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„Brand and Brand User Stereotypes in the Social Media
Context: The Impact of Smile-Intensity and Influencer-
Brand-Fit”

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Abstract

Using the stereotype content model (SCM) as a basis, the paper explores how *warmth* and *competence* stereotypes are transferred from social media influencers to brands, and how both stereotypes affect consumers' responses with regard to brand attitude, eWOM, and purchase intention toward those brands. A quantitative approach was used to test the hypotheses, which involved conducting confirmatory factor analysis along with utilizing (serial) mediation analyses to examine the impact of influencer stereotypes on consumer behavioral intentions through brand stereotypes, specifically focusing on *warmth* and *competence*. The study found that the *warmth* and *competence* perceptions of an influencer have an impact on the *warmth* and *competence* evaluations of a brand, thus supporting the predicted transfer of stereotypes. However, the effects of the moderator variables influencer smile intensity and influencer-brand congruence were not consistently significant across both brands surveyed. Lastly, the study identified significant indirect effects of influencer stereotypes on consumers' brand attitudes and behavioral intentions, which operated through the influence of brand stereotypes. With regards to the originality of this study, this paper presents the first empirical effort that (1) distinguishes between consumers' stereotypical views of an influencer and their stereotypical views of the brands that the influencer endorses, (2) introduces the concepts of influencer smile intensity and influencer-brand fit the literature on stereotype content transfer, and (3) examines their influence on consumer behavioral intentions, including changes in brand attitude, eWOM, and purchase intentions.

Abstract (German)

Auf der Grundlage des Stereotype Content Models (SCM) wird untersucht, wie die Stereotypen *Wärme* und *Kompetenz* von Social Media-Influencern auf Marken übertragen werden, und wie beide Stereotypen die Reaktionen der Verbraucher, in Bezug auf die Markeneinstellung, eWOM-Verhalten und Kaufabsicht gegenüber diesen Marken, beeinflussen. Zur Überprüfung der Hypothesen wurde ein quantitativer Ansatz gewählt, der die Durchführung einer konfirmatorischen Faktorenanalyse zusammen mit (seriellen) Mediationsanalysen umfasste, um die Auswirkungen von Influencer-Stereotypen auf die Verhaltensabsichten der Verbraucher durch Markenstereotypen zu untersuchen, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf *Wärme* und *Kompetenz* lag. Die Studie ergab, dass die *Wärme-* und *Kompetenzwahrnehmungen* eines Influencers einen Einfluss auf die *Wärme-* und *Kompetenzbewertungen* einer Marke haben, was die angenommene Übertragung von Stereotypen unterstützt. Die Auswirkungen der Moderatorvariablen „Intensität des Lächelns des Influencers“ und „Kongruenz zwischen Influencer und Marke“ waren jedoch nicht bei beiden untersuchten Marken durchgehend signifikant. Schließlich ermittelte die Studie signifikante indirekte Effekte von Influencer-Stereotypen auf die Markeneinstellungen und Verhaltensabsichten der Verbraucher, die über den Einfluss von Markenstereotypen wirkten. Im Hinblick auf die Originalität dieser Studie, stellt diese Arbeit die erste empirische Untersuchung dar, die (1) zwischen den stereotypen Ansichten der Verbraucher über einen Influencer und ihren stereotypen Ansichten über die Marken, die der Influencer unterstützt, unterscheidet, (2) die die Konzepte der Intensität des Lächelns des Influencers und der Influencer-Marken-Kongruenz in die Literatur über die Übertragung von Stereotyp-Inhalten einführt und (3) ihren Einfluss auf die Verhaltensabsichten der Verbraucher untersucht, einschließlich der Veränderungen der Markeneinstellung, des eWOM-Verhaltens und der Kaufabsichten.

Table of Content

Abstract	2
Abstract (German)	3
1. Introduction	6
2. Conceptional Background	9
2.1 Principles of Stereotyping and the Stereotype Content Model (SCM)	9
2.2 Brand Stereotypes.....	11
2.3 Brand-User Stereotypes	13
2.4 Influencer Marketing	15
2.4.1 Influencer-Brand Fit.....	16
2.5 Stereotype Content Transfer	18
2.6 Smile Intensity in Stereotype Content Transfer.....	19
2.7 Stereotyping Effect on Consumer Behavioral Intentions	22
2.7.1 Brand Attitude	23
2.7.2 Word-of-Mouth	25
2.7.3 Consumer Purchase Intentions	27
3. Methodology	30
3.1 Research Design	30
3.1.1 Pretest.....	30
3.1.2 Final Study	33
3.2 Measurement and Descriptive Analysis	35
3.2.1 Brand Familiarity	39
3.2.2 Purchase History	40
3.3 Analysis and Results.....	40
3.3.1 The Relationship between Influencer Stereotypes and Brand Stereotypes	40
3.3.2 The Impact of Influencer-Brand Fit in the Stereotype Content Transfer.....	42
3.3.3 The Impact of Smile Intensity in the Stereotype Content Transfer	45
3.3.4 The Impact of the Stereotyping Effect on Consumer Behavioral Intentions.....	48
4. Discussion and Conclusions	54
4.1 Theoretical Implications	54
4.2 Managerial Implications	57
4.3 Limitations and Future Research	58
References	60
Appendix	63

