new research results.

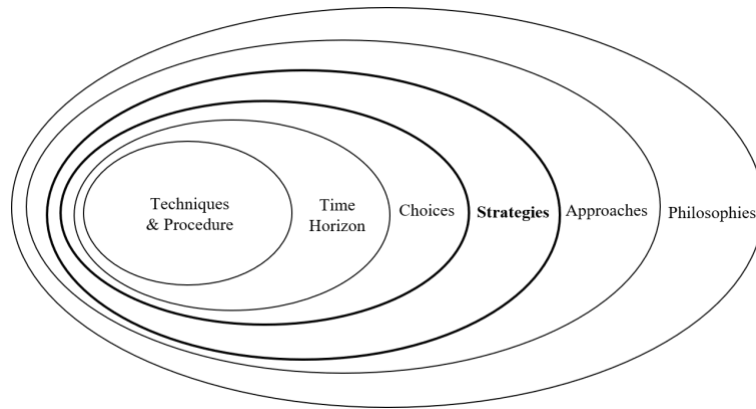
While abduction concerns the search for the best explanation for the information available, the authors Velázquez-Quesada, Soler-Toscano and Nepomuceno-Fernández (2013) appeal to the underlying individuality of defining the best explanation available. This is aligned with the subjective ontology and interpretivism epistemology that build the fundament for this study. According to the authors, the term should not be “the best explanation” but “the agent’s best explanation” (Velázquez-Quesada et al., 2013, p.509). As each researcher is a social agent who considers his past experiences and knowledge when creating new explanations for a new situation, observations are interpreted differently, and different explanations might be chosen as the best among different researchers.

### **3.3. Research Strategy**

The third layer of the research onion by Saunders et al. (2009) defines the research strategy of this study. While the first two layers’ purpose is to set the fundamentals of the research itself, the research strategy layer represents the first step in the research design process.

In order to define the adequate research strategy, the purpose of the planned research must be defined. In this case, the purpose is of exploratory nature. According to Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree (2014), exploratory research is done in the primary stage of a research process. This applies to this study, since the social media marketing strategies implemented by a gym chain and their influence on CBBE is a yet unresearched combination of variables and context. Further, it should be explored to which extent the gym chain is aware of CBBE and how it can be created on social media. Finally, it should be explored

how established theories on consumer engagement are applicable on social media and whether they are applicable in the context of the chosen sample as well as in reference to the social media presence of gym chains.



*Figure 9: Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009), Strategies Layer. Source: Authors' own Depiction.*

In order to find answers to the questions described above, in-depth semi-structured interviews will be held. This is aligned with Saunders et al. (2009), who name the interview of experts as one of the three ways to conduct data in an exploratory study. However, the nature of the conducted interviews will be two-fold. First, an interview with a marketing expert of the gym chain John Reed will be conducted, in order to gain knowledge through his expertise in the fitness industry. Second, the expert insights into John Reed will serve as an illustration of the importance of social media marketing within gym chains' total marketing efforts. Lastly, consumers will be interviewed in the same in-depth and semi-structured approach.

The exploratory research purpose is characterized through high flexibility (Saunders et al., 2009). This flexibility was necessary for the change of the consumer interview guide after realizing that only one expert interview will be conducted. As a result, one thematic block of the consumer interviews has been dedicated to the marketing expert's company John Reed. This measure enabled to directly compare the expert's intentions behind John Reed's social media marketing efforts concerning CBBE with the evaluations of said efforts by consumers.

### 3.4. Research Choice

This study's research is based on a single method, as only semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted. According to Sreejesh et al. (2014), depth interviews in qualitative research can be classified in standardized, semi-structured and unstructured. Developed interview guides lend structure to the interviews as they are divided into essential topics, but no explicit questions. Through this measure, a certain amount of flexibility and interview individuality is kept, which is aligned with the definition of a semi-structured depth interview. However, the expert interview and consumer interviews differ in their goals. For the consumer interviews, the focus lies on the consumer's individual usage of social media and the motivations that drive the usage. In addition, the exposure of the consumer to fitness related content on social media and his general opinion regarding the popular fitness lifestyle on social media platforms stand in focus of the interviews. In the last part of the consumer interviews, the social media presence of the marketing expert's company John Reed is explored and evaluated by the consumers, based on their own preferences and perceptions.

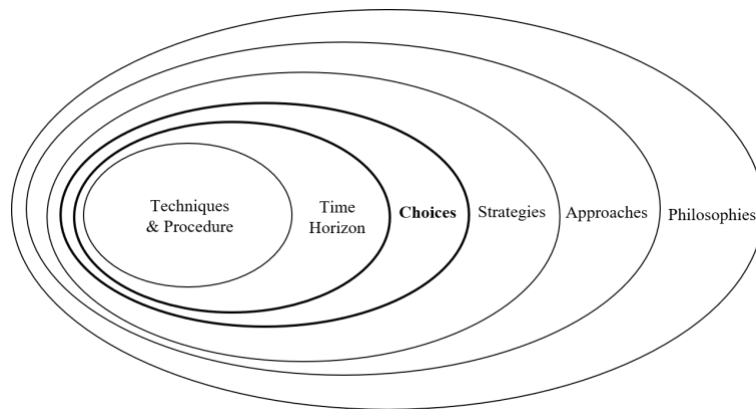


Figure 10: Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009), Choices Layer. Source: Authors' own Depiction.

The 12 interviewed consumers are chosen on several common criteria. Firstly, they all belong in the age group between 24 and 28 years. Applying the selection criteria age while searching for participants has three reasons. Firstly, the age level is an indicator for a similar level of digital literacy, which is important to guarantee that all interviewed consumers have similar digital competences and knowledge. Secondly, social media users of the same age are more likely to show similar usage behavior than users of different age levels. This creates a common base on which patterns in the consumers' answers can be identified

and analyzed. The third reason is the facilitated access to consumers of this age group within own social networks and the automatic fulfillment of the requirement for the participants to be current social media users.

In contrast to their social media usage, it is not an exclusion criterion that the consumers have to be current gym customers. Rather, it is important that they are generally pursuing some form of fitness routine in their daily life. With this choice, it can be investigated what kind of fitness option gym chains represent for customers, who are also aware of other fitness options in the industry and might also be current customers of other fitness brands. Besides, consumers who are past customers of gym chains are able to relate to experiences and the reasons why they have terminated the subscription.

According to Berg (2013), a sample's purpose is to represent a larger population. Through representativeness, it is possible to make inferences about the larger group based on the sample. A simple random sample, where every individual in the population has an equal chance to be part of the sample leads to the highest probability of representativeness. However, simple random samples are more often used in quantitative research, whereas "from the perspective of qualitative research, nonprobability sampling tends to be the norm" (Berg, 2013, p.50).

For non-probability sampling techniques, the suitable sample size should be dependent on the research question and purpose, as there are no specific rules (Saunders et al., 2009). However, it is suggested that a suitable sample size is reached once data saturation exists, as no or only few new insights are won with newly conducted interviews. Based on a proposition by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), 12 participants of in-depth interviews, who belong to a homogenous group, are deemed as sufficient for creating data saturation. This proposition especially accounts for the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling, which has been applied in this study. During purposive sampling, the researcher judges potential participants with common criteria according to their ability to contribute the most insightful answers and chooses them accordingly (Saunders et al., 2009). Within the technique of purposive sampling, the strategy of homogenous sampling has been chosen, which allows the study of this particular homogenous group at an extraordinary level of depth (Patton, 2002). Data collections with an underlying purposive sampling technique do not obtain the capability of making generalizations on the total

population based on the sample (Saunders et al., 2009). In this research, the investigated population can be defined as “European social media users between 24-28 years old” and the number of interviews fulfills Guest et al.’s (2006) requirement for data saturation. Data saturation, in turn, indicates a “solid understanding of a given phenomenon” (Guest et al., 2006, p.77), which can lead to the creation of hypothetical inferences through choosing the best explanations available, as it is aligned with the abductive research approach of this study.

### 3.5. Time Horizon

This study has the nature of a screenshot-like insight into specific consumer behaviors and expert knowledge. At first, the expert is interviewed at one specific point in time. Afterwards, John Reed’s Instagram profile is evaluated by the interviewed consumers in order to analyze the effectiveness of the brand’s social media marketing strategies. The consumer interviews are held during a short period of seven days in total, which guaranteed similar external conditions for all participants in terms of economy and politics amongst others.

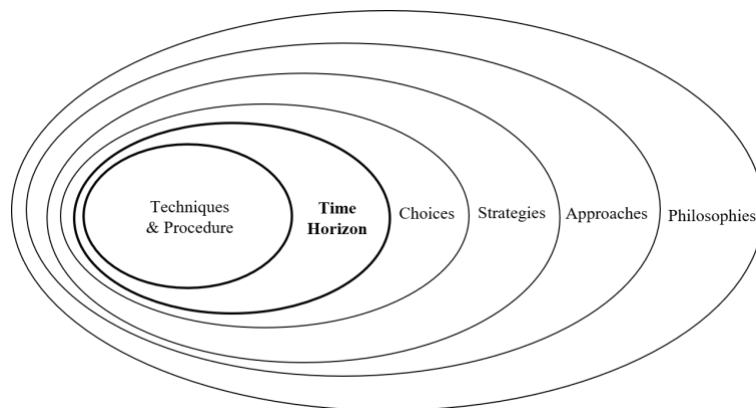


Figure 11: Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009), Time Horizon Layer. Source: Authors’ own Depiction.

A cross-sectional study always depicts a phenomenon at a specific point in time, and thus is dependent on the situation in which the data collection happens (Saunders et al., 2009). In case of this research, the interviews are conducted during a time in which the outbreak of the Coronavirus greatly impacts all gym chains’ current social media marketing goals as well as the current living situations of consumers.



However, the expert as well as the interviewees are encouraged to base their statements on their usual routines and strategies before the precautions to avoid the spread of the Coronavirus started. Nevertheless, both expert as well as consumers find themselves in exceptional situations at the time of the conducted interviews.

### 3.6. Techniques and Procedure

With all outer layers of the research onion defined, the core of the research onion is reached. Here, the distinct procedure and technique used for this research are highlighted, previously narrowed down and justified by the outer layers of the research onion by Saunders et al. (2009).

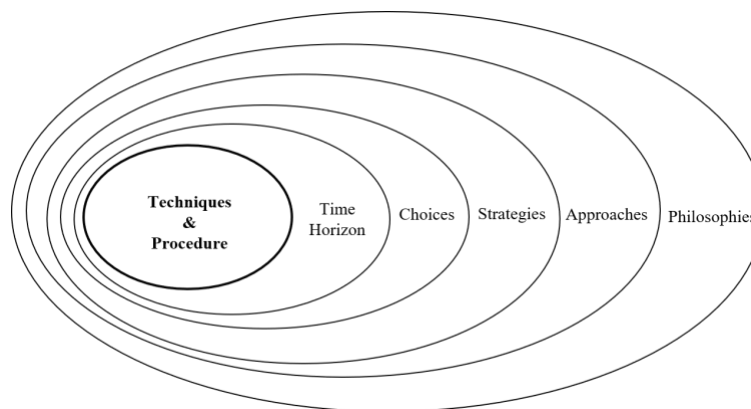


Figure 12: Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009), Techniques & Procedure Layer. Source: Authors' own Depiction.

Personal interviews have various advantages compared to other qualitative research methods. One main advantage is that the interviewee has a feeling of secured anonymity and might thus answer more freely. As Malhotra, Nunan and Birks (2017) point out, individual in-depth interviews lift the interviewee from the pressure to answer conform to expectations or moral standards, which are present in the situation of group interviews.

Further, the depth of the conducted interviews is reflected in four distinct areas (Malhotra et al., 2017). Firstly, the deep knowledge of a consumer on his daily life events is desired by the interviewer. In this

case, the consumer is the only one with deep knowledge on their daily social media usage and the role that social media plays for his communication with friends but also for his consumption. According to Bogner and Menz (2009), an expert is justified in his role because of his contextual situation. Therefore, the interviewed consumers can as well be defined as experts of their daily life, having specific contextual knowledge that is only available to them. This is supported by McCracken (1988), who points out that interviews are the most effective form to understand the individual view the consumer has on the world.

Secondly, in-depth interviews try to reach a deep level of context (Malhotra et al., 2017). This is done by testing contextual boundaries in which the daily consumer actions are happening. To reach contextual boundaries, the interviewer asks the consumer for his opinion regarding an issue without adding a specific context at first. In a second question, the consumer is then asked to affirm his opinion in a hypothetical situation, for instance under consideration of gym chains instead of companies in general.

Thirdly, a multi-faceted depth should characterize interviews (Malhotra et al., 2017). By trying to create a multi-faceted, holistic overview of a topic, the interviewer tries to achieve the most varied answers as possible, which shed light on every aspect of a specific context. This also implies a constant follow up on answers in order to make the consumer rethink his answer and maybe discover another facet that has not been considered in the primary answer. Additionally, the consumers are assured before the interviews that there are no right or wrong answers, and that every insight shared is useful. This has been done to avoid any thematic limitations or expectations the consumer might have in mind. Instead, their answering should be freely and solely based on how the question is interpreted at that point in time.

Next to the implications of in-depth interviews for the interviewees, the depth of the held interviews also leads to an interviewer reflection (Malhotra et al., 2017). This aspect is based on the belief that interviewers are unconsciously expecting certain answers and hence might be limited in receiving answers that differ from their expectations. However, the aspect of interviewer reflection also leads to adaptations of the interviewing procedure along the process, as flaws in the interviewer's actions can be reduced and improved. Here, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews as a research method is beneficial.

Due to the implications of the Coronavirus outbreak, all interviews are held via Skype phone or video call and are audio recorded. Usually, in-depth interviews are best conducted face-to-face in person as this creates an atmosphere of trust that motivates the participant to share his private knowledge and experiences (Saunders et al., 2009). Besides, non-verbal communication by the participants were only observable during the interviews held via video chat. However, as visual cues are not applicable in all interviews, they are not further considered during the data analysis.

### **3.6.1. Developing the Expert Interview Guide**

At first, the interview guide for the expert interview is created. The guide starts with an interview part that is not recorded and which is about the research objective and structure of the interview. This first part is included in order to set general guidelines for the expert participating in the interview. Further, it is necessary to clarify the confidentiality of data analysis and interpretation. For analysis depth purposes, the expert permitted the reference to the company's website and social media accounts throughout the analysis of both expert and consumer interviews.

After starting the audio recording, the first thematic block is about the expert's position within John Reed and the role that social media plays regarding the brand's entire marketing performance. According to Arsel (2017), an interview guide is helpful for using a suitable vocabulary and language style for the given context of the interview. This is why there has been extensive research on the gym chain John Reed, its website and social media presence in advance of conducting the interview. Further, the expert is asked which social networks are used and which one bears the highest potential for the brand. Concludingly, the intention of the first thematic block is to gain insights into John Reed's consumer segment or segments and their potential targeting on social media.

The second thematic block of the interview guide concerns the competitive landscape the gym chain is positioned in. Thus, the expert is asked for his general evaluation of the fitness industry and whether fitness influencers on social media represent a threat for John Reed or not. Additionally, the expert is asked for his opinion on the popular fitness lifestyle, that is omnipresent on social media networks and around which an increasing online community interacts.

The last thematic block of the expert interview focuses on the four brand assets within the CBBE framework by Aaker (1991). Without the expert's explicit knowledge of each brand asset, all four assets are covered with several questions. Here, the aim is to identify the asset(s) the brand puts the most focus on, and how social media is used as a marketing tool in order to create said brand asset through CBBE.

Although thematic blocks with potential questions are set up in the expert interview guide, the interviewer is free to change the order of the questions freely, to make follow-up questions or to intensify the conversation on a specific topic if the expert raises it. This is in alignment with the concept of semi-structured in-depth interviews, which maintain a level of flexibility that enables the mentioned options. Based on the expert's wish, the interview is held in German, which is why the interview guide is created in German as well. However, an English version can be found in Appendix 1.

### **3.6.2. Developing the Consumer Interview Guide**

In the second stage of the process, the interview guide for the consumer interviews is created. Similar to the expert interview guide, the first part of the guide is unrecorded and contains information on the research project, the following interview and its confidentiality. Further, all participants are asked for their confirmation to publish their first name, age and other personal information such as current place of living in the data overview and analysis. In order to achieve the data saturation mentioned by Guest et al. (2006), a similar set of questions must be asked, and the answers of the participants must be independent from each other. Thus, the interview guide contains thematic blocks that are covered throughout the interview and the interviews are held individually in one-to-one conversations.

After starting the audio record, the participants are asked to give a short introduction on themselves, including their name, age, profession, place of living as well as hobbies. This is done to enter the conversation and to give the participant a comfortable feeling. Nevertheless, the demographic information is highly important in order to find patterns that might be in relation to similar answers identified in the coming thematic blocks of the interview.

The following short section is about the attitude of the participant towards fitness and his current routines and methods. Here, it is necessary to identify current gym customers, non-customers and the fitness

methods that are pursued in addition to or as a substitute for gyms. While elaborating on present and past fitness routines, the participant is asked to evaluate the importance that fitness has in his daily life as well as in regard to his achieved goals and success. Afterwards, a thematic change happens from fitness to social media, entering the next block of the interview guide. Participants are asked to evaluate the importance of social media from a scale of 1-10 and whether they would define themselves as heavy social media users or not. Further questions of this block concern the most used social media networks and whether the participant follows any fitness related brands on these networks.

In the following, the participants are asked questions about their social media usage and their motivations behind it. The intention is to include the motivations and antecedents for social media usage identified by Tsai and Men (2013) and to investigate whether they apply to the participants or not. Furthermore, it should be examined whether the behavior of the participants on social media is coherent with statements by Belk (2013) in his theory on the Extended Self in a digital environment or the congruity theory (Islam et al., 2018). At this point, it is important to point out that although the participants knew the research topic of the study in advance, they are not aware of the specific theories that are applied. This also includes Aaker's (1991) theory of CBBE, which is the center of attention in the following section. Here, participants share insights into their interaction with brands from any industry on social media, but also with fitness brands specifically.

As the expert interview is conducted before the consumer interviews, it has been possible to dedicate the last section of the consumer interview to John Reed. This was not planned originally since more than one expert interview had been intended to conduct. However, the Coronavirus and its implication led to the unavailability of many potential experts. Nonetheless, this unplanned situation leads to the benefit of establishing a direct evaluation of John Reed's social media presence. With several experts as interview partners, this kind of analysis depth would not have been achievable. In order to be prepared, the participants are asked one day before the interview to spend a few minutes to look at the Instagram profile of John Reed and to focus on first impressions and opinions. Like this, the consumers know that the brand will be part of the interview but are not aware of the scope of its involvement in this research or the previously held expert interview. Before talking about the participants' impressions and evaluations of the social media profile, it is necessary to identify which participants had prior knowledge on John

Reed. After terminating the audio recording, the participants are asked to give feedback on the interview and the clarity of all questions and topics covered. This is done in order to intensify the interviewer reflection aspect in depth interviews mentioned by Malhotra et al. (2017) and potentially improve flaws in the following interviews. In contrast to the expert interview, all consumer interviews are held in English, which facilitates their analysis and comparability. The consumer interview guide can be seen in Appendix 2.

### **3.7. Data Analysis Method**

Qualitative data is “based on meanings expressed through words” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.482). Due to the richness and fullness of qualitative data, a beneficial characteristic is that the subject can be explored in-depth (Robson, 2002).

Since the study at hand adopts a qualitative research design, the way of how the qualitative data is collected has significant implications for the analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). Overall, it may be argued that the development of theory from data is the ultimate goal of researchers who are carrying out a qualitative research. The gathered data, however, needs to be analyzed and the meanings have to be understood in order to make the data useful for the present research. In order to achieve this goal, qualitative data analysis procedures are utilized as an invaluable tool. Thereby, qualitative data can be analyzed by consulting one of three approaches, namely the deductive, inductive and abductive approach which is, in the end, depending on the respective study’s research approach (Hansen, 2008).

The collected data has to be subjected preliminary preparations before an analysis according to scientific standards is possible. Within qualitative research, non-standardized interviews are usually audio-recorded and afterwards transcribed. Researchers do so by reproducing the spoken interview in a written form using the actual words that have been said (Saunders et al., 2009). A common tool to ensure the interviews’ understanding is data cleaning. Within this method, the transcription is made accurate and mistakes, for instance languages mistakes, are removed. Subsequently, data is non-standardized and

complex because it is expressed through words. In the next step, data is summarized and classified into categories within the analysis by using conceptualization (Healey & Rawlinson, 1994).

In line with the above-discussed methods of data preparation for analysis, the collected data is examined. Derived from the study's abductive research approach, an abductive analysis approach of the data is applied, called abductive reasoning (Hansen, 2008). Within this creative approach of data analysis, theory is generated from qualitative observations. Hence, the first step of the analysis is to collect data and then explore the results by looking at which topic and issues to concentrate on (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Since all interviews are audio-recorded, the analysis starts with transcribing the audio files. To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, adequate software is used. The software Otter is applied for transcribing the English consumer interviews whereas Amberscript is applied for the German expert interview. Data cleaning is executed where language mistakes have obstructed the overall understanding. Further, it is ensured that the transcription of the software was accurate. Where necessary, the transcription errors of the software are corrected, which equals a further form of data cleaning (Saunders et al., 2009). Subsequently, all 13 transcripts are read thoroughly. In order to analyze the transcripts of the interviews, two different methods are implemented. The transcripts of the expert interview and consumer interviews can be found in Appendix 3 and 4 respectively.

The expert interview is analyzed manually in an Excel sheet. More specifically, the transcript is summarized and categorized into the categories based on the expert interview guide. Finally, phrases and sentences belonging to the same topic are coded into text pieces and allocated to the specific category (Saunders et al., 2009). This analysis method is justified by the fact that only one expert interview is conducted. In contrast, the consumer interviews are analyzed with the software NVivo which facilitates the identification of patterns. Through the creation of nodes belonging to several categories, all consumer statements are coded and thus grouped for each node (see Appendix 5). This facilitates the overview as well as the analysis of the collected data. In order to enhance the analyzed patterns, relevant quotes of the consumers are highlighted and interpreted accordingly.

### **3.7.1. Credibility of Research Findings**

A good research design is characterized by ensuring credible findings and is fundamental for every scientific study (Saunders et al., 2009) as it demonstrates that a genuine and accurate representation of the investigated topic is given (Shenton, 2004). With regard to the credibility of research findings, Guba (1981) has developed four quality criteria for trustworthiness within qualitative research. More precisely, the author states that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are prerequisites for a trustworthy study.

Saunders et al. (2009) also determined the importance of the quality criteria of credibility in research findings. Accordingly, credibility is an indicator of the findings' quality and is the first aspect which must be established and is linked to reliability and validity. While reliability specifies "the extent to which [...] data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Lowe, 2008, p.109), validity deals with the question whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about (Saunders et al. 2009). Further, validity provides insights about the relationship between two variables and whether it can be defined as a causal relationship.

Applied to the present study, a comprehensive knowledge on social media marketing, consumer engagement and brand equity is obtained through the literature review. This ensures that the research findings of the semi-structured interviews are credible. The acquired knowledge builds the foundation of the interview guides. Subsequently, the guides are used to structure the dialogues with the interviewees. The thorough examination of all thematic areas before and during the interview enables the credible evaluation of the responses that constitute the qualitative data. Further, the credibility of the findings is increased as the respondents are informed about the topic prior of the interview, making it possible for them to engage with the subject.

The second quality criterion is defined as transferability of the research findings and discusses if the findings can be applied to other situations besides the specific research situation (Shenton, 2004). However, this represents a challenge in qualitative research, as the sample sizes are rather small and findings dependent on the context of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2014). To address this difficulty, researchers are required to provide sufficient contextual depth of the study to facilitate transferability.



This is the prerequisite for determining if the findings can be legitimately transferred to other frameworks' settings (Shenton, 2004).

This study utilizes an extensive description of the investigated topic as well as the research and data collection method in order to lead to a profound understanding, which represents a crucial prerequisite to make transferences to other studies (Shenton, 2004). By means of a detailed description of the illustrated company John Reed, all required information regarding the research are provided which facilitates the understanding and transfer of the results. With respect to the qualitative data collection method, i.e. interviews, information about the participants and the overall interview procedure is provided supporting the transferability of this study.

Dependability defines the third quality criterion and is a parameter of reliability that provides insights about the repeatability and consistency of a study's findings (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Thereby, it is closely linked to the criterion of credibility as dependability ensures reliability to a certain extent (Shenton, 2004). Dependability can be generated if there is more than one researcher (Silverman, 2014). Therefore, conducting this study in pairs allows to analyze and compare the same data set from two separate perspectives ensuring dependability of the findings. Due to consulting an auditing approach, the study at hand provides findings (Bryman & Bell, 2014). In line with this approach is that all reports and documents of the whole research process, e.g. audio files, interview transcripts and data analysis documents, are saved to assure future research. Furthermore, the whole study process, including the research design and its implementation, is explained in detail to ensure the readers' understanding and is complemented with the provision of an effective evaluation of the research. All these aspects contribute to the dependability of the findings (Shenton, 2004).

Lastly, confirmability builds the fourth quality criterion of research findings and is „the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity” (Shenton, 2004, p.11). Confirmable findings demonstrate that the study has been carried out in good faith by the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2014). To achieve confirmability, researchers must implement actions to demonstrate that the findings emerge from the data and not their own predispositions (Shenton, 2004). More specifically, the findings have to

emphasize that the results are based on the respondents' opinions are not the desired results of the researchers. Hence, the researcher's bias must be completely overcome.

In this context, this study is providing confirmable results as it is characterized by a thorough explanation of as well as argumentation for every chosen method and approach. In addition, limitations of the study and further research approaches are illuminated, which also supports the reader's understanding of every decision. Simultaneously, the reader can assess the extent to how far the data and its emerging framework may be accepted (Shenton, 2004).

### **3.7.2. Ethics of the Research Design**

Researchers are confronted with ethical issues in every scientific research (Bryman & Bell, 2014). It is crucial to consider these issues when designing the research (Saunders et al., 2009) as they directly relate to the integrity of the research and the disciplines involved (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Thus, ethical issues implied by the research design must be carefully evaluated (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, Bryman and Bell (2014) identify eleven categories of ethical principles. Even though all categories must be considered when conducting a research, six, partly overlapping, categories were considered particularly important for the study at hand due to the qualitative data research approach. These categories are harm to participants, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and lastly, honesty and transparency.

Firstly, the category of harm to participants refers to “the potential to cause harm through the research process and the need to ensure physical and psychological well-being” (Bryman & Bell, 2014, p.71). Even if there is a chance of harming the respondents before, during and after the research process, the well-being of the respondents is always the priority. This is interlinked to the criteria of informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. Taking part in the research is voluntary and every participant is informed on the usage of data before the interview. Besides, all information regarding the participants as well as the gathered data itself is kept private and is treated strictly confidential. Lastly, every stage of the interview process is communicated to the participants openly and honestly which ensures the criteria of honesty and transparency. Conclusively, the well-being of the participants is respected at all times and ethical issues are treated responsibly.

## 4. Illustration of John Reed

The following chapter provides a thorough illustration of the German gym chain John Reed. Subsequently, these insights are complemented by the evaluation of the expert interview. Further, the social media marketing strategy of the gym chain is investigated in the context of CBBE.

### 4.1. John Reed

John Reed is a German gym chain headquartered in Berlin belonging to the RSG Group. Founded in 1997, the RSG Group represents a global innovation leader in the fitness industry by providing fitness and sports related products and services to around 2 million customers in 48 countries (RSG Group GmbH, n.d.-a). Besides John Reed, further gym chains such as McFit and High5 but also other fitness related brands such as the virtual training brand Cyberobics constitute the RSG Group. The John Reed fitness studios are referred to as clubs and so far, the company maintains 26 clubs in 7 countries across Europe (John Reed, n.d.-a). Even though, the majority of clubs are located in Germany, there are additional studios in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland and Turkey. John Reed describes itself as a fitness music club focusing not just on the functional values of a gym but equally on lifestyle aspects. As it is stated within the company's corporate profile, the John Reed business model consists of three core values: training, music and design (John Reed Fitness Music Club, n.d.-a).

The combination of these values is supposed to create an extraordinary workout atmosphere called the “John Reed Feeling” (John Reed Fitness Music Club, n.d.-a). Thereby, the gym's slogan “Not Your Average Gym” reflects the John Reed feeling (John Reed, n.d.-d). As such, the company aims to differentiate itself from their competitors “*With more urban flair, more community, more coolness and style*” (John Reed, n.d.-d). The John Reed feeling is supposed to be the inner drive for more motivation, happiness and power as well as for more success with the customer's workout in the community.

Three different membership packages, i.e. “Basic”, “Silver” and “Gold”, make John Reed accessible to a broad target group (John Reed, n.d.-c). With 25€ of a monthly membership fee the “Basic” membership represents the cheapest package including unlimited access to one chosen club and the diverse course

offer, i.e. live and virtual courses as well as access to John Reed events. The monthly price of the “Silver” package totals 30€ and enables the members to train in every John Reed, McFit and High5 studio Europe-wide as well as to access all advantages of the “Basic” membership. An automatic upgrade to the “Gold” Membership is offered after two years of being a “Silver”-member. The most expensive package is called “Gold” and costs 40€ per month. It includes all advantages of the “Silver” membership and in addition the user gets four individual training units and is permitted to bring a friend to each workout.

The target group of John Reed can be derived from the relatively low subscription cost with an average monthly price of 32€. Thus, it is assumed, that the John Reed concept addresses young people who like sports, exercise a lot, but also appreciate cultural activities such as music and art events.

#### 4.1.1. Values of John Reed

As briefly mentioned above, the three core values of John Reed, fitness, music and design (see Table 1) are responsible for creating the John Reed feeling (John Reed, n.d.-b).

Training	Music	Design
Great variety of training possibilities (e.g. cardio, equipment, free weight, functional training)	Central element in every club	Unique exotic interior design with club atmosphere for every studio
Live classes with trainers teaching individual programs (e.g. burning, muscle building, mobility, relaxation, cycling)	Different music styles (e.g. electro, hip hop, pop)	Influenced by different cultures, design elements of historical eras, street art of urban metropolises
Virtual CYBEROBICS courses	Customized to each studio and the time of the day	Unique mix of colors, shapes and materials
Courses available between 6am and 12pm in special course rooms	International live DJ sessions twice a week in every club	Art works of local artists such as graffiti art and colorful patchwork carpets
Courses are based on different training levels and goals	DJ-sets can be streamed and downloaded online	Comfort
Personal training sessions	24/7 online John Reed radio with different music styles	Lighting concept for club atmosphere
<b>John Reed Feeling</b>		

Table 1: Core Values of John Reed (John Reed, n.d.-b, John Reed, n.d.-c, John Reed, n.d.-d). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

“More Than Fitness” represents a significant sentence summarizing the training experience in John Reed clubs. According to John Reed (n.d.-b), the “*clubs turn [the] workout into an experience [with] innovative training opportunities*”. The second core value points out the importance of music within the John Reed studios. “More Than A Club” refers to the unique club atmosphere within every John Reed studio (John Reed, n.d.-e). At John Reed (n.d.-e) music is perceived as “*the motor for greater motivation during training*” and the diverse music genres in the clubs, live DJs as well as the John Reed Radio are supposed to increase the motivation and performance. Finally, the design aspect is illuminated as the third core value (John Reed, n.d.-f). In this context, the slogan “More Than A Club” refers to the exceptional design elements of the clubs comprised of a diverse mix of textures, sculptures and art works from all over the world.

#### **4.1.2. Social Media Marketing of John Reed**

John Reed makes use of three social media platforms within their social media marketing. Namely, Instagram (John Reed Fitness, n.d.-a), Facebook (John Reed Fitness, n.d.-b) and YouTube (John Reed Fitness Music Club, n.d.-b). On all three platforms of John Reed, fitness, music, community and design related content is shared multiple times a week. For the sake of completeness, it has to be mentioned that selected clubs in Germany maintain their individual accounts on Instagram and Facebook besides the official account. However, these accounts will not be considered in the following analysis for two reasons. Firstly, it is believed that their social media marketing presence cannot contribute to valuable results of the study at hand due to the small reach of the single accounts. Secondly, it would go beyond the scope of this work to analyze the social media marketing strategy of each individual sub-account. Even though, John Reed is not represented on any other social media platform, e.g. Twitter and LinkedIn, the RSG Group does maintain a LinkedIn account where content related to all brands of the group is shared (RSG Group, n.d.-b).




	Account name	Followers*	Total posts*	Ø likes*	Post types*	Content*
<b>Facebook</b> 	@JohnReedFitnessClub	29,628	891 timeline photos	82**	Photos, videos, links	Training tips, fitness events (trainings), opening events, John Reed parties, music
<b>Instagram</b> 	@johnreedfitness_	30,200	520 posts	853**	Photos, videos, stories, reposts	Workouts, opening events, clubs (functional focus, interior design, community, John Reed parties, Q&As, give-aways
<b>YouTube</b> 	@JohnReedFitnessMusic Club	587 subscribers	58 videos	1**	Videos	Workouts, opening events, parties, DJ sets

Table 2: Social Media Networks John Reed (John Reed Fitness, n.d.-a, John Reed Fitness n.d.-b, John Reed Fitness Music Club, n.d.-b. Source: Authors' own Depiction). \* as of 11.05.2020. \*\* Ø of the last 10 posts.

Taking all three John Reed social media accounts into consideration, it can be observed that Instagram represents the social network with the highest interaction. More than 30,000 Instagram users follow the brand's account (John Reed Fitness, n.d.-a). Hence, it is the social network with the most followers. John Reed reports about their clubs, workouts, community and music events in 520 shared posts. The network with the second most followers is Facebook (John Reed Fitness, n.d.-b). The shared photos, videos and links inform about 29,000 Facebook users about upcoming events, music and their studios. John Reed also regularly shares training tips, specific workouts and questions about the fitness lifestyle on Instagram and Facebook. Although Instagram and Facebook have almost the same number of followers, Instagram is the most popular social media platform. This assumption is in line with the average amount of likes since these are more than ten times higher on Instagram compared to Facebook. Whereas the content shared on Facebook and Instagram is similar, the videos on YouTube mainly cover fitness topics. Lately, John Reed has started to share several home workouts videos daily on their YouTube channel (John Reed Fitness Music Club, n.d.-b). However, it is assumed that this is due to the current Coronavirus crisis. Until the beginning of April 2020, the channel was used infrequently, and the 15 videos shared until then have mainly focused on music and events. This is also represented by the engagement metric as YouTube videos only account for one like on average per video.

The brief analysis of John Reed's SNSs reveals that Instagram is clearly the most frequently used network. Thus, it is assumed, that it represents the most important social media platform for the gym chain. Therefore, it is determined that John Reed's social media marketing is observed and evaluated on the brand's Instagram presence alone.

## **4.2. Expert Interview**

The interviewed expert is Martin Meyer who works as team lead marketing at John Reed (see Appendix 3). The interview is divided into three thematic blocks according to the interview guide presented in Appendix 1. The first block includes questions relating to the brand John Reed, its marketing as well as the integration of social media marketing into the overall marketing strategy. In the second part, the competition in the fitness industry is examined more closely and in the third part the goals of John Reed's social media marketing are discussed under the consideration of CBBE. The evaluation is supported by direct quotes from the interviewee in order to emphasize fundamental aspects of the interpretation. A translation of the highlighted German quotes can be found in Appendix 6.

### **4.2.1. Social Media Marketing of John Reed**

*“With John Reed we have developed a concept which is more into the lifestyle, urban and a bit cooler, where it's all about being at a nice place while working out with pleasant people and where you have fun.”*

This statement by Martin Meyer provides insights about the idea behind the brand John Reed. He explains that the concept of John Reed has been developed in order to reach a bigger target group. Thereby, the three core values of training, music and design, which have already been identified in the preliminary research, are supplemented with a fourth value being highly influential on the brand's identity. According to the expert, the fourth brand value is the community which is “*carefully maintained through organizing events regularly*” (see Figure 13).

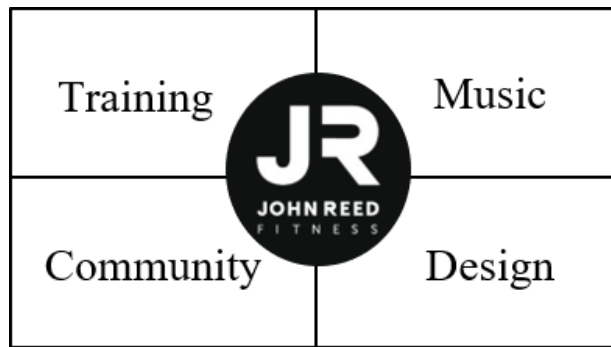


Figure 13: Values John Reed (M. Meyer, Personal Interview, March 26, 2020). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

Regarding the target group Martin Meyer confirms it is rather young, between 18 to 40 years old. Thereby, John Reed tends to target “[...] *more lifestyle-oriented people, an urban audience, people who also like to go out, listen to music, meet people and for whom sport is an important part of life, but not the most important*”. Further, the gym chain is supposed to attract not just men but also women. Besides the age of the target group, the expert states that the target group is a very “[...] *social-media-oriented target group, both in terms of age and lifestyle*” but that there is no “*need to be well-off financially*”. This draws the line under the importance of John Reed’s social media marketing. Throughout the entire interview, Martin Meyer stresses the enormous meaning of social media for John Reed within the marketing mix. Besides the reason that TV commercials would be too expensive since John Reed has only 26 studios Europe-wide, he argues that a key benefit of social media is the possibility of targeting customers locally. This results in social media as the most efficient advertising channel. However, he emphasizes that not every social media platform is equally relevant to John Reed. He stresses that Instagram is by far the most important channel which is also reasoned in the story format (see Figure 14). Besides sharing daily content in the story, e.g. workouts and news, the story format enables to repost the content shared by consumers which makes Instagram even more valuable for the brand.



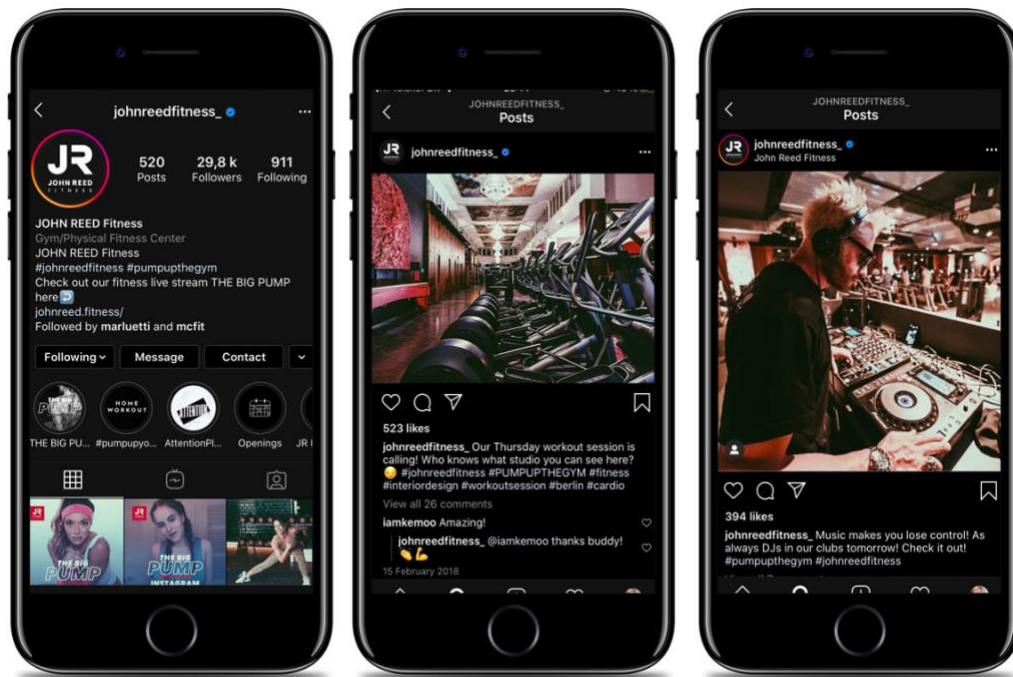


Figure 14: Instagram of John Reed (John Reed Fitness, n.d.-a). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

The expert points out that Instagram represents major benefits for John Reed as it is possible to promote the four core values on an emotional level due to the possibility of sharing moving images and videos. Another crucial benefit is the interactivity of the platform since it allows the brand and the consumers to get in touch with each other easily. Moreover, it is the platform offering the most efficient local targeting. With respect to Facebook he explains that even though *“it is still huge and especially for advertising and paid content it is still important”* it is not as important for John Reed’s social media marketing as Instagram.

#### 4.2.2. Fitness Industry

In the context of the fitness industry, two main aspects are addressed during the expert interview. On the one hand, the competition within the whole industry and on the other hand the threat of competition emanating from fitness influencers.

Overall, Martin Meyer explains that the competition is extremely strong. Especially in the discount segment there are many providers making it an extremely competitive and fast-paced environment. Even

though John Reed is positioned in the “*premium discount segment*” the expert does not consider any real competition in the whole industry due to the brand’s unique business model. The gym chain provides the customers “*value for money in a cool lifestyle concept*” which differentiates the brand strongly from the competition in the discount segment. Further, Martin Meyer believes that the values and USPs conveyed by John Reed, i.e. the combination of training, music, design and community, are crucial for the differentiation. In order to benefit from the values and set apart from the competitors, he argues, it is crucial to communicate the USPs on social media.

Martin Meyer does not acknowledge fitness influencers as a threat or direct competition. On the contrary, he explains that influencers represent a great opportunity for John Reed and that they are of great relevance for John Reed's social media marketing. His reasoning is that influencers are utilized as means to implement authentic marketing and to increase the overall reach on social media. Due to influencers the brand is able to reach certain target groups that they would not reach otherwise. Although, John Reed is only working with fitness influencers who have a high brand fit. The expert stresses: “*We also have many influencers with whom we have been working for a long time. Those who are really connected to John Reed and who also film themselves during the gym workout*”. However, neither are influencers who are not affiliated with John Reed but sell their own workout programs considered a threat “*[...] because I don't think anybody does it so well, that they would be competition for us in the target group, so that people would decide against a gym contract with us*”.

Martin Meyer claims that home workout programs of influencers are seen as a supplement for John Reed customers: “*I think with us it's more of a complementary thing. So, I don't think that somebody wouldn't sign up with us now because when he follows an influencer who gives great workouts, because this atmosphere in the club is really part of our concept*”. He also attributes this to the low price of John Reed: “*And you can still argue, well, 25€, [...], you can afford it*”. Furthermore, he believes that John Reed customers are working out differently depending on their weekly schedules. Among others, he assumes that customers might go to John Reed on weekends when they have more time and if they do not have the time during the week, they would rather do an influencer home workout.

#### 4.2.3. Goals of Social Media Marketing

The goals of John Reed's social media marketing on Instagram are illustrated in the light of CBBE. Therefore, the expert interview revealed essential insights in terms of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

The expert interview with Martin Meyer reveals that John Reed pursues one key objective with its social media marketing as he explains: *"It's all about the [...] USP's that set us apart from the competitors. And this is definitely a major goal in our social media marketing"*.

Therefore, it is crucial to communicate the brand accordingly to its values which the expert elaborates by saying: *"[...] we always want to communicate a lot of brand values and of course we can communicate our brand values perfectly on social media."* Also, in relation to the interaction with the John Reed community does social media and particularly Instagram represent an efficient customer relationship management tool. Apart from the communication between the brand and the customers it enables John Reed to react quickly to criticism and to appease people.

Even though Instagram is also used as a sales channel, its main function is to create brand awareness. According to Martin Meyer, creating brand awareness is an overall desired goal and has an enormous relevance in the objectives of John Reed's social media marketing. This is due to the opportunity to create brand awareness among potential customers who have never experienced the brand before. Therefore, John Reed uses the possibility to communicate their unique values by posting pictures, videos and stories.

Due to the Instagram story format, John Reed is able to create awareness by sharing stories of the own content such as live workouts, home workouts and club opening events but also to re-post stories shared by followers and customers. Martin explains that it is always considered: *"What is cool, interesting content and how can we encourage people to engage with us, e.g. via hashtags or via reposts."* Therefore, re-posts, again, represent an efficient and relevant tool as they simultaneously increase the reach. Fitness influencers are also a vital tool in order to create brand awareness since they are often targeting different customer groups and are thus often used within the social media marketing strategy.

With respect to brand associations the interview reveals that the Instagram account of John Reed is mainly used to communicate the cool and urban attitude of the brand. Consequently, it is desired to create exactly these associations with the brand through Instagram. The communication of the John Reed values on Instagram is supposed to emphasize that John Reed is a “*cool and aesthetic place*” where the costumer can have fun together with the community. In line with this, the emotions and feelings of the consumers are supposedly addressed via social media. The expert explains: “*For us it is more an emotional approach as opposed to the functional approach at McFit. [...] And we also try to appeal to the emotions and the heart in the same way. [...] It’s about the John Reed feeling, i.e. the entire training experience should feel different*”. John Reed wants to be associated with positive feelings and emotions by communicating the training atmosphere, the music, the design and, of course, the community on social media. Therefore, positive feelings and emotions such as fun, joy and pleasure towards the “*cool and urban*” John Reed brand are among the most valuable associations. However, Martin Meyer points out that it is crucial to stay approachable and humble because “*coolness is only cool as long as people can understand it [...]*”.

Martin Meyer explains that it is not focused within the social media marketing strategy to create brand associations related to the gym’s price segment even though they “[...] *have sales campaigns that also focus on price or certain price offers*”. Thus, price offers are only advertised for new club openings. It is perceived to be more important to focus on the brand’s emotional values in order to make it admirable to customers. As this is best done on Instagram, marketing campaigns focused on price are implemented via other channels, such as the corporate website.

Consequently, the focus on social media is not placed on sales and it is not necessarily desired to create associations that are limited to the price. Instead, and as previously outlined, brand associations regarding the “cool”, “urban”, “aesthetic” and “unique” brand concept are intended. The brand association cloud in Figure 15 summarizes the desired brand associations.



Figure 15: John Reed Brand Association Cloud. Source: Authors' own Depiction.

Here the link to the third brand asset, namely the perceived quality can be traced. The expert notes that quality can be communicated on Instagram but that “*We want to communicate our USPs. So high quality in terms of in terms of USPs*”. Thus, the John Reed Instagram account is aimed to be perceived high-quality in terms of aesthetics. However, the brand wants to be perceived as a premium brand which is also supported by Martin Meyer saying, “*We always speak a little affectionately of the premium discount segment*”. Hence, John Reed is planning to open new clubs offering saunas and whirlpools which will then be in a higher price category (40-80€ monthly) which is why “*the entire brand will also get a higher quality image*”.

According to Martin Meyer, brand loyalty is also considered in the social media marketing of John Reed and represents another important factor. Attention is paid to loyalty of existing customers by creating “*campaigns for existing customers, which is also very important. This is also a main goal in any case, to bind people to us [through Instagram]*”. Further, the expert views the John Reed Instagram account as a customer relationship management tool used to increase the customer loyalty. Events are important to increase brand loyalty why “[...] *we also regularly hold various events, where we interact with the community via social media and try to involve them in some way through various measures*”. However, even though binding the existing customers to the brand and strengthening the relationship through social

media is vital according to Martin Meyer, it is not the main objective within the social media marketing strategy.

Taking John Reed's social media marketing strategy in the light of all four brand assets of CBBE into account, it can be concluded that the creation of brand awareness and brand associations are the most relevant dimensions. Thus, the key focus lies on creating brand awareness and communicating brand associations that are in accordance with the brand values. However, John Reed is aware of perceived quality and brand loyalty but does not consider them any further in their social media marketing strategy which is also reflected in Table 3.

<b>Brand Awareness</b>	<b>Brand Associations</b>	<b>Perceived Quality</b>	<b>Brand Loyalty</b>
Pictures	Cool	Aesthetics	Campaigns
Videos	Urban	High-Quality	Customer Relationship Management
Story-format	Lifestyle	Premium-Discount Segment	Events
Paid Campaigns	Music	Communication of USP's	
Influencer Marketing	Design		
Events	Community		
Communication of USPs			

*Table 3: John Reed's Brand Assets based on Aaker (1991). Source: Authors' own Depiction.*

## 5. Data Analysis

The following analysis of the consumer interviews is divided in six subchapters. This is done to facilitate the reading flow and overview of data. Additionally, quotes of the consumers are included into the text, in order to emphasize the patterns which are identified and analyzed.

Table 4 displays an overview of the consumers' demographic variables. These variables provide an understanding of the consumers' backgrounds and current living situations.

Participant	Age	Nationality	Place of living	Profession
Amelie	25	German	Berlin, Germany	Master student
Andreas	28	German	Cologne, Germany	Bachelor student
Annika	26	German	Copenhagen, Denmark	Master student, part-time student assistant
Apolline	24	French	Copenhagen, Denmark	Master student, part-time student assistant
Charles	24	French	Copenhagen, Denmark	Master student, part-time student assistant
Csanád	25	Hungarian	Copenhagen, Denmark	Master student, part-time student assistant
David	25	German	Lisbon, Portugal	Master student
Ellen	26	German	Berlin, Germany	Bachelor student, part-time student assistant
Hannah	24	German	Copenhagen, Denmark	Master student, part-time student assistant
Lea	25	German	Berlin, Germany	Bachelor student, part-time student assistant
Sandra	24	German	Copenhagen, Denmark	Master student
Thaddeus	26	German	Berlin, Germany	Investment broker

*Table 4: Demographics of Interviewed Consumers. Source: Authors' own Depiction.*

Of the twelve participants, five are male and seven are female. They are all aged between 24 and 28 years. With one exemption, all of them are still studying, mostly in their Masters. Half of the interviewed consumers live in Copenhagen and are students at Copenhagen Business School. However, they all have moved to Denmark for their studies. Nine of the participants are German, two are French and one participant is from Hungary.

### 5.1. Fitness Routines and Social Media Usage

**12 out of 12** consumers are actively pursuing some form of fitness. However, it is noted that they talked about fitness with different levels of encouragement and passion. On one side, Charles argues for his gym membership with “[...] *I'm not a very sporty person, so I'm not into some kind of sports. So, the only way for me to stay fit is by going to the gym*”. On the other side, Thaddeus describes himself as a “[...] *very passionate sports man*”, who accomplishes several other sports activities with friends next to working out in a gym.

**10 out of 12** consumers have a current gym subscription. However, David and Sandra, who are no present gym customers state that they had gym memberships in the past. David explains this with his current living situation, which also sets the conditions for his fitness routine. Going to the gym obtains only functional values for him, as it is “[...] *more means to an end than an end itself*”. On the contrary, other activities that he defines as his hobbies such as surfing, or skateboarding contain emotional values and are “[...] *more an end than a mean*”. **6 out of 12** consumers describe going to the gym as their hobby, whereas other participants view it more as something that should be accomplished as Annika points out: “*I try to go to the gym two times a week. Sometimes I am better at that, sometimes I'm really, really bad at it*”.

**8 out of 10** current gym customers state that they are doing other fitness routines next to going to the gym. The most mentioned alternative is running, followed by yoga and home workouts. At this point, the influence of the Coronavirus outbreak on the consumers' fitness routines is noticeable. Since all gyms were closed by the governments in Denmark, Germany and Portugal at the time of the interviews (week 14, 2020), the participants are pursuing other fitness methods to stay active. As an exceptional consequence of the Coronavirus, many brands offer free access to their online fitness videos for one up to several months, which is why Sandra acknowledges that there are “[...] *lot of things going on where you have some people showing your exercises for free, which is nice*”. The free access to home workout videos as well as the obligation to practice social distancing thus results in the high popularity of home workouts at the moment.



**12 out of 12** consumers affirm that their fitness routine plays an important role in their lives. Amelie describes her routine as “[...] *more like kind of a lifestyle to be active*”, while the importance for Apolline is “[...] *on of a scale of 10, I would say 10*”. Achieving fitness goals is also interconnected to achieving other goals in life as Andreas affirms that “[...] *it makes me mentally fit because when I try to achieve the goals in the gym, on the other hand, I try to reach my personal life goals*”.

Having a fitness routine is highly valued by the consumers as it has great impact on other aspects of their lives. **9 out of 12** consumers share their most desired outcome of working out, which is escaping the stressful daily life with what Charles describes as “[...] *the sense of achievement, the sense of stress relief*”. Besides that, **4 out of 12** consumers mention the high learning effect as another desired outcome of a fitness routine. Apart from working out in order to feel less stressed, fitness routines and goals help the consumers to learn more about their body, the right nutrition and how to lead an active lifestyle outside of the gym as well.

As a transition from the importance of fitness in the participants’ daily lives, the consumers were asked to evaluate the importance of social media in their daily lives. On a scale from 1 to 10, **7 out of 12** consumers evaluate the importance of social media with a value higher than 5. While two consumers give it the lowest value of 3, **4 out of 12** consumers evaluate it with an 8 or higher. Hereby, the average lies at 6.9. At this point, the implications of the Coronavirus leading to social distancing again are noticeable. As many participants state, the lockdown of most social interactions has increased their social media usage drastically. Focus of the usage lies thus on staying up to date on friends’ lives and find entertainment. As social media enables the consumers to stay close to each other while considering physical social distancing, Sandra admits being “[...] *very addicted to that at the moment*”.

Aligned with Sandra’s statement, **6 out of 12** consumers mention the danger of being addicted to social media. Most interestingly, these six consumers all evaluated the importance of social media as above 5. Charles, for instance, who defines himself as a heavy social media user, admits that there are “[...] *videos that hook you in, and that you end up watching for hours*”. In order to avoid being addicted and wasting too much time on social media, Amelie controls herself and limits her social media activities to one hour a day. The waste of time through social media is also mentioned by consumers who evaluate social media

as less important for themselves. Annika, for instance, would be happy if social media would be switched off and would “[...] *actually sometimes enjoy it because I get annoyed at myself about how much I use social media sometimes and how much time I'm wasting on it*”.

**12 out of 12** consumers are using both Facebook and Instagram. In addition, nine of them are using other social media platforms as well, most frequently including Snapchat, YouTube and TikTok. However, all 12 consumers report that Instagram is the social media platform that they use most. The main reason for this is that content on Instagram is perceived as more relevant than on other platforms by the consumers. For David, Instagram is the only platform that keeps him informed about his social network, whereas other platforms are purely used for entertainment. Instagram is the most informative and efficient social media platform to keep consumers up to date because their peers also use it the most. Moreover, **6 out of 12** consumers mention the visuality of Instagram compared to Facebook as the main reason for using Instagram the most. While Apolline describes her usage of Instagram as “[...] *a personal magazine*”, Charles describes his feed “[...] *as his universe*”, that is carefully curated and enhanced by following interesting accounts.

**12 out of 12** consumers mention that they are using Instagram more for communication with friends than with companies. Hereby, Instagram serves as an alternative for WhatsApp, on which direct, one-to-one conversations are happening. However, on Instagram, people can get updates on their peers’ lives without necessarily engaging in direct conversations since users post pictures that are available to all followers.

In contrast to their communication with friends on Instagram, the consumers’ opinions are divided in regard to the communication with companies over Instagram. While all consumers follow brands and companies on Instagram, only **5 out of 12** consumers declare to have had an interaction with companies in the past. This happened mostly through participating in polls in the companies’ Instagram stories or by using the platform as a customer service tool. Nevertheless, **12 out of 12** consumers do not recognize an impact on their communication with brands because of Instagram or Facebook. However, all of them admit that following brands on social media has a high influence on their consumption. According to Csanád, this is especially applicable if he is about to make “[...] *a high involvement decision, or a high involvement purchase, when I'm actually trying to get as much information as I can*”. Here, the way

brands represent themselves on Instagram has a major influence on the consumers' perception of the brand as Apolline thinks that *"[...] the brand image is reflected on the different posts that the brand is actually posting"*.

It is noticed that although 10 of 12 consumers are current gym customers, only **1 out of 12** consumers follows his gym's profile on Instagram. While **7 out of 12** consumers assume to find the social media content of their past or present gym chain potentially interesting, there are also strong opposers. Although working out multiple times per week in the gym, Andreas has no interest at all in content that his gym chain could share on Instagram, since it all seems like a big promotion to him. For him, his gym chain's Instagram presence is all about *"[...] looking at all these Instagram gym models. For me it's always the same content, and it's quite boring"*.

In contrast to following gym chains on Instagram, **9 out of 12** consumers are following at least one account of a fitness lifestyle influencer, often several. Hereby, the fitness content is not necessarily the motivation to follow them originally but the insights into the influencer's daily life and other interests such as fashion, food or travel. Accordingly, fitness related content is often consumed on Instagram as a popular side effect. Still, many influencers focus on sharing details on their fitness routine online, and Sandra describes them as her *"[...] daily inflow of inspiration"*, of which workouts can be done at home or whose accounts she might follow as well.

**4 out of 12** consumers are aware of the fact that there are many free home workout videos available on social media, which are posted by gym chains and fitness influencers. However, the consumers do not follow these accounts but only visit them from time to time when they want to be exposed to that content. Annika does the same where she *"[...] would actively search for those people if I want that input, but I don't need to see it every day"*. Accordingly, the interest in gym and workout content is present, but is only temporary and does not have the extent at which the consumer decides to become a follower of the influencer or gym chain.

## 5.2. Consumer Engagement on Social Media

In the following sections, all relevant theories on consumer engagement building the theoretical framework of this research are analyzed.

### 5.2.1. COBRA

The consumers have been asked to categorize their consumer engagement into one of the three levels of online activeness established by Muntinga et al., (2011). All of them define their engagement either level 1, level 2 or in between the first two levels and no one describes the own usage behavior as particularly active or especially creative. Although both liking and commenting a post would define a consumer as showing level 2 online activeness, most consumers describe themselves as passive but admit to like posts from time to time. **6 out of 12** consumers, who describe themselves as passive, perceive liking a post as a passive action. Ellen summarizes this perception by stating “[...] *I do like the pictures most of the time, but I think it's just a reflex*”.

In addition, **all 12** consumers state to never or only once have created brand related content themselves on Instagram. However, when asked whether they have tagged a brand in a story or under a post before, most consumers affirm the question. In a follow-up question, **5 out of 12** confirm that they have tagged their gym's location in their Instagram stories once or even multiple times. The evaluation of their engagement as consumers shows that the participants do not put much thought into their behavior on social media. As a result, they are describing themselves as mostly passive while actively liking content and tagging fitness-related brands amongst others in their content that is visible by their social networks. Only Csanád seems to be aware of the importance of consumers' social media behavior for brands as he thinks: “[...] *I feel like many times, our positive feedback on brands or gyms or whatever, can have a huge influence. And I think we should always, you know, express the positives as well. Not only the negatives*”.

### 5.2.2. Media Dependency

In the following part of the interview, the consumers have been asked to which extent they use social media platforms when they are searching for information. **10 out of 12** participants acknowledge the

importance of social media as a source of information. However, information shared on social media and information shared on the website is believed to be different in nature which is why it is communicated on different channels. Accordingly, Thaddeus' starting point of his information search "*[...] depends on the information I'm looking for*". Information on the website is described as more generic and with long-term validity. Hence, **9 out of 12** explicitly confirm that they would visit the corporate website if they are looking for a specific piece of information. David reasons this with the structured overview of information on the website, "*[...] whereas it's a super tricky way to have the right information in the right way presented on social media*". Information on Instagram is perceived as wrapped in visuals and aesthetics and is thus less clear to detect right away. Consequently, social media is consulted for inspiration and brand discovery purposes when there is no clear focus on which specific information is desired. However, social media is also used for explicit information when the topic is considered as a recent event or short-term issue. Independent of the question asked by the interviewer, **5 out of 12** consumers mention the current Coronavirus crisis and that social media accounts are their first choice when looking for information on how specific brands handle the governmental regulation or other restrictions. For gym chains, **10 out of 12** consumers would consult the website in order to gather information on different memberships, price lists and location. This is because information on the corporate website is generally perceived as more credible than information on social media. Sandra summarizes this notion with: "*[...] I feel like that's the more reliable source for this kind of information*". Nevertheless, **10 out of 12** consumers are consulting social media networks for other information on gym chains apart from information on prices, opening hours and location. For instance, social media serves as a source of inspiration and motivation on fitness and thus represents a mean to create an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand, which a corporate website is not able to.

### **5.2.3. Parasocial Interaction**

As brands are perceived as more approachable on social media compared to corporate websites, **10 of 12** consumers admit perceiving some brands as persons on social media or to at least associate personality traits with them. This happens partly for founders of small companies or startups, where consumers like Annika would "*[...] attach that person to the place itself*" through its social media presence. For David, a successful corporate Instagram account "*[...] feels more like a person telling the story*". However, four consumers point out that perceiving a brand as a person is more difficult for bigger companies, because

the branding strategy behind the social media presence is often clearer than the authentic display of personality traits. The collaborations between companies and influencers on social media are evaluated differently among the consumers. According to Ellen, influencers are the main reason why social media pages are “[...] *more human interactive than the website*”. Per contra, collaborations with influencers lead to inauthenticity of a brand’s personality for David, who argues that it is obvious “[...] *they have to have a certain amount of stories and say things a certain amount of times*”. Here, particularly fitness brands and their collaborations with fitness influencers are addressed. Next to their general performance on social media, the brand’s visible interaction with other customers on social media has a high impact on the brand’s overall evaluation for **11 out of 12** consumers. Accordingly, being observers of positive interactions or good customer services improves the brand image and overall evaluation, whereas it is perceived as “[...] *basically the biggest mistake they can ever make*”, when the brand neglects other customers on social media according to Csanád.

#### **5.2.4. Credibility**

In the following, the consumers are asked to evaluate what supports a brand’s authenticity and thus credibility on social media. **11 out of 12** consumers affirm the statement that social media in general helps to make a brand more authentic as it increases its transparency. Yet, a brand’s social media presence can deteriorate its credibility when the shared content is not perceived as real. Thus, Lea would rather prefer a company that is open about its “[...] *company goals and what it stands for [over] a company that is not mentioning anything of it on social media*”. Consumer can easily detect the company’s intention behind a certain type of post, especially as marketing students as Csanád points out. However, as long as these cases of obviously polished branding initiatives are limited, he opinions that “[...] *it might not be the most credible thing, but at the same time, you know, this is what they have to do*”. Interestingly, Sandra connects a gym chain’s credibility on Instagram with the type of customers that the brand depicts with their posts. As a result, the entire brand’s credibility is questioned if a gym chain features “[...] *only top models that look so amazing*” the entire brand’s credibility is questioned. In contrast, showcasing “[...] *women or men that look more natural, like actual people*” has a high positive impact on a gym chain’s authenticity and thus overall credibility.

