



Consumer Brand Awareness – Fitness Industry, Instagram and Influencing Female Millennials

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<p>The subject of the thesis is consumer brand awareness on Instagram – fitness industry and millennials. Brand awareness of consumers is vital for increasing company revenue as well as selling services or products. Social media has changed the marketing and advertising landscape for organizations as they are forced to adapt to the changes it has brought to the world. With the number of social media users reaching nearly 3 billion in 2020, investments into social media advertising continues to grow. Cost efficiency of advertising on social media and its impact on consumer behavior has increased the competition among global brands. Female users and young adult population dominate the platform and have the highest spending behavior with users aged 14 to 30. The fitness industry is continuing to grow to reach revenue of 100 billion dollars. Hence, Instagram represents an ideal platform for first encounters with millennials, as they are the driving force behind the platform.</p> <p>The study focuses on brand awareness within the scope of the fitness industry and female millennials in the Instagram context. The research analyzes three fitness Instagram-popular brands in order to gain an understanding of how to achieve successful brand recognition among female millennials and to determine specific actions which can be executed to influence brand awareness on Instagram. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three Instagram based fitness brand leaders that focus their marketing strategies on female millennials on Instagram: Nepra Activewear, Nine Pine Activewear and Weekendbee Sportswear. The theoretical part of the thesis provides a literature review on establishing a brand on social media and the evolution of Instagram. Research findings reveal that in the competitive fitness market, utilizing Instagram Stories and user generated content such as mentions and tagged photos of users, posting compelling educational authentic content, and building community around the brand and its values, greatly supports engagement and brand awareness among female millennials.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims of the study

Social media has changed traditional means of communication and has become a mass media. The importance of social media has grown tremendously for millions on users: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram continue to grow their customer base of social media users, forecasted to reach up to 2.95 billion by 2020. These platforms provide two-way communication between consumers and brands in the marketing communication process (Berthon et.al. 2008). In this communication, consumers are a vital part and are able to influence the process in contrast to traditional marketing. Brands are able to engage and interact with social media users and consumers by executing campaigns and social media marketing communications. Brand awareness is a powerful concept, which has a major impact on organizational revenue, marketing efforts and consumer perception. In a world where consumers rely on comprehensive research and feedback of other consumers before making a simple purchase, brand trust is everything (Decker A., 2018). Organizations seek brand trust and awareness more than anything, as it makes customers loyal to their product and make them more likely to purchase that product repeatedly in the future as well.

As a marketing tool, social media present powerful opportunities to build brand-consumer relationships and communication. However, creating brand awareness is a challenging, complex and time-consuming process. Success on social media has become one of the main goals of companies' overall marketing strategy. In addition to having more than 2.4 billion users – which is expected to increase – social media is not going to be relegated to the background anytime soon and purchases made online will increase even more with time. This means abundance of paid advertising and higher competition for users' attention. Making audiences aware of a brand will become more and more challenging. Limited financial and time resources create challenges especially for small companies in keeping up. To stay in the minds of current followers and to attract new ones, clear objectives are required for social media marketing communication. That is why companies need to adapt and make their social media strategies a number one priority.

This thesis will investigate how influencers build brand awareness on Instagram among female millennials interested in fitness. It will investigate challenges of gaining attention of social media users, establishing brand awareness, and connecting with consumers as well as the importance of strategic Instagram marketing activities. The research will analyze three fitness Instagram-popular brands in order to gain an understanding of how to achieve successful brand recognition among female millennials. The outcome of the research will be analyzed to determine concrete actions that should be executed to influence engagement of customers, brand exposure and increased brand awareness.

This thesis research will answer the following questions:

How can brand awareness among female fitness millennials be increased through Instagram?

What specific actions/techniques increase brand awareness and recognition?

The use of social media does greatly affect brand awareness. Brand awareness has positive correlation with electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and customer engagement in the social media context. The theoretical framework of the thesis and findings of the interviews will identify concrete activities that can be used to influence brand awareness through Instagram in order to influence fitness-minded millennials.

The results of the thesis are useful and important for fitness organizations, which are present in social media and want to build their brand and increase their revenue. Generally, the results will be useful for the social media marketing research field and brand/marketing specialists.

1.2 Research method and limitations

The method of research chosen for this thesis is qualitative content analysis. Literature review and semi-structured interviews will be used as complementary research methods. Qualitative research techniques will be used to analyze the findings of the interviews. Qualitative research methods are often utilized to examine attributes of branding. Such

techniques are unstructured evaluation approaches through which a series of possible consumer responses is permitted. Keller (2003) states that a qualitative research method is the beneficial first step in brand analysis due to the extensive freedom it provides for researchers as well as customers in their responses.

The research investigates what kind of content gains the most engagement among female Instagram users and what methods companies need to implement in order to gain higher brand awareness. To get a deeper understanding of brand awareness in consumers' minds, traditional advertising and marketing theories, such as purchase funnel theories, and the hierarchy of effects model, are presented in the literature review section of the research. Through conducting three semi-structured interviews with Instagram based fitness brand leaders and specialists that focus their marketing strategies on female millennials on Instagram, the thesis will investigate actions which impact building of brand awareness. Three brands were identified and key persons were interviewed from the following companies: Nepra Activewear, Nine Pine Activewear and Weekendbee Sportswear. Interview results are analyzed in the findings section. The interviewees were contacted through Instagram or LinkedIn and chosen using purposive sampling. Research interview questions are presented in the Appendices section.

The literature review is used as a theoretical framework to analyze recent articles and books investigating brand awareness and social media user engagement. The theoretical part will also thoroughly investigate millennials in the social media and Instagram context. In addition, Instagram as a social media platform is defined. Since digital marketing is constantly evolving, the literature review will concentrate on the newest publications.

The research does not take into consideration how brand awareness correlates to financial reports nor is the turnover of the three featured companies part of the research. Neither does the research involve all the statistics and numbers regarding brands' performances across Instagram since it is not an internal investigation. For example, engagement rates, most liked and commented posts, or total reach of interviewed brands will not be evaluated. The research does not investigate the impact of Instagram Shop and Stories on brand awareness. Customer engagement and WOM were the primary focus factors of the study. Paid advertising is not inside the scope of the study, although it might be challenging to

achieve brand awareness without it. Moreover, chosen interviewed brands are still new to the market and might not possess the whole spectrum of field knowledge and expertise. The study is also limited by the amount of interviewees.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

People are making their purchases online more than ever. In 2018, e-commerce sales made up 11.9% of all global retail sales and the number will continue to grow. (Garvin R., 2019) It has been found that 74% of consumers rely on social networks to help with their purchasing decisions.

A recent study suggests that almost three-quarters of consumers rely on social networks to guide purchase decisions and that almost half of these consumers purchase a product after sharing it on social media (Saboo, Kumar, & Ramani, 2016).

According to BigCommerce marketing company, which represents popular brands such as Ben&Jerry and SkullCandy, the three best places to invest money for advertising are Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The value of social media for businesses and their return on investment is undeniable. Around 96% of marketers by 2017 were using social media as a marketing channel (Garvin R., 2019).

It's becoming clear for companies that social media as a sales channel is a tool that needs to be embraced and mastered, especially when it comes to brand image. Big companies such as Coca-Cola, Nike, GoPro, Adidas, McDonald's and Red Bull have recognized and accepted the power of social media and its importance for their brand. (Hsin-Chen L. et al, 2017). Social media helps companies to be able to understand what consumers think about their product, how loyal they are to their brand and whether they intend to purchase a particular product or not. (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, & de Vries, 2015) The popularity of a brand undoubtedly relates to purchase intentions of consumers, organizational sales, and stock prices. An organizational use of social media and the popularity of its brand posts online can positively affect purchase behaviors of their consumers (Hsin-Chen L. et.al, 2017).

With their exceptional communicative and interactive features, social media offer new possibilities for businesses: tools for engagement and collaboration of customers but also to boost brand awareness. Consumer choices, decision making, and behavior are greatly affected by awareness of a brand by consumers (Barreda A.A et al. 2015). A special feature that makes social networks so attractive is that it allows marketers and advertisers to

have a two-way communication with users. Virtual social networks give users the opportunity to interact, as well as to have a more influential, effective and direct relationship with companies and brands (Sánchez-Torres J. & Arroyo-Cañada, 2016).

2.1 Definitions

To form an understanding of what brand awareness means in a social media context, the central concepts, such as brand, social media, Instagram and brand awareness are defined.

Social media

Social media is the online environment where people with common interests come together to share their thoughts, comments, and ideas. Social media are web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible. (Sloan & Quan Haase, 2017). It involves several different social (online) channels in several forms, including Internet forums, message boards, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. For a significant number of small businesses, Facebook and Instagram are the most engaged social media platforms used for media marketing. It is indicated that Instagram is an effective tool for reaching the final consumers of a service or product. As a marketing tool, social networks such as Facebook and Instagram provide great opportunities to create brand consumer relationships as they provide exceptional connectivity between companies and their customers (Maria S. et.al, 2019)

Instagram

Instagram is a company founded in 2010 in America. It is a mobile application that is made available for smartphone users free of charge. Instagram is a social networking platform that affords its users the capacity to share contents in the form of pictures, and audio-visuals, which are subsequently accessed by other users. Since its creation, Instagram has been able to obtain as much as 100 million active users with as much as 40

million pictures being uploaded daily and close to 8500 likes generated per second (Instagram Press, 2017). Instagram is used by businesses to connect and communicate with their respective customers and potential customers with respect to products, brands, and other incendiaries. It is often the norm for companies to upload pictures of their products and brands on Instagram to convey a personal message.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the level of consumer recognition, acceptance, and recall of a brand. (Percy and Rossiter, 1992). Brand refers to degree of consumer recognition of a product by its name (Wikipedia, 2020). Creation of brand awareness is a vital step in order to promote a new product or refresh an older brand and ideally, separate it from its competitors. It is stated that brand recognition is the extent to which people or an organization's target market can identify a brand by its attributes. (Kopp, 2019)

Millennials

The term millennial refers to people born between 1980 and 2000. The term can extend far beyond those age barriers as millennials form a major influence over national and global economies. This means they become essential for any business as a target for marketing. Millennials according to Diamond S. (2018), hold great economic influence and brand advocacy. They can share information more quickly than ever with access to Internet, and they are trend setters. They are the most connected generation that ever existed. Millennials have tremendous market power, and they accounted for 30% of retail sales. (Diamond S., 2018)

2.2 Brand in the social media context

2.2.1 Definition of a brand

Fundamentally, a brand represents a name, symbol, term or a sign, an emotional experience a customer has with a company, it's product, or service. Brand is intended to separate

a product or service from its competitors. It represents more than a rational connection to a product. It is a relationship and it goes beyond boundaries of reason. (Hammond J., 2011) There is a difference between “brand” and “product”. Both of these terms are satisfying basic needs of a consumer, however, a brand adds an emotional, intangible attribute to a product, aiming at communicating thoughts and feelings which increases a product's value. Brand plays a major role in the decision process of a consumer with certain expected performance and benefits (Chan-Olmsted, S. M., 2005).

Branding is essential to marketing communications; it is an experience that is embedded in the mind of every customer and the success of individual brands are dependent on how effectively brand owners transmit it to the public. Brand holds focus of attention for all negative and positive expressions made by the consumers over time as they come across the brand's product, personnel, communication, and distribution channels (Kepferer J., 2008). Brand is also described as:

A collection of actual and emotional characteristics associated with a particular identified product or service that differentiates that product or service from the rest of the marketplace. (Egan J., 2007, 10-11)

In essence, a brand is created in the mind of the customers and aims at creating value and positive meaning and associations connected to the product in order to distinguish it from competitors and be recognized among customers (Egan J., 2007). All human beings are influenced by emotions, feelings, and relationships. Brand choice operates on emotions rather than logical reasons. Brands are stored in customers' memories hence their influence is long lasting. From the financial point of view, a brand's economic influence extends farther than only product consumption (Kepferer J., 2008). Keller states (1998) that brands help consumers identify the source and quality of a product, assign responsibility to producers, reduce risk and search cost, form relationships between product makers and consumers and serve as a symbolic tool.

Brands need to provide a feeling of authenticity for customers as truthfulness and ethics of a company are factors that affect purchase decisions. Diamond (2020) describes an authentic brand as one that seems truthful, transparent and cares about customers satisfaction. Additional value in branding include reassurance, promise of performance, transformation and positive experience. A branded product creates loyal customers, legally

protects unique features and signals “quality” levels and is considered an asset as it is an equity of its own. All of these brand features equip companies with a source of long-term competitive advantage and financial returns (Chan-Olmsted, S. M., 2005).

In the brand-dominated climate of modern society, customers are prepared to pay a premium amount for a preferred brand, especially if they feel loyal to that particular brand and a successful long-term relationship has been formed (Hammond J., 2011). Creation of a brand is a continuous marketing process and requires businesses to adapt and implement a set of new marketing techniques that should be designed to reflect the changing life cycle of a product and its environment (Chan-Olmsted, S. M., 2005). Philip Kotler (2016) has stated that brand building is the most important element in the art of marketing. Without the brand, the product becomes simply a commodity. Keller (2003) states that brands provide a shorthand instrument or means of simplification for consumer’s purchase decision. Whenever and wherever a customer is making a decision about alternative products, the role of brand in their judgement has an extensive implication.