List of Figures

Figure 1: Research Model	30
Figure 2: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Male Unknown Influencer Promoting Vapiano.....	31
Figure 3: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Female Celebrity Influencer Promoting Vapiano	32
Figure 4: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Male Unknown Influencer Promoting PUMA.....	32
Figure 5: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Female Celebrity Influencer Promoting PUMA	33
Figure 6: Structural Equation Model H1a & H1b	42
Figure 7: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between PUMA Warmth and Influencer Warmth	44
Figure 8: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between PUMA Competence and Influencer Competence.....	44
Figure 9: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between Vapiano Warmth and Influencer Warmth	45
Figure 10: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between Vapiano Competence and Influencer Competence	45
Figure 11: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between PUMA Warmth and Influencer Warmth	47
Figure 12: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between PUMA Competence and Influencer Competence.....	47
Figure 13: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between Vapiano Warmth and Influencer Warmth	48
Figure 14: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between Vapiano Competence and Influencer Competence.....	48

List of Tables

Table 1: Construct Measures & Psychometric Properties	37
Table 2: Structural Model Estimation Results	41
Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Brand Awareness and Purchase History of PUMA and Vapiano	63
Table 4: Descriptive Statistics Grouped Variables.....	63

1. Introduction

“A stereotype is a fixed general image or set of characteristics that a lot of people believe represent a particular type of person or thing” (Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2022).

However, as Judd and Park (1993) stated, stereotypes do not need to be negative or inaccurate, as they arise from situations where the clichés formed later apply or must apply. In recent years, the concept of stereotypes also gained high prominence in academic research.

Fiske et al. conceptualized the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) in 2002, which originally served to explain people’s attitudes and behavior toward different social groups. Thereby, the authors proposed the existence of two stereotype dimensions, namely *warmth* and *competence*, by which individuals tend to rate others (Fiske et al., 2002). According to the authors, these dimensions can be combined in four different ways and each combination results in different feelings towards the judged group. Over the years, the original model was applied to different directions of research. These include brand-user stereotypes (e.g. Antonetti & Maklan, 2016), country of origin (COO) stereotypes (e.g. Diamantopoulos et al., 2017; Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Halkias & Diamantopoulos, 2020; Xu et al., 2013), as well as brand stereotypes (e.g. Davvetas & Halkias, 2019; Gidaković et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2015; Kervyn et al., 2012).

With reference to the latter one, Kervyn et al. (2012) applied the originally built Stereotype Content Model by Fiske et al. (2002) and modified it in a way that it can also be used for explaining brand stereotypes. The underlying reason for this was that the researchers argued that brands would be perceived similarly to people by consumers. Therefore, Kervyn et al. (2012) set up a new, enhanced version of the SCM, the Brand as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), with the adapted stereotype dimensions of *intentions* (former *warmth*) and *ability* (former *competence*).

Since the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) can be utilized to rate social groups, countries, and brands, it is obvious that the model can also be used to determine brand-user – and in particular – influencer stereotypes. Prior studies presented differences in stereotyping between individuals’ gender (e.g. Zhang et al., 2020), optical features (e.g. Fernandes et al., 2022), and facial expressions (e.g. Chen & Wyer, 2020; Kim & Read, 2021; Kim & Read, 2022; Wang et al., 2017). Last named referred, among other things, to whether individuals presented themselves with broad

compared to slight smiles, and how this affected others' buying intentions in an advertising context, and online behavior in the social media environment.

Considering the above-mentioned effects, previous studies have tried to find linkages between single prejudices and eventual transfers of those to other subjects or objects. Diamantopoulos et al. (2021) for example analyzed the extent to which country stereotypes can be transferred to brands and to what further behavioral intentions on the part of the consumers these effects lead. Antonetti and Maklan (2016) on the other side investigated whether stereotypes held against brand users reflect on brands and influence the way other consumers perceive those brands. These processes can be explained by McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model, which was constructed in the year 1989. The model testifies that advertising can transmit assumptions about (celebrity-) endorsers' characteristics to products (McCracken, 1989).