### 5.2.5. Social Identity and Community Identification

As the last of Tsai and Men's (2013) antecedents of consumer engagement on social media, consumers were asked whether they have a feeling of belonging towards an online community that forms their social identity. Although all 12 consumers are aware of online communities on social media, only **2 out of 12** participants describe themselves as an active, long-term member of a community. One of them is Apolline, who follows all content with the hashtag "sustainability", and hence experiences a lot of exposure of related content which feels like she is "[...] *interacting indirectly with everyone who posts something with this hashtag*". The second consumer who finds self-identification in an online community is Ellen, who opinions that most of the influencers she follows "[...] *share one mindset*", as they all have the same zodiac sign as her. Both active or inactive members of online communities reason their commitment with their personal interests, as Apolline is interested in any kind of sustainability initiatives and Ellen is interested in the relation between zodiac signs and emotions. However, neither of them states to belong to a fitness community. Apolline explains that her lack of intrinsic passion for fitness is the reason for her not being part of such online community. This is aligned with Charles, who feels the sense of a community during his offline experiences at the gym although he is not part of it. As a result, he imagines that the community feeling he observed offline "[...] *translates online*" and is thus also present on social media.

### 5.2.6. Extended Self

The fitness movement on Instagram is perceived as positive because of its motivational influence by **8 out of 12** consumers. All 12 consumers are daily exposed to fitness related content that can be derived from the healthy and fit lifestyle promoted on social media. Consumers state that this exposure has a direct effect on their daily lives, as Csanád points out that "[...] *since this trend started, I noticed that adapting healthy decisions into my life on a daily basis got way easier*". This is mainly because influencers on social media constantly share fitness related information which gives the consumers new knowledge and motivation without search efforts. The consumers know of the advantages of the social media fitness trend for gym chains but also acknowledge their obvious manner of commercializing it. Andreas thus clearly differentiates real motivation and commercialized posts, since, "*it's [the fitness related posts] not because they want to motivate people or help people*". This statement emphasizes a general mistrust in gym chains and whether they have genuine motivational purposes behind their social

media presence or only focus on client acquisition and increasing their reach. In contrast to the overall positive attitude of the fitness lifestyle for themselves, **5 out of 12** consumers explicitly mention the dangers of this lifestyle on younger people, as they might be more easily influenced by false recommendations. Since all consumers grew through their adolescence with the increasing importance of social media, it is likely that these warnings are based on own experiences of an age where the consumers were conscious about their weight and physique and impacted by unhealthy body standards which were promoted over social media channels.

**12 out of 12** consumers affirm that they have several people in their social networks who often try to present themselves as healthy and fit on Instagram. Consequently, the living out of one's own personality on social media is influenced by fitness content and a seemingly fit and healthy network every day. This is especially important as *"[...] friends have a big influence on my life when it comes to sports"*, as Csanád points out. Ellen goes further and declares, since several female friends transitioned into the social media fitness community as active members, that she thinks she *"[...] might transition as well at some point"*. Despite the positive acknowledgement of friends presenting themselves as fit and active, Charles opinions that it can be perceived as bragging.

Most interestingly, **7 out of 12** consumers state they are sharing content on social media that presents them as especially healthy and fit, but only **4 out of 7** consumers admit that this is done intentionally. For Thaddeus, this is done because *"[...] it connects to my own personal goals, to my routine"* and thus has a self-motivating purpose. However, **3 out of 7** consumers explain that they are sharing content of them working out or cooking healthy from time to time, but do not have the intention to present themselves as especially fit on social media. Rather, it is about sharing information on one's day and hobbies which can include trying out healthy recipes, for instance.

### **5.2.7. Congruity Theory**

The value of "true health" has been mentioned by **5 out of 12** consumers as particularly important regarding their fitness motivation. Here, the term includes not only increasing knowledge about nutrition and mental health, but also knowing of different body types and to work out in a healthy but sustainable way. Therefore, this value changes the essence at fitness' core, as it is *"[...] more about the core of being*



*healthy than being fit*”, according to David. This change is necessary because the consumers perceive a lot fitness related content to focus on muscle building, neglecting the individuality of each body and thus its possible achievements. Individuality is linked to inclusiveness, which is mentioned as the most important fitness related value of Sandra. For her, it is important that people of every health and fitness level feel welcome at the gym, since “[...] *everyone should have a right to follow this goal of being healthy*”. As a result, **7 out of 12** consumers affirm that it would have a major positive impact on their interest if gym chains and fitness influencers would represent their most important fitness values on social media. Nevertheless, it is mentioned that values communicated by gym chains on social media must be consistent with the offline experience in the studios. Otherwise, a lack of consistency between the diverging touchpoint experiences depicts a threat to the authenticity of the gym chain.

The ideal self-image is an important parameter especially in the context of fitness and working out. **11 out of 12** consumers state that they are working towards a specific fitness and body goal of theirs. Further, **9 out of these 11** consumers add that they are either feeling supported by their gym in reaching that goal or that they are following fitness influencers on Instagram because they are supporting them in reaching that goal. Additionally, fitness influencers are often followed because their lifestyle involves features that the consumers’ ideal selves would like to obtain as well. For Lea, it is especially supporting to see other people who have accomplished a body transformation by losing old habits and overweight. She contrasts this to a general fitness influencer, “[...] *who was like thin from the beginning on and just got some muscles*”. Often, the ideal self-image of consumers is not only linked to their physical appearance but is based on their firm belief that when they are able to achieve their physical goals, they are able to reach other life goals as well. For Thaddeus, achieving a fitness goal has thus more advantages, as he uses the discipline which has been acquired through fitness for pursuing other goals.

It becomes evident that **11 out of 12** consumers have specific ideal images of themselves in their minds, but that they want to be supported to reach these ideals by people who already possess the desired features. However, if the person representing the consumer’s ideal self is perceived out of reach by the consumer, the motivational effect turns into frustration. Consequently, the ideal self-images depicted by gym chains must be in realistic reach, especially regarding fitness goals. This is summarized by Hannah, who states that “[...] *if you feel like you could reach that picture, then I think it's positive. But if you're*

*never going to reach it, no matter how much you work out anyways - I think it's not very helpful to promote it to people”.*

### **5.3. CBBE on Social Media**

In this section, it is analyzed how the four brand assets of CBBE are evaluated by the consumers regarding their past or present gyms and how their communication on social media can enhance the creation of CBBE.

#### **5.3.1. Brand Awareness**

Through the analysis, it can be determined to which brand equity asset the consumers contribute the most in daily life for brands in general and gym chains specifically.

**10 out of 12** consumers state that they are exposed to fitness related content everyday through their Instagram feed or stories. As a result, they become aware of new brands through the content of other social media users on a continuous basis. Here, the consumers state that the exposure to new brands is evenly distributed between friends and influencers the consumers are following. In case of the latter, consumers become aware of new brands through commercial cooperation between influencers and brands, but also through unpaid shared experiences by the influencers. Since the influencers are followed because their lifestyle is perceived as admirable by the consumer, their purchase decisions are likely to be copied. The exposure of fitness brands through friends is mostly evoked through Instagram stories, in which a friend posts a picture of himself at a gym or while running. These posts or recommendations frequently translate into a visit of the consumer on the respective brand's Instagram page. Compared to product recommendations by influencers, recommendations by friends are valued more and thus more likely to be leading to a purchase. As Csanád points out, he has trust in his friends' opinions because *“[...] I feel like that we have the same expectations from certain products and we just share the same values”*. Accordingly, both friends and influencers create a lot of eWOM when it comes to fitness related brands and companies. However, some consumers mention that although their exposure of fitness related

content is high, it does not interest them enough to follow new accounts on social media. Charles describes this with “[...] *I don't feel like committed enough to follow these people*”.

Consumers also become aware which specific gym their friends are customers of, as they tag the location and brand name in their Instagram story or report that they have just accomplished a group course workout. For current non-customers, this helps to get an overview of the gym without trying it out or looking actively for information. For Sandra, this is useful information as it “[...] *gives you an impression of how it could be to go to the gym*”. In this aspect, the consumers who are gym customers create CBBE by making friends within their social network aware of the brand and the services. Besides, when creating Instagram content, it is often polished and shows the positive sides of the experience at the gym. This is why Sandra knows of distinct advantages of a gym in Copenhagen that is frequently posted within her reach on Instagram: “*Especially like in Copenhagen, for instance, lots of people go to a gym with a very nice view, so they tag it a lot of times*”. As a result, consumers are becoming aware of fitness related brands on social media and the recommendation by friends and influencers often leads to a further information search on the recommended brand or product.

### **5.3.2. Brand Associations**

The associations that a consumer forms in his mind with a brand and shares with his social network are the second asset of CBBE. Participants describe a combination of functional values and emotional values when they elaborate on the associations with their current or past gyms.

**9 out of 12** consumers mention a certain atmosphere that they connect to their past or current gym. On one side, Hannah describes the atmosphere through feelings, as the gym's atmosphere is influenced by her belief that the gym is “[...] *available and reliable*”. On the other side, attributes of the gym can constitute the atmosphere as Apolline points out that “*The view is literally the motivation*”. However, the atmosphere is mostly dependent from the people at the gym, including other customers and staff. In fact, **8 out of 12** consumers affirm not only the strong contribution of the people to the overall atmosphere in the gym but that the people are also representing another independent association with the brand. Hereby, the people at the gym can either be positively impacting the atmosphere or deteriorating it. On the positive side, David points out that the people at the gym can shift the purpose of visiting the gym from only

working out to a social event, as “[...] it was more about, like having community and actually wanting to go there and being with friends”. On the negative side, Csanád reports from an experience where he visited a gym chain on a trial day, and “[...] the people they attract just totally ruined the whole experience to me”. As a result, several consumers are able to identify differences in the people that are present at their past and current gyms. Andreas, a current customer of the RSG Group, has a membership that allows him to visit both McFit and John Reed studios, depending on his location or preference. Most interestingly, he reports that for the respective gym chain, “[...] you can see definitely see the difference between the people who are going there”. This has such a high impact on the atmosphere of the gym, that he feels “[...] directly there's a different vibe”.

The facilities are another crucial association the consumers have in mind when thinking about their gym, especially the cleanliness and extra services such as a sauna or hammam. These extras form an association of luxury in the consumer's mind, as Charles states that his gym is “[...] very modern, very bright - it looks nice and luxurious”. However, **2 out of 12** consumers associate the terms “*decent*”, “*not fancy*” and “*basic*” with their current gyms (Annika, Hannah). Nevertheless, Hannah adds that her gym “[...] offers everything that I need”. It becomes clear that the associations consumers have in their minds mirror their distinct needs as gym chain customers, which might require more “*luxury*” or “*reliability*”. However, consumers who associate positively intonated terms with their gym chains also state a higher preference for it. Because of the luxurious extras such as the view, sauna and modern facilities, Apolline declares that “*for me this gym is the best I ever had*”.

**6 out of 12** consumers affirm that it would have a strengthening effect on the associations that they already have in mind if the gym also communicated these associations on social media. However, it is of great importance that the associations made during offline experience are coherent with the associations the gym chain wants to communicate on social media. As an example, Andreas criticizes that there is an obvious discrepancy between the atmosphere at McFit gyms offline and online, as “[...] this specific atmosphere is totally the opposite of what McFit is trying to show us on their Instagram page”.

In general, **12 out of 12** consumers create their associations to their gym based on functional values as well as emotional values. Whereas the price, the facilities, cleanliness and quality of equipment are

mentioned on the functional side, the people and the entire atmosphere are crucial emotional aspects that impact the associations in the consumers' minds. Accordingly, the consumers are asked whether they would like their gym chain to focus their social media communication on either functional or emotional values. As a result, it becomes evident that there is no uniform support for functionality or emotionality. Rather, each consumer would like to see his own associations and values communicated over social media. In order to depict the complexity of consumers' different associations with gym chains, David argues that "[...] *this really depends on the situation I am in*". Since 11 of 12 participants are students, their living situation is often impacted by changes of residency. Accordingly, David mentions that it depends on his current living situations whether he values functionality over emotionality. Hence, if his residency is short-term, a low-cost and flexible gym chain is preferred. If looking for a long-term option, emotional values such as atmosphere and the feeling of support by the gym's staff is more important for his purchase decision. Considering the gym chain's social media presence, David would therefore like to see high flexibility and convenience communicated when he is looking for a short-term solution. Contrastingly, if looking for a long-term membership, facilities and community-feeling should be emphasized in the gym's communication on social media.

However, both Sandra and Annika strongly favor a focus on the emotional side. Regarding functional values such as cleanliness or facilities itself, Sandra opinions that social media could not be trusted because "[...] *in the end I don't think any gym, even if they're dirty, they would show a picture where their equipment looks dirty*". Accordingly, it is assumed that gym chains always represent their facilities in a polished way. Instead, she favors a focus on the emotional values because this does not only "[...] *really well convey the atmosphere that the gym ideally has and the kind of people that go there*" but also because the way emotional social media content is created from the gym chain's side is "[...] *really important and just showing what kind of atmosphere you can expect in the gym*". In addition, Annika argues that the functional, hard facts such as price and location are easily looked up through an online search. However, "[...] *when it comes to these emotional things, you don't really know that unless you sign up and enter the gym multiple times*". Still, gym chains should communicate their emotional values on social media in order to create a first positive impression and therefore positive associations the potential customer creates in his mind, as it is beneficial for the brand in the consumer's final decision process.

### 5.3.3. Perceived Quality

The overall perceived quality of a brand is constituted by several quality factors. Therefore, the consumers are not only asked to evaluate the perceived quality of their gyms but also to elaborate on their most important quality aspects.

While other people at the gym, customers and staff, form a strong brand association in the minds of 8 out of 12 consumers, only **4 out of 12** people mention them as a decisive factor of perceived quality. This shows that there are heterogeneous requirements for a high-quality gym among a homogenous sample group. Although all consumers are social media users within the same age group and 11 out of 12 pursue a similar lifestyle as students, some consumers seek personal interaction at the gym whereas others prefer to stay on their own. Hence, while the community feeling and interaction with other people at the gym is positively contributing to the perceived quality of some, it can be negatively impacting the perceived quality of others.

Moreover, the factors location, equipment, professional trainer and the price are mentioned as further factors that constitute the overall perceived quality of a gym. Interestingly, the price is evaluated as less decisive once the first three factors are evaluated as high quality. Apolline, who describes her gym as “[...] *definitely not the cheapest – actually the contrary*” voluntarily prefers to pay a higher price, because if she is “[...] *paying less where the place is not triggering me to go do some sport activities there, in the end I will go less and therefore waste more money in that sense*”. Accordingly, the price of a gym chain is an important quality attribute for **4 out of 12** consumers, especially in terms of value for money. Andreas points this out as he reckons that McFit and John Reed “[...] *give you for the price you're paying, everything you need*”.

**6 out of 12** consumers are mentioning the service that they experience at the gym as an important quality factor. Here, the service includes the course program offered but also the helpfulness and approachability of the employees. These aspects are important since they show the gym's effort to provide the best experience possible to the consumer. Plus, the employees of the gym chain represent the brand towards the consumer which is why their behavior has great impact on the perceived quality. Andreas, who

differentiated earlier on the atmosphere differences between John Reed and McFit thus declares that “[...] both brands try to evoke a feeling of community and motivation, and fun and everything”.

As **6 out of 12** consumers opinion, showcasing the most important quality attributes on social media can intensify the perceived quality during the offline experience at the gym. Csanád thinks that “[...] *social media can still highly influence my opinion or my perception about the gym*”. However, it is not only the type of quality attributes that are presented in social media posts or stories but also the way these are created. As Sandra points out, the aesthetics of a gym chain’s post in general have a high impact on its perceived professionalism and thus quality. According to her, a gym chain’s Instagram profile “[...] *where it looks like that's just somebody working there took a picture with their phone*” evokes the thought that “[...] *maybe the gym is really good, but it doesn't really look like high quality*”. Annika emphasizes the need for aesthetically appealing social media posts as well, but stresses that this only has a positive effect on her perceived quality if the claimed professionalism is “[...] *aligned with reality as well*”. Accordingly, too polished interiors online and a contrary offline experience could thus result in a lower perceived quality than the perceived quality of the offline experience alone.

#### **5.3.4. Brand Loyalty**

**6 out of 10** current gym customers evaluate themselves as loyal customers of their gyms. However, **only 1 out of 12 consumers** follows their gym chain on Instagram or other social media networks. In fact, Amelie states that she is following several gyms on social media because she is moving soon and thus is looking for a new membership. In contrast to her, Ellen, for instance, “[...] *never thought about following my gym on social media*”. Instead, **5 out of 10** current customers argue that they are not following their gym chain on social media because the gym chain has an own application, which provides all the course schedules and necessary information.

Both David and Csanád take the view that brand loyalty can only be strengthened on social media to a limited extent. Once they decide to become customers, David does not “[...] *think that the online experience is going to impact my loyalty much*” and Csanád adds that once decided which gym he chooses, “[...] *I wouldn't say that I would go back to their accounts a lot*”. Instead, both consumers evaluate it as helpful to communicate the most important consumer values on social media during their

primary purchase decision process in order to evaluate the best alternative. This is supported with Amelie's current search for a new gym in which different social media profiles are consulted.

It becomes evident that there is a diverging perception of loyalty as a term among the consumers. On one side, Charles opinions that he is “[...] *satisfied of the functional values - but definitely I'm loyal to the brand because of the emotional value*”. On the other side, Andreas states that he is “[...] *only loyal because of the price*” and is “[...] *not there to interact with people or try to get the John Reed or the McFit spirit*”. Aligned with Andreas' statement, **5 out of 12** consumers mention the price as an important factor for establishing brand loyalty. Amelie summarizes this need for appropriate value for money, as many factors are important for creating loyalty but “[...] *most important [is] the price and also what they offer for this price*”.

In contrast, **6 out of 12** consumers mention the general “feeling at the gym” as the most important driver for brand loyalty. However, over the course of the conversations, it becomes clear that although the consumers mention these aspects first, convenience factors such as price and especially location are at least of equal value for establishing brand loyalty. When asked whether he would switch his current gym chain if it would not be that close to his workplace, Charles admits that he would “[...] *definitely try to be loyal to the brand, but the main priority is the convenience. So that could be the only thing to convince me of changing*”. Sandra backs this up with stating she would not become a customer of “[...] *the most amazing gym*” if she would need to commute for half an hour, since this “[...] *would already make it much less convenient for me*”. However, when choosing between two alternatives, consumers are willing to bear some trade-offs in order to choose the gym that offers the better overall atmosphere. Still, this willingness is only given to a certain elevated price or increased distance which again affirms the high impact of price and location on purchase decisions. If she would be to choose between two options, Sandra says “[...] *that there is a limit but if it's not so far away, I would rather go a little bit further but then have the gym I feel more comfortable in*”.

Another interesting aspect is that convenience is not only mentioned as the reason for deciding against a certain gym but is also used to reason against changing the current gym. Although Hannah does not evaluate herself as a loyal customer, which “[...] *might be due to me also not being that big part of a*



*community*”, she hesitates to switch the gym since she is accustomed to her gym. When switching, she would have to again find out “[...] *how everything works with booking classes and whatever*”. As a result, “[...] *it feels like there are switching costs even though they maybe aren't*”.

#### **5.4. John Reed on Social Media**

Before the interview, all consumers confirmed to have looked at John Reed’s main Instagram account as they were asked to.

**10 out of 12** consumers report to have known John Reed prior to this interview, while the two French consumers Apolline and Charles had no prior knowledge of the brand. **8 out of these 10** consumers have only heard the brand’s name before. As one of the remaining two consumers, Csanád has been to a trial day at a John Reed club in Budapest, Hungary once. Andreas, the second participant with offline experience with John Reed, is a current customer of both John Reed and McFit. Of the RSG Group brands, McFit and John Reed are by far the best known among 10 out of 12 consumers, whereas the brands Cyberobics and High5 are known by only two and zero consumers respectively.

After getting insight on the consumers’ knowledge on John Reed, they are asked about their impressions of the Instagram profile. Accordingly, the following subchapters contain analyzed patterns supported by consumers’ statements regarding the four brand assets of CBBE, and to which extent these are influenced by the Instagram presence of John Reed.

##### **5.4.1. John Reed Awareness**

Regarding their first impression of the Instagram profile, **8 out of 12** consumers state the darkness of the pictures. While Csanád “[...] *really liked their aesthetics*”, Thaddeus describes it as “[...] *very, very, very, very dark, a feeling you're in a nightclub*”.

In addition, **8 out of 12** consumers notice that the majority of posts depict people during or after their workout. Six consumers further state that the people all looked muscular and fit. In fact, their physique

is perceived as so fit, that Sandra mentions that she feels “[...] *like I would have to be an expert in fitness to go there with them*”. **7 out of 12** consumers are communicating a certain apprehension after describing the type of people that are present in John Reed’s profile. Apolline summarizes this apprehension as she thinks that “[...] *it seemed like a more professional Instagram profile rather than for beginners*”. This apprehension is picked up by Csanád who mentions a discrepancy in his perception of the pictures and his perception of the caption (that John Reed communicates). Although the post texts are described as motivating and focused on inclusiveness, he mentions that “[...] *they are not really fighting the stereotypes of gym members*”. This statement is not only based on the people’s fitness level but also on their general looks characterized by tattoos, hairstyles and in case of the women, make-up.

Most interestingly, only **1 out of 12** consumers mentions the special interior design of John Reed or the DJ music as his first impressions of the Instagram profile. Even Andreas, who is a current customer of John Reed and knows of these specialties, describes his impression of the Instagram presence as “[...] *not that special [and] kind of generic*”. Regarding the live music, Annika reports that she “[...] *saw that they also host a lot of like sports events where they have DJs and it looked really cool actually*”. However, she did not become aware that there are live DJs in the fitness clubs on a regular basis but identified them as sports events. Not being aware of the brand’s existential differentiation is also mirrored in the consumers’ evaluation of the brand’s slogan “Not your average gym” which is included in the Instagram profile’s biography. When Charles is asked whether he is able to detect the brand’s USPs, he declares that his attention lies on the pictures and that the text is only consulted for further information if his first impression is positive. But since, “[...] *the images threw me off a little bit, I didn't even go to the next step*”. In total, **6 out of 12** consumers did not notice the biography of the Instagram profile, which contains the brand’s slogan and its description as “Fitness Music Club”. After the slogan is communicated to them, none of the consumers reports to have been able to link the brand’s statement of not being average to their USPs. After informing the consumers about the interior design and live DJ music concept that characterizes John Reed, their overall impression of the brand improved drastically. Sandra declares that she “[...] *never heard of any other gym that does it*” and thinks “[...] *it's really cool because music is definitely part of working out because it kind of motivates you*”. Apolline, who has been thrown off by the slogan initially as she interpreted it as “[...] *if you are a beginner, don't bother*”, was

surprised when hearing about live DJs at the gyms and admits that this definitely changes her opinion on the brand.

**4 out of 12** consumers emphasize on a need for the brand to communicate the music aspect more on Instagram, as the concept is not evident when looking at the profile for the first time. This applies especially for the images, as consumers focus more on visual aspects for a first impression than on the caption. Besides, the music aspect increases the understanding for the brand's identity and its differentiation strategy. Csanád remarks that “[...] *this live music feature is actually a huge differentiating factor in general*”. Especially for consumers similar to him, who primarily consult social media profiles in order to evaluate alternatives and make an informed purchase decision, the brand should put more visual attention on the aspects that differentiate the gym chain from its competitors. This also applies to the interior design, which should be highlighted more through the posted images according to Charles.

#### **5.4.2. John Reed Associations**

Based on their first evaluation of John Reed's Instagram presence, the consumers are asked which associations they have in mind to the brand.

**5 out of 12** consumers associate young people with the brand based on its social media presence. Sandra describes their target group as “[...] *somewhere in their 20s*” which is aligned with Lea, who assumes the people of being her age and in their “[...] *mid 20s, early 30s*”. The youth of the targeted customers by John Reed also leads to an association of the terms “*modern*” and “*dynamic*” with the brand. Next to young people, **6 out of 12** consumers associate the devotedness to fitness by the customers to the brand. Charles describes the people as “[...] *very serious*” and Ellen believes she might not fit in as a customer because “[...] *it's a bit too much*” for “[...] *somebody who, like me, wants to start doing fitness but isn't into it as much*”. Hannah describes her association with “[...] *relaxed people - not in terms of working out obviously*” and other consumers mention the words “*strict*”, “*too professional*” and “*focused*”. Thus, Annika would prefer “[...] *if they would post something from people that are just starting to work out*” and their progress as this “[...] *will definitely help to change my impression*”.

**4 out of 12** consumers associate “coolness” with the brand. This partly refers to the entire vibe that the profile transmits but also again to the people who are depicted as John Reed’s employees and customers on Instagram. Directly linked to “coolness” is the association with “urbaneness”, which also **3 out of 12** consumers have in mind.

Interestingly, the associations that are mentioned by Andreas and Csanád, who are the only two consumers who have been in a John Reed club before, differ from the ones who only formed their associations based on the brand’s Instagram presence. Andreas refers back to his experience of entering the club and thinking that “[...] *it's more design and it gives you more feeling of being special*”. As a result, he associates “wealthy” and “special” with John Reed. Moreover, he strongly associates the interior design with the brand and mentions a “[...] *high-class feeling*”, “[...] *furniture from East India*” and “[...] *colorful and crazy paintings*”. Csanád shares the same associations as Andreas from his trial day at a club in Budapest. He sees John Reed’s interior design as a strong differentiating factor and shares that he likes “[...] *literally everything from the color of the wall to the different lightning, I think they managed to create a super special environment in that sense*”. As a consequence, he is one of four consumers who associate a “cool vibe” with John Reed.

#### **5.4.3. Perceived Quality of John Reed**

The consumers are asked to evaluate the quality of John Reed as a gym chain based on its Instagram presence.

**11 out of 12** consumers are able to classify John Reed to a certain quality category based on its Instagram presence, while only Charles would need more information to do so since he “[...] *didn't see enough pictures of the facilities*”. 5 out of these 11 consumers favor for a high-quality level. As a reason, 3 of them mention the high effort which is perceived by John Reed. Among them, Ellen and Csanád argue that the visible effort John Reed puts into its Instagram presence most likely mirrors in the offline experience. Accordingly, they assume that John Reeds puts great effort in providing a better appearance and service than other gym chains. As a result, the assumed professional service is the main reason for assigning a high-quality level to John Reed. This especially refers to the employees at the gym, from

who Annika assumes that they are “[...] *really knowledgeable trainers who want to help you as best as they can*”.

Apart from Charles, the six remaining consumers evaluate John Reed as a gym chain from medium quality. The equipment that is visible on the pictures on the Instagram profile is mentioned by five consumers. While Hannah mentions that the equipment appears to have good quality but that “[...] *it's also not [...] the highest-class gym with a lot of wellness*”. Sandra shares her opinion “[...] *that the equipment is not of bad quality, but I think maybe it's not the highest quality*”. Aligned with Sandra's previous statement on the influence of the picture quality on Instagram on the overall perceived quality of the gym, Amelie says “[...] *that they have a really strong Instagram feed and also the quality of the pictures are good*”. Based on this perceived quality of John Reed as a gym, she “[...] *would not expect to be really cheap, but also not like high, high, high class*”.

#### **5.4.4. John Reed Loyalty**

Finally, the consumers are asked whether they would consider becoming customers of John Reed, under the assumption that there is a club located in the consumer's current city of residency.

Apart from Andreas, who already is a customer of John Reed, **8 of the remaining 11** consumers would consider becoming a customer of John Reed and are willing to have a trial training there. However, **6 out of these 8** consumers state that they are not able to make a final decision solely based on John Reed's Instagram presence. As the focus on Instagram lies on the people and community aspects, six consumers express doubts about the convenience factors. As previously identified, these factors form the convenience base without brand loyalty is not possible to emerge according to most of the consumers. As a result, Hannah would have to “[...] *go to the website and check out their locations and everything*” as this type of information has not been visible to her on Instagram alone. Especially the price is of high importance in order to decide to become a customer or not and Sandra concludes that there was “[...] *no indication of location or price on social media*”.

In total, **7 out of 12** consumers further base their decision on a comparison between themselves and the people that are displayed on John Reed's Instagram profile. This is done in order to examine “[...] *if you*

*can see yourself as a member in the gym*”, according to Thaddeus. As previously established, the consumers John Reed shows on Instagram are mostly perceived as “*very focused on fitness*”, “*professional*” and “*strict*”, which leads to the assumption of most participants that they do not belong to the appropriate consumer group. While David affirms that John Reed is communicating important loyalty values such as the overall vibe at the gym and the community aspect, he adds that “[...] *they are doing it, but I guess they're just aiming at a different person*”. Although she thinks that live DJs are a great incentive, Annika “[...] *would be a bit intimidated and I would probably never sign up for this gym*”. However, she says that this impression of hers could be changed if the brand “[...] *would post something from people that are just starting to work out*” or “[...] *the progress of people who started, you know, at the bottom and then they became really fit*”.

It becomes evident that consumers require more information in order to make a final purchase decision than the information John Reed’s Instagram profile offered. As pointed out by Charles, an information search on social media is often initiated based on a recommendation via word of mouth. Hence, he states that “[...] *as soon as you gave me like all the differentiation points, that's what drew me in*”. Lea supports this because “[...] *after you told me that they're doing those live DJ sessions and classes, I would consider it*”.

As a result, **7 out of 12** consumers opinion that John Reed’s communication of its USPs on social media should be intensified, as the consumers were not able to detect them at first sight without prior knowledge on the brand. This, in turn, would increase the likelihood of the consumers being more convinced to become customers of the brand without having the need for further information search or WOM recommendations. Otherwise, social media can have a deteriorating effect on the consumer’s perception of the brand, as David thinks “[...] *the concept itself sold way better to me than the social media presence*”.

## 6. Findings

In this section, each sub question is answered based on the previous analysis. Finally, the overarching research question is answered with the help of the sub questions.

### 6.1. Sub Question 1

**SQ 1:** *What role does social media have in gym chains' total marketing efforts?*

As illustrated by John Reed, social media is extremely important for gym chains and an indispensable component in their marketing mix. This is particularly due to the fact that social media provides a cheap and efficient alternative to traditional marketing channels such as TV. This advantage of social media outweighs the benefits of traditional marketing to an extent that it is considered unnecessary to invest in other marketing channels apart from social media. The possibility of local targeting further emphasizes the importance of social media in the marketing mix. With a limited geographical coverage or within an expansion process, national or cross-national marketing campaigns, e.g. TV campaigns, are too costly compared to social media marketing efforts. Additionally, consumers are easier to address with marketing messages on social networks than in the gym itself because they are actively searching for inspiration. This makes social media an efficient tool for brand communication.

The most important objective of using social media is to arouse consumers' emotions while successfully conveying the USPs of the gym chain. As both aspects are attainable with the brand's presence on social media channels, social media gains importance regarding the gym chain's total marketing efforts. However, not every social media network is of equal importance to achieve these objects and therefore the respective platforms are utilized differently depending on the specific marketing objective pursued. While the social networks Facebook and YouTube are used less intensively, Instagram has the greatest importance for the social media marketing of gym chains. Thus, gym chains focus on Instagram and the platform's specialties in the process of content creation. Thereby, the story feature is especially impactful as it enables to share the brand's own content but also to display content created by the consumer. Hereby, the created content by the consumer is reposted from the gym chain's profile. As a result, Instagram

fulfils the purpose of targeting the gym chain's customer segment with marketing communications and additionally helps the brand to manage and maintain existing customer-brand relationships.

Moreover, it is found that the main focus of a gym chain's social media marketing strategies lies on creating brand awareness with the use of influencer marketing. Thereby, social media influencers with a high brand fit are essential for gym chains in their total marketing efforts as they extend the reach and create brand awareness among their wide social networks. As such, gym chains do not perceive local influencers as a threat but rather as a key component within the overall social media marketing strategy.

## **6.2. Sub Question 2**

**SQ 2:** *What are the underlying motivations for consumers to engage with gym chains on social media?*

Fitness related content is found to be omnipresent in the consumers' social media experience as they are exposed to fitness content of companies and peers on a daily basis. Despite general interest of consumers in fitness related content on social media, the overall consumer engagement with gym chains' content is found to be low and passive. In fact, the creation of UGC is rare. According to the analysis it occurs only unconsciously by the consumers through tagging the gym's location in their Instagram stories. A reason for the low consumer engagement with gym chains is that the shared content is mostly perceived as generic and too similar among different gym chains. Additionally, consumers are only motivated to engage with a gym chain if the content is perceived as authentic and credible. Here, integration of influencers into the social media marketing of gym chains is discovered to increase the transparency of the brand and the likelihood of consumer engagement. This is because influencers are not just perceived as more authentic but also as a source of inspiration.

Although the fitness online community on Instagram is well known to the consumers, being a member of online communities does not further support consumer engagement with brands. However, consumers have distinct values concerning fitness and they are willing to engage more with gym chains on social media when these values are displayed. The most important fitness value is defined as true health. It



implies not only that fitness has a positive influence that goes beyond the physical health but also that achieving true health is an individual process for each consumer. Consequently, consumers affirm to engage more with gym chains on social media if they are convinced of the shared value that fitness and working out has a farther-reaching purpose than gaining muscles or losing weight. Consumers have imaginations of their ideal selves in mind, which they are striving to become. Therefore, consumers have a higher motivation to engage with gym chains on Instagram if the content motivates and supports them in reaching their goals.

Apart from shared values, information search represents another motivation of consumers to engage with gym chains on social media. Which online channel consumers consult for their information search depends on the nature of the desired information. For specific information with short-term validity, such as upcoming events, as well as for broad unspecified inspiration, Instagram is preferred because of its high visuality. For information on the gym chain's functional conditions such as the price list or opening hours, consumers consult the corporate website instead. This is reasoned through a higher credibility as well as clearer structure of information shared on the website than on Instagram.

It can be summarized that there are two main underlying motivations for consumer engagement with gym chains on social media. Firstly, the desire for fitness related inspiration that is visually appealing. For the consumer to be inspired, fitness related content must be authentic in a way that it is perceived as believable and in line with potential offline experiences. Additionally, content must be attainable, which is achieved when consumers can identify with the customers and employees that are showcased on the gym chain's profile. Secondly, consumers engage with gym chains because of the desire for motivation. Gym chains transmit motivation by sharing fitness values and by supporting the consumers to become closer to the ideal version of themselves.

### 6.3. Sub Question 3

**SQ 3:** *How do social media marketing efforts of gym chains lead to potential CBBE?*

Brand awareness and brand associations are the only brand assets of CBBE that can be created purely through social media marketing. These brand assets can be enforced unintentionally as well as intentionally by gym chains.

Regarding the former, social media can act as a valuable initiative for gym chains to create CBBE, even if it is not directly intended. As such, customers create CBBE in form of brand awareness and brand associations through voluntary UGC, which is not incentivized by the gym chain's social media marketing but intrinsically motivated. However, gym chains are bound to their functionality and thus dependent on their functional values. These are more difficult to transmit on social media than emotional values and hence impede the creation of potential CBBE.

If social media marketing efforts to create CBBE are applied intentionally by gym chains, this cannot happen without the premise that the customers, as the creators of CBBE, are following the social media profile of the brand. Therefore, it is necessary to convince customers of the continuous added value of social media content shared by the gym chain. This is best done by first identifying the customers' most important values and second aligning the brand's social media communication towards these values. Only if current customers follow the gym chain on Instagram, their engagement with the brand can be expanded intentionally. This, in turn, would increase the likelihood of created CBBE through intended social media marketing efforts as other social media users within the customer's network become aware of the brand.

The analyzed data shows that intended social media marketing efforts do not necessarily yield the desired outcomes concerning brand awareness and brand associations. As illustrated by John Reed, the communication of the brand's USPs, the music aspect as well as the unique interior design, is in focus. However, the consumer interviews reveal that the USPs were not identified on first sight without prior brand knowledge. This contradicts the intended social media marketing efforts to increase brand awareness, as consumers are incapable to become aware of the brand's differentiating factors. Without

conveying the complete information on the gym chain's USPs, social media marketing efforts can clearly not reach their full potential. Apart from the unclear communication of USPs, another example of social media marketing efforts that do not create the desired CBBE is the display of the gym chain's target customer group on Instagram. This is because the people in the studio as well as the people who are displayed by gym chains on Instagram form a strong brand association in the consumers' minds. If a potential customer does not see himself aligned with the customer group displayed by the gym chain, the Instagram profile can have an alienating effect for the customer and lessens the probability of becoming a customer.

For the brand assets of perceived quality and brand loyalty, consumers require more information outside of social media in order to form an opinion. Thus, the assets perceived quality and brand loyalty can only be created in interplay with offline touchpoints between the customer and the gym chain. Nevertheless, potential customers can get a grasp of the gym chain's quality and the loyalty of its customers over social media, which is identified to have a high impact on the first impression of the brand. For potential customers, the first impression of both CBBE assets is positive if the gym chain's equipment is displayed professionally and the Instagram presence transmits a feeling of community between the brand and its existing customers. In case of current customers, it is revealed that laying the focus on important quality attributes or loyalty values in their social media communication can also enhance their existing perceptions and thus can strengthen CBBE. For that effect to take place, however, it is crucial that the depiction of the gym chain's quality or loyalty efforts on Instagram are justifiable with the customer's offline experience, as it weakens the brand's perceived authenticity otherwise.

#### **6.4. Research Question**

**RQ:** *How do gym chains implement social media marketing strategies in order to remain successful in the fitness industry?*

The analyzed consumer interviews and evaluated sub questions indicate a high importance of social media for gym chains. Consequently, a successful social media marketing strategy is a competitive

advantage to maintain a favorable industry position. Under consideration of the widespread online fitness community and omnipresent fitness related shared content, it is evident that a great part of the fitness industry's marketing takes place on social media. Both results represent reasons why it is vital for gym chains to exploit the opportunities social media has to offer. These include the cheap and geographically unrestricted targeting of gym chain's identified customer group and the opportunity to address the consumers' emotions. It is identified as necessary for gym chains to root the social media marketing strategy within their total marketing efforts in order to guarantee alignment in their presence. Preventing this incoherence preserves the perceived authenticity by potential and existing customers.

Through a focus on the brand assets brand awareness and brand associations, gym chains can strengthen their CBBE on social media and thus contribute to their success and standing within the fitness industry. Especially Instagram and the platform's story format are effective for presenting the brand's USPs and target consumer group on social media. Furthermore, Instagram is the platform on which consumers show the highest engagement with brands and the platform on which the fitness lifestyle movement is supported the most. To keep consumers interested in engaging with gym chains, it is necessary to support them in reaching their desired fitness level by being a daily source of inspiration as well as motivation. Since consumers prefer Instagram over other social media platforms because of its high visuality, it is necessary to create professional and aesthetic content. This makes it more likely to elicit consumers' emotions, especially regarding their ideal self-image and fitness goals.

As consumers mostly consult social media profiles of gym chains for evaluating different alternatives, gym chains can support their customer acquisition by presenting the brand's USPs in a quickly recognizable and appealing way. This does not only enhance the perceived quality that existing customers have of the gym chain but also enables potential customers to form their own perception of the quality they expect when becoming a member. The gym chain's CBBE is strengthened through consumers' perceived quality as long it is positive and motivating to become a member. Instagram can further benefit gym chains' CBBE through increasing the brand loyalty of consumers. When UGC is created on Instagram, gym chains have the opportunity to acknowledge this content by reposting it through their story format. This gives the consumer a feeling of loyalty towards the brand as he is assured of the mutuality of the customer-brand relationship.

All initiatives to support the creation of CBBE on social media require a strong customer focus and equally strong knowledge about the target consumers' desires. As such, a customer focus in the social media marketing efforts is recommendable. It is, however, even more efficient if brands incorporate the CBBE framework as principal guidance in the planning for successful social media marketing strategies.

## **7. Discussion**

This research is an extension of the existing literature on brand equity and on the motivations behind consumer engagement on social media. Nevertheless, a critical evaluation of the potential implications of the results is necessary.

The findings reveal that social media can have a major impact on how consumers perceive a gym chain, especially without prior knowledge on the brand. As the consumer's perception of a gym chain compiles the foundation on which he creates CBBE in form of brand awareness and brand associations, a strong focus on social media from the gym chain's side is required.

To achieve these findings, consumer engagement theories by Tsai and Men (2013), Belk (2013) as well as Islam et al. (2018) have been applied within the empirical data collection. Each theory was examined in the interviews through a unique set of questions. All three theories concern consumer behavior on social media but are not originally applied in the context of gym chains. Therefore, the scope of the theories was altered by adding a specific context under the assumption of the theories' applicability for gym chains.

The analyzed data affirms all four antecedents of consumer engagement on social media by Tsai and Men (2013) to be applicable. Even though the consumers confirm that social identity and community identification, the fourth antecedent, increases their engagement with brands, none of the participants felt part of a community in the fitness industry. The heavy usage of social media combined with the exposure to fitness related content and a seemingly fit social network lead to the conclusion that the consumers

have extended their selves on social media. Additionally, the fitness lifestyle movement also has impact on their behavior as consumers on social media. Consequently, Belk's (2013) notion of the Extended Self in a digital environment is a relevant theory while examining the behavior of consumers in the fitness industry. Finally, the application of the congruity theory on social media by Islam et al. (2018), consisting of value congruity and self-image congruity, is found to have a high influence on the consumers' willingness to engage with gym chains on social media.

The framework of CBBE by Aaker (1991) has been extended in its original purpose in order to fit the analysis of social media marketing strategies of gym chains. The empirical data reveals that all four assets of brand equity can be significantly influenced through the gym chain's social media presence and marketing initiatives. However, social media can only impact the brand assets of perceived quality and brand loyalty if additional offline experiences are congruent with the online efforts. Brand awareness and brand associations, in contrast, can originate on social media without the need of the customer to have complementary offline experience with the brand.

Accordingly, the collected empirical data successfully enabled the testing of mentioned theories as well as the examination of the research question. Yet, it is to discuss to what extent the results of this study enable inferences on the totality of gym chains in the fitness industry. As pointed out earlier in the process, the abductive research approach only accounts for making hypothetical inferences that are overwritable by further research.

In the discussion, whether the results are appropriate to generalize insights for all gym chains, it needs to be pointed out that the importance of social media may vary significantly between different types of gym chains. This assumption is based on the lack of insights into the relevance of social platforms for other gym chains that do not share similar characteristics with John Reed. John Reed exemplifies a unique gym chain that strongly distinguishes itself from competitors in the fitness industry for two reasons. Firstly, John Reed is targeting a specific consumer segment in terms of age as well as lifestyle. The target customers are predestined for a high social media usage compared to other customer segments. As a result, social media might be of less importance for gym chains who do not target such an urban and young customer group. Secondly, John Reed strongly emphasizes the concepts of live DJ music and a

mixed interior design of exoticism and industrialism. These USPs differentiate the gym chain further from their competitors. While the live DJ music can be presented efficiently on social media in videos, especially through the Instagram story format, Instagram posts of the unique interior design satisfy the social media user's desire for visual and aesthetic inspiration. Hence, the inferred suitability of social media to present the USPs of gym chains from the illustration of John Reed will likely be biased.

## **8. Managerial Implications**

Based on the previous chapters, strategic as well as tactical recommendations for social media marketing managers of gym chains are derived. Hereby, implications referring to social media marketing of gym chains will be illuminated first, followed by implications related to CBBE.

### **8.1. Potential of Social Media Marketing for Gym Chains**

Fundamentally, gym chains should define their position in the fitness market based on their core values to ensure the successful implementation of their social media marketing strategies. While doing so, it is required to evaluate the potential that social media offers within the marketing mix of the specific gym chain. The target group of the gym has to be carefully considered in the course of the evaluation as it reveals the specific values and needs which, in turn, influence the potential of social media marketing.

Based on the evaluation, it should be decided whether the investment into social media as a marketing effort is worthwhile and adds value to the company. As such, social media efforts should not be adopted into the marketing strategy, if the company's target group is not native to or accessible via social media. On the contrary, if social media represents great potential in terms of the target group, it should be acknowledged in the marketing mix as a vital marketing tool.

Before the social media marketing strategy can be developed, the gym chain should determine the most relevant social networks by aligning them with the key objectives as well as the consumers' needs. To achieve the largest possible reach, all kinds of social media platforms should be considered and ranked depending on the different marketing objectives. Attention should also be paid to new social media network trends to avoid missing new opportunities to connect with the customer base and giving competitors a great advantage if they leverage this trend. The social media marketing strategy can be created after the potential has been evaluated and the most relevant social networks have been identified.

## **8.2. CBBE on Social Media for Gym Chains**

The lack of CBBE awareness of marketing managers in combination with the conferred power of consumers represent a challenge for gym chains to gain strategic advantage through their social media marketing efforts. Thus, social media should be considered as a tool to create CBBE including its four brand assets. Some of the actions referring to the individual brand assets are interrelated and therefore cannot be clearly separated. Furthermore, social media initiatives might result in additional positive effects on other brand assets. In the following, several managerial implications are introduced which are partly illustrated by examples based on a fictional gym chain (i.e. Best Gym). All implications are dependent of the gym chains' financial resources. Although this section refers to managerial implications for social media, these implications are often interlinked to offline actions.

One main objective of the social media marketing strategy of gym chains should be to create brand awareness. Therefore, influencer marketing is identified as one of the most effective tools. However, it is fundamental to choose influencers who represent the gym chain as well as the target group's values and needs. In order to increase the brand's reach, it is recommended to not limit the social media marketing to fitness influencers but to also include influencers from different areas such as fashion and music. The influencers could promote the gym chain by tagging it in their workout posts and stories. Further, captions and hashtags such as *"This is my favorite gym ever! The people are amazing, their*



*service is great, and the atmosphere is super motivating! #BestGymEver*” should be used to underline the gym chain’s values. This initiative could be accompanied by sponsoring local fitness athletes. Further, real life events (e.g. open-door events, fitness events, festivals, concerts) could be sponsored and broadcasted via a live stream on the gym chain’s Instagram profile for consumers. To increase the motivation of purchasing a gym membership the whole live stream could only be accessible on the website for paying customers. In order to promote the sponsored events accordingly, countdowns could be set and shared in the gym chain’s story on Instagram.

Besides influencer marketing, regular discount codes and promotions for new and existing customers should be implemented. Christmas, Valentine’s Day or the beginning of summer represent special occasions where consumers are aiming at becoming more sportive and are thus looking for a new gym membership. In this context, promotions such as one month of free training for new customers or monthly percentual discounts for existing customers could be created (see Figure 16).

Moreover, fitness challenges such as a “*Yoga Challenge*” could be initiated animating the followers to participate (see Figure 17). The consumers who have successfully taken part in the challenge are asked to nominate a certain number of friends. Another approach may be to involve employees in fitness challenges. An employee performing a sporting exercise such as pull-ups could be presented in the gym chain’s Instagram story. Afterwards, the consumers are invited to complete this exercise faster. Since the customers are supposed to tag friends, the engagement of the community would make the challenges go viral and brand awareness would be created. In order to reach even more consumers, collaborations with nutrition and other fitness-related brands (e.g. protein bars, healthy snacks) could be entered.



Figure 16: Instagram Post Example – Special Offer (Pixabay, 2016-a). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

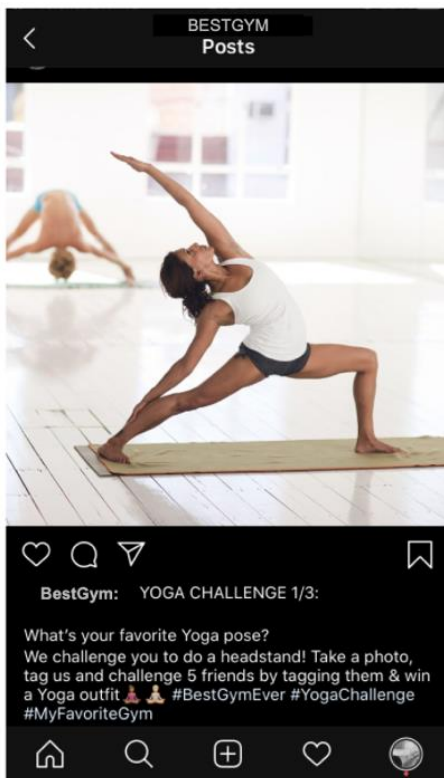


Figure 17: Instagram Post Example - Yoga Challenge (Pixabay, 2017-a). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

Both brands could benefit from this collaboration by sharing it in their Instagram stories and posts. Additionally, the gym consumers would gain knowledge and additional health information.

As for consumers, the gym chain should strive to include them as key part of the social media content creation process and encourage them to create UGC regularly. For instance, by asking them to share the location of the gym and using unique hashtags which have been promoted by the gym (e.g. “*#BestGymEver*”, “*#MyFavoriteGym*”). In return, some of the posts could get reposted on the gym chain’s Instagram account. Similarly, the brand can encourage the consumers to post transformation pictures. As such, the gym chain could promote this action by featuring the best transformation pictures on their social media and reward them with a merchandise or workout gear in addition. Other than that, social media marketing measures like paid ads should also be considered to create brand awareness.

Further, it is fundamental to actively seek brand loyalty as it leads to competitive advantage. As the offline gym experience is of major importance in the process of strengthening brand loyalty, it should complement the social media marketing strategy. In fact, it is recommended to build a strong brand community which is based on the shared interest of fitness to enhance the brand loyalty. Therefore, customer events could be organized by the gym chain, e.g. parties, fitness festivals or cooking classes, which are then advertised on the gym chain’s social media account.

To arouse the customer’s interest social media concepts like storytelling should be considered. Therefore, workout tips, instructions and healthy recipes could be divided in multiple content parts and shared separately in different posts or stories (see Appendix 7). Hashtags could, again, support this action (e.g. “*#StayTuned*”, “*#ToBeContinued*”).



Figure 18: Instagram Post Example - Quality (Pixabay, 2020). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

Likewise, brand associations and the perceived quality are often shaped by the offline experience of the consumers but can be strongly influenced by the social media strategy of the gym chain.

As brand associations are rooted deeply in consumers' minds, building and maintaining positive associations should be focused strongly in the process of the social media marketing strategy creation. This refers to the clear communication of the gym chain's USPs. In order to find out which attributes the gym chain is associated with, surveys could be carried out in the Instagram story function (e.g. "*Which attributes do you associate with our gym?*", see Figure 18). The gym chain should adjust its communication on social media in the case that the results do not reveal the desired associations. Overall, it is fundamental to embed the consumers in the process of building brand associations.

Since the brand community is a significant contributor to brand associations, the gym chain should highlight its community on social media. This could include pictures of their target group in group workouts or customer interviews about what they like best about the gyms. Moreover, the functional values of the gym chain should be emphasized (see Figure 19).

These values can be transmitted through Instagram stories and posts about the equipment, i.e. machines, facilities, course rooms. As a gym chain's service represents a significant reference point for consumers, individual employees could be introduced. Thereby, they could tell more about their work or their favorite part of the gym (e.g. "*Hey Name XY, what is your responsibility in our studio and which workout is your favorite one?*").

This traces back to the aspect of perceived quality. Here, the service and the gym chain's quality should be pointed out. For instance, by introducing all unique features the gym has to offer, e.g. saunas, showers,

chill areas, equipment. Customers can, again, be involved in this action by participating in Instagram stories in which they are asked what they like about the machines, for instance. Regarding the brand asset of perceived quality, Instagram polls, question and survey functions are a recommended tool to use. Consumers could be asked “*Do you like the quality of our gym?*” in order to assess whether the communication strategy on social media should be reconsidered in terms of quality (see Figure 18).

Considering all of the above-mentioned implications for gym chains referring to CBBE, it can be concluded that various measures on social media can effectively contribute to enhance the individual brand assets. Nevertheless, the most important managerial implication remains that the consumer should be included in the strategy creation process and a clear communication of the USPs should be ensured.

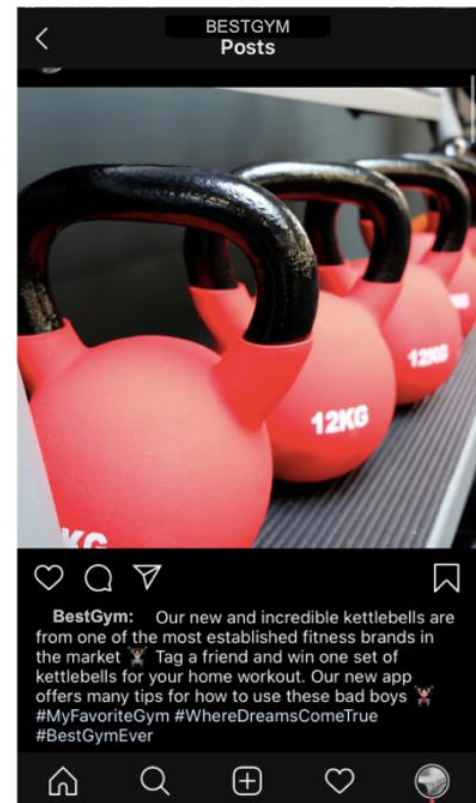


Figure 19: Instagram Post Example - Equipment (Pixabay, 2017-b). Source: Authors' own Depiction.

### 8.3. John Reed

In order to draw managerial implications for John Reed, a SWOT analysis has been carried out which is based on the gained consumer insights, the expert interview as well as the thorough theoretical framework. A SWOT analysis identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a company and is a frequently used tool in strategic planning. Internal qualities and characteristics are the origin of strengths and weaknesses while opportunities and threats are caused by external circumstances (Hill & Westbrook, 1997). The following SWOT summarizes the findings above and illustrates John Reed's internal qualities as well as the external circumstances influenced by the fitness industry and consumers.

Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Training (Facilities)	Weak communication of USPs on social media
	Music (Live Music by DJs, John Reed Radio)	Unawareness of CBBE
	Design (Interior)	Weak CBBE: Lack of emotional attachment Lack of favorable brand associations
	John Reed Community	
	Value for Money Concept	
	Constant growth	
External	Opportunities	Threats
	Social media affine target group	Strong competition of gym chains and influencers
	Fitness lifestyle movement	Easily accessible home equipment
	Interest of consumers in fitness content on social media	Unsteady environment through emerging fitness trends

*Table 5: SWOT Analysis for John Reed. Source: Authors' own Depiction.*

Two key managerial implications for John Reed can be derived from the SWOT analysis:

First, John Reed should clearly communicate their USPs on social media in form of the brand's core values, i.e. training, music, design and community. These values clearly represent strengths due to their unique combination. John Reed is growing rapidly across Germany and Europe which is reflected in the constant opening of new studios. Presumably, this is attributable to the identified strengths of the brand as well as the affordable prices that are defined by the value for money concept. The active use of Instagram is also one of John Reed's strengths as pictures, videos and stories are shared frequently. This results in a relatively large number of followers compared to e.g. CleverFit, the gym chain with the highest studio number of over 470 in Europe but only 23.3k Instagram followers (CleverFit n.d.-a; CleverFit n.d.-b). Compared to John Reed's current number of 26 studios in Europe, this is the clear indication that the brand is already applying several social media marketing tactics successfully. Besides a consistent design of the account as well as its posts, John Reed hashtags and John Reed influencers are used. Further marketing measures are the organization of John Reed community events and the integration of consumers by reposting their content. However, the strengths come along with several weaknesses concerning the unclear communication of USPs to the consumer on social media. This is identified as the reason why non-customers are rather averse to the Instagram account and customers do not follow the John Reed Instagram profile. As the consumer interviews reveal that almost no one could

identify music as one of the core values, it is highly recommended to showcase this value intensively on social media.

The second fundamental managerial implication is based on CBBE. John Reed must be aware of the power consumers carry in terms of brand value creation and should monitor CBBE closely in the social media marketing strategy development process. It is not obvious for the consumer to understand the values and uniqueness of John Reed. This results in a weak CBBE which is, among others, shown in the consumers' associations with the brand. Among others, the consumers perceive the color scheme as extremely dark and therefore deterrent, which is why John Reed should consider a color scheme which is in line with the USPs. Further, it is striking that the participants do not feel addressed because they could not identify themselves with the people depicted on Instagram. This is mainly based on the fact that the consumers feel that the posts only depict fitness models and not the average gym customer. This is further supported as especially female consumers are deterred by the images, although John Reed aims to appeal to a broader female target audience as a brand and on Instagram. Therefore, it is suggested that John Reed rethinks this strategy by focusing more on the average consumer on social media to reach more consumers and inspire them to follow the account.

Nevertheless, the social media affine target group as well as the general interest of consumers in fitness related content is a key opportunity for John Reed. However, the strong competition, also caused by influencers, should be continually considered.

## 9. Conclusion

Originated in our interest and passion for fitness as well as social media, the purpose of this study is to provide insights into social media marketing strategies of gym chains and the consumers' motivation to engage with gym chains. The strong competition within the fitness industry and the dynamic of fitness trends on social media represent a challenge for gym chains. In order to avoid losing competitive advantage to competitors, it is not sufficient to simply have a social media account. Instead, constant attention must be applied on arising trends and the competition's social media efforts that require adapting own social media marketing strategies. We as fitness consumers, however, believe that the enormous relevance of social media networks nowadays harbors great potentials for gym chains to increase their success and withstand strong competitors. Therefore, the main motivation behind this work was to explore the nature of social media marketing of gym chains by investigating the extent to which European gym chains can affect and, at best, create CBBE with their social media marketing strategies.

From the viewpoint of gym chains, we have discovered that social media represents an integral part of the marketing mix. Also, from the perspective of consumers we have figured that fitness represents an essential element in everyone's daily life as the underlying reasons for engagement in gym chains' social media content is the desire of inspiration and motivation. Gym chains can benefit from this interest by considering it as a tool in terms of CBBE creation. Even though the desired results might not necessarily be achieved, gym chains can strengthen CBBE on social media if they strongly focus on creating brand awareness and brand associations. To successfully do so, marketing managers of gym chains should define their position in the fitness market based on the USPs and communicate these clearly on social media. In turn, social media decisively contributes to their success and reputation in the whole fitness industry.

However, in the course of this paper, it also became apparent that external situations can have an inexorable impact on the whole industry. The current Coronavirus pandemic is not just severely affecting lives and businesses worldwide but also gym chains. The pandemic has drastically increased the significance for gym chains to exploit all opportunities of digitization as they had to close immediately and thereby lost their greatest functional value: their facilities. In order to remain successful, gym chains must therefore react instantly and adapt their social media marketing strategy accordingly.



### **9.1. Limitations**

Despite of its thoroughly planned structure and execution, this paper includes several limitations. One external circumstance causing two main limitations of this paper is the Coronavirus pandemic. The first limitation concerns our writing process, as the facilities of CBS like all educational institutions closed, including the library. Therefore, access to offline literature has not been granted.

The second limitation concerns the conducted expert interview. It has been originally planned to interview experts from several gym chains to achieve results which are inferable to the whole industry. In addition, one to two in-depth interviews with consumers would have complemented the results by evaluating the experts' intentions from a consumer perspective. However, with one exemption, all experts have cancelled our scheduled interview because of the challenging situations gym chain faced as they were required to close their studios immediately. As such, we are especially grateful for Martin Meyer to hold onto his confirmation of the interview. Due to these challenging circumstances, it was necessary to adapt our research methodology. Although the expert interview offered detailed insight into John Reed's social media marketing efforts, not enough numerical data and further information on overall strategies were given for a purely case-based research. As a result, it has been decided to conduct 12 consumer interviews during which an entire section was dedicated to the evaluation of John Reed's Instagram presence. This enables a direct comparison between the expert's intentions to support the creation of CBBE and the consumers' perception of the brand's social media marketing efforts. As such, the gym chain John Reed has the status of an illustration in this research. Therefore, this research illustrates how a specific gym chain type makes use of social media in order to create CBBE. In combination with the used abductive reasoning approach, this limits our findings to hypothetical inferences on the use of social media marketing of gym chains that are similar to John Reed. However, given that John Reed is characterized by its disruptive business model in the fitness industry, we would expect the results to differ substantially for traditional gym chains. If we would have been able to conduct the data as it was planned originally, we could cast further light on the differences in social media marketing efforts between traditional gym chains and innovators in the industry.

Apart from adapting the research approach, both the expert interview and consumer interviews, show limitations in their conduction. In contrast to the consumer interviews, the expert interview was held in



German and the transcript was translated into English. Therefore, the implicit meaning expressed through the word selection may have been altered to a certain degree. In addition, all interviews were conducted via Skype. Consequently, the body language of the respondents could not have been observed. Additionally, the consumer interviews were conducted in English but since neither the authors of this study, nor any of the twelve respondents is a native English speaker it might have resulted in linguistic restrictions due to a lack of vocabulary that could have led to misunderstandings.

A general limitation of the chosen research method is that semi-structured interviews may have caused interviewer as well as response bias (Saunders et al., 2009). Whereas interviewer bias refers to bias created through the comments, tone or non-verbal behavior of the interviewer, as well as bias of how the authors interpreted the responses, response bias implies that interviewees might only have provided a partial picture of the situation or topic.

In addition, the consumer interviews were conducted over a short period of time. In order to gain more accurate findings or causal implications, a longitudinal approach over time would have been required. This could have led to different findings based on changes in the fitness industry, among competitors as well as consumer behavior and their perceptions of certain phenomena.

It has to be noted that the consumer data collection based on twelve individual interviews is a small sample which limits the inference of the findings. Further, the interviewees represent a rather homogenous consumer group, both in terms of age as well as cultural and educational background as all respondents are between 24- and 28-years old students from Europe. Even though the consumers belong to the target group of John Reed, they do not represent all characteristics of it. This implies that the findings and managerial implications might not be applicable for consumers with distinct characteristics. Especially in the context of social media and gym chains it is vital to take into account that different consumer groups differ in their needs and values. For instance, consumer groups belonging to Gen Z, Baby Boomers, or Gen X might find themselves in different life stages and financial situations, which results in different values and needs for gyms and social media.

Apart from methodological and structural limitations, this paper only examines the online performance of gym chains. However, the social media marketing performance of a gym chain is often difficult to

separate from the offline experience. This is especially because of the functional nature of gym chains. The quality and services in their facilities are strongly correlated with the social media presence. The interrelation is also affirmed in the findings, since in two brand assets of CBBE the offline experience is a necessary component for customers to build their opinions which contribute to gym chains' CBBE. Social media can thus serve as an initiator and monitor of the brand assets but is dependent on the offline component.

Despite these limitations the study at hand can be perceived as pioneering research in the field of social media marketing and the resulting CBBE in the fitness industry. Further, the social media marketing strategies examined on the illustration of John Reed can be consulted as a guideline for marketing managers in the fitness industry as discussed in Chapter 8.