2.2.2 Brand Awareness

Brand Awareness plays a vital role in forming consumer behavior. Brand awareness shows the strength of a brand and is a common tool to examine the effectiveness of advertising (Survey Monkey, 2020). Creating brand awareness is often considered the first step of branding and appears when a brand becomes recognizable and customers are able to recall previous relationships with the brand (Kotler & Pfertch, 2007). Although creating brand identity might be a strategic goal for a company, the image consumers mind hold about the brand can be vastly different from that objective. Brand awareness can be defined as the degree to which a customer is able to recognize a brand among others and even recall its promise.

It is an extent to which people identify a company and its product or service (Chan-Olmsted, S. M., 2005). Moreover, it is defined as a measure of how well consumers identify brands and probability that a brand will appear in the mind of the consumer and the ease with which it does so, given various types of suggestions (Keller K., 2003). The higher the number of consumers which can identify the brand is directly relative to higher

brand awareness. Brand awareness does not imply that the customer must recall a certain company name. Most importantly, a customer needs to know the attributes of a product or service that differentiates it from others in the same category of a product or service. Brand awareness displays the value of a company, its brand strength, equity, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. It is achieved when consumers are aware that a certain brand is the best for meeting their needs and consequently chooses a firm's product over another similar product (Kang J., 2018).

One of the main goals of marketing is creating and maintaining a high level of brand loyalty, including behavior as well as cognitive and emotional loyalty. Establishing brand awareness plays a vital role in strategic marketing as it builds a connection between a company and its customer. Moreover, it plays a crucial factor in the decision-making process of a customer prior to making a purchase and is considered a forecast of how customers make these choices. Kapferer (2008) states that brand awareness is a collective phenomenon. Brand awareness is described to be more than mere cognitive measure. It is connected to many beneficial image dimensions such as quality/price ratio, customer service, reliability, trust, style, and originality. Keller (2003) states that in order to increase brand awareness of a product name or company, sponsorships are an impactful way to affect sustained brand exposure, a required condition to develop brand recognition. Through skillfully appointed sponsorships of activities and events, recognition of a product and subsequently brand recall can be increased.

A brand's presence in the mind of the consumer is strengthened by prior experiences and it could enable consumers to form and learn information about a brand. Emotional associations are stated to have a considerable effect on brand awareness. These associations develop construction of brand preferences and brand loyalty. Organizations could also achieve a considerable competitive advantage through brand awareness (Alimen N., Cerit G., 2010). It is evident that brand awareness is fundamental to a company's success.

According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness is hierarchical and consists of three different dimensions: brand recognition, brand recall and the highest level of knowledge, mind recognition. The awareness pyramid (Figure 1) can be interpreted that the higher a level of brand awareness the stronger the relationship of a consumer to the brand, which leads

to higher levels of loyalty and commitment. Brand recognition confirms whether the brand is perceived by people and displays consumers ability to verify prior exposure to the brand. Brand recall shows if the brand is recalled from memory when given cues such as usage/purchase situations, benefits or product categories (Hoxha H., 2019). Top-of-the-mind awareness represents the highest level of brand awareness for a brand, as it is the first to come to consumers mind when a consumer thinks of a brand and its relation to a certain quality (Chan-Olmsted, S. M., 2005).



Figure 1. Awareness Pyramid (Aaker D., 1991)

Aaker (1991) states that brand awareness creates value in at least four ways:

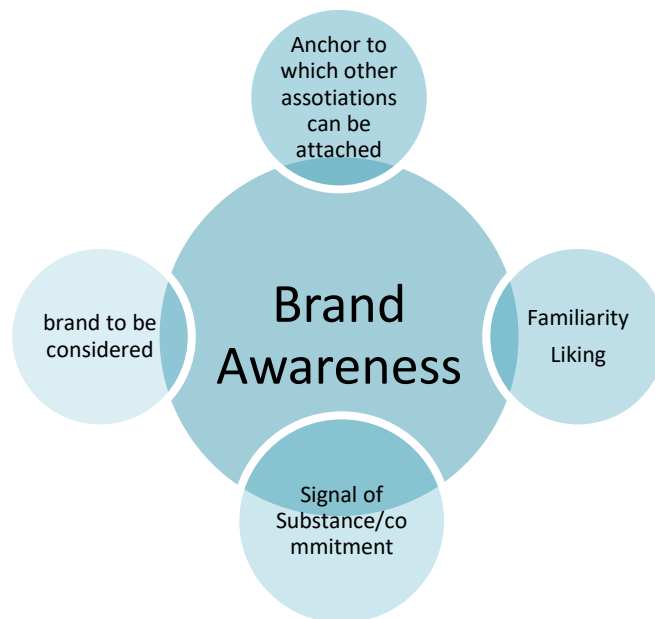


Figure 2. Brand awareness value. (Aaker D., 1991)

When a consumer is aware of a brand, he connects feelings and associations to that brand. Brand awareness helps to create anchors to which customers can attach those associations. (Figure 2). Name awareness can be a signal of commitment of buyers. If the name is recognized, there is a signal of substance formed. The logic of consumers is that the firm has advertised extensively, has been in business for a long time, is widely distributed and successful and that other people are using it. These assumptions do not necessarily mean a knowledge of specific facts about the brand. Even if there is no specific knowledge, brand awareness plays a pivotal role and puts a big effect on product consideration and purchase decisions. Brand Awareness provides a sense of familiarity and people like when something is familiar to them. In the absence of motivation to engage in attribute evaluation, familiarity may be enough (Aaker D., 1991).

2.2.3 Brand recognition

Brand recognition also known as *aided recall*, refers to how consumers recognize a brand or their ability to correctly identify a certain product or service just by viewing a brand's color scheme, logo, packaging, or advertising campaign. It is a basic first step in the communication task. There cannot be brand awareness without brand recognition, and vice versa (Kang J., 2018). It is pointless to attempt to communicate attributes of a brand until the name is established, to which we associate those attributes. Chain of associations to a brand is crucial. Without the name ready and accessible in the mind of the customer, brand related facts and feelings become mystified and cannot be accessed. A new product or service is naturally interested in gaining recognition as it is a key initial construct and a purchase decision can rarely occur without recognition (Aaker, 1991). Brand recognition has a strong effect on people's judgement and companies need to keep their brand in the eyes and minds of consumers so that the product or service is easily recognized (Webb, R.L., 2017).

Brand recognition is placed at a minimal level of awareness (see figure 1). It requires the consumer to recall prior knowledge and it can be triggered via color schemes, tone of voice, and audio. To create brand recognition, companies are required constantly to provide consumers with an invariable auditory or visual learning experience and utilize homogenous advertising messages providing consistency with logo, packaging, fonts, styles

and colors across all media platforms. Brand recognition can be measured using an aided recall test (Rouse M., 2019). By applying various brand recognition measures, marketing specialists can examine which brand attributes exist in consumer memory and additionally the strength of their associations. Brand recognition measures determine only an estimate of potential recallability. In order to discover whether the brand attributes will actually be recalled under different occasions, measures of brand recall are necessary (Keller K., 2003).

2.2.4 Brand recall

Brand recall is defined as a customer's ability to extract a brand name from their memory as a result of a cue by a product group. Additionally, it is stated to be an ability to identify a brand under different circumstances. When a consumer is presented with a certain word or product category, it should bring specific brand names to mind. Consumers must retrieve definite brand elements from their memory when given some related suggestions and hints (Keller K., 2003).

A brand recall is a more demanding memory activity than brand recognition. Commonly, consumers can recall at least three brands. Brand recall presents the existence of a strong connection between the product division and brand. The amount of brands that customers can recall in a product classification depends on attributes like the awareness set size, brand loyalty, usage aspects and situational aspects. There are two different measures of brand recall, which are determined by the category of cues presented to customers, unaided and aided recalls (Kang J., 2018).

Unaided recall refers to a marketing method to discover how well a consumer remembers an advertisement without any external help such as cues or visuals. It is utilized to measure the brand's effectiveness when consumers are questioned about it without giving any other indications. Unaided recall is likely to determine only the strongest brand (Lavrakas P. J., 2008).

Aided recall, however, applies different kinds of cues to help consumers to recall a certain brand. Keller (2003) states that use of progressively narrower hints can be used as one

possible sequence, such as class, category, and type labels of a product. Such application provides an insight of the customers brand knowledge structures. Product attributes, purchase decision context, consumption circumstances, and purpose of use are also analyzed to assess extent of brand recall. Additionally, brand recall helps to determine brand positioning and category structure in the minds of customers. Studies show that consumers tend to remember a brand when it is presented to them and they will recall it, if they are provided with sufficient number of cues. Category structure in consumers minds has an extensive effect on consumer's purchase decision and marketing strategy (Keller K.,2003).

2.2.5 Top-of-Mind Awareness

Top-of-mind brand awareness (TOMA) refers to the initial step in order to form brand loyalty as well as product preference. Most organizations strive to achieve this type of awareness as it means that consumers think of their product or brand first, “off the top of your head”, when a particular category is presented to them or when asked an unprompted question about a specific industry. Building a strong bond and relationship with consumers is critical for marketing specialists worldwide and considered to be the primary goal for organizations. Therefore, brand loyalty is considered a crucial link between the consumer and the brand (Aaker D., 2011).

When the same concept is applied to a larger group of consumers, it is then referred to as the most remembered or most recalled brand name. Sometimes, there can be many recalled brand names. It is stated that brands which consumers think of first when given certain cues or product categories are most likely to be purchased by the consumer. When presented with multiple options of competing brands, consumers are faced with choices of purchase and the positive associations with the brand play a vital role in the impact towards a purchase decision. This typically occurs in the impulse buying situations or low-involvement categories (Hoxha H., 2019).

2.3 Brand awareness in the purchase decision process

The lives of people are greatly affected by advertising. It has grown rapidly and its role in society and consumers daily lives is undoubtedly immense. Advertising has become more creative and strategic and has been shaped and adapted tremendously by the changes in media technology in the age of the Internet. Advertising impacts consumers beliefs and attitudes as well as informs them about a brand's services and products. This ultimately leads to certain consumer purchase decisions. (Kenton W., 2018)

Traditionally, advertising has been defined as a way to sell a product and announce product availability, place of production and where to purchase needed items. Nowadays advertising has been used for a more meaningful purpose than mere persuasion to make a purchase or informing a customer about product details. It aims to build the brand and provide tangible or intangible values in order to establish customer loyalty and furthermore strengthen connection, create love and a bond with the brand (Moriarty et. al, 2009).

Sjoberg A. (2017) states that to boost consumer response and engaged behavior, organizations are obligated to captivate and get attention, maintain, and hold the interest of a customer as well as build a desire. Advertising must create a mental change in the consumers mind. Moreover, the outcome of successful advertising must be a switched perception after persuasive communication and exposure. Advertising is a type of informative communication used to impact consumer behavior towards certain services, products or ideas which aim at altering consumers current attitude towards brand image. Advertising communication is commonly paid for by sponsors and observed through different media channels such as television, radio, magazines, or newspapers, additionally nowadays through social media platforms and websites. However, spreading of desired organizational message and accomplishing successful advertising is challenging. The desired outcome is usually changed consumer behavior with respect to goals of organization and usually an increased level of sales and awareness (Wijaya, 2017).

Advertising can greatly influence consumers' perception of brand's characteristics and ultimately decision making process. Consumer decision making is defined as a process advancing from recognition of a need, followed by information search for ways to satisfy

the certain need, assessment of alternatives and subsequently purchase. Commonly, consumer engagement varies across customers, product categories, situations and products itself (Mooradian et al. 2012). Figure 3 presents the process of decision making by the consumer.



Figure 3. Consumer-decision-making process. (Mooradian et al. 2012)

2.3.1 Hierarchy-of-Effects Models

Brand awareness is a standard characteristic of a number of models known as hierarchy of effects models, which is similar to the consumer-decision-making framework. However, instead of presenting the consumer movement through purchase decisions, hierarchy of effects models aim its attention to the relationship of the customer with a certain brand or product, from product-unaware towards awareness, purchase, and loyalty adoption (Mooradian et al. 2012). It was created based on advertising theories in order to help effective communication with consumers and establishment of successful advertising campaigns (Kenton W., 2018).

Such models are examples of advanced advertising theory, which has been established to assess the effect of advertising messages versus consumer audience behavior. It demonstrates the process of a product sale through persuasive, well-developed advertising communication constructed to build brand awareness over time. Other theories are purchase funnel theories, which are also referred to as purchase decision process, purchase funnel or sales funnel. Funnel theory defines the assumed thoughts of consumers as they advance

through their purchase cycle – from the point a need for a service or product is recognized until the actual purchase (Court D. et al. 2009). The model represents an influence of advertising on a consumers decision whether to purchase a product or service or not.

Hierarchy of Affects Model in advertising allows us to predict behavior. It also provides information on what advertising strategy to emphasize. It is utilized to establish a structured sequence of advertising communication objectives for a certain product, which upon successful implementation ultimately leads to accomplishment of sale. The model is defined through a pyramid. Primarily the lower level goals such as awareness and knowledge are accomplished and subsequently liking, preference, conviction, and purchase. (Kenton W., 2018) Egan (2007) states that it is simpler to achieve advertising goals which are situated at the base of the pyramid than the ones at the higher levels. The percentage of anticipated consumers will diminish as they advance further through the pyramid towards more action-oriented goals, such as regular usage of a brand.

AIDA is one of the earliest attempts to design an effective advertising model. It was created, originally, to show through which stages advertisers must proceed to gain a prospect. AIDA explains that consumers go through four different stages on the way to purchase – Awareness (Attention), Interest, Desire and Action (Egan J., 2007).