Similar to Antonetti and Maklan's (2016) and Diamantopoulos et al.'s (2021) approach, this paper also attempts to research the process of stereotype content transfer. The procedure of stereotyping thereby is classified according to Fiske et al.'s (2002) Stereotype Content Model, where stereotypes are grouped into the previously demonstrated dimensions, *warmth* and *competence*. Here, however, it is focused on social media influencers as carriers of prejudices in the first place. Further, this research wants to examine whether stereotypes held against influencers are assigned to the brands the influencers promote. In terms of social media influencers, this paper solely focuses on Instagram as social media platform on which promotional collaborations between brands and influencers are entered. This is because Instagram had around 3.15 million active users in Austria at the beginning of the year 2022, which corresponds to over a third of Austria's total population (Turulski, 2022). The online service has thus more than tripled its user base in Austria since 2017 and established itself as the leading social network behind Facebook (Turulski, 2022). Additionally, in the young user group, Instagram is currently even ahead of Facebook and Snapchat with a user share of 84 percent (Turulski, 2022).

Apart from examining the transfer of social media influencer stereotypes to brands, this paper aims to investigate whether influencer-brand congruence as well as influencer smile intensity influence the stereotype transmission. Influencer-brand congruence (in the following sections also named influencer-brand fit, influencer-brand congruence, or influencer-brand fit) thereby covers the level of how well influencers fit the brands they advertise, and is said to be more effective if influencers

fit the brands well and high levels of congruence are reached (Belanche et al., 2021; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Schouten et al., 2020). Finally, the impact of all the above-mentioned processes on consumer behavior with regard to brand attitude, word-of-mouth, and purchase intentions is measured.

To the extent I am aware, no research to date exists that looks into the stereotype transmission from social media influencers, with particular regard to Instagram, to the brands they advertise, and how these stereotypes work together to predict consumer behavior. What is more, the constructs of influencer-brand fit and influencer smile intensity have not been applied together in one study. Thus, this paper wants to contribute to this field of research and seeks to offer new perspectives.

Speaking of the objectives of this study, this research attempts to respond to the following five key questions in an effort to comprehend the relationship between brand and influencer stereotypes: (1) To what extent are brand stereotypes influenced by the stereotypes of influencers promoting the brand? (2) Does the relation between influencer and brand stereotypes depend on influencers' smile intensity on promotional posts? (3) Does the relation between influencer and brand stereotypes depend on how well the influencer fits the brand? (4) How do stereotypes about influencers and brands affect consumer attitudes towards the advertised brands and eWOM intentions? (5) How do stereotypes about influencers and brands affect consumer attitudes toward the advertised brands and purchase intentions?

In light of this, the goals of the current investigation are to define the process of stereotyping as well as to introduce Fiske et al.'s (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM). Drawing from this, an overview of existing research on brand and brand-user stereotypes is given. Next, the topic of influencer marketing in the social media context and the Match-up Hypothesis are presented. From this, the Stereotype Content Transfer Model, and the impact of smile intensity in this procedure are explained. Last but not least, possible behavioral changes that can be traced back to the stereotype process are mentioned, with a focus on brand attitude, word-of-mouth, and purchase intentions.

2. Conceptual Background

2.1 Principles of Stereotyping and the Stereotype Content Model (SCM)

There exists a rich body of research on the topic of stereotyping. When defining the concept of stereotypes, prior studies have agreed on stereotypes are “an individual's set of beliefs about the characteristics or attributes of a group” (Judd & Park, 1993, p. 110). But against common thoughts, this set of ideas, however, does not need to be negative or inaccurate. Judd and Park (1993) presented the example of the prejudice that all accountants are good with numbers. This popular belief exists because, in fact, this group of people needs to be good with numbers as it is part of their job, and therefore, it does not have any negative connotation or present any kind of inaccuracy (Judd & Park, 1993).