## **9.2. Future Research**

The findings of this paper can be revoked by future research since an abductive research approach leads to hypothetical inferences which are based on interpreted observations. However, the findings can also be enhanced through future research in several ways. In addition, future research can also lead to overcoming several of the mentioned limitations. Firstly, a higher variety of gym chains ought to be analyzed to increase the validity of the results. This analysis could for instance be based on further interviews with marketing professionals from other gym chains or industry experts, or on secondary data. It would be particularly interesting to put further research focus on the general importance of social media for gym chains, as it has been discussed that social media is of special relevance for the illustrated brand John Reed. Secondly, increasing the number and heterogeneity of consumer interviews would also extend the validity of the findings. Increased knowledge on the needs of different gym chain customers can also be beneficial for gym chains in the process of their CBBE creation on social media.

Furthermore, future research is not limited to the research methodology of in-depth interviews that has been applied for this paper. For instance, a fruitful data collection method would be focus groups with consumers as they enable a consumer discussion on gym chains and fitness content on social media. In

addition, longitudinal studies could be applied to analyze the entire customer journey. This would illustrate the primary creation of CBBE on social media and the impact of the offline experience at the gym once the consumer becomes a customer.

Resulting from this, we suspect that the way gym chains create their social media marketing strategies will change in the future and we are eager to follow this evolution beyond this study.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Expert interview guide

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#### **Before the interview**

- Introduction of interviewers
- Research objectives and interview process
- Confidentiality of data
- Permission to use expert's name and John Reed's website and social media accounts within the analysis

#### **Block 1: John Reed and social media**

- Introduction of expert and John Reed
- Importance of social media marketing for John Reed's total marketing efforts
- The most used social media platforms and the most important one
- The consumer target of John Reed and its targeting on social media

#### **Block 2: Fitness industry**

- Evaluation of the competition in the industry and the influence on John Reed's social media marketing
- Evaluation of fitness influencer and home workouts as competition of John Reed
- Influence of the fitness lifestyle movement on social media on John Reed's social media marketing possibilities
- Communication with target customer segment on social media

#### **Block 3: John Reed's social media marketing**

- What are the main goals of John Reed's social media marketing?
- Brand awareness:
  - o Are you focused on people who are not yet gym customers and thus need information and motivation or more focused on customers of other gym chains?
  - o Is social media used to differentiate the brand from competitors? Reference made to the brand slogan "Not your average gym"
- Perceived quality:
  - o Are you aiming at communicating John Reed's quality as a gym chain on social media?
  - o Should John Reed's social media presence improve the quality perception of existing customers?
- Brand loyalty:
  - o Evaluation of reposting customer content on Instagram as brand loyalty measure
  - o Usage of social media as customer service or community management tool
  - o What are important factors for customers when deciding to become a gym chain customer? Are the most important factors emphasized on John Reed's Instagram profile?
- Brand associations:
  - o Evaluation of the aesthetics of John Reed's Instagram presence: Link to aesthetics of John Reed in offline experiences?
  - o Purpose of showcasing fit and muscular customer on Instagram



- Evaluation of customer requirements on Instagram: Do they want to be informed, motivated or personally addressed?
- Which attributes should customers associate John Reed?

## Appendix 2: Consumer interview guide

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### **Before the interview**

- Introduction of interviewers
- Research objectives and interview process
- Confidentiality of data
- Permission to use participant's name and statements within the analysis
- Have you visited the Instagram profile of John Reed before this interview?

### **Block 1: Demographics**

- Introduction of participant, including name, age, profession, place of living, hobbies

### **Block 2: Fitness routine**

- How do you keep yourself fit?
- What kind of influence does fitness have on your life, success, mental health, health, etc.

### **Block 3: Social media usage**

- How important is social media in your life from a scale of 1-10?
- Would you define yourself as a heavy social media user?
- Which networks do you use and which ones do you use the most?
- What are the implications of social media on your communication with companies and brands?
- Do you follow gym chains or fitness brands on social media?
- Do you follow fitness lifestyle accounts on social media?
- Do you follow your current gym's account on social media?
- What benefits do you have from following fitness related accounts?
- Is social media content from gyms interesting to you at all?

### **Block 3: Consumer engagement**

- COBRA:
  - How would you evaluate your engagement as a consumer on social media? → Introduce 3 levels of online activeness
- UGC:
  - have you ever shared created content related to a brand voluntarily?
- Media dependency:
  - Is there information on brands that is only shared on social media?

- How would you look for information regarding brands in general?
- How would you look for information on gym chains?
- Parasocial interaction:
  - How do you interact with brands on social media ?
  - Are there brands that you perceive as persons on social media?
  - Does it have an impact on your opinion of a brand when you see how the brand interacts with other consumers on social media?
  - Did that happen with your gym chain?
- Perceived credibility:
  - Would you agree that sharing a lot of information on social media makes a brand authentic? Why?
  - Would you only react to brand content on social media if it is perceived as credible by you?
  - How do you evaluate the credibility of social media content of fitness brands?
- Social identity and community identification:
  - Are there online communities on social media which you feel part of?
  - Is the interaction with members of said online community a reason for you to engage in social media / engage with a related brand
  - Does your gym chain has an online community on social media?
- Extended Self:
  - What is your opinion on the fitness lifestyle on social media?
  - Do you often experience people you follow presenting themselves as especially fit or healthy on social media?
  - Do you do that yourself?
  - Do you feel motivated when you see other people posting fitness related content?
- Congruity theory:
  - Do you have an ideal image of yourself in mind?
  - How does your gym support you in reaching that goal?
  - How do fitness brands you follow on social media support you in reaching that goal?
  - Does the gym or fitness brand you follow support you in the ideal self image of yourself? Do you feel more motivated?
  - What are your most important values regarding fitness and being fit?
  - Does the fitness brand you follow represent those values? If not, why do you follow it?

#### **Block 4: Brand equity of gym chains**

- Brand awareness:
  - How are you exposed to fitness related content on social media?
  - What do you remember most when you see fitness related content on social media?
  - Are the offline experiences you have made with gym chains offline supported / aligned with their social media presence?
- Brand associations:
  - What comes into your mind when thinking about your gym chain?
  - How important are functional values over the emotional values of a gym chain?

- What values should a gym chain communicate over social media?
- Perceived quality:
  - How do you evaluate the quality of your gym chain?
  - Which attributes are the most important to you when evaluating quality?
  - Are these attributes supported on social media?
- Brand loyalty:
  - Are you a loyal customer of your gym?
  - What are the most important decision factors for you to become a loyal gym member?
  - Should your gym chain communicate these values on social media? How?

#### **Block 5: Social Media Marketing John Reed:**

- What is your previous knowledge of John Reed or other brands of the RSG group?
- Brand awareness:
  - What do you remember from seeing the Instagram profile of John Reed?
  - What did you find interesting?
  - What is your overall first impression of the profile?
  - What did you look at first?
- Brand associations:
  - Which attributes would you associate with John Reed?
  - What do you associate with the brand slogan “Not your average gym”?
  - Are your brand associations aligned with your first impression?
- Perceived quality:
  - Based on your first impression, how would you evaluate John Reed’s quality as a gym chain?
  - Are your most important quality attributes present on the brand’s Instagram profile?
- Brand loyalty:
  - Would you consider becoming a customer of John Reed?
  - Are your most important loyalty values communicated by the brand on Instagram?

#### Appendix 3: Transcript of expert interview

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**Interviewer:** Bitte gib uns einmal eine kurze Einführung in das Unternehmen John Reed, in dem du arbeitest, und deine Position.

**Expert:** Ja, genau. Also, das Unternehmen, in dem ich arbeite, ist die RSG Group, die Rainer Schaller Global Group, früher McFit. Und da gibt es drei Fitnessstudio Marken: McFit, High5 und John Reed. Und es gibt noch weitere Marken, wie Sports Nutrition, eben auch Cyberobics mit dem virtuellen Kurstraining. Und John Reed ist jetzt vier Jahre alt. McFit hat immer noch die meisten Studios, die haben so 250 Studios. John Reed hat jetzt 26 Studios und John Reed wurde als Marke etabliert, um noch mehr eine größere Zielgruppe zu erreichen. Also McFit hat eine hohe Bekanntheit, ist in 5 Ländern aktiv, hat auch viele Fans, aber natürlich auch eher so ein Image als eher "Pumper lastiges" Studio. Der Fokus liegt auf Bodybuilding, relativ hoher Männeranteil. Und viele sagen dann auch "Okay, ja McFit ist jetzt irgendwie nichts für mich, da würde ich jetzt nicht hingehen". Vor allem auch

weibliche Zielgruppe ist da jetzt nicht so stark vertreten. Und es ist natürlich so das Kundensegment (??), was so im Prinzip erfunden wurde vor 22, 23 Jahren, was es da noch nicht gab, was halt hier auch stark besetzt wurde, wo es jetzt inzwischen auch viel Konkurrenz gibt. Und mit John Reed haben wir ein Konzept entwickelt, was so ein bisschen lifestyleiger ist, urbaner, so ein bisschen cooler, wo es darum geht, dass man beim Training an einem schönen Ort ist, mit angenehmen Menschen, und dass man Spaß hat. Und insgesamt ist es für uns eher ein emotionaler Ansatz im Gegensatz zu einem funktionalen Ansatz bei McFit. Da geht man hin, um zu pumpen und einen dicken Bizeps zu bekommen. Und wir versuchen eben auch so die Emotionen und das Herz anzusprechen. Bei uns geht es im Markenkern, also bei John Reed, um das John Reed Feeling, also das gesamte Trainingserlebnis soll sich anders anfühlen. Und wenn man sich mal die Studios oder die Clubs, wie wir sie nennen, anschaut, die sehen ja auch anders aus. Dies sind mit ganz vielen Designelementen eingerichtet aus verschiedenen Stilen. Wir haben immer einen lokalen Künstler, der dann auch in einem Club ein Kunstwerk malt. Und wir haben eben das Thema Musik, was auch einen wesentlichen Teil des Konzepts ausmacht. Wir haben zweimal die Woche live DJs in jedem Club. Das sind dann pro Woche 52 DJs, also über 200 DJ Sets, die quasi in Europa gespielt werden. Und wir haben das John Reed Radio, was quasi den Tag über läuft, wenn kein DJ spielt. Das haben wir jetzt vor kurzem als App rausgebracht und fünf Channels, also quasi vier weitere Channels, gelauncht, wo man jetzt auch so ein bisschen Genre spezifischer hören kann. Also wir haben jetzt einen Urban Channel, wir haben jetzt einen Elektro Channel und das kann man eben auch als App quasi zu Hause hören. Und genau, um das abzuschließen, also beim Training, ich weiß jetzt nicht wie tief wir da gleich nochmal reingehen. Aber grundsätzlich geht es halt um verschiedene Trainingsbereiche, die man nutzen kann. Cardio, Freigewichte, Geräte und Functional und so das Thema Kurse mit Live Kursen mit Group Workouts, die wir auf der Fläche machen. Genau. Und der vierte Markenwert ist dann Community, wo wir dann auch regelmäßig verschiedene Events machen, wo wir eben auch über Social Media mit der Community in Interaktion treten und versuchen, sie irgendwie einzubinden über verschiedene Maßnahmen. Und Community ist eben auch... am Ende geht es ja auch darum, dass du dich auch wohl fühlst. Und das hängt natürlich auch stark von den Leuten ab. Also "kann ich mich mit denen identifizieren, ist es eine angenehme Gruppe?". Man trainiert oft auch mit der besten Freundin und mit dem besten Freund oder auch in derselben Live-Kurs Gruppe.

**Interviewer:** Ja, ich finde es total interessant, dass du das schon gesagt hast mit den funktionalen, emotionalen Werten, weil wir uns das in die Richtung auch schon gedacht haben. Einfach, auch weil emotionale Werte viel besser verkaufbar sind über Social Media als, sage ich mal, die funktionalen Werte, die so das traditionelle Fitnessstudio aufgemacht haben. Über diese Differenzierung und wie sich das auf Social Media auswirkt, das würden wir gleich nochmal aufnehmen. Einmal zum generellen Social Media Marketing im gesamten Marketing von John Reed: Würdest du dem Social Media Marketing eine große Bedeutung zuordnen, oder würdest du sagen, da gibt es für John Reed wichtigere Touchpoints als Social Media aus Marketingsicht?

**Expert:** Also es hat auf jeden Fall eine große Bedeutung bei uns, weil wir eine sehr Social Media affine Zielgruppe haben, also sowohl vom Alter als auch von der Lebensgestaltung her. Die haben alle ein Smartphone, und die haben alle irgendwie Accounts auf Instagram und Facebook. Es ist ein interaktiver Kanal, wo die Leute dann auch mit uns in Kontakt treten können. Bilder und Videos spielen eine Rolle. Da hat man natürlich auch immer mehr Möglichkeiten als jetzt auf anderen Kanälen, wie auf einem Plakat, da kann ich jetzt kein Bewegtbild zeigen. Und gerade das Thema Musik ist für uns halt auch nicht so leicht zu kommunizieren. Es ist ja eben auch so eine Unterscheidung, dass eben Musik bei uns eine wichtige Rolle spielt, und das kann man natürlich am besten über Bewegtbild machen. Und bei uns ist halt immer auch ein ganz wichtiger Punkt: Klar, wir können auch Fernsehspots schalten aber wir haben aktuell 26 Clubs in sechs Ländern und wir haben auch noch keine nationale Abdeckung in Deutschland. Das heißt irgendwie Fernsehspots, abgesehen davon, dass sie zu teuer werden, würden die keinen Sinn machen. Und mit Social Media können wir halt auch immer lokal targeten. Es geht immer um lokale Bekanntheit in den Städten auszubauen wo wir Clubs haben und das kann man eben über Social Media gut machen.

**Interviewer:** Ja, also John Reed ist ja präsent auf Instagram, Facebook und YouTube, soweit wir jetzt gesehen haben. Aber Instagram hat auf jeden Fall die höchste Followerzahl. Würdest du da auch sagen Instagram hat am meisten Potential?

**Expert:** Also Instagram ist schon die wichtigste Plattform für uns von den Social Media Plattformen. Perspektivisch wird es, glaube ich, auch noch wichtiger werden, weil sich auch die Plattformen selber natürlich so weiterentwickelt haben. Das kennt man ja auch eigentlich von seinem privaten Nutzungsverhalten. Auf Facebook ist man jetzt vielleicht noch irgendwie für Events oder, keine Ahnung, wenn man etwas verkaufen will, aber ich poste da eigentlich nichts mehr. Schon lange nicht. Natürlich ist es noch riesig groß, und gerade auch für Werbung, für Paid Content ist es immer noch wichtig. Aber so an sich, für die Bespielung von unseren eigenen Kanälen, da ist Instagram am wichtigsten und auch gerade durch das Story Format. Das spielt auch eine wichtige Rolle bei uns. Klar, es gibt inzwischen auch Facebook Stories, aber gefühlt hat sich auch noch nicht so richtig durchgesetzt. Deswegen ist bei uns Instagram auf jeden Fall die wichtigste Social Media Plattform.

**Interviewer:** Ja, auch eben weil du meinst, dass sich John Reed eher auf eine gewisse Altersgruppe fokussiert, was vielleicht, im Vergleich zu anderen Fitnessstudios, anders ist. Da ist vielleicht vom super jungen Teenie bis zum Rentner, der sich fit halten will, noch jeder vertreten. Aber bei John Reed geht es dann eher in die Richtung gut situierter Mittzwanziger, oder wie würdest du so eure Zielgruppe beschreiben?

**Expert:** Ja, also gut situiert finanziell muss man ja eigentlich gar nicht sein. Man kann auch ab 25 Euro trainieren, also wir sprechen dann immer ein bisschen liebevoll vom Premium Discount Segment. Aber eigentlich ist es immer noch Discount. Wobei wir uns da jetzt gerade ein bisschen auch nach oben entwickeln und Clubs, die wir aufmachen, teilweise auch teurer sind und besser ausgestattet, also 40, 60, 80 Euro kosten, zum Beispiel jetzt Zürich und Regensburg. Aber zur Zielgruppe: Also grundsätzlich ist die auch jung so, also die Kernzielgruppe ist so 18 bis 40. Ist jetzt glaube ich auch gar nicht jünger oder älter als bei McFit zum Beispiel. Aber bei uns, wir richten uns auch eher an lifestyleigere Leute, an ein urbanes Publikum, an Leute, die auch Bock haben, rauszugehen, Musik zu hören, Leute zu treffen und für die Sport ein wichtiger Teil des Lebens ist, aber auch nicht der wichtigste und auch Fitness nicht unbedingt der wichtigste. Man macht vielleicht noch andere Sportarten und geht zwei, dreimal die Woche ins Studio. Und bei McFit geht man vielleicht auch ein bisschen öfter, nimmt es irgendwie noch ein bisschen ernster. Genau, das ist so unsere Zielgruppe.

**Interviewer:** Ja, okay. Einmal zu generellen Einschätzung der Fitnessindustrie. Kannst du uns da etwas zum Wettbewerb sagen, wie du diesen einschätzt? Also würdest du sagen, der ist gekennzeichnet durch eine sehr hohe Konkurrenz oder durch eine Schnellebigkeit oder eher langsamere Wandel?

**Expert:** Also, generell ist die Konkurrenz extrem groß. Im Discount Segment tummeln sich inzwischen super viele Anbieter. Wir heben uns da noch preislich auch ein bisschen ab. Bei uns kostet der vergleichbare Vertrag dann so 35 Euro. Wenn du jetzt auf jeden Euro schauen muss, dann ist das schon ein Unterschied, ob du jetzt 19,90€ zahlst oder 35€. Das ist bei uns aber auch bewusst, um ein bestimmtes Publikum auszuschließen. Aber ja, in dem Discount Segment ist die Konkurrenz hoch. Wir bewegen uns hier mit der ganzen Marke aber auch. Wir werden, wir wollen, ein bisschen teurer werden. Nicht, dass wir jetzt die Preise erhöhen aber wir werden eben die Clubs, die wir jetzt neu aufmachen, die werden teilweise eben auch noch 25 Euro kosten, aber teilweise auch 40, 60, 80 Euro. Das heißt, die gesamte Marke wird auch ein hochwertigeres Image bekommen, und wir werden eben auch in den Clubs vermehrt Saunas und Whirlpools haben. Das heißt, wir bewegen uns da eher auch ins Mittel-Preissegment und da ist dann eigentlich nicht so viel Konkurrenz. Da gibt es irgendwie so FitnessFirst und HolmesPlace. Aber FitnessFirst ist jetzt auch eher so auf einem absteigenden Ast, und wir sehen halt keine Marke, die so ein, also einerseits wirklich top Sportmöglichkeiten anbietet, aber das Ganze auch in so einem lifestyleigen Designkonzept. Also so FitX und FIT/ONE so als größte Konkurrenz, das ist so "gutes Value for Money" aber es

ist halt irgendwie relativ langweilig, auch schon vom Design her und vom ganzen Look and Feel der Marke und von der Coolness und von den Marketing-Aktionen. Also da bin ich natürlich nicht ganz unvoreingenommen. Aber wir schauen ja auch, wie wir uns positionieren wollen. Und da sehen wir in der Kombination "Value for Money, aber in einem Lifestyle Konzept" sehen wir auf jeden Fall so einen Sweet Spot. Aber du hattest noch so einen zweiten Teil der Frage, und den hab ich vergessen. Ach, die Dynamik des Marktes.

**Interviewer:** Ja genau, vor allem im Bezug, das kann ich direkt hinterhersetzen da darauf auch unsere Masterthesis viel basiert, diese Fitness Influencer. Die über digitale Kommunikationswege ihre eigenen Homeworkouts promoten. Ich mein, die RSG Group hat ein eigenes Homeworkout Programm. Inwiefern stellen die Influencer eine Konkurrenz dar oder hält Leute auch davon ab, Kunde eines Fitnessstudios zu werden?

**Expert:** Ja, es sind natürlich super viele Dimensionen, die da irgendwie reinfließen. Vor vier Wochen hätte ich gesagt Homeworkouts sind irgendwie ein komplettes Randthema. Aber im Moment hat sich das natürlich total geändert. Aber wenn wir jetzt mal so vier Wochen zurückspulen würden... Also generell, spielen Influencer natürlich große Rolle bei Social Media und auch bei uns im Marketing Mix sind Influencer natürlich auch ein wichtiger Teil, um die Reichweite zu erhöhen, um auch bestimmte Zielgruppen zu erreichen, die auch noch mal authentischer zu erreichen, als wenn man als Unternehmen selber Werbung macht. Speziell das Thema Homeworkout, also ehrlich gesagt, weiß ich nicht, ob es Influencer gibt, die sich vor vier Wochen auf das Thema Homeworkout konzentriert haben. Wir gehen natürlich idealerweise auf Influencer, die schon bei uns trainieren, die auch affin zur Marke sind. Wir haben auch viele Influencer mit denen wir schon lange zusammenarbeiten. Die dann halt auch wirklich mit John Reed in Verbindung stehen und die sich dann auch beim Gym Workout filmen. Und die Frage zur Konkurrenz - gute Frage, auf jeden Fall. Also wir haben ja eben mit Cyberaerobics quasi noch einmal ein Programm oder eine Marke, die sich da nochmal abgrenzt. Und so von der Zielgruppe und vom Look and Feel grenzt sie sich da auch sehr, sehr stark ab. Das ist halt wirklich eher so, eher für Frauen. Es ist sehr unlifeystilig. Es ist eher so für junge Mütter, die zwischendrin ein Workout machen wollen. Ich mein, die Videos sind super aufwendig produziert und auch echt hochwertig. Aber in der Zielgruppe unterscheiden sie sich halt auch total. Ich glaube, bei uns ist es eher eine Ergänzung. Also ich glaube nicht, dass sich jetzt bei uns jemand nicht anmelden würde, weil als er jetzt einem Influencer folgt, der geniale Workouts gibt, weil bei uns ja auch diese Atmosphäre im Club wirklich zum Konzept gehört. Und wenn ich jetzt sage "Ja, das ist mir egal, mir reicht meine Yogamatte", ich glaube, dass es dann eher so Cyberaerobics' Zielgruppe ist oder die halt eben Leuten wie Pamela Reif folgen. Und da kann man immer noch argumentieren, gut, 25€, wenn du jetzt schon einen Job hast, dann kann man sich das leisten. Ich würde auch mal die Hypothese aufstellen, dass vielleicht auch manche Leute gemischt trainieren, je nachdem, wo sie wohnen oder wie viel Zeit sie haben. Dass sie am Wochenende ins John Reed gehen und unter der Woche, wenn nicht so viel Zeit ist, machen sie halt eben ein Homeworkout.

**Interviewer:** Aber du würdest grundsätzlich sagen, dass Fitness Influencer gerade eher als Teil einer Marketingstrategie gesehen werden aber dadurch, dass sie eben verschiedene Kundenbedürfnisse erfüllen im Vergleich zu John Reed, eben nicht als direkte Konkurrenz gewertet werden?

**Expert:** Ja, das zielt das jetzt auch so ein bisschen auf die Programme ab, die die auch teilweise haben. Die versuchen ja auch, zum Teil ihre eigenen Workout Programme zu verkaufen. Es hängt natürlich stark vom Influencer ab und auch von der Zielsetzung im Marketing Mix. Wir suchen natürlich nach Influencern mit einem hohen Markenfit zu John Reed. Es gibt auch viele Influencer, das sind halt wirklich Influencer, die passen viel besser zu McFit, oder die passen besser zu anderen Marken. Ich glaube auch, je höher dann der Brand Fit, desto höher ist auch die Authentizität und die Glaubwürdigkeit. Und, sag noch mal kurz die Frage?

**Interviewer:** Es gibt im Grunde nur um eine abschließende Bilanz, dass Homeworkouts keine direkte Konkurrenz für John Reed darstellen.

**Expert:** Ja genau, sorry. Also die Zielsetzung, also "Was will ich eigentlich mit meinem Influencer erreichen?" Da kann man ja auch verschiedene Ziele haben. Bei uns geht es oft um Reichweite erhöhen. Das ist halt tatsächlich Werbung und Promotion oder die Influencer eben einzubinden, zum Beispiel bei Events. Also, ich sehe bei den Influencern selber keine Konkurrenz, weil ich finde, es macht auch keiner so gut, dass er jetzt bei uns in der Zielgruppe eine Konkurrenz wäre, dass die Leute sich jetzt gegen einen Gym-Vertrag entscheiden würden. Ich glaube, dass ist bei anderen Marken irgendwie anders. Ich kann mir schon vorstellen, dass jetzt jemand bei FitnessFirst kündigt und bei Cyberobics das Gold-Paket bucht, weil man sagt "Okay, ich bin jetzt gerade Mutter geworden, ich hab nur 2x20 Minuten in der Woche und das reicht mir jetzt".

**Interviewer:** Okay, ja. Einmal, um in den dritten Block des Interviews so langsam rüberzuwechseln: Was soll durch eure Social Media Marketing Strategien erreicht werden? Liegt eher die Neukundengewinnung im Fokus und dass potenzielle Kunden auf die Marke aufmerksam werden, oder liegt der Fokus eher auf der Pflege von Beziehungen zu bestehenden Kunden?

**Expert:** Ja, schon definitiv beides. Bei Kampagnen mit Neukunden-Ziel ist Social Media auf jeden Fall immer ein wichtiger Teil im Marketing Mix. Und wir sehen da aber Social Media auch eher als Mix aus Image- und Sales-Kanal. Für uns ist das auf keinen Fall ein reiner Sales-Kanal, da gibt es irgendwie bessere. Wir gehen eher auf qualitativ hochwertige Reichweite, indem wir halt auch viele Video-Ads einsetzen, indem wir auch Formate einsetzen, wo man einfach viel Möglichkeit hat, die Botschaften rüberzubringen. Also Story-Ads zum Beispiel. Natürlich auch immer Feed-Ads. Also ist immer so ein Mix aus Sales und Image.

**Interviewer:** Also es geht auch viel um die Bekanntmachung der Marke, die nicht zwingend direkt mit neuer Kundenakquise verbunden ist? Also natürlich ist das das gewünschte Ziel, aber es wird nicht alles genau darauf ausgelegt.

**Expert:** Genau, also wir steuern jetzt unsere Social Media Paid Kampagne nicht auf Cost of Sales aus, sondern eher auf Reichweite. Und wir schauen, dass wir quasi die Leute über Social Media in Kontakt mit der Marke bringen und dann eher über andere Kanäle konvertieren. Die sehen dann eine Story-Ad oder eine Feed-Ad, und dann sehen draußen auch nochmal ein Plakat, und dann suchen die über Google und schließen dann ab. Das wäre dann eher so eine typische Journey. Klar, wenn die jetzt direkt abschließen, nachdem sie eine Ad gesehen haben, ist natürlich auch gut. Aber das macht nicht so viel Spaß, dass nach den Zahlen auszusteuern. Weil ich meine, es geht auch in der Regel um ein, zwei Jahre Fitnessstudio. Das ist auch eine Entscheidung, die dann oft auch ein bisschen ausreifen muss, wo man einfach auch mehrere Kontakte mit der Marke braucht.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Du hast gerade die hochwertige Qualität von John Reed angesprochen. Ich mein, du beschreibst es ja als Premium Discountkette im Vergleich zu anderen Discountketten. Da gibt es dann natürlich diese Premium-Attribute sage ich mal. Wollt ihr über Social Media auch diese hochwertige Qualität an eure Kunden herantragen? Also liegt euer Fokus dann auf diesen bestimmten Vorteilen, die diese höhere Qualität ausmachen? Zum Beispiel eben die Musik oder die DJs oder das aufwändige Design der Studios.

**Expert:** Ja, absolut. Wir wollen da natürlich die USP's kommunizieren. Also hohe Qualität im Sinne von eher im Sinne von USP's, also wir sprechen jetzt auch nicht über Premiumqualität wie zum Beispiel eines HolmesPlace's, wo du 90 Euro zahlst, wo du halt auch noch zig Services hast. Das haben wir aktuell in den meisten Clubs noch nicht. Aber es geht um Qualität und USP's, die uns vom Wettbewerb unterscheiden. Und das ist auf jeden Fall ein Hauptziel bei Social Media.

**Interviewer:** Okay, ja aber meinst, dass wenn Kunden in einem eurer Fitnessstudios waren und dann eben auch noch diese Werte, die ihnen vielleicht positiv aufgefallen sind, auf Social Media auch noch mal wiedererkennen,

dass sich dadurch deren wahrgenommene Qualität noch erhöhen könnte? Einfach dadurch, dass darauf noch mehr Kommunikationsfokus liegt.

**Expert:** Meinst du jetzt, wenn man quasi Mitglied geworden ist, und dann wird man bei Instagram zum Fan?

**Interviewer:** Genau, angenommen, man kennt das Konzept noch nicht von Anfang an. Man geht rein und da ist ein DJ und man denkt sich so "Was soll das denn?" und wenn sich die Marke dann auf Social Media eben auch noch so positioniert und dass dann auch noch so herausdeutet, dass sich das dann durch Social Media noch mehr in den Köpfen der Kunden manifestiert?

**Expert:** Ja, ich denke schon. Also, weil es ja auch eine Weile dauert, diese ganzen Sachen auch wirklich zu kommunizieren. Und durch die DJs passiert ja auch ständig etwas. Also wir können dann auch mal die DJ's, die dann auflegen. kommunizieren. Wir können die Events kommunizieren und am Ende natürlich auch die Interaktivität mit den Leuten befeuern, indem wir zum Beispiel Reposts machen von Mitgliedern. Also das ist dann so der zweite Teil neben dem Ziel Neukundenakquise wirklich auch Bestandskunden-Maßnahmen, was eben auch super wichtig ist. Das ist auch auf jeden Fall ein Hauptziel, die Leute an uns zu binden und auch immer zu überlegen, was ist cooler, interessanter Content oder wie können wir auch die Leute aufrufen, über Hashtags mit uns in Kontakt zu treten oder eben auch über Reposts. Also auch darüber, diesen Markenwert Community extrem spielen.

**Interviewer:** Ja, auf genau den Aspekt wollte ich mit meiner nächsten Frage aus, nämlich eben die Markenloyalität bestehender Kunden. Man kann halt eben fast denken, dass wenn eine Kunde im Fitnessstudio sein Ding durchzieht, vielleicht viel weniger offen ist für Eindrücke oder neue Interaktionen mit der Marke als für das, was eigentlich sein Vorgehen ist. Aber dann zuhause auf dem Sofa liegend im Feed zu gucken, da ist man vielleicht viel aufnahmefähiger. Und deswegen wollte ich es auch ansprechen, dass viele Fitnessstudios ja gerne Bilder reposten, die Kunden von sich machen und die ihre Verwandlung oder sich beim Training zeigen. Also du würdest sagen, dass das bei John Reed auf jeden Fall auch im Fokus steht um mit Kunden zu interagieren?

**Expert:** Ja, grundsätzlich glaube ich ist das auch wieder so ein emotionaler Ansatz. Ich meine, am Ende wollen wir ein Ort sein, mit dem die Leute auch positive Gefühle verbinden. Sport ist ja auch etwas Emotionales in negativer und positiver Hinsicht, aber im besten Fall, wenn du dann deinen Schweinehund überwunden hast und du hast ein positives Trainingserlebnis und du siehst auch deinen Fortschritt. Da hat man ja auch in der Regel Lust, es auch zu teilen. Deswegen, ich glaube, es gibt schon auch Leute, die auch viel aus dem Studio posten, Selfies machen. Das ist auch hedonistisch, und die Leute haben auch irgendwie Bock, sich da so zu zeigen. Klar, auf dem Sofa ist es natürlich dann auch oft noch ein bisschen entspannter. Oder ist man eben auch so ein bisschen aufnahmefähiger.

**Interviewer:** Seid ihr denn auch aufnahmefähig, sage ich mal, was Kunden euch auf Social Media bieten? Wie ist so das Community Management, gilt das wirklich auch als Feedback-Option? Benutzt ihr Social Media, um Kundenservice zu betreiben?

**Expert:** Ja, auf jeden Fall. Also, die Leute schreiben uns natürlich zu allen möglichen Themen, und für uns ist es auch ganz wichtig, schnell zu reagieren. Positiv wie negativ, um dann einerseits so Stimmungen auch irgendwie lenken zu können. Oftmals kann man ja, wenn man schnell reagiert und einzelne Leute besänftigt, auch vielleicht irgendwas Größeres verhindern, als wenn man jetzt nach zwei, drei Tagen erst reagiert, und es hat sich schon eine Stimmung gebildet. Natürlich ist es dann auch so ein bisschen Service. Die Leute wollen etwas wissen oder haben kleinere oder größere Probleme, die gelöst werden müssen. Auch in Richtung Bewertung, ist ja auch super wichtig. Wir versuchen auch, so viele Sachen wie möglich zu beantworten. Also auch auf Social Media wirklich alle Kommentare zu beantworten, also positiv wie negativ. Weil Bewertungen immer wichtiger werden und natürlich



auch Kaufentscheidungen beeinflussen. Ist am Ende natürlich auch immer eine Frage der Manpower. Also wir sind 3,5 Leute bei uns im Social Media Team für sechs Länder und viele Projekte. Das ist dann natürlich auch immer eine Frage von Prioritäten. Aber kennt man ja auch selber, nichts ist frustrierender, wie wenn man einem Unternehmen schreibt, und dann bekommt man halt kein Feedback. Oder andersherum ist Social Media auch oft so der letzte Verzweiflungs-Kanal, wenn man sonst gescheitert ist. Und das sind ja eigentlich auch genau die Sachen, die du nicht auf der Pinnwand haben willst.

**Interviewer:** Das stimmt natürlich. Das Instagramprofil einer Marke kommuniziert schon immer viele Attribute, die die Marke mit sich verbinden möchte. Zum Beispiel, bei John Reed's Instagramprofil hat man einen sehr einheitlichen und ästhetischen Eindruck. Eher immer ein verwendeter dunklerer Farbton, wie es jetzt unser Eindruck war. Wir haben auch einen großen Unterschied zu McFit's Instagramprofil gesehen. Größtenteils weil gar nicht lustige Sprüche zum Gym oder zur Motivation gepostet werden, sondern der Fokus bei John Reed einfach auf dem trainierten Körper und dem Lifestyle liegt. Sind dann also Ästhetik und diese Qualität und dieser fitte Körper Attribute, die mit John Reed verbunden werden sollen?

**Expert:** Grundsätzlich ja. Also wir wollen uns ja natürlich auch von McFit abgrenzen. Die Kollegen sitzen hier direkt ein paar Tische weiter, aber wir wollen in der Kommunikation als eigene Marke dar stehen und das ist ein super wichtiges Ziel. Das ist auch oft nicht so einfach, denn es wurden ja teilweise McFit Studios umgebaut zu John Reed, diese Abgrenzung. Aber genau, das spiegelt sich dann natürlich auf Instagram wider. Ja, Ästhetik auf jeden Fall, Qualität auch. Schöne fitte Körper würde glaube ich auch auf McFit zutreffen, wobei da ist ja auch die Definition von schönen Körpern irgendwie noch mal anders. Also bei McFit sieht man wahrscheinlich mehr Haut und mehr Muskeln und bei uns mehr Tattoos. Aber der größte Unterschied ist wahrscheinlich tatsächlich, dass McFit da schon etwas lustiger, salopper daherkommt. Und ich finde die machen da auch einen guten Job, die Kollegen, also die haben auch super Interaktivitätsraten. Also die haben auch echt eine super interaktive Community und befeuern die halt auch echt gut. Die sind halt auch da sehr auf Augenhöhe von John Reed. Wir müssen halt immer gucken, dass es auch nahbar genug bleibt. Also Coolness ist auch immer nur so lange cool, solange die Leute das für sich nachvollziehen können. Also wir wollen natürlich nicht unnahbar sein für die Leute. Und lokal ist es halt natürlich auch anders was in Berlin cool ist, ist jetzt vielleicht in Dresden auch drüber oder überfordert die Leute in Dortmund. Da muss man natürlich auch gucken, dass man da einen guten Mittelweg findet. Wobei wir von unserer Strategie her auch schon versuchen, da etwas höher einzusteigen. Weil oftmals ist es dann ja auch so der andere Aspekt, denn man will bei einer coolen Brand dann vielleicht irgendwie dazugehören und es stellt halt auch eine gewisse Attraktivität und Begehrlichkeit dar, wenn man es halt gut macht, die Marke so aufzubauen.

**Interviewer:** Auf jeden Fall, also ich habe schon das Gefühl, es muss diese Balance gefunden werden, Leute immer noch zu motivieren, aber dafür muss man einer Person immer noch recht ähnlich sein. Denn wenn plötzlich der Unterschied zur realen Person und wie sich das Fitnessstudio präsentiert zu groß wird, denkt sich der Kunde vielleicht auch: „Das kann ich eh nicht erreichen, so kann ich eh nicht aussehen“. Und ich denke, das ist vielleicht auch für die Motivation wichtig, realistische Ziele vor Augen zu haben.

**Expert:** Ja, aber da glaube ich, dass es uns auch weniger um ein bestimmtes Schönheitsideal geht, tatsächlich auch zu McFit in der Abgrenzung. Bei uns geht es eher darum, einen bestimmten Lifestyle zu verkörpern. Deswegen ist es auch ein eher urbanes Konzept und eher ein lifestyleiges Konzept, weil wir halt irgendwie sagen, dass die Leute aus der Zielgruppe, die wir ansprechen wollen, die spricht es an und für die ist es auch erstrebenswert, dazugehören. Und bei uns geht es ja auch gar nicht wirklich um dieses Schönheitsideal extrem muskulöser Körper, sondern es geht eben um einen bestimmten Lifestyle, einen fitten Lifestyle, aber auch um das Motto „Ich geh raus, ich geh zum Sport, ich treffe da coole Leute, ich bin aber auch sonst immer unterwegs. Ich bin happy bei John Reed und bin da ein Teil von“. Also deswegen, es geht um Trainiertheit und einen schönen Körper, aber jetzt

nicht darum, einem Schönheitsideal oder einem bestimmten „Aufgepumpt sein“ zu folgen. Das ist dann bei McFit, glaube ich, nochmal deutlich stärker.

**Interviewer:** Okay, ja. Von mir die abschließende Frage: Was glaubst du erwarten Social Media Nutzer von einem Unternehmen auf Social Media? Geht es um Information, geht es um Unterhaltung, geht es um Motivation, vor allem im Hinblick auf Fitnessstudios wie John Reed?

**Expert:** Ja, hängt natürlich auch wieder vom Nutzer ab und von der Marke. Ich glaube, am Ende geht es natürlich auch um so einen Mix von vielem. Es geht auch um authentischen Content, ich glaube auch um dieses „verstanden werden“ und auf einer gewissen Augenhöhe zu sein und zu kommunizieren. Man will ja als Kunde auch, dass das Unternehmen die eigene Sprache spricht so gut es geht. Man will da jetzt nicht wie bei einem E-Mail-Verkehr formell behandelt werden. Und bei uns geht es auf jeden Fall um Unterhaltung, es geht auch um Markenkommunikation mit Sales-Zielsetzungen, also dass wir dann versuchen, bestimmte Sales-Aktionen und Abverkäufe, eben Vertragsabschlüsse, zu fördern. Aber es geht auch um Markenaufbau und um Infos. Da geht es bei Facebook noch mal eher drum als bei Instagram. Genau, also bei uns ist es schon auch stark visuell, es soll auch gut aussehen und zur Marke passen. Wir wollen einen guten Brand Fit dann haben mit unserem Content und wir wollen eben auch viel Bewegtbild eben über Stories oder Feed-Videos zeigen, weil man so ja auch die Marke am besten erleben kann.

**Interviewer:** Ja, also du meinst ja vorhin schon, dass es auch diese Emotionalität ist, was John Reed von anderen Konkurrenten abgrenzt. Also liegt grundsätzlich auch der Fokus auf der Vermittlung von emotionalen Werten anstatt von funktionalen Werten, wie zum Beispiel Preis, Standort, Kursprogramm, sondern eher auf Lifestyle, Experience und dieser urbane Lebensstil?

**Expert:** Genau, also das hängt natürlich dann auch wieder von der Kampagnen-Zielsetzung ab. Also wir haben auch Sales-Kampagnen, bei denen es auch um den Preis geht oder um gewisse Preisangebote. Wir haben bei Neueröffnungen auch in der Regel Preisangebote, aber wir versuchen diesen Brand- und Emotionspart auch schon stark zu spielen, da wir auch glauben, dass je begehrllicher und attraktiver die Marke, desto eher sind die Leute auch gewillt, einen Vertrag abzuschließen. Dann ist man auch eher Fan von der Marke und bleibst eben auch Kunde. Das ist auf jeden Fall auch immer ein Teilziel auf Social Media, im Vergleich jetzt zu anderen Kanälen wie zum Beispiel Google, wo der Sales-Fokus höher liegt. Aber es hängt dann bei Social Media auch vom Kanal ab, da wir immer viel „Marke“ mit kommunizieren wollen und natürlich auch unsere Markenwerte auf Social Media gut kommunizieren können.

**Interviewer:** Super. Also von meiner Seite aus wäre es das. Janina, hast du noch eine Frage?

**Interviewer2:** Ja, also was ich besonders interessant fand, ist dass du John Reed immer viel mit McFit verglichen hast. Also ist es für euch schon schwierig, sich da abzugrenzen?

**Expert:** Also, wir sind sehr zufrieden, was wir bisher erreicht haben. Auch damit, wo wir mit der Marke bestehen. Wir haben jetzt letztes Jahr eine ausführliche Marktforschung gemacht und eben auch Marktwerte gemessen und da sind wir sehr happy. Für uns ist diese Abgrenzung zu McFit aber natürlich ein großes Thema weil es ist quasi ein Konzern, es ist auch eine gesunde Konkurrenz. Wir haben andere Ziele als McFit und es ist natürlich auch eine Herausforderung, da der Konzern ja eigentlich 20 Jahre nur McFit war. Und in den ersten zwei Jahren mussten wir als Underdog auch erstmal unsere Legitimation erschaffen, „warum gibt es eigentlich John Reed?“. Und da haben wir auch viel erreicht, zum Beispiel bekommen wir inzwischen ganz andere Standorte. Da sagen Vermieter von hochwertigen Malls: „Nein, McFit bitte nicht“. Bei John Reed bekommen wir aber teilweise aktive Anfragen, die genau uns darin haben wollen. Und auch durch die teuren Preise können wir in ganz andere Lagen gehen. Jetzt zum Beispiel in London, in der Innenstadt, machen wir auf, in Paris machen wir Clubs auf, in München. Das wäre

bei McFit auch mit dem Pricing gar nicht gegangen. Deswegen ist John Reed schon die Marke der Zukunft. Aber aktuell: 26 Clubs vs. 250, da ist McFit natürlich immer noch das Flaggschiff, welches auch die Kohle reinbringt und wo natürlich Sales-mäßig immer noch ein gewisser Fokus drauf liegt. Also wir tauschen uns viel mit den Kollegen von McFit aus, und man schaut natürlich auch immer nach links was die machen, aber wir sind erstmal sehr zufrieden, wie wir die bisherige Abgrenzung hinbekommen haben. Teilweise ist es dann auch so, dass in Kreuzberg in der Umkleidekabine gesagt wird „Hast du schon gehört, John Reed hat McFit gekauft“. Also es kann dann auch in die Richtung gehen.

**Interviewer:** Super, vielen Dank für das Interview. Dann werde ich die Aufnahme jetzt beenden.

#### Appendix 4: Transcripts of consumer interview

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##### **Interview 1: David**

Tue, 3/31 3:47PM • 45:05

##### **Speakers**

David, Marlene Lüttje

##### **Marlene Lüttje 00:02**

Could you please give me a short introduction on yourself such as your name, age, your profession, place of living or your hobbies?

##### **David 00:11**

My name is David, I'm 25 years old. I'm currently living in Germany due to the corona crisis but I'm studying in Portugal so I was actually living in Lisbon before. What were the other questions?

##### **Marlene Lüttje 00:30**

Just like your hobbies, what are you exactly doing, what is your current life status?

##### **David 00:37**

I like to do a lot of board sports such as skating, snowboarding, surfing. I also occasionally go to the gym. And apart from that, I like reading books.

##### **Marlene Lüttje 00:55**

Okay. So this also is connected to my next question, what you said. How do you keep yourself fit, what are your methods and routines and especially in the context of gyms and fitness studios?

##### **David 01:13**

Well, this really depends on the situation where I'm in, so if it's possible I always try to do the things that I like the most to keep me fit, for example in Portugal I like to go surfing a lot so I can be fit from surfing. But for this I try to exercise like five, six times a week. And if it's not possible to do something that I really like such board sports, I'll do some other types of workout, either home workouts or going to the gym, depending on whether I have a membership going on or not.

**Marlene Lüttje** 01:48

Do you have a current gym membership going on?

**David** 01:51

Right now? No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 01:52

Okay. Um, what kind of influence does fitness have on your life. Like when you consider your success or your mental health, physical health.

**David** 02:05

For me, again, this really depends on what type of fitness you're talking about. If it's just work out like body workout or working with weights, it's more as a functional value for me so I do it to feel better to, as I said, to clear my mind and be, be more active and be more fit in the brain as well. It's more means to an end than an end itself. Whereas if you're talking about fitness as a general thing, like being active and doing sports, going outside and being adventures and stuff like that, than it is more an end than a mean.

**Marlene Lüttje** 02:42

Okay, um, how important would you evaluate social media in your life?

**David** 02:52

On a scale from 1 to 10, I would say it's probably six or seven. It's pretty, pretty important. And I guess nowadays because it's a good way for people to stay connected. And especially in such a world where you usually travel a lot and go to different places, it's very hard to stay in contact with other people to at least feel like you're, you know, what's going with them. And I mean, there's a lot of bad parts about social media as well. But in general, I think it is, it is a good tool, a very helpful tool for, um, yeah, that brings a lot of value to people.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:32

So would you define yourself as a heavy social media user?

**David** 03:39

I mean, depends on what you're comparing to, I would say. If you look at the overall population, yeah, a few compared to my peers, I would say, no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:50

Okay. Which networks do you use and which one do you use the most?

**David** 04:00

If you say which networks I have an account on, it's Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram. Vine, but I think it's deleted now. TikTok, HouseParty, um, what else.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:24

Okay, but which one would you say that you use the most?

**David** 04:30

I guess Instagram.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:33

Okay, do you know why?

**David** 04:39

It's the most well rounded. It's most used by other people you can add. See, like for me, it's to stay in contact with other people and to know what's going on and that's where I get all the information and the rest is just entertainment. And I mean Facebook for some sort of organization but I guess it's dying down as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:56

Has social media changed the way of your communication with companies and brands as well next to your peers.

**David** 05:08

Hmm, my communication with them. No, but the way I consume their information, yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:20

Okay, but isn't that also a form of communication when you receive information?

**David** 05:28

Yeah I guess yes, that's what I said. I mean, I guess it's just, if it's the one way channel then for sure, but I do not communicate myself with brands on any social media.

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:42

Mm hmm. Okay. You said that you previously had gym memberships? Do you follow these accounts of these gyms on social media or do you follow other fitness related brands?

**David** 05:59

Gyms no, none of them. And fitness related brands.. I mean, just in a broad spectrum. So if it's sports related yes but for example like snowboarding accounts and stuff like that, yes. But no fitness, like workout, gym style fitness, those no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:23

So also no other gym chain that you follow?

**David** 06:27

No other gym chain, no fitness influencer as far as I know.

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:32

Okay, so how are you exposed to fitness related content on social media? I mean, if you are exposed, is it still to a high extent?

**David** 06:43

Hmm, just for me to get a better reference. When you say fitness you actually talk about the art of fitness of workouts and stuff like that not just general health, or?

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:54

I mean working out in training. Yes.

**David** 06:56

Okay, yeah. The way I am in contact with fitness over social media, I guess it's from friends or colleagues of mine, from my peers, who share their gym or fitness workouts or tips, tricks, whatever, they share social media. But yeah, that's what I get from my friends who I would follow anyway whether they are doing it or not.

**Marlene Lüttje** 07:24

Okay. Regarding your consumer engagement on social media, which describes your engagement with companies and brands, as a consumer, how would you evaluate your engagement? If there are three levels? Are you rather passive, only consuming or are you a bit more active, contributing, like liking, commenting? Or would you consider yourself as the creating type, like are you often creating own content that is brand related?

**David** 08:01

Um, I would say the middle part. So I do like quite a lot of stuff from my favorite brands and stuff. Sometimes when I comment, I do it for my friends to share it with them. But regarding creating no, I don't create anything for brands.

**Marlene Lüttje** 08:23

But have you ever created user generated content, UGC, in form of tagging a brand with a hashtag under a post or tagging the location of a brand's location under your post? Something like this.

**David** 08:45

I've created a post once with a GoPro and tagged GoPro. I guess that counts.

**Marlene Lüttje** 08:52

Yeah. But as you said, you're mainly positioned in the middle part of engagement?

**David** 08:59

Yeah, so, I rarely do it but it might happen in a story at some time or another, but not frequently at all.

**Marlene Lüttje** 09:08

Do you think that there is much information on brands that is only shared on social media?

**David** 09:13

I guess, I don't know. I think for some companies, it's definitely the main channel of communication nowadays. So I mean, the way I see it is that I or other people sometimes don't even go to the websites anymore to consume information, but also get a lot of information from social media already, so there might be more information. At least it's, probably, it's a super tricky way to have the right information in the right way presented on social media, whereas on the website it is very structured. So like, contact, opening hours, whatever, whereas in social media everything's like in one feed so it's hard to organize I guess. But it really depends on the type of brands, like a lifestyle brand with clothing and stuff like that they probably have a link to the shop but all the other information about the clothing, the collections and everything is on Instagram. But for something more complex, such as a gym, I don't know. I guess they have most of the information also on the website, but that's just me guessing, I don't know.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:28

So in general, imagine the case you're looking for specific information on a specific brand, would you consult social media networks first?

**David** 10:37

No, no, if I look for specific information, I'll go with the website.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:43

Okay.

**David 10:44**

If it's just me getting inspired or like discovering the brand, then I'll check out their social media channels first, but like, if I know okay, I just want to know what collections they have or when they drop something, I'll go to the website first. Or when I want to know when they open or whatever it costs, I wouldn't consult social media for that.

**Marlene Lüttje 11:05**

Okay. This next question is connected to your previous evaluation of your consumer engagement. How would you describe your interaction with brands on social media? Like are there for example brands that you might perceive as persons on social media when you see that in your feed?

**David 11:26**

It's a good question. Um, maybe, I don't know. Yeah, I guess sometimes for example, if it's like a magazine, it feels more like a person telling the story. For companies, I don't follow that many companies, I so can't really say anything about it. But for magazines, I guess yeah, which also are companies in a sense.

**Marlene Lüttje 12:09**

Okay. Does it also have an impact on your opinion of a brand when you see how the brand interacts with other people? Not you?

**David 12:21**

Yeah, it does.

**Marlene Lüttje 12:28**

Have you ever been exposed to some kind of fitness brand and how they are interacting with another person on social media?

**David 12:41**

I mean, just now when I looked at John Reed but I might save this example for later. I can tell it now, but I don't know what you prefer. But, fitness brands, so I mean, I see a lot of those posts from social media brands interacting with their sponsored influencers, so how they pay them do the stories. And you can tell by the way they have to have a certain amount of stories and say things a certain amount of times. This seems a little bit unnatural to me and this loses the way of them being like super authentic, I guess.

**Marlene Lüttje 13:28**

So it lessens the way?

**David 13:30**

Yeah, it makes them lose their authenticity.

**Marlene Lüttje 13:37**

Why would you say so? Because I think there's rather a high transparency on social media where lies are like easily detected and there's a lot of sharing of information, which would maybe make the brand more authentic?

**David 13:52**

Yeah, exactly. That's what I said. So generally, of course, social media makes it more authentic eventually as well. But what I was referring to is the sponsored content from the influencers in Instagram stories, for example, and they say like, Oh, I'm going to show you my favorite workout booster, whatever, and then every time they

say it, it's like for stories with companies, always talking the same way. It's always one vote. So you know, like they have strict guidelines which they have to follow, which makes it super often unauthentic for me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:26  
Okay.

**David** 14:26  
Do you know what I am referring to?

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:28  
I know what you mean, yes. So, would you describe yourself as only willing to react to brand content on social media in a positive way if it is perceived as credible by you? Is this like your exclusion criteria?

**David** 15:03  
I mean, this kind of depends on the content. If they're trying to sell something or promote their services and this is incredible, then of course, I would consider it only if it's credible. But I mean, I think I didn't get your question completely. With "incredible" do you mean if they're trying to sell something and you don't buy their argument?

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:49  
Yes.

**David** 15:51  
Yeah, I wouldn't. I wouldn't react in a positive way to that.

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:57  
But would you evaluate a brand in total as more credible, when they are sharing a lot of information on social media, because it kind of shows their willingness to be honest?

**David** 16:11  
I think it's a super, it's really, it's a really sharp edge on this. So because people or companies also sometimes share so much and are so keen on sharing so much on social media that they might only state a very specific point of view, which contains some truth. But then, like, sells it so hard that people say, "Okay, this got to be credible because it's so much information". And then in the end, they're just like, trying to trick people into it. So I wouldn't say that just because they share information on social media, it makes them more credible.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:55  
Okay. Are there any online communities on social media that you feel part of? I mean a group of people communicating over social media with similar interests concerning a topic.

**David** 17:19  
I wouldn't really say so, no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:22  
Okay, but I mean, interaction with other social media users is a reason for you to engage in social media?

**David** 17:33  
Yeah, but like people I engage with are the people I engage with offline as well. So I wouldn't consider them like online communities. Like I don't engage with strangers for example.



**Marlene Lüttje** 17:45

Okay.

**David** 17:46

So I don't discuss with people online about something that I like with people I don't know. Like all this other stuff that people would discuss within personal life as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:59

Okay. Regarding the fitness lifestyle that is lived on Instagram: What is your general opinion on topics like fitspiration as a term or the highly popular movement which is also supported by actors and other famous people? Would you rather describe it as healthy because it is motivating people or can it also be dangerous, for example, if idealistic body images are created?

**David** 18:38

I mean, it's not both black and white for sure. But overall, I think it's a very good movement, because it could be a lot worse. Like overall, the underlying thing is to be healthy and to be active, which is super important. But as in everything, there's so many people using Instagram, so of course there's going to be extremes. So there's, of course there's going to be people that overdo it, that are unhealthy and that share unhealthy recommendations and stuff. But overall, I think it's definitely a good movement compared to what else they could be.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:18

Yes, okay. Do you often experience people in your feed or that you follow that they are presenting themselves as especially fit or healthy on social media?

**David** 19:32

Yeah, yes. A lot of people.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:34

Do you do that yourself as well?

**David** 19:36

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:41

Are you sure? Like is it not a common goal or interest of somebody to present yourself as healthy, fit, working out? Because it's like connected to positive characteristics if you present yourself like that on social media.

**David** 20:04

Well, it's definitely not at the core of how I present myself.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:13

Okay.

**David** 20:14

So I think the way I present myself is more as being funny, original content and doing cool stuff. And it's more like the cool stuff than actually being healthy or fit. I mean, if I go surfing and show the act of being surfing, it's not because I want to say that "Hey guys, I'm fit, I'm going out", it's more like "Hey, I'm cool, I'm being a surfer".

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:41

Okay. But it's also a certain type of lifestyle you're trying to communicate over social media?

**David** 20:52

Yeah, I guess.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:01

It's an assumption that everybody has an ideal self image in their minds that they want to reach. Would you only follow fitness related brands or accounts if they are supporting and motivating you in reaching that goal?

**David** 21:21

Um, no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:23

Okay, why?

**David** 21:34

I mean, I never thought about it that much whether I have a clear goal in mind that I want to follow with my representation of myself. Maybe I do it subconsciously, but I don't evaluate companies that I follow based on whether they motivate me to be a better self. I usually follow them because they might be just entertaining as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:01

But don't you think that those companies might sometimes represent values that you would like to obtain yourself? If you're talking about your lifestyle?

**David** 22:16

I'm not saying that they don't, I'm just saying that not everyone, it's not an criteria for me to not follow them if they don't do it. I guess most of them actually do. Most of them motivate me but it's not like it's gotta be this. It might also be something completely unrelated to this.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:32

Okay? Um, what would you describe as the most important values for you regarding fitness and being fit? Examples would be values like discipline or fun or interaction with friends while working out such as a group workout. Maybe also openness or gender equality.

**David** 22:57

I guess nowadays it's actually true health. So instead of just like this artificial fit or being super muscular and just heavy weight lifting, it should be about being naturally fit and also mind fitness and stuff like that. So it's more about the core of being healthy than being fit.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:25

Okay, so you would also like to follow fitness related brands that share those values? Saying if they present those values, it would be more likely for you to be interested in the social media account that they have?

**David** 23:40

Yeah. So I would rather follow a fitness guy who I perceive to be very smart and who looks very healthy than a guy that's just like a tank because he is lifting weights.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:59

Yes, okay. Since you are not particularly following any gym chain or fitness related brand, I will ask the following questions hypothetically, if possible. So how are you exposed to particular fitness brands in your feed? Would it be through seeing an ad or comments made by your peers? Or through friends who post a picture with their location and consequently you would be exposed to the brand?

**David** 24:31

I mean all of those actually happen, because I follow people that are kind of portraying the fitness lifestyle. I see them tagging their new sports leggings from Gym Shark or whatever it is, and it is also through content generated by my friends if they go to a gym and tag the gym or all the things you just said.

**Marlene Lüttje** 24:56

Okay, do you remember particular content on gym chains? Or fitness studios?

**David** 25:13

I'm trying to think of another example but the only thing I that comes to my mind is people who are going to McFit and tagging McFit. But from gym chains... Yeah, I guess that's it. I don't think I've ever seen somebody tag another gym than McFit.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:33

Okay.

**David** 25:34

Oh no, no wait. I actually saw people here going to the John Reed opening and tagging John Reed for like going to the gym. I don't know if they were invited or not, I don't know. But they went through it and showed everything around and yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:52

Okay, so they kind of showed over social media the experience that you would have if you would be a customer of John Reed?

**David** 26:01

Yeah, but it didn't really look like they were working out. They were all like in their normal clothes and just like there for the event so it wasn't really like the authentic way but like just saying "Oh guys, how amazing this is, blah blah".

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:13

Okay, but then this was kind of where you got more aware of the brand by seeing it through your peers?

**David** 26:21

Yeah. That is actually how I knew it existed before this interview.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:25

What comes into your mind when you're thinking about your previous gym that you once had membership in? Was it McFit?

**David** 26:34

Um, it wasn't the last one but I was a member of McFit before, yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:41

Okay. So what are the most important things that you remember, what are the things that were most important to you?

**David** 26:51

Regarding all of them or like just McFit now?

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:56

No, I mean in general.

**David** 26:59

Well, this really depends. Because for the last six years it was just super important for me that they are super flexible and I guess cheap because I was changing locations so often that I needed very flexible contracts that go for no longer than three, four or five months. And then I could cancel them very quickly, that I don't have to pay huge signup fee and stuff like that. Like, convenience was more important than anything. But actually, when I am in a place long term, I don't enjoy that types of gyms because it is a means to get the end, to feel better. But I don't enjoy going to those convenient cheap functional gyms because I think it's actually depressing to be there. But what I liked about the gym I was at before, it was super friendly, so it was actually more of a community. You'd go there, you talk to people, the trainers will remember you and it wasn't all about lifting the heavy weights. It was more about, like having community and actually wanting to go there and being with friends. That's why it also was obviously more expensive than the discount gyms, but it made me feel good going there.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:34

Okay, so would you evaluate those rather emotional values over kind of functional convenience factors?

**David** 28:46

As I said, this really depends on the situation I am in. If I am somewhere long term and consider for a long time then yes, if it's just for a short period of time, then convenience is all that matters.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:54

So it depends on your situation, but then if a gym chain would communicate those values that are the most important to you at this particular moment, you would be more interested in that social media content?

**David** 29:08

Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:10

So you would want your gym chain to communicate your most important values in their social media content?

**David** 29:18

I mean, if they want me as a member then, yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:21

Okay, yes. Um, what are the most important attributes for you when evaluating a gym chain's quality? Is it the services, the course programs, the quality of the equipment, the price, location, whatever you can think of?

**David** 29:57

Well, again, it depends on my situation. Short term: price and location. Long term: it's more the emotion of that service and community feeling and people actually being nice. One more thing, equipment isn't really that important to me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:23

Equipment is not that important to you. Okay. It's more the overall atmosphere that you're in while training?

**David** 30:30

Yeah. And the thing is, I actually don't use a lot of equipment anyway. So yeah, it's not important that it's the newest and best. Everything works.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:48

Okay. When you were a customer of a gym chain, where you then following that social media account or have you then been more exposed to that gym chain on social media?

**David** 31:04

I guess, when I first started going to the gym, like 9-10 years ago, I was following McFit on Facebook. But that's it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:18

Can you remember whether the values that were important to you at that point in time while you chose McFit, were also part of their communication to you. Like were you then exposed to the same values that you deemed important at that point in time?

**David** 31:34

I guess back then I didn't share anything on social media. No, it was just like, you could sign up the page and you could follow them to tag them in your post or something like this. So that's what I did. But yeah, I do not remember consuming any content from them on Facebook.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:59

Okay. So, as you said it would also depend on your living situation what would make you a loyal customer of a specific gym chain and not feeling the need to change?

**David** 32:17

Um, I guess for me to be a loyal customer, it would have the values for long term like I said before. It's because all the short term things would never make me loyal. I mean, I would use it again if I'm there again for a couple of months but I would never stay there going to a different city where I have different options, where I stay long term, just because it is functional.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:44

So for real customer loyalty, the brand should be communicating the values like atmosphere, environment and the general vibe. Like emotional values as well.

**David** 32:47

For me to first sign up, I guess it will be good for them to communicate them but once I signed up, I don't think that the online experience is going to impact my loyalty much.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:28

But it would be the offline touch points with the brand when you are in the studio?

**David** 33:33

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:34

Okay. So let's move to our last interview block where we talk about John Reed and its Instagram profile. You have seen the account of John Reeds before and you've got familiar with the shared content. So I would like to talk about the first impressions that you had and your opinion. So my first question would be: Have you known John Reed before?

**David** 33:59

Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:00

Okay, then just as a short reminder, John Reed is a German gym chain and it has approximately 26 gyms worldwide and also new openings that are planned in close future. They are describing themselves of belonging in the premium discount segment and they are part of the RSG group. RSG group is the former McFit group and it owns other fitness related brands such as Cyberobics, which is a home workout program and also the gym chains McFit and High5 gym. Do you know the other brands that I just mentioned which also belong to the RSG group?

**David** 34:43

High5 and cyberobics I don't know.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:47

But you know, McFit, you mentioned it before.