The model suggests that the objective of advertising is to stimulate the three behaviours so that the customer advances to conative behaviour and purchases the product (Lannes X., 2019). Cognitive stages such as *awareness* and *knowledge* are defined by the informed state of the customer towards a product or service, and how they understand the advertisement communication and information that was provided. It represents a challenging step as consumers see extensive amounts of advertisements and awareness of customers after seeing an ad does not guarantee brand knowledge. Thus, the brand name is required to be a focal point in order to get consumers to become aware. In this stage the important aspect is consumer comprehension of the brand name and its values, it's benefits and differentiation from other brands (O'Guinn et al., 2015).

	KNOWLEDGES	FEELING	MOTIVATION → ACTION
AIDA (Strong '25)	Attention Interest	Desire	Action
DAGMAR Colley '61	Awareness Comprehension	Conviction	Purchase
Lavidge & Steiner '61	Awareness Knowledge	Liking Preference	Conviction Purchase
Wells et al. '65	Awareness Perception	Understanding	Persuasion
	COGNITIVE	AFFECTIVE	CONATIVE

Figure 4. Hierarchy of effects models. (Egan J.,2007)

2.3.2 Modern Advertising theories

The existing hierarchy of affect models does not comprehensively take into account the development of information technology, which influences communication and social aspects among individuals as well as consumer audience behavior (Modern Buyer Behaviour, 2017). The evolution of the Internet has forced scholars to rethink existing advertising theories such as the AIDA model (Wijaya B.S., 2011).

Wijaya B. has developed the AISDALSLove model (Figure 7), which emphasizes the importance of post-buying effects and places experience at the center of an advertising process. The model stands for Attention, Interest, Search, Desire, Action, Like/Dislike, Share, Love/Hate. Steps from Attention to Like/Dislike represent short-term effect while Share and Love/Hate describe long-term effects in today's consumer behaviour. The model suggests positive (love) or negative (hate) feelings towards brands, products or companies (Modern Buyer Behaviour, 2017). The pyramid of love (Figure 8) represents the ranges of feelings of a customer from brand obsession and love towards hate.

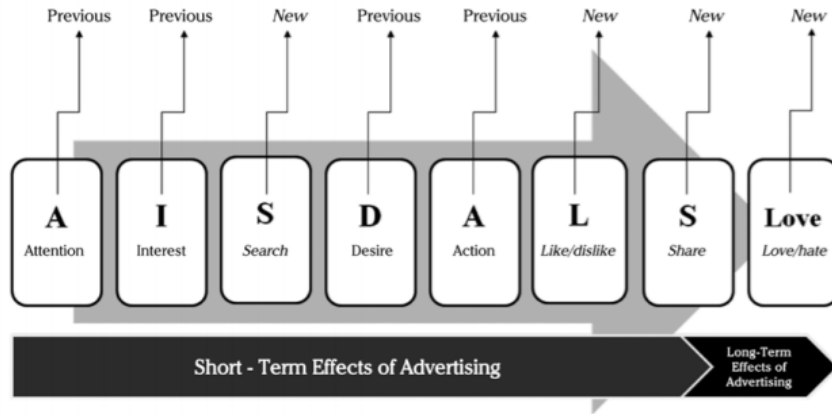


Figure 5. AISDALSLove Model

Figure 5. AISDALSLove model. (Wijaya, 2011)

The internet supplies modern customers with a comprehensive research tool and gives opportunity to review product alternatives, offers and facts. The extended AIDA model considers such factors as critical thinking of consumers towards advertising promises within the search phase (Wijaya B.S., 2011).

The like/dislike step considers consumers' experience and satisfaction after they have completed a purchase. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction of customers are seen in their behaviour. The established loyalty towards a product and further sharing of positive experience is influenced by advertising promises, which have proven to be true for consumers. Further experience sharing is called word-of-mouth and it has an enormous impact on brand reputation and market success. The Internet has enabled growth of various powerful communication channels, social networks and rating platforms, which provide power to consumers and word-of-mouth. The author of the model stresses the importance of word of mouth in the "Share" stage as people rely on the opinions of friends and relatives and consider it a representation of what the majority thinks of the brand (Digital Guide, 2020).

Love/Hate stage represents the long-term effect of advertising where good brand experience leads to powerful connection and subsequently sense of belonging and brand loyalty.

2.3.3 Levels of Customer Awareness

Additionally to Hierarchy of Effects model, a similar model of five stages of consumer awareness have been identified and systematized by Eugene Schwartz in 1966. However, as stated earlier, the Hierarchy of Effects Model is different as it shows the sequence of events a prospect has to go through before he or she becomes a customer (Essays UK., 2017). Customer Awareness levels are concentrated on examining the degree of awareness of prospects about a company, its product or service and what type of problem it solves. Furthermore, it investigates what a prospect knows about other existing solutions that competitors offer (FundingTrack, 2017). Hence, levels of customer awareness provide information on ways to approach prospects and how to market to them.

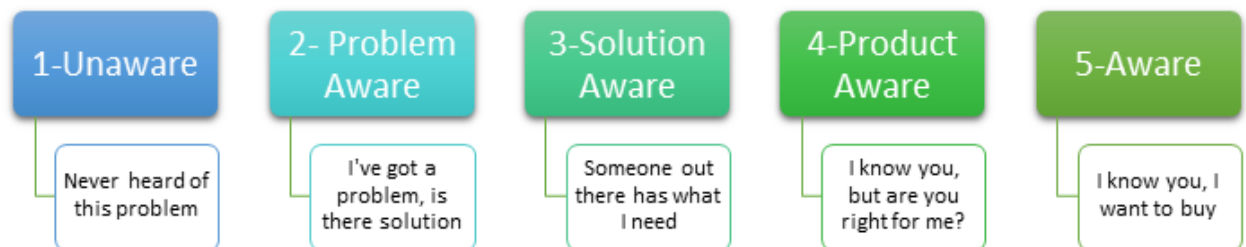


Figure 6. Schwartz's 5 levels of customer awareness (Essays UK., 2017)

The 5 stages of Customer Awareness are: Unaware, Problem aware, Solution aware, Product Aware and finally, Aware. Consumers at the different awareness levels have various desires and needs. Unawareness stage refers to consumers not knowing the existence of the problem hence they have no knowledge of a product or company. Problem awareness, on the other hand, means customers have knowledge about the offer company provides but they do not entirely comprehend the problem as well as a solution for it. Solution awareness however means consumers know the expected result they seek and know of the existence of possible solutions. Nonetheless, they will not know about the company's specific product offering. Product awareness refers to full knowledge of the solution and belief that the offered product solution is a good one for the consumer. Aware level indicates the highest degree of awareness, which leads to purchase by a prospect. Consumers, which reached the topmost level of model of awareness, know of their problem and company solution and are prepared to make a purchase (FundingTrack, 2017).

2.3.4 Social media effect on advertising

How social media impacts on advertising has redefined the digital media landscape and the way consumers perceive marketing communication. Social media has enabled sharing between brands and consumers in new ways by providing opportunities for consumers to identify brands of interest and connect with them (Bloom Ads, 2019).

Moreover, it provides the possibility for a company to establish a public voice and online presence by creating an online community or engaging within one. Social media allows consumers to become engaged with a brand at a deeper and broader level, enabling participation from consumers and building a long-term marketing asset in the process. Consumers are turned into message creators (Kotler P. & Keller K.L., 2016).

Social media is designed for communication and value creation, which are important elements of marketing. It creates a strong bridge between vast numbers of people all over the world from different classes of society and builds a connection between brands and consumers, allowing sharing of content, and thus creating two-way relationships. Brands increasingly understand the importance of establishing a social presence and engaging with their followers, shaping customers' experience development, as well as leveraging their reviews and voices for greater marketing impact. (Kelly D., 2016)

Due to its ability to target specific groups of people using powerful algorithms and data, social media is an ideal tool for segmenting markets so advertising specialists are able to reach the right people. Moreover, it facilitates an innovative approach to brand information sharing between closely related individuals and helps to stimulate the company's reach and influence (Bloom Ads, 2019). Social media has redefined the traditional model of the sales funnel. Sales funnel is a model used to demonstrate revenue generation and sales processes. (Figure 6)



Figure 7. Social media extends the sales funnel. (Kelly N.,2013)

First three stages of the redefined sales funnel support goals for building brand awareness. The exposure category defines brand reach. A higher number of consumers to see the brand is equal to more consumers who remember the brand. This stage is crucial, as attracting people at the top of the funnel will lead to higher opportunities for brands to produce sales. Exposure in social media is measured in impressions and examines the amount of followers and subscribers. Influence examines customers who were exposed to a brand by an influencer. Influencers support loyalty and credibility towards brands as friend referrals are more powerful in sales than brand communication. The engagement section provides means to quantify users and consumers who engage with the brand on social media platforms (Kelly N., 2013). An engaged consumer will have higher brand recall than one who was only exposed to the brand. Social media has become the platform for companies to promote and increase the sales of their products as well as a medium to attain potential consumers. The final stages of the funnel lead to conversion and customer retention (Webb, R.L., 2017).

Social networking eliminates various barriers to expression that traditional advertising models bring. Posting content online is more cost-efficient for companies than TV advertising campaigns. Transparency and trust is valued most by consumers. Social media builds an ideal space for word-of-mouth marketing, “buzz”, and brand trust, which are

essential in a marketing landscape as consumers no longer receive aggressive advertising messages. Word of Mouth Marketing holds extensive exposure potential for companies while social media is able to provide immense increase in profitability and return on investment through message spreading (Tarigan & Tritama, 2016).

Keller and Kotler (2016) state that, when it comes to social media, companies must recognize certain barriers. Only some consumers want to engage with some brands and even then, only for a certain period of time. By using the Internet and social media with a constructive and mindful approach, firms have means to create a strong online presence and community, which support and stand behind the brand.

2.4 Brand Awareness on Instagram

With the abundance of information on our hands and ability to communicate with anybody across the globe, there are endless opportunities for entrepreneurs to start their business with the help of social media. Interacting with the target customer has become easier for advertisers. The social media landscape has shaped new organizational marketing strategies and how brands implement them in an ever-changing, highly fragmented social media environment (Wright C., 2020). Companies now understand the importance of powerful storytelling and conversation with the customer that provides meaningful customer experience. Instagram has given that storytelling opportunity for companies to connect to online users on its platform and develop meaningful relationships with target customers. Companies understand that in the highly competitive social media environment, a story about the brand, what it stands for and how it relates to customers life is crucial in building a brand online and gaining a customer (Hammond J., 2011).

Instagram has more than one billion users, which includes a demography of under 35 urban residents. Instagram is known for tools for picture editing and sharing and represents a big photo and video album with content from users all over the world, which are tied together by hashtags. Instagram has evolved since its launch in 2010 to a powerful business platform. It is comprehensively composed of the visual appeal element and allows companies to efficiently promote their brand, create an authentic image, and attract

consumers. The Discover page of Instagram gives the option to easily connect with prominent customers and influencers. Instagram is stated to be 15 times more efficient in captivating consumers and marketing to them as compared to Twitter and Facebook (Kelly, D., 2016). Many brands have adopted it as an effective e-commerce tool and mechanism to drive brand message and exposure. Instagram has proven to be an ideal platform for companies to expand the reach of their brand for a fraction of the cost and effort some companies invest into traditional marketing (Kelly D., 2020).

A company must create awareness to be remembered and known (Chan J., 2017). To build brand awareness on Instagram, companies utilize various techniques such as use of hashtags and Instagram stories, posting high quality imagery which define the brand image and advertising in order to reach brand name identity and connect it to the product category of the operated niche market. Sjoberg A. (2017) states that in order for a brand to become familiar and to be stored in long-term memory of consumers, they must be continually exposed to the various means of advertising or promotion.

Use of native advertising has been proven to be effective to support brand awareness on Instagram. Native advertising is the use of paid ads that match the look, feel and function of the media format in which they appear. It provides a better engagement rate, quick conversions and generally higher level of brand awareness and loyalty at a more efficient rate. Instagram enables the audience to create their own marketing efforts such as common shares, reviews, and endorsements for a brand through native means of advertising. (Wright C.,2020)

Additionally, it is stated that there is a positive correlation between brand awareness and brand exposure, electronic word-of-mouth and customer engagement, the latter being the most effective (Sjoberg, A., 2017).

2.4.1 EWOM

Consumers trust in friends' opinions about the product or service is ten times higher than brand advertising messages. Such phenomena is referred to as word-of-mouth marketing or WOM (Kang J., 2018). The development of social media and the internet has impacted traditional ways of conduct and impacted evolvement of electronic word-of-mouth

(EWOM). Formerly performed via telephone or in person, it has been shifted to an online realm allowing a variety of new ways such as online reviews and testimonials. Customer reviews can be especially influential. All these features increase brand awareness. Social media has enabled a possibility for companies to scale EWOM to an extensive degree due to its viral nature. Word-of-mouth is considered to have the highest impact on sales alone with an unaided advertising awareness (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Advertising and word-of-mouth are inseparably connected. Every individual contact with a company, and therefore with every employee of that company, plays an important role in WOM marketing. It influences brand experience and customer experience perception. Statistics show it to influence fifty percent of consumer purchase decisions while eighty one percent of consumers state that they are affected by social media posts of friends. Moreover, seventy percent of consumers analyze reviews of other customers when examining a brand. Word-of-mouth marketing includes many subcategories such as buzz, blog, referral, viral and influencer marketing (Kang J., 2018).

For companies, one of the fundamentals in EWOM often includes determining individuals with an influential voice on a specific subject, including for example bloggers and influencers. Companies need to choose among such influencers a brand advocate that has a positive connection to the product or service. Such a choice has to be done wisely. EWOM extensively boosts the purchase decision process through the trust that customers have in the individual that they are communicating with (I-Scoop, 2020).