Regarding the consensus on this definition, this paper employs the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) by Fiske et al. (2002). There, the authors argued that stereotypes are reflected by two primary dominant dimensions, namely *warmth*, and *competence*. Whereas the construct of *warmth* refers to interpersonal interactions and people's goals as well as intentions in these interactions, the *competence* dimension results from intergroup interactions and the efficiency of people to reach their goals in these social interactions (Fiske et al., 2002). The *warmth* dimension's intentions can be seen either as positive and associated with that, warm, or as negative and cold. The first refers to the extent to which people are well-intentioned, cooperative, and benevolent, while the latter applies a competitive, harmful, and ill-intentioned behavior. Moreover, *warmth* is associated with positive emotions, such as being kind, friendly, and good-natured, whereas negative ideas associated with the *warmth* dimension are the reverse (Diamantopoulos et al., 2021)

Further, Fiske et al. (2002, p. 878) proposed that “subjectively positive stereotypes on one dimension do not contradict prejudice but often are functionally consistent with unflattering stereotypes on the other dimension” and that these different combinations of the *warmth* and *competence* specification lead to a certain set of emotions toward the defined social groups. According to the authors, there exist four different combinations of *warmth* and *competence*: high *warmth* × high *competence*, low *warmth* × low *competence*, high *warmth* × low *competence*, and low *warmth* × high *competence* (Fiske et al., 2002).

When both dimensions are rated high, the social group consists of high-status, non-competitive peers to whom one has feelings of pride and admiration (Fiske et al., 2002). In a subsequent study,

Fiske (2018) added to this classification the group's social class and origin. Thus, citizens and the middle class, as well as of the view of the United States, Americans, and Canadians complete this societal cluster (Fiske, 2018). On the other side of the matrix, if both *warmth* and *competence* are rated lowest, people refer to the contemptuous prejudice, under which low status, low competitive peers fall. Individuals experience feelings of contempt, disgust, as well as anger towards this group (Fiske et al., 2002), which often consists of poor, homeless, and immigrants (Fiske, 2018). Also, with regards to nationality from the perspective of U.S. Americans, Latinos, Africans, and Muslims belong to this set (Fiske, 2018). A third classification comes with the combination of high levels of *warmth*, but low levels of *competence*: paternalistic stereotypes. This mixed prejudice portrays a non-competitive, low low-status up towards which emotions of pity, but sympathy get evoked (Fiske et al., 2002). Common social groups are elderly, children, and disabled, or when thinking about social origin, Italians and Irish (Fiske, 2018). The last combination of the two dimensions mirrors high degrees of *competence* with low levels of *warmth*. Fiske et al. (2018) stated that Jews, Asians, and nontraditional women are typically parts of this social cluster, as they are highly competitive and characterized by public high status. Hence, people perceive emotions of envy and jealousy towards this social group (Fiske, 2018).

Until today, many studies have applied Fiske's Stereotype Content Model. Even though the model was originally constructed to explain behavior in social groups, subsequent research has employed it on topics of all kinds. Gidaković et al. (2022) for example investigated the relationships between brand, brand origin, and brand-user stereotypes and their effects on consumers' value perceptions, and Diamantopoulos et al. (2021) researched how preconceptions of *competence* and *warmth* may be transferred from countries to brands and how this affects brand perceptions and behavioral intentions among consumers. Generally speaking, the Stereotype Content Model has been successfully adopted for examining stereotypes of social structures (e.g. Fiske, 2018; Janssens et al., 2015; Lee & Fiske, 2006; Fiske et al., 2002), countries (e.g. Diamantopoulos et al., 2017; Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2013), brands (e.g. Davvetas & Halkias, 2019; Gidaković et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2015; Kolbl et al., 2020; Kervyn et al., 2012) as well as brand-users (e.g. Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). On the whole, previous research was able to demonstrate that the constructs of *warmth* and *competence* can be utilized not only to capture feelings and behavior toward people but also towards inanimate objects, such as countries and brands (Diamantopoulos et al., 2021).

2.2 Brand Stereotypes

Fournier (1998) was among the first who researched consumer-brand relationships and found that consumers not only choose brands as static objects but “they choose lives” (p. 367). Put it in another way, to people, relationships with brands matter and these relationships are comparable to those, they have with other human beings. Based on these findings, Kervyn et al. (2012) introduced the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) as a further development of Fiske et al.’s (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM).

Same as the SCM, the BIAF also relies on the previously mentioned personality dimensions, *warmth*, and *competence*. However, to make these characteristics better fit the brand environment, both constructs were adapted to the new dimensions of *intentions* (former *warmth*) and *ability* (former *competence*). Therefore, a brand can be either well- or ill-intentioned and can have either a high versus low ability to achieve its intentions (Kervyn et al., 2012).

Further, the authors were able to show that the discovered emotions held by people towards different societal groups can also be transferred to the brand context. Thereby, brands were classified into four different quadrants: *popular brands* (e.g. Coca-Cola, Johnson & Johnson), *luxury brands* (e.g. Rolex, Porsche), *troubled brands* (e.g. BP, Marlboro), and *externally supported brands* (e.g. veterans hospitals, public transportation, Kervyn et al., 2012).