**David** 34:51

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:51

Okay, but you were not a previous follower of John Reed's Instagram profile?

**David** 34:56

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:57

Okay. Yeah, what do you remember from seeing the profile before the interview?

**David** 35:08

So I remember, well, they mainly posted pictures of some people working out there and everything was kind of darkish, I guess to set the mood. And they were also really focusing on their architecture or their decoration and stuff like that to set the overall mood or atmosphere in the gym. That's kind of what I noticed.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:50

Was your mood positive when you saw it? Did you like what you see?

**David** 35:56

Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:57

Okay. Was there something that struck your mind, something that was the most interesting to you?

**David** 36:05

Well actually the thing that was most interesting to me was on this one picture. I clicked on it and there was a very long comment from John Reed talking about this one girl who had been working for John Reed who posted something racist in her stories. And then a lot of people were commenting on this post, asking how they could employ such racists and stuff like that. And then John Reed did a long comment saying that they fired her.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:36

Okay.

**David** 36:38

That's pretty much the first time I've ever read some company saying this in the comments, or like giving such statements in the comments about how they react to this sort of issue of unrespectable behavior of their workers.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:57

Okay, that is very interesting. So now you mentioned two kind of different areas. On one side the area of just the visuality; when you describe the dark pictures and the kind of mood they're giving you. On the other side you mention specific content on a specific issue how John Reed reacted. What would you think is more important to you for your first impression?

**David** 37:30

I guess for the first impression, usually, the visuals. But in this case, I think the communication was super unorthodox, and that obviously struck my mind but it's usually more the visuals that are important.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:47

Okay. After seeing the Instagram profile, what attributes would you associate with the brand? Such as coolness, exclusivity, something like that.

**David** 38:07

I would say, probably, it is coolness, arrogance and... yeah, those are the two main ones. It's very cool and seems a little bit arrogant in my opinion.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:27

Okay. Were you able to understand the brand's slogan in their Instagram biography "Not your average gym"?

**David** 38:45

It does look very different than a normal gym, yeah. So if they refer to this then yes. If there's something more behind "Not your average gym", then I don't know.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:54

So from looking at the Instagram profile, you were not able to see another difference apart from the design of the studios?

**David** 39:08

From the picture scrolling through it, I mean, yes, I saw that there's also something that they called "the Reed", which is like a bar or something and they also had a barber shop, so I mean, yeah. Different in a way that they offer different things and stuff like that. Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:27

Okay. Um, so your graphic impression of the profile, did it match the fact that they are not like the average gym?

**David** 39:37

Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:38

Okay. What would you say about John Reed's quality as a gym chain, just by looking at the social media profile?

**David** 39:51

I guess high quality.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:54

Okay, so they were able to give you the feeling that they would offer you high quality studios.

**David** 40:01

Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 40:02

Okay. Knowing that John Reed belongs to RSG group, would that have any impact on the quality that you would evaluate by seeing the social media profile?

**David** 40:28

The quality no, not really. I mean, this just shows that it's supported by a big conglomerate. But this just shows me that it's a concept gym. It doesn't take anything away from the quality, more from the personality, but not from the quality, I guess.

**Marlene Lüttje** 40:55

But it changes the way you perceive the personality of the brand?

**David** 41:00

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:02

Okay. So before we were talking about you potentially becoming a loyal customer of John Reed. For that, you would need more emotional values, such as the personal service and the experience that you have at the studio. More than convenience factors such as price and location and flexibility.

**David** 41:26

Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:27

Would you say that John Reed is communicating these values on Instagram?



**David** 41:33

The emotional values?

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:34

Yes.

**David** 41:38

Yeah, but like, not in a way that really convinces me, I think. But they are doing it, but I guess they're just aiming at a different person.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:51

Okay.

**David** 41:52

I don't think, like they didn't - like, it didn't match my preferences.

**Marlene Lüttje** 42:00

What would that person look like? Or what kind of personality do you mean with "they're aiming at a different person"?

**David** 42:08

So what it looked like to me was like this very, very cool brand, very hip, nicely branded, really for those influencer type of people who go to the gym to share everything. And like really polished everything and it's most about being cool. Whereas, in my opinion, it's more about feeling welcomed and having the sense of community and like, nothing like a family style, but you know, like, where you would feel like the guy that's going to treat you nice, and it's going to be very cool. A very, very nice person, instead of being this very cool guy.

**Marlene Lüttje** 42:54

So you would feel like maybe people are judged if they are there? Is it that what you are referring to?

**David** 43:09

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:09

Okay, but they are addressing a certain type of people with their social media marketing presence?

**David** 43:17

In my opinion, it does address a certain type of people, yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:23

So according to John Reed's social media presence, would you consider becoming a customer or not?

**David** 43:34

Hypothetically, I might take a look. Sure. I think overall, I think the concept is really cool. And I think it is very intriguing to see how they're doing it and especially to have more than just your average gym. I think it's really cool. And it's especially because it's just my imagination that might not suit me. I'll still, like, if I consider signing up for a gym where there's John Reed available for a long period of time, I'll check it out to see if it's

actually how I think it is, so not my style, or whether it's just my false judgment of how they represent themselves.

**Marlene Lüttje** 44:19

So we can conclude that the social media presence was interesting to you, that you saw positive parts, but it did not completely sold you to become a customer right away. But it increased your interest in the brand.

**David** 44:35

I think the concept itself, sold way better to me than the social media presence. I think that social media presence took a little bit more away from their potential actually.

**Marlene Lüttje** 44:46

Okay, perfect. Thank you. Do you have anything more to add to the topics that we talked about so far? Otherwise? I would thank you very much and I would stop the recording now.

**David** 45:01

Yeah, you can stop.

**Marlene Lüttje** 45:03

Thank you very much.

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## **Interview 2: Apolline**

Tue, 3/31 3:48PM • 44:04

### **Speakers**

Apolline, Marlene Lüttje

**Marlene Lüttje** 00:01

Could you please give me a short introduction on yourself? Such as your name, age, your current status of living? What are you doing?

**Apolline** 00:09

Yes, sure. So my name is Apolline. I'm 24 years old, turning 25 very soon this year. I'm currently a student at CBS doing Brand and Communications Management. And next to that I'm also working part time at Pandora.

**Marlene Lüttje** 00:33

Oh, yes. Perfect. Thanks.

**Apolline** 00:34

Yes, that's me. And I'm French.

**Marlene Lüttje** 00:39

Thank you. That's also very interesting. How do you keep yourself fit in your daily life? What are your sports methods? Your routine? What do you do?

**Apolline** 00:52

Okay, usually, when it is not the current situation, so when it's not Covid-19, I'm at a gym. I have a gym subscription. And I'm trying to go there once every second day. So, yeah, like three to four times a week. I don't know if you need the name but I'm going to Blox next to the library.

**Marlene Lüttje** 01:32

Okay perfect.

**Apolline** 01:37

Do you want to know what I am doing like for activities?

**Marlene Lüttje** 01:42

No thank you, the gym subscription is sufficient. Do you maybe go running as well sometimes?

**Apolline** 01:51

I guess since I can't really go to the gym anymore, I started to run twice a week. And yes... but next to it I'm not really doing more right now.

**Marlene Lüttje** 02:10

Of course, okay. What do you say? What kind of influence does fitness have on your life when you consider your mental health and your general mood?

**Apolline** 02:20

A lot. Out of a scale of 10, I would say 10, to be honest. And I don't know like, it's always hard for me to get started but then when I'm done with it, I'm always so happy and I try to remember the dopamine effect and the end effect to kind of motivate myself.

**Marlene Lüttje** 02:47

Perfect. Again, the scale from 1 to 10: How important is social media in your life?

**Apolline** 02:57

I would say a 3? I mean, I have Facebook, Instagram.. And that's it. I will be on it every day, I must admit. But I'm, I'm not posting anything or very rarely. I'm barely using Facebook and Instagram. I'm mainly using it as a personal magazine.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:36

Okay. Yeah. So you would not define yourself as a heavy social media user or would you define yourself as one because you look at it every day?

**Apolline** 03:50

Okay, well then I would say heavy user if the definition would be because I'm looking at it every day.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:00

Okay, no, that's not the natural definition. I mean, you would describe yourself more as the passive user, more looking for content?

**Apolline** 04:10

Exactly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:10

Okay. So out of Instagram and Facebook, you use Instagram more?

**Apolline** 04:19

Yes, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:20

Could you name a reason for that? Why is Instagram more interesting for you?

**Apolline** 04:25

Um, well, because like I said before, I'm using Instagram more as a magazine. For Facebook, you can't really do that. And also I have the feeling, that maybe 10 years ago, it was different, but now people tend to post less on Facebook, so less content, and well, and on the other hand for Instagram it is the opposite. So I think that's the main reason. And something I wanted to add and also visually speaking, and I think it's nicer as well on Instagram. So it's really like, you know, scrolling down, up and everything is like a book. Which I like.

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:25

Um, do you think that your social media usage has any implication on how you communicate with companies and brands? Because you see their content in your feed?

**Apolline** 05:44

Do you mean for gym brands?

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:47

No, not necessarily. Regarding companies in general.

**Apolline** 05:51

Okay. Yes, well, then definitely. I think the brand image is reflected on the different posts that the brand is actually posting. And yeah, and according to what they are using, for me, at least I will see the brand. Or I will relate the brand to something more specifically, whether it's a luxury brand, I will consider it more qualitative at the post or seem to be more qualitative, and so on.

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:34

Okay, perfect. So you say you are a current customer of a gym, but do you follow that gym chain as well on Instagram?

**Apolline** 06:47

No, I do not. But I have the app.

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:55

Okay, well, yes. Do you follow other fitness related brands? Here, we differentiate between gym chains and there are also fitness influencers that act like entrepreneurs on social media who sell their own home workout programs over social media channels. That's like one part: the selling. But then there are also influencers that only share health and fitness related information or who might serve as influencers and represent other brands' products. This is, I guess, the more common type. Do you follow any of those?

**Apolline** 07:37

Yes, So, I'm actually following an influencer, who is sharing different programs. But when I started to follow her, it was not for that. So she is mainly a fashion influencer if you would say, but she also cares a lot about her

daily activity and sport. So at the same time I can see this, but other than this, sometimes at home, I might follow YouTube videos from one specific influencer.

**Marlene Lüttje** 08:25

Okay. So for you, the biggest benefit of following that fitness influencer is that also different areas of living are addressed on her profile. It's not all about fitness, but she can like generally talk about her whole lifestyle and everything that affects this lifestyle.

**Apolline** 08:45

Exactly. Because if it was just fitness for me, I would not follow her.

**Marlene Lüttje** 08:51

Okay, Okay, perfect. So would you say in general that a content that a gym chain would post on social media would be interesting for you at all or not?

**Apolline** 09:05

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 09:05

Okay. So now there's a question regarding your consumer engagement on social media. And by that I don't mean your interaction with your peers, with other users, but with companies specifically. So, if there are three levels, where you should categorize yourself into, would you rather be the more passive type, only reading and consuming the content that companies share on social media? Would you be the contributing kind? So you are liking, you are commenting, you are newly following? Or have you also been at the creating level where you voluntarily created content that was related to a specific brand?

**Apolline** 09:54

Umm no, I would consider myself the first level, so more reading.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:00

Okay, perfect. But have you ever created content yourself? So user generated content, UGC? Where you just tagged a brand in your posts' text or have you maybe ever added a location to your post that was in connection to a specific brand?

**Apolline** 10:20

Or tagging a brand with a hashtag, does that count?

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:25

Yes, that does count.

**Apolline** 10:28

Okay. Yes, actually, yesterday was my first time.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:34

Wow. Okay.

**Apolline** 10:38

Or otherwise what I already did was tagging the location of the fitness club.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:46

Okay. Yeah, perfect. That's very good to know. When you are a user on social media, do you think that there is much information on brands that is only shared on social media, which you would find nowhere else online, or offline?

**Apolline** 11:06

Sorry, I did not get that question. Can you repeat?

**Marlene Lüttje** 11:10

Yeah, of course. Do you think that there's information on brands that is only shared on social media? So you would only find it there and not online elsewhere or offline?

**Apolline** 11:26

Yes, I do believe that. So, I think that sometimes fitness clubs can share posts or images about something that will make consumers happy or trigger other consumers. Other potential consumers, but not enough information to post it on their website or on Google, SEO or whatever.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:03

Okay, so would you consult social media networks first when you are looking for a specific piece of information, or would you rather use the corporate website?

**Apolline** 12:17

Hmm, good question. No, I think I would.. yeah, so it doesn't match what I said before, but I would say website automatically. And then if I don't find the information I want, I will then go to their social media platform.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:43

Did that happen with your gym chain as well? Have you ever visited their Instagram profile before? Although you're not following it?

**Apolline** 12:54

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:56

Okay. Would you say that you have different levels of how you interact with brands in general on social media? Like if you describe your Instagram home feed as a magazine, do you sometimes also have brands that you perceive as persons? That have like this very distinct character?

**Apolline** 13:22

Yes, definitely. And I think also I'm more interacting with brands that I really love and also the ones that are encouraging consumers to to act, e.g. with polls or with a quiz or something like that. Even though I don't really know the brand actually, it will trigger me to answer.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:54

Okay, perfect. And does it have an impact on your opinion of a brand when you see how the brand interacts with other users, not you, but when you see interaction of the other parties? Like if you see a post in your feed and there are comments, does it negatively or positively affect what you see what the brand responds maybe to a different user?

**Apolline** 14:27

I think sometimes yes, but more like if, for example, one customer might give a negative comment that I think is unfair, I might judge more the customer rather than the brand.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:49

Okay. Yes. In general, there's a high transparency on social media and therefore lies that brands may tell can be easily detected. Do you think that the more information a brand shares on social media, the more authentic it makes the brand?

**Apolline** 15:08

No. Like a 100% no. For me, I don't think that social media can be related to authenticity. I think more and more, we kind of had a lot of proof that it is not, from different influencers. And I think social media is more a platform to sell your own product or service, which will be put more as beautiful and the positive aspects of it, so more like the superficial side of it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:55

Okay, yeah. We'll come to that aspect soon. So, the fitness influencer that you are following - don't you follow them because you think their content is credible? So is the credibility of content not a main reason for you to follow a profile?

**Apolline** 16:21

Yes. So, for me, if an influencer or someone or a brand does not look natural I would not follow it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:45

Okay, perfect. Are there online communities on social media that you would say you feel part of like in terms of a group of people all using social media networks with similar interests? So do you also exchange your opinions on certain topics with people you don't know offline?

**Apolline** 17:08

I wouldn't say that, but I'm following the hashtag "sustainability". So I guess in an indirect way, I'm also part of the people who are also following this hashtag.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:23

And therefore you are also in contact with brands who are engaging in this online community?

**Apolline** 17:32

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:33

It's rather about the other consumers?

**Apolline** 17:39

Yes, I'm seeing every post that has this specific hashtag. So in a way, I'm interacting indirectly with everyone who posts something with this hashtag. Does that make sense?

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:59

Yeah, it does. Do you do that in a fitness context as well? So do you follow a certain fitness hashtag in the same sense?

**Apolline** 18:09

Um, no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:12

And that is because factors like sustainability are more your personal interests compared to the fitness lifestyle?

**Apolline** 18:23

Exactly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:24

Okay perfect. And regarding said fitness lifestyle: It's highly popular on social media, e.g. through the word "Fitspiration", which kind of originated because famous people such as actors started to promote their lifestyle as especially healthy. And then their admirers started to follow it as well. What is your general opinion on this movement? Do you think it's healthy because it's motivating? Or do you also think it can be dangerous because idealistic body images can be created?

**Apolline** 19:02

I think it depends on how they communicate it. I think it's all a matter of communication. Because if they are advertising it as more getting fit but meaning thinner, this might be negative, but if they are communicating it in a more fit, healthy, feeling good in his or her own body, body positivity, motivation and so on - I think this on the other hand would be way better.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:50

Do you often experience people you follow, can be your friends or peers, presenting themselves as especially fit or healthy on social media?

**Apolline** 20:06

I would say most of them no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:10

So you yourself don't have the desire to represent yourself more fit than you would sometimes feel on social media?

**Apolline** 20:36

Not really. I mean, it's true that I'm posting once in a while something, but very rarely. But it's true that I have one or two friends that are posting quite often a few times per week and every time I see it I kind of feel bad about myself not doing any activity.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:05

But so it's more getting on your bad conscience if you see other people working out instead of motivating you yourself?

**Apolline** 21:18

It's kind of a mix of both.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:26

Okay, perfect. So there's the assumption that every one of us has an ideal image of ourselves in our mind that we want to reach, also in terms of our body and our fitness. So, do you think that for example, the fitness influencer that you follow, that she or he supports you in reaching that self image of yourself?



**Apolline** 22:10

Yes I think so.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:14

Because she or he represents values or does things that you ideally would also like to do or represent?

**Apolline** 22:27

Yes. In that sense yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:32

Now a question regarding gym chains and this can also be related on the gym chain that you are current customer of: What are the important values regarding fitness? What is most important to you? Is it the discipline? Is it the fun? Is it the interaction with your friends while working out? It can be openness, gender equality, things like that.

**Apolline** 22:58

Okay, for me.. so mainly why I am doing sport, what is triggering me?

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:05

Yeah, and at the same time, what does the gym chain has to represent if it should represent the same values that you have?

**Apolline** 23:14

Okay, so to answer the first part of the question, what I represent and why am I doing sport activities is my need to feel better. Afterwards I'm always happy about myself. So this is really the main aspect and also, I mean, obviously to be fit. These are the two main ones and the values of my gym I would say, also to be fit, that's for sure. But yeah, I mean, for happiness, I think as well, because they are offering a lot of different courses. So I think they are trying to make every customer happy and motivate them to get fit. So in that sense, I would say yes, our values are similar.

**Marlene Lüttje** 24:23

But it does not reach a level where you would say, if that gym chain would communicate this value, this happiness that you feel during and after working out, if they would focus their communication on social media on this value, or on the value of making everybody happy by offering very diverse programs. Would that content be interesting for you then on social media?

**Apolline** 24:53

Maybe, yeah. But to be honest, I don't think I would see it since I'm not following them. I don't think I would be aware of those changes or new informations.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:11

Okay. So, how are you exposed to fitness related content in general on social media? Because you said you are following one specific account of a fitness influencer, but is it that you are exposed to fitness brands through your peers like when they are tagging themselves in the studio or when they are reacting to something or when they are reposting something? Does that happen often?

**Apolline** 25:45

No, I don't have a lot of friends who are doing that. There is just one I have in mind who is tagging all the time the same gym. And it's true that I looked at this gym to see because they were offering a lot of different nice courses, so I looked into it, but but not any further.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:19

Okay. What comes to your mind when you think about your gym? What do you associate the most to the brand, is it for example the logo or the facilities themselves, the classes, the people?

**Apolline** 26:40

For me, this gym is the best I ever had. And mainly because of the facility, the location. It's not too far from my place and I mainly go there for the view. Because we can see the water everywhere and so it's kind of a motivation for me. The view is literally the motivation. And that's why I'm not going to the closest gym because even though it's not far it's not the closest, so the view motivates me to go there.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:21

So you were naming functional values, such as the facilities, but then they have an emotional value for you as well. And this emotionality, like this vibe and the atmosphere you have while working out because of the nice view, it weighs more for you than for example, a functional value such as the closest location.

**Apolline** 27:49

Yes, definitely. And also because the facility itself is clean, the people are on their own and not bothering each other, they are respectful. Exactly. Yeah. And also the bathroom or the shower, everything is clean and they have sauna and hamam, so that's definitely a big plus.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:32

So I guess it's a mix between the emotional values as well as the functional values but they're also interlinked with each other. But do you think that your gym chain should then more promote the functional values that they obtain on social media or the emotional ones? If you would be a potential customer and you would not know your gym but you would see it on social media, how would you like to be convinced?

**Apolline** 29:01

I think both are needed. Because everyone is very different. So I think if they want to reach as more people as possible, they would definitely need a mix. But I have the feeling that most of the time gyms are more communicating about the physical stuff, the facilities and everything what it offers, rather than the emotional side of it. Or if they do the emotional side, it is more for the sport itself or about how you feel physically after an activity rather than how you would feel about the different lights the room can offer while you're dancing or the music or the different vibes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:54

Yes, perfect. How would you have evaluate the quality, your perceived quality of that gym chain?

**Apolline** 30:06

On a scale from 1 to 10, I would say 9. Because you can always be better but I really love my gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:19

Okay, and that is also based on things you said such as the facilities and the different things they're offering such as the sauna, the view. It's all coming together to create your quality perception?

**Apolline** 30:37

Yes, and also because I subscribed to other gyms before and so I can compare the one I had before to this one and I can definitely say that this one is the best as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:51

Okay, so would you describe yourself as a lot of as a loyal customer of that gym?

**Apolline** 30:59

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:00

Okay. And for example, you never mentioned the price. I mean, of course, we are in Copenhagen, where gyms chains are expensive in general, but you would give other factors more importance than the price?

**Apolline** 31:21

Yes, it's definitely not the cheapest. Actually the contrary, yeah. But they offer a special price for students. So that's a plus already. And second of all, yes, I'm more willing to pay a bit more every month to be more motivated to go because I prefer the place. Because if I'm paying less where the place is not triggering me to go do some sport activities there, in the end I will go less and therefore waste more money in that sense.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:06

Okay. So now we would move to the last block of the interview: John Reed's Instagram profile. You have seen the account of John Reed before the interview already and you got kind of familiar with the shared content. So I would like to talk about your first impressions and your general opinion regarding their Instagram performance. So my first question is: Did you know the gym chain previously?

**Apolline** 32:35

No, not at all. Never heard of it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:37

Okay, so just to give you a quick overview, John Reed is a German gym chain. And it has around 26 gyms worldwide but they are planning to open additional ones in close future. And the brand is owned by the RSG group and the RSG group also owns fitness brands such as McFit, which you might have heard of, which is also a German gym chain, High5 gyms and a home workout program called Cyberobics. But what do you remember from having a look at the social media profile?

**Apolline** 33:24

I remember that the colors were really dark. This is like the first thing. And also, from what I remembered everybody was very fit and it seemed like a more professional Instagram profile rather than beginners.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:48

Okay, perfect. So you would say that your first focus was on the visual, what you saw, not specifically on what you read?

**Apolline** 34:01

Definitely not.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:04

Okay, but do you like what you saw? Was it interesting?

**Apolline** 34:21

Not to me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:23

Okay. So which attributes would you associate with the brand after having a first look at the Instagram profile? Such as coolness, these kind of attributes? What would be your first choice?

**Apolline** 34:55

I would say professional, maybe even a bit too much. Yeah, I think that's the main one. I would definitely not say cool. For me, it presents that the customers are people who are doing that every day and are really focusing their life on sport activity.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:51

Okay. Can you understand that they have the slogan "Not your average gym" in their biography? Did you see anything in the profile that made you understand this? Like, why is it not your average gym?

**Apolline** 36:12

Actually, when I read it, I thought.. Well, first of all, I didn't really understand what that meant. And second of all, I think it was a bit arrogant.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:37

Okay, so you would say that your associations match with the graphic impressions, but that of course the graphic impressions also have an influence on your associations that you made in your mind?

**Apolline** 36:52

Yes, definitely. I think for me, this sentence - like when I read this sentence for me it was more "okay if you're a beginner, don't bother".

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:06

Okay. But that it's more for people who are already perfectly fit and athletic.

**Apolline** 37:17

Exactly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:18

Okay. Based on the social media presence, how could you evaluate the quality of John Reed as a fitness studio? Have you seen anything that would indicate a certain level of quality that is offered? When you think of the values that you mentioned which were important to you?

**Apolline** 37:45

Yes. Okay. I think definitely, when I saw it, I saw that there was a certain level of quality, which goes back to what I said in terms of of professional or experts going there. Because if it was not qualitative, I don't think that an expert or professional would be triggered by it. And also when you see the different equipment that they have, or the room and everything, it looks quite expensive, which might be linked to quality.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:34

Okay, perfect. So, when you were talking about your current gym and that you would describe yourself as a loyal customer, you also said that it would need the kind of interplay of functionality and emotionality to get you to become a loyal customer, such as a nice view and general nice atmosphere while working out, e.g. through

saunas and additional services. Would you say that John Reed is communicating these, so your values on Instagram?

**Apolline** 39:17

I would say yes and no in a way that regarding the lightning, they are trying to communicate a certain atmosphere. I have the feeling, yeah. And also the modern aspect of it, and it seems quite clean as well. So in that sense and with a lot of different equipment, so in that sense, yes. I would say they are definitely trying to target a kind of people or get the emotional aspect from it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:59

So imagine a situation where you would be in a city where a John Reed fitness studio would be positioned in, would you consider becoming a customer based on your impression of the social media presence?

**Apolline** 40:15

I think I would need to know the price. And also, I think I might not consider it because I might feel too much as a beginner whereas in my opinion, I don't think I am but from what I saw, I have the feeling those are experts so I would rather not go in such a gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 40:44

Okay, just as an information, they have different contract types, but if you choose to only visit one studio, the price would be 25 euros per month.

**Apolline** 40:59

Oh! That's okay!

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:03

Because they are positioning themselves in the premium discount segment of gyms. But so based on your reaction, I would conclude that you thought it would be more expensive?

**Apolline** 41:22

Definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:24

Okay. But can this also be related to the fact that you're currently living in Copenhagen where price standards are generally different for gyms?

**Apolline** 41:38

Yes, but to be honest, still - for what they are showing on their Instagram and the facilities or at least how I see it, it looks very new, very modern, so yes, more expensive. And since they have a lot of equipment or they seem to have a lot of equipment which are usually also expensive and I expected the subscription price to be more than that.

**Marlene Lüttje** 42:12

They are saying that the aspect that is differentiating John Reed from other gym chains is their focus on music. So they are also calling their fitness studios Fitness Music Clubs, because they always have really nice music made by DJs that is constantly playing. And twice a week for some hours they have DJs within the gym, like life DJs playing music while you are working out.

**Apolline** 42:52

Okay, this might change my mind.

**Marlene Lüttje** 42:54

Okay, but you did not see that USP as I would call it during your first impression of their social media presence?

**Apolline** 43:07

No, not at all. But it's funny that you say it because when I saw the different lightning, I would have imagined the music behind it as well. But I didn't say it before, because I couldn't see it on Instagram. Or it was not communicated. If it was communicated more in the description of the posts and not just in the biography, I think this would have triggered me more. At first.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:38

Okay, that's a perfect conclusion. If you don't have anything to add to the previous blocks or anything else that strikes your mind, then I would stop the recording now.

**Apolline** 43:56

I think no, I'm good.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:58

Perfect. Thank you very much for the interview, I'm going to stop the recording now.

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### **Interview 3: Sandra**

Tue, 3/31 3:48PM • 43:35

#### **Speakers**

Sandra, Marlene Lüttje

**Marlene Lüttje** 00:01

Could you please give me a short introduction on yourself? Like maybe your name, age, your current place and status, what are you doing?

**Sandra** 00:09

Of course. Hi, I'm Sandra. I'm 24 years old. I'm a student in Copenhagen. I study my master's degree there. I'm currently in Germany though because of all the corona madness. But I'm going to graduate soon, and then hopefully find a job somewhere in Germany or Europe. And, yes, anything else that you want to know about me?

**Marlene Lüttje** 00:29

No, that's perfect. But I would like to know, how do you keep yourself fit? How do you train and work out? What are your methods and routines right now?

**Sandra 00:38**

I love to go to yoga classes. So before the whole lockdown thing happened, I tried to go once or twice a week in my university's yoga club. I go running regularly. And right now I actually follow some online classes. There's a lot of things going on where you have some people showing your exercises for free, which is nice. So I'm doing that. I'm actually going for a run later. So I'm still doing yoga and running, but also trying to do some other fitness stuff that I can find online tutorials for at the moment.

**Marlene Lüttje 01:06**

Perfect. What kind of influence does fitness have on your life when you consider your success or your mental health?

**Sandra 01:15**

I find it very important, especially when I'm in a stressful situation. For instance, right now with writing the master thesis, there's so much things I need to think about and all day long like working and stuff. So I really like to go for a run or go to yoga and just get my mind free. And just in general, I think it's, you know, you're sitting all day long. So it's so important to have something that kind of relaxes you and also keeps you fit and just healthy.

**Marlene Lüttje 01:37**

Okay. How important would you grade social media in your life from a scale from 1 to 10?

**Sandra 01:45**

Probably 10. Or I may say 9, but I'm very addicted to that at the moment. So probably right now it is very high.

**Marlene Lüttje 01:54**

Okay, so you would therefore define yourself also as a heavy social media user?

**Sandra 02:00**

Yeah, I'm not posting that much. But I'm spending a lot of time on there watching other people's stories and the content they create.

**Marlene Lüttje 02:07**

When you mention stories, so you would say that Instagram is the network you use the most?

**Sandra 02:14**

Yeah, definitely. I use Facebook as well. But usually like my routine is I wake up in the morning, I go to Instagram, first watch some stories, see what's new. And then maybe I will go to Facebook and see if there's anything new there. But I feel like everything is happening or most things are happening on Instagram at the moment.

**Marlene Lüttje 02:32**

Okay. And does social media also have implication on your communication with companies and brands, not just with your peers, but also the way you interact with brands?

**Sandra 02:45**

I think so. Yes. I mean, definitely. Sometimes I see some companies that I might actually not even have noticed before because some people like influencers show them and then I might go on their profile and just see what they do. A lot of companies also do some like sweepstakes, or the kind of competitions where sometimes like, you know, like when you have to comment people underneath a post and then you can win something and do a

lot of these things. So I feel like I definitely interact more with companies from social media than I would in my everyday life.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:14

Okay. You don't have a current gym membership. Is that right?

**Sandra** 03:22

Yeah, currently not.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:24

Okay, but did you have one in your past?

**Sandra** 03:28

Actually, pretty much until I went to Copenhagen, I was always in a gym. I started when I was 16 in my hometown and then wherever I moved, I was a member of a gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:37

Okay, did you then follow that gym chain account on Instagram?

**Sandra** 03:43

To be honest, not really. I think also, no, I'm not even sure they were on Instagram or were that big on Instagram back in the time. And especially my last gym, it was a local gym in Maastricht where I did my bachelor's degree. I'm not even sure they have an Instagram account. Maybe they have now but I'm pretty sure they didn't have last time that I was actually joining the gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:04

Okay, perfect. You mentioned the home workout programs that you're doing right now online. Do you follow these kinds of fitness brands on social media?

**Sandra** 04:16

Yeah, well, it's mostly personal trainers that I follow. So that definitely, but I was thinking actually about joining some of the groups - I was actually yesterday, I saw some influencer, I don't remember the name, posting some programs of some gyms or sports clubs, like around the world. And I actually had the plan today to look into these and maybe follow them as well to just get a daily inflow of inspiration of things that I could do.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:45

Okay, when I talk about fitness related brands, on one side, of course, you have the ones that are actually selling their gym membership or also their home workout programs with like really this entrepreneurial mindset behind it. But then there are also these fitness influencers who don't necessarily sell themselves but who are paid to present other fitness brands' products, which is, I guess, also a pretty common type and they share their general food and health related information from their daily life. Do you follow people like that?

**Sandra** 05:20

I don't specifically follow these people, but I follow some influencers that do occasionally show their fitness routine with some equipment that they bought, and also some of the health trends or food trends that they follow.

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:34

Okay, so you would say that you are exposed to fitness related content every day in your feed?



**Sandra 05:41**

Yeah, probably. Yeah, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje 05:43**

Okay, perfect. Um, do you think that the content that a gym chain could share on social media would be interesting for you at all?

**Sandra 05:52**

Oh, yeah definitely. I think there's so many, especially right now, given that we can't really go to a gym or workout. I think there's so many possibilities to actually still stay healthy and fit by working out at home or maybe outside. But personally, I'm not like an expert on fitness. So I need to have some information on how I can best train and some inspiration as well. And I think that is some content that I find very interesting. And even if it goes to like, even before Corona, I think lots of companies also, there's so many like own bodyweight exercises, for instance, we don't need to have equipment. So when these kind of chains post this kind of stuff, I would find that very interesting as well, even though I'm not a current gym member.

**Marlene Lüttje 06:33**

Okay, perfect. Now, I have a question regarding your consumer engagement. So then, I mean, not your interaction with your peers, but especially, particularly with companies and brands. How would you evaluate your consumer engagement on three levels, if the first level would be just consuming, like passively consuming messages, like just reading on a higher level contributing which will would be like liking and commenting posts. And the third level would be creating where you actively create brand related content yourself.

**Sandra 07:10**

Okay, so I would say that I'm probably between one and two. So I mostly read things, but I also do share them with some friends or like comment their name underneath or like a post. But what I wouldn't really do, like some people that comment and be like "Oh, this is such a great workout" and that they compliment the person doing this or commenting on the thing that is shown like I would never do that. I would rather share with my friends and show them what I found and maybe tell them that I think this looks really cool or not so great, and then share my opinion with them in that way, and I actually never, I don't think I've ever created some kind of branded content where I tagged a company or something.

**Marlene Lüttje 07:50**

Okay, so you never kind of tagged maybe a brand's name with a hashtag on one of your posts or tag one of your stories with the location of a specific brand? I mean, not fitness related right now, just in general.

**Sandra 08:06**

I mean, the location in a story maybe to be honest, I don't recall it right now, but I wouldn't say that I've never done it. That could actually be that when I don't know, maybe it was at a store or something that I have done that. But I don't think it was a fitness related brand, no, nothing fitness related I think. But it could be that I tagged some other company in my stories, but not on something that I posted on my profile.

**Marlene Lüttje 08:32**

Okay, perfect. Um, do you think that there is information on brands that is just shared on social media exclusively and not on other digital communication means or offline?

**Sandra 08:45**

I sometimes feel that you get more information on companies when you join their social media. But then occasionally, when I actually go to the company's website, which I especially do right now that I'm looking for a

job. Then I see some companies on social media, I look at that, then go to the website, I often find that they actually show the same content maybe to a more limited extent, but they do show it but I feel like I'm usually, unless I'm now like now looking for a job, I would never go to the company website unless it's like an online shop. So I definitely think that you can get more information and even that probably some information is not given on the website, maybe just in a very short, very small scope. And you could on that specific topic, you get much more information from social media.

**Marlene Lüttje** 09:31

Okay, so imagine the case you would be looking for a specific piece of information regarding a gym chain, would you then consult the social media account first?

**Sandra** 09:43

For a gym chain, I will probably look at the social media and just see how the location looks and at the equipment if it makes a good impression. But I would probably then go to the website because usually that's where you get information on membership length and price of a contract and these kind of things. So obvious conditions that I would look up on the website because, again, I feel like that's the more reliable source for this kind of information.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:11

Okay, so when you need like an overview of the hard facts of the functional values, you would then consult rather the company website?

**Sandra** 10:19

Yeah probably. Although I would actually also, now that I think about it, I would go to the social media, if I look for some special codes that would give me like a discount on something because that's usually where they post these kind of things. And I think it's actually very useful. So maybe I would actually go first to social media for there for sure. And then see what it says on the website. Just to compare.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:38

Okay, perfect. Um, the next question is not particularly focused on fitness brands, but the brands that you see daily in your feed. Are there maybe brands that you already perceive kind of as persons because they have such distinct characteristics that you connected to them when you see the posts?

**Sandra** 10:59

Yeah, I think I can actually, you know, I probably can imagine that. I'm just thinking, I mean, that's not also a fitness brand, but I follow Nike and Adidas. And I do actually think they kind of represent a person, like a very ambitious person, very active person, obviously. And their posts usually have same kind of style, even though they show different things as a consistency. And I think they could be like a person. Definitely. It's more like, I mean, it's a company, but when you see it, you know, like, "Oh, yeah, that's Adidas", so you kind of think about it as a person in that way.

**Marlene Lüttje** 11:32

Okay, perfect. Um, does it have an impact on your opinion of a brand when you see the brand interacting with other users on social media, such as when you see the brand responding maybe to a comment underneath the posts? And would that have an influence on your opinion?

**Sandra** 11:49

Yeah, I think so. I actually like it a lot when they're doing this because I feel that brings you closer to the brand and you can, or at least I feel that the brand really cares about their consumers and customers and really wants to

interact with them. And you feel like that you actually have a possibility to reach out to that brand and talk to them and interact. And I feel like when I see that companies do that, I think that is really cool, it's a very interactive space. And yeah, I feel more close to the company and they also know that I have the chance to actually interact with them. And they would actually respond so it's not like I'm talking to a wall. But they would actually be responsive to what I'm saying.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:26

So a potential gym chain that you would maybe become a customer of, it would also maybe change your decision whether to become a customer or not, if you would see how the brand reacts with other users on social media?

**Sandra** 12:40

Yeah, yeah, definitely. I think it would be really nice, especially you know, you might have some questions. And if you know that they respond to it, I think that's something like a very easy way of communicating with that chain because sometimes people are like, I don't like to call so it's just much more comfortable and easy if you can just comment on something and then they will reply.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:01

There is an assumed high transparency on social media where lies are super easily detected. And thus sharing a lot of information makes a brand seem authentic. Would you agree to that?

**Sandra** 13:17

I think it depends on the kind of information but in general, I would agree. I think that mostly if they are being honest, and they don't only show like the perfect shiny version of themselves, I think then it makes it very authentic, because there are usually things that are going wrong and there are some companies, I can't really think about a specific example, but I know that I've seen it that maybe they were in the news with something negative. And when they also share this on their own social media, I think that just shows that they acknowledge that something went wrong and that they are caring about it, and they want to change it. And in that way, I think that's very authentic. But then again, if they would only show the good things and not acknowledge that there's something bad, then I think it could be a bit, yeah not that authentic.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:00

Does that apply also, in your daily life? When you look through your feed? Do you like brand content more than you would perceive as credible or authentic?

**Sandra** 14:12

Yeah, definitely. I know there's some content where you know, that looks so unrealistic and that's never gonna happen in real life. And I feel like for instance, when some brands have like these only top models that look so amazing, and you know, like, that's not really reality. But then now there are some brands that include women or men that look more natural, like actual people and I think that makes the brand much more approachable and also much more authentic in a way.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:36

Would you also connect this to a gym chain and their presence on social media when you're talking about top models?

**Sandra** 14:43

Yeah, definitely. I feel like when gym chains show just like the perfect - well people that already look so fit and like professional athletes, I feel like maybe that's not the chain for me, you know. Because that's, first of all, I

either I don't think that's realistic or if all the people who go there actually look like that, then that's not the place for me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:04

Yeah, I think this is very aligned with the general fitness lifestyle with the buzzword Fitspiration, which is super popular right now on social media and especially lived through Instagram. Which kind of started because famous actors or celebrities started to advertise their fit lifestyle, and then their admirers and large group of followers started to pursue it as well. What is your general opinion of this movement? Do you find it rather healthy because it's motivating people? Or do you think that maybe idealistic body standards can be created what also has a dangerous side to it?

**Sandra** 15:43

I think it can be both. It really depends on the individual. I have a feeling that some people who create this kind of content are still showing the more realistic side and that they also do some other stuff. Or they also show you the downside so that you don't think that once you want to start you have to be like them, you know like perfect and everything. But there are some people when you look at them it seems like so easy to have this perfect body but it's actually not in reality and I think that is very dangerous because then people will try to look the same way and they would hope to get immediate results but that's not possible and I think that could be very dangerous for some people who are maybe not so confident with their own body and that they might then I don't know maybe stop eating because they think they should already look like that person. But they don't and in that way I think that could be a little bit dangerous and also misleading because that's not how the real world should work or is working.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:33

So do you often experience people you follow, not necessarily fitness influencers, but also your friends presenting themselves as especially fit and healthy on social media?

**Sandra** 16:46

Yes, and also the opposite. Like I follow some influencers for instance, Caro Daur, a fashion influencer and she is super skinny and very fit and then she also shows that she eats like a lot of sweets and a lot of food. And that's like, just not true. So in that way, I think that's very inauthentic, because you wouldn't be that skinny if you actually ate that much as you pretend to do. And then also, I think there are some people who, yeah, they try to look extremely healthy. Maybe they are that healthy but I think they just aren't showing the downside of following this kind of lifestyle.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:24

Okay, and like would you catch yourself in creating content that you post on social media that shows you as particularly fit and healthy because you would like to show the people that follow you that you are following a fit lifestyle?

**Sandra** 17:41

I don't think I ever post anything where I work out. Or even if I did, I think people wouldn't really assume that I'm super fit because I just don't look like these kind of people. What I would do sometimes is I post my food and that might look very healthy in some instances and I know that sometimes people think "Oh wow, this is so healthy", but even then I actually noticed that "yeah well, maybe that one meal was very healthy", but the rest of my diet is not necessarily as healthy. So in that regard with food, maybe I do that sometimes. With fitness, I don't think so, at least not yet. Because I don't think I'm at that level where I should do that because I'm just not that fit at the moment.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:20

Okay, so when you see fitness related content on your Instagram, does it motivate you or does it rather address your bad conscience or frustrate you?

**Sandra** 18:33

I find it very motivating actually. Like I'm following this couple. They live in Dubai, and they are super fit but they're not like this kind of people that go to the gym and then drink protein shakes just to build some muscle mass, but they are actually super fit and very strong. And then sometimes they do individual workouts or like partner workouts and they do a lot with their own body strength like doing a handstand and then doing push ups while on the handstand. Like these kind of things, you know, and I think that is very impressive. It just shows what is possible with your body if you just train it, and that I find very inspiring. And I mean, it probably will never be able to do that myself. But it inspires me to just become more strong and maybe also achieve some of the exercises that they are showing. But then when I see people who are just looking very bulky, like especially guys that do that a lot when you think "Oh, wow, he is only eating chicken and then drinking protein drinks, to build lots of muscle". I don't find that very motivating, because that's not a look that I would want for myself.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:37

Okay, it's very interesting that you address this because my next question would be regarding the assumption that everybody of us has their self image in mind, their ideal version of themselves that they want to reach. So you would say that you also follow accounts that kind of support you in becoming closer to your ideal self?

**Sandra** 19:58

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Like that lady or this couple I just talked about, they're definitely - like she, for instance, does a lot of yoga as well. And I mean I love yoga so that's definitely something I would also hope that one day I can reach maybe not the same level but at least a similar level of like control of my body to be able to do some of the positions that she's able to do. And I definitely do not follow any of these people that I just described like these bulky fitness guys that are just working out for their looks. I don't follow these people. So definitely, and that's not who I am. So I would agree with your statement that I follow people that might be similar to my ideal self.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:38

Perfect. What are the most important values for you when you think about your fitness and working out? Would it be discipline or fun or maybe the group workout aspect, interaction with others? It could also be openness, gender equality, what what comes into your mind?

**Sandra** 20:59

So I definitely like to work out in group just because I find it more motivating. Sometimes I think I lack self discipline a little bit, like when I'm just on my own. And I might have a certain goal in mind, but then I find myself being like "Oh no, I'm tired, I rather watch Netflix". But then when I'm with friends, I feel it's much more motivating. But then also, when I go, for instance, to a yoga class, I find it very important that it's very inclusive and that everyone can participate and then no one feels discriminated or, you know, there's some gyms or you hear stories when the person that's a bit chubby goes to a gym and people are looking at them weirdly. And I really do not like that. I think sports should be something, and fitness in general, that is very inclusive and is there for everyone because it's about being healthy and everyone should have a right to follow this goal of being healthy. So I find that's very important that you just being inclusive and let everyone join, kind of make a group experience out of it rather than shaming other people or something like that.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:59

Do the fitness brands you follow represent this inclusiveness as a value as well?

**Sandra** 22:05

I think more and more for sure. For instance, Nike or I'm not sure if it's Nike or Adidas, I think it's Adidas actually, they started to include more curvy people in their campaigns. And I think it was a hashtag something like #myroutine, or I don't know, something like that. But really showing that you can have some more curvy people as well. They're still working out and as they should be, and they were showing that it is for everyone. And I like that kind of content.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:37

Next to the brands like Nike and Adidas, which you are aware of, because you're already following them. How do you get aware of other brands that you don't follow? Does that happen through peers because they post something brand related?

**Sandra** 22:53

Yeah, yeah, definitely. So it's either some of my friends who might have some friends who tag the brands they use or people telling me about a brand they found on Instagram or at a certain point in general. Or also a lot through influencers, even though they're not specific fitness influencers, but I mean, almost all influencers are working out in their stories and tagging brands. And sometimes if I find that a brand does tag a lot of influencers, for instance, I would go to their profile and also check it out myself.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:21

Hmm. Do you see any content that is related to a gym by friends like friends of yours posting themselves in a gym chain, for example?

**Sandra** 23:33

Yeah, no, that happens a lot. For sure. No, I see it a lot. Especially like in Copenhagen, for instance, lots of people go to a gym with a very nice view. So they tag it a lot of times. And then you know that they're going there. But also some of my friends from Germany, when they go, they tag the gym. I think mostly they do it to show that they're working out and have a healthy lifestyle now that I think about it, but yeah, I definitely see a lot of gym chains there as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:59

So you think these posts are also for you to see the real experience that they are living at that gym chain? So that through these posts, you could kind of get a grasp of how it would be to work out there?

**Sandra** 24:15

Yeah, I think that definitely, because you see the equipment, you see if it looks like clean for instance. Or I mean, some of the people that would also take a picture just before they join a class so you know that the gym would offer classes and these kind of things. So definitely, I think it gives you an impression of how it could be to go to the gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 24:36

When you think about the gyms that you were a customer of in the past, what are the attributes you think the most of? For example, the logo, the studio, the facilities or the people?

**Sandra** 24:53

Stuff like the logo I wouldn't really care about. What was really important for me is the facilities. I do not like gyms that are not clean. For instance when I was living in London I had two gyms close to where I lived and one of them, I went to see it and the floor was wet and they let me walk in with my shoes from outside so I was like "this is really disgusting", so I did not join this gym. And so it needs to be clean and also needs to have like nice

equipment. For instance, the other gym I actually joined in London they had a swimming pool, which I thought was really cool. And it was a really huge gym. I also find it very important like who the people are, I need to feel comfortable. I don't want to have these kind of people, you know sometimes you are in a gym and you feel like people just go there to show up their muscles and maybe also like to look at you and you really feel observed. I don't really like that. But as I said before, I like it to be inclusive so everyone can feel comfortable to be there. And I also find it very important that the people working at the gym are professional in a way that they actually can give you good advice when you use the equipment and when you exercise. Because there are some gyms that do not have anyone working there. And I think that's not ideal because I'm not an expert. So I might make some mistakes, especially when you use the machines and equipment that could damage your physical health. So I think it's really good when you have someone working there. And another very important thing for me is whether or not they offer classes, because I think to me, that's the most motivating thing and I think it's more fun than actually being on the equipment or the machines to work. So if they have good classes, it's a big plus for me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:31

So you were mentioning a mix of functional values and emotional values. Functional values, in terms of cleanliness and the facilities as well as the quality of the equipment, but also emotional values that generate your general atmosphere while working out. What do you think, when you would first see your gym chain on social media, what should they communicate more: the functional values or the emotional values?

**Sandra** 26:59

I think probably the emotional values, because if you have pictures or videos, I think you can really well convey the atmosphere that the gym ideally has and the kind of people that go there. And I think for me, that would be the most important because I mean, in the end, I don't think any gym even if they're dirty, they would show a picture where their equipment looks dirty and stuff. So that should be a given that obvious things are fine, that the equipment looks nice. And anyway, they would make some pictures that look nice, but I think the people that go there and just the kind of type of content that they create, I think that's really important and just showing what kind of atmosphere you can expect in the gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:37

So this content would also have an impact on how you would evaluate the quality of the gym chain without maybe ever being there, but based on the way they create content?

**Sandra** 27:49

Yeah, yeah, I think, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:51

So what would be the aspect that would make you believe most in a high quality? Would it be cleanliness or?

**Sandra** 27:58

I mean, also, in regards to the content they create, right? I think also whether or not the pictures look professional, because I've seen some gym chains where it looks like that's just somebody working there took a picture with their phone. And I think that doesn't really... maybe the gym is really good, but it doesn't really look like high quality. So for me, there should be a certain aesthetic when it comes to the content that they create. And the pictures should look professional, like, I don't know, like the lights and everything, the quality of the picture should be good. And I mean, it should also show the equipment to a certain extent so that I know that there's a variety of different things you can do in the gym. And that also represents a high quality for me that you have a choice that you can make.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:46

So for you it's not only the fact that they would obtain all these high quality features, but they also know how to show them in an aesthetic and convincing way on social media.

**Sandra** 28:57

Yeah, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:58

Okay, perfect. If you take these aspects into consideration, also regarding your previous gyms, would you describe yourself that you were a loyal customer to these gym chains?

**Sandra** 29:14

Um, I mean at least while I was in a certain place I didn't change the gym. So in that way, I think I was loyal. Unfortunately, none of it - I mean, one of them in London that was a chain but I only lived in London and then went back to Germany, so there was no possibility for me to stay loyal. But I think once I like a gym, and the other ones, they were local, so I couldn't join them again, but once I like a gym and it's a chain, I would definitely go to that one again and also stay there.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:43

Okay, so you think that your situation of living is also having a high impact on your loyalty as a customer?

**Sandra** 29:58

Yes, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:58

Okay. And does your situation of living also have an impact on how you choose a gym chain in front of the other?

**Sandra** 30:11

Yeah, definitely. I mean location and convenience is also very important to me. Like even if there's the most amazing gym but it would take me, I don't know, like half an hour, 40 minutes to get there, I probably wouldn't go just because that would already make it much less convenient for me to get there. And especially now when you're, you know, you're writing your master thesis, you don't have that much time to travel through the whole city to go to your gym and then especially later I can imagine once I start working, you don't want to take forever to go to your gym. So the location is very important. In that way also where I live, because also I feel like in different cities there might be different gyms, I mean you have chains but then you also have local gyms that might be different in a way. So definitely where I live is very important.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:57

Okay, so you do value emotional values very high, but they are not as important, not if the convenience base is not given?

**Sandra** 31:07

I mean, it probably depends. Well, let's say that there's two gyms which are approximately around the same area, maybe not the same area, but like the same distance, then I would definitely go to the one that I feel more comfortable in. And even if that gym might be a little bit farther away, I would go to that one. But there's a limit, I would say, because if I would have to go too far, then I would probably go to the other one. But let's say that there is a limit but if it's not so far away, I would rather go a little bit further but then have the gym I feel more comfortable in.



**Marlene Lüttje** 31:42

Okay, thank you. Now we would move to the last block of our interview, the social media presence of John Reed. You have seen the account before and you got familiar with the shared content. So I just would like to talk about your impressions and your general opinion regarding their Instagram performance. So my first question would be whether you knew John Reed before?

**Sandra** 32:08

I knew them, I heard them, it could be that I saw them on TV or on social media in some advertisements. But I've never been to one before.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:18

And you have not been a follower of their social media account before?

**Sandra** 32:22

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:22

Okay. So just as a short explanation, John Reed is a German gym chain and has approximately 26 gyms worldwide but new openings should be coming soon or have been postponed right now. They are describing themselves as belonging in the premium discount segment and they are part of RSG group RSG group is the owner of many fitness related brands such as the homework program Cyberobics but also of the other gym chains McFit and High5. So, were you aware of the other three brands that I just mentioned?

**Sandra** 32:58

McFit definitely, I actually once was a member of that one but just for two months because they had a special offer. But the other ones I don't know.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:06

Okay, perfect. Um, so what do you remember from seeing the profile?

**Sandra** 33:12

It's actually funny that now you said that they belong to McFit and these other brands because that's actually what I kind of connected to when I saw these pictures. I think the profile in general, like the first time I saw it, I thought it looks cool. But at the same time, it looks a bit dark, like they use a lot of dark colors. And I think it doesn't look very inviting, to be honest. And then I took a closer look and even looking at the pictures, I mean, they seem to be like around like my age, like, somewhere in their 20s but I think that the people don't look very nice. Like they always have like a very, I wouldn't say angry face, but very serious face and most of the people look like they're either very sporty or they are the type of guy or girl I described before that just go to the gym to have a certain physique. But who are not really looking at the actual fitness aspect. So I actually felt like I probably wouldn't feel very comfortable going to that gym just based on the content they have on their social media.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:11

Okay, so your first impression was based on the general vibe of all the pictures, the darkness that you mentioned, but also the people you saw. Like this visual aspect that there were a lot of people displayed in the pictures, okay. Was there any particular content or picture that stayed in your mind? Or was it an overall impression?

**Sandra** 34:41

Well, there's two things. So actually, like the latest post, I liked them much better because they were showing a lot of home workouts, which I think is really cool. And they also seem to be a bit friendlier, but also they were not made in the same style. Probably they are now at home so the posts are not the same quality as the pictures they had before and from the ones before, they are like super dark and everything. I remember a few pictures where they would be like, for instance, there was one of three girls looking into the camera, but they're like kind of standing with their arms crossed in front of them. And they just don't look very friendly in a way, you know, like the gesture is not very welcoming in a way and also there were some close-ups of people. Like the quality of pictures is really nice and aesthetic as well, but I just think it's so dark and then people are not smiling, so it just doesn't seem like they're welcoming new people. And I feel like I would have to be an expert in fitness to go there with them and like, I would have to be of the same level of fitness as these people. So they would accept me in a way. Yeah, that's what I thought when I looked at these pictures.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:43

So as an overall conclusion, did you like what you see or rather not?

**Sandra** 35:49

I liked what I see from the aesthetic aspect, but not to join them as my gym. Like I wouldn't choose them as my gym, just based on these pictures.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:59

Okay, based on your first impression, what would be the two or three attributes that would come into your mind that you would associate with the brand?

**Sandra** 36:10

Ooh, that's a difficult question. I think it's "modern" for sure. Just the way they have the pictures. For some reason, I would put "serious" because they seem serious to me, like the people. Maybe something like "strict". I don't think that's actually true, but just the people, they look like they're on a very strict plan with their physics.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:43

Okay. Have you become aware of the brand's slogan in the biography which says "Not your average gym"?

**Sandra** 36:52

Yeah, I saw that and it also said something about like a music gym or something.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:56

Fitness Music Club, yes.

**Sandra** 36:59

Yeah, do they play music loud or...?

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:03

Actually they have all the time in all their gyms, they have electronic music played by DJs especially for their studios. And two times a week for some hours they have live DJs in every studio playing live music for the people who work out there.

**Sandra** 37:23

Oh, actually, that's really cool. I would actually really like that because especially as I like electronic music as I listen a lot to electronic music. Maybe they should show that. I mean, I know that there was one picture of a lady on a DJ thing, but then she was just wearing some very sexy outfit, so I wasn't sure if they were just like promoting weekend vibes or if that was actually someone from the gym. Maybe they should advertise that a bit more because I think that's really cool.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:46

So you did not see that aspect of the gym chain in your first impression of the profile?

**Sandra** 37:55

No. I read and I saw that picture but I thought "okay, does that mean that she's there?". But for me, there was no information given on that. So it didn't really make the connection.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:06

Okay, so, before you knew that, were you able to comprehend that slogan "Not your average gym"?

**Sandra** 38:16

No, not really. I mean, it didn't look like... Actually after that, I went to some other gym profiles just to see if they look similar and they didn't so I assumed "okay, there is something different from that gym to others." But I couldn't really say why.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:32

Okay, but now that you know that they call themselves also fitness music clubs and what stands behind this statement, would you now agree to the statement of not being average?

**Sandra** 38:44

Yeah, definitely. At least I've never heard of any other gym that does it. And I think it's really cool because music is definitely part of working out because it kind of motivates you. So I think that's actually a really cool concept.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:56

Okay. Um, when you were talking about your previous experience with gym chains you mentioned functional values such as the cleanliness and the equipment, the facilities as strong influence factors on the perceived quality of a gym chain. Have you seen those values as well at John Reed? So could you say from just looking at the social media profile, whether it would be high quality?

**Sandra** 39:27

I mean, the equipment looked nice, it didn't look bad. But as I mentioned before, I had the impression that it's a cheaper gym without knowing the prices, like kind of like McFit. Maybe a bit higher price, but not too expensive. So in that way, I still think that the equipment is not of bad quality, but I think maybe it's not the highest quality as compared to other more expensive clubs where you have maybe a higher variety of equipment or maybe more staff walking around helping you work out. So in that way, I would probably classify this kind of mid-quality based on the pictures I saw.

**Marlene Lüttje** 40:02

Just because you mentioned the price, when you decide to only visit one studio, so be fixed on the studio's location, you would pay 25 euros per month, which would be the lowest price. And if you would then decide you want to visit more studios, of course it would rise up to 30-35 euros per month.

**Sandra** 40:21  
Okay, well that's okay.

**Marlene Lüttje** 40:27  
So you know, as I told you, McFit and John Reed both belong to RSG group. Would you say knowing that somehow affects the perception of the quality of John Reed or other aspects?

**Sandra** 40:43  
Yeah, probably because I mean, McFit... I mean, again, I don't think their equipment is such as bad but if you go to one of their other studios, it's just not... Well, there are no trainers walking around and it's not the best quality and it's also probably not like super super clean and these kind of things. And knowing they belong to each other, I definitely feel that for me, my perception of John Reed's quality goes down a little bit. But at the same time, I can imagine that they try to differentiate themselves from McFit and maybe they try to serve another segment of customers that want to have a bit more quality, but also not pay that much. So it doesn't affect it a lot. But a little bit, probably, yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:25  
Okay. So before we talked about the factors that would make you become a loyal customer of a gym chain. And it became clear that it's like an interplay of your current situation of living, but also the values that are given, such as you said that you need a base of convenience, referring to the location or the price, but also that you want to feel comfortable there.

**Sandra** 41:53  
Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:53  
So would you say that all of these values... Did you see anything regarding maybe the location or the price on social media?

**Sandra** 42:01  
No, nothing. Like I don't think they said something about where they are located in Germany. I mean, I know that I saw their advertisements, so I would assume there's many locations. But they didn't say anything. Also the price, I didn't see any indication of that on their social media.

**Marlene Lüttje** 42:17  
Okay, so would you say that if you are in search of a new gym chain that you would like to become a customer of, would John Reed be convincing you based on their social media profile?

**Sandra** 42:30  
I mean, initially, not really. Now that I know that they have this music club, I think that's really cool. So I would definitely see if you get like a trial training or something. So yeah, but no, initially, not really. Just because I didn't feel like that is a gym where I would fit in because I'm not at the same fitness level as these people and they didn't look so welcoming. But yeah, I would, I would like to try it out. Now that I know that it's a music club, I think it's really nice.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:01  
Okay, but it needed further information from other sources which you would have probably gotten over the website to consider becoming a customer? And it would not have happened solely based on their social media presence?

**Sandra** 43:15  
Yeah, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:16  
Okay, perfect. Yes, that is all from my side. Do you have anything that still is in your mind that you want to add to any of the blocks that we talked about?

**Sandra** 43:27  
No, I think I said everything.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:29  
Okay. Perfect, then thank you for the interview. I will stop the recording now. Thank you.

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**Interview 4: Charles**  
Tue, 3/31 7:10PM • 36:54

**Speakers**  
Charles, Marlene Lüttje

**Marlene Lüttje** 00:01  
Can you please give me a short introduction on yourself? Maybe your name, age, your status of living?

**Charles** 00:08  
Okay, so my name is Charles. I'm 24 years old, from France, currently living in Denmark, Copenhagen. I'm studying part time Brands and Communications Management in my masters and I'm working part time in a tech company. Otherwise, I'm not a very sporty person, but I go to the gym on a regular basis.

**Marlene Lüttje** 00:38  
Perfect, that is connected to my next question. How do you keep yourself fit? What are your methods? What is your routine?

**Charles** 00:47  
So as I said, I'm not a very sporty person, so I'm not into some kind of sports. So the only way for me to stay fit is by going to the gym. I used to go there quite a lot, like five times a week. A year ago, it has decreased to like, two to three times a week because I'm much more busy. But yeah, that's what I do.

**Marlene Lüttje** 01:13  
Okay, so how would you describe the influence working out in a gym has on your life when you consider your success or mental health?

**Charles** 01:25  
I think well, as you said, mental health is boosted a lot with the gym. Because after working out I do feel like I've achieved something in the day. And it's also a great way to relieve the stress of the day after a day of work or

studying. So yeah, the sense of achievement, the sense of stress relief, and also, you know, you have the self-esteem aspect. When you see the results on your body and physical appearance. So that counts as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 02:03

For sure. On a scale from 1 to 10, how important is social media in your life?

**Charles** 02:14

Well, I work in social media tech company, but I'm personally also like a heavy user of social media. I would say, like I use it like maybe four hours a day. Whenever I wake up, before I go to sleep, throughout the day, so it's, I would say, pretty important to me. Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 02:34

Okay, which networks do you use? And which one do you use the most?

**Charles** 02:40

I would say I use Instagram and Facebook the most. Although I think Instagram is like, by far my heaviest usage.

**Marlene Lüttje** 02:54

Okay. Can you think of why this is the case?

**Charles** 02:57

I feel like content on Facebook is not too relevant. And I mean, obviously you have these videos that hook you in, and that you end up watching for hours. But then I feel like this is more content that I'm aware is wasting my time. So after like an hour Facebook, I will be like "Okay, this was super unproductive and useless" and I feel dumber after leaving Facebook whereas for some reason, it might be similar content on Instagram, but then I will feel like it's more appropriate for what I want to see. It's more targeted. And also, I think it's more visual.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:46

Okay, yes. What are the implications that social media has on your communication with companies and brands like apart from the communication with your friends?

**Charles** 04:00

Actually, brands that I'm a customer of or a prospect of, I don't really engage with them on social media, except maybe the dream brands. So the brands that will give me cool visuals, but like for consumer goods, I will rarely follow anything. Although I will use social media to interact with them instead of calling them, their customer support, I will just shoot a message on Facebook or Instagram.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:34

Okay, so you mentioned that you are a current gym customer. Do you follow the gym's account on Instagram?

**Charles** 04:42

Actually, I don't, no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:44

Okay. And do you follow other fitness related brands? There, I would make the differentiation between gym chains and fitness influencer who are like entrepreneurs selling their own home workout programs on the one side and on the other side there are fitness related accounts in terms of fitness influencers who present products from other brands.

**Charles** 05:09

I think I follow neither of these.

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:12

Okay but what about lifestyle persons, like influencers?

**Charles** 05:16

No, because I made the conscious decision maybe like a year or two ago to unfollow all the influencers. Because I felt that was bringing me several self-esteem issues. And, I don't know, I thought the whole thing was very toxic. So then I unfollowed every single influencer.

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:42

Okay. But are you still in some way exposed to fitness related content in your social media through your friends?