2.4.2 Customer engagement on Instagram

Among social media platforms, Instagram is regarded to be the best at supporting brand engagement rate. Engagement on Instagram is 10 times higher than on Facebook, 54 times higher than on Pinterest, and 84 times higher than on Twitter (Petro K., 2018). Due to its visual features and possibility to share images, Instagram strongly supports product promotion. It helps brands to create and support brand trust and loyalty. By using engagement metrics, companies can assess engagement to demonstrate social media success and ROI (Kelly D., 2016). Customer engagement refers to a metric that examines levels of audience engagement to a certain content created by a brand as well as emotional state of

mind towards a brand. It reflects brand performance and such factors as comments, reposts and likes reflect levels of engagements of consumers in a social media context. Consumers who interact with brand content are more likely to convert into paying customers. EWOM and engagements are strongly related, as engaged consumers are more willing to recommend and promote the brand to other people (Sjöberg A., 2017). Based on data from Sprout Social (2020), engagement has shown to impact brand affinity, visibility, EWOM marketing and referrals. It also leads to stronger relationships with consumer and brand trustworthiness.

Instagram engagement consists of four elements: involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence. In order to measure engagement towards a brand post likes, comments and number of saves are divided by reach metric and multiplied by 1000 (Figure 9) (Montells L.,2020).


$$\frac{\text{Likes+Comments+Saved}}{\text{Reach}} \times 1000$$

Figure 8. Publication engagement rate calculation. (Montells L.,2020)

Followers

Observing the advancement of follower growth is crucial in Instagram. It is beneficial for a company to grow the number of followers as it is directly correlated to engagement. It is stated that if brand fans don't increase over time, company presence on Instagram is irrelevant (Montells L., 2020). A higher number of followers support a community behind the brand and the opportunity for EWOM marketing (Diamond S., 2020). However, for brands it is essential to gain authentic followers. Brands concentrate on expansion of an

organic social media audience due to the existence of fake accounts on Instagram. Instagram fake accounts do not invest in brand purchase and referrals hence their value towards brand awareness is ineffective. (Chen J., 2018)

Likes, comments and reposts

Popularity of the brand and engagement is reflected in positive reactions towards brand posts, such as likes, comments, reposts and mentions. The number of likes a publication receives can be placed in comparison to other brand post reactions and the amount of followers the account received which showcases the profiles' health and success. By analysing followers' comments, brands can better assess levels of engagement. Commenting to a post requires more time thus it showcases a significant sign of users involvement. (Rane Z., 2019).

Instagram allows users and businesses to repost content on the platform. This has enabled brands to leverage user-generated content and promote users who take pictures or videos of brand products or services accompanied by its logo. By reposting user pictures with purchases, businesses are able to repost those photos on their own Instagram feed and accomplish a feedback loop. This supports showcasing and establishing social proof of a trustworthy and customer-friendly company (Petro K., 2018).

Reposts are one of the strongest and influential forms of unpaid reactions (EWOM) and it is vital for brand marketing. Displaying social proof is beneficial as it represents a powerful psychological method to awaken the interest of the consumer. Actions performed by other users are considered exemplary behaviour. Kelly D. (2016) states that 63% of consumers demonstrate their preference for purchasing from a company, which provides social proof in the form of reviews or product ratings. Moreover, reposts of user content increases a brand's awareness of consumers and supports the user's sense of accomplishment and belonging to a community.

2.5 Fitness Industry in Instagram Context

It is reported that the fitness industry has experienced tremendous growth in 2019. The global industry revenue has reached almost 100 billion dollars in 2019 (IHRSA report, 2019). The total number of gym participants in the USA per year has grown from 24 million people in 2000 to almost 36 million people in 2018-2019. As a result, health clubs are expected to reach 230 million members by 2030 (Murrell, Y., 2019). Instagram is being used by 30% of internet users and has become one of the best social media platforms for companies in the fitness industry. The reason is that Instagram is a visual platform and naturally social media users have chosen a media that inspires them and urges them to be active by providing motivating and encouraging visual content (Aramyan, P. 2015).

Instagram offers its users a continued stream of motivation to draw on and this has naturally influenced the growth of fitness and sports brands on the platform, exploiting the ongoing human quest for self-improvement. Instagram is an exceptional platform for fitness brands to broadcast their values and philosophy while amplifying their business efforts. (Hudson D., 2018). It provides an ideal opportunity for first encounters with millennials as they are the driving force behind the platform and for further relationship and loyalty development (Diamond S., 2019). While other industries might center their social media approach to multiple channels in order to reach a larger audience, such as Facebook and YouTube, fitness brands chose Instagram as a business platform (Gilliand N., 2017). Companies utilize different tactics such as sharing photos of their clients who use fitness products or provide motivational quotes that connect with the users' specific goals (Aramyan, P. 2015).

2.5.1 Fitness Brands on Instagram

Instagram began as a simple photo-sharing app, which now has over a billion active users. Over 60% of these people login on a daily basis into the app. Instagram has grown into a global community and has 70 million photos and videos shared daily (Ramsey C.,2019). Half of the platform's users follow brands. The users aged from 14 to 30 dominate the entire population of Instagram. These people are the most active users on the platform

with the highest spending behaviour (Wright C., 2020). According to Statista, about 55 million people belong to a health or fitness club. Instagram represents the best social media platform for health and fitness businesses for brand exposure, marketing, and engagement (Ampfluence, 2019).

Instagram users pursue visual confirmation and demonstration that they can achieve their goals and transform into the person they would like to become. Visual content support brand recall as users typically remember 65% more of information if it is combined with a relevant image. Visual content fitness brands share with consumers give individuals the emotional stimulant, motivation, and boost of confidence and offer products and tools to support the personal goals of an ideal physical shape they have imagined (Ramsey C., 2019).

Instagram allows two-way communication for fitness brands with their customers and the possibility to share stories and connect. It has greatly assisted the fitness industry by supporting users to have effortless and quick access to nutritionists, personal trainers, and inspiring influencers. Users can learn sport techniques; receive advice about meal plans, and motivational content from experts (Murrell, Y., 2019). Instagram thrives on peer enthusiasm and fitness brands have understood the opportunity for finding their target customers by means of catering to these sentiments. The social platform has given space for fitness influencers to build their follower base and attract users who seek inspiration and instruction. It is stated that people seek connection with a person and their story, not with a company or brand. Users search for authentic journeys through health and wellness other individuals might provide. This has supported brands to find means to market themselves by collaborating with influential personas: personal trainers, bodybuilders, fitness enthusiasts, and instructors, and utilize influencer marketing (Noskov A., 2019).

Instagram has helped fitness influencers to become brand ambassadors through brand partnerships, to build and promote their own clothing lines, fitness apps and virtual workout programs. For companies, however, influencer marketing brings financial implications as personalities with high amounts of followers are highly priced. As a result, brands focus on a cost-effective approach by utilizing micro-influencers as they provide

more targeted audiences and higher engagement rates. Importantly, applying a subtle approach towards marketing and concentrating on posting content that reflect and support users' desire for a certain lifestyle rather than a brand product has proven to be successful (Gilliand N., 2017).

Instagram is effective for building and maintaining an audience, which has resulted in companies to focus on fostering a sense of community. 68% of Instagram users are stated to engage with brands on a regular basis, compared to 32% of users do it on Facebook (Gilliand N., 2017). By posting regular post content, image or video sharing, which show-cases fitness activity and people interacting with the brand, companies provide their customers motivation, a sense of being part of the brand, and an incentive to purchase a product or service. Additionally, fitness users are also greatly interested in lifestyle content such as nutrition, health and general well-being as it is connected with sport. Thus, brand Instagram posts must be versatile and reflect all ranges of customer interest. Content, which contains motivational and empowering quotes, is applied to engage users as well as display companies' values and beliefs (Hudson D., 2018).

Use of hashtags

Using popular hashtags on brand publications can positively affect Instagram engagement and attract a higher number of followers. Hashtags provide means for brands to discover and reach users who post on certain topics and are interested in the same product category which a brand provides. Wright C. (2020) states that the more niches a brand can involve, the more potential users and consumers the company will attract. Brands should use famous hashtags among users as it states to be most beneficial for companies. Fitness hashtags such as “fitness”, “fitnessmotivation” or “fitnessgoals” are highly popular on Instagram. Usage of such hashtags allows companies to search for their target customers who have also used these hashtags in the same category. (Petro K., 2018)

Posts containing relevant hashtags will provide better engagement and will be more accessible to the platform's audience. Campaign Monitor (2019) states that brands must apply the STRICT system when posting content and utilizing hashtags to enhance brand online. Hashtag system stands for Specific, Targeted, Relevant, Innovative, Concise and Thoughtful.

Instagram Stories

It is estimated that almost 500 million people all over the world use Instagram Stories in their daily lives (Statista, 2020). Instagram Stories allow companies to increase Instagram reach and following, interact with their target audience, thus supporting engagement. Moreover, it helps to drive traffic to a brand's main page or other marketing channels (Diamond S., 2020).

Instagram Stories represent a new, quick, and engaging format feature adapted from Snapchat where users can see images or videos for 24 hours. It additionally includes a "Swipe Up" feature, which encourages users to swipe up to discover more content. It directs users to certain websites linked to the story where they can see offered products or services. The Swipe Up -feature positively affects brand exposure. The feature is only available for accounts that have 10,000 or more followers (Rodriguez M., 2020).

Millennials do not trust faceless corporations and they seek authenticity. With Instagram, fitness companies can repost stories of their followers mentioning their brand to boost user-generated content in order to attract millennials and promote authenticity. Moreover, Benson Z. (2018) states that millennials seek trending topics and utility of Instagram Stories and sharing popular content is beneficial for brand image and engagement of millennials. Importantly, Instagram Stories enable brands to generate sales leads and convert potential buyers into paying customers and grow sales (Wright C., 2020).

Instagram allows users to create highlights of their stories on the front page of their account. Highlights are beneficial for brands as they are able to link products and other posts to their Instagram feed. Female Sport brand Athleta has utilized titles in Highlights, which supports their brand image such as Hike, Athleta Girl, and Sustainability. (Figure 9)

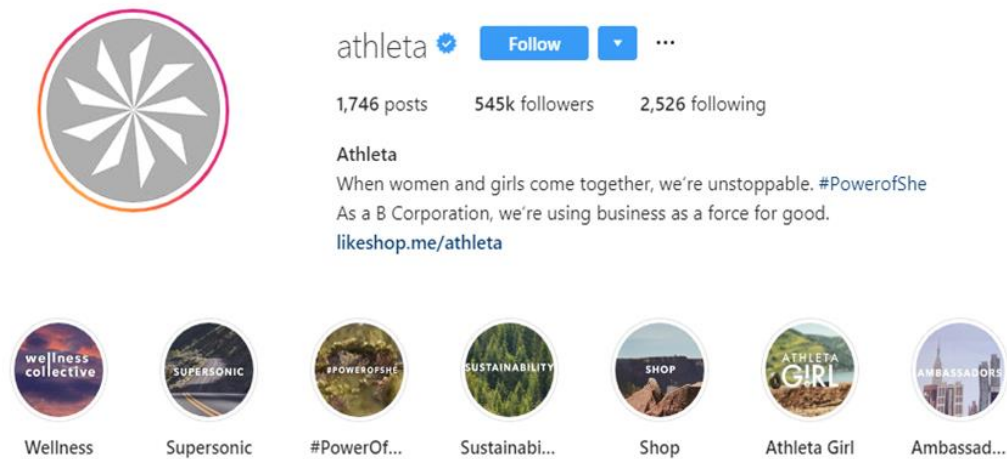


Figure 9. Athleta Instagram Highlights, June 2020

Locations

Sport brands can increase their engagement and brand awareness by adding geolocation tags. This supports searchability and allows people from the same region to discover brands in their local area. Users are stated to frequently seek for services and brands via location search. By placing the same location tag to brand post, Instagram provides an opportunity to grow an Instagram archive of posts and showcase people who have interacted with the brand in the tagged location. This supports customer trust, brand transparency, and eWOM (Wright C., 2020). Additionally, Geolocation tags allow businesses to grow their audience and allow users to discover content, a brand products or services, when looking through Instagram posts in a certain area (Kurley E., 2019).

Content

For a fitness-focused brand it is beneficial to showcase customers that utilize brand products. Images and video containing inspirational and motivational content is stated to be the most popular among Instagram based fitness brands. Additionally, brands are able to share products and materials, which support health and wellbeing through Instagram. Product marketing must be limited, however, as the millennial generation do not tolerate heavy promotional messages. Gunelius S. (2016) mentions that brands are able to apply

the 80/20 marketing rule, which translates into helpful content representing 80 % of communication and 20 % sharing of promotional posts. Companies acquire and retain their existing customers by posting regularly content to promote awareness. Fitness brand Lululemon is highly popular among female audiences on Instagram and their engagement with users and social media planning. Lululemon often include stories from their followers to display examples of their brand community members, along with product features and functions, enabling a sense of belonging and authenticity (Figure 10) (Chen J., 2020).

Consistent exposure to the brand supports higher reach therefore reinforcing acquisition of followers (Diamond S., 2020). Quotes and text based content relevant to followers interests additionally supports engagement. Fitness brands feature such topics as wellness, relaxation, workout and nutrition ideas, as well as motivational captions or promotional posts. Call to Actions are stated to support follower growth. Urging users to take action towards certain fitness activities or participate in competition by commenting/liking/sharing and following a post reinforces follower increase and engagement (Patel N., 2020).