According to the authors, popular brands can be characterized by high levels of *ability* (*competence*) as well as high levels of *intention* (*warmth*). The emotions people experience towards these brands resemble the feelings evoked in the Stereotype Content Model. Therefore, popular brands result in consumers’ admiration. Further, luxury brands are categorized in the ill-intentioned (low levels of *warmth*) but able (*competent*) quadrant and bring up, same as in the SCM, feelings of envy. For the externally supported brands, emotions of pity are experienced, as these brands are perceived as having good intentions (high ratings on *warmth*) but being unable (low ratings of *competence*) to perform these intentions. Lastly, troubled brands lead to feelings of contempt, as they are rated low in both dimensions, *intentions* (*warmth*) and *ability* (*competence*, Kervyn et al., 2012). In simple terms, consumers’ perceptions, feelings, and behavior toward brands strongly resemble those toward social groups (Kervyn et al., 2012).

In addition, the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework also suggests that “a brand’s perceived relational intentions are also strong predictors of purchase intent and brand loyalty behavior over and above a brand’s perceived ability” (Kervyn et al., 2012, p. 13). This theory is supported by the research of Kolbl et al. (2019), which highlights the relevance of a brand’s *warmth (intention)* dimension in predicting consumer responses. There, the authors also stated that, about consumer-brand identification, the intentions of a brand are of higher importance than the brand’s ability.

With the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) in mind, Ivens et al. (2015) investigated consumers’ feelings evoked by brand stereotypes and how these relate to further behavioral intentions towards brands. The authors proposed that a brand’s personality serves as a starting point for consumers to organize their perceptions of a brand by its stereotypes. This stereotype formation thereby is classified by the constructs introduced in the SCM and the BIAF: the *warmth* and *intentional* dimension as well as the *competence* and *ability* dimension. After having a brand successfully categorized, certain emotions toward the brand are evoked: admiration, contempt, pity, and envy. Lastly, these feelings will lead to consumers creating an attitude and behavioral intentions toward the brand. Additionally, Ivens et al. (2015) expected univalent (= consistent) emotions to have a stronger impact on consumer behavior. This can be traced back to cognitive psychology literature that builds on consistency theory, and therefore, the idea of differential impacts of univalent and ambivalent emotions on brand beliefs and behavioral intentions gets more support (Ivens et al., 2015).

The findings of the study revealed that the stereotype dimensions of *warmth* and *competence* played a significant role in predicting consumers’ emotions toward a brand. Further, consistent with cognitive psychological research, non-contradicting emotions did have a stronger impact on consumer responses concerning attitude and behavior (Ivens et al., 2015).

Apart from this, Davvetas and Halkias (2019) examined global and local brand stereotypes and their impact on consumer responses. By doing so, the authors were able to show that perceived brand *competence* had a positive effect on brand relationship passion but did not affect brand relationship intimacy. The construct of brand *warmth* on the other side demonstrated positive effects on both brand passion and intimacy towards the brand, whereby brand passion positively influenced brand loyalty as well as consumers’ resistance to relational adversity. Drawing from this, brand warmth especially played an important role when it comes to long-lasting relationships (Davvetas & Halkias, 2019).

2.3 Brand-User Stereotypes

As seen in the preceding chapter, brand stereotypes are important cues in shaping consumers' feelings and intentional behaviors toward brands (Davvetas & Halkias, 2019; Ivens et al., 2015). However, often not simply the prejudices people have towards brands are responsible for influencing consumer behavior (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). Antonetti and Maklan (2016) explored the reasons behind consumers' hesitant adoption of responsible brands and proposed that the feelings people have towards certain consumer groups are decisive for that. As a base of their research, Antonetti and Maklan (2016) utilized brand and consumer group attributes of the ethicality of consumption and altruism of the consumer group. They expected both to have a positive impact on the cognitive stereotype of *warmth*. Further, the stereotypical dimension of *warmth* was proposed to positively influence social emotions of admiration toward a consumer group and negatively impact feelings of envy toward a consumer group. With regard to consumer behavior, both emotions of admiration and envy were predicted to positively impact intentions of imitation of the consumer group (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016).