**Charles** 05:49

Yeah, so for example, in my explore page on Instagram, I'm definitely gonna bump into some content and still be interested like, I feel like, I don't feel like committed enough to follow these people. But I think the Instagram algorithm knows that I'm interested enough to watch. So I do bump into some fitness content, although I'm never paying attention to which accounts this comes from.

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:20

Okay. But then would you think that, for example, the content that your gym would share on social media could be interesting for you at all?

**Charles** 06:28

I feel like if I would bump into it through my feed, probably I could be interested. I don't know if I would really want to follow on a regular basis because I'm not taking part in classes or events. I'm just going to the gym doing my own thing. So I don't know to what extent I would feel interested and targeted by this content.

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:55

Okay, perfect. The next question will be regarding your consumer engagement, so I don't mean your interaction with your friends but your actions as a consumer of brands. If there are three levels of consumer engagement, the first one is very passive, only reading content, consuming it. The middle level would be contributing in form of liking or commenting. And the third level would be actively sharing and creating brand related content. Where would you position yourself?

**Charles** 07:30

You mean for any brand or?

**Marlene Lüttje** 07:32

Yeah, that is not about fitness related brands but in general.

**Charles** 07:38

I feel like mostly passive. Even the content that I enjoy, I rarely like or comment.

**Marlene Lüttje** 07:48

Okay, so have you ever tagged a brand with a hashtag under a post of yours or have you ever tagged the location of a specific brand or company in one of your posts or maybe in your story?

**Charles** 08:04

Never the hashtag but the location, yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 08:07

Okay, did that also happened with your gym?

**Charles** 08:12

Um, I think in my story I have like once or twice tagged my location in the gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 08:20

Okay, perfect. Um, regarding any kind of brands, do you think that there is much information regarding the brand that is only shared on social media and not on other online and offline communication ways?

**Charles** 08:38

I think social media is often like, a summary of the information that you can find somewhere else. Except for some informal campaigns in like stories or live videos. I think it's, it's not a lot of brand new content.

**Marlene Lüttje** 08:59

Okay, so what would you do if you were looking for information on a specific brand? Would you consult the social media network first?

**Charles** 09:11

If it's about a specific event or response to a crisis, then I would check their Facebook page because I trust it more than Instagram for some reason. But if it's deeper information research that I need to do, then I will go on their website.

**Marlene Lüttje** 09:30

And in case you are looking for specific information on your gym?

**Charles** 09:38

Well for my gym, I'm subscribed to the newsletter by email. So I do receive a couple of updates by email especially lately with Covid-19. So I have the newsletter. So actually, that's complete enough for me to ever look for other information. Otherwise the other interface that I use in connection to my gym is an app. So I have the SATS App, in which you have the news section and the contact section. So that even replaces the website.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:18

Okay, perfect. Um, how would you say is your interaction with brands on social media? So do you follow brands and you see them in your main feed, you kind of perceive them as persons because they have such distinct characteristics that you can as well imagine a person telling you this?

**Charles** 10:38

Well, yeah, I think so because I really don't follow a lot of brands. So if I'm convinced enough to follow a brand, then I will integrate it in my feed, which is my universe. So then I will like feel more attached in a way to them. I only follow brands that I feel connected to.

**Marlene Lüttje** 11:08

Does it have an impact on your opinion of a brand when you see how the brand interacts with other consumers? So if a consumer comments something and the brand answers there? Does this have an impact on your opinion?



**Charles** 11:23

Yes, absolutely. Maybe I'm biased because I used to be a community manager. So to me, the community management aspect is very crucial for a brand. And I'm very attentive to how customers are treated, for example, maybe I think it would have more of a positive opinion than a negative opinion in a way that if the brand doesn't reply, or reply super shortly, it will not necessarily give me negative attitudes, but it's only a bonus when I see a super good interaction, then it will like, reinforce my positive attitudes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:02

Does this also apply to your gym chain? So could this maybe also negatively affect your offline experiences that you have with that brand?

**Charles** 12:15

Actually, maybe because if it's the gym in particular that I'm going to, and I see like some customers having like a bad situation with that gym, that are not being replied to or not treated well, then it will definitely impact my offline experience. Because it will break the connection that I have with that gym. But if the, the person behind the social media account of the gym is super nice and friendly and helpful, then it will like reinforce my belonging feeling to the community of the gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:57

Okay, so it's said that there is a high transparency on social media where lies are easily detected and where brands are sharing a lot of information. And that makes them more authentic. Would you agree to that?

**Charles** 13:12

Yeah, I think so. Because I think it's very easy now for consumers to call out brands on social media. Unless I guess they delete comments or something. But in general, I think it's easy to see in the comment section what people actually feel. And then, yeah, it gives you like a more real overview of the brand.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:36

So you would also agree to the statement that the more information a brand shares on itself, the more authentic you perceive it?

**Charles** 13:45

Yes, I mean, I guess it depends on the industry, but for a gym in particular, then totally yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:51

Okay. Perfect. You just mentioned the community of your gym. Would you say that they are online communities on social media, which you feel part of?

**Charles** 14:04

Actually, I mean, maybe there is, but I am not a part of it. But I could totally see it. And even when I go to the gym, so my offline interactions, I still feel a sense of community. So I imagine it translates online.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:20

Do you follow a specific hashtag, such as #sustainability or something?

**Charles** 14:26

Oh no, actually, I'm just too scared that it's gonna pollute my feed.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:35

But you do feel a community sense in when you are offline in the gym?

**Charles** 14:41

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:42

Okay, perfect. The general fitness lifestyle with buzzwords like Fitspiration is like super popular right now on social media, as you already mentioned. It basically started because famous people such as actors or other celebrities started to advertise their fitness lifestyle and so their large groups of admirers started to pursue it as well. What is your general opinion on that? Do you think it's healthy because it's motivating a lot of people to work out? Or do you find it also may be dangerous because idealistic body standards can be created?

**Charles** 15:19

Oh, that's a good question. I think both. I have my moods. So most of the time, the reason why I unfollowed most influencers and celebrities is that I think it has really bad effects on the general population because of the unrealistic body standards and I think it leads to a lot of body dysmorphia, especially with young people. So most of it, I think is kind of negative but I do get that it comes from good intentions and these celebrities have such an influence on people that I'm sure they managed to get people to move. For example, I know the Michelle Obama campaign about practicing sports was super successful. So I'm happy that it has a lot of effect on people but it doesn't have on me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:18

Okay. So apart from celebrities, do you often experience people you follow, like your friends too, that they are presenting themselves in a especially fit or healthy way on social media?

**Charles** 16:32

Yes, I have a few of these friends. Yeah, I don't know how to feel about that. I'm not too much on board. Okay, so like a small degree. Yes. But sometimes it just looks a little braggy.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:50

So you never had the intention yourself to present yourself in that way?

**Charles** 16:55

No, no, never.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:57

Okay. When you see your friends doing that, do you rather feel motivated to reach your fitness goal or does it rather address your bad conscience?

**Charles** 17:07

Well, it depends. If it's close friends that I can identify with in my close circle, then I will definitely feel like motivated. If it's acquaintances, then it's gonna have a much lower impact on me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:24

Okay. It is said that everybody of us has like an image of our ideal selves in our minds that we want to reach. And I think this is especially applicable regarding fitness. Do you feel supported by any kind of brands to reach that fitness goal?

**Charles** 17:44

Oh, I missed the first part of the question.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:47

Whether you feel supported by, maybe even your gym chain, to reach that goal?

**Charles** 17:56

Actually, I'm sure there's resources available but I don't feel personally supported, no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:03

Okay. What are your most important values regarding fitness and being fit? So what is most important to you? It could be discipline or fun, interaction with others while working out, openness, gender equality - what is the most important?

**Charles** 18:23

I think it started with fun because I started going to the gym with friends. And they convinced me to join. So I think it was more a social thing at first. But now I'm following my own schedule and my own routine. So I think now it's more about myself. And yeah, discipline, achievement, and a little bit body goals, but that's not the main reason.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:52

So you think that if your gym chain created a lot of content on social media, that is regarding fun, but also the discipline you need to achieve your goals, you would be more interested in the content?

**Charles** 19:06

Yes, definitely. Maybe still not enough to follow, but be like interested to check it out here and there.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:14

Okay. So you have said that on social media, you get aware of new fitness brands regularly through your peers?

**Charles** 19:29

Yeah, I would say only through my peers. Yeah, it's a lot of word of mouth.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:33

But you were never that intrigued to engage in following or more?

**Charles** 19:41

I feel like I'm really like, loyal to the brands that I use now. So I'm not looking for other options.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:52

But do you think that if you would follow your current gym chain that it could have an impact on the experience that you have offline, either boost it positively or deteriorate it?

**Charles** 20:05

Um, it could boost it actually, I could feel definitely, like I could grow more attached to the community for sure.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:14

And when you think about your gym chain SATS, what is it that comes into your mind now regarding your offline experience in the gym. Is it maybe the logo, the studio, like facility wise? The people, design?

**Charles** 20:29

Um, I think of the the facilities. This is the main reason why I chose this gym because it's very modern, very bright. It looks nice and luxurious. So that's, that's the reason why, yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:47

So how would you evaluate your importance regarding the functional values which kind of belongs to premises and facilities, but then again, you connected it to emotional values because you said it's bright and it's cool. You know?

**Charles** 21:02

Yeah, I feel like I'm satisfied of the functional values. But definitely I'm loyal to the brand because of the emotional value.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:12

So, if you would be a potential customer, what would convince you to become a customer if you would see the gym chain on social media? Would it be the advertisement of the functional values first or the emotional ones?

**Charles** 21:25

I think definitely the emotional one, showcasing the facilities. And I think it's easy to see that it would be much better than the competition that I'm aware of.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:39

Okay. What are attributes when thinking about how you could evaluate the quality of your gym? Do you find it high quality?

**Charles** 21:54

Yes, yes, I find it high quality because the equipment is brand new. The building itself is brand new with a view towards the sea. It's bright, it's very clean. And you have nice facilities such as the sauna and the hamam. And I also base my opinion on what I hear from my friends who are in other gyms. So I can evaluate the perceived value of all gym brands. Based on that, I can know that I made the choice that fits my criteria the best.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:43

Okay, and what if your gym chain would really point out these values like the hamam or the brand new facility on social media and you would be a follower - do you think your perception of quality would be even more increased?

**Charles** 23:00

Yeah, I'm sure because that's the arguments that would convince me. Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:06

Okay. So you have mentioned it before, so I just conclude that you would define yourself as a loyal customer of your gym chain right now?

**Charles** 23:16

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:17

Okay. And this is based on the reasons that you mentioned before, which is like an interplay of functional and emotional values.

**Charles** 23:25

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:27

Is there anything more? Is the interaction with the people at the gym especially important for you?

**Charles** 23:33

Well, I actually am not a natural sporty person and I go to the gym, like, I'm doing my own thing and I don't really feel a sense of belonging to the community because most of the people going there are very sporty and very coveted. So I feel like I am following my own little tribe. So I don't really identify with most people there. I'm just not interacting with them, just doing my own thing.

**Marlene Lüttje** 24:11

Okay. Do you think that a loyalty towards a gym is also dependent on your current living situation?

**Charles** 24:19

What do you mean?

**Marlene Lüttje** 24:21

Can you imagine being in another living situation where you would value other attributes of a gym higher than you do right now?

**Charles** 24:30

I mean, definitely the location is super important. The fact that the gym, that I have, is very close to my office is super convenient. Yeah, so that's a big plus as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 24:44

So you can imagine if your workplace would be in a different location that it could happen that you're not as loyal as you are right now?

**Charles** 24:55

Oh, for sure, I would probably look for another gym of the same brand. But if there's no ideal location of that brand and I would have a look at other brands.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:11

Okay, perfect. So you need to have this convenience base fulfilled in order to be convinced by the emotionality?

**Charles** 25:22

Yeah, I would definitely try to be loyal to the brand, but the main priority is the convenience. So that could be the only thing convince me of changing.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:32

Okay, thank you. Now we would move to the last block of the interview, the social media marketing or social media presence of John Reed. You've seen the account before and I just would like to talk about your impressions of the Instagram performance and your general opinion. So my first question would be whether you know John Reed or not?

**Charles** 25:56

No, I don't.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:57

Okay, so just a short explanation: John Reed is a German gym chain and they are positioning themselves in the premium discount segment. And they are owned by RSG group and RSG group owns other fitness related brands such as a home workout brand, and also other gym chains, McFit and High5 gym. Have you heard from any of those brands before?

**Charles** 26:26

No.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:26

Okay. So tell me, what do you remember from having a look at the Instagram profile before the interview?

**Charles** 26:33

I remember, like, what stood out is that it has a very distinctive identity. And to me, it looks like it's definitely trying to target a specific kind of people. Which I do not really feel a part of.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:55

How would you describe that kind of people?

**Charles** 26:58

Um, well, it's just a lot of very, super muscular people. So it looks like people who are very committed to working out. Having, you know, the tattoos and the girls with a lot of makeup.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:17

So you think the first visual impressions of yours were the many pictures of people in the profile?

**Charles** 27:25

Yeah, that was the thing that I had to look at unconsciously. I think, just seeing whether I could picture myself in that gym by seeing whether I could identify with the people that they are showcasing.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:40

Okay, so did you feel a certain vibe of the profile?

**Charles** 27:46

Yeah, yeah, I felt.. how could I say that? Like an expensive but still kind of tacky way.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:59

Okay.

**Charles** 28:00

If I can say that.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:05

Of course. So your first impression, or your first focus was on the visual aspects and not content wise, like comments or something?

**Charles** 28:17

No, more individual because in order to assess the identity of the brand, I wanted to assess the, like intention that the brand has behind all of these posts, and the kind of people that they choose, the high contrast, high filter

photographing, and the kind of actions that they're showing. I'm sure that it's meant to highlight a certain personality trait of the brand. So that was what I was looking for.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:52

So, did you find the content interesting?

**Charles** 28:58

Yeah, it's pretty varied.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:02

So overall, did you like what you see or not like?

**Charles** 29:06

I could very quickly see that I do not picture myself as a potential customer of them.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:13

Okay. What attributes would you associate with the brand? If you could think of the two or three adjectives or nouns that come into your head first?

**Charles** 29:24

I would say young, dynamic and very serious.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:34

Okay. Thank you. Um, have you seen the slogan in the brand's biography "Not your average gym"?

**Charles** 29:44

Oh, actually, I didn't even pay attention to the biography. I paid attention to the number of followers first, because for some reason it gives them relevance or not in my eyes. And then I look at the pictures instantly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:03

So but now knowing that they declare themselves as being not your average gym, can you relate to that by your first impression of the social media profile?

**Charles** 30:15

I mean, to me it fits to a certain cliché of gyms. But I could see why it's still not average because for people who are seeking such high performance, serious gyms, it's maybe not easy to find, I don't know. But to me, I didn't really feel like a different vibe.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:38

So during your previous evaluation of your current gym, you mentioned the factors of the facilities, but as well the ability to do your own workout without being involved too much with others, with the community. Could you evaluate John Reed considering the Instagram profile as a high quality gym?

**Charles** 31:03

Um, actually, I didn't see enough pictures of the facilities in my case. I saw a lot of people, and I see that they're trying to project a kind of reference group. But I would be interested to see what it looks like in the facility and then I could be more interested.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:28

So your first impression of the social media profile did not make it possible for you to have a high quality perception, because you would need additional information?

**Charles** 31:40

Yes, I would. I would need other stuff to convince me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:46

Okay. So below the statement of "Not your average gym", it says that John Reed is a fitness music club and this is because they always have specifically made DJ electro music playing in all of their studios while working out. And twice a week for several hours, they have live DJs in every studio playing while you are working out.

**Charles** 32:16

Oh, that matches with the vibe of Instagram. Yeah, I am not surprised.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:21

Okay, but you have not seen this unique selling point that they have by looking at their social media profile?

**Charles** 32:31

No, actually no, I mean, when I check out a social media page, I will check only the visuals on the images. And then when I'm convinced by the images, I will pay attention to the text. But in that case, as the images threw me off a little bit, I didn't even go to the next step.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:56

They are also advertising their very unique style of decoration of the facilities, which are all brand new, and they're trying to create a mix of urbanness and Asian functionality.

**Charles** 33:09

Oh.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:10

Have you seen that? Did you become aware of that?

**Charles** 33:16

Not really actually. Crazy how many details I missed.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:20

But would these factors improve your opinion of the brand?

**Charles** 33:26

Well in that way, that differentiates that much more in my opinion. And maybe then it should be highlighted more by the pictures.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:36

So, but after knowing that you could more understand their slogan of not being your average gym?

**Charles** 33:42

Yes. And then after knowing that I feel like the next time I check out their social media profile, I would dig a little deeper.



**Marlene Lüttje** 33:51

Okay, perfect. So you mentioned that there has to be a type of convenience base in order for you to become a loyal customer and then the emotional values, the right vibe. And the facilities, the luxury of it would come on top regarding what you see. Now assuming that you live in a city where a John Reed gym would be, would you consider being a customer based on the social media profile?

**Charles** 34:21

I mean, ideally, I would say no. However, if it's really the only gym around, then definitely and I would still try to do my own thing. But if I have a second choice, I might lean towards the second option.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:38

Okay, but the factors that they advertised got you a little bit intrigued, so you might check it out.

**Charles** 34:47

Yeah, and which is what happened when I chose my current gym is that I often rely on word of mouth first, and then I will do the research for myself. When I start from zero on a social media profile of the gym, I will not really be fully aware of everything because I'm not too interested in it and I rely on people's opinion. So as soon as you gave me like all the differentiation points, that's what drew me in.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:24

So for instance, friends who tell you about their positive experiences with John Reed, would bring you to try it out more probably than the social media presence.

**Charles** 35:37

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:38

Okay. But you would also say that John Reed could increase the communication of their most precious values, so to say.

**Charles** 35:47

Yes, I would encourage more differentiation in the kind of posts that they do. In a way that they do have a nice variety but I would add the little spice that they bring by their motto, and stuff like that. So by showcasing maybe more different kinds of people, people kind of vibing or dancing to highlight the music part. And maybe more Asian influence... maybe it is already their interest. It just hasn't occurred to me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:28

Yeah, of course, that is what it was all about: your first visual impression. Okay, perfect. Would you like to add anything? Is anything still in your mind, also to the previous blocks?

**Charles** 36:40

No, I think I've left everything off my chest.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:46

Okay, perfect. Then I will stop the recording now. Thank you very much for your time and for the interview.

**Charles** 36:52

Thank you.

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**Interview 5: Annika**

Fri, 4/3 9:24AM • 44:45

**Speakers**

Annika, Marlene Lüttje

**Marlene Lüttje 00:02**

Could you please give me a short introduction on yourself such as your name, your age, current place of living or profession?

**Annika 00:11**

My name is Annika. I'm 26 years old. I am from Germany. And I study and live in Copenhagen at the moment. And I am currently in Berlin because of the Corona virus for a couple of weeks. Yeah, is there anything else that you want to know?

**Marlene Lüttje 00:31**

No, that's perfect. How do you keep yourself fit - if you would consider your usual routine?

**Annika 00:39**

So I have a gym membership. I try to go to the gym two times a week. Sometimes I am better at that sometimes I'm really, really bad at it. If I'm super busy or just don't feel motivated. Then I also bike a lot in Copenhagen, which I also consider as something to keep me active. Since the lockdown of Germany and Denmark, I also started running again a bit. Usually I'm not really a running person at all. But now it feels really nice to go outside for a run. I don't run for a very long time, but I enjoy doing it at the moment. So maybe I can continue doing it. After we can go out again and move freely, but yeah, that's what I do usually. And sometimes I do some exercises at home on a fitness mat if I have one or on a blanket, just some exercises if I feel like it.

**Marlene Lüttje 01:40**

Okay, you just said that you enjoy running right now, at the moment. In general, what kind of influence does fitness have on your life when you consider your success or mental health?

**Annika 01:54**

Yeah, so I definitely always feel better after I worked out and I think it also helps me a lot with my stress levels. If I feel really stressed, and then I go to the gym or I go running, I can definitely tell a difference afterwards, I feel much better. And also, when I'm sitting a lot at work, or when I'm writing my thesis, I just feel like I'm sitting the whole day. I need to move somehow to stay sane, basically. And right now, that's absolutely the case. So that's what I think keeps me normal during these exceptional times, just to move and go outside and walk and run and yeah, do some exercises at home as well.

**Marlene Lüttje 02:40**

Okay, and on a scale from 1 to 10, how important is social media in your life?

**Annika 02:51**

Um, I would say from 1 to 10, I would say.. 5? I don't know. Or even less, 4 or 5. I use it a lot, but I don't think it's important for me. I don't know. Sometimes I feel like if someone would switch it off or if we didn't have

internet anymore, I wouldn't be that bothered. I would actually sometimes enjoy it because I get annoyed at myself about how much I use social media sometimes and how much time I'm wasting on it. So, maybe 4 or 5.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:28

Okay, but would you still define yourself as a heavy social media user?

**Annika** 03:36

Yes. I would say so. Compared to other people of my age probably normal, but like for myself, I think I use it too much.

**Marlene Lüttje** 03:47

Okay. Which networks do you use and which one do you use the most?

**Annika** 03:54

I use the most Instagram. I also use a lot of YouTube. Recently I started using TikTok which is super annoying, but also really addictive. And what else am I using? And yes, Snapchat only a little bit. Yeah, mostly Instagram, Facebook also a little bit. Yeah, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, I would say,

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:24

But Instagram would be the one you use the most?

**Annika** 04:27

Yes, I think so.

**Marlene Lüttje** 04:30

Can you think of the reason why it's the most used platform for you?

**Annika** 04:36

I think mainly because most of my friends also use it the most. And I can always see what everyone is doing what everyone is posting. So it's kind of also keeping up with friends. Then I also have a lot of group chats with friends on Instagram where like, multiple times a day people write stuff and then it's kind of like getting in touch with friends, which used to be Facebook for me, but now it's more Instagram. And also I just like looking at the pictures, of course. And yeah, it's just a good app to waste time on.

**Marlene Lüttje** 05:16

Okay, but apart from your communication with your friends, do you think social media has implication on your communication with companies and brands as well?

**Annika** 05:32

I don't think I actively communicate with companies but I follow a lot of companies on social media. That's actually a good point. On Instagram, I follow a lot of like cafes and restaurants for example, in Copenhagen or, I don't know, just places where you can go and do stuff. Then I just want to see what they're posting. If they have special offers, if they have an update. Just to get updated and yeah, I'm following them and I see what they post and so on. And sometimes if they have like voting on their stories like "Which recipe you want or you'd like to have next" I would also react on that but I don't text them necessarily myself.

**Marlene Lüttje** 06:19

Okay, um, you mentioned that you are a current gym customer Do you also follow your gym on social media?

**Annika 06:28**

I don't follow my gym on social media. I think I've never followed a gym on social media before. I use an app for my gym instead.

**Marlene Lüttje 06:42**

But do you follow other fitness related brands? So I would make a differentiation here between on one side gym chains, but also the fitness influencers, who are marketing their home workout program via social media. And then on the other side, there are these fitness lifestyle influencer, I would call them, who are mainly focused on representing products from other brands.

**Annika 07:09**

I don't follow a lot, if not any fitness influencers or people who post their own workouts. I can only recall one person right now that I follow who I know has a fitness app. Her name is Stephanie Claire Smith or Miller now, I think. And she has like a fitness app with her best friend. And I think she's really inspirational. But yeah, since I'm not like super crazy a sports person myself, I don't follow them actively. But I do sometimes go on to sports accounts like Pamela Reif. For example, I sometimes go to her page to see her workouts. But I don't follow her. I would actively search for those people if I want that input, but I don't need to see it every day.

**Marlene Lüttje 08:00**

Okay, so do you think that the social media content that your current gym could create would be even interesting for you or not?

**Annika 08:10**

I think it would be interesting if they, for example, give updates about offers or courses in the gym because then I can actually go there and do that. Or like information about the gym. I don't know if they have something new. Maybe they could even like introduce their staff or post some stuff when opening times change. Any information that is helpful, I think would be nice. And I mean, it's not the most popular gym. I mean, there's a lot of people going there but SATS for example is more popular than the gym I go to. I think they could do a lot in terms of like, you know, building a community and approving their brand image online.

**Marlene Lüttje 08:57**

Okay. Regarding your consumer engagement on Instagram, so I mean your interaction with companies and brands, not your peers. How would you evaluate it? So imagine there are three levels. The first one is very passive, only consuming and reading posts, the second one would be contributing, so in form of liking and commenting. And the third one would be actively creating brand related content yourself. Where would you position yourself?

**Annika 09:28**

I think between one and two. I don't actively contribute that much. But as I said, sometimes if they want to know something and they have this voting option, for example, in the stories, I would vote or I like some of the pictures that they post, which I guess is also some kind of engagement or contribution for them. Yeah, but I don't actively write something to them. Like in the messages or common pictures. Not really.

**Marlene Lüttje 09:59**

Okay, but have you ever maybe tagged a brand with a certain hashtag on one of your posts or tagged a certain brand location in one of your posts?

**Annika** 10:13

I mean, I probably tagged like restaurants or cafes in my posts. But then only the location I think, I haven't used hashtags before as like comments in the post. I don't think I've done that.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:29

Can you remember whether you ever tagged the location of your gym in maybe your Instagram story?

**Annika** 10:38

I have done that maybe in the past when I was still living in Berlin like 5-10 years ago. But now I don't do that anymore.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:49

Okay, thank you. So you just mentioned that it would be interesting for you if your gym would share those information such as, for example, opening hours or change in staff? Do you think in general, not specifically focused on fitness brands, that there is much information on brands that is only shared on social media? And that can only be found there and not on other online communication ways or offline?

**Annika** 11:22

You mean for any brand in general?

**Marlene Lüttje** 11:25

Yeah.

**Annika** 11:27

Yeah, I think so. Because I also realize now, in Berlin, for example, during the isolation or lockdown, a lot of restaurants here in the neighborhood I live in, they do takeaway for example, to keep themselves alive. But nowhere online, you can see their new opening times or whatever they're offering, but a lot of them only post that on Instagram or Facebook. So you can't find that on Google, but also not on their website. Sometimes they don't even have a website but they post on Instagram mostly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:05

Okay, so imagine you are looking for specific information on your gym, would you then consult social media networks first?

**Annika** 12:20

For my gym, I would probably go to their website first. Because for some reason I've never looked up my gym on Instagram. I don't even know if they have Instagram or Facebook. I think it's because I don't see them in that way. I can't imagine what they would post on Instagram or Facebook. And maybe that's the issue that they don't have this image you know. For example, the other gym, the SATS, I can totally imagine that they have a really good Instagram page and a really good Facebook page with a lot of content but for my gym for some reason, I can't imagine that. So I haven't actually checked out whether they have it or not. So I would go to the website I guess, or the app.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:08

Okay, which gym are you going to?

**Annika** 13:12

Fitness World.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:13

Okay, perfect. How would you describe your general interaction with brands on social media in terms of when you see brands in your feed that you are maybe a long follower of? Do you even might perceive them as persons when you see a post of them because they have such distinct characteristics?

**Annika** 13:37

Yeah, for sure. It's also that some, I don't know, I just have always this example of a lot of cafes, restaurants, because I follow a lot of those on Instagram. And in many cases, I see for example, who are the owners of this place and they also post about themselves. So I attach that person to the place itself. And then for me it gets like a character.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:06

Okay. Does it also have an impact on your opinion of a brand when you see how the brand interacts with other consumers on social media? Through comments maybe?

**Annika** 14:21

Yeah, definitely. I think it's always a good sign to see when the page or the account is reacting to comments and is like commenting in helpful, nice way. Or when they repost things from the followers that they post about them if it's something nice or something inspiring or whatever. I think that's always a good sign that the brand are interested in what the followers have to say and what they think about them.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:54

Do you think that if you would observe your current gym doing that on social media as well, that your opinion of it could be improved or in turn also deteriorated if you would see something negative?

**Annika** 15:09

Yeah, so if they would interact a lot with their followers, I think it would definitely give me a better impression of the gym. But yeah, if they post something negative or they ignore, for example criticism online, then my opinion of them, which is at the moment only like neutral, would even get worse.

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:33

Okay. There's the assumption that there's a high transparency on social media where lies are easily detected and where sharing a lot of information is what makes a brand authentic. Would you agree to that, that the more sharing the better?

**Annika** 15:57

I mean, not necessarily because you can share a lot of wrong information without people noticing that it's wrong. So I don't think it's the quantity that counts. I think it's just very important just to be, you know, really clear and give the consumers also the possibility to check the facts that are given. And to make sure that this is actually true.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:30

So do you only follow brands on social media which content you always perceive as credible?

**Annika** 16:42

Yeah, I would say so. Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 16:44

Okay. Are there any online communities on social media which you feel part of? Like, where you maybe will feel a sense of belonging, maybe even to strangers because you share the same interest?

**Annika** 17:03

I mean, it is such a typical example, when a friend and I did the vegan challenge in January. Yeah, I could definitely identify more with a lot of people who posted like vegan tips and meals on Instagram or, for example, I don't know, this this cook or she's also book author, and she posts a lot of like only vegan recipes on Instagram and I also follow her and then I felt a lot more connected to her because she was my source of inspiration for that month. But now that I'm not vegan anymore, that's not the case and I can't think right now of any other like, obvious community that I feel part of.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:55

But at that point the interaction with members of the online community you mentioned were a reason for you to engage more in social media?

**Annika** 18:07

Yeah, I would say so.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:09

Okay. Do you think that there could be an online community around your gym or working out at a gym in general that could be of interest to you?

**Annika** 18:20

Yeah, I think so. I think if my gym for example, would start something like okay, fitness specifically for women, I would be interested in that. I would also be interested in something like, you know, a challenge to get fit until summer. Because almost everyone is trying to do it and it would be really motivational to have other people do it with you. So if they would start something like this, I would definitely be interested.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:55

Okay, um, the general fitness lifestyle on Instagram is very powerful. Also popular, I mean there are words occurring such as Fitspiration, which kind of started because famous people such as celebrities started to advertise their healthy lifestyle and then their large group of admirers started to follow it as well. What is your general opinion on that? Do you think it's healthy because it's motivating people? Or do you also see the dangerous side, for example, because idealistic body standards are created?

**Annika** 19:26

I think in general, it's a good thing because I also noticed that I get motivation when I see other people being really healthy and only posting healthy food and going to work out a lot. It definitely influences me and when I'm super unhealthy and lazy, I definitely feel bad about it. But so yeah, generally I think it's a good thing. And also, yeah, for younger people to get inspired and see what you can do to keep fit and healthy. But the worst thing I think on social media is definitely the creation of the perfect body image or what it should look like. Because I feel like you only see perfect bodies on Instagram...and I think it's even affecting me as well, even though I'm not a super young teenager, but yeah, I think it's really bad actually. And yeah, I could imagine that also some girls or even boys that they get serious trouble with, like, yeah, their mind about themselves and their body and also how they're eating, and that they should work out more and so on. So yeah, I think it's also really negative sides.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:46

Okay. Do you often experience people you follow and I mean your friends and peers with that, that they are presenting themselves as especially fit and healthy on their social media account?

**Annika** 21:01

Yeah, I mean, some of my friends, they post a lot of their vegan meals. And a lot of friends also post when they've been running. They also sometimes run together and then they post and tag each other. So yeah, you see that quite a lot, but I don't have anyone that I can think of right now who's like overly posting only healthy stuff and only working out. I don't have someone like that in my closer circle of people who I follow on Instagram.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:38

Okay, were you yourself ever motivated to present yourself as especially fit or healthy on Instagram?

**Annika** 21:49

On Instagram, not really. If I'm healthy and working out and so on, I usually just do it and I don't really post about it. But I don't post that much on Instagram in general. I rarely ever post anything to be honest. So yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:11

But you mentioned that if you see this fitness related content from your friends in your feed, it would rather motivate you then make you feel bad about yourself.

**Annika** 22:22

It's kind of 50/50, depends on how fit I am in that moment myself. If I'm really lazy and haven't done anything, I feel mostly bad. But if I'm also moving a lot and eating healthy, then I can relate to that person. I'm like, "Check".

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:41

Okay. So you just mentioned this "challenge of getting fit for summer". So this kind of matches with the assumption that everybody of us has this kind of ideal version of ourselves in our minds that we want to reach. So do you think that you are exposed to fitness related content on Instagram that helps you reach this goal?

**Annika** 23:06

Yeah, definitely. I think also if you want to find it you can easily find so many accounts with food inspiration for I don't know, low-carb dishes or vegan dishes. Whatever it is, about fitness, about in general your mindset when you want to lose weight or get really really fit. So yeah, and actually one time, it was like five to seven years ago, I once was really, really unhappy with my body and then I started doing like, it was almost a crash diet for three months, I think. And I actually lost a lot of weight and looked a lot for recipes and yeah, like fitness inspiration. So that was really helpful.

**Marlene Lüttje** 23:53

Okay, and you just mentioned that you would also be more interested in the social media content of your gym if your gym would also maybe create content that would support you in your reaching your ideal self?

**Annika** 24:07

I think it would be most important to create motivational content and to create a sense of community that you're not trying to do this alone, that there are other people who also want to achieve what you want to do. And then it's definitely more fun to do it together. I think that's what I would like most



**Marlene Lüttje** 24:27

Okay. What in general what are important values for you regarding fitness and being fit? It can be discipline or fun or maybe what you said, "reaching a goal together", working out together or also openness or inclusiveness. What comes into your mind?

**Annika** 24:49

So, definitely health. I always want to make sure when I work out that I don't damage my back or my bones when I'm doing it or exercise wrong or too much. I always want to do it just so I feel good and don't feel bad about it or have pain. Then yeah, I like doing courses in the gym because it's much easier to pull through the exercises with everyone else. And to have an instructor as well. Okay, I think it's also yeah, I think it's also fun to have like, social events where you do sports together, even though I don't do that very often. But I think it's really fun, actually.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:34

So you would be looking for this professional guidance, who's focused not on just heavy weight lifting, just to have some gains, but also to have a focus on the health of the body behind that.

**Annika** 25:49

Yeah. Also because everybody is different. For example, I have a lot of lower back pain. And I noticed that in some courses, for example, "body pump", which I did a lot, I get like super heavy back pain. Sometimes when I have too much weights and I do it kind of wrongly the exercises so I definitely want some guidance from experts.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:12

Okay. How are you in general exposed to fitness related content on Instagram? So you said that you only occasionally visit some fitness related accounts. But do you get exposed to this kind of content through your peers because they are sharing locations or posting something?

**Annika** 26:40

No, that does not happen every day. It happens very rarely, I think because the friends that I follow, they don't really post fitness related stuff that much. They only post mostly when they go running. But that's almost all that I can see or sometimes they post from the gym but not very often.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:15

And what comes into your mind when you're thinking about your current gym but also maybe if you compare it to your previous gyms you had a membership of? What comes into your mind first? Is it maybe the facilities itself, the classes, the people, design?

**Annika** 27:33

In a positive or negative way or both?

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:36

Yes, both of course.

**Annika** 27:38

Okay, so what comes to my mind is that the gym is more affordable than others. So it's not the fanciest one. And there's a lot of different people in the gym that I go to. Like, not only one type of people if you know what I mean, it's very diverse. Sometimes when I go very late in the evening, there are a lot of girls who wear like headscarves and who also sometimes go with their smaller siblings. I don't know. It's just something I've never

seen before, but it's a lot of different people, which I actually like. And what else? Yeah, I like that they have the courses in the gym. I like that. It's close to my home. Mm hmm. But yeah, I wouldn't say that the interior is very fancy or very, like super well equipped. It's just basic and super fine. But yeah, maybe some more sporty people would miss something. So it's not very spacious. It's a bit crowded.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:04

Okay, so what you mostly mentioned were these kind of functional values, the price, the location, these kind of things, but then you also mentioned that you would like to have this kind of community feeling which would be more focused on like an emotional value. But then you would rather categorize your current gym into more of the functional values that you are interested in regarding this gym.

**Annika** 29:35

Yeah, I mean, I chose it because it was really, really close to my old home, multiple locations of the gym, they were all really close by, and because it was cheaper, and that was basically all that I needed in that moment. Okay, and I feel like the gym is quite anonymous. I don't have a feeling of community there at all. But yeah, maybe they could build that in the future.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:00

But then what would you suggest for them regarding their social media presence? Should they rather focus on these functional values as being maybe one of the cheapest gyms around or with having multiple locations nearby you? Or would you rather want them to focus on the emotional values for you to be interested in the content?

**Annika** 30:19

I think they should concentrate more on the emotional values because the functional ones you can also kind of look for yourself. I mean, you can see on Google Maps how close they are, if you're looking for a gym, you can also look up the prices online quite easily. But when it comes to these emotional things, you don't really know that unless you sign up and enter the gym multiple times. And I think that's what makes the difference in the end in the long run, because the gyms are all I mean, quite similarly priced. So if this one gym has a way better community then I would also think about switching, actually even if it's more expensive. Yeah. And I've thought about switching to SATS for example, because also most of my friends go there.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:09

Okay, so what are the most important aspects for you when you are evaluating your current gym's quality? Would you evaluate it as a high quality gym?

**Annika** 31:23

I would say it's medium to high, I would say.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:27

Okay, and then you would focus on the facilities or the general atmosphere?

**Annika** 31:34

Yeah, both. The facilities definitely, but also like the general atmosphere you get when you enter the gym, the cleanliness, the equipment they have, the smell, everything, the service of the people who work there.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:51

Yeah. Do you think that this impression could be even strengthened when you would follow them on Instagram and then you would see content focused on these things?

**Annika** 32:01  
Yeah, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:03  
So that your perception of the quality could even more increase?

**Annika** 32:08  
Yeah, it could increase but then only if they actually, you know, if it's truthful, if they're not pretending like it's so great and then you get there then it's not. So it has to be kind of aligned with reality as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:21  
Okay. So you mentioned it before, but again, the question: Would you describe yourself as a loyal gym member right now?

**Annika** 32:32  
Right now, I mean, right now not really because I'm not in the same city.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:38  
Yeah. And you mentioned that you are considering to change.

**Annika** 32:44  
Yeah, I'm considering to change because a lot of my friends go to the other gym, that is also quite close by. And I know that they have a lot of different courses and the gym's in general look a lot nicer on Instagram. And I'll always see them from outside.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:03  
Okay, so it's not only the other friends that you want to work out with, but also the way that the other gym is representing itself on social media or is maybe really focusing on showing the best values that they have to offer?

**Annika** 33:21  
Yeah, I haven't actively checked them out on social media, but they just have a general better image. And I don't know why but everyone kind of knows about that. I feel like so, yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:33  
So your friends also tell you about the good experience they have there?

**Annika** 33:37  
Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:38  
And this does impact your purchase decisions more than companies social media profile?

**Annika** 33:49  
For sure.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:50  
Okay. Perfect. So now we would move to the last block of the interview, which is regarding the social media marketing presence of John Reed. You have looked at the account before and you got familiar with the content.

So I just would like to talk about your impressions of the Instagram performance and your general opinion. So my first question would be: Did you know John Reed before?

**Annika** 34:17

I did know the gym chain or person, I'm familiar with it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:23

Okay, just so as a short explanation, John Reed is a German gym chain with 26 gyms worldwide, but with more gyms having openings soon, and they are describing themselves as belonging in the premium discount segment and they are belonging to the RSG group. And the RSG group is the owner of many fitness related brands such as Cyberobics but also also the gym chains McFit and High5 gym. Do you know the other brands that I mentioned?

**Annika** 34:58

Yes. The only thing I don't know is High5 gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:01

Okay, but Cyberobics and McFit are well known?

**Annika** 35:05

Well for Cyberobics, I'm not sure exactly what it is but I've definitely heard of it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:10

It is a home workout program that is supported by all those gym chains. But okay. So what is it that you remember most from checking out the profile?

**Annika** 35:25

I remember most that they have a lot of online fitness courses that they offer and a specific program at the moment for the lockdown situation. I also remember that they work with a lot of influencers. And I saw that they also host a lot of like sports events where they have DJs and it looked really cool actually. And my first impression was that their focus is really heavy on fitness because I saw a lot of, I don't know, just a bit intimidating pictures sometimes, like it all seemed very muscular. It had more, yeah, masculine touch to me even though they also showed pictures of females obviously, but it was very rough and very. focused on this muscular strength - feeling, I don't know how to describe it. But yeah, also a bit intimidating.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:23

Okay, so we can say that your first visual impression was focused on the people that were shown in the images.

**Annika** 36:30

Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:31

Okay. Did you find it interesting, or did you like it? Didn't you like it?

**Annika** 36:38

Yeah, I found it interesting to see because I didn't know about this before. And then I saw how many gyms they have in Germany and I had no idea so I thought it was interesting. And I actually really liked the videos where they had these workouts in a group and the DJ, it looked really fun. Yeah, that's what I liked most about it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:00

You mentioned the word "rough" before. What are other attributes that come into your mind that you could associate with the brand?

**Annika** 37:12

Okay. Hmm, I have to think. I mean, definitely like very athletic, muscular, rough, masculine. Yeah, these are the main ones I can think of.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:37

Have you seen their slogan in their Instagram profile's biography stating "Not your average gym"?

**Annika** 37:46

Um, no, I haven't noticed that.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:49

Okay, but considering your first impression, do you understand that statement? Did it appear to you as it not being one of your average gyms?

**Annika** 38:02

Yeah, I think definitely because it also looked like the interior was very luxurious or fancy. I remember that right now. And it looks like, I feel like, if I would be part of this gym, they would push me to the maximum. So I think if you really want to reach something, this would be a good place to go. And it felt like everyone there is extremely motivated and they're just living for the fitness lifestyle.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:31

Okay, so based on your first impression of the social media profile, how would you evaluate the quality of John Reed?

**Annika** 38:46

In terms of?

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:49

Yeah, I mean, regarding what you mentioned, what would be important for you when evaluating quality which would be the interplay of the facilities but also the general vibe while working out?

**Annika** 39:00

Should I do it on a scale from 1 to 10?

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:03

Yeah, sure, or just evaluate it as high quality or moderate.

**Annika** 39:10

Yeah, I think it's high quality. Definitely, it looks like they have more money than the average gym. So they probably have a lot of good equipment. And I feel like they would also have really knowledgeable trainers who want to help you as best as they can. And I would also assume that you would pay a lot more for this gym than for example, McFit or other chains.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:35

You are actually paying 25 euros a month when you decide to be fixed on one studio location. Of course, if you want to visit all studios, then you would pay up to 35 euros per month.

**Annika** 39:48

Okay, I thought it would be way more. Yeah, that's interesting, quite good, I guess, for them that they fooled me like this.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:54

Okay. And so you knowing now that John Reed belongs to the RSG group to which McFit also belongs, do you think that has an impact on your general opinion of John Reed or maybe the quality you would evaluate?

**Annika** 40:12

Um, yeah, I think it might be a good sign because maybe if they belong to this group, they have some general guidelines and some general, I don't know, regulations or something. Because McFit is a really well known and popular brand, which I generally trust. So yeah, I think it's a good thing to know. But that also kind of takes away the individuality of the gym because I don't know, now that I found out it's part of the group, that makes it a bit less individual, you know.

**Marlene Lüttje** 40:52

Okay, but still, you could see a clear differentiation between John Reed and McFit because you said that you would believe it being much more expensive?

**Annika** 41:04

Yeah, yeah, I see them quite differently from the way it was presented on Instagram.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:12

Okay. So you mentioned that this kind of motivating online community feeling would also be great for you and you would be really interested in that. So would you say that John Reed is communicating these values on Instagram?

**Annika** 41:28

Yeah, I think so. I think they're doing that quite well with the home workouts where they asked everyone to join and these social events where they work out. I think it's a really good, yeah, really good community vibe that they are delivering.

**Marlene Lüttje** 41:45

Okay, um, did you also see below the "not your average gym" in the biography text that it's a fitness music club? So actually what they're doing is that all day long, they have this high quality mixed DJ music playing for people while working out. But then, twice a week, they have live DJs in the gyms for several hours playing while the people are working out. Did you perceive it like this? Because you mentioned these music events? But did you really understand from the post what it is about?

**Annika** 42:22

No, I didn't. I didn't know that they have this, like, regularly. I thought they only have DJs for specific events that they do. And I thought maybe that only happens once a month or something. Or even less, so I didn't know that they do it regularly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 42:39

Okay, so do you think that they should communicate this more on Instagram? Because it's a very good feature?

**Annika** 42:47

Yeah, I think so. I think it's super fun. Actually, I would love to go to a gym that has live DJs. Yeah, they should definitely communicate it more.

**Marlene Lüttje** 42:57

Okay, so imagine you would be living in a city where John Reed would be available. Would you consider becoming a customer based on your impression of the social media presence?

**Annika** 43:09

Um yeah, I mean, I really like the aspect of the community feeling and the DJ and so on. But yeah, as I said, when I looked at it, I was super intimidated because it felt like really muscular, yeah, male energy. And a lot of like fitness addicts. I don't know, that was just the general impression that I got. And since I'm not a person like this at all, I would be a bit intimidated and I would probably never sign up for this gym. But I think for people who are more into it and more fit, it would be a really nice choice.

**Marlene Lüttje** 43:46

So you don't feel personally addressed in your type of a gym customer? So you would rather prefer seeing more normal people working out as well? Instead of people that you don't really can identify with.

**Annika** 44:04

Yeah, definitely. That will definitely help. Also, if they would post something from people that are just starting to work out for example. Or like yeah, the progress of people who started, you know, at the bottom and then they became really fit and had a lot of progress. That will definitely help to change my impression.

**Marlene Lüttje** 44:27

Okay, perfect. Is there anything else from your side to add to any of the blocks, is anything still in your mind?

**Annika** 44:36

No, I think I said everything.

**Marlene Lüttje** 44:37

Okay, perfect. Then thank you so much for the interview and I will stop the recording now.

**Annika** 44:43

Okay.

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## **Interview 6: Csanád**

Fri, 4/3 10:56AM • 39:38

### **Speakers**

Csanád, Marlene Lüttje

**Marlene Lüttje 00:02**

Could you please give me a short introduction on yourself such as your name, age, profession, and your current place and status of living?

**Csanád 00:11**

Yes, of course. So, my name is Csanád. I'm 25 years old. I live in Copenhagen at the moment. I both study and work and I am finishing up my Master studies in Brand and Communications Management.

**Marlene Lüttje 00:28**

Okay, um, how do you keep yourself fit in your daily life? What are your methods and routines?

**Csanád 00:36**

Like currently, or also in the past years, I have to say it's a 100%, it was gyms. I always had a gym membership. And I was attending several courses there and I was just working out by myself. Besides that, I'm trying to also pay attention to like, my nutrition intake. And so actually I have to say that I'm trying to be as healthy as possible.

**Marlene Lüttje 01:09**

Okay, so how many days per week do you visit your gym?

**Csanád 01:14**

Every, let's say three to four days.

**Marlene Lüttje 01:20**

What kind of influence does fitness have on your life when you consider your success or your mental health?

**Csanád 01:27**

I have to say I think it has a great influence on mental health in general. I would say for me personally, probably, it has the biggest influence on stress relief. I can totally tell for example, like, let's say if I get busy with schoolwork and let's say I don't have the chance to go to the gym, I can actually observe myself that I'm even more stressed than if I was only from school and work.

**Marlene Lüttje 02:00**

Okay, um, how important would you evaluate social media in your life? If you would evaluate it on a scale from 1 to 10?

**Csanád 02:10**

I have to say, I consider myself to be a pretty heavy consumer of social media. If I had to put it on a scale, I have to say 8 or 9.

**Marlene Lüttje 02:27**

Okay. Which networks do you use? And which one do you use the most?

**Csanád 02:33**

For sure, Instagram.

**Marlene Lüttje 02:35**

Okay. Now do you know the reason for that?



**Csanád 02:40**

I think it will be because of the content I can find there. In general, I have to say just because yeah, I think that's a great way because like, I would say I'm kinda interested in photography in general, and just like visuals and aesthetics. And I think Instagram is the best way to do that. And I have to say that I feel like it's just a really good source of, you know, consumption of media, if that makes any sense. There's not much to read, let's say, wherever you are, you can just scroll through, but at the same time, I like Instagram, because I feel like that over the years, even though it started as a photo sharing platform, I think it grew out to be way more. So for example, I would even consider it to be one of my main sources in several fields in life. So I feel like there was a shift from only creating nice photos to actually have, like, I feel like Instagram became a super informative platform. Actually, in many cases, I even noticed that, let's say I would look for information on Instagram, even instead of Google.

**Marlene Lüttje 03:58**

Okay, yeah, that's interesting that you mentioned that, we will come back to that later. And what are then the implications of social media on your communication with companies and brands, not your peers, but how you interact with brands?

**Csanád 04:15**

I have to say I wouldn't directly reach out to brands usually. But for example, I definitely check out the social media accounts of several brands. Usually when it comes to, let's say, a high involvement decision, or a high involvement purchase, when I'm actually trying to, like, you know, get as many information as I can. And yeah, I think because I just feel like for example, through the social media account of let's say, for like a clothing brand. You might not find out let's say the prices of the certain product because it's not even necessarily for that. Many times you can't even find advice, but it's more about the community. For example "what kind of people they follow"? And I think it's also a great way to see how satisfied people are with a certain brand. And you can also tell how, how engaged they are with it. Does that make sense?

**Marlene Lüttje 05:12**

Yeah, of course. Um, you mentioned that you have a current gym subscription going on. So do you follow that gym account also on social media?

**Csanád 05:22**

I have to say, no. However, my gym has an application itself, which I actually use.

**Marlene Lüttje 05:31**

Okay. Um, do you follow other fitness related brands on Instagram? So here I would differentiate between gym chains on one side together with fitness influencers who are entrepreneurs themselves and who sell their home workout programs via social media. And then there are also fitness influencers who only share health and fitness related information and may be representing other brands' products.

**Csanád 06:00**

I have to say I follow actually like several accounts, several fitness related accounts if I apply the categories that you just mentioned, I follow several fitness influencers. In many cases they have a direct strategy when you can tell that the purpose of the account itself is to educate people on fitness and giving away good tips. But on the other side, I also follow, let's say influencers, who are not solely focusing on you know, let's say health benefits and fitness. But based on their whole lifestyle you can tell that fitness plays a significant role in their lives.

**Marlene Lüttje 06:40**

So it might not necessarily be the fitness aspect that make you follow them but their general lifestyle?

**Csanád 06:47**

Exactly. For example, let's say, if I follow an influencer, let's say that most of their content will not be fitness related. However every forth day, they are posting something about you know like their workouts or like the tips.

**Marlene Lüttje 07:10**

Do you think that the content that your gym could post on social media could be interesting for you or not?

**Csanád 07:19**

When it comes to gyms, I think it could be a pretty personal opinion about I feel like that once I decided which gym I will be choosing. After that, I wouldn't say that I would go back to their accounts a lot. But of course that depends on the gym itself. Like they have to find ways, I think, to attract customers but checking out the social media accounts of certain gyms... I would do that in the decision process, let's say in order to find that one gym I should choose.

**Marlene Lüttje 07:53**

So you would only consult social media in the prior purchase process.

**Csanád 07:59**

Exactly.

**Marlene Lüttje 08:01**

Regarding your general consumer engagement, so you engaging with brands and companies, not with your friends, if there are three levels, where would you categorize yourself into? The first one would be very passive, only reading and consuming content. The second one would be contributing, where you are liking and commenting. And the third one would be where you voluntarily create brand related content yourself.

**Csanád 08:32**

The second one. Yeah, personally, I feel like that. I mean, this might be just the Marketing student in me, but I feel like many times, our positive feedback on brands or gyms or whatever, can have a huge influence. And I think we should always, you know, express the positives as well. Not only the negatives.

**Marlene Lüttje 08:55**

But have you ever created brand related content yourself where you, maybe just tagged the brand with a certain hashtag under your post or you tagged the brand through a certain location in your posts?

**Csanád 09:08**

I have to say no, but it might be the fact because I'm actually keeping my social media accounts pretty privately. So it wouldn't really make sense.

**Marlene Lüttje 09:18**

So you never for example posted the your gym's location in your Instagram story?

**Csanád 09:26**

Okay, I mean, yeah. That's a fair point, I did not think about that. Yeah, I mean, for example, location I would definitely use.

**Marlene Lüttje** 09:33

Okay. Um, so you just mentioned the real overabundance of information that can be found on social media. So, you think that there is information on brands that is only shared on social media and that cannot be found, for example, on their corporate website?

**Csanád** 09:50

I feel like that, yeah. For example, updating the website is obviously really time consuming, and you need several resources to keep everything updated. Whereas I feel like that on social media as soon as something happens, you can see the reaction of people and it's way easier for companies as well to address even the smallest events or happenings, you know.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:13

Okay, so in case you're looking for a specific piece of information on any brand - that is not a fitness brand related question - would you maybe consult social media networks first?

**Csanád** 10:28

I have to say yes. I mean, yeah, I know, I was thinking about it, because like my top of mind, I would always check out their website, but at the same time, I just know that several times, it was Instagram that I turned to first.

**Marlene Lüttje** 10:42

Okay, could you imagine a situation where you are looking for a specific piece of information on your current gym and you would consult their social media platform?

**Csanád** 10:55

Yes, I mean, I think for an example, like it's an unfortunate situation that we have nowadays. But for example, I think about the Corona virus, I would definitely check out their social media accounts just to see how they are addressing the issue. And obviously, I would assume that this is the first place where they are able to share how and what will be changed due to the circumstances.

**Marlene Lüttje** 11:21

Okay. How would you define your interaction with brands on social media? So are there maybe brands in your feed that you see so often and you are so used to that you might even perceive them as persons? Because they have such distinct characteristics for you?

**Csanád** 11:41

Yeah, actually, I have a few for sure. But, at the same time, I would point out that I think, for me, personally, it's a longer process. I think I have to follow a brand for a certain period of time in order to have the personal connection to them.

**Marlene Lüttje** 11:57

Okay. Um, does it also have an impact on your opinion of a brand when you see how the brand interacts with other consumers on social media, for example, in comments?

**Csanád** 12:08

Oh 100%, that's actually one of the most influential ways to see how a brands treats their own customers.

**Marlene Lüttje** 12:18

Okay, so thinking of your gym, could that also maybe deteriorate your opinion of that brand if you would see something negative in how they're treating other consumers?

**Csanád** 12:30

Oh, yeah, 100%. I have the general mindset that obviously, it's a mutual relationship. And customers should express their satisfaction or anything negative even with their chosen brands, and in this case, gyms. However, I feel like once the company starts treating their customers negatively, it's basically the biggest mistake they can ever make.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:00

Yeah, but it could also work the other way around, that it could even improve your opinion more if you would see something positive?

**Csanád** 13:09

Oh yeah, for sure, that as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:11

Okay. Um, in general, it's said that there's a high transparency on social media and that sharing a lot of information makes a brand authentic. So would you agree to that "the more sharing the better"?

**Csanád** 13:29

I would say it really depends on the quality of the content. But at the same time, if we have to generalize this question, then I would say it's definitely a good sign if I can see that the company is happy to share. If a company is happy to share everything, because like, you know, it just means that they have nothing to hide and they are super open minded.

**Marlene Lüttje** 13:54

So would you say that you are only following brands or accounts on social media which content you always perceive as credible?

**Csanád** 14:06

Yeah, in most cases. I mean, sometimes at the same time, I have to say that it might be the Business student aspect again. But sometimes I think about posts and I am like "Oh, I know the goal with this certain post". But as we have experience, sometimes I have the feeling that "Okay, it might not be the most credible thing, but at the same time, you know, this is what they have to do".

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:32

Okay, so that does not necessarily deteriorate your opinion?

**Csanád** 14:37

No, not necessarily. I would say that, like, you know, these cases should be super limited.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:44

Content where it's obvious what they're trying to get through it?

**Csanád** 14:50

Exactly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 14:50

Okay. Um, are there online communities on social media which you feel a part of and where you exchange your opinions, maybe even with strangers because you share the same interests?

**Csanád** 15:07

I have to say, not really.

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:08

Okay. So although you are following many fitness related accounts, you do not feel that you are belonging to a certain kind of fitness online community?

**Csanád** 15:19

Yes, exactly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:21

Okay. So it's more the interaction with the brands or seeing content from these brands that make you follow them and not the interaction with the other consumers?

**Csanád** 15:33

Exactly.

**Marlene Lüttje** 15:33

Okay, the general fitness lifestyle is very popular on Instagram. And, for example, through the words like Fitspiration, famous people with large groups of admirers started to advertise their healthy lifestyle and then of course, their followers started to do that as well. What is your general opinion on that movement on Instagram? Do you think it's healthy because it's motivating or are you rather focused on the dangerous side where idealistic body standards can be created?

**Csanád** 16:07

I mean, obviously, it's a really controversial question in general. And for example, like this is a topic that I've been talking a lot about with my friends. And I would say that I understand both sides. My personal opinion is that I am getting away more positive from this whole trend than negative. At the same time, I feel like it's really about the person itself. And like the personality and like all the past, let's say events or even, you know, traumas obviously, because we process and perceive everything differently. But for me, it's definitely more motivating. And I could even observe it on myself that I, since this trend started, noticed that adapting healthy decisions into my life on a daily basis got way easier. I feel like it's just so easy to get information on stuff. Once you trust a certain influencer or even celebrity, I think and like, obviously, you see the results. I think it makes them even more trustworthy. So I think for me personally, it's way more on the positive side.

**Marlene Lüttje** 17:23

Do you often experience people you follow, so I mean your friends, that they are presenting themselves as especially fit or healthy on social media?

**Csanád** 17:35

Yeah, I mean, I have a few friends who will start with the influencer life, I'd say. But let's say if you'd have to talk about average people, I think yeah, I think posting about healthy lifestyle choices and doing sports, I think it's one of the more popular topics to post about.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:01

But this kind of content that you see then from your friends is also motivating you?

**Csanád** 18:08

Yes, I would say definitely. I think for example, friends have a big influence on my life when it comes to sports, for example. And actually, I was told that in many cases, I'm influencing them as well. So it's certainly the case that everybody has this in a mutual relation ship.

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:29

So, there's this assumption that everybody has this kind of ideal self image of us in our mind that we are constantly striving towards to. So when you consider this in a fitness aspect, do you think that the content shared by the accounts you are following, that you chose them because they support you in reaching that goal?

**Csanád** 18:52

Can you repeat this question?

**Marlene Lüttje** 18:54

So if you have an ideal image of yourself in your mind, regarding your fitness and your health, do you choose the accounts you are following according to whether they support you in reaching that goal?

**Csanád** 19:09

Yes. Yeah, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 19:10

So you feel supported, but you can also identify with them because they represent this kind of ideal image that you want to reach for yourself?

**Csanád** 19:20

Yes, I think so. But I think a super important factor is that, how aware actually, everybody is about the different fitness goals and like realistic goals, I would say. For example, I think one should always bear in mind their own body type. And I feel like that whenever it comes to fitness, one of the most important things is that we have to keep realistic goals. For example, I just know that many people, let's say, would have unrealistic goals and then they are just constantly frustrated because they followed unrealistic Instagram accounts. You know, we have to admit that working out and eating healthy is one thing but the biological part is super significant when it comes to body types, I think.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:13

Okay, so my next question would be about the most important values for you regarding being fit and fitness. But then you would definitely include "reality" and "realistic expectations" there, that you set towards yourself as well?

**Csanád** 20:30

Exactly. And I think it's super, super important to be aware of ourselves and what we can reach because in that way, it plays a significant role who I could follow. Because I'd say I can admire the fitness levels of a certain guy, but if it's clear that we are two completely different body types, I wouldn't follow him because things will work for him that are not what I would need.

**Marlene Lüttje** 20:58

Okay, so you say that you choose the accounts you follow based on whether they are supporters of this type of self awareness?

**Csanád** 21:08

Yeah, I would say so.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:12

Okay. Would you say that you are exposed to fitness related content every day in your feed?

**Csanád** 21:18

Oh, 100%.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:20

Okay, mainly through the accounts of fitness influencers that you follow or mainly through your friends?

**Csanád** 21:28

Uh no, I have to say that happens mainly from influencers and different brands.

**Marlene Lüttje** 21:36

Okay. Does it ever happen that you get aware of a certain brand because a friend makes a certain post about it and then you visit that account?

**Csanád** 21:47

Oh, yes, definitely. I think in general, I really value the opinion of my friends. Because especially I feel like that we have the same expectations from certain products and we just share the same values. So I know that actually, I solely rely on the recommendations from my friends. Not even in fitness but like in general but my fitness is definitely one of them as well.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:13

But do these recommendations often happen over Instagram or rather in offline life?

**Csanád** 22:24

I think in most cases offline, like in real life, but I have to say that at the same time, that I checked out several brands because a friend posted something about them.

**Marlene Lüttje** 22:33

Okay. Now think about the gym you are currently going to but also if you have on your past gym memberships that are still in your mind - then you can also relate to that experience. What comes into your mind when you're thinking about a specific gym, or what is it that strikes your mind the most? Is it maybe the logo, the studio, the facilities, or maybe the people you meet there?

**Csanád** 23:02

For me, I have to say location is something that I would consider first. And then the equipment and the facilities are crucial, I would say for obvious reasons, whether I feel like that once you start paying for a membership, you should be able to do everything that you think you would need in order to reach your goals. So for example, usually before committing to a gym, I always participate or take advantage of the free trial days or weeks even. Because at the same time, I think only walking around the gym for 10 minutes wouldn't be the best picture but you actually would like to try out what they offer. And besides that, obviously, the sense of community is super

important to me because as I told you that on social media, I'm not part of a lot of communities and I'm more on the passive side. But when it comes to that, however, in the real life, I think like the whole atmosphere is highly influenced by the people and the members of the gyms, and I know that it can be that the whole atmosphere is coming from people and the community. Actually, it can be so influential that I would not consider a certain gym anymore. Because there has been recently one example even in Copenhagen, where I visited the gym called "Repeat" and I have to say I only did the trial day. And even though I was super happy with their facilities, I have to say it was even better than my current gym in that regard, but the people they attract just totally ruined the whole experience to me.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:03

Okay. So you say that you need this kind of base of convenience fulfilled, which would be about the location and also the equipment and the facilities. But then what really keeps you there is the emotional value of a sense of community which forms the whole atmosphere you are in.

**Csanád** 25:23

Yes, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 25:28

Okay, so you said that you would only consult social media profiles of gym chains when you are in the decision process. So imagine you would be looking for a new gym - would you like them more to focus on these functional values that you mentioned? Or would you like to see more of the emotional values such as the community feeling?