Figure 10. Lululemon product presentation on Instagram. (Lululemon, 2020)

Visual elements

As Instagram is a visual platform, brands have no more than 2 seconds to get attention from users thus utilizing unique, vibrant, and recognizable brand images and posts is crucial for brand recall and staying in the minds of consumers. 67% of Instagram users rely on quality images of a product or service when making a purchase decision, rather than product information or reviews from other consumers. However, forceful frequent product presentation and marketing will alarm and discourage users to follow hence it is not beneficial (Patel N., 2020). Utilizing high quality visual elements is crucial for engaging an audience and building a brand. Video is forecasted to reach 80% of internet traffic by 2021, so it is vital for business to incorporate it to Instagram strategy (Kurley E., 2019). Top health and fitness brands ensure that their pictures are attractive, unique and dynamic. Moreover, it is stated that images containing faces of people receive better likes and engagement. New features such as boomerangs, videos with various filters and possibility to post longer-form visual content supports Instagram marketing (Gunelius S., 2016).

Tagging and Mentions

Sharing tagged photos from a brands' followers on their own profile is stated to create a virtual network and positively impact EWOM referrals and brand awareness (Loren T., 2018). Utilizing tagged photos/user generated content impacts positive brand recall and supports engagement with a brand. 65% of instagrammers confirm to experience feeling privileged to be mentioned by the brand (Patel N., 2020). Mentions are an important metric to measure a brand's Instagram success, brand awareness, EWOM, and engagement (Katai R., 2018). Authentic tagged photos from the brand's customers and mentions influences customers' buying decisions. Loren (2018) states that creating stoppable Instagram posts and tagging products provides the highest conversion among customers. It is also possible to tag individual products in Instagram feed posts and Instagram Stories. Businesses can boost their sales by linking physical products or e-commerce websites to their Instagram account.

2.5.2 Female Millennials and Instagram

Instagram is a platform with younger users compared to Facebook. Companies, which aim at targeting millennials benefit from a targeted Instagram strategy. According to Statista, more than half of the Instagram user population globally is younger than 34 years old (Chen J., 2020). Moreover, Instagram is dominated by female audiences. A recent study shows 56.3% of Instagram users are female and 43.7% are male. (Salman, A., 2020) 13 percent of active Instagram users globally were women between the ages of 18 and 24 years old and seventeen percent were between 25-34 (Statista, 2020).

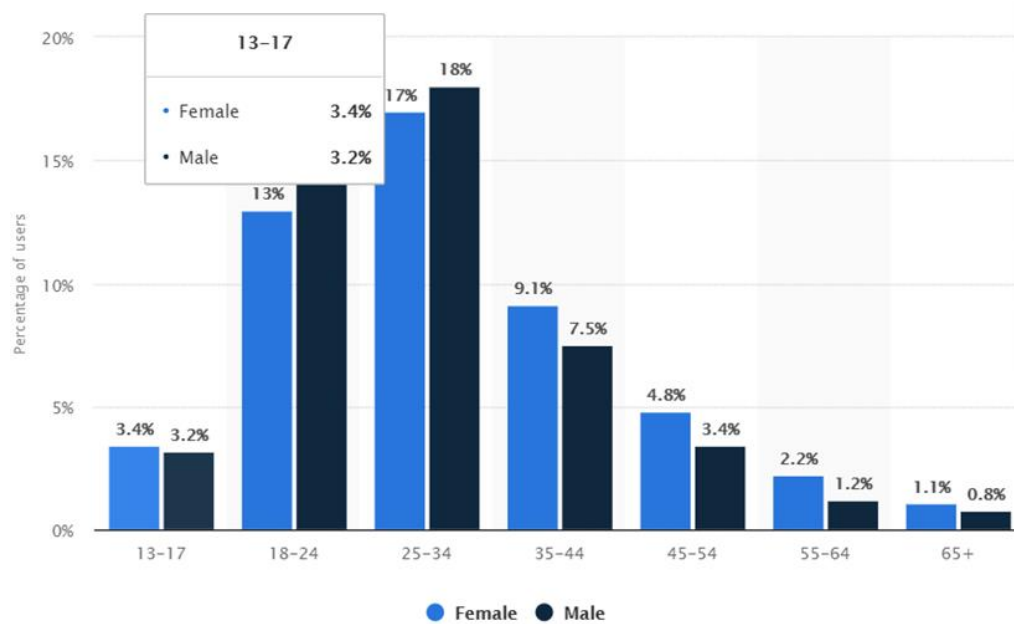


Figure 11. Distribution of Instagram users worldwide as of April 2020, by age and gender (Statista, 2020)

It is crucial for businesses to develop strategies that reach, engage, and convert millennial consumers, as they possess extensive economic influence. Millennials account for 30% of Internet retail sales globally. (Diamond S., 2020).

Curley (2019) states that 80 % gym attendants are Generation Z or Millennials. Generation Z are people born from 1995 to 2010, which were exposed to the internet from earliest youth. (Francis T., Hoefel F., 2018) Moreover, they account for the highest share of health club membership and add to 57% of total members combined. 76% of Millennials state that they exercise at least once a week (Valerio R., 2019).

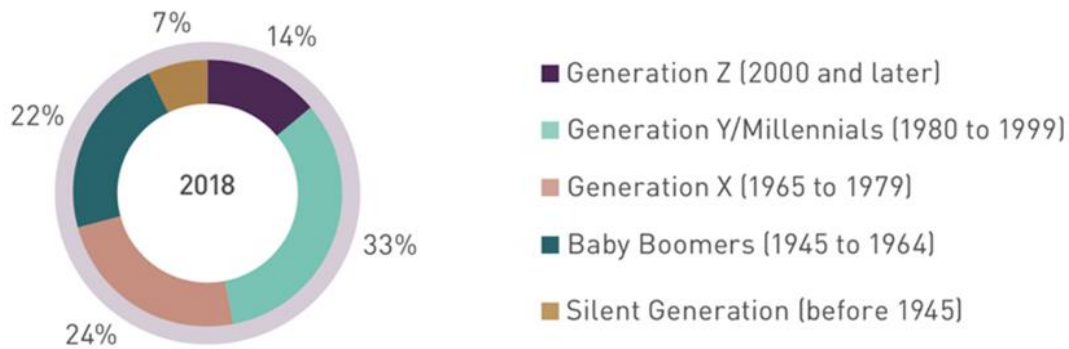


Figure 12. Health club members by Generation in 2018. (IHRS Consumer report, 2019)

In the fitness segment, Millennials look beyond achieving an athletic and healthy body. Social interaction, experience, and a sense of community is vital for them. (Valerio R., 2019) Utilizing influencer marketing is among the best strategies to engage with millennials. As this generation is accustomed to life online, they aspire to build relationships. Millennials prefer to discover products through WOM and listen to influencer reviews about products. The fitness company SoulCycle has successfully connected with millennials by displaying the lifestyle behind their brand and engaging them to become part of their brand (Cassata C., 2020).

To gain millennials' trust fitness companies have to utilize posts, which stimulate positive emotions and are honest and authentic. Nike, for example, has positively affected millennials by indicating that everyone can engage in health and sports, not only top athletes who wear their products. Being honest and authentic in advertising has supported their brand image in social media strategy (Valerio R., 2019).

The millennial generation is cautious when making purchase decisions due to the great recession in 2008. They value quality over price in products and brands must consider this in their company strategies in order to nurture long-term relationships and brand loyalty (Diamond S., 2020).

Additionally, providing educational content and linking articles and blogs has been stated to influence millennials. Lastly, having mobile optimized solutions, images, and promotions are vital to reach millennials. An attractive and enjoyable Instagram experience supports a positive brand image and recall (Kelly D., 2016).

3 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted for the research in order to get an insight of Instagram brand awareness strategies and implementation. Companies that were chosen for interviews include Finnish brands Népra Activewear, WeekendBee and Swedish brand NinePine.

3.1 Népra Activewear

Népra is a Finnish activewear brand, which was founded in 2015 with a shared goal of producing ethical, sustainable, and reasonably priced quality activewear available for anyone. The interview was conducted with Elsa Ahlfors. Ahlfors oversees all organizational customer service and marketing across different media channels and possesses extensive experience in Instagram marketing and branding. Her expertise includes deep knowledge of the market, female millennials, and their behavior across different media channels, especially on Instagram. Her responsibilities include Népra's brand's growth and presence in social media. All these qualities made her a suitable candidate to be interviewed.

Népra's primary platform is Instagram as it supports various organizational needs: posting of educational content, visually engaging images, possibility of two-way communication, building community around their brand, increasing brand awareness, and spreading EWOM. Their primary audience is sporty female millennials, 25-35 years old, who lead an active lifestyle. These attributes have made Népra a subject of the research.

Népra's idea behind the brand started as a CrossFit-focused sport clothing company but later broadened and emerged beyond that concept. Népra Activewear line includes sports clothing for both women and men to support health and wellbeing and their styles are defined as simple, Scandinavian, and minimalist. Népra's sportswear is designed to fit various kinds of activities. The brand message states that it is an activewear that makes you feel good, is pleasant to wear, holistic, and durable.

The company's fundamental focus is sustainability. Népra's mission is to build a responsible activewear brand and accelerate positive change in the textile and clothing industry (About Népra, 2020).

Ahlfors states that the athletic clothing market is highly competitive hence increasing social media visibility and building brand awareness is important for the company's success. Népra's Instagram daily operations and content creation process are co-aligned with their brand values and goals of increasing brand exposure. The content the company provides on their Instagram pages is essential towards brand awareness growth. It includes educational posts with scientific information as well information about the company, Népra products, and product details. Ahlfors asserts that spreading brand values of sustainability across social media platforms is what they believe is a crucial element for their brand success and expansion. Additionally, the company shares their events and regularly reposts followers' content in their Instagram feed and stories. They want to offer their followers a time in the spotlight, which they believe is beneficial for them as well as for their customers. Not only can the company see a customer's reactions to products but their followers can also examine how other customers look and feel in Népra products. The company encourages its followers to tag the company in their photos when they wear Népra activewear. That way they can examine how different products behave in different sports environments, how they fit and whether something needs to be developed. Reposting of users' images supports EWOM and brand awareness.



Figure 13. Instagram post showcasing #Neprateam member. Népra, 2020

Népra has its own #Neprateam, which consists of 15 crossfit athletes, with whom the company does collaborations. These athletes test the company's products in their daily crossfit life and share feedback. Moreover, by wearing Népra, they promote products in their local gyms, ultimately spreading the brand's name in their community.

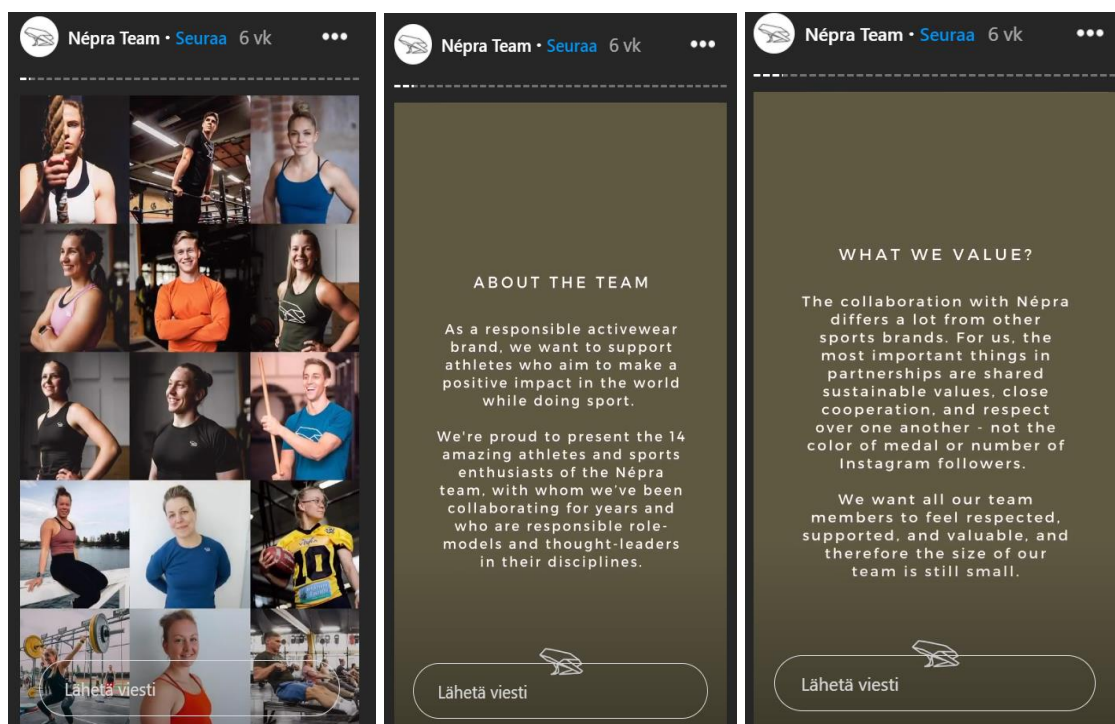


Figure 14. Népra's Instagram Story feature of Népra Team. Népra, 2020

Additionally, there is a #NepraFam, a long-term, tight collaboration team, which currently includes three Instagram influencers, who share the ethical fashion and sustainability values of the company and support the building of a community around the brand. These influencers also share information about the company on their personal blogs. Additionally, Népra hires two to five short-term influencers per month, who are mostly micro-influencers. Usually the contract is fixed term and singular, and candidates are chosen based on their values. Applicants must also be interested in the Népra brand and cannot be involved with alternative sport clothing companies. By choosing the right influencers, who share the same principles, the company determines that the content of their page is authentic. Utilizing collaborations and influencers strongly supports the brand's word-of-mouth marketing. Additionally to influencer collaborations, Népra has done partnerships with companies, which share the same values. Such collaborations included Goodio, a Finnish chocolate brand.