The results demonstrated that a brand's perceived ethicality led to stereotypes of the *warmth* dimension, which made a consumer group seem dissociative through the moderating function of envy. In a similar manner, when it came to the nature of consumption, prejudices of caring and selfless behavior weakened feelings of envy and made imitation of this consumer group less likely. Facing these findings, one can say that social emotions of envy do have a stronger impact on emulative effects than feelings of admiration (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016).

Since Antonetti and Maklan's (2016) study primarily focused on brand-user stereotypes in the responsible brands context, this paper wants to refer in addition to another direction of research to provide further insights. Chen and Wyer (2020) examined the effects of influencers' facial expressions with regard to smiling versus not smiling on the perception of the influencers' status. Besides, the effects of the perceived status and smiling intensity on consumers' purchase intentions were observed. The researchers expected influencers who advertise products with smiling facial expressions to stimulate the perception and categorization of the *warmth* stereotype, which is "characterized by kindness, nurturance and tolerance" (Chen & Wyer, 2020, p. 372). Promoting a product on the other side without a smile would evoke perceived *competence*, which is "associated with agency, achievement orientation, and independence" (Chen & Wyer, 2020, p. 372). Moreover,

according to Chen and Wyer (2020), social status can be seen as a result of long-lasting accomplishments that can be traced back to the existence of *competence*. As a consequence, facial expressions that either trigger *warmth* or *competence* perceptions are concluded to lead to status perceptions (Chen & Wyer, 2020).

As additional variables, the authors focused on the gender and the social role of the influencer. Thereby, it was hypothesized that certain facial expressions are associated with particular social roles. Chen and Wyer (2020) presented the example of high-status individuals that do not have to conform to any societal judgments, since their social standing is stable. Because of this, high-status persons were expected to deviate from social role assumptions (Chen & Wyer, 2020). Along with this, gender is linked with specific social role expectations. In the advertising context, women are often supposed to smile and transfer emotions of kindness and warmth, while men are assumed to convey feelings of masculinity and seriousness (Chen & Wyer, 2020). Thus, if the perception of social status is triggered by deviating social roles, female influencers are expected to promote products with non-smiling facial expressions, and male influencers are assumed to smile (Chen & Wyer, 2020).

The findings of Chen and Wyer's (2020) study contributed to the existing literature on the effects of stereotyping by highlighting that smiling influencers were stronger liked by consumers than non-smiling influencers. This effect was observed independent of the influencers' gender. Unlike this, influencers' smiling had contrary effects on influencers' effectiveness. While it was found that male influencers were more effective when they smiled, females were less successful when they did so (Chen & Wyer, 2020). These effects can be traced back to the deviation of influencers' social standing. Furthermore, the research by Chen and Wyer (2020) revealed that independent of gender, influencers were perceived as being more agentic and scoring higher on the *competence* level if they did not smile while advertising a product. But again, when it came to a high social status product, deviations from this norm were observed (Chen & Wyer, 2020). All things considered, influencers' smiling led to perceptions of *warmth* that resulted in a higher liking of the influencer, whereas an absence of influencers' smiling evoked perceptions of *competence*. Smiling is not equally effective for each gender and when promoting a product of high social status, deviations from social roles must be considered (Chen & Wyer, 2020).

Similar effects have been observed in Zhang et al.'s (2020) research. There, the authors examined the effects of male influencers' *warmth* on advertising effectiveness and proposed that consumers feel more connected to male influencers if the stereotypical dimension of *warmth* is triggered. With female influencers, opposite effects were expected, as their social role is prejudicial assumed to be warm and caring (Zhang et al., 2020). The results demonstrated that these assumptions were right and that male influencers with high levels of perceived *warmth* led to increases in consumers' brand attitudes as consumers felt stronger connected to the brand (Zhang et al., 2020). Also, these effects could not hold for female influencers. However, some constraints to male influencers' *warmth* on advertising effectiveness have been detected: the mentioned effects were not true for all consumer groups and brand functions. Male influencers' perceived *warmth* only benefited consumers' brand attitude if consumers showed interdependent self-construal, which means individuals did not strive for individual accomplishments and rivalry (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and if the brand was functional versus prestigious (Zhang et al., 2020).

2.4 Influencer Marketing

According to Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon (2018), influencer marketing can be defined as the planning, management, and control of the targeted use of social media opinion leaders and multipliers to increase the value of brand messages and positively influence the buying behavior of the target group through their recommendations. Fakhreddin and Foroudi (2022) thereby summarized that the term opinion leadership includes individuals with expert knowledge about certain topics, that can influence others because of their high amount of socialness and vast number of social relationships.