**Csanád** 25:50

I have to say that I think it's more like a process. I believe the very, very first thing that I would look at are the facilities in general. Because as we talked about it, for example, because like, posts from other people... sometimes I can just see through that strategy so I know they want me to see what equipment they have and what facilities they operate in. I would say that's the very, very first thing that I would look into. And then obviously, for example, I think social media gives me a good feeling about the sense of community there and how people are, but at the same time, when it comes to that, I would definitely, you know, like to check out the place in person as well. Because I feel like that social media can be misleading when it comes to people.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:47

Okay. Um, would you describe your current gym as high quality?

**Csanád** 26:53

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 26:56

Do you think that the social media presence of your gym could influence your perception of the quality? Or would you only base that on your offline experiences that you have?

**Csanád** 27:08

I mean, I think it's good because besides the practicalities, as we talked about, like location and the facilities, I think social media can still highly influence my opinion or my perception about the gym, even if it's my current one. Because even though I'm not an active consumer, or active member of them on social media, I would be open for new initiations and like different campaigns, that are for example community building.



**Marlene Lüttje** 27:38

And these initiatives could have alter your perception of the quality more?

**Csanád** 27:46

Yes, I think would add a lot to it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:49

Um, would you define yourself as a loyal customer of your gym right now?

**Csanád** 27:55

Yes, definitely.

**Marlene Lüttje** 27:57

Okay, so do you think that your loyalty could be even enhanced through maybe more loyalty program initiatives on social media as well?

**Csanád** 28:06

Yes, I think so. I think that companies in general and like, in this case, gyms, nobody should be satisfied with the loyalty levels of their customers. I think regarding being loyal, there is not a certain point in my eyes where you can say "Okay, I reached the maximum". I think brands and companies can always improve that.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:30

Okay, perfect. So let's move to the last block of our interview, the social media marketing presence of John Reed. You had a look at the profile before and I just would like to talk about your general impressions and your opinions. And so my first question would be, did you know John Reed before?

**Csanád** 28:52

Yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 28:53

Okay, perfect. So just as a short explanation, it's a German gym chain and it has 26 gyms worldwide but new openings are planned in close future. And they are describing themselves as belonging in the premium discount segment. And they are belonging to the RSG group. It's a German group that also owns fitness brands like Cyberobics, but also McFit and High5 gym which are two gym chains. Do you know any of the other brands?

**Csanád** 29:25

I have to say no.

**Marlene Lüttje** 29:26

Okay. Um, yeah, so tell me what do you remember most? What was most striking to you?

**Csanád** 29:37

I think the first thing that I have to point out is that I really liked their aesthetics, in a way, I think they did a great job, with the aesthetics on social media. Their posts are super aligned both in style and content. I think they are pretty straightforward, which I really liked about them. I could clearly sense the tone of their communication I think is really inviting and really casual, which is super nice because I feel like gyms can for many people feel like an intimidating place, and you really want to feel welcomed. Especially, and I think we can all relate to that, especially when we start the working out process, insecurities are peaking at that time for sure. So I think it's

really important for gyms to make their members feel good, or even the new customers they would like to have and they have to reassure them that it's a safe place.

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:36

So you would feel supported as a new customer disregarding the fitness level you would have at that moment?

**Csanád** 30:46

In the case of John Reed in specific?

**Marlene Lüttje** 30:48

Yeah.

**Csanád** 30:52

Okay, so it's gonna be a little controversial because like, the tone, the way they communicate, I really felt good. I think "Yeah, it's a really cool gym chain". But the photos they posted showed me the opposite. If that makes sense.

**Marlene Lüttje** 31:09

Oh, that's very interesting.

**Csanád** 31:12

So the way they communicated, I would have a different perception of the gym. Because for example, the content, like the photo content that they provided to me was actually a bit exclusive, let's say too exclusive because it was super weird to me to see that regardless the gender, they only feature, in my opinion, really really fit people. Where you can tell "Okay, they are into working out like crazy." And I'm not talking about spending two years in the gym, but even more. And for me, that was a bit intimidating, let's say. Because I feel like when it comes to the gym that like it's a competition between the members but at the same time you just you know you are just there because you want to make yourself feel better about yourself and not the opposite. Although at the same time, I feel like when only fitness models are featured, it's definitely the opposite effect.

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:13

Okay, so you kind of saw a discrepancy between the content they communicated through their texts, but then with the visual content of the picture?

**Csanád** 32:23

Yes, 100%. I also, personally, what I would like to point out, for example, that they are not really fighting the stereotypes of gym members, I have to say. That it's not only about the level of fitness, but also the way their models or like the people who are featured, the way they dress, the different kinds tattoos, hairstyles, you know what I mean?

**Marlene Lüttje** 32:54

Yeah. Okay, so would you overall say that you found it interesting what you saw?

**Csanád** 33:03

Even though I don't agree with the choice of featured people, I think their social media account is put together really nicely? And it is really consistent, which is I think is key.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:15

Okay. But so would your overall opinion be positive or negative from your first impression?

**Csanád** 33:24

About the gym itself or their social media platform?

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:29

I mean your opinion on the gym based on the social media presence.

**Csanád** 33:38

Yeah. Let's say it's positive in a way because I know that my concerns would vanish if I would be as fit as the people featured.

**Marlene Lüttje** 33:48

And what attributes come first into your mind that you could associate with John Reed based on the Instagram profile? So for example, you just mentioned "aesthetics". Is there anything more?

**Csanád** 34:04

I think for me personally, I would say the USP of John Reed would be the interior design of the gym. I think it's super special. I really really like the vibe itself. I would honestly say that the gym itself is a really cool place. Like, I like literally everything from the color of the wall to the different lightning, I think they managed to create a super special environment in that sense. Definitely different than your regular gym.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:39

Since when do you know John Reed?

**Csanád** 34:43

I think since 2017.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:49

Okay, have you been there?

**Csanád** 34:52

Yes, we tried out their trial period.

**Marlene Lüttje** 34:55

Okay, perfect. Have you seen their slogan in their Instagram biography saying "Not your average gym"?

**Csanád** 35:09

Oh, I mean, I actually don't remember it.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:13

Yeah, that's no problem. But, I mean, now that you know, could you relate to that? So can you see why they are not your average gym?

**Csanád** 35:20

Yes, I definitely, I think it is really on point.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:23

Okay, what would you say about John Reed's quality as a gym chain? I mean, you have the offline experience as well but also based on what you saw now on their social media profile.

**Csanád** 35:37

To me, it definitely looks high quality. That's my impression that I think they will actually put a lot of effort into the gym and into providing the best service possible.

**Marlene Lüttje** 35:52

Okay, knowing that John Reed is owned by a bigger conglomerate that owns two other gym chains and a home workout program, does that kind of influence your perception of the quality?

**Csanád** 36:05

Oh, no, I really differentiate that because in my head, that's just business life.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:11

Okay. So before you mentioned that you would need a certain kind of convenience base with the right location and nice equipment, but also the proper sense of community and feeling motivated while working out. Do you think that you could have that John Reed?

**Csanád** 36:29

I think so. Yeah.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:32

Okay, and have you also like seen all of the values, the emotional ones as well as the functional ones when you first saw the Instagram profile?

**Csanád** 36:43

No, I mean, that's really... I mean, I've seen a few of their facilities, but I think based on what I saw, they definitely put greater emphasis on the people and the community.

**Marlene Lüttje** 36:55

Okay. Do you know that they are focused on music? So they also call themselves fitness music clubs, instead of just fitness clubs.

**Csanád** 37:09

Yes, I experienced that when I tried it out. And actually that was something that to me, that's super appealing, because I think music and working out is highly linked together.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:21

So was there a live DJ when you were working out?

**Csanád** 37:27

There was not, but I've heard that they would feature different DJs on certain days.

**Marlene Lüttje** 37:32

Yes. So basically they have maybe twice a week for some hours they have live DJs playing while you are having your normal workout and then the other time they also have like this DJ mixed music playing. But do you think

that if you would not have known that factor, would you become aware of that by just seeing the social media profile for a few minutes?

**Csanád** 38:01

Not really. I don't think so.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:04

Okay. Well, I mean, since you said that this is a very appealing factor, would you rather suggest them to point that out more in order for new customers to see that right away?

**Csanád** 38:15

Yes, I think so as well. Because especially that being "Not your average gym" is the main part of the communication. I think this life music feature is actually a huge differentiating factor in general.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:30

Yes, exactly. So, I mean, and for you, who mentioned that you would only consult social media profiles of gym chains when you are a potential customer who is trying to evaluate different alternatives, that would be a really important factor for you to know.

**Csanád** 38:48

Yes, yes.

**Marlene Lüttje** 38:49

Okay. Let's imagine the situation that you would be living in a city where a John Reed studio would be available, would you consider becoming a loyal customer of John Reed based on what you saw on Instagram?

**Csanád** 39:06

I would definitely want to try it out but as I said, my biggest concern was about the community. But based on their social media account, I would definitely try out the place and then I will decide about the community and the atmosphere.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:26

Okay, yes, perfect. That's already everything from my side. Yes, thank you so much for the interview.

**Csanád** 39:34

Of course.

**Marlene Lüttje** 39:35

I will stop the recording now.

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## **Interview 7: Ellen**

Tue, 3/31 4:15PM • 52:51

## Speakers

Ellen, Janina Roosen

**Janina Roosen** 00:01

Okay, so hello and thank you very much for taking the time to give me a short or like to give us a short interview, and to help us with our master thesis. So just like in the beginning, could you give us a short introduction on yourself, like your name, your age, profession, where you live, and maybe your hobbies. So just in general about who you are?

**Ellen** 00:25

Okay, my name is Ellen. I'm 26. I'm from Berlin. My hobbies include traveling, and well, doing sports I'd say, meeting friends and playing tennis, sometimes.

**Janina Roosen** 00:44

That's super nice. Thank you very much for the introduction. So you already said you like to play tennis and you do like some working out or like, how would you say that you keep yourself fit. So do you have any methods or routine or yeah, like you said, you're playing tennis? Yeah. Just tell us a little bit about fitness.

**Ellen** 01:10

Okay, well, I've got a fitness membership, which I don't regularly use, I'd say, but I do yoga quite, quite regularly I'd say. I play tennis, but that's not like regular at any form. And in general, I think I go to the gym, probably once a week, twice a week. And that's often. Yeah, that's, that's it.

**Janina Roosen** 01:43

That's like a lot of ways of working out already. So, you said you have a fitness membership. So this means you have a gym membership member like what you pay on a monthly basis?

**Ellen** 01:56

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 01:56

Okay. So and the yoga like, how do you do that? Is a video? Is it online? Or is it in the gym?

**Ellen** 02:03

It's partly in the gym. And right now, it's via YouTube. It's just some random YouTube channel and, yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 02:13

But that's super nice. That's a lot. And, um, what kind of influence would you say does fitness have on your life? So, is it like for your mental feelings or for your health or would you say that it has an influence on your on your daily life, so to say, or is it just for fun? I mean, that's also an influence.

**Ellen** 02:39

Well, I think because my boyfriend does a lot of sports. I'd say he's the main influence why I do it. I don't really enjoy it. I just enjoy it because he's pushing me to do more and that's what I enjoy, but I don't enjoy the feeling and I'm not crazy about sports.

**Janina Roosen** 03:02

But in general, you do it because of your boyfriend?

**Ellen** 03:06

Well, basically because I want to be fitter and I want to be, well, you know, healthy and stuff. But I would say he's the main reason why I actually go because he pushes me to.

**Janina Roosen** 03:23

But that's also very good to have kind of like a person as motivation, right?

**Ellen** 03:26

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 03:27

So but yeah, but that's already very interesting and that was regarding your fitness attitude. So we can jump to the next part. And so, regarding social media, as I said already in our introduction, it's about social media as well. And thus I have like a question. Like, how important is social media in your life and on a scale from one to 10? Would you say it's important to you? Is it just like actually not important at all? Do you have it? Do you have an account? Um, yeah. Is it important for you or not?

**Ellen** 04:10

Yes, because I do have an account and I think I spend quite a lot of hours in front of Instagram. But, um, I'm not somebody who posts a lot. I think. So. I mean, it's, you know, I can't live without it, but I'd rather not. I like it as like stalking stuff, and do my research, and then I'll have inspiration and stuff, but I don't think it plays that much of an active role in my life. You know, I'm not very active on social media.

**Janina Roosen** 04:49

Yeah, but you said you use it for inspiration?

**Ellen** 04:51

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 04:52

Yeah. So but you also said that you have an Instagram account. Do you have like any other social media accounts? Like social networks such as Facebook, Snapchat, whatever, tiktok?

**Ellen** 05:05

I have any Instagram account, an Facebook account, Snapchat, and LinkedIn. And I think that was about it. Yeah. Pinterest is quite a big inspiration for me. So. But that's probably not social media.

**Janina Roosen** 05:20

Yeah, so but like, overall, what's the one you're using the most? Would you say it's Facebook? It's Instagram?

**Ellen** 05:29

It's definitely Instagram. Honestly, Snapchat is just because of you. That's why I still have this account. Um, but no. Instagram and Pinterest are the main accounts I use.

**Janina Roosen** 05:42

So and you said already, you are not that active. So you wouldn't describe yourself as a heavy social media user. So just like for like finding inspiration and stuff?

**Ellen** 05:53

Yeah, I'm not that active in terms of posting stuff myself.

**Janina Roosen** 05:57

Yeah. Okay, but that's fair enough. So, and what are the implications of social media on your communication with companies and brands? So, do you have any implications on that? Or do you communicate actively on social media, like on Instagram, for instance, with brands? So do you text with them? Or would you like kind of react? So it's like, there is not really a communication?

**Ellen** 06:24

I sometimes like their posts but never commented on anything actively, I think. And no, I haven't had any conversations with anyone. I don't know.

**Janina Roosen** 06:39

Thank you. And like regarding our topic of our interview today. It's social media and the fitness aspect. So do you follow any gym chains or fitness brands on social media. And when I say fitness brands, like gym chains, I think that's obvious but fitness brands. We define it as fitness studios as well as fitness influencers who act like entrepreneurs and who sell their own workout programs. I'm not sure if you know Pamela Reif, for instance, like she would be one of these fitness brands so to say but also like, as I said, gym chains like, do you follow any of these or rather not?

**Ellen** 07:23

Um, actually no. I follow one. One girl and she's a ballet dancer but I mean yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 07:32

Yeah. That's awesome. Yeah, good and interesting. And do you so you said you follow the ballet dancer. So she's kind of like doing a fitness lifestyle account or is it just like her life and some parts are the ballet part?

**Ellen** 07:50

Yeah. I think it's more of her life and just. But I wouldn't even call her an influencer. She's just a ballet dancer and I think she's in the Royal Ballet Stuff. So um, I'm not even sure she's an influencer. I think she's just, it's just a job.

**Janina Roosen** 08:18

Yeah. Okay. Um, so you said you are a gym goer like from time to time. But you also said you don't follow any gym chain? So you don't follow your your gym, like on social media?

**Ellen** 08:34

No.

**Janina Roosen** 08:34

And um, as you said already, you don't really follow any other fitness fitness related brands. Or do you follow like, for instance, fitness related brands such as like companies who do fitness clothing, fitness gear, for instance, or is it not really that important to you?

**Ellen** 08:54

Um, I mean, not actively, I think non comes to mind. Let me think. Well, I don't think so. No, I don't follow anyone or anything related to fitness.



**Janina Roosen** 09:13

And you said like, for instance, the um, the yoga videos on YouTube you're doing.

**Ellen** 09:19

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 09:19

Um, it's just like random? So it's not like that it's done by person and you want you're following this person for instance?

**Ellen** 09:28

It's, well, actually, it's, um, I think she's a fitness blogger, but I'm not following her on any social media account. Okay. So, let me check. Actually, I think she's, I think she's a yoga instructor. So she's a professional Yoga teacher.

**Janina Roosen** 10:00

So but in general, would you say that social media content from gyms is interesting at all? Like to you personally? Like, since you said you don't follow it, would you say that you would care about it? Or is it just like, just not important to you or not interesting?

**Ellen** 10:18

Um honestly, I never thought about it. I've never thought about following my gym on social media, for instance. Um, so 'd say, it's not important for me, but I might, you know, you just made me aware of the fact that I don't follow them. So I might just check their profiles out later.

**Janina Roosen** 10:41

So, um, yeah, that's interesting. Thank you very much. Um fine. Then we will jump to the next block of our interview. Um, how would you evaluate your engagement as a consumer on social media? So just like if you see yourself as a consumer on social media? Would you say it's rather passive, for instance only that you consume and that you read posts, for instance? Or is it like maybe a bit more active that you interact, that you react with brand content, like, for instance, by liking a picture, by following by commenting it? Or is it like very active? But you already said that you're not. You have maybe liked a picture once or something, but it's not that you're really sharing pictures or? Yeah, how would you describe yourself or like your engagement?

**Ellen** 11:35

Um my engagement in general, I think, is, it's not really that active because I don't comment on stuff. Um I do like the pictures most of the time, but I think it's just a reflex. I mean, I like the pictures and I double tap. But I'm not doing it actively. Um, and I think I'm on Instagram for like 5 or 6, 6 years. Um and I got I think around 100 posts. So you know, I'm active I'm not super active on Instagram.

**Janina Roosen** 12:11

Yeah. And in terms of being a consumer, so like you said, um like the with respect to brands that you would like pictures, but not comment pictures?

**Ellen** 12:24

Yes. I think I've never commented on anything.

**Janina Roosen** 12:27

Yeah. So if you engage with a brand then it's rather that you like a picture or something.

**Ellen** 12:32

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 12:33

So but um, for instance, what is also engagement, that you like do hashtag under your post or that you kind of like tag a brand. Have you done that before? Or that you tag a location? So for instance, if you are somewhere in a restaurant or something, then you say, I'm in that restaurant or I'm in that gym today, or, like, did you do that and like have you done this before?

**Ellen** 12:57

Ah, yes, I've tagged my location before. Never in a gym though. Um but in restaurants for sure. So, um, but I wouldn't say that often.

**Janina Roosen** 13:11

Okay. So then, um, another question regarding brands and like what they share on Instagram. So, um, do you think that there's much information on brands that is only shared on Instagram? So like, if you are looking for something like a particular information, do you think that there's something which is only shared on Instagram or is it all like on social media? Or do you think it's like on their website, for instance, as well?

**Ellen** 13:43

Um, I'd say social media has is more of an add on. I think it's it's information that is shared maybe more specifically for the followers and not on the website. They might have, for instance, let's say it's Christmas, and they have a Christmas special, I think that would be on the website, and then more specific information would be on Instagram.

**Janina Roosen** 14:09

So yeah. So you say that they have like, in that case, that they have more information on Instagram? So that you can find something on the website, but also some parts or more parts and more details on social media.

**Ellen** 14:24

Yeah, more specifically on Instagram, maybe.

**Janina Roosen** 14:27

Yeah, that's interesting. So would you like, in general, consult social media networks, so either Facebook or Instagram or like LinkedIn, for instance, when you're looking for information, like of a specific companies. So as you said, you would maybe for a Christmas special, you would check out the website first and then maybe the social media? Or would you say that you go on to social media in order to find information?

**Ellen** 14:56

Um, I would say I go on social media to specifically find information. I would say I would actually say I check social media first. And if I don't get the information I'm looking for I check the website.

**Janina Roosen** 15:09

Okay. That's interesting. And did you do that with your gym? No, you said you don't follow your fitness studio.

**Ellen** 15:15

No, I don't follow my fitness company, but I did it. Um, actually, there was a group on on Facebook that had an event around Christmas, and I checked the Facebook group before I checked the website, so.

**Janina Roosen** 15:35

So you would, like, consult social media?

**Ellen** 15:39

Oh, yeah, yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 15:40

Okay. And, um, so, yeah. Then we have that, and how do you interact with brands on social media? So do you think we had the engagement pad already, but do you think that there's also brands that you would perceive as a person? Like that you can feel that there's people behind doing it or that there's brands who acting like person on social media? Or do you think that it's more like, just generic content? And that it's like more like a machine behind it kind of?

**Ellen** 16:20

In terms of fitness companies?

**Janina Roosen** 16:21

No, just like in general.

**Ellen** 16:22

Okay in general. Um, well, to be honest, I think, okay. It's quite hard to say because I think because of all those social media influencers, I think the big companies try to be more open and try to be more like customer friendly and like to be approached as more human. But, um. Yeah, for instance, I mean, I work at H&M and if I look at the Instagram account of H&M, I think you see that there's a big company, it's a big branding, like a lot of, you know, social media stuff going on. But if you look at specific Instagram influencers, I think they bring it to life, you know what I mean? It's more human interactive than the website of H&M. So, um, yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 17:26

Yeah, that's interesting. And do you think it has an impact on your opinion of a specific brands like how the brands interacting with other customers on social media, for instance, like when you can see like, for instance, how they react to comments, like if they are sharing something? So, would that influence on like how you perceive a brand?

**Ellen** 17:49

Yes, yeah, highly. Highly, because it's, I've got an example for that because at H&M at the website if you see maybe a shorts you like. Then you can scroll down. And then it has this little part where it says styled by you. And then they link Instagram accounts where people style that shorts. So it's not only influences but like normal people like me. For instance, if I buy the shorts, I take a picture, I upload the picture and have a hashtag, I think, #h&mandme, something like that. Um, then, if the picture is good enough, then they would share it on their website, which I think is pretty nice because you not only get to see what the stuff is worn in real life, but also that H&M is actually working with the people and their customers. And I really like that.

**Janina Roosen** 18:38

Yeah. That's a very good example actually. So that's nice. Um, and in general, I mean, like, we all know, Instagram and social networks, but, um, I have a quote right now and it is: "There's a high transparency on social media and sharing a lot of information makes a brand authentic." Would you agree like, look, like if they share a lot of information that it's more authentic, so to say, or like, do you think it's not that transparent, anyway? So on social media?

**Ellen** 19:12

It depends on the information I'd say. I mean, if they share a lot of their content based on the product, I'd say it's not that authentic because I mean, they want to sell their product, but they share real stories and real customers, I'd say, yeah, then it is authentic. It really highly depends on what they're sharing what kind of content. What they create, what kind of product they have, and what kind of company it is.

**Janina Roosen** 19:43

So would you only react to brand content on social media, if it is perceived as credible by you? Or is it like that it's not really like a matter? So you would react like just if you like it, but you don't really care about if it's credible?

**Ellen** 20:02

I think Instagram in general is more about aesthetics than anything else so if it's aesthetic to me if it's pleasing for my I would react to it. If it's not done it's not and I don't care if it's authentic or not. I care if it's if I like it or not.

**Janina Roosen** 20:16

Yeah. Okay, so super so um, like you said, you don't really follow brands but like if you're thinking about your Instagram and like the brands, like if you follow any brands or if you see any brands, are there any online communities on social media, of which you feel part of? So is it like, is there any brands or any, any communities on social media where you say you belong to that community? Or is it just not?

**Ellen** 20:49

That's funny that you asked that because just I think yesterday, I talked to a friend and we both agreed, because we're both cancer. And we both agreed That we feel like the cancer memes are like our place to go. And we specifically follow influencers and content creators, that are cancers as well and that share the emotions and stuff that goes on within cancer. And so yeah, I'd say I belong in that group. Um, and.

**Janina Roosen** 21:28

So it's kind of like the shared interest you have?

**Ellen** 21:31

Yes. Yeah. That interest is a good point. And also shared emotion. Shared mindset. And I think yeah, a lot of influencers I follow share one mindset. It's not all about the clothes, all about where they go next, or what destination they go to, but what mindsets they kind of have.

**Janina Roosen** 21:55

So but it's not really like communities, which focus on like Yoga, for instance, because you said you're doing Yoga so it's not really like Yoga communities you follow?

**Ellen** 22:06

Oh they actually, it's funny because two girls come to my mind that both are cancer both that you know category but they also do a lot of sports they also do pilates and yoga. And a lot of sports so yeah, maybe, maybe it's a category I also feel I belong to but I don't follow them actively because they do yoga. I follow them because of the cancer thing.

**Janina Roosen** 22:38

Yeah. So but, um, is the interaction with members of like, for instance, that cancer community a reason for you why you engage like in specific posts, for instance? So is that kind of a connection and where you would say you interact for that with friend them is not that important to you that you share the same community mindset?

**Ellen** 23:11

I mean, if I like the content, I don't think it is important to me if we share the same, um, mindset. I think it helps. Because I feel a sense of belonging. But if I don't feel that it's still like the content, it's still fine. So did that answer the question?

**Janina Roosen** 23:34

So, um, to come back to the fitness part of our interview. Um, there's lots of fitness stuff going on on Instagram. So yes, I'm not sure if you know, for instance, like this fitspiration like that you can post for instance, photos and then it's like, kind of like an inspiration to be fit like when you want to work out or something. And like the whole fitness like aspect of movement on social media is getting pretty big, like, due to like the influences and stuff like that. So do you have like an opinion about that? For instance, do you think it's healthy because it's motivating people to work out and to become more fit or more, like to do more sports to work out more? Or do you think it can also be kind of like dangerous, so if like, like also regarding, like, the body ideals, because like, some people create, some people create standards like body standards. And so would you say it's more healthy because it helps people to get back on track and to get motivation? Or do you think it can also be dangerous?

**Ellen** 24:42

I think, well, I think it can be both actually. I mean, it can be totally motivating for people I totally get that. Um, but also, I think as a consumer, not having a body that's perfect, maybe, it can also be dangerous, especially for young girls that are like 14, 15 and have no self image or no um yeah. No self esteem um but I think in general, it's more healthy because it's not all about the new lip gloss and then you know, clothing and stuff. But also about fitness and stuff that is really healthy and also eating the right food and you know. Yeah, I actually think it's quite healthy. But all in moderation.

**Janina Roosen** 25:34

Yeah. So but do you often experience people or like your peers who follow who present themselves on Instagram and that are like, very healthy or very fit? So like, actually, it doesn't matter if it's your peers, or if it's just people you see, but do you often see that people are kind of like presenting themselves being like super fit, super healthy and sporty. Do you see that quite often? Or not? What do you think?

**Ellen** 26:01

Yes, I actually see that quite often. Also, maybe because of the times changing right now, but, um, I actually follow a few girls for quite some time now and they've kind of transitioned into this whole fitness community. Slowly but surely. So. Yeah, I think I might transition as well at some point, I don't know.

**Janina Roosen** 26:27

But is it kind of like motivating for you? That you say it helps you to reach certain fitness goal? Like when you see other people working out. Like people who get like in shape, so it's kind of like a motivation for you?

**Ellen** 26:40

Yeah. For sure.

**Janina Roosen** 26:40

Okay. So that's, that's super interesting. Um, so and you said, you don't really follow like any gym chains of fitness. But like the ballet dancer, for instance. Um, do you think she's supporting you in like the way of becoming your ideal self? No, like the ideal self image of yourself? So is it like helping you to become like, the most ideal version of yourself? Do you feel motivated like by her?

**Ellen** 27:16

Not specific by her, but I do follow a few other people that I would definitely say they do. Um, because they share their routines and their daily life and I think that is something that really, um, strikes me because I really think routine is key. So I tried to, you know, copy some parts of it and yeah. I think, yeah. Not specifically the ballet dancer but I think other people.

**Janina Roosen** 27:51

So but it's more regarding lifestyle?

**Ellen** 27:53

Yes, yes it's more like lifestyle and you know, including fitness and healthy routine into your lifestyle and I think that's the key. They don't think they post I don't need a yoga session and be like, okay, that's the thing you have to do to become skinny. You know. No, it's more like the daily lifestyle.

**Janina Roosen** 28:12

Yeah. So and in general, like regarding being like fit or like, the fitness aspect. Um, what important values to you? So is it like, is it more that like discipline or fun or interaction with friends while working out or like with your spending quality time with your boyfriend? So what is like most important values for you regarding working out and doing yoga?

**Ellen** 28:39

Yeah, for me personally, I think it's that my boyfriend and I do sports together. So it's a couple thing maybe? And also discipline for sure. Because I'm, I think I don't have discipline regarding spots and I really, you know, want to become sporty. Yeah. I think this isn't for me would be key. And, and, a daily routine I think if I if I say okay go to the gym maybe Mondays and Fridays, do some sports at home during the week I think that would be key.

**Janina Roosen** 29:19

So discipline. Yeah. Nice. Perfect. So then we're almost done. So, um, now we jump over to the next part. Um, we had like questions regarding your social media behavior and your fitness routine now. So and we've been talking about gyms on like gyms and gyms on social media already but you know, like some different gym chains right like also because you're a member and have you been exposed to that particular gym on social media already? So have you seen any content already? Like any gym chains like consciously? So not just like.

**Ellen** 30:00

Yes, I have. Um, actually, my fitness chain has those challenges going on. Um, and whenever I went to the fitness studio, I saw that we have like a big board and there's like the 30 day challenge for planks or something like that. And, um, they also support it on social media, you know that they post the people that completed the challenge, and, um, that is something I have quite actively followed. But I don't follow the brand. Or this fitness studio. And um, sorry, what was the question again?

**Janina Roosen** 30:41

So like, if you have seen like, anything of that on social media already? Or like, for instance, that your friends like, follow it or that they have liked something of a fitness like a gym chain on social media? Or that they have shared their location?

**Ellen** 30:56

Um, actually quite a lot of people I follow like normal people, some friends of mine, um, post pictures out of the gym. So, I think I'm exposed to it quite a lot.

**Janina Roosen** 31:12

So now like when you when we were talking about that. So what exactly do you remember? You said you remember the challenge, for instance? Of your gym chain? But also the people tagged locations?

**Ellen** 31:23

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 31:24

So that's like what you mainly remember?

**Ellen** 31:26

Yeah, I remember mainly people posting themselves and those girls at the gym. I think that's it. Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 31:37

Yeah. So but and you said you have seen like the challenge, for instance. You have like been following it on Instagram as well? Like, even though you're not following your gym chain?

**Ellen** 31:50

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 31:51

So and do you think like your gym has any specific values what they want to kind of like present on social media? Or is it like not really that you have realized that?

**Ellen** 32:04

I haven't, I haven't realized that because I don't follow them actively. Um, I'm pretty sure they do have values. But I couldn't name them. Even if I tried. Um, but maybe I think they actually try to push you to go to the gym, which I actually enjoy because I'm lazy. And I usually don't go because I, I am not lazy. But when they have that challenge going on, I feel like I'm more motivated to go because, you know, I want to be a part of the movement. So it's like, again, kind of like the discipline part and motivation.

**Janina Roosen** 32:46

So yeah, that's very interesting. And what comes in your mind when you think about your fitness, like your gym, for instance? So is there like, what is when you think about your gym? What is it coming to your mind?

**Ellen** 33:03

Um, it's clean and new. Because they just got new machinery and stuff. Um, and usually quite full when I, when I tend to go it's around seven-ish. So it's quite full.

**Janina Roosen** 33:23

Yeah. So it's like, um, the studio you're thinking about? But also the people probably?

**Ellen** 33:30

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 33:31

Or like the logo? Is it coming to your mind as well or not really?

**Ellen** 33:35

Yeah. Oh yeah. Well, not actively, but now it does. Um, but yeah, the people also. I mean, I enjoy, we have a class called dance moves, which I really enjoy. And I think I'm safe to say I'm the youngest person there. But it's still very fun. You know? Because everybody's enjoying it. Everybody's giving their best. So you're also thinking about the classes and the studio in general? Yeah. Because you know, the most of the time I go in and do the classes. So it's not that I'm somebody who's on the free machines.

**Janina Roosen** 34:13

So and you say you go there for classes? So would you say that it's more important to you have like the functional values of a gym? Or is it more emotional? So that you have kind of like a bond to your gym?

**Ellen** 34:25

Yes. Yeah. Um, definitely, it's more emotional. Because I'm, I'm somebody who goes to the classes to be part of the classes and not to be that fit but to, to participate in a group and have a good bit of a group activity and, you know, maybe have a bond with the people in the class and with the instructor, so yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 34:50

Yeah, so it's more about the emotional values?

**Ellen** 34:53

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 34:54

So and do you think, like your fitness yeah, like your gym can communicate that on social media as well? Or like because you said you had a look at their Instagram profile already? Like, what do you remember? Do you think they communicate that? Or is it more that they communicate the functional values of their studio?

**Ellen** 35:14

I think, they communicate the functional values. Wait, let me check. I just. No, I think it's way more functional. I mean, they do share they do share, um, pictures of the staff. And you know what they do, but I'm not that connected of the most people working there. I'm just connected to the gym itself. To the courses maybe?

**Janina Roosen** 36:04

Perfect. And, um, which attributes are the most important for you in terms of the quality of the gym? So is there anything which is like super important to you like that it's the machines?

**Ellen** 36:18

That it's clean. Yeah, most definitely, um, because before I was at Fitness First, I've been at FitX. Yeah, I think it was called FitX. And I hated the way of you know, it looked and it was always sweating. I mean, obviously it's a gym it has to be sweaty. But yeah, kind of gross. And, um, Fitness First is kind of clean and it's a little bit more fancy and yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 36:51

So but you say, your gym now has like, what you perceive as like these, these aspects?

**Ellen** 36:58

Yes.



**Janina Roosen** 36:58

And do you think can or they are able to communicate it on social media? So would you say like when you're looking at their Instagram account. Do you have the same impression? That it's not just like clean in the studio itself but also that they have that they kind of like are able to communicate that on social media like even though they're not saying our studios clean but it would you like. What is your impression?

**Ellen** 37:19

Um, I think maybe it's also the people that are training there. They I, no. It goes in the wrong direction. Um.

**Janina Roosen** 37:29

But do you think that you can see that kind of like a clean studio?

**Ellen** 37:34

I'm not sure but I think the pictures they post, you can see the new machines and the new maybe wall paints and stuff. So I think the image is quite clean. In general. Not only clean clean as in dirty clean but clean as in design clean. Yeah, it's clean colors, clean yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 37:55

Yeah, yeah. Perfect. And you said already you changed like the Fitness Studio recently, or like you changed it.

**Ellen** 38:02

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 38:02

And would you describe yourself as a loyal, like member of the new gym?

**Ellen** 38:10

Yes. Well, definitely because I visit that gym way more often then the other one in about three years.

**Janina Roosen** 38:19

Yeah. So, do you think it's like regarding this or like, because of the aspects, you've just said that it's clean and that it's maybe good quality?

**Ellen** 38:26

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 38:26

And is it also regarding is it closer to your home?

**Ellen** 38:30

Yes. That's absolutely the case.

**Janina Roosen** 38:31

So it's also about the location but also like the design?

**Ellen** 38:35

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 38:35

Or good service? Yeah. Perfect.

**Ellen** 38:38

Yes, service was a big aspect as well.

**Janina Roosen** 38:39

Yeah. So you have that in your in your new studio?

**Ellen** 38:43

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 38:43

Okay. So that's like, the most important aspect for you and do you think they are like your studio was able to communicate that on social media or like, do you think in general, fitness like a gym is able to communicate values on social media and that you can become a loyal member then? Like, do you know what I mean?

**Ellen** 39:06

Yes, I think. Yeah, I think it's possible. I think, um, in terms of a fitness studio on Instagram. Maybe it would help if every fitness studio of that chain has its own Instagram account for this studio location. And because you know, Fitness First is a huge chain, obviously. And I maybe don't feel the connection with Fitness First in general, but with this specific Fitness First I go to. So maybe that would help if they have location focused more than the chain in general. Does that make sense?

**Janina Roosen** 39:50

Yeah, yeah, that's perfect. Okay, thank you very much. So and now it's the last part. Yeah. Um, I have asked you to check out the Instagram account of John Reed before our call. And so I have the question, first of all, did you know John Reed before? Or was it like name you've never heard before?

**Ellen** 40:11

Um yes. I've heard the name John Reed before, I've never checked out their profile. I've never seen a logo or brand or anything. I just heard the name.

**Janina Roosen** 40:21

So you've just heard the name. Okay, so let's talk about just like your impression of the Instagram presence so to say. And just like as a short introduction again, like even though you know John Reed, you said you only know the name.

**Ellen** 40:34

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 40:34

So it's a German gym chain and it has approximately 26 gyms right now worldwide but further openings are planned in the close future. And they would say they like are kind of like, um, acting in the premium discount segment of gyms. But also they belong to the RSG group. I'm not sure if you know the RSG group but they are the owner of many fitness brands and also gyms like, for instance, McFit belongs to the RSG group and High5Gyms but also as Cyberobics. I'm not not sure if you know that. It's kind of like an online training, it belongs to the group as well. So just like for you as little as an introduction, that there's a group behind and that's

a gym, like gym chain. Um, you said you know the name but you don't follow like John Reed on Instagram, because you've never really been in contact with that.

**Ellen** 41:34

No.

**Janina Roosen** 41:34

Okay, so um like, as I said, already, I asked you to look at their Instagram. And is there anything you remember? So like just from viewing the profile before?

**Ellen** 41:47

I honestly, if I wouldn't know the name John Reed as a fitness studio chain or brand, I wouldn't know that it would be a fitness studio chain or brand from the Instagram account, I would say. Because it has a lot of this showy vibe going on. But not in terms of the brand. But in terms of the people that are presented in the Instagram account. And the Instagram profile. So I think there's a lot, yeah, sort of showy vibes.

**Janina Roosen** 42:20

So it's not really that they focus on on the fitness aspect. That's not clear?

**Ellen** 42:26

I mean, they do because all the people presented there are super fit and super trained and stuff, but it doesn't speak to me as a consumer of Instagram. Well, I wouldn't hit that subscribe button. Because, it doesn't speak to me as an Instagram account I would like to follow.

**Janina Roosen** 42:49

Yeah. Okay. So you don't really, you're not a big fan of what you just saw. So it's not that you really like it?

**Ellen** 42:56

No.

**Janina Roosen** 42:56

Okay and why?

**Ellen** 42:58

It's too much for me.

**Janina Roosen** 43:00

Okay, um, but do you think like in general that it's interesting what you've seen there? Or is it like you said, not really touching you?

**Ellen** 43:09

I think is interesting for people, maybe that have the goal to look like that. Maybe it's exactly what they're looking for. But for me, it's hard to say, but for me as somebody who is interested in sports, but not as interested as many people. Yeah, I would say for me, it's, it's a little too much.

**Janina Roosen** 43:28

Yeah. Okay. That's super interesting. So you put your attention like mostly on the people or like that it's too much.

**Ellen** 43:36

Actually I wouldn't have noticed that it's a fitness brand. If you wouldn't have told me you know, I would have just thought okay, it's a group of people, um yeah, sharing that fitness routine.

**Janina Roosen** 43:52

Perfect. So but, um, what would you like, associate with the brand now like now you've seen it? So it's They're like any attributes you would kind of like associate with the brand? So, like, I don't know, what the vibe was of the of the account?

**Ellen** 44:12

I think the vibe was quite strong and quiet showy showing off.

**Janina Roosen** 44:24

So or maybe like, I mean cool or boring or like, elegant, classy, urban?

**Ellen** 44:31

I mean it's definitely cool. And urban is a good word. But um, for somebody who, like me, maybe, maybe wants to start doing fitness but isn't into it as much. Yeah. Um, it's a bit too much. Um, for somebody who maybe says, okay, I want a super summer body in 20, 21, I don't know. Maybe it's the perfect page because you know, they have their goals right in front of them. And the, you know, inspiration. It's just like not my cup of tea.

**Janina Roosen** 45:06

Yeah. And I'm not sure have you seen the slogan? It's called not your average gym. So that's what their slogan is.

**Ellen** 45:15

Ah, okay.

**Janina Roosen** 45:16

Um, do you like feel anything about that now like now you know what their slogan is? So do you have an opinion regarding that slogan? Or is it likely?

**Ellen** 45:28

I mean, it's a nice slogan, but in what? In what way does that differ from the average gym?

**Janina Roosen** 45:35

So you don't really what to say. Okay. So that's what you, what you think you like when you hear the slogan?

**Ellen** 45:42

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 45:43

Um, so but in general, like also regarding the slogan, do you think it covers the, like, the impressions of the pictures like of the graphic design of the Instagram? Or is it just like random?

**Ellen** 46:00

Yeah, I was, I was. Yeah, surprised to see that to be honest. And it was yeah but again, that showy vibe, you know? I can see there is a concept behind it and I can see they want to send a certain message. I can see there is a concept behind it and I can see they want to send a certain message. But I'm not quite sure I received the message. Um, but I can see they really tried to make it as pleasant as possible. Not your average gym? Well.

Yeah. I mean, it's different because, you know, you wouldn't even notice that it's a gym chain. When you first look at the profile, maybe that's what I mean.

**Janina Roosen** 46:44

Yeah. Like, um, I'm sure you've not seen it. But they describe themselves as a fitness music club. So it's like, their studios are not called a studio. It's more a club because they have like also like for them it's very important that they have the music aspect as well. So they have like DJs I think twice a week and every studio that's a DJ.

**Ellen** 47:08

Like a live DJ?

**Janina Roosen** 47:10

Yeah, a live DJ making music and like the whole music aspect is like super important for the brand and it's rather a fitness music club than just like a fitness studio.

**Ellen** 47:20

Ah okay, so I can tell by then it wouldn't be a club I just tried to go to.

**Janina Roosen** 47:25

You wouldn't go to?

**Ellen** 47:27

No. Most definitely not.

**Janina Roosen** 47:31

So and then like if you see the Not Your Average gym, the slogan. Do you think it makes sense?

**Ellen** 47:39

Yeah. I see the point of Not Your Average Gym. Um, but to be fair, when I go to the gym, I want it to be empty, as empty as possible. You know, to do my thing to not be looked at. Because I don't enjoy being the center of attention. And I feel if there was the live DJ in that club. Um, well, there would be a lot of people. So you know, it's crowded. It's full. It's loud. I mean, it's, it's, it's what you want in a Fitness Studio. Fine. It's not my cup of tea.

**Janina Roosen** 48:16

Okay, fair enough. But in general, do you like, what would you say about the quality of the gym? Just like from seeing it on Instagram? Do you think it's like high quality, low quality, whatever?

**Ellen** 48:29

I would say it's high quality. I mean they put a lot of effort in the Instagram account, a lot of effort in the in the general appearance. So I would say the studio is very modern, very young, maybe.

**Janina Roosen** 48:48

So you said it's modern. Like, also the style of it. Okay. Um, and like, do you have any opinion regarding the RSG group like now you know that it's like different studios belong to that group, like McFit, or is it just you don't really have an opinion regarding that group?

**Ellen** 49:08

Honestly, I mean, I've heard of the group. But I've never actually thought about it. I mean if it if it does it mean they have like fitness studios for each category, like cheap and expensive ones?

**Janina Roosen** 49:32

I think all of them are acting in the lower price segment. But it's just like if it changes your your opinion regarding John Reed? Okay, well you mentioned, for instance, that good service and quality, for instance, and clean like tidy is like a studio should be clean.

**Ellen** 49:54

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 49:55

And for you to be like to become a loyal member? Would you say that John Reed is able to communicate these values on Instagram? So I mean, I know that you haven't been in the studio of the of John Reed before but would you think they would kind of like communicate these values as well? Or is it more like?

**Ellen** 50:16

Yeah. Okay. I think I would, yeah, I would say yes. They are able to communicate these aspects. But I think they want to be really hip, really modern, really active? I mean I totally get it because I totally get the hype around it and the hype around being fit and being active. And I can see that on Instagram as well. But that's not what I would be looking for in a studio. Does that make sense?

**Janina Roosen** 50:54

Yeah. So, but but like in general. Would you say that according to the social media like appearance or like presence on Instagram of John Reed, would you consider to be to become a customer? You said you, you are not a big fan of that.

**Ellen** 51:15

No.

**Janina Roosen** 51:15

Okay. So and why is that? Because of like, you just want to have it like empty?

**Ellen** 51:20

Yeah, I want to have my peace in life. And when I go to the fitness studio and I, I wouldn't think I would have that at John Reed. Um, I mean, of course, if you go, I don't know, it's seven o'clock in the morning. Um, but if the point of John Reed is to have a DJ and to have, you know, this disco party vibe going on, I'm not sure I'm the right person.

**Janina Roosen** 51:47

Yeah. So it's mainly because they kind of like have different values than you have? But it's not because you say you don't like their Instagram?

**Ellen** 51:57

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 51:57

It's not that I don't like the brand or don't like the studio. Well, it goes they have a different, I don't know, maybe perception of how to do sport. Well, actually, that's the end of our interview. Um, so thank you very much for taking your time. Do you have any further questions like regarding John Reed or like the Instagram aspect? Or is it like, all clear to you so far?

**Ellen** 52:24

Have you ever been into a John Reed studio?

**Janina Roosen** 52:27

No, I haven't. No, not yet. Okay, anything else? Otherwise, I will stop the recording now.

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## **Interview 8: Lea**

Tue, 3/31 9:14PM • 44:58

### **Speakers**

Lea, Janina Roosen

**Janina Roosen** 00:00

Hello, Lea, and welcome to our interview. And thank you very much for taking the time. Um, first of all, I would like you to give us a short like a short introduction on yourself, like your name, your age, your profession, where you live, and maybe your hobbies. So just like a short intro on yourself.

**Lea** 00:20

Okay. Hi, Janina. Thank you for having me. I'm Lea. I'm 25 years old. I'm living in Berlin. And my profession is, I'm a student, part time. I'm also a working student working for a company in compliance and my hobbies are mostly meeting up with friends. I know it's not a hobby but it's like what I spend most of my free time on and also, sometimes I do love reading or paintings and I also try to have a not a routine, but like to do some sports during the week.

**Janina Roosen** 01:02

Oh that's interesting. Thank you very much. So you already said that you like to do sports. Um, so what does that include? So do you have you said you you would like to have a routine? Do you have routine? How do you keep yourself fit? So do you have a gym membership, for instance? Or how do you do you do that?

**Lea** 01:23

Um, well, I have a gym membership but it's like, can I name the brand or not?

**Janina Roosen** 01:31

Yes, sure.

**Lea** 01:32

Okay, um, it's um, Superfit?

**Janina Roosen** 01:38

Yeah.

**Lea** 01:39

I'm sorry, but it was like half a year abroad, so I wasn't there. And, actually at the moment, it's closed because of the virus but because it's close, I try to do some, like home workouts, some yoga sessions or home workouts

from some influencers. Um, and also some jogging, but mostly, actually home workouts because I'm not that kind of jogging person or cardio person.

**Janina Roosen** 02:10

Yeah. Okay but that's already quite a lot. So you said you have kind of like a fitness routine to keep yourself, right?

**Lea** 02:19

Yeah, that's right at least to do some at the moment to try these to do like some home workouts two to three times a week. But mostly, normally when the gym is open, and when I'm motivated depends also on the time of the year. I try to go there two times a week.

**Janina Roosen** 02:41

Yeah.

**Lea** 02:41

At least I would say, yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 02:44

Great. And do you think fitness has kind of like an influence on your daily life so maybe on your success of like, just what you're doing or the mental health, like your health or just how you feel does it have any influence?

**Lea** 03:01

Actually, yes. Um, I would say the whole time or like always, after a work out. I mean, before I'm doing workouts, I literally have to motivate myself to do them actually, because I'm always like, okay, I could also do something else instead. But after I did some workouts, I did some sports, I feel really motivated, I feel that I have more energy and also like, I, because normally I do the workouts in the morning, because I'm not the kind of person who is doing this in the evening. And I'm also like, studying pretty good in the day I would say, I'm motivated, I'm not tired. I'm full of energy. And also like in general fitness is also I would say, actually, it has a lot of impact, because I'm not thinking constantly about it, but I would say that I mean, fitness also includes for me like nutrition, um how I eat and, um, how I think about. Like okay, I can use the stairs instead of the elevator, escalator. So I would say it has an impact kind of way.

**Janina Roosen** 04:10

That's, that's great. So, um, as I told you, our master thesis is about fitness and social media, so now I'm going to ask you some questions regarding social media. Like, I'm pretty sure you have all like you use different social networks. Do you have like accounts on specific networks?

**Lea** 04:33

Yeah. I have like Instagram, un Facebook. Um, I don't know social networks are also like LinkedIn and Xing?

**Janina Roosen** 04:43

Yeah.

**Lea** 04:44

Yeah, those I have. And I use WhatsApp I would say.

**Janina Roosen** 04:49

Yeah.



**Lea** 04:49

Yeah, that's all I would say.

**Janina Roosen** 04:51

So, and which one would you say that you use the most? Like, is there any social media network you know, you use the most?

**Lea** 04:58

Yeah, Instagram, of course. I mean like texting with people's like WhatsApp, but for checking on people's, like life updates, it's always Instagram.

**Janina Roosen** 05:10

Yeah. So and um on a scale from one to 10. How important is social media in your life? Would you like, could you say a number? Is it like important?

**Lea** 05:24

Ten is like important?

**Janina Roosen** 05:26

Ten is important and that is kind of like literally your life.

**Lea** 05:31

I would say it's, um, six to seven.

**Janina Roosen** 05:36

Yeah. So like, above five you would say?

**Lea** 05:40

Yeah, of course. Because I mean, I do follow some influencers on Instagram, but only like three to five people I would say. Um, but the rest or like the other people I follow it's like mostly people I really know in person or friends or yeah. So it's like, not that important. I mean, it's important to like know, what are people doing but I'm also like, I would be fine not checking it constantly.

**Janina Roosen** 06:12

Hmm. Okay, and what are you implications of social media on your communication with companies and brands? So does it have an impact or is it not really influencing your communication with brands? Like do you use social media for communicating with brands?

**Lea** 06:36

Of course. Um, it's like on Instagram, there's also like, sometimes these ads are popping up on my like, from certain companies. And if they have like a good, I would say social media appearance, I would definitely, or I normally go on their Instagram page and check them out. And if I really like them, I would also like click on their website. So I would say it's also kind of important how companies appear on social media. And also it's important for me. Because I mean, it's also good if they have like, of course like their, I mean, for example, it's like an apparel brand if they have like, the clothing on the side. But also if they like stand for, like sustainability or something else. So yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 07:26

Yeah.

**Lea** 07:26

So, I would say it's quite important. Yeah. If this was the question.

**Janina Roosen** 07:30

Yeah, that's, that's correct. So but, um coming back to the fitness aspect of like our interview. Do you follow any gym chains or fitness brands on social media? And like, I mean, gym chains is kind of like self explaining, but fitness brands. It's what we define as fitness studios as well as fitness influencers who act like an entrepreneur selling their home workout programs. So do you consciously follow any of the kind of accounts?

**Lea** 08:02

No, not really. I mean, I'm checking them out time to time and like also talk with friends about them because like during this time I was like last post last week asking your friend if she has like any tips for home workouts and then she like recommended some um not really influencers but like more like fitness instructors, um, which are also like on Instagram and doing like or posting home workouts for free. But I'm not checking them out constantly I would say. If I'm like in the mood for like, okay, let's try something new, I would like look them up and see how they're doing the workouts or how I can improve my workouts but not always.

**Janina Roosen** 08:44

Okay, and do you follow any fitness lifestyle accounts.

**Lea** 08:48

No.

**Janina Roosen** 08:48

And like fitness lifestyle accounts are what we define as, um like people like influencer, for instance, who also share some of their fitness routines. Like recipes. No, you don't follow any of these?

**Lea** 09:03

No.

**Janina Roosen** 09:03

Okay, that's fine. So and you said you have a gym membership and then you go to the gym from time to time. But you also said you don't follow gym accounts on social media? So I guess, you don't follow your gym on Instagram?

**Lea** 09:21

No, no. Because like my gym has like its own app and I'm always using the app.

**Janina Roosen** 09:26

But you're using the app? That's interesting.

**Lea** 09:28

Yeah, it's like, it's like the training schedules online. And also important news of like, not as, for example, it's like a gym is not close, but like in a construction or something like this.

**Janina Roosen** 09:38

Yeah. That's so interesting. So, um, but you said you do the home workouts, um do you follow these accounts? Or not really?

**Lea** 09:49

Um, not really.

**Janina Roosen** 09:50

Okay.

**Lea** 09:51

I mean, honestly, it just started like three, no, I mean, three weeks ago. And I started with you just running outside and so and like I know some basics of was always doing it at home. So I'm trying to keep up with them and just my plan was if I have more time for like the other weekend or next week, that I would like to start checking out, um, the people like the friend recommended to me. So I would say, I will check them out on Instagram but I'm not following them.

**Janina Roosen** 10:25

Yeah, um but so in general are you're exposed to fitness related content on social media? So do you see it from time to time? Do you get ads? Do you like, do your peers like content like fitness related?

**Lea** 10:39

Ah, I also forgot, I also am on Pinterest.

**Janina Roosen** 10:42

Ah, okay.

**Lea** 10:42

And, um, I mean, it's like also, um it's always giving me like some updates about home workouts or some fitness instructions. Yeah, so I would say I'm always, I'm not. I'm not looking for it on purpose but if it pops up.

**Janina Roosen** 11:07

Yeah.

**Lea** 11:08

I'm always like, oh okay, let's check it out and then open it and checking it out. So yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 11:12

That's interesting. So but in general, is like gym, social media content interesting for you? Or is it not that important or interesting to you? Just like fitness related or gym related content?

**Lea** 11:27

Um, it's interesting. Yeah, of course, it's interesting. Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 11:30

Okay. So, then we will dig deeper into like your social media consumption. Um, how would you evaluate your engagement on social media as a consumer? So you are a consumer, obviously, but would you like in with respect to engaging with a brand, for instance, would you say it's rather passive? So that you're only consuming like the content of brands? Like that it's just popping up and then you read it, for instance, or would you say it's a bit more active? So in the way that you're reacting to the brand's content? Like, for instance, that you're liking a picture or like also that you follow a picture, or maybe to the comment? Or would you say it's very active? Like very active means, for instance, that you have shared created content?

**Lea** 12:29

What was the other one? Like not active, but like the first one? What was this?

**Janina Roosen** 12:32

It's that you're just consuming. So that you're consuming.

**Lea** 12:34

I'm just consuming, I would say. I'm just looking at the pictures sometimes, from time to time I would like them. But normally, I won't leave a comment or never share a picture. No.

**Janina Roosen** 12:47

Yeah. So but like, for instance, doing a hashtag under your own photo, or sharing a location like for instance, that you're like eating somewhere in a restaurant or that you like shopping in a specific store. Do you do that sometimes? Or do you tag a brand?

**Lea** 13:07

Yeah. Like eating when I'm eating I'm like mostly posting my stories like pictures from food I was cooking or I will. Or if I'm out with friends, um, I would also most of the time check the location, actually, of the restaurant. Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 13:24

But not like the location of gyms for instance, like when you're going to the gym, you wouldn't really share it?

**Lea** 13:30

No.

**Janina Roosen** 13:31

No. Okay. And do you think that there's much information on brands that is only shared on social media? So for, instance, like that if you want to look something up that you think that brand had shared only on social media? Or would you say that it's more the website, for instance?

**Lea** 13:52

Do you see me, I would like, I mean like. Do you mean like, if it's over like more than that the information is only on social media? Or also on the internet?

**Janina Roosen** 14:01

Yeah. No, just on social media.

**Lea** 14:03

Um, I would be actually a bit curious if the brand will be only on social media and wouldn't have its own website. Um because I also like to read on the website or like to google a brand if I like, like it on social media and find something on the internet about it. So yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 14:26

So in general would you consult social media networks, if you are looking for specific information of a company? Like, for instance, a product or price?

**Lea** 14:37

No.

**Janina Roosen** 14:38

You wouldn't. You would check out the website?

**Lea** 14:41

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 14:41

Yeah.

**Lea** 14:42

More like the internet.

**Janina Roosen** 14:43

And um, regarding the fitness aspect. Like if you like, for instance, your gym, have you ever checked it out on on social media on Instagram, for instance? Like when you were looking for an information or was it mainly the website then? Or just the website?

**Lea** 15:01

It only the website for checking out the prices, actually. And then about some information about the membership what included, includes or not. And, actually, I've just found my gym, because from mouth to mouth because friends have been there before. And so I knew that it's a good one. So I was like joining.

**Janina Roosen** 15:22

Yeah. Um like there's a high transparency on social media, let's assume that. And like many brands share lots of information. And would you say it makes a brand authentic? Like if it's very transparent and if it's sharing like many information?

**Lea** 15:43

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 15:44

Yeah. And would you rather react to like, would you react more to a brand that is like transparent to you and that's perceived as credible? Like is it important to you that the brand is transparent so to say?

**Lea** 16:01

Yeah, I would definitely prefer this instead of like a company who just looks for, I don't know. Lots of publicity. I like I would like yeah, I would definitely say that I just like more like, companies which are more transparent.

**Janina Roosen** 16:22

Yeah.

**Lea** 16:22

I don't know why though.

**Janina Roosen** 16:23

And that's kind of like important to you also, like when you think about reacting and engaging with a brand? I mean, you said you don't really do that. But would you say it is?

**Lea** 16:33

Yeah, I would rather interact with a company like this. Um, which is like really transparent also with like, it's like, with the company goals and what it stands for, then, like a company who's not mentioning anything of it on social media.

**Janina Roosen** 16:51

Yeah. And you said you don't really follow your gym or like other fitness lifestyle accounts. But, um, are there any online communities on social media which you feel part of? So it doesn't have to be in the fitness context but is there like anything like fashion communities or like are you a fan girl of like a band and you feel like connected to like this community? Or is not really important to you?

**Lea** 17:21

I mean, I don't follow a of any musicians or like bands on social media.

**Janina Roosen** 17:30

Or like what you can also have is that you have brands, like different brands, for instance, Nike or something and then they have kind of like online communities.

**Lea** 17:42

I have more like, um, which I recently followed is like, Mit Vergnügen. It's like a website created or like its own as from Berlin. It's a social media. I would also say things like an internet page, but it's like, um they are posting like actual themes, like or topics from Berlin, and also some recipes and fun memes and also some tips for home workouts, I would say. Um, so I don't know if it's kind of like a social community, but I would say so in kind a way it is because it's addressing to the people in Berlin.

**Janina Roosen** 18:20

And you feel kind of connected to it? Or is it just that you like it?

**Lea** 18:25

I just like it and like the pictures, and I mean, depends on what interaction is. But I just, they just posted a recipe, ut was like two days ago, and I just cooked it but I will say that, I don't know if it's interaction or not, but I would say so.

**Janina Roosen** 18:40

Yes.

**Lea** 18:40

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 18:40

Yeah. Perfect and, um to come back to, like fitness lifestyle on Instagram. So it's getting like very popular there. I'm not sure if you've noticed that but also there's different trends such as Fitspiration. So when people post something and they want to know motivate people because they are fit or to become fitter and, um, do you have kind of like an opinion regarding this trend? So, would you say it's healthy because it's motivating people and it's good to like to make everyone move a little more and more? Or do you think it's kind of like dangerous because it can create wrong body ideals? Yeah.

**Lea 19:23**

Yeah. I mean it's like I would say it's like a thin line because on the one hand I really like it that some people get motivated who would normally would stuck at home and checking out their social media like would normally not going out and maybe they get motivated by looking at those pictures and also see transformations of other people who also been for example maybe overweight it and then they see the pictures and are okay, that there. And see okay, I can see that they have achieved some weightloss. But on the other hand, I mean, um I'm also I mean I'm also talking with friends about this topic that, um, social media is also like affecting lots of younger people, I would say like teenagers, for example, because they're like mostly in their life crisis but they need to find themselves and I think it could be dangerous for them if they are, um, getting a wrong body ideal I would say. It's like has like a step follow like for example like I don't know influencer. Can I say names?

**Janina Roosen 20:32**

Yeah, sure. Yeah.

**Lea 20:32**

So, for example, the influencers like it's a German influencer, Caro Daur, and really like her style but she's really, I would say she's skinny. And she's also I was like, because I talked with a friend of mine like it was last week, about it. And she's [Caro Dauer] also doing like, home workouts now. And I don't think it's a right body image, she's transferring. Because she's very thin. And if like, for example, younger girls, or woman would see her and think, okay, I follow her like daily routine, like with nutrition and work out and become as thin as she is and I don't think it's a good thing. It's only relying on one influencer but yeah. I don't know it's a thin line. I don't really have an opinion about this because it's could be also good but also bad.

**Janina Roosen 21:30**

But in general you would say that social media can have an impact, like, with influencers, for instance?

**Lea 21:35**

Yeah. Of course it has an impact either positive or negative.

**Janina Roosen 21:37**

Yes.

**Lea 21:37**

But I hope it's more the positive because it's like with social media, you can like reach out to a lot of people and also it's quite important, which is really good. Because like in this Corona crisis now is like also good that so on social media, like Instagram, you can also interact with so many people and doing like, I saw that lots of personal trainers working in some different gyms, they are doing a home work from home. So home workouts from home. And so they reach more people than normally in the gym. So it's also a good thing.

**Janina Roosen 22:13**

Yeah, great. So but you already said that you've been talking with a friend regarding this topic. So do you experience that people like friends of yours, for instance, or people you follow are presenting themselves as like very fit or healthy on social media?

**Lea 22:32**

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen 22:33**

And do you do it yourself?

**Lea** 22:35

Um, presenting fit and healthy? Actually, I must admit, um, if I cook, for example, a healthy meal, which looks really good and delicious, I also would post it on my story.

**Janina Roosen** 22:51

Yeah.

**Lea** 22:52

But I, I mean, and from time to time from go out running and if it's like really good weather, I'll post also maybe a picture of it. But it's not like, I wouldn't say it's like, too regularly. But like, if I'm in the mood, yes. But I would say I'm mostly regarding like, posting pictures from workouts, um, I mean we're leaving the food out because I'm always posting pictures of food.

**Janina Roosen** 23:19

Yeah.

**Lea** 23:19

But like, relating to the pictures from working out, I would normally not posting them, or like posting that I'm doing workouts or I don't know.

**Janina Roosen** 23:29

Yeah. So but in general, you already said, that you're looking on that you're using Pinterest, for instance, in order to get like some inspiration. Do you also do that in terms of fitness goals you want to achieve? Or like Instagram, for instance.

**Lea** 23:46

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 23:46

Then you use it in order to get motivation, inspiration.

**Lea** 23:50

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 23:50

Yeah. So because it kind of like helps you to become more fit, healthy, for instance, when you see people who post that content?

**Lea** 24:00

Yeah, I mean, for me it is also motivating seeing people um, who did a transformation and achieved a lot of things. I mean, I'm motivated by people who, I mean, sounds mean now, but who were a bit overweighted in the past and lost weight or I mean have like a healthier lifestyle now and so therefore they have changed their habits or like I don't know changed their habits instead of, um, like a influencer who was like thin from the beginning on and just got some muscles. So those people are a bit more motivation for me.

**Janina Roosen** 24:37

Yeah.



**Lea** 24:37

And also to see because sometimes on Pinterest there's also like some pictures like 30 day challenge and like you start like for example the first day with like 10 situps and push ups and whatever. And that's also kind of the motivation to do this. So I mean 30 days in the morning, always. To achieve at the end like that you can say okay, I achieved it, I did it. I did 30 days and I'm able now to do I don't know 60 push ups or something.