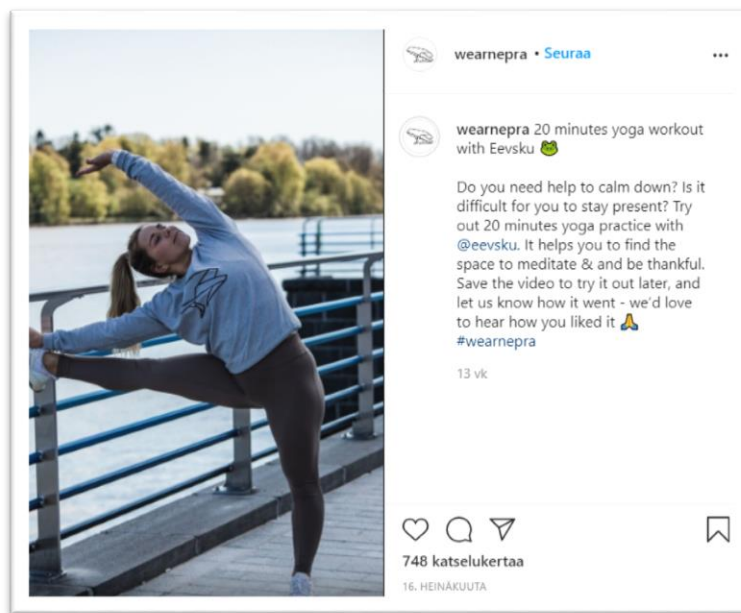


Figure 15. Népra's Instagram influencer collaboration with Eveliina Tistelgren. Népra, 2020

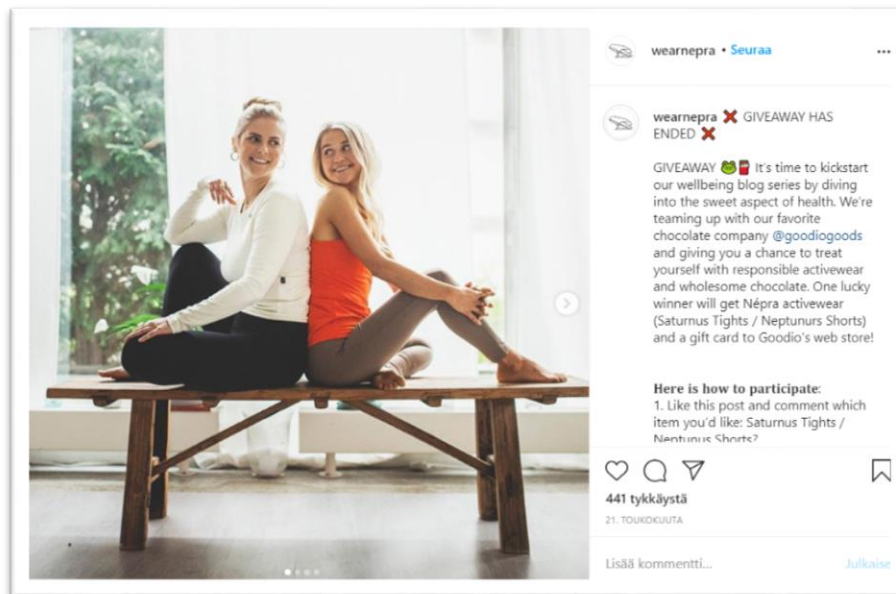


Figure 16. Collaboration with chocolate brand Goodio. Népra, 2020

Népra applies paid advertising on social media, awareness campaigns in Finland and Germany as well as retargeting campaigns in Finland. However, paid marketing is not a primary focus for building awareness. Ahlfors states that a challenge of growing a brand awareness on Instagram is finding a balance between company's values, ethics and how much they want to grow their Instagram account with various marketing techniques the platform supports. As a sustainable brand, the company's ongoing challenge is motivating crossfit athletes and new audiences to be interested in ethical fashion. Another challenge is finding a balance between sport and product related content and topics of sustainability in their Instagram feed. Female millennials seem to be educated on such topics as Népra's data shows. The company offers new colors of products in their limited editions. They emphasize long-lasting durable garments to be at the forefront of their business and do not want to produce many lines of products that people do not necessarily require. This seems to be a challenge for a company as they strive to create revenue but also be sustainable.

Népra post daily and have noticed their engagement rate and amount of followers to increase. The company focuses on providing high quality, visually appealing photos and utilizing hashtags that are relevant to the industry.

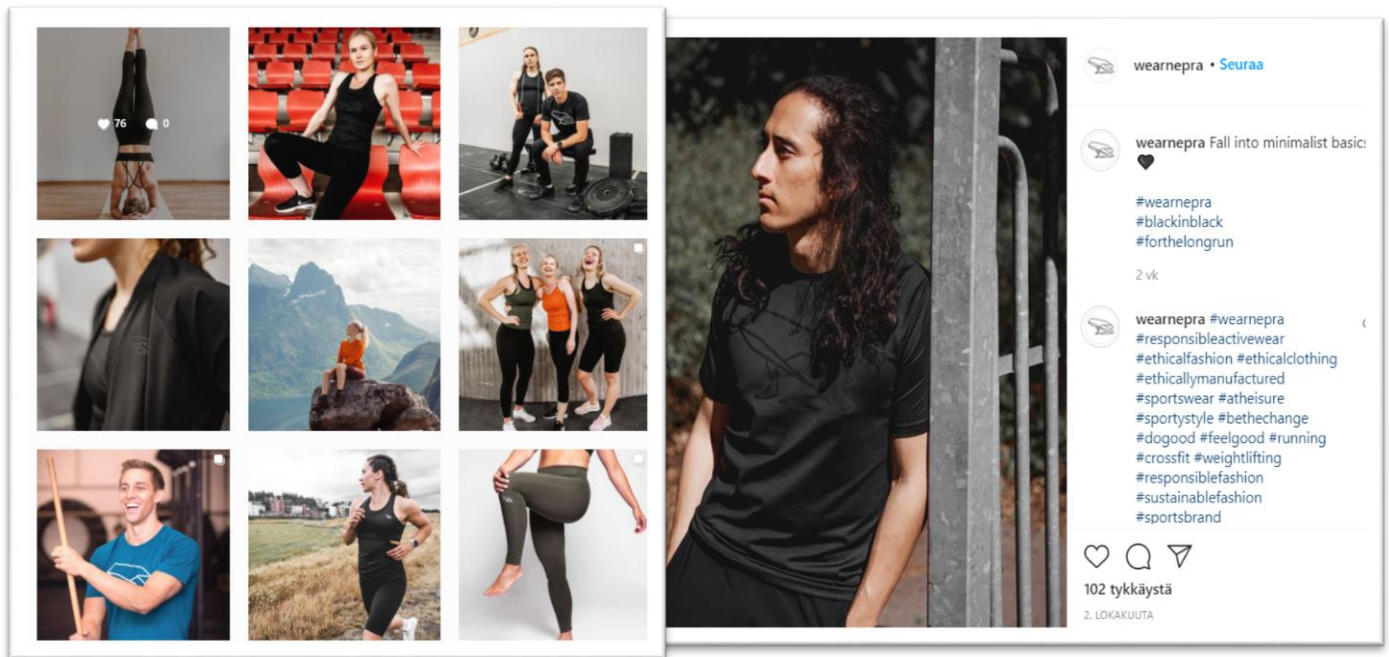


Figure 17. Népra's visual elements and use of relevant hashtags on their Instagram page. Népra, 2020

The content and images of the page aims at providing “feel-good” emotions to their followers. Ahlfors states that it is important for them to showcase women in the fitness industry of all shapes, sizes, and nationalities wearing their clothing, which further promotes their authenticity and brand values.

Népra tracks activity times of their Instagram followers in order to post during peak hours to further increase engagement. Moreover, to strengthen customer loyalty of followers, the company provides discounts in a very limited manner. Népra doesn't aim at providing Instagram challenges or giveaways to raise their follower base. Reposting of their customers' pictures in Népra products had a significant effect on engagement among customers as followers like to see other customers wearing Népra clothing. The company frequently features users' content on their Instagram feed and stories. Collaborations and scientific articles have also been used to raise engagement versus simple product photos.

The company believes that authenticity is an essential element to their success and repost of follower content greatly supports that, positively impacting the engagement rates of followers. Collaborations with influencers and sharing scientific information have also positively affected engagement. The company's daily operations and content reflect their brand values of ethical, minimalist, and holistic well-being as that is the basis of their

products, company, marketing and business at large. Ahlfors has stated that in the highly competitive market their biggest advantage is their company story and their authenticity. Népra's Instagram content is honest, reliable and transparent and doesn't strive to create a polished image about their brand.

As a fairly new brand, it is crucial for a company to communicate their brand values to the followers as well as the attributes that differentiate them from their competitors. The company aims at achieving their brand awareness goals by inspiring and educating their followers on Instagram rather than pushing advertising content of their products.

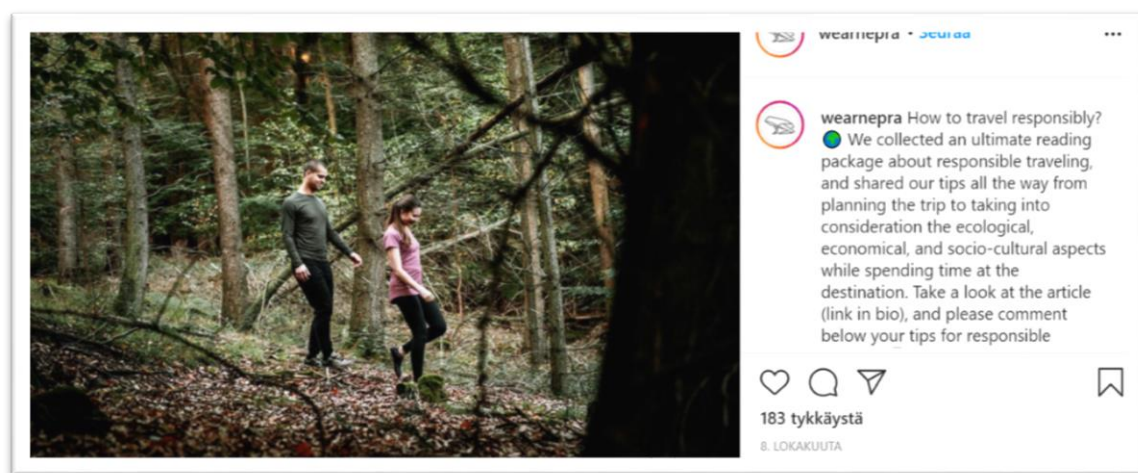


Figure 18. Népra's educational Instagram post about responsible travelling. Népra, 2020

They don't want to acquire followers by means of overwhelming them with promotional content, rather they want to show what their brand stands for, content that attract an audience that understands and shares the same values as the company. Népra aims to inspire followers to take action and join the change of habits in the fashion industry. When it comes to Instagram strategy, their brand strives to create a feeling of being in the right place doing the right thing for their customers. They encourage followers to support the brand and purchase their products, becoming part of the story and part of the change. Népra wants to ensure that their followers are educated on the subject of sustainability and ethical manufacturing. They do so by primarily educating themselves, becoming experts in the field, as well as providing relevant information through their media communications channels, such as their blog and their Instagram page. Népra also shares information showcasing people behind the brand, not only the founders of the company but

also manufacturers and the clothing supply-chain and creation process, which they believe additionally supports their transparent brand image on Instagram.

Ahlfors adds that their brand awareness strategy is building a community around the brand. They want their customers to feel that they are part of the brand, and that they are heard and listened to. Népra considers their Instagram page as a crucial communications platform between them and their customers. To Népra, Instagram is more than a marketing tool and platform for brand promotion and awareness building. It is a communication channel where they inform about product launches and new lines. As the company has established itself as an essentially online brand and doesn't have a physical store where they could meet their customers, Instagram is a crucial customer care platform, where they can listen to their customers and serve them with various inquiries, for example help them with size choice. They care greatly for the customer's wishes, needs and the feedback they receive.

3.2 NinePine Activewear

NinePine Activewear was founded in 2019 in Stockholm by Australian entrepreneur Benjamin Lau with whom the interview was conducted. NinePine's clothing is created to satisfy various types of activities: yoga, crossfit, gym work, or leisure walking. Target customers of NinePine activewear are 25-40 women in the capital city area. At the moment, the brand's main production focus is towards women activewear but the company plans to expand to menswear in the future too. NinePine believes mindful movement helps to feed mind and soul as well as conquering personal ego and overcoming self-doubts and need for instant gratification. Mindful movement is what brand stands for.

Benjamin Lau, founder of NinePine activewear, has worked in his previous job at Facebook and has extensive background in e-commerce, social media marketing, and videography. He is the CEO and a visionary behind the brand, which operates mainly on Instagram, and targets solely female millennials. Lau was an ideal candidate to be interviewed. As an expert, he possesses knowledge about brand awareness strategies, goals, and challenges when operating a female fitness brand on Instagram.

Lau states that incremental innovation was something he was interested in, aiming at improving in-demand existing products on the market and creating competitive differentiation. After gaining expertise, he decided that he would like to create a product, which focused on providing affordable, high quality activewear to consumers who led mindful and active lifestyles. The company's focal point is high active sportswear for work-outs. Lau states that even though the company is concentrated on gymwear, they don't want to limit their brand in that scope. As a CEO and founder, Lau represents and drives the brands' vision and values. NinePine's brand slogan is "moving mindfully" and it promotes a healthy lifestyle and stress management as its core value, which the company wants to communicate to their followers.