Since an increasing number of brands is realizing the benefits of influencer – or using another term, endorser – marketing on social media (Vrontis et al., 2020), a rich body of research, investigating the effects of influencer source characteristics (e.g. Breves et al., 2019), content specifications (e.g. He et al., 2021) as well as consumers' behavioral outcomes (Weismueller et al., 2020), arises.

Lee et al. (2022a) explored the reasons consumers follow social media influencers on Instagram and further investigated the effects these causes have on consumers' trust towards influencers as well as the related purchase intention frequency. The results pointed out that the most prominent reasons to follow influencers online are their authenticity and the degree to which consumers are able to identify with the influencer (Lee et al., 2022a). As the second and third most important

motives for following influencers on Instagram, consumerism and creative inspiration were mentioned (Lee et al., 2022a). Apart from this, Lee et al. (2022a) found that some social media users also stated envy as the reason behind interacting with an influencer. Even though authenticity was not directly linked to how frequently people made purchases, the study was able to show the beneficial impact on trust spread on people's purchasing behavior (Lee et al., 2022a). Consumerism on the other side was directly linked to followers' purchase intensity (Lee et al., 2022a). Both motives, creative inspiration, and envy, had no observable impact on consumers' purchase behavior.

Another study that investigated social media followers' behavioral responses toward influencers was provided by Belanche et al. (2021). There, the authors found that if social media users perceive the influencer and the advertised product are being congruent, the influencer is rated more credible than if they seem to be a bad match (Belanche et al., 2021). This leads in further consequence to positive behavioral effects toward the influencer, which are mirrored by consumers' willingness to copy as well as recommend the influencer (Belanche et al., 2021).

Comparable behavior patterns were analyzed by Dhun and Dangi (2022), who researched the impact of influencer credibility and influencer-brand congruence on "Indian consumers' brand attitude and eWOM intention on Instagram" (Dhun & Dangi, 2022, p. 5). eWOM hereby refers to consumers' word-of-mouth intentions in the electronic media context. Their findings revealed that influencers' perceived credibility, reflected by their expertise and similarity, do have positive effects on brand attitude, whereas no relationship between influencers' credibility and their levels of trustworthiness as well as attractiveness was observed (Dhun & Dangi, 2022). When it comes to influencer-brand congruence, the results demonstrated a positive significant relationship between influencer-brand fit and consumers' attitudes towards brands (Dhun & Dangi, 2022). However, no significant relationship between influencer-brand congruence and eWOM behavior was observed (Dhun & Dangi, 2022).

2.4.1 Influencer-Brand Fit

Similarly, De Cicco et al. (2021) examined the relationship between influencer-product fit and consumers' attitude towards the influencer, their willingness to continue following the influencer as well as the influencers' perceived credibility. This study also confirmed the positive effects of high levels of influencer-product congruence. Accordingly, a good match positively impacts

influencers' credibility, users' willingness to continue following, and consumers' attitudes towards the influencer (De Cicco et al., 2021).

These outcomes, along with the findings of Belanche et al. (2021) and Dhun and Dangi (2022), confirm the theory behind the Match-Up Hypothesis, which was explained by Kahle and Homer (1985) as the extent to which a celebrity's physical appearance matches the promoted product and further leads to positive advertisement and product evaluations.

A prominent research addressing the Match-Up Hypothesis was conducted by Kamins and Gupta (1994) whose aim was to explore the "context of product-spokesperson image matchup [...] for both a celebrity and noncelebrity spokesperson" (Kamins & Gupta, 1994, p. 570). In order to measure the degree of product-influencer congruence, the dependent variables influencer believability, product, and ad attitude as well as people's purchase intent were chosen (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). The results showed that high levels of influencer-product fit lead to higher perceptions of influencer believability as well as higher ratings of the spokesperson's perceived attractiveness (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Moreover, interaction effects of spokesperson-product congruence and product/ad attitude on consumers' purchase intentions were detected (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). However, above mentioned effects of spokesperson-product congruence were only true for the celebrity endorser – the same effects were not observed with the noncelebrity endorser (Kamins & Gupta, 1994).

Since Kamins and Gupta's (1994) outcomes refer to a time before the existence of social media platforms and social media endorsers, recent studies have explored the mentioned effects in an online environment. Schouten et al. (2020) for example studied the effectiveness of influencer versus celebrity endorsement, with regard to consumers' advertisement and product attitudes as well as related purchase intentions. Even though the authors were not able to report significant differences between celebrity and influencer endorsers regarding advertising and brand attitude, influencer endorsement advertisements led to higher purchase intentions (Schouten et al., 2020). Besides, consumers feel closer to influencers because they seem to be more similar to them than traditional celebrities in advertisement contexts (Schouten et al., 2020).