**Janina Roosen** 25:06

Yeah, yeah, that's interesting. So, would you say that social media or like fitness account, for instance, of influencers who do fitness or who care about fitness, that they support you in the ideal self image of yourself? Because you already said you feel motivated from time to time?

**Lea** 25:32

I mean, I would say yes.

**Janina Roosen** 25:34

Yeah. Okay. And what are like the most important values for you like regarding being fit, for instance? Is it more that you have fun, or the interaction with friends while you go working out? Or, for instance, discipline? So, do you have like any values coming to your mind when you think about fitness and being fit?

**Lea** 25:55

Fitness and being fit is like I try. Um, I mean. Okay, I have to admit, um I don't know if it's also a thing, but um, okay, I guess like, I have like a family member who passed away of cancer and like was like, nearly two years ago. And since then, like, my mind, or like, during this time and the experience together, um, my complete mindset, I would say changed regarding nutrition. Because since then I like, I think more about healthier foods and how I'm eating and what I'm eating. And, like, for example, since then, I've tried to eat more like fresh food cooked by myself. Not eat more the already cooked meals, pre-cooked meals.

**Janina Roosen** 26:46

Yeah, pre-cooked foods. Yeah.

**Lea** 26:48

Yeah, that and then I think that changed because that's my motivation, eating healthier to prevent some illnesses.

**Janina Roosen** 26:58

Yeah, but it's not coming from.

**Lea** 27:00

And also I like to work out with friends. Normally, I go into the gym it's like I'm going by myself but mostly also with one or two friends.

**Janina Roosen** 27:09

So but like your motivation like, for instance, to eat more healthy it's not like caused by gyms or by fitness accounts?

**Lea** 27:19

No.

**Janina Roosen** 27:20

Okay, so now we are almost done, like ish. Um, but we've been talking about social media now and about gym chains on social media and you already said that you're not following your gym and that you're not following a particular gym chain on Instagram, but you have been exposed to fitness related content, you said. Right?

**Lea** 27:44

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 27:45

Okay, so and are you aware of any gyms on social media? Have you ever been in contact with like any social media accounts of gym chains, for instance? Like that you have shared a location or like that your peers have, like shared, like a post, for instance?

**Lea** 28:06

Um, of course, like from FitX because I was there like, I would say it's three years ago, a member. And then there's also because it's like those brands like McFit, because we also have it in Berlin and lots of friends are also members there. And we have also John Reed. And what is the other brand? Aspria?

**Janina Roosen** 28:28

Okay, I know that. But yeah, so you know, like many brands?

**Lea** 28:32

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 28:33

And you've seen them on Instagram, as well? Or is it just that you know these names?

**Lea** 28:40

Yeah, I mean, I've seen McFit on Instagram because there was like some advertisement popping up. And also, I wouldn't say FitX, no.

**Janina Roosen** 28:50

Yeah.

**Lea** 28:50

John Reed. Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 28:52

And what do you remember of both of these, for instance? Or is there anything you remember of the ads?

**Lea** 29:00

I, um.

**Janina Roosen** 29:03

Or is it just that you remember that that was something?

**Lea** 29:07

Um, I can't really remember what kind of content McFit but or like what the advertisement looked like. But John Reed is like posting something. It was like, I thought it was like last week I would say that they have posted something with work home workouts and then I checked out their website and Instagram page, I'm sorry.

**Janina Roosen** 29:36

Yeah.

**Lea** 29:36

Instagram page.

**Janina Roosen** 29:37

So yeah, you are like aware of like many many fitness gym chains on social media?

**Lea** 29:44

Mhm.

**Janina Roosen** 29:45

Okay. And have you made experiences with these gyms in real life already? So have you been to McFit or John Reed before?

**Lea** 29:54

Um, McFit once. Yeah. But I didn't really like it.

**Janina Roosen** 30:01

Yeah okay, but do you do you remember if you have liked the, um, social media like appearance of McFit? Because you said you've seen something? Did you like that or do you don't really remember that?

**Lea** 30:04

I don't remember actually.

**Janina Roosen** 30:16

Sure. And, um, what comes in your mind you said you don't really like McFit, for instance, but what comes to your mind when you think about this studio? So is there like any association you have with McFit?

**Lea** 30:30

Yeah, good. I mean it was. I mean, maybe it was also the studio I was going into but it was in Berlin Südkreuz a McFit. I went once with a friend and it was a large studio and it was many people were in there. But I mean, a point which I didn't really like is that they don't have any trainers in their classes.

**Janina Roosen** 30:54

Yeah.

**Lea** 30:54

And for me it's like, I like it, if you have a trainer, like in a gym class, which is looking at you and maybe telling you okay, you're doing this exercise wrong or how to do this better or put your I mean, I don't know. I mean your posture and so on.

**Janina Roosen** 31:10

Yeah. So it's mainly what do you remember of McFit?

**Lea** 31:16

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 31:17

In that example it is the studio.

**Lea** 31:19

But my studio, I have to admit, you know, they had new machines, and yeah, yeah, that's pretty good. So.

**Janina Roosen** 31:31

So would you rather say or would you rather say that it's more about the functional values when you go to a gym or is it more the emotional aspect, for instance. So is it more about that the machines are good and that like how the studio is equipped? Or is it more that you want to have kind of like a bond to the studio or to the people like because also you said, it's important to you that you, um, that that there are trainers and?

**Lea** 32:00

Yeah, um. It depends. I mean, I'd like to have trainers there but don't ask me like, I don't know. Um, because I'm also like, like that you have like new machines but it depends.

**Janina Roosen** 32:14

But, so you don't you know kind of like the people.

**Lea** 32:18

I mean it's just. Intentionally I just registered for my gym, which I'm now because they have like staff there who is like looking at you and after you in the classes they have trainers and because they have also a sauna. Yeah, it was like the main reason why I joined this gym.

**Janina Roosen** 32:40

Yeah, so in general like in terms of quality. You already said that it's important to you that there is staff so then it's like more this aspect like also in terms of quality that there's a good service and also that the studio is well equipped.

**Lea** 32:55

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 32:56

Yeah. Okay. And do you think like you said, you don't follow your gym chain on social media but you use the app. And would you say like these values are supported like on like online on social media or in the app? Do you have the same impression like that it's good that it's kind of like structured?

**Lea** 33:19

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 33:20

Yeah.

**Lea** 33:20

Because their website is very structured and they're also like mentioning their benefits and yeah, I would say so and also like I had an experience like I had like I wouldn't say it was a problem but it was like a problem with my membership and just wrote them an email and just replied within 24 hours, which is like good customer service also.

**Janina Roosen** 33:41

Yeah, okay. So and like, if you're thinking about your membership, would you describe yourself as a loyal customer to your to your gym? Or is it rather that you say, it's like you did it because because of the location? Or because of the price? So you would switch the studio as well?

**Lea** 34:03

Um, I'm actually I'm not a loyal customer.

**Janina Roosen** 34:11

But I mean loyal in terms of that you would also consider to sign up for a different studio if it was cheaper, for instance, or it was closer to your home or something better quality?

**Lea** 34:23

Um, yeah, I would say so.

**Janina Roosen** 34:26

So you're not loyal?

**Lea** 34:28

No, I'm not loyal.

**Janina Roosen** 34:30

Perfect. So then we can jump over to the last part of the interview. I've been asking you to check out the Instagram account of John Reed before our interview, and thus, I would like to know have you or like did you know John Reed before the interview already, or is it kind of like a new thing you've never heard before?

**Lea** 34:55

I know or heard about the brand before.

**Janina Roosen** 34:59

Yeah. I'm also sad that you have seen like an ad or something last week?

**Lea** 35:05

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 35:06

Yeah.

**Lea** 35:06

But I've never been in a gym of John Reed or, um, I mean, I have a few friends who are members of John Reed, I would say.

**Janina Roosen** 35:17

Yeah.

**Lea** 35:18

But never really heard of them.

**Janina Roosen** 35:21

Okay. So but just for you as a short introduction, like even though you know, John Reed. It's a German gym chain and has approximately 26 gyms worldwide. And further openings are planned in the close future. And they say like, they are acting in the premium discount segment of gyms and they also belong to the RSG group. And they RSG group is the owner of many fitness related brands such as Cyberobics for instance, I'm not sure if you know that that's kind of like online, virtual classes, and then they have like, different other gym chains such as McFit, for instance. Um, but you said you've seen an ad on Instagram, but you don't follow John Reed on Instagram, I assume?

**Lea** 36:11

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 36:13

And you said that some of your friends are members of John Reed? So you are kind of aware of John Reed in general?

**Lea** 36:23

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 36:24

Okay. And like now you've seen the profile or like the account or like on Instagram. Is there anything you remember? Like what you remember in particular? Like, is there anything coming to your mind?

**Lea** 36:37

Um, yeah, and I think about their daily story today and it was actually, I mean, because of the actual like circumstances it was very good because they were also mentioning like in the story that there's like a live workout in the evening with a, I would say, not quite unfamous, um, instructor?

**Janina Roosen** 37:03

Instructor.

**Lea** 37:04

Instructor, yeah, thank you. And, um, also they were giving tips for, um, for home workouts and also their recent posts are also mainly about how you work it, or what can you do at home for what kind of different workouts. And this is what I really like, but also, um, their pictures are, I would say kind of a bit dark. Like I have, I don't know if it's like a filter or something, but it's like a bit dark, which is, I mean, depends on maybe the person who looks at this but it's not really my kind of style of pictures I really like.

**Janina Roosen** 37:45

Yeah, so it's too dark you are saying.

**Lea** 37:47

Yeah, I would say so. Yeah, it's like, because with dark pictures, I don't, I mean, I, um.

**Janina Roosen** 37:53

It's not that appealing to you?

**Lea** 37:55

Yeah. It's also like also has not a negative effect but it's like also like, how is it called? Impact? Impact. Kind of like a negative impact.

**Janina Roosen** 38:04

Yeah, sure. So but you said, for instance, the story today was interesting because yeah.

**Lea** 38:08

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 38:09

Okay. And, um, also you said that you have realized, that it's kind of like a very dark appearance of the overall account?

**Lea** 38:19

I mean it's just like, I have just checked like this site out for like, yeah, like less than five minutes. But it was like the first thing I saw. But also I have seen that they have like lots of highlights, different highlights for different purposes like for home workouts.

**Janina Roosen** 38:22

Story highlights?

**Lea** 38:33

For muscle training. Yeah, story highlights. Um, this is also good because you can like if you check out the site and you're like, okay, I'm gonna do like muscle training today. You can go to their story highlights to the home work, home workout section, so it's also good.

**Janina Roosen** 38:52

Yeah. So it is like, are there any attribute, attributes you would associate with the brand so, for instance, like that it's, I don't know, boring or cool or urban, astetic? Is there anything coming to your mind when you think about the brand itself?

**Lea** 39:09

Well I would say it's urban and kind of a young brand. Um, because also on the side there are mostly people our age, like I would say, mid 20s, early 30s and I was, oh that's also like a positive thing. I saw a picture in a way like some few pictures they posted recently with a woman with normal weight like like normal looking not very skinny, not really trained or toned. It's like, also positive thing because I would more identify with a woman like this instead of like a really trained or I would say with a really trained muscle woman. Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 39:54

So their slogan or the slogan of John Reed is not your average gym. Have you seen that? That's their slogan?

**Lea** 40:06

Um no, but maybe I just overread it on there.

**Janina Roosen** 40:08

Yeah. But would you say like, they are kind of like I'm not sure if you've read that but they described themselves as a fitness music club. So they have a live DJ twice a week in every studio. And they have also like very big focus on music in their clubs. So it's like more about this whole music aspect as well and like the lifestyle of the brand. Um, would you say that the slogan not your average gym is covering the graphic impression now you know, that it's more also a lifestyle music club?

**Lea** 40:47

I would say so because it also includes, I mean, like, I would just, I can just talk about myself but I would enjoy going to the gym where is like a live DJ. Because it's different. I don't know this yet, or I haven't experienced that yet. But also, I think a community can grow within this. Like, if you have like, you can also meet people there like, become friends and I think it's a very different gym, it's not like a daily gym you go.

**Janina Roosen** 41:20

Yes.

**Lea** 41:21

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 41:22

Yeah, nice. Um, so but in general. Now you've seen like pictures of the studio itself of the people who are working out there. Um, what would you say about John Reed's quality like as a gym? I know you've never been there before before. But is there something you are thinking about the whole kind of like quality, maybe that it's modern, or like classy the style, high quality, low quality, whatever?

**Lea** 41:51

I would say for the price range, because I know it's like, I would say it's like, I don't know. It's like 25 Euros per month or something like this, right?

**Janina Roosen** 41:59

Yeah. They have different offers but yeah, I think the lowest one or like the cheapest one.

**Lea** 42:05

Yeah, I would say, um, because within that price range it's like really good gym because they offer much like with the DJ, the dance classes or that they have like different segments and also they are addressing different customer groups I would say because if they're doing like advertisement for different people it's an appealing gym, it's like a young, a modern gym and also very urban.

**Janina Roosen** 42:36

Yeah.

**Lea** 42:36

It's like, um, I would say it reaches out to the people and it's not like too classy, so yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 42:42

Yeah, nice. So um, before you said that, for instance, good service and the good or well equipped studio is kind of like a decision decision criteria for you to become a loyal brand or like a loyal gym customer. And now you've seen like, the Instagram performance or presence of John Reed, would you say that John Reed is



communicating these values? And would you consider to become a loyal or like not like a loyal but a member of John Reed? Due to what they present on social media?

**Lea** 43:22

Actually, after you told me that they're doing those live DJ sessions and classes, um, I would consider if they would have a gym in my area. But I know they don't have it. So honestly, I would stay with my gym now for the moment, but if they would open up a gym, like for example, in Charlottenburg, yeah, I would definitely consider going there.

**Janina Roosen** 43:50

Yeah. So but I'm like to come back to the social media performance. You said you think it's too dark, like the whole style of the Instagram account, but you would still consider to become a member?

**Lea** 44:07

Yeah. I guess maybe it's their style like maybe it's that they try it with this I mean, it's maybe like just the filter but try maybe to be like really urban, modern, um, attractive also maybe with the dark pictures. Sexy to try to appeal I don't know which kind of groups but it's just only my opinion for the pictures maybe other people like it the style. And I would also like thing or like really my opinion a lots of male or the male group will mostly like to kind of style of the pictures.

**Janina Roosen** 44:39

Yeah. So great. Thank you very much. Actually, that was the last question. And thank you very much for the interview. And um, do you have any further questions?

**Lea** 44:51

No.

**Janina Roosen** 44:52

No? Okay. Then I will stop recording the interview now. Thank you very much again.

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## **Interview 9: Hannah**

Thu, 4/2 10:35AM • 39:15

### **Speakers**

Hannah, Janina Roosen

**Janina Roosen** 00:01

Hello, Hannah, and thank you for taking the time. Could you give us a short introduction on yourself like your age, your name, your profession, and where you live, for instance, and your hobbies.

**Hannah** 00:12

Um, I'm 24. I study and live in Copenhagen, and I study marketing, and I work in a digital marketing agency. And I'm originally from Germany.

**Janina Roosen** 00:29

And what do you like to do in your free time? So do you have any hobbies?

**Hannah** 00:34

Um, I like to socialize. I like to go to the gym. I like to go running and just basically hang out with my friends, go to the city center. Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 00:52

Great. So you already said that you like to go running and to the gym. So do you have kind of like any fitness routines or methods what do you what do you do in order to keep yourself fit? So you said you go to the gym and you go running, but how is that? Like, how do you do that during the week? So is there a routine?

**Hannah** 01:12

Um it's more, I try to do it as much as possible. So it's kind of like trying to do it, like five days a week, maybe. And then because I'm busy on weekdays, I do it either early in the morning, or in the evening, usually. And then on the weekend, it's random kinda. And usually, I go to the gym and I usually do some cardio workout. And some, like time by time maybe once or twice a week, other stuff with weights or stretching or anything and then I also go to classes. Um if it fits in my schedule. And yeah, and I go running if the weather's nice.

**Janina Roosen** 02:08

Yeah. But that's already a lot. So would you say that cat like fitness and working out has an influence on your on your life like maybe on your health on your mental health or for your success for feeling successful?

**Hannah** 02:25

I feel like it definitely helps you with feeling better with being able to concentrate better, because you're just a bit more balanced, I guess. And then yeah, I just feel like I feel better when I workout more. And it does indeed help me with concentrating as well. But sometimes, I mean, I also get stressed if I feel like I need to work out and I don't have time. So that also goes the other way around. I guess.

**Janina Roosen** 02:59

Okay. So, um, you know that our master thesis is about fitness and social media. So now we're coming to the social media part, um, how important is social media in your life? Like, on a scale from one to 10? Would you say, has a very big influence or it's very important? Or is it not that important? So?

**Hannah** 03:24

I would say for me personally, it's not that important. I use it. I look at what other people are posting, but I'm not really the person who posts herself like I use Facebook and I use Instagram and WhatsApp but I don't really post a lot of stuff anymore, or, like in the last couple of years.

**Janina Roosen** 03:53

So actually, that was kind of like detailed. So you wouldn't describe yourself as a heavy user like more like?

**Hannah** 04:00

No on a scale from one to 10, maybe? I don't know, a three?

**Janina Roosen** 04:06

Okay, so and, and does social media have any influence on your communication with companies and brands? So have you ever contacted a brand via social media? Or do you have any communication or interaction with brands or companies on social media?

**Hannah** 04:25

I mean, I have contact the brands on social media when I had a question.

**Janina Roosen** 04:32

What social media network was that? Or where did you do that?

**Hannah** 04:36

Facebook? Because they have these, you know, online customer service on Facebook now, so I've done that a couple of times. But not too often, I guess, and then, well, obviously, LinkedIn.

**Janina Roosen** 04:54

So you would use it for communication with companies or brands as well or like you would come consider to use it?

**Hannah** 05:00

Yeah. I mean, I would usually probably use email. But nowadays, it's just so easy with the messenger. So if I just have a quick question, I might as well just text them there because I feel like that's just more convenient and writing an email and waiting for a response for quite some time.

**Janina Roosen** 05:19

Yeah. Yeah, it's very, very helpful. That's true. And you said you go to the gym so that means you have a gym membership. Maybe?

**Hannah** 05:28

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 05:28

Yeah. And do you follow your your gym on social media or like on Instagram you said or LinkedIn?

**Hannah** 05:36

Um, no. I mean, I use their website mostly and see what's going on there and like, what classes they have and what news they have, but I do not follow them on social media.

**Janina Roosen** 05:51

But do you follow any other gym chains or fitness brands on social media and like when I'm saying fitness brands, it's like for us it's fitness studios as well fitness influencers who act like entrepreneurs and sell their own workout programs, for instance. So there's like quite some influencers.

**Hannah** 06:09

I mean I've followed or I do follow influencers who do upload workouts time by time. But I don't believe that they have sold anything, but they do upload their like home workouts and stuff so you can look at them. But I also do not follow any fitness chains, but I do follow like sports brands and such.

**Janina Roosen** 06:40

Yeah, so like, as you said, it's more influencers who upload their workout routines from time to time, but it's not necessarily necessarily fitness influencers?

**Hannah** 06:51

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 06:52

Okay, so but would you say like you don't follow your gym chain and you don't really follow like other fitness brands, would you say that fitness content or like content on social media of gym chains is relevant or interesting to you at all? Or is it just not playing a big role in your life?

**Hannah** 07:14

I think it's more. For me, it's more interesting what they offer on their website, because then I can specifically search for what I want to know or what I'm looking for, anyway. And if I'm following them on social media, it's mostly just content that's coming to me, but nothing that I'm looking for. So I'd rather go on their website and check it out, there then just get their daily updates.

**Janina Roosen** 07:46

Yeah. So now you already said you would rather check the website instead of the social media. So when we talked or like talking about like your engagement with a brand on social media as a consumer, you as a consumer, um, so you would say that it's rather passive as well? Because you're only consuming like their content and would check out the website for specific information or for texting them, for instance? Or would you say it's a bit more active so that you react, react and that you maybe like or follow or comment something or maybe even more active so that you have kind of like generated content already on social media, as a consumer?

**Hannah** 08:01

Um, I think for me, it's only the liking part that I do when I see something that I think is interesting, or maybe if there's something like, kinda extraordinary, I mean, something that I think is really interesting or like when for example, your gym had a renovation and it looks very nice now or something, then I might send it to a friend but probably a direct message and not even like comment.

**Janina Roosen** 09:03

Not sharing it or something?

**Hannah** 09:05

No.

**Janina Roosen** 09:05

So but have you shared your location like maybe once or something or that you added a hashtag like when you posted a photo? Or like in your story, like maybe on Instagram, so then you have, like, tack the location that you're in the gym or something? Or do you usually not do that?

**Hannah** 09:25

I mean, I did it generally but not related to the gym.

**Janina Roosen** 09:30

Yeah, yeah. So and you already said that you like for information, you go on Facebook, for instance, like for finding some information. But would you say that there's much information of brands like gym brands, fitness brands and gyms, on social media, or would you say it's rather on the website?

**Hannah** 09:53

I think there is definitely some information like on Instagram you can it's more like the visual information, I'd say because you can look at how the studios look, and maybe they also upload short videos of their workouts or something. So you can have a look at that. And also have like the trainers look nice and sympathetic. And I think Instagram is very much about the kind of visual aspect and then Facebook, there's a bit more information, I'd

say, because at least you have this like about us section. And, obviously, they also post like any news there, but if I really want information, I'd go to the website.

**Janina Roosen** 10:42

Yeah. But already, like you said before that you send like brands, for instance, on Facebook a message like when you had a question or like when there was something like a complaint or something. Um, so you would consult social media networks for like getting information for communicating?

**Hannah** 11:03

yeah, I think it's a very easy and convenient way to get in touch with companies. If it's just something minor, then I think it's a very good way, easy way. And they usually are also pretty fast with responding as a guest or someone. Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 11:22

So maybe faster than writing an email?

**Hannah** 11:26

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 11:27

So and um, like, when we talk about interacting with brands on social media, would you say that there's, like, fitness brands are something who are like what you perceive as a person who are acting as a person? Or would you say that it's like, kind of obvious that it's a company? Or is there like, also some personal like accounts, even though it's a brand so but you would say that it's acting like a person, so to say?

**Hannah** 11:56

I mean, I feel like for like fitness chains, I perceive them very much as a company because they kinda obviously they have some kind of personality. But as they're all about, or a lot of them are about promoting community it's kinda, at least to me, I feel like it's obvious that it's not a person but it does have definitely a personality and all of them obviously have the overall same mission or like, similar but not. But they are still kinda different from each other. Like some might be more feminine or more soft or yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 12:45

Yeah, great. And does it have an impact on your opinion of like of a brand when you see how they communicate with other customers. Like if you can see on on Instagram, for instance, you can see if they reply to comments or if they like, for instance, pictures of consumers or to share pictures. Would you say that has an influence on your, like attitude towards the specific brand?

**Hannah** 13:14

Yeah, I mean, I haven't seen anything that like any brands have liked pictures of consumers except for influencers, but I always feel like it's very positive when brands respond to comments, actually. Because it feels like they care about their customer satisfaction. And I think that's a like that's very positive. So I get a more positive impression of the brand.

**Janina Roosen** 13:42

Great. And so I mean, social media. It's kind of like, like a critical topic because people can fake a lot. And it's like, not that transparent. But would you say that you would rather like that you rather react to content on social media that you perceive as credible. Is that important to you as well? Like that it's by a brand that is more transparent maybe?

**Hannah** 14:10

Yeah, I think. Yeah, I think that definitely plays a role. Also with like, all these collaborations, some of them like with influencers, some of them seem more credible and as if the person really likes to brand and would want to engage with it and others seem more, like solidly paid.

**Janina Roosen** 14:32

Hmm.

**Hannah** 14:33

And not really, you know, a match.

**Janina Roosen** 14:36

Yeah.

**Hannah** 14:37

So then I always feel like it's kind of very superficial and kinda trying to pretend which doesn't, you know, give me the best impression of the brand then but if it's a person who fits very well with the brand image and if you feel like they've already used or liked or whatever the brand they uploaded a picture or something, then I think it's usually a good thing and if the influencer is such as likable, obviously.

**Janina Roosen** 15:10

Yeah, yeah. But you already mentioned like communities like what fitness brands or gym chains have? Um, do you feel part of one of these online communities? So it can be in the fitness context, but also like maybe a fashion brand. Do you have like any online communities where you feel part of? Or is it not really influencing you like what kind of communities they have, like, for instance, fashion brands or something?

**Hannah** 15:40

Um, no, I think I'm not too much influenced maybe. I think I'm definitely in some like Facebook groups of topics, which I thought made sense, but it's not really like I don't really take part in any brand communities like I'd rather sign up for newsletters or I don't know, talk to my friends about it. If they like the same brand rather than being part of online brand communities. Also because I'm probably not an active user. So that makes a difference, I guess.

**Janina Roosen** 16:18

Yeah, sure. So and yeah, I said some things regarding transparency on social media. And like, also regarding this to fake things side of these networks, there's a trend called fitspiration, for instance, I'm not sure if you know that. So it's like more that people post something who looked like very fit in order to motivate like other people because they are going to the gym quite often or whatever. So and just in general, there are like many fitness lifestyles, what you can see on Instagram, or like social media in general. So do you have an opinion? Do you think it's healthy because it can help people to work out more or to become fit or healthy. Or would you say it can also be dangerous maybe because people are creating wrong body ideals or beauty standards. So.

**Hannah** 17:16

I think it's kind of both ways because there are definitely people who do look like they work out a lot and but they also look healthy and they look like they're also enjoying it. So then I think it's very nice to see that and it also motivates you and you can think like, oh, maybe I can look like this as well or I can enjoy it as well. But then there's other people who are like, especially girls when they're very, very skinny. Then you obviously see their muscles a lot and I feel like that's very, it's just wrong to give people the impression if they are not, for

example, that skinny then they would look the same because they're not going to and they're probably never going to. But I think like promoting this healthy fit, like image and lifestyle of yourself is very nice and very motivating.

**Janina Roosen** 18:26

Yeah.

**Hannah** 18:26

It's just it shouldn't go too far.

**Janina Roosen** 18:28

So you say it depends on the context. So to say?

**Hannah** 18:32

I think it depends very much on the person.

**Janina Roosen** 18:34

Yeah.

**Hannah** 18:34

The person as such like, if they actually look like, you know, a normal person who goes to the gym a lot, or if they're really like, if it's, if you feel like you could reach that picture, then I think it's positive but if you're never gonna reach, no matter how much you work out anyways. I think it's not very helpful to promote it to people.

**Janina Roosen** 19:02

Yeah. So but would you say you do it yourself like to present yourself as very fit or something on social media? Or is it not playing like a role in your life on your social media?

**Hannah** 19:16

No for me, because I'm not really yeah, the active user. So I don't really post anything about working out or.

**Janina Roosen** 19:27

But do you experience that because you already said that some girls or some, like people who post pictures or they look like very skinny. So do you have like, do you know people or do you follow people who try to present themselves very healthy and fit?

**Hannah** 19:43

Yeah, I mean, I have some friends who post a lot of how they're working out. But I mean, if you feel like you need to do that, I don't know. It's also fine. And then I know there's also like online communities and where you can tag other people and I don't know, there's a lot of people who are posting about working out actually in their Instagram stories, for example.

**Janina Roosen** 20:11

But you also said that it's kind of like motivating you to reach a certain fitness goal or that it can be helpful and support that?

**Hannah** 20:21

Yeah. I feel like it's, it can go both ways. Sometimes I feel like it's a bit annoying.

**Janina Roosen** 20:28

Yeah.

**Hannah** 20:29

But sometimes I also feel like Oh, if I see it, then I'm like, oh, maybe I could also, you know, go running or do whatever. So for me, it can go both ways.

**Janina Roosen** 20:40

Yeah. But you already said that it's that you like to do that you like to work out because it helps you to feel better like your mental health. Um, what is important values regarding fitness and being fit for you like is it more discipline, for instance, or having fun or the interaction like if you're going to a class for instance. So do you have like any important values from regarding fitness and being fit?

**Hannah** 21:10

I think for me, probably like personally most important is the discipline that you need to kind of keep it going almost every day and but just also keeping in mind that it keeps you healthy and makes you feel better. Both because just because you work out as such, but also because you look more like you imagine yourself how you want and then also, this definitely the mental health part and it just balances you. And that it gives you something else besides studying or working which is very good, I think.

**Janina Roosen** 22:00

So what you just said that it helps you to look like you would like to look like so to say. So like your gym is helping and supporting you to become the ideal version of yourself or would you say that it has any influence on that?

**Hannah** 22:18

I mean, I think a gym is definitely one of the means to come to your goal kinda, to reach your goal of looking and feeling the way you wanted to do. But obviously, I mean it's still yourself who has to go and has to motivate yourself and that gym doesn't really makes it easier though, it just facilitating you to have an easier workout and go there and maybe also, you know, watch a series or something while working out. So it's not, it doesn't really feel like working out rather than when you do it at home, where you actually only usually only focus on that. But with all these machines it's just very easy and you just get into your routine and you just go there and then you're done and go home again. And it kinda, it feels less of an effort and doing it at home, I feel like.

**Janina Roosen** 23:22

Okay, interesting. So now we'll jump over to the second big part of our interview. So it's regarding gyms again. Um, you said you are a gym member but have you been exposed to your gym chain on social media? Or like before? I mean, you said you don't follow your gym chain, or like you're not an active follower. But still have you seen it on Instagram already? Or before?

**Hannah** 23:52

I think I've gotten ads. But I haven't. Like I haven't followed them. I think maybe I've check their profile once or so but.

**Janina Roosen** 24:02

But have you seen like some other gym chains for instance? Like, for instance, because friends have shared their location or like they did a hashtag or tagged maybe the brand. Have you seen that before on social media?



**Hannah** 24:16

Yeah, definitely. Like also like friends but also like influencers.

**Janina Roosen** 24:21

And do you remember anything in particular? Like or was it just that you remember that it's like they're in the gym?

**Hannah** 24:28

Like what they posted or which brand?

**Janina Roosen** 24:31

Yeah. Like just what you what you know or remember.

**Hannah** 24:35

I mean, I think it's a lot of the times it's just people who go work out and upload it in their stories and then it's usually a picture of them in the mirror and a picture of them going to the gym or something. And then I feel like it's more of the stories than the you know, actual posts.

**Janina Roosen** 24:59

Yes.

**Hannah** 25:00

That they do about going to the gym. But that I mean, you see a lot.

**Janina Roosen** 25:04

Yeah. And um like, even though you're not following your gym. What comes in your mind when you when you think about it, so do you have like any associations with the your gym?

**Hannah** 25:21

Um, I mean, the gym as such, it's not very high priced, but it's like decent. And so I kind of feel like it's a very, it's kind of like a basic, I don't know, basic personality, I would say like that. And I think, for me, it offers everything that I need. And I know that if I have questions, they're gonna be, you know, available and reliable and I feel like also if I have an issue that they would try to deal with it. So that's very nice. I kind of feel like they're pretty reliable.

**Janina Roosen** 26:13

Yeah.

**Hannah** 26:13

As such and.

**Janina Roosen** 26:14

So it's like, mostly regarding the studio itself, and maybe the staff, the people, that it's good service.

**Hannah** 26:22

Yeah. Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 26:24

But you already said that you have the feeling that it has, that your studio has everything what do you need to it's more like regarding the functional values for you? Or do you have kind of an emotional bond to your to your gym as well?

**Hannah** 26:40

And I think this is also more regarding the like, the emotional part is more the reliability part that I know they're there when I need it kinda and I know that it's helping me it's kind of like a supportive function that it has for me, so um.

**Janina Roosen** 27:03

Yeah.

**Hannah** 27:03

So it's kind of like I don't know, kind of like a friend who's there when you need it. And you can go there but you don't, you know, you don't have to and I don't have like a strong emotional attachment. I mean something definitely.

**Janina Roosen** 27:22

Okay. So but would you describe yourself as a loyal customer to your gym?

**Hannah** 27:26

Yeah, definitely.

**Janina Roosen** 27:27

So you would not change or like switch gyms if there was one closer to your home or cheaper or?

**Hannah** 27:36

I mean, I think that I would definitely consider it. Which might be due to me also not being that big part of a community. But also now I'm very used to the gym as such. And I also like that once you get accustomed with everything there how it looks In the different studios are and how everything works with booking classes and whatever. So I kind of feel like there is, it feels like there is switching costs even though they maybe aren't. But I mean, for example, if I don't know if a gym would really be very much closer to my home, I think I could imagine.

**Janina Roosen** 28:26

So for you it would be regarding, like, the location to like what is very important kind of like a decision decision criteria to switch gyms, for instance, or is it the price?

**Hannah** 28:41

I think it's, it's both the price and the location and then obviously, you also look for who goes there? But then I'm also a person who goes alone.

**Janina Roosen** 28:53

Like, you mean friends?

**Hannah** 28:54

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 28:54

Okay.

**Hannah** 28:54

If it's like friends, who you could go work out with but then also in the last two years, I've mostly worked out by myself. And that's going pretty well for me. So I think, yeah, the location is definitely the biggest factor for me and then the price and then if they also like how many classes they have.

**Janina Roosen** 29:19

Mhm, okay, great. So now we are like almost done and I've been asking you to check out John Reed on Instagram before and to get familiar with the content of their Instagram account. And now I have a question: Did you know John Reed before?

**Hannah** 29:39

No, I've heard the name before but I didn't really know it before.

**Janina Roosen** 29:43

Okay. So um, so just for you as an explanation, John Reed is a German gym chain, and they have approximately 26 gyms worldwide and further openings are planned and the close future like all not just in Germany, but also in London or in Spain so they are kind of like very international and also in the US. And they are like acting in the premium discount segment and belong to the RSG group and the RSG group they own like different fitness related brands, for instance, Cyberobics. It's an online online class program, but also other gyms such as McFit and yeah, you said you've heard the name before but you obviously don't follow John Reed on Instagram, right?

**Hannah** 30:34

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 30:35

Yeah. Um, so but what do you remember from just like having a look at the at the profile on Instagram? Is there anything what stuck in your head? What was your first impression of the pictures of the account? Like the overall account?

**Hannah** 30:50

I felt like it looked pretty like urban. Maybe. As such with the whole like, light game that they use. And then I thought it was nice that there were also a lot of women on the profile actually. And it also felt like they kind of promote their, um, employees they post pictures of them as well. Yeah, that's kind of nice.

**Janina Roosen** 31:25

So you liked them and what do you what do you saw like that they post women and the color scheme? Or was it was, was there something you didn't really like?

**Hannah** 31:35

I mean, as such, I think it was a nice profile, but it didn't feel like they posted like those everyday pictures of you know, it kind of felt like it was very planned, what they posted like if they really planned the pictures, and I mean, obviously they have pictures of people working out but it doesn't look like they're really at the gym, working out for an hour, and then the picture gets taken, but it looks like they sit down on a machine and then they take the picture. Um, but still, I mean, like the picture of the employees for example, I thought was very nice.

**Janina Roosen** 32:15

Yeah. So and you already said and you find it quite urban so that like the studio itself looked urban. Are there any other attributes what you would associate with the brand? So what would you say does the brand embody?

**Hannah** 32:32

I feel like it looks like a very yeah, like urban, really like cool brand kinda. More like relaxed people not in terms of working out obviously but just in terms of their general mindset and that's kind of what I felt like.

**Janina Roosen** 32:53

Yeah, um very good. So I'm not sure have you seen that slogan which is not your average gym? Have you seen that?

**Hannah** 33:01

No.

**Janina Roosen** 33:02

Okay. So because their slogan the official slogan is not your average gym, and they also describe themselves as a fitness music club, so it's not just about the fitness aspect, but also about the music because they have a DJ, like playing twice a week live in every studio. So they have like 26 Studios right now, I think. And so an average studio, they have a DJ like twice a week, and it's like very important for them that it's also just like kind of like a club atmosphere. Would you say that the graphic impression that it covers the slogan? So would you say it's matching with what you see and then kind of like their slogan?

**Hannah** 33:47

I mean, I think it does look a bit different than like the other gyms that I've known from Germany maybe. But also my former gym in Germany had kind of similar concept with also having music there twice a week. So and so I kind of felt like this was a bit similar to 711 but yeah compared to I don't know Fitness First or McFit or whatever there is I think it does look different because it does look a bit more urban and it does look a bit more stylish kinda but still like a chill atmosphere not very like Fitness First is very classy and bright but more like, yeah, more like, chill people, I guess.

**Janina Roosen** 34:50

Yeah. That's very interesting and, um if I'm asking you regarding the perceived quality. So what would you say to I think it's possible to say something regarding the quality is like good quality, or maybe a modern style? Also you said it's like a cool style, but just like what comes in your mind when you hear quality? Is there like coming something to your mind?

**Hannah** 35:15

I think it's kind of like the upper middle class maybe quality if because obviously, I don't know. So I wouldn't perceive it as the highest quality gym. But I also would think that the quality is like, good? So it's more like, above average, maybe? Not too bad, but also not the best you could have.

**Janina Roosen** 35:44

Yeah. So and before you just you mentioned that the decision decision factors, such as location and price, and also the people are relevant to you in order to become a loyal customer. Um, would you say that John Reed is communicating these values on Instagram? I mean, sure location is kind of like, difficult right now, but you said that there's like lots of content regarding people who work out there and regarding, like the coolness, so? Would you say that is enough for you to become a customer at least?

**Hannah** 36:22

For me personally not, but I think it's because I very much care about the functional aspects of gyms rather than the emotional aspects and the image that they promote. Um, so for me, it doesn't really make a difference rather than, I mean getting a good or bad first impression. So that might have an impact. But then after I would still, you know, go to the website and check out their locations and everything which they at least from my short view that I had, it didn't look like they promoted that on the account.

**Janina Roosen** 37:07

Yeah. So and now I can tell you the price. So they have different price levels, so to say, and the cheapest one is 25 euros a month and then they like what they can go to one gym and then they have the next package, which is like 35 euros, I think. And then you can go to every gym and you can bring friends I think once a month or something on the weekend. And then they have like another package and it's like 45 euros. So if you like now you know the prize, what do you consider to to, like, have a look? Or is that kind of like decision criteria? So that you consider it even more? I mean, not that they have it in Denmark but if there was one close to your home, for instance?

**Hannah** 37:55

Yeah, I mean if I would still live in Germany then I think I would definitely consider it because it's actually the same the 35 euros that I used to pay for my gym in Germany as well. Which also was very similar to John Reed, I guess. Which I think is because I think it's a reasonable price for being able to go to all the studios, have classes if they do?

**Janina Roosen** 38:25

Yeah.

**Hannah** 38:25

I think they do. Yeah? And, you know, have a proper gym where you feel like it's hygienic and it also looks kinda nice. So you like to go there as such. But it's also not obviously the highest class gym with a lot of wellness or whatever.

**Janina Roosen** 38:50

Actually, they have saunas. Like, at least I have plans to deals with saunas, like which they will open in this in the future but yeah, that's, um, very interesting. So actually, this was the last question of the interview. So thank you very much for the interview. And do you have any further questions?

**Hannah** 39:11

No, I think it's

**Janina Roosen** 39:13

No? Okay. Thank you.

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**Interview 10: Andreas**

Sun, 4/5 1:35PM • 44:06

## Speakers

Andreas, Janina Roosen

**Janina Roosen** 00:01

So hello, and thank you very much for taking the time for our little interview today. Um, could you first give me a short introduction on yourself like your name, your age, your profession, your place of living and your hobbies?

**Andreas** 00:16

Okay, Hello. My name is Andreas, I'm 28 years old. I am a student or like a current master student and applying for master universities and yeah, I'm living in a suburb area close to Cologne.

**Janina Roosen** 00:35

So in Germany and what are your hobbies?

**Andreas** 00:39

My hobbies like sports related or general?

**Janina Roosen** 00:44

No, in general. Like what you like to do.

**Andreas** 00:46

Yeah, of course, like doing sports, I'm playing basketball, but I'm going often to the gym, and other hobbies are like typical like meeting friends or traveling.

**Janina Roosen** 01:00

That's nice. Thank you for your introduction. So um, you know that our topic for the interview today is like regarding fitness and social media so my first question regarding that topic is how do you keep yourself fit? So do you have any methods do you have a routine you are you said that you like to go to the gym and that you're playing basketball? But do you have a specific routine? Or is it just like, depending on your mood? Could you tell us some more about that?

**Andreas** 01:33

So, um, with the basketball especially for my like, four years ago I played at the university team or played in when I when I was younger, in the club. So it was like two times a week and then at the weekend was always the game. At the moment it is not this case. But on the other hand, I'm going to the gym like at least five times a week or I'm trying to do sports five times a week and yeah and on this case I would say that at the moment I only go to the gym.

**Janina Roosen** 02:12

So and would do you say that like going to the gym, in your case, that it has any influence on your life? And that fitness overall has an influence like yeah as I said on your life or on your success or mental health or your health? Can you feel any influence?

**Andreas** 02:30

Yes. The three points that you named have a big influence of my daily life because one point is that I need sport or going to the gym to yeah, after a long day when my head is full and I worked a lot or study a lot, I need sometimes the sport to keep my mind yeah, to clean.

**Janina Roosen** 02:58

To clear your mind?

**Andreas** 02:58

Yeah, to clear my mind, actually. And on the one hand, it makes me mentally fit because when I try to achieve the goals in the gym, on the other hand, I try to reach my personal life goals. And this is on one hand, or this is like a really good balance for me to figure out to reach my goals and to get mentally health and mentally strong.

**Janina Roosen** 03:23

Yeah, that's super interesting. So, it has quite a big influence.

**Andreas** 03:28

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 03:28

On how you feel. So and regarding social media, would you say that it has a big influence on your life too? So how important is social media in your life from a scale of one to 10? If 10 is like, very like it has very high importance and one is like a very low importance?

**Andreas** 03:50

When, I'm when comparing my social media behavior, I would say that in the last year, it was quiet high. I would say like a seven, but over the last year, it has decreased. So I would say at the moment is like a five.

**Janina Roosen** 04:10

So but it has still kind of like an influence.

**Andreas** 04:12

Yes, there is still kind of an influence. I'm daily on Instagram, or on Snapchat, on Facebook, to check up some things, some news, or some new posts, but not in this frequency, like, one year ago.

**Janina Roosen** 04:29

Okay. And so I guess you wouldn't define yourself as a heavy social media user?

**Andreas** 04:36

No, I wouldn't define myself as a heavy user.

**Janina Roosen** 04:38

So and you already mentioned that you use Snapchat and Facebook and Instagram. Are there any other social networks you're using? Or is that like the, the most used one, so to say?

**Andreas** 04:51

No, it is like these three mainly. The other one like Tick Tock or what it is I don't like it.

**Janina Roosen** 04:58

Okay. And which one do you use the most?

**Andreas** 05:04

Like time wise or how often a day you mean?

**Janina Roosen** 05:08

Um no, just like in general like what's the one you're using the most?

**Andreas** 05:12

Yeah, then I'd say it's Instagram.

**Janina Roosen** 05:15

Okay, great so and um you already said that you're going to the gym. Do you follow your gym chain on social media?

**Andreas** 05:26

No, actually not.

**Janina Roosen** 05:27

Okay.

**Andreas** 05:29

I got my gym exercises or my gym exercise plan actually when I'm looking it up at the internet for for specific plans. Um, YouTube is sometimes a big help I have to say because at YouTube you find a lot of good exercise tutorials where you can see how some exercising and how you are doing it correctly and this is this kind of a good overview that I have for myself when I consider social media and gym together. And when I when I'm comparing it to Instagram, I've not so often used or I don't see it, or, well, um.

**Janina Roosen** 06:24

You can say it in German as well.

**Andreas** 06:26

No, no no it's like I don't, recognize so much actually. I don't take care on the social media Instagram sites because for me it's like a big promotion. Especially when when I'm looking at all these Instagram gym models. For me it's always the same content, and it's quite boring. So I don't, yeah, I don't, I don't recognize and like it so much.

**Janina Roosen** 06:58

Okay. So you don't follow your gym chain on Instagram?

**Andreas** 07:04

No.

**Janina Roosen** 07:04

But do you follow any other fitness brands? And like, for instance, fitness brands means like fitness influencers or people who act like entrepreneurs selling their own home workout programs. So are you mainly using you already said YouTube tutorials? So is that what are you using from time to time? But you don't follow them on Instagram? Or do you have like any specific fitness influencers that you follow on Instagram?

**Andreas** 07:32

Actually, this is a really good question because a couple of days ago, I found by accident video, how a YouTuber changed his body with a 30 days workout by using a specific app that's called center. And center is an app created by the famous actor Chris Hemsworth. I mean, like the actor from The Avengers and Thor and different



other movies. This was actually like the first time that I checked really the page and the content of some gym sites or websites or let's say, Instagram sites. But before I've never looked it up, actually.

**Janina Roosen** 08:20

Okay, great, but do you follow any other lifestyle accounts?

**Andreas** 08:24

No. In gyms, so sports and gyms, I don't follow anyone. Nobody, actually.

**Janina Roosen** 08:33

Okay. So but just in general, would you say that social media content from gyms is interesting to you at all? So, like, for instance, like any content regarding home workouts or workouts and you already mentioned that you're looking at some workouts on YouTube as well. So is that interesting to you?

**Andreas** 09:00

Actually, not.

**Janina Roosen** 09:01

Okay. Good. Um, so then let's just come back to your engagement as a consumer on social media. How would you evaluate your engagement as a consumer on social media? So would you say that your engagement with brands is rather passive? So that you're only consuming and reading posts, for instance, like from brands, like in particular fitness brands, but also just like in general, or would you say you're a bit more active and you're reacting to the brand content, for instance, your liking or following or commenting a post? Or would you say you're very active?

**Andreas** 09:46

Related to sports and gyms or related to Instagram in general?

**Janina Roosen** 09:50

Just related to brands, like when you see yourself as a consumer on social media, and yeah, just like with respect to brands.

**Andreas** 09:59

In this case I'm quite passive, actually.

**Janina Roosen** 10:01

Okay, so you're only consuming and reading posts, but you wouldn't engage.

**Andreas** 10:06

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 10:06

But also, for instance, you have the option to tag locations or to tag brands. Have you done that before? Like that, you mentioned, for instance, that you went to the gym and you tagged the location, or that you're saying you went to a restaurant or when you bought some clothes that you tagged the brand. Did you do that?

**Andreas** 10:29

Actually, not.

**Janina Roosen** 10:30

Okay.

**Andreas** 10:30

The thing I was doing sometimes is to tag the location, but never the brand or where I am. I mean, like, whit the location it's more like the city itself and not like the specific name of the gym or the restaurant or something.

**Janina Roosen** 10:45

Okay, good. Um, and do you think there's much information on brands that's only shared on social media? So, like, just in general, if you want to look up some information regarding a brand, do you think that there's some specific content, which is only shared on social media? Or would you say that it's rather on the website, where you find it?

**Andreas** 11:07

I think it definitely depends on the brand, but I can definitely say that Instagram is the fastest way to get the news.

**Janina Roosen** 11:16

So you would consult social media networks when you're looking for information.

**Andreas** 11:21

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 11:21

Okay, great. So have you looked up information regarding your gym on social media before?

**Andreas** 11:29

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 11:30

Okay. Great. That's nice. And, um, how do you actually interact with brands on social media? So do you think that there any brands that you perceive yourself as a person? So brands that are acting as a person or would you say that you can already tell that it's companies behind them?

**Andreas** 11:51

More the second one. Yeah, definitely that companies are behind it.

**Janina Roosen** 11:57

And does it actually have an impact on your opinion of a specific brand, when you can see how the brand interacts with other consumers on social media? So, for instance, I mean, you can see that they are like replying to any comments or something and just like the way they do it. Would you say it has an impact on your opinion of the brand?

**Andreas** 12:21

I mean, if there's a big interaction with the followers, then the only impact on me would be that there's like a high communication between the brand and customer and this is like, for me, kind of like a good influence. But in general is it has not a deep impact for me. If I'm doing a comment on a Instagram post, for example, and then the brand is replying on my comment in let's say, in a positive way, then it wouldn't change my general opinion regarding the brand.

**Janina Roosen** 13:01

Okay. But if you see, for instance that, um, like, if consumers have any negative feedback, and the brand would only, like would not react to it at all or would just like, like, say something unfriendly. What do you say it has an impact on your opinion regarding the brand? So that you see it, like in a more negative way, or would you say it doesn't influence you?

**Andreas** 13:27

Yeah, it just tests in a negative way actually. Because then then my first impression would be like the brand or the company's just interested in good publicity, and, therefore, they only want to make money and I think this is not consumer friendly.

**Janina Roosen** 13:50

Okay. So now I have a quote for you and it is "there's a high transparency on social media and to share lots of information makes a brand authentic" would you agree to that? So that it's very high transparent on social media and to share lots of information makes the brand more authentic? Would you agree or would you say that's not true?

**Andreas** 14:17

I think it depends on the brand actually, because if you're looking at a brand.

**Janina Roosen** 14:29

You can also name examples.

**Andreas** 14:32

Yeah, for example, if you are more like if you are a brand that is more like, let's say, like a clothing brand is more like low key or more, not so loud. Let's say not so loud. Then this is something like a brand identification of this brand to be like low key and to convey this message. But on the other hand, if you are, for example, like a loud brand, like H&M or something then, of course, it's a benefit to be more active on social media.

**Janina Roosen** 15:09

Okay. So you say that it makes a brand more authentic?

**Andreas** 15:17

Yes. But it always depends on the brand because of the brand identification some brands are not so active on social media. And they do that on purpose. To evolve some kind of yeah, it's like embracement for the for the customers.

**Janina Roosen** 15:38

Okay, great. Um, so and would you react to brand content on social media, if you perceive it as credible? So is that kind of like an requirement for you to perceive the brand as credible in order to react?

**Andreas** 15:54

It helps to be credible. I think it's not 100% due to credibility but it helps you to be credible.

**Janina Roosen** 16:01

Okay, great. And do you like would you say that there are any online communities on social media which you feel part of? So, like online brand communities? Or do you say there's not really like, it can be in terms of fashion in terms of fitness? Is there any community you feel kind of part of?

**Andreas** 16:25

No, there's no community that I would or that I will join.

**Janina Roosen** 16:29

Okay. Um, so then we will just come back to the fitness aspect. So you already mentioned that there's like some some fitness movement going on on social media and stuff. So like, for instance, I'm not sure if you know the fitspiration trend or movement, for instance, like where people post photos or videos or something where they look like very fit in order to motivate other people? What is your general opinion regarding like these fitness lifestyle trends on social media? Because would you rather say that it's healthy because like as fitspiration, for instance, it helps people to motivate themselves or to motivate others or would you say it can also be dangerous because, um, sometimes the created body standards, are like not realistic, or just like in general, what do you think regarding these fitness social media trends?

**Andreas** 17:31

I mean, firstly, like gyms and people who are providing or doing posts on Instagram, try to emphasize the people a positive feeling. To show them you can you can make it too if I did it, then you can do it too. To reach goals. This is like the, I think like them most important point in this social media gym thing. But also it's just like a cash cow for me because they are just trying to make money. choice to just try to do make money. In this case, for example, like you mentioned before, there's like a famous Instagrammer who is famous for gym related topics and training workouts and he is doing daily posts or content of brands. But it's always a collaboration with a sport brand, for example, or for clothes or for other products like drinks or something. And this is like always like a contract that this person has to post this in order to make money. So let's say 50% of all of these motivation posts on Instagram there are collaborations behind it. It's not because they want to motivate people or help people.

**Janina Roosen** 19:10

Do you often experience people you follow who are presenting themselves as like very fit or healthy on social media? For example, friends of yours trying to promote themselves as being like super fit and healthy.

**Andreas** 19:37

Yeah but even two years ago I followed some Instagram models that are like gym models, but for me the content was always the same. And, for example, the influencer has posted a picture which looked quite good but the content of the picture was just not interesting and always the same due to collaborations and it was not credible at all. They would always promote a code for a specific brand such as brands for fitness drinks. And, actually, many influencer do this, especially in the fitness industry and this was the reason why I have unfollowed all influencers like this because there is no real content behind it.

**Janina Roosen** 21:00

Okay, but you said you did follow people so it kind of like motivates you to reach a certain fitness goal for yourself? When you see other people who do that? Like also you said like the YouTube video you saw and it kind of motivated you?

**Andreas** 21:17

I mean the YouTube video, for example, it was for doing my workout. But yeah, it definitely motivates me to see someone working out very hard.

**Janina Roosen** 21:45

Okay, perfect. So, then we'll just go back to your gym. So would you say your gym helps you to like you to follow and support The ideal ideal self image of yourself so that it kind of like supports you to become the ideal version of yourself so to say, and does it motivate you like your gym in general?

**Andreas** 22:28

Like if I go to the gym?

**Janina Roosen** 22:29

Yeah, if you see your gym, does it help you to become a better version of yourself? Like because then you work out and you reach a certain fitness goal. So what do you say it helps you for that? To become like the ideal version of yourself?

**Andreas** 22:47

Yeah but independent of the brand?

**Janina Roosen** 22:50

Yeah.

**Andreas** 22:52

Yeah, then it helps of course.

**Janina Roosen** 22:53

Okay, and what are important values for you regarding fitness and being fit? So is it for instance more the discipline or that you are having fun or the interaction with friends while you workout?

**Andreas** 23:07

So it's like discipline and fun because during the exercise time I really hate it. But in the end you feel better and then of course you are motivated to do the next days or to keep on to do more exercises the next day. So it's kind of yeah, relive feeling. Okay. Also, I usually go alone because then I can concentrate on my exercises, so I don't really have interaction with friends.

**Janina Roosen** 23:47

Okay, and would you say that your gym, is that kind of like, representing those values? So discipline and fun?

**Andreas** 23:58

Actually like the brand, can I name the brand?

**Janina Roosen** 24:01

Yeah, sure.

**Andreas** 24:02

Yeah, it's like I go to McFit and McFit has like to our subsidiary, like, for example, John Reed. And I go to both of them. Of course, I mean, like John Reed is more like let's say, a high class gym compared to McFit, but both belong to the RSG Group. But both brands try to evoke a feeling of community and motivation, and fun and everything. But if I go to the gym, especially like to the McFit, then I have a different feeling, but it's only because of the people who are going there. Because the people make a different vibe.

**Janina Roosen** 24:48

Okay. Okay, great. So you already mentioned that you go to McFit and John Reed so have you been exposed to these two brands on social media before? Like, for instance, that you have seen like because you said you don't follow your, your gyms on social media, but have you seen, for instance, that friends have shared something? Or that they have liked something? Or that you saw an ad of like one of these two gyms?

**Andreas** 25:19

Actually, I went to their Instagram pages. Just as I mentioned before to get some information, especially when we look at the Corona Crisis at the moment. Therefore, Instagram was quite good to get information and news, but that's it. So I'm not really interested in looking up further information on their Instagram accounts.

**Janina Roosen** 25:49

Great. So, um, what comes in your mind when you think about like these two gyms? You already said that John Reed, for instance, is high class. But what in general comes to your mind? What do you associate with like, your fitness studios? Or to which gym are you going more often?

**Andreas** 26:21

Actually, I go more often to McFit but only because there is no John Reed in Cologne, there is only one in Düsseldorf. But if I'm Düsseldorf, I go to John Reed, because I like it more than the McFit in Cologne or Leverkusen, for example. And when I'm in Berlin, I go to John Reed, because I like the location better. But this was of the question, right? Can you repeat it again?

**Janina Roosen** 26:50

No, I was just like, what do you think about it? But, actually, um, when you say that, like you like the way you said right now then it's like more you're thinking about the studio itself. And the interior because that seems to be kind of like having an influence on which studio you're going to, right? And the people?

**Andreas** 27:08

Yeah, especially like the people have a big influence on where I go because if I'm allowed to say that, McFit and John Reed have like a big gap between. I mean there are other subsidiaries like High5Gyms or something, but I've never been there before. But in John Reed and McFit you can see definitely see the difference between the people who are going there. And when we're looking at John Reed you get more like the high class especially like in Düsseldorf. You have more like yeah, like people with this specific kind of knowledge or education, where you feel directly there's a different vibe and in McFit in Leverkusen or Cologne, you have more lower class people and then you can feel that there it's much more rough and that like a different atmosphere. And this specific atmosphere is totally the opposite of what McFit is trying to show us on their Instagram page.

**Janina Roosen** 28:21

Okay, that's super interesting and just like in general, would you say that like of these gyms. Is it more important to you that you have the functional value so that you have good machines and that you have a well equipped studio? Or would you say that it's my emotional values you're focusing on? So that you have a bond with your studio and that you like the people like that you close to the people or is it more that you go there only to train?

**Andreas** 28:54

It's more the first one, the functional values, yeah. That the gym is in a good condition and that you can exercise well. And because I don't need a big bond to a specific gym, especially, since I'm traveling a lot. But the benefit or the advantage of McFit is like it's in some European countries. For example, when when I did my exchange semester in Madrid in Spain, they had like three McFit and this was like a big, or like a huge advantage for me. So that I didn't have to sign for a new gym. And in this case, then I could train a lot there. And then for me, it

was important that the gym is like in a good condition and thus, I don't need like a special bond to a specific gym place or to the people who work there or train there daily.

**Janina Roosen** 29:54

Okay, great. So and what attributes are the most important aspects for you in terms of the quality of the gym? So is it for instance the service? Or like as you already said, the machines?

**Andreas** 30:10

The machines are the most important fact because if you don't have proper machines and you can do a proper workout and I like a gym that has a huge or massive variety of different exercises, so that it's possible to change your muscular moves and with your exercises to change the muscular parts. So the variety of machines and the condition of the machines are very important. Then the service, and then the people. But actually, I don't really care about the people because I'm going there for one or one and a half hour and I'm doing my thing and then I'm leaving. So I'm not there to interact with people or try to get the John Reed or the McFit spirit. For example these group workouts or these Cyberobic programs where you are in a room with six other people doing exercises.

**Janina Roosen** 31:26

Okay, so but um, so then it seems like that especially like the machines and the studio and like the functional values are very important to you. But would you say your gym can communicate that on social media? I mean, you said you don't follow your gym chain but you had a look on the pages you said. Would you say they can communicate that the studios are good equipped and that machines are like in a good quality and that kind of like the functional values are highlighted?

**Andreas** 32:05

Yeah, depends on the location of the gym. And I have to say like the Leverkusen McFit is quite old. It's one of the oldest in Germany and it's the biggest actually in Germany. So, what was your question again?

**Janina Roosen** 32:23

Like if social media can support that.

**Andreas** 32:27

Ah, yeah. And then the social media doing this, for example, like the McFit page, is trying to emphasize this but it has no impact on me.

**Janina Roosen** 32:40

Okay. To sum it up, you said that especially the quality is like very important to you the quality of the machines, but also the locations I've heard that. So would you define this as the most important factors to become a loyal gym member? So like the, the high quality, the location and maybe the price that like your decision factors to become a loyal gym member?

**Andreas** 33:13

Yes. these three points that you mentioned are the key factors for me.

**Janina Roosen** 33:17

Okay, great. So then we almost like done with the first parts. Now it's the last part. So I was asking you to have a look at John Reeds Instagram account before and to get familiar with like the impression of like the overall Instagram presence of John Reed and your opinion regarding their Instagram performance. And you already said that you knew John Reed before and that you're actually like a customer of John Reed, right?

**Andreas** 33:49

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 33:49

Okay. So and I mean, you already said some some information of John Reed yourself before, so you know that it belongs to the RSG group. And you know that McFit belongs to this group as well and that they own many fitness related brands such as Cyberobics. And yeah, and just like to explain it again to you, John Reed consider themselves as premium discount gym studio. So they're actually still like in the lower, like price range class, oftentimes, but um, yeah, it's more the premium discount gym at premium discount segment. And yeah, you already said that you don't follow John Reed on Instagram, but also, besides from checking it out. Now, you said that you like were looking at the Instagram page before sometimes, right? Yes. Okay. And what do you actually remember from just like viewing the profile before our interview? Like what have you noticed? Is there anything what you remember in particular? So can you tell me

**Andreas** 35:05

Yeah, I mean like the true message that is like permanent in Instagram is like the motivation part and the fun part because when I'm looking at the John Reed Instagram page, in my opinion they they try to convince the customer or the people or the Instagram user that going to the gym is fun and due to the fun you get a better body and to feel healthy. And of course you're doing this all together you're not alone. So there are a lot of pictures where a bunch of people are there like like a group. Like they did a group workout before together so, of course, to get motivated and to have fun as one point but together with other people it makes more fun. This is like this kind of impression that I have about the John Reed Instagram page.

**Janina Roosen** 36:06

So that they try to tell you this as a message and that it's all about community?

**Andreas** 36:12

Yes, yes, exactly.

**Janina Roosen** 36:13

And so you're already you've been talking about the people on the pictures and stuff. So that's what you mainly remember? So the graphical impression so to say the visuals?

**Andreas** 36:26

Yes. And I have to add that the people on John Reed's Instagram are mostly customers, so they don't use models or something for it. So yes, they are using the normal customers to show, yeah, the other users that everybody can be in a good shape, for example, and you don't have to be a model.

**Janina Roosen** 36:51

Okay. That's super interesting. So did you like it in general? Like, did you like what you saw and the overall picture?

**Andreas** 37:00

Yeah, overall it's like a positive impression for me. But on the other hand, this is like the same message that other gym companies or other gym brands try to provide.

**Janina Roosen** 37:19

Okay? So it's not that interesting and not that different to the content of other gyms on Instagram?



**Andreas** 37:24

It's not that special it's kind of generic.

**Janina Roosen** 37:27

Okay. So and which attributes would you associate with John Reed? Is there anything like any attributes you would connect with that brand?

**Andreas** 37:40

Yeah on the one hand definitely when when I went there for the first time, it's like this, let's say high-class feeling. You feel the difference between like McFit. For example when you are stepping into the building and then you see already how the interiors. That's like a big difference and then how everything is designed you can feel it at the beginning that it's not so old it's more more like there's it's more design and it gives you more feeling of being special, for example. And this, or I mean like the one attribute is like wealthy and special and on the other hand it's always the fun factor. This is what I associate with John Reed and the music, of course, I like the music actually there.

**Janina Roosen** 38:35

Great. So you would say it's more a cool lifestyle club?

**Andreas** 38:39

Yeah, it's like really like a lifestyle thing. Especially when you when you see that there are some plants or that there is some furniture from East India. Or also the colorful and crazy paintings, for example, it's more like it gives you a feeling that you are in a special place compared to McFit where everything is quiet yeah general and out-dated.