Lau adds that he was greatly inspired by the book of Simon Sinek "Start with why", who developed a "golden circle" model of organizational structure and company leader's innovative implementation strategy. The model states that consumers don't buy "what" a company does, however, they buy "why" it does it. Sinek explains the need for organizations to know their "why", which is their main purpose, belief, and cause. And if an organization communicates that product belief to their consumers, they will attract customers with the same belief, which will see the cause and subsequently stay loyal to the product or a service in the long-term.

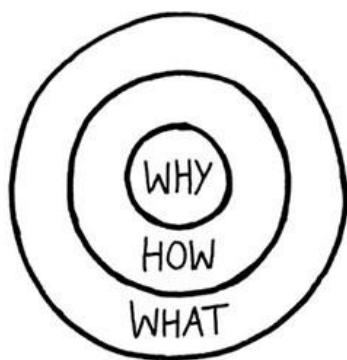


Figure 19. Simon Sinek "Golden Circle". (Sinek S., 2009)

To Lau, the "why" of their company is mindfulness and movement encouragement. Every decision the company makes is based on the core values and beneficial social impact of these values.

Lau was inspired from his previous experience in the technology sector to see how many companies are value-driven, which has affected how products and decisions are made. Lau has adapted such an approach when he transitioned the creation of the NinePine brand. The company's vision is not just selling activewear and pushing the product into highly competitive markets but rather operating according to their brand ethics. When it comes to the brand image, it is important for a company to emphasize their belief in the philosophical elements of sport and a healthy lifestyle as it adds to personal wellbeing.

Lau states that both marketing and product levels support their brand differentiation. On the product level, the company's main line of production are leggings which are unique with their high quality material, draw strings and accessory placement possibility.

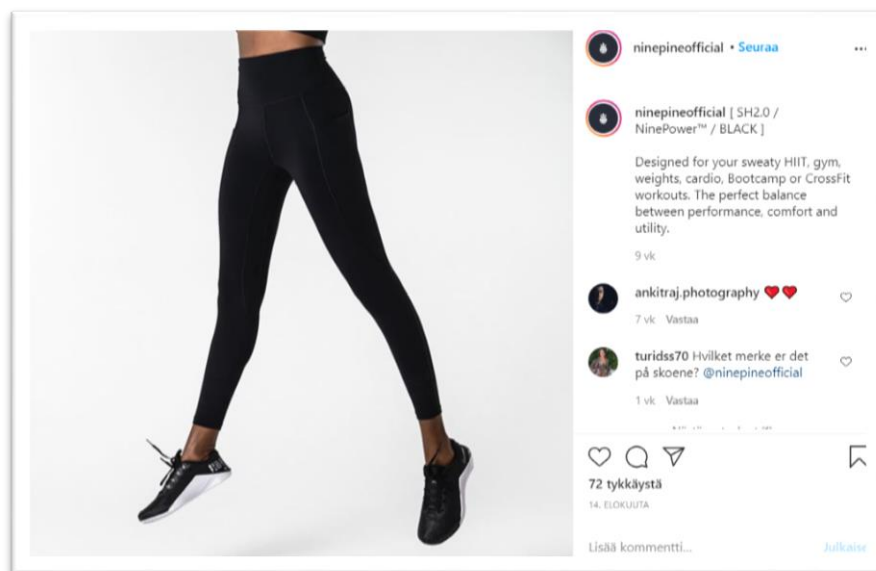


Figure 20. Instagram product post showcasing NinePine's leggings. NinePine 2020

Lau adds that having a great product is not enough. NinePine's additional differentiator is the way they implement their digital marketing. The company is focusing substantially on paid marketing in order to promote their brand on Instagram and Facebook. Lau considers it to be a predominant technique compared to organic marketing as the brand operates in a highly competitive marketplace and this is considered to be the most time-efficient, impactful and beneficial way for building NinePine's brand awareness. Creating content for organic marketing on Instagram is resource consuming and time spent writing

a post can be used elsewhere as Instagram is not the only channel. Lau adds that an additional differentiator in his opinion is NinePine's high quality video production due to in-house production (Figure 20).

NinePine doesn't strive to utilize influencers for building brand awareness as a considerable number of competitors in the market have been seen using such an approach. Lau states that collaborations with influencers are beneficial as they help to reach a follower base of that person. However, in his opinion, influencer reach is unstable while actual impact and benefits are doubtful and hard to measure. In this case, marketing becomes an easier way to obtain certainty in order to reach the right people and subsequently convert these people into consumers. There is hesitance towards influencer collaborations as the person, which they are interested in, should embody NinePine's brand values and vision. Substantial amount of activewear influencers are quite often promoting various brands on their Instagram feed and it is not beneficial for NinePine as they want to collaborate with an influencers, which support solely their brand. Ben adds that many influencers are concentrated on their own growth on Instagram, which has added to the reluctance of the company to utilize collaborations as a way to build brand awareness and amplification of brand reach.

Ben states that since their company is rather new, Facebook and Instagram present a perfect opportunity for them to build their customer base as it enables self-discovery and purchasing of products. This approach is an ideal solution rather than investing into Google advertising in the competitive activewear niche. NinePine considers brand discovery to be beneficial and prefers users to find the company on their own. Lau believes that brand awareness and growth can be achieved through reaching a certain amount of people, at a certain amount of frequency, with a certain message, as consumers will eventually connect to a brand. Lau added that in his experience he has seen clothing companies set up branding and sales teams separately which was not beneficial for brand growth. He believes that every promotional email, every encounter, whether it's on Instagram or on a company website, is an important touchpoint and possibility to reach and connect with a customer with the right brand message. As CEO, Lau attempts to incorporate this brand strategy with NinePine's followers and at every touchpoint promote the brand's values,

highlighting that they are still a small business. Additionally, the content of their Instagram feed supports the brands communication and awareness goals and aims at educating users about various wellbeing topics such as the human immune system and studies on nature and personal health. Moreover, NinePine's Instagram stories seek to advocate the brands values such as movement and mindfulness rather than product advertising.



Figure 21. Figure NinePine Instagram post promoting mindfulness. NinePine 2020

NinePine strives to reach target customers through advertising to increase brand awareness. NinePine doesn't actively try to increase their follower base, although they are aware that there is no stated correlation between the amount of advertising and followers. Lau believes follower engagement doesn't represent the actual purchase intent. He adds that as the brand grows, amount of followers acquired organically can be very powerful. Hence, the lifecycle of a company is a deciding factor in this situation, which affects the decision of increasing the number of followers.

The company's core focus is currently to build business fundamentals such as a customer base and sales in order to have a solid baseline for driving brand initiatives. To reinforce further brand growth, the company needs to have strong integrated processes in place.

Customer support is a stellar pillar of the business and everyone in the company is involved in overseeing that consumers are replied to and satisfied to support this touchpoint of brand experience. This supports positive brand image and recall.

Moreover, supporting customer loyalty has been one of focal points in NinePine's operational strategy as repeat customers are better than new customer acquisition and require less investment. Customer loyalty is a fundamental pillar for the company flow and operations. Lau adds that if you have a brand that people associate with, if they like the products and receive good customer service it supports greatly consumer satisfaction and brand strength. Having customer loyalty as well as returning customers reinforces the foundation of a solid business. The company's clothing does not have a large assortment of products. The company focuses on creating high quality, durable items, which customers love. The company improves upon them by creating different versions of the same quality piece to further support loyalty towards NinePine.

3.3 Weekendbee

Weekendbee is a Finnish sportswear e-retailer specialized in sustainable outdoor clothing and activewear founded in 2018. Their Instagram account has over 6000 followers. The company focuses on promoting sustainable sportswear with eco-friendly materials and ethical production. Weekendbee collaborates with sustainable clothing brands, products, and services and secures quality by setting high sustainability and production criteria. The company mission is to provide products, manufacturing, and operations, which are as ecological as possible. The company's symbol is bees and it supports the ecological image behind the company's mission and values.

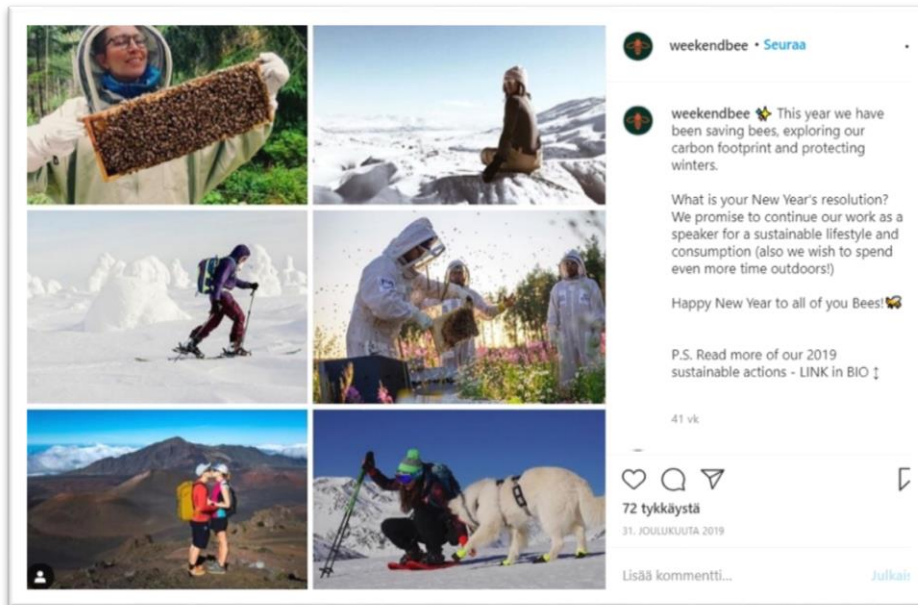


Figure 22. Weekendbee Instagram post promoting sustainability, active lifestyle and brand symbol of bees. WeekendBee, 2020

The interview was conducted with CEO, Head of Marketing and co-founder of Weekendbee Aissa Paronen. Aissa has extensive expertise in digital marketing on social media channels and particularly in the fitness industry and among female millennials on Instagram. These attributes made her an ideal candidate for an interview and subject of research.

Utilizing Instagram is crucial for Weekendbee and they have used it as their main marketing channel since the foundation of the company to promote brand visibility and awareness. The company operates user generated content and in-house produced images in their daily Instagram activities. Their marketing strategy involves building a community around the brand rather than mere advertising and posting promotional content. As the company doesn't have a physical store, Instagram is an important channel for the brand as it supports their brand awareness goals enabling two-way communication with customers and seeing their feedback for products. Instagram is considered the most beneficial channel to reach customers. Women customers account for 80% of brand sales and share of Instagram followers. Aissa believes that this is due to higher interest among women in sustainable sportswear. The target market for the brand is "urban outdoors" which also includes "athleisure" clothing for both men and women. Casual sportswear is

stated to be popular among consumers as they value comfort and multifunctional attributes in apparel. Moreover, the company sees enthusiasm in customer behaviour towards sustainability.



Figure 23. Weekendbee Instagram post promoting sustainable ski wear. WeekendBee, 2020

The brand advertising is concentrated at the moment at the Finnish market which accounts for 70% of sales.

The brand message inspires community members to lead active sustainable lifestyles, enjoy nature and travel responsibly. The company Instagram posts and content supports the brand message and values.

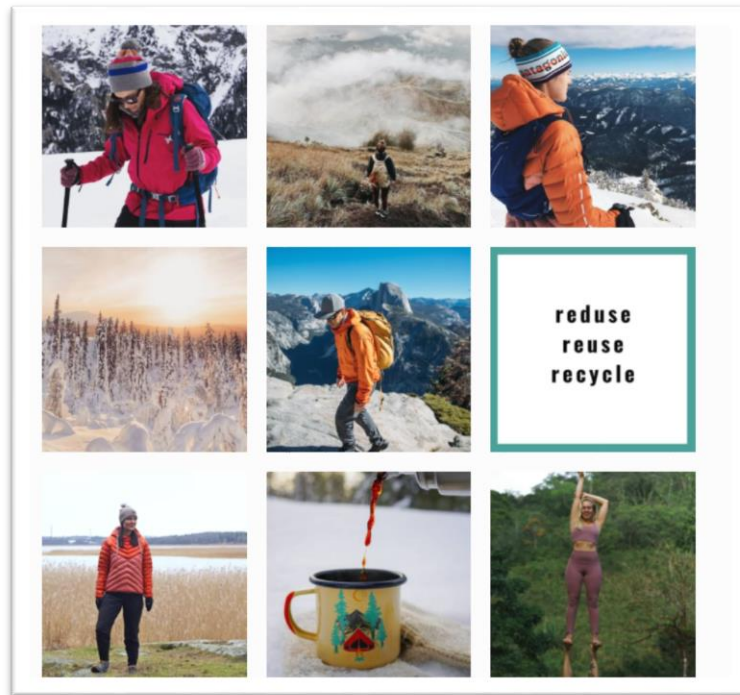


Figure 24. WeekendBee Instagram image posts support brand message and values. WeekendBee, 2020

Brand values are stated to be crucial as a differentiating factor in the competitive sports-wear market. The company utilizes various content themes such as sustainable lifestyle, educational posts and examples of community members with images/videos from their adventures to inspire people to travel and explore local places. The building of community and using tagged photos with mentions of the brand has greatly supported engagement, WOM, and brand awareness.