2.5 Stereotype Content Transfer

Diamantopoulos et al. (2021) summarized that stereotypes serve the fundamental purpose of enabling people to make rapid, straightforward judgments. This is because of automatic processes that lead to categorizations of persons and objectives. Because of this phenomenon, it is expected that consumers are able to transfer stereotypical knowledge they have acquired over the years from certain movable or immovable objects to other subjects or objects (Diamantopoulos et al., 2021). The theory to which this assumption refers is the Meaning Transfer Model, introduced by McCracken in the year 1989. There, the author argued that the “effectiveness of the endorser depends, in part, upon the meanings he or she brings to the endorsement process” (McCracken, 1989, p. 312) and that these meanings then will be transferred to the consumer goods. Advertising hereby is crucial, as it is responsible for transferring the purpose from the endorser to the promoted product (McCracken, 1989).

According to McCracken (1989), the process of meaning transfer is classified into three particular stages. In the first stage, a celebrity who will be responsible for consigning meaning to certain products is chosen (McCracken, 1989). At this point, the celebrity’s characteristics, such as his or her personality, former roles, and lifestyle, need to be taken into account, since these will be of high relevance for the further meaning transfer process (McCracken, 1989). In the next stage, these formerly mentioned personality traits of the celebrity are used to assign meaning to the promoted product (McCracken, 1989). In order for the consumer to complete the final stage of the meaning transfer process, the advertisement must be made to highlight the key similarities between the product and the celebrity endorser (McCracken, 1989). In the third and last stage of McCracken’s model, the consumption stage, the product fully reflects the former transferred purpose of the celebrity (McCracken, 1989).

In light of the above, this paper argues that McCracken’s (1989) Meaning Transfer Model can be applied to the context of social media influencer stereotypes. It is expected that consumers have prejudices against influencers and that these refer to the stereotypical dimensions, *warmth* and *competence*. Furthermore, it is proposed that exact these stereotypes will be transferred from social media endorsers to brands when exposing consumers to promotional pictures in which the influencer advertises a certain brand. Thereupon, this paper predicts that if an influencer is perceived as reflecting high levels of the stereotype dimension *warmth*, the brand which is promoted by the

influencer on Instagram will also be rated warm. Contrarily, if the social media influencer is perceived as being cold, this perception will be transferred to the brand, which then also will be rated cold.

Accordingly, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1a: If an influencer is perceived as scoring high on the warmth stereotype content, the promoted brand is also perceived as scoring high on the warmth stereotype content.

In the same fashion, it is expected that the perceived *competence* (or incompetence) of an influencer will be assigned to a brand that is promoted by the influencer on Instagram so that it will be judged in a similar manner to the social media influencer. Thus, hypothesis 1b) is formulated as follows:

H1b: If an influencer is perceived as scoring high on the competence stereotype content, the promoted brand is also perceived as scoring high on the competence stereotype content.

With reference to the theory behind the Match-Up Hypothesis that is presented in the preceding section, this paper also expects positive effects of high levels of influencer-brand fit on the stereotype content transfer. It is argued that a good match between influencer and brand is mirrored in a stronger transfer of the stereotype dimensions of *warmth* and *competence* from social media influencer to brand than a poor fit between both sources. This results in hypotheses 2a) and 2b):

H2a: Influencer-Brand congruence effectively moderates the stereotype transfer effect between influencer warmth and brand warmth.

H2b: Influencer-Brand congruence effectively moderates the stereotype transfer effect between influencer competence and brand competence.

2.6 Smile Intensity in Stereotype Content Transfer

Brand users and influencers are often perceived quite differently. As in Chapter 2.3 already stated, different characteristics of individuals, such as their sex (Zhang et al., 2020), whether they consume responsible alternatives (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016), or whether they engage with others showing a smile versus not (Chen & Wyer, 2020), impact how society perceives those individuals. By the same token, this paper wants to investigate the impact of influencer smile intensity on the process

of brand stereotype content transfer. Smile intensity hereby refers to the broad versus slight smiles of the social media influencers on Instagram while promoting products of brands.

Wang et al. (2017) examined the role of people's smile intensity on social judgment and further related purchase intentions. By conducting five different studies, that included photos of people, fictitious advertisements, and articles about fictional service programs, participants' perceptions of individuals' levels of *warmth* and *competence*, their perceived risk level towards the advertisements as well as the intention to purchase any kind of goods or services from the presented marketers were analyzed (Wang et al., 2017). The findings of