**Janina Roosen** 39:07

Yeah. Okay so and um I'm not sure if you've seen that the slogan after it is "Not your average gym" and you're already a customer and you know John Reed. So would you say that this is covered by the graphic impression? So that it's not your average gym? And then you can tell it already from their social media like account so to say?

**Andreas** 39:38

No, from the social media account I wouldn't say this. Yeah that's what I described before. This is only my opinion of the gym when I have entered it first but I would never say it from the Instagram account. Because there I don't get this kind of impression and feeling.

**Janina Roosen** 40:01

Yeah. So you say that actually like, in real life, it gives you the feeling of being special and of a very cool place but this is not supported by social media?

**Andreas** 40:15

It is supported by social media but has no big impact on me.

**Janina Roosen** 40:19

Yeah, but just in general, like, independent of the impact it has on you. Would you say that the brand is able to communicate that they are cool lifestyle brand on social media?

**Andreas** 40:32

Yes, it can.

**Janina Roosen** 40:33

Okay. So and, um, what would you say about the quality of John Reed? You say you already said that it's high quality, right?

**Andreas** 40:45

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 40:46

Okay. And the style of John Reed? would you say it's, like more modern or urban?

**Andreas** 40:53

Fancy.

**Janina Roosen** 40:54

Okay. That's interesting. And so compared to McFit, you already said that it's like completely different between between these two. Okay, great. Um and before you mentioned that um decision factors such as the location but also the like, the quality of the studio and the machines are very relevant to you when becoming a loyal customer of a gym chain. Would you say that John Reed is able to communicate these values on Instagram? So like for instance the quality and that they are very well equipped and that they have like, big variety of machines. Are they able to communicate that?

**Andreas** 41:39

Yes, they communicate that with the videos for example. When I was there last time on their Instagram page, I saw a video that was in the gym. I can imagine it was maybe in Berlin, but I'm not sure. But on this video, you could see all the machines behind the person who yeah who worked out there or who was showing a specific exercise and there for example due to the video you could see that John Reed is quite good equipment, for example.

**Janina Roosen** 42:17

Okay great. So now you've been exposed to the social media presence of John Reed and since you are already a customer, um, would you say that you are, yeah, a loyal customer to John Reed?

**Andreas** 42:38

Yeah, but I'm only loyal because of the price because I'm just like I said at the beginning I'm a student and McFit and John Reed give you for the price you're paying, everything you need, but I can imagine if I will get a proper paid job later, then I can imagine to change the gym and to get for example a gym with more extras that that John Reed or McFit don't have because like you said, John Reed is like a high class gym but for low costs. Oh, like you said it's like a premium but on the low cost gym. Yeah, and this is this is actually like the feeling that I have, because it's, of course in some ways special, but on other hand quite cheap.

**Janina Roosen** 43:32

Okay. So like if you had more money, for instance, or if there would be like a better studio closer to your home, you would like switch to studio?

**Andreas** 43:43

Yeah, I can imagine to switch.

**Janina Roosen** 43:45

Okay. Great. So actually, that's the end of the interview. Um, thank you very much for taking the time, again. Do you have any further questions? Or is there anything you want to know before I'm like stopping the record?

**Andreas** 44:00

No, I don't have questions.

**Janina Roosen** 44:01

Okay, great. Thank you very much then.

**Andreas** 44:03

Thank you.

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## **Interview 11: Thaddeus**

Mon, 4/6 11:09AM • 45:15

### **Speakers**

Thaddeus, Janina Roosen

**Janina Roosen** 00:00

Okay, perfect. So thank you very much for taking the time for the interview today. And first of all, I would like to ask you to give us a short introduction on yourself, like your age, your name, your profession and your place of living, for instance.

**Thaddeus** 00:20

Sure. My name is Thaddeus. I'm 26 years old, from Berlin. And I'm a professional investment residential broker in Berlin and I'm a very passionate sports man, let's say.

**Janina Roosen** 00:40

Okay, so your hobbies include going like to the gym or running or what do you do in your free time to keep yourself fit?

**Thaddeus** 00:50

I was always kind of sports interested, sporty man, sporty guy. I used to play hockey like for 14 years. So I began with a team sport, and then changed my changed to more the gym part with other friends. So like last five years, let's say. I prefer to go to the gym or maybe with other friends to do activities. I played all kind of sports.

**Janina Roosen** 01:33

Okay, great. So would you say that fitness or like going to the gym has an influence on your life? Like, for instance, that you say it's important for your mental health or for your health or also for your overall success in your life? So is there any influence you can feel?

**Thaddeus** 01:56

Definitely. Because in the beginning I really had to learn to be patient to, to really learn a lot about myself got discipline about a diet, about really getting over my, my own limits and to go really beyond the limits during the, during the sessions in the workout and to have fun with friends in the gym. And it's a really, really big, big influence on knowing knowing myself a bit better and get a better picture and get more self confident, I would guess. About all your strength and your weaknesses as well. Overall to get more focused on balance in life.

**Janina Roosen** 03:08

Okay, that's great. So it has kind of like, a big impact on your whole life and on how you feel. So that's super interesting. And also, um, the next question is also about, like, having an impact/influence on your life. It's about social media. So would you say social media is important in your life? Or does it have a big influence? Or just like on a scale from one to 10. Would you say that it's important in your life or that it's not that important, so with the 10 being very, very important and the one is like, not important at all.

**Thaddeus** 03:48

Um, I mean, I would say like, seven or eight. Like my my job is not dependent on social media, and not yet, so I'm using it very often or very intense for branding purposes or it's, for the moment it's more the connecting part of friends with the business contacts and to keep up with other influencers from the real estate market or from business markets as well. So I would say I'm not following big fitness brands. I would rather prefer individual with individual brands. Well, very focused for fitness or sports.

**Janina Roosen** 04:57

Okay, great. And would you define yourself as a heavy social media user? You said you don't need it for your job but in your free time would you say you a heavy user, so to say?

**Thaddeus** 05:11

I mean, how would you describe heavy?

**Janina Roosen** 05:15

It's just that you use it like quite often and like very often a day and that you do lots of like research, like stuff like that on social media a day on a daily basis. So that's what we define as heavy. So that you use it quite often and for many things for research for like, as you said, keeping up with friends.

**Thaddeus** 05:43

I would, I would say overall, like, three, four hours maximum. If you would count YouTube as well.

**Janina Roosen** 05:53

Yeah.

**Thaddeus** 05:56

Social media channel then that's definitely probably more but it's dependent on my schedule that day. How loaded it is. So. Yeah, I mean, um, sometimes I spend more time when I, when I'm active as well. Having fun making stories or take the time to connect more with friends but I'm not I'm not that very addictive, heavy user. So I always wanted to be aware of my my time and how to you use it. So I'm sometimes a bit care careful.

**Janina Roosen** 06:48

Yeah, but that's also very good. So which networks do you use the most? You already said you use YouTube but is there anything else and and what do you use the most?

**Thaddeus** 07:04

I mean, it changed from from Facebook more to Instagram and YouTube and the last two or three months I use LinkedIn as well. So yeah, I would say these three.

**Janina Roosen** 07:24

But Instagram is still the most? Like what you're using the most?

**Thaddeus** 07:30

Yeah, I think so, yes.

**Janina Roosen** 07:31

And what do you say that social media like no matter which network has an influence or impact on your communication with companies and brands? So like how you can communicate with them? Does it have an impact on the way you do that? So like reacting to the to the brand's content or like to like if you have a question or something that you would I'm consult social media. Do you, do you do that?

**Thaddeus** 07:56

To be honest, I never really thought about it.

**Janina Roosen** 08:16

So you're not really?

**Thaddeus** 08:17

No, no, not really. So if I because I mean many reasons. You are very, very close to brands it's, for example, all the cosmetic makeup industry, maybe, maybe other big industries, but for me, I didn't need to make the appearance yet to have such such a strong relationship to a brand that I'm following to be in touch with them.

**Janina Roosen** 08:56

Okay. And you already said that you follow us really follow big fitness brands? But you follow like, do you follow some influencers? Or do you follow people who share their home workouts? Or do you follow any gyms? So do you do that?

**Thaddeus** 09:15

Yeah, I follow some personal trainers and some, some people I know from the earlier days like 5, 6, 7 years ago when they started their YouTube fitness channel and I followed them all the way to see how they develop their style and how they develop their fitness routine. So I'm not really following, like, the workouts they do on a daily basis. So like for the moment in quarantine I just look up on YouTube for a nice home workout that I could do. So I don't really have a go to guy that I am following if I'm having questions. I'm just getting impressions, I would say. For me it's the most important to follow people who have a nice balance. Who have success in real life, have a good relationship, fitness so that they have really good mixture of everything and how the routine looks like and to achieve everything.

**Janina Roosen** 10:37

Okay, great. And you go to the gym, right? You have a gym membership you said?

**Thaddeus** 10:42

Yes, yes.

**Janina Roosen** 10:42

Okay. And do you follow your gym on social media?

**Thaddeus** 10:52

No, only my personal trainer, yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 10:57

Okay, yeah. So but in general, you are interested in, like the content that gyms could share or are sharing? So, in general, like, related content, is that interesting to you?

**Thaddeus** 11:16

Yes, of course. Yeah why not. Depends on how they, how they create it. How they create the content and what's, what's the peer group.

**Janina Roosen** 11:33

Yeah. Okay. And you already said like, you didn't really communicate with brands on social media. So you would say it's rather passive so that you are consuming the content maybe and that you're reading posts, but not that you kind of react to the brand's content?

**Thaddeus** 11:54

No not really. I'm really just passive and get impressions.

**Janina Roosen** 12:04

Okay, but have you for instance, um, like shared, some some posts already, like where you did a hashtag of brand, for instance. So it's not necessarily like a gym brand, but that you have tagged the brand, like, for instance, a fashion brand or a place where you've been. Did you do that before?

**Thaddeus** 12:27

Yes, sure.

**Janina Roosen** 12:29

Um, that's good. So would you say all in all there is much information on brands that is only shared on social media? So what's your opinion regarding that? So would you rather consult social media networks when you look for specific information of a company? Or would you check the website first?

**Thaddeus** 12:57

I would probably, would check the website first. Hmm, depends on the information I'm looking for. But if I'm really looking for something particular, and maybe I would consider just to contact one of my close contacts made from like a personal trainer, or another friend who has more information or so it's, I would, I would rather ask personal contact for information. Personal trainers as well but not the brand.

**Janina Roosen** 13:40

Yeah, sure. Um, and do you like for instance, like you said, you don't follow your gym. But in general, like if you can see on social media, how a brand is reacting to other consumers, like input or feedback, would you say that it has an impact on your opinion of the brand? So for instance, if you can see negative feedback or comments of the consumers on their social media on the brand's social media and the brand is replying in a very good way and very friendly or if they are just like not replying at all or in a very negative way, would you say that this has an impact on how you see the brand like this specific brand?

**Thaddeus 14:24**

Of course, because nowadays where everything is so, so, so open and for everyone to see open conversations and maybe a negative feedback and where the brand is behaving, not in the good way. Then it has really, really fast impact on I think the customer relationship and the customer satisfaction. So especially for big brands they how we, yeah, they're really motivated to keep them all satisfied. They, they that you have a good impression of them in a positive way, and that they don't have they don't make any mistakes or so. But of course for me, I would, I would prefer that most of the brands are really just honest and sometimes make some honest, honest statements then to really satisfy everyone. Because you know your audience. And you know who's following you. And, who's, who's your customer. Then that is everything, so you have to focus on the big group keeping satisfied instead of pleasing everyone.

**Janina Roosen 16:12**

Yeah. So and I mean, nowadays, it's like very, like critical what to share on social media because if like, sometimes the people are just like faking content or whatever. So, um, but like, let's assume that there's a high transparency on social media and to share lots of information makes the brand more authentic. Would you agree? Like, as more information they share, the more authentic they get? Like regarding the brand. So the more information they share, so the more transparent they get, so the more authentic a brand gets?

**Thaddeus 16:56**

I would say yes, yes. Because as a result, I would love to see brands where I could see the values of the, of the founders or of the people behind the brand. So everything else is very, like a bit cold, there's no there's no no passion behind it. And if you can't see their their values and their, their perception about things and how they see things and not only about their own products or brand, just overall. So to attract more people, I guess. And of course, if you if you share more insights as well, about yourself and your brand and how we work and how you interact with the audience and your your people around you and your your other employees for example, that would definitely strengthen the impression.

**Janina Roosen 18:17**

And would you say that it's important for you to like, would you only react to the brand's content on social media if you perceive it as credible? I mean, you said you don't really react to a brand's content, but would you say that that is kind of, like, fundamental for you in order to react to a content? To be perceived as credible by sharing lots of information?

**Thaddeus 18:48**

Yeah, I think so. I think, I have to say, I react to content, but it's not related to fitness

**Janina Roosen 19:00**

Ah, okay.

**Thaddeus 19:01**

I react to content like for for fashion brands, for example. Yeah, just make some nice brands I just like but I'm not very really doesn't happen to that I comment specific but it's false. I say it's, I would, I wouldn't react to any brands.

**Janina Roosen 19:28**

Okay? So it's important for you to, to like them and that they are honest?

**Thaddeus 19:34**

Yeah, if I like what I see, of course.

**Janina Roosen** 19:39

Okay. And you said like you don't necessarily react to gym content but for fashion, for instance, and are there any online communities that you feel part of? So, like maybe a fashion online community of a brand, or like maybe of your personal trainer? Do you have that? Or not really? That you say you don't really have that.

**Thaddeus** 20:06

Well, so my social media niche or my interest, for example, is for the moment very focused on business related and real estate. So I am reacting a lot to that niche. Yeah just connect with the yes some some of the real estate leaders or in yes some some fashion fashion idols as well for some some good business influencers as well, where to get tips and advices, that's really thing I'm following and where I am reacting.

**Janina Roosen** 21:10

And do you interact with members of like for instance the real estate online community? Do you are like are you in contact with like some of these people? So that you exchange information or some some knowledge? Or is it more that you kind of like consume the content that a friend is sharing and that's it, so to say?

**Thaddeus** 21:41

No, I would say, I don't, I don't really get in touch with the with other other followers of a brand. But if they send me a message, or react to anything then I'm very, very, very fast with interacting. But not that I see a comment and I really have to answer that. I have to know the person to see what kind of guy he is or why he has that perception.

**Janina Roosen** 22:22

Okay, right. So come let's come back to the fitness aspect. So actually one can say that there's kind of like a bit a big movement going on on social media right now especially regarding the fitness lifestyle. So for instance, there's like a trend called fitspiration where people upload photos where they look like super fit in order to motivate other people. This getting like very popular. Or yeah, just like other movements would you like what do you have a general opinion regarding these trends? Like fitness trends on social media, because some people say that it's healthy because ama to help people to motivate and some people say it's kind of like it's dangerous because wrong body ideal standards can be created. Do you have an opinion on that?

**Thaddeus** 23:15

I mean, everyone has an idea of their branding and marketing and audience. So I mean not not, not every marketing is for everyone clear. So, of course, like, like a fitness studio or a gym that wants to attract young people. It doesn't really help to show older people on the bicycle, I don't know to to attract young people. So They know, like, sex sells sex, sexuality, sweat and motivation and that kind of stuff. But I'm not really offended by these marketing ideas because everyone has an idea. But you have to keep in mind like for everyone that there's always a strategy behind. So you can get fooled by just the first first impression the first picture and just understand okay they want to achieve something with that picture or strategy.

**Janina Roosen** 24:58

And do you follow people like, for instance, friends or like, as you said, your personal trainer who present themselves as very fit and healthy on social media? So posting a workout photo or whatever.

**Thaddeus** 25:13

Yeah, of course. Yeah.



**Janina Roosen** 25:14

And do you do that yourself sometimes? To post a picture, like out of the gym or something like a new story on your feed?

**Thaddeus** 25:25

Yeah, sometimes.

**Janina Roosen** 25:26

So it kind of like helps you to like seeing these pictures or posting these pictures. It's kind of like helping you to get a motivation to reach a certain fitness goal? Like for instance, the photos your personal trainers sharing so is it kind of like a motivation for you? When you see these pictures of fit people, would you say it's kind of like yeah, motivating you?

**Thaddeus** 26:00

I would say is this not the motivation when I say just only picture. Um, but it connects to my own personal goals to my routine I notice okay, let's go back to the gym. Today's the day, forget your hangover, whatever. So it kind of triggers.

**Janina Roosen** 26:33

Okay, so what do you say like let's come back to your to your gym. I mean you said you don't follow your gym on Instagram, um, but would you say your gym helps you to become like the ideal version of yourself? That kind of like a tool like let's see your gym as a tool and to become the ideal version of yourself by working out there so to say?

**Thaddeus** 26:58

Definitely.

**Janina Roosen** 26:59

Okay.

**Thaddeus** 26:59

Definitely, yeah, this this is why I have changed the gym membership four or five months ago to another gym.

**Janina Roosen** 27:15

Okay. So and what you already said that it's very important for you to interact with people while you work out or like also you mentioned discipline. So what are the most important values for you regarding fitness and being fit? Is it the discipline? Is that the fun?

**Thaddeus** 27:44

It's really difficult to say.

**Janina Roosen** 27:47

Is it not important for you to interact with friends, for instance, while you work out? Or is it important for you that you have the discipline and to move?

**Thaddeus** 27:58

Um, I would say, the most important thing I have learned about or during my, my fitness routine, like what the last four or five years where I had ups and downs and a good shape and shape where I wasn't really satisfied. What has always helped me to get clear about my self image. Just know, okay. And this is the situation where I

am right now is not constantly. So you can't change that if you change your attitude and your habits. You can go to the gym like more, more than twice a week. You can change that or you are just unsatisfied as you are at the moment. Just a bit to get more reflected on how you see things. So that case, it helped me to lose my anxieties.

**Janina Roosen** 29:48

Okay, great. So and would you say that your gym is representing these values like for instance discipline. So would you say that it's representing these values?

**Thaddeus** 30:08

Yes. Yeah, definitely.

**Janina Roosen** 30:10

Okay, perfect. So now we jump over to the next part. And where have you found like you said you have just switched your your gym membership. Where have you found like your your new gym like where did you get aware of like what friends told you something, that you saw an ad, that you have seen it on social media, for instance, like how did you find this new gym?

**Thaddeus** 30:36

Yeah, on the side it was the friends around me. And I knew that gym, way back, some years ago and another part was that it was very close to my, my apartment. So it doesn't take a lot of time to get to the gym.

**Janina Roosen** 31:12

Okay, that's great. And what comes in your mind when you think about your gym? Like when you just see your gym in your head right now when you just see it in front of your eyes? What do you see? Is there anything specific coming to your mind? Like is it the studio? The people, the logo, the design of the studio? What what do you see when we think about the gym now?

**Thaddeus** 31:40

It's the people I would say. So the people.

**Janina Roosen** 31:45

So it's very important for you what kind of people are there and that they are nice, for instance.

**Thaddeus** 31:57

Yeah. I mean, I need a good vibe. For a good workout and the people in the gym or around me, during the workout. I mean, they have influence on the vibe.

**Janina Roosen** 32:20

So would you say it's more important for you to have like, this emotional bond with your studio instead of the functional values? Or would you say that it's more important for you to go there to work out? So to use the machines and stuff, but not like really that you have, like the emotions with it? So could you go in every gym, like just for working out or is it important for you that you have kind of like an emotional bond with a studio of the people you said?

**Thaddeus** 32:55

I think I, um, now I've realized I'm more attached to the emotional power if the gym is stands for the same values. Like good people, I mean the equipment anyway. We have a wellness part. Like a sauna, like everything is like balance.

**Janina Roosen** 33:40

So in high quality is important for you as well because you said, um, well equipped and sauna. So would you say that it's important for you that it has kind of like a high quality as well?

**Thaddeus** 33:52

Yeah, I would say that.

**Janina Roosen** 33:54

And do you like see or do you perceive the quality of your studio? Very high as well? Is it kind of like a high quality they offer you?

**Thaddeus** 34:10

I would say on the the higher middle.

**Janina Roosen** 34:13

Okay, okay. So and in general just like regarding gyms and what would you say are the most important decision factors to become a loyal member? So is it like for you the people as you said are the service or is it the design the quality or maybe just like the equipment so that you have a sauna? Or also you can have the price the location so, what's the most important factor for you to become a loyal gym member?

**Thaddeus** 34:51

I think it's the feeling of orking out there.

**Janina Roosen** 34:58

Okay, so just like the overall impression

**Thaddeus** 35:02

Yeah of course, so the equipment everything is kind of part. But overall just the feeling of my workout. That's the most important thing for me.

**Janina Roosen** 35:22

Okay, great. So now we are almost done with like our interview. And the last part is about John Reed and I've been asking you to have a look at John Reed's Instagram before our interview. And so my first question is, did you know John Reed before or was it just like a new name for you which you didn't and you've never heard?

**Thaddeus** 35:46

I knew John Reed before but I've never been there.

**Janina Roosen** 35:50

Okay, perfect. But just for you as an explanation, um, John Reed is a German gym chain and they have like, I think around 26 Studios worldwide so not just in Germany but also like in Europe, for instance, and further openings are planning to close future and they are acting in the premium discount segment and belong to the RSG group and I'm not sure if you know the RSG group, but it's the owner of many fitness related brands such as Cyberobics they offer and live and not live, online classes, but also other gyms such as McFit. And do you follow John Reed on Instagram?

**Thaddeus** 35:53

No.

**Janina Roosen** 35:53

Oh, okay. So yeah, now I've been asking you to have a look at that Instagram account. Um, what do you actually remember from just seeing the profile? Is there anything like what you what you just saw what sticks in your head or like something? What did you like what did you didn't like? So can you tell me some something about that?

**Thaddeus** 37:08

For the moment, it's all the pictures quiet good choosen. They use the same, the same colors, some similar colors. I mean, what I what I noticed was they really focus on younger people. So you don't see an older grandpa or maybe 50 or 40 Pplus, that would say. Yeah, that's good mixture of videos and pictures. That's yeah, it was just a first look.

**Janina Roosen** 38:01

Yeah, sure. And did you like it just like the overall impression or do you say no, not really. It's not my style, not my my people, whatever?

**Thaddeus** 38:14

I mean, what I like is that they focus on individuals. I mean, I don't know if they're the people are fitness models from John Reed or it's just repost it. But I don't like the filter, to be honest. It's not my style because it's like it's, yeah, very, very, very, very dark an feeling you're like in the nightclub a little bit.

**Janina Roosen** 39:10

Ah, okay, but did you actually know that um John Reed they consider themselves as a fitness music club. So they have a DJ and like twice a week or something so it's like music is also a very big part of their values so to say and like also their slogan is not your average gym. So now you know that and taking this into consideration would you say it fits kind of like to the graphic impression? So that it's like still this moody and night club? Would you say that matches kind of the music aspect.

**Thaddeus** 39:50

Yeah, makes sense.

**Janina Roosen** 39:51

Okay, great. And um, do you like now you said it's kind of like this dark filter, but do you have any attributes And what you would associate the brand now now you're just like after having a look, is it like more, you already said it's not really old for old people. But, um, would you say there's like, maybe it's aesthetic or elegant? Boring? Is it cool? Is it urban? Something like what comes in your mind when you think about the brand?

**Thaddeus** 40:24

I mean, like when you said it's with a DJ, focus on music that makes sense. At least how they present themselves. I would really consider just trying it out for a workout. What is and I think it's authentic. I mean, the pictures and how they how they're presented and the models as well. It's really a little bit like a nightclub. It's dark, you see different lights, you see sweat and sexuality. So.

**Janina Roosen** 41:16

Yeah, so it's authentic and fits to the message you would say?

**Thaddeus** 41:24

Yes, I would say so.

**Janina Roosen** 41:25

So and before you said that, especially like the people are very important for you as a decision factor when you want to become a loyal gym member. Um, would you say that John Reed is communicating that on on Instagram for instance, so like the people the aspect of the people so to say? That it's kind of focused on the Instagram? Like before you said, that they are having like, many pictures with people on it. So would you say it's kind of like a big focus of them on their social media?

**Thaddeus** 42:06

Yeah, I mean, I would say it's it's important focus for them. Just to show everyone how's their audience. And if you can see yourself a member in the gym.

**Janina Roosen** 42:29

Okay. And now like, it's actually the last question. Like now you've just had a short look at social like a John Reed's social media and then we've been talking a little bit about it. And would you consider to become a customer or would you consider to to go there and have trial training or something now, you know, their values and their social media and performance like presence? I mean, it's just like your first impression, but would you come to go there at some point?

**Thaddeus** 43:05

I would say no. Because for me, it's like kind of like a nightclub and party gym at least as it sounds and for me it's not the best mixture to yeah, work out and have you ever had look on your balance? For me it's not the best, best mixture. It's not It's not the best.

**Janina Roosen** 43:44

Yeah, yeah so you don't really like the business model so to say I like the model they're following?

**Thaddeus** 43:53

No, I mean for the right people it's probably the best gym to choose but for me, it's probably not the not the best audience because I would prefer to have a gym that is focused on balance on wellness on workout and connections. And yeah, I mean a gym that stands for like a nightclub, DJ and so on. It's, it's cool. No, no offense, but you I got the collection in my head that it's connected to party and alcohol. And that's not the best way to yeah, to have an impression or like workout and a healthy diet and so on.

**Janina Roosen** 44:52

Okay. Great. Thank you very much for the explanation and thank you very much for the interview. Do you have any further question? Regarding like this topic or regarding the interview?

**Thaddeus** 45:07

No.

**Janina Roosen** 45:08

Okay. Thank you then you're done and I will stop the recording now.

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**Interview 12: Amelie**

Tue, 4/7 9:46PM • 38:09

## Speakers

Amelie, Janina Roosen

**Janina Roosen** 00:00

So Hello, and thank you very much for taking the time. Um, could you give us a short introduction on yourself like your name, your age, your profession, your place of living and your hobbies maybe?

**Amelie** 00:12

Sure. So my name is Amelie and I'm 25 years old. I'm a student and I'm studying healthcare economics in my masters. And my hobbies are like reading doing a lot of sports, for example, going for a run but also like going to the gym or doing some yoga at home. And yeah, is it enough?

**Janina Roosen** 00:37

Yeah, that's perfect. Um, you already mentioned that you like to go for a run or that you have a gym membership, I guess? Um, do you have like any methods or routines like when it comes to keeping yourself fit? So do you have kind of like, like, a fixed schedule when you go for a run or when you go to the gym? Or is it more or less what do you feel like? So to say.

**Amelie** 01:02

I guess it's more about what I feel, for example, the day like on Monday, maybe I feel like going for a run. But I think I have a schedule, like regarding how often I do sports and then I decide what I want to do, for example, do yoga class online or then I go to the gym the other day, but I, I try to keep like my routine when it comes to how often I do it. So I tried to go or to do sports, I guess every other day, like, three to five times a week, and then I decide and, like each day what I feel like.

**Janina Roosen** 01:43

Oh, that's a lot already. Would you say that it has kind of like an influence on your life? So maybe on your mental health, on your success on your health in general? So does fitness have an influence on your life so to say?

**Amelie** 02:00

Yes, I would definitely say it has an influence on my life and also, it feels like more like kind of a lifestyle to be active. It's not particular, like going to the gym or doing like, like a specific interval training or something but I feel like doing sports in general has a positive effect on my like mental health and also, I'm a more active person in general. Also, like my family's really active and I feel like it's, yeah, good for your mental health. If you need to concentrate for a long time a day, then I love to go for a run afterwards for example, or go to the gym afterwards because then you like can free your mind and yeah, forget about your problems and maybe your daily life and I feel like that's yeah, the main point why I practice and exercise

**Janina Roosen** 03:00

Great. So and you already know that interviews are regarding fitness and social media, so to camera to the social media part of the interview. Um, how important is social media in your life? Like on a scale of one to 10? Would you say it's like very important? Or would you say it's not that important? So if you have like the one for not important at all, and the 10 for very important. So, how important is it for you?

**Amelie** 03:30

Um, let me think about it. I would say, I think it's more important to me than maybe to other people, but not that important. So I would say like, a seven, maybe a seven. So it's not that I'm like really into it and always checking

on social media, but I really love to like and I enjoy it to look at pictures and social media in general. So I would say seven.

**Janina Roosen** 04:01

Okay, so And would you say you're a heavy social media user or not that heavy? So like heavy in terms of that you'd use it quite a lot and daily and like many hours a day.

**Amelie** 04:18

Yeah, yeah. I always check like, how long or how much time I spend on social media platforms in general. So, um, I would, I would say like, I'm not a heavy user when it comes to social media in comparison to other people my age, but I would say that it's that I use it like every day. Like I'm maybe a little bit more to heavy side but um, yeah, not that heavy like. I always like restrict myself to go on social media for one hour a day. And I like to it every day as as it is, yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 04:57

Oh, okay. Great, that's interesting.

**Amelie** 05:00

I use it. I mean, I use it. I have like every social media platform you could imagine.

**Janina Roosen** 05:07

Yeah, that's exactly what I wanted to ask. Which networks do you use? And which ones do you use the most?

**Amelie** 05:13

I would definitely say I use Instagram the most. And then second, like all the like more job and how do you say like more work, related? Yeah, work related platforms like Xing and LinkedIn. And then on fourth and third place, I would say like Facebook, and I also have like, registered on Twitter, but I don't use it that often.

**Janina Roosen** 05:45

Okay.

**Amelie** 05:46

Instagram is definitely like the most I use.

**Janina Roosen** 05:50

Okay. And would you say it has an influence on your communication with companies and brands? So that social media is having an influence on how you can communicate with companies?

**Amelie** 06:06

I would say that I yes, definitely because it's part of my day. I check also like companies I like and, um influenced me in in terms of like I know what they are doing, I know what they're currently posting. So it definitely has an impact, but it has like a bigger impact on what I'm consuming. And like decisions I make for consuming products of like certain companies. But yes, I would say it has definitely an impact.

**Janina Roosen** 06:42

Okay. And you said you you are a gym member So, do you follow your gym chain, for instance, or like any other fitness brands on social media? So and when I say fitness brands, I mean, fitness studios as well as fitness influencers who act like entrepreneurs and who sell their work out programs, for instance?

**Amelie** 07:05

Yes, definitely I follow a lot of like fitness influencers and also in I would say, like I know which companies they support where they go to for their like gym routine. So definitely the persons and influencers and for the company itself, I only follow like my gym that I used to go and but no like bigger, bigger gyms like, oh, but that's not really true. I also follow like some other gyms, but I'm not a member. But I'm like kind of interested in them because I'm moving soon. So I look for a new membership. And yeah, I know that they're in the city where I'm moving. So I kind of, I am not following them, but I kind of check their Instagram.

**Janina Roosen** 08:04

So you say that you follow them because kind of has a benefit for you in terms of, that you can see what they offer because you're moving to a new place and you want to decide for a new gym?

**Amelie** 08:15

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 08:15

Okay, so and this is like also because you said you're following the gym you used to go to?

**Amelie** 08:20

Yes.

**Janina Roosen** 08:21

So it can be kind of like concluded that you are that the content gyms are sharing that it is important to you or interesting at least?

**Amelie** 08:32

Yeah, it's interesting. It's, it's like not really important, but it's interesting and it's fun to look at and also like sometimes really informative. Like, you know what I mean? Like, yeah, you getting information about them. Um, yeah, like memberships and what it includes sometimes. So yeah, I think it's interesting and I look at it for like reference information.

**Janina Roosen** 08:57

Okay, great. And um, so let's say we all are consumers, which we actually. Um, how would you evaluate your engagement as a consumer on social media? So would you say it's rather passive, so that you're only consuming and reading posts made by companies? Or would you say you're a bit more active and you're reacting to brand content? So, for instance, by liking a picture or by like following the brand, or would you say you're very active? And you would kind of like share content? Like Share created content?

**Amelie** 09:35

Yeah. I have to say that I'm like more of the passive like social media user. I always look at the postings and sometimes I like something but I'm, I'm not that active. So I never comment something or never like, share something. It's more that I'm liking like posts of friends I know and not that much like companies.

**Janina Roosen** 10:01

But have you ever made a hashtag, for instance? Like when you did the post? Or that you tagged the location of like, specific place? Did you do that?



**Amelie** 10:12

Yeah. So I mean, I think the tagging the place is like really important thing. And I also like to look at, like the location pin, you know what I mean? Like, where you can pin your location. And also I often look it up for, big influencers or others when I'm interested in where they are, and it looks cool and then I check it. And for myself, like my, my social media accounts, I always, like tag where I am. So I think this is a really important function of social media, with hashtags. I like used to use them in the past but not so much anymore.

**Janina Roosen** 10:58

Yeah, but you're not tagging any labels or brands are something?

**Amelie** 11:02

No no, I'm not.

**Janina Roosen** 11:04

Okay, and do you think that there's much information on brands that is only shared on social media? So like, for instance, that a brand is like opening a new gym or something or the prices? Do you think that brands are posting some information only on social media? Or would you say it's rather on the website?

**Amelie** 11:24

Yeah. I think that the main information are always provided on the website, but I have the feeling that if something is, for example, for short time of period like I don't know any, like cheap membership offers or something. I feel like it's more posted on social media.

**Janina Roosen** 11:46

So you would comes out social media as network when you're looking for, like for specific information of a company?

**Amelie** 11:54

Yeah, definetly.

**Janina Roosen** 11:55

And have you done that with the gyms as well like, for instance, the gyms you are following now, because you are like thinking about signing up for a membership. Have you done that that you consulted social media for information?

**Amelie** 12:10

Consulted in terms of looking at it or like getting?

**Janina Roosen** 12:15

Yeah.

**Amelie** 12:15

Yeah, definitely like I always check them for information and I feel like it's really helpful because they have like, on social media I feel like you have a shorter time of reaction. So they also for example, with this Coronavirus, they have like posted information on their social media first and then shortly after that on their website. So you feel like you're better informed like, if you follow the social media website ahm social media platforms of your gym, and then also checking the website like to compliment.

**Janina Roosen** 12:53

Yeah, so would you say that that also brands or like companies that are perceived as a person on social media? So as you already said that they are reacting faster. So do you think that it's like more personal as well?

**Amelie** 13:09

Yeah, I feel like for example, on Instagram, you also have like, specific functions like stories you can make, and it feels more personal to interact and like, on social media than on website and I think they're like, yeah, acting more as a person on on social media. If this is the question, or do I get it wrong?

**Janina Roosen** 13:36

No, that was correct. And um, does it have an influence on your opinion of a brand when you see how the brand interacts with other consumers on social media? So for instance, if there's negative feedback or something and the company is like, very nice replying, or like in a nice way replying to the to the person? Or like some times it might be that they are like, aggressive or not replying at all. So does it have an influence on your opinion of the brand when you can see how they interact with other customers?

**Amelie** 14:06

It actually has a big influence. I think it's, um, or impact. I think it's, um, it's personal because I really, like, check how they're answering. I think it's a personal thing. Because I think the communication with your consumer is really important. And it's one of the like, more easy ways to interact and like I think it's one of the easiest ways to show that you're like kind and like you're reacting well, you're like not rude or anything. I think it's something you can change easily. So for my like personal feeling, it's really important how companies act on social media and also reply to like questions and stuff. So I think it's it really has an impact on mine, and actually I unfollowed one company, because they like reacted really harsh to critic and, um, not that kind and also like very I don't know how to say unconstructive. Um, and I feel like this is not what you should do on social media and actually felt like that was really rude and not helpful for the company.

**Janina Roosen** 15:24

Oh, that's interesting and have you made any experiences regarding your gym or like the gyms you are considering to sign up like in terms of the reactions to other consumers?

**Amelie** 15:39

Yes I am I'm following. As I said I'm following my own gym where I had the membership till now. Hmm. And yeah like, um, I I know like, sorry I have to ask again. Can you say the question again?

**Janina Roosen** 15:54

Yeah so if you have made any experiences with your gym, for instance like the fitness accounts? That you have seen that they have reacted to some some critique, for instance, like that they give feedback to the consumers. Have you seen that before?

**Amelie** 16:11

Yeah, yeah. So what I wanted to say, for my gym which I'm still following also on social media. And I kind of saw like some interaction with followers and like questions they answered.

**Janina Roosen** 16:26

And does it have an impact on you? Or is it like rather positive or negative feedback they give?

**Amelie** 16:34

Yeah, I mean, it's it's positive so I for my gym, I don't check it like recently, or like often and frequently. Yeah. Not every week or so. So, I can't really say something about this, but it's not negative or not, not something negative. I have in my mind, like regarding this social media of my gym.

**Janina Roosen** 17:01

Hmm. So and I mean, like nowadays, social media is often, like, it's often said that it's kind of like a critical platform as well, like Instagram in particular. Because many people can like fake something and also brands, but would you say that it makes brand more authentic to to be very transparent?

**Amelie** 17:27

Yes, and I feel like transparency is really important. And for example, I will, I will say it as an example, again, in this situation with the Coronavirus, I feel like it's really important to be transparent and also to communicate with your followers and members. And yeah, I feel like it's really important.

**Janina Roosen** 17:55

So you're already saying something about gyms as well. So you may be experienced that the gyms or like the gym, you're following that they are very transparent on social media right now as well? And you say that it's important to you and makes it more authentic?

**Amelie** 18:12

Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**Janina Roosen** 18:14

And does it have an influence on how you react to the brand? Or like, like, does it have an influence on your reaction at all? So that you say like, if they aren't very authentic, then you would rather react so to say?

**Amelie** 18:31

Yeah, yeah, definitely. Like, I feel like I would rather react if they like more transparent and open.

**Janina Roosen** 18:40

Yeah. And actually any communities on social media, which you feel part of? So you said, like, I'm coming back to your gym chain again or like to gym. Do they have a community or would you say you belong to a you're a part of the online community of them on social media? Or is it not important to you? Or is there any other online communities on social media you feel part of? Like, for instance, fashion or like your school, for instance? Like, do you have any communities where you say you belong to these communities?

**Amelie** 19:14

Yeah, I have to say that, for me going to the gym is like something I do on my own. And so it's not like I feel I belong to the community of my gym, for example, but I do feel like I belong to a fitness community that stays active and healthy. And other communities maybe I belong to. Yeah, definitely interested and feel like part of communities like fashion and interior and stuff. But it's not like an actual community feeling you have with each other in person.

**Janina Roosen** 19:51

So but you're not interacting with people of like these communities?

**Amelie** 19:56

No, I'm not.

**Janina Roosen** 19:57

Okay. And while they're actually many fitness movements going on on social media nowadays. Like for instance, I'm not sure if you know, and the hashtag fitspiration where people try to motivate other people by posting, very fitness like fitness related content in order to, yeah, like as I said, to motivate like other people. Um, what is your general opinion regarding these fitness, lifestyle movements on social media? Because some people might say, it's healthy because it's helping people to get fit, but others say, it can be dangerous because wrong body ideals are created. So do you have any opinion regarding that topic?

**Amelie** 20:42

Yeah, I feel like I'm really open about it. I feel like why shouldn't you motivate others by, for example, using a specific hashtag. And I feel like that maybe people could be offended by a specific body type or like promoted by hashtags and stuff. But I have to say I'm like more open about it. I feel like everyone's moving freely on social media. So you always have the decision. Or you always can make a decision by yourself if you want to join, if you want to, like search for those hashtags, if you want to look at some posts, so I feel like motivation on social media is nice to have and really like can motivate you. Um, I feel like everybody's free and their decisions if they want to join or not. So I'm not seeing it is particularly unhealthy.

**Janina Roosen** 21:41

So, you say that it's helping you to to get motivated as well?

**Amelie** 21:46

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 21:46

In order to reach like, for instance, a certain fitness goal?

**Amelie** 21:50

Oh, no, it's for me personally, but I'm really open about it. I have to say so it's not putting any pressure on me. So for me, it's more motivating then rather than like putting pressure on me.

**Janina Roosen** 22:03

Okay. And do you often experience it but people you follow, for instance, that they are posting like fitness related pictures or that they try to present themselves as very healthy or fit do you follow these kind of people like, just your peers not influencers or something, but just like people you follow?

**Amelie** 22:24

Like friends?

**Janina Roosen** 22:25

Yeah.

**Amelie** 22:26

Yeah. I feel like it's getting more and more important and even people who, like in the past they didn't post anything about it. Like nowadays they post more about like staying healthy being fit, maybe posting their food, etc. And I feel like it's, yeah, it's getting more and more and people are like sharing more about their like, fitness

and health. Like, yeah, I feel like it's getting more but it's not, um, yeah, I do not follow as many people that are posting something like this. Yeah, but I feel like it's, yeah, increasing.

**Janina Roosen** 23:09

Okay. And like your gym chain or like gym you're following, would you say that it's helping you to become the ideal version of yourself? So that you become kind of like a more healthy or more fit person?

**Amelie** 23:27

No, I feel like my social media of my gym is not playing a big role in this it's more like personal motivation and also more about influencers and people. So it's, I check the social media accounts as I have mentioned more for inflammation than rather for like becoming my ideal self.

**Janina Roosen** 23:50

And, um, does fitness or like have any values for you. So what are important values for you regarding, just like fitness and being fit, for instance? Like is it more the fun part? Or is it interaction with friends while you work out? Is it discipline?

**Amelie** 24:08

I feel like for gym and going for a run it's more for myself like for my health and for fun and also yeah, like relaxing and, um leaving the daily life behind me. And I think team sports, for example, like or going for a run in a group is more for just for fun for interacting with people. And yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 24:35

And um you said that you, to say that again, um that you follow your gym chain or like a gym?

**Amelie** 24:42

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 24:42

And what comes to your mind when you think about that? Ah about the account? So is it that you see quite often and you feed for instance or that you see the stories? Or that friends are posting something or sharing a location? So how do you get exposed to your gym on social media?

**Amelie** 25:02

It's more about like regular posts, that I see my feed then stories because I think Instagram has this function where you like, see the stories first that you watch the most. So I rather see it and posts like actual posts of my gym, of my own gym than in stories and not that much like location pins or hashtags.

**Janina Roosen** 25:33

And what do you actually like that associations do you have um when you think about your gym? So is it like the logo for instance or the studio? So do you have any associations when thinking about your gym?

**Amelie** 25:49

Yes, definitely the logo and it's also like how they are put together and they have like a specific style in their studios, and I think they're like really always following the same concepts, so that comes to my mind. And also I know or I have in my mind that it's a big chain like gym chain. You can like go to the gym with your membership in every city and could switch, so that comes to my mind.

**Janina Roosen** 26:24

Okay, so that it is kind of like, also very flexible and a big gym?

**Amelie** 26:29

Yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 26:29

Okay. And um, when you go to the gym or like also just in general your behavior when going to the gym, is it more that it's, um, that the functional values are important to you? Or is it like more the emotional value? So that you kind of like have a bond with the with the gym? So functional would be that it's more that you go there because you train and you want to have the machines which you couldn't have at home. Um, or is it the emotional values?

**Amelie** 27:05

I think especially in smaller gyms it's regarding the emotional values and about the emotional connection for me, especially, it's really important about the functional values.

**Janina Roosen** 27:23

Okay, and do you think your gym is able to communicate these values on social media? So the functional values?

**Amelie** 27:31

I think they're more about the emotional factor.

**Janina Roosen** 27:34

Okay.

**Amelie** 27:35

I see the posts and I know like, they are more about like the people that train there and having like, and more of community sense than what actually function they have.

**Janina Roosen** 27:49

Okay. And, um, which attributes are the most important aspects for you in terms of the quality of a gym? So is it the service? Or the machines? Or what's very important for you and that, um that topic?

**Amelie** 28:06

For me personally, it's, of course the machines and good quality they are but also what courses they offer. And if they are live or if they are on screen, I think that's really important to me. And also like, how friendly the service is. And I also love that, for example, my gym, there's always somebody there to communicate about any problems or if you forgot something, I think that's really important as well.

**Janina Roosen** 28:38

And would you say that they are able to communicate these values or like these aspects on social media as well? Or is it rather have you experienced that in real life for your gym?

**Amelie** 28:50

Yeah. I feel like they communicate especially like the community's sense and also the communication and being in this together as I would say. More than just like, which machines they have and the function. I mean they

promoted their new live courses really big. So, I think that as well but they're not like dive deep into the functions of their machines and stuff on social media.

**Janina Roosen** 29:22

Okay. And now you already said something about price and the service. So what would you define as the most important decision factors to become a loyal gym member? So is it rather like the service or design of the quality like the price as you said, the location so what's very important?

**Amelie** 29:41

I feel like it's a little bit of everything but most important the price and also what they offer for this price. So for example, if you get like live courses with it for a good price. And then afterwards I would say it's about design and if I feel like being in a community.

**Janina Roosen** 30:06

Okay, and would you define yourself as a loyal member to your, like loyal member of your gym right now?

**Amelie** 30:14

Yes, I would say so, yeah.

**Janina Roosen** 30:16

Okay. So now we are almost done. It's the last part of our interview and I have asked you to have a look at John Red's Instagram account before our interview. Let's talk about your impressions and just like your general opinion of the John Reed Instagram page, but now my first question would be did you know John Reed before?

**Amelie** 30:44

I knew John Reed before, yes.

**Janina Roosen** 30:46

Okay, so like even though you knew it before, I have just like a short introduction for you. John Reed is a German gym chain and they have approximately 26 gyms worldwide and further openings are planned in the close future and they are acting in the premium discounts segment of gyms and they belong to RSG group, which again is the owner of many fitness related brands such as Cyberobics and they provide live courses, not live close, sorry, online courses, online classes, and they have other gyms such as McFit and High5Gyms. Do you actually follow John Reed on Instagram?

**Amelie** 32:03

I do not follow John Reed.

**Janina Roosen** 32:05

Okay, and um you have seen the account now. So what do you remember from like the profile? Is there anything what comes to your mind? Or what you liked or what you dislike or what you what you didn't like?

**Amelie** 32:20

So the first thing that comes to my mind is like more moody. They have like moody pictures like dark pictures and the whole impression is like really clean? On the on the posts on the pictures they post. And I feel like after this interview I feel like it's more about like community and design wise the posts themselves and I feel like it's really good. Like, it speaks to me.

**Janina Roosen** 32:48

Okay, so you like to the overall first impression.

**Amelie** 32:52

Yes, I like the first impression.

**Janina Roosen** 32:55

And did you find it interesting what you what you've seen on the profile? So the pictures of the people and the content?

**Amelie** 33:05

Yeah so some posts more other posts less. The post about the fitness studios themselves, I find it quite interesting because they have cool design and speak to me as a consumer and I didn't dive deep into the posts with the people like telling me what they're doing there. But I feel like they're doing a good job in like representing their gym online.

**Janina Roosen** 33:37

So and are there any attributes you would associate with the brand?

**Amelie** 33:43

Yes, I feel like young. One of the attributes I would say first like, it's I feel like they're posting a lot of pictures with young people like, um, I don't know millennials or so. Also, yeah, like a really clean designed. look.

**Janina Roosen** 34:04

Would you also say that it's urban and cool? Or would you rather say that it's a bit boring maybe and elegant, classy?

**Amelie** 34:16

Yeah. I feel like, it's really urban and like kind of industrial, moody.

**Janina Roosen** 34:23

Yeah. So and I'm not sure if you've seen that, but their slogan is not your average gym? So would you or like, what would you associate with that? Or do you have any associations? Would you say that it's covered like this slogan by the graphic impressions on social media?

**Amelie** 34:40

Yeah, definitely. Because I also read the slogan first, and didn't know like, like, I don't felt like it was specific for this gym because I knew what, what what to expect. But then I looked at the pictures and I feel like it's kind of more a community based gym with a cool design that speaks to you and I saw that they also have like, some lounge chairs and stuff and maybe I don't know if it's a Café or something, but really like places where you can get together and chat with each other. So I feel like it's more a place to come and train and talk to people maybe relax. I don't know. And then I think it speaks to the slog and that it's not your average gym where you just go do your workout and leave. So yeah, I feel like it's it looks like a really cool place.

**Janina Roosen** 35:38

Yeah, that's nice. And can you already like just from your first impression, can you say something regarding the quality like what you kind of like perceived quality? So that it's maybe like a high quality gym or just like more low quality or that it's a good service? So, um, can you say something regarding this?



**Amelie** 36:00

I feel like that they have a really strong Instagram feed and also the quality of the pictures are good. And they have like a cohesive design and the pictures and also the color. So I would consider that as more pricey or I think you see that they're thinking about what they pose. So I would not expect to be really cheap, but also not like high high high class.

**Janina Roosen** 36:32

Okay. And just before you mentioned that, and for instance, the service and the machines are very important to you and that they are kind of like decision factors for you in order to become a loyal customer of a gym chain. And would you say that John Reed is communicating these values on Instagram? So good service or like that that's consumer friendly and that they have like good machines?

**Amelie** 36:57

Yeah, I think these values are really hard to communicate on social media and it's not something I would say I'm getting from the pictures right away.

**Janina Roosen** 37:05

Okay. And so now, the last question actually, um, according to like what generators posting on social media? Would you consider to become a customer? Or would you considered to at least have a look on their website or like on their social media again and see, like, where they have a studio or just like, yeah, um thinking about becoming a member?

**Amelie** 37:30

Yeah, I would definitely think about becoming a member because they have a studio in Berlin as well. We're moving now. And I would first check the website and then afterwards maybe decide, but it speaks to me as a consumer, but I would check their offers and also prices before I'm like, would get even more information about it.

**Janina Roosen** 37:55

Okay, great, actually that person and do you have any further questions?

**Amelie** 38:01

No thank you and thank you for the interview.

**Janina Roosen** 38:03

So then thank you very much for the interview and then I will stop the recording now.

## Appendix 5: Overview of created codes in NVivo

**DATEN**

- Dateien
- Dateiklassifizierungen
- Externe Quellen

**CODES**

- Knoten**

**FÄLLE**

**HINWEISE**

- Memos
- Anmerkungen
- Memo-Verknüpfungen

**SUCHE**

**ABBILDUNGEN**

- Abbildungen

**Name**

- ▼ 1 Demographics
  - Age
  - Hobbies
  - Name
  - Place of living
  - Profession
- ▼ 2 Individual fitness routine
  - Current routine and methods
  - Importance of fitness
  - Past routine and methods
- ▼ 3 Social Media
  - Evaluation of own usage
  - Fitness lifestyle influencer on social media
  - Gym chains - home workouts on social media
  - Importance from 1-10
  - Social Media for communication with companies
  - Social Media for communication with friends
- ▼ 4 Consumer engagement on social media
  - COBRA
  - Congruity theory, ideal self-image and received brand supp...
  - Congruity theory, important values regarding fitness
  - Creation of UGC
  - Extended Self, fitness trend on social media
  - Extended Self, network presenting itself as fit on social media
  - Extended self, presenting oneself as fit on social media
  - Media dependency (information search)
  - Parasocial interaction (perception of brands as persons)
  - Perceived credibility (authenticity of brands on social media)
  - Social identity, community identification on social media
- ▼ 5 CBBE on social media
  - Brand associations to current or past gym
  - Brand associations, communication via social media
  - Brand associations, functional values vs. emotional values
  - Brand awareness, exposure of fitness brands
  - Brand loyalty, evaluation of customer loyalty
  - Brand loyalty, loyalty values
  - Perceived quality, communication via social media
  - Perceived quality, quality attributes
- ▼ 6 John Reed
  - Brand associations, attributes based on experience
  - Brand associations, attributes based on Instagram account
  - Brand associations, brand's slogan
  - Brand awareness, evaluation after first impression
  - Brand awareness, first impression of Instagram presence
  - Brand loyalty, becoming a potential customer
  - Brand loyalty, loyalty values on Instagram account
  - Perceived quality, attributes seen on Instagram account
  - Perceived quality, based on experience
  - Previous knowledge of other RSG group brands
  - Previous knowledge, experience with brand

OBJEKTE ÖFFNEN

1 Objekte ausgewählt

## Appendix 6: Translation of highlighted expert statements

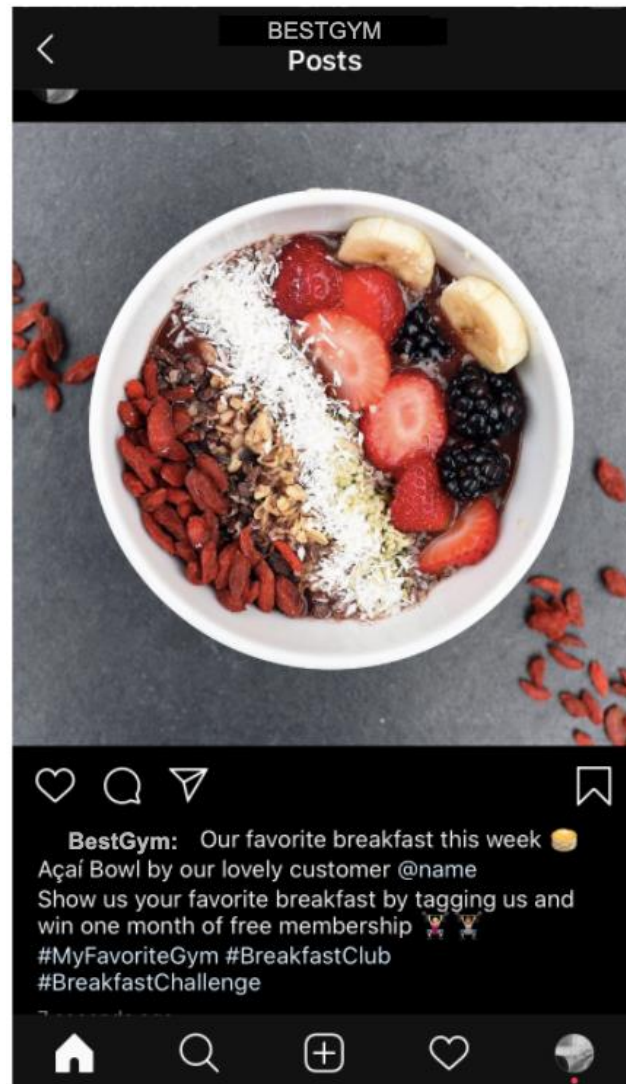
	German quote	English translation
1	Und mit John Reed haben wir ein Konzept entwickelt, was so ein bisschen lifestyliger ist, urbaner, so ein bisschen cooler, wo es darum geht, dass man beim Training an einem schönen Ort ist, mit angenehmen Menschen, und dass man Spaß hat.	With John Reed we have developed a concept which is more into the lifestyle, urban and a bit cooler, where it's all about being at a nice place while working out with pleasant people and where you have fun.
2	Und insgesamt ist es für uns eher ein emotionaler Ansatz als der funktionale Ansatz bei McFit.	For us it is more an emotional approach as opposed to the functional approach at McFit.
3	Und wir versuchen eben auch so die Emotionen und das Herz anzusprechen.	And we also try to appeal to the emotions and the heart in the same way.
4	Bei uns geht es im Markenkern, also bei John Reed, um das John Reed Feeling, also das gesamte Trainingserlebnis soll sich anders anfühlen.	Our brand essence, so the one of John Reed, is about the John Reed feeling, the overall workout experience is supposed to feel different.
5	Und wir haben eben das Thema Musik, was auch einen wesentlichen Teil des Konzepts ausmacht.	Also music is representing a fundamental part of our concept.
6	Und der vierte Markenwert ist dann Community, wo wir dann auch regelmäßig verschiedene Events machen,	And the fourth brand value is the community where we are organizing events regularly.
7	Wir wollen da natürlich die USP's kommunizieren. Also hohe Qualität im Sinne von eher im Sinne von USP's.	We want to communicate our USP's [on social media]. So high quality in terms of USP's.
8	Also gut situiert finanziell muss man ja eigentlich gar nicht sein.	Well, you don't really need to be well-off financially.
9	Wir sprechen dann immer ein bisschen liebevoll vom Premium Discount Segment.	We then always speak a little affectionately of the premium discount segment.
10	Aber bei uns, wir richten uns auch eher an lifestyligere Leute, an ein urbanes Publikum, an Leute, die auch Bock haben, rauszugehen, Musik zu hören, Leute zu treffen und für die Sport ein wichtiger Teil des Lebens ist, aber auch nicht der wichtigste und auch Fitness nicht unbedingt der wichtigste. Man macht vielleicht noch andere Sportarten und geht zwei, dreimal die Woche ins Studio.	But with us, we also tend to target more lifestyle-oriented people, an urban audience, people who also like to go out, listen to music, meet people and for whom sport is an important part of life, but not the most important and fitness is not necessarily the most important. You might do other sports and go to the studio two or three times a week.
11	Und der vierte Markenwert ist dann Community, wo wir dann auch regelmäßig verschiedene Events	And the fourth brand value is community, where we regularly hold various events, where we also

	machen, wo wir eben auch über Social Media mit der Community in Interaktion treten und versuchen, sie irgendwie einzubinden über verschiedene Maßnahmen.	interact with the community via social media and try to somehow integrate them through various measures.
12	Und mit Social Media können wir halt auch immer lokal targeten.	And with social media we can always target locally.
13	Also Instagram ist schon die wichtigste Plattform für uns von den Social Media Plattformen.	So Instagram is the most important platform for us among the social media platforms.
14	Natürlich ist es noch riesig groß [Facebook], und gerade auch für Werbung, für Paid Content ist es immer noch wichtig. Aber so an sich, für die Bespielung von unseren eigenen Kanälen, da ist Instagram am wichtigsten und auch gerade durch das Story Format.	Of course it is still huge [Facebook], and especially for advertising, for paid content it is still important. But for our own channels, Instagram is the most important especially due to the story format.
15	Deswegen ist bei uns Instagram auf jeden Fall die wichtigste Social Media Plattform.	That's why Instagram is definitely the most important social media platform for us.
16	[...] es geht um Qualität und USP's, die uns vom Wettbewerb unterscheiden. Und das ist auf jeden Fall ein Hauptziel bei Social Media.	It's all about quality and USP's setting us apart from the competitors. And this is definitely a major goal in our social media marketing
17	Also das ist dann so der zweite Teil neben dem Ziel Neukundenakquise wirklich auch Bestandskunden-Maßnahmen, was eben auch super wichtig ist. Das ist auch auf jeden Fall ein Hauptziel, die Leute an uns zu binden [...].	That's the second part, besides the goal of acquiring new customers, measures for existing customers, which is also very important. This is also a main goal in any case, to bind people to us [on social media].
18	Wir haben auch Sales-Kampagnen, bei denen es auch um den Preis geht oder um gewisse Preisangebote. Wir haben bei Neueröffnungen auch in der Regel Preisangebote, aber wir versuchen diesen Brand- und Emotionspart auch schon stark zu spielen, da wir auch glauben, dass je begehrtlicher und attraktiver die Marke.	We also have sales campaigns that also focus on price or certain price offers. We usually have price offers for new openings, but we also try to play this brand and emotional part strongly, because we also believe that the more desirable and attractive the brand.
19	Aber es hängt dann bei Social Media auch vom Kanal ab, da wir immer viel „Marke“ mit kommunizieren wollen und natürlich auch unsere Markenwerte auf Social Media gut kommunizieren können.	But with social media it then also depends on the channel, because we always want to communicate a lot of "brand" and of course we can communicate our brand values well on social media.
20	Generell ist die Konkurrenz extrem groß.	In general the competition is extremely strong.
21	Value for Money, aber in einem Lifestyle Konzept.	Value for money, but in a lifestyle concept.

22	Wir gehen natürlich idealerweise auf Influencer, die schon bei uns trainieren, die auch affin zur Marke sind. Wir haben auch viele Influencer mit denen wir schon lange zusammenarbeiten. Die dann halt auch wirklich mit John Reed in Verbindung stehen und die sich dann auch beim Gym Workout filmen.	Of course, ideally we go for influencers who already train with us and who have an affinity to the brand. We also have many influencers with whom we have been working for a long time. Those who are really connected to John Reed and who also film themselves during the gym workout.
23	Was will ich eigentlich mit meinem Influencer erreichen?" Da kann man ja auch verschiedene Ziele haben. Bei uns geht es oft um Reichweite erhöhen. Das ist halt tatsächlich Werbung und Promotion oder die Influencer eben einzubinden, zum Beispiel bei Events. Also, ich sehe bei den Influencern selber keine Konkurrenz, weil ich finde, es macht auch keiner so gut, dass er jetzt bei uns in der Zielgruppe eine Konkurrenz wäre, dass die Leute sich jetzt gegen einen Gym-Vertrag entscheiden würden.	What do I want to achieve with my influencer?" Well, you can have different goals. In our case it's often about increasing range. That's really advertising and promotion or to integrate the influencers, for example at events. Well, I don't see any competition among the influencers themselves, because I don't think anybody does it so well, that they would be competition for us in the target group, that people would decide against a gym contract now.
24	[...] weil wir eine sehr Social Media affine Zielgruppe haben, also sowohl vom Alter als auch von der Lebensgestaltung her.	[...] because we have a very social-media-oriented target group, i.e. both in terms of age and lifestyle.
25	Also ich glaube nicht, dass sich jetzt bei uns jemand nicht anmelden würde, weil als er jetzt einem Influencer folgt, der geniale Workouts gibt, weil bei uns ja auch diese Atmosphäre im Club wirklich zum Konzept gehört.	Well, I don't think anyone wouldn't sign up with us now, because as he follows an influencer who gives great workouts, because this atmosphere in the club is really part of our concept.
26	Und da kann man immer noch argumentieren, gut, 25€, wenn du jetzt schon einen Job hast, dann kann man sich das leisten.	And you can still argue, well, 25€, if you already have a job, then you can afford it.
27	Aber es geht um Qualität und USP's, die uns vom Wettbewerb unterscheiden. Und das ist auf jeden Fall ein Hauptziel bei Social Media.	But it's all about quality and USP's that set us apart from the competition. And this is definitely a key objective in social media.
28	Aber es hängt dann bei Social Media auch vom Kanal ab, da wir immer viel „Marke“ mit kommunizieren wollen und natürlich auch unsere Markenwerte auf Social Media gut kommunizieren können.	But with social media it then also depends on the channel, because we always want to communicate a lot of "brand" and of course we can communicate our brand values well on social media.
29	Und auch immer zu überlegen, was ist cooler, interessanter Content oder wie können wir auch die Leute aufrufen, über Hashtags mit uns in Kontakt zu treten oder eben auch über Reposts. Also auch darüber, diesen Markenwert Community extrem spielen.	And to always think about what's cool, interesting content or how can we get people to contact us via hashtags or even via reposts. So also about playing this brand equity community extremely.

30	Wir müssen halt immer gucken, dass es auch nahbar genug bleibt. Also Coolness ist auch immer nur so lange cool, solange die Leute das für sich nachvollziehen können.	We just have to make sure that it stays approachable enough. So coolness is only cool as long as people can understand it for themselves.
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## Appendix 7: Instagram post example



Instagram Post Example – Recipes (Pixabay, 2016b). Source: Author's own depiction.