Figure 25. Weekendbee Instagram post with user generated content. WeekendBee, 2020

As the company's target consumer is young millennials, Paronen mentions transparency to be vital in the brands Instagram content and operations. User generated content and examples of community members support companies marketing strategies and positively affect the target customers' purchase decision and promotes brand trust. The creation of community around the brand supports brand awareness and marketing goals. To support transparency and attract female millennials, the company encourages consumers to provide product feedback. Outstanding customer experience and service is crucial for success on the market, brand, and positive referrals.

The company's monthly Instagram content plan includes sporty activities posts to encourage people to lead a healthy lifestyle. Brand stories and missions are presented to showcase what type of companies are provided in Weekendbee store. Visual content of Weekendbee profile is concentrated on various types of outdoor, nature images of forest or mountains from Scandinavia or Europe to support the brand's image of an outdoor sports-wear company. Beautiful images of nature have been noticed to gain most likes. Product focused posts are limited as the company doesn't believe it to be beneficial for the brands image.

The company has found it challenging to find suitable influencers who would present the brands mission and values, hence influencer marketing has been minimal. The company however comprised "testbees", a group of micro-influencers to wear and review brand's products on Instagram to encourage brand exposure and EWOM.

Engagement of followers on Instagram is important for Weekendbee. The company focuses on growing the number of followers who support the brand message and want to become part of the brand community. Surprising, interesting images have raised engagement and gathered most comments from followers (Figure 24). Paronen has stated that the brand operates in a very competitive niche and it requires the company to adapt to new ways for people to utilize Instagram. Instagram Stories have strongly affected users' activities and changed the way the company operates on the platform. Paronen states that using Instagram Stories is demanding for a small business and requires continuous production of images and videos. Reach levels for Instagram posts have been seen to decline

compared to Instagram Stories. Finding a balance between utility of these two methods as well as post frequency is a current goal for the company. Paronen states that to reach a customer with a certain message, the company requires frequent content publishing in their feed, but neither do they want to overwhelm their followers.

To achieve top of mind recognition and increase brand awareness, the company has utilized a sales funnel model and posting of quality content on Instagram to reach users who are not yet interested in products or not yet familiar with the brand. For people who are ready for action and conversion in the sales funnel, the brand utilizes Instagram advertising to impact purchase intent.

4 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate concrete activities that should be executed to increase brand awareness of fitness minded female millennials as well as brand exposure and engagement on Instagram. The study contributes to research done by Pierre Berthon, Michael T. Ewing, and Julie Napoli (2008) as well as studies done by David Aaker (1991) on Brand Management. The thesis aimed at studying challenges of gaining attention of social media users, establishing brand awareness, and connecting with consumers as well as trends affecting Instagram female fitness market. To investigate the topic, two research questions were formed: How can brand awareness among female fitness millennials be influenced through Instagram? In addition, what specific actions/techniques increase brand awareness and recognition?

Brand awareness is defined as an extent to which a customer is able to recognize a brand among others (its product or service) and recall its promise (Chan-Olmsted, S. M., 2005). Interviews reveal certain tendencies, which can be traced for sport brands that choose Instagram as a base for their promotional activities to increase brand recall and brand awareness among female millennials. Instagram is considered the main social media platform for interviewed brands as they see it as a powerful tool for communication and creation of brand-consumer -relationships. Sport brands have an opportunity to reach target customers, create relationships with them and the brand, follow them through the sales

funnel and subsequently reach the highest level of brand awareness –Top of Mind Awareness. Female millennials are taken through the redefined sales funnel: exposure, influence and engagement. These are important steps taken by the featured companies for creating brand awareness and converting their followers into buyers.

The interviewed subjects stated that they find creating brand awareness challenging and a complex and time-consuming process. All company representatives stated to believe that awareness is essential for their brand's success. When a consumer is aware of a brand, he connects feelings and associations to that brand. Brand awareness helps to create anchors to which customers can attach those associations. (Aaker D., 1991)

Unless customers are aware of a brand, they cannot purchase a brand service or products. Interviewees stated that a higher number of followers to see the brand is equal to more consumers who remember the brand. Therefore, brands are required to attract followers, increase engagement and exposure, promote eWOM and make consumers aware of their offering via different marketing procedures on Instagram. Higher number of followers have been stated to correlate with increased engagement and higher sales as it translates into exposure of posts to a wider audience and thus higher probability of reach. Engagement however is seen as a controversial metric by one of the interviewees as it does not automatically mean followers of brand on Instagram to make a purchase even if they follow a brand page and like company posts. It was stated that creating posts and writing page content to attract followers is a highly time-consuming process. It is not an ideal marketing strategy especially for small companies which are limited in resources. Hence, some sport companies choose to focus on mere Instagram advertising and brand promotion via paid marketing.

Sport companies utilize different methods to differentiate themselves from competitors and to spread brand image among female millennials. Instagram represents an ideal platform due to its subtle approach to marketing for companies, which can use user-generated content and utilize influencers to promote their service or product without being too aggressive. Interviewees stated that Instagram allows them to create an online community around the brand, which supports brand trust and sharing of content to stimulate reach, influence and exposure. It creates an ideal space for word-of-mouth marketing. eWOM

is vital for reaching out to female millennials as they value friends' opinions about the product or service higher than the brand advertising message. Wijaya (2011) asserts that in the “Share” stage of AISDALSLove model and stresses enormous impact of eWOM on brand reputation and eventually amount of sales.

Interviews further reveal that fitness brands must post content which is genuine, human, honest and authentic to gain fitness minded female millennials trust and promote EWOM. Sharing of customer reviews, brand values supports building authentic brand image. Moreover, collaboration with influencers are beneficial for building brand awareness. However, interviews point to the vital importance of choosing influencers, which support the brand's values. For a fitness-focused brand, it is beneficial to collaborate with influencers and showcase customers that utilize brand products. Followers of social influencers will become aware of a brand, will use hashtags and will see how brand products are utilized, which leads to more mentions and brand awareness in Instagram.

As Instagram is a visual platform, fitness brands must provide unique, vibrant, and recognizable brand images and video containing inspirational and motivational content. It is crucial for brand recall and staying in the minds of consumers. It was stated however by interviewees that it is important not to overwhelm their followers with too much product related content. Additionally, it was stated by one interviewee that introduction of Instagram Stories have changed how companies operate on the platform. Reach levels for Instagram posts have been stated to decline compared to Instagram Stories. Hence companies currently need to find balance between utility of these two methods as well as their brand post frequency. Companies in the fitness market might benefit from creating content in-house as it is stated to be cost and time effective. Nevertheless, not all brands have the possibility to do that.

Word-of-mouth, utility of user generated content, collaborations with influencers and companies, which share same values such as e.g. sustainability, are considered to have the highest impact on sales for interviewed sport brands. Sharing educational content on topics such as mindfulness and wellbeing have seen positive feedback among fitness brand followers. It leads to higher engagement among followers, stronger relationships with consumer and brand trustworthiness. Moreover, it positively affects conative stages

of conviction and purchase of consumer in hierarchy of effects model, which are focused on actions, and creation of consumer's desire to buy a product. An important aspect for creating desire among fitness minded female millennials is their comprehension of the brand name and its values, its benefits and differentiation from other brands.

All three interviewed company representatives stated having strong brand message and promotion of that message to their followers to be their highest priority. The interviews revealed strong inclination in the market among female millennials towards sustainability and mindfulness. Promoting sustainability: making responsible choices for environment, buying less with higher quality, transparency, and ethical manufacturing are brand values, which are said to be differentiating factors from other big fitness brands in the industry. Having brand values and outstanding customer care are vital for building brand awareness and increasing sales. These aspects are vital in Love/Hate stage in AISDALSLove model, and lead to long-term powerful connection with consumers and subsequently their sense of belonging and brand loyalty in the future (Wijaya, 2011).

It is important to note that information shared during interviews might be bias and the values of the companies might be compromised in order to make more profit. For example, companies often state that they promote sustainability and encourage consumption of durable, long-lasting garments. However, this approach might not be the most beneficial. Selling durable items will lengthen the life-cycle of the products and diminish sales in the sector of the loyal customers, thus reducing revenue. Henceforth, it is justified to question the complete honesty of the companies and interviewees when it comes to the values that they promote.

It is evident that to gain attention of millennial consumers, companies still need to use extensive amount of Instagram advertising. Promotion of brand values only adds certain degree to consumer's brand awareness. Visual elements and promotion of beautiful lifestyle, attractive and beautiful body stay to be predominant on Instagram to attract millennials and make them follow company's Instagram page. It is also evident that even though companies say that they don't want to overwhelm their followers with promotional content, they are forced to do so and post regularly in order for content to be seen in the feed of the consumers.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Social media have given companies a new perspective on marketing and have drastically changed the market. Social media is a perfect platform for establishing or finding new brands. Instagram has proven to be an ideal platform for fitness companies to expand the reach of their brand for a fraction of the cost and effort some companies invest into traditional marketing. Instagram greatly supports the fitness industry by enabling sharing of enticing visual material, which is beneficial for fitness companies to promote their brand and increase sales. Instagram is an optimal platform for building a devoted follower base and community around the brand. With various marketing techniques, companies are able to attract users who are interested in the niche products or services of the brand, increase brand awareness, impact the purchase decision process and convert users into buyers. Brand awareness is an important step in the sales funnel vital for finding target customers, and subsequently converting them into making a purchase. Purchase decisions on Instagram are greatly influenced by user engagement, EWOM and brand awareness. Female users and young adults dominate the platform and these groups have the highest spending power with users aged from 14 to 30. The fitness industry is continuing to grow to reach revenue of 100 billion dollars.

The research revealed that Instagram represents a crucial communications platform for fitness brands and their customers. It is used for brand promotion and awareness building but it also serves as a two-way communication channel where companies can listen to their customers, receive feedback and serve them with various inquiries. Even though Instagram has proven to be an excellent platform for fitness brands' marketing strategies, it represents a highly competitive, evolving market space, which requires companies to differentiate themselves, quickly adapt, and constantly provide attractive, compelling content and be authentic with marketing efforts. Increasing awareness and promoting a brand on Instagram is a highly challenging process that involves multiple attributes.

Utilizing collaborations and influencers strongly supports the brands EWOM. The research also revealed that finding influencers, which are devoted to the brand and share the company mission and values have been challenging. Many influencers collaborate with multiple brands, which is not ideal for companies.

Instagram Stories have changed the platform drastically as almost 500 million people use it in their daily lives. It is important for fitness brands to utilize Instagram stories as female millennials enjoy trending topics and utility of Instagram Stories is beneficial for brand awareness. Instagram Stories allow companies to repost stories of their followers mentioning their brand to boost user-generated content in order to attract users, promote authenticity and engagement. The study revealed that some brands have struggled with adapting to this new feature, as it requires continuous production of high quality content. Some brands have used in-house production, and have been successful at providing a stream of visual elements for their Instagram Feed and Stories, and have stated it to positively influence growth of followers, engagement and brand awareness.

To conclude, companies attract female millennials by posting high quality, visually appealing photos, utilizing relevant hashtags and user generated content. Instagram, however, is evolving platform and these techniques are useful for the time the study is conducted and might change overtime. Companies say they try to abstain from overwhelming their followers and posting too frequently but they are still forced to publish content daily in order to be seen. Companies focus on providing content that support their brand communication and awareness goals and aim at educating users about wellbeing, fitness, nutrition, and sport topics. These methods are useful for brand awareness however, it is still evident that advertising is used greatly to attract and increase follower base. To abstain from excessive advertising, fitness brands choose to utilize user-generated content, posting of educational material, and visually engaging compelling images to increase brand awareness. They also collaborate with influencers, build community around their brand, and provide values behind it. Interviewed companies say that authenticity and transparency is an essential element for building a brand on Instagram and a loyal customer base. Since research have been conducted with only three rather small companies, methods used to increase brand awareness by bigger companies such as Nike, Lululemon or Athleta are unknown and need to be researched further.

For interviewed companies, reposts of follower content and encouraging tagging and mentions have positively affected engagement rates and EWOM among followers.

Brands offer their followers a time in the spotlight, which the companies believe is beneficial for them as well as for their customers. It builds community and increases the engaged number of followers, which is crucial for fitness brands. Additionally, fitness brands understand that female millennial users do not like aggressive promotional content. To attract followers and increase engagement companies have to utilize subtle approaches with a minimal amount of advertising. That however is challenging and Instagram algorithms force companies to post more than daily in order to be seen. Companies limit their product-focused posts as it is not considered to be beneficial for the image and awareness of brand. Applying paid advertising continues to be beneficial and is an efficient process to drive sales and awareness. Writing and producing content is considered by some brands to be a time-consuming process and too slow to grow awareness, brand reach, and number of followers. Hence is is considered controversial method to increase brand awareness. Research with higher amount of companies would need to be conducted to determine what is most beneficial. When growing the brand on Instagram, it is challenging to find a balance between brand values and ethics and how much a company can grow their Instagram account with the various advertising techniques the platform supports. However, naturally, having brand values adds to a certain degree of higher engagement and eventually growth of brand awareness.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Questions

- What are most important things to consider when creating brand awareness Instagram strategy?
- What is your implementation process for brand awareness among female millennials?
- Are there any specific techniques you find useful for building brand awareness on Instagram?
- How do you encourage WOM and engagement?
- Do female millennials actively engage on your account? What percentage do they account for in your number of followers?
- How do you reach the target audience/female millennials?
- What is your content creation process?
- What images/content do you think promote your brand best?
- Do you consider the number of followers and engagement rates?
- What mistakes have you made? What do you consider most difficult in managing your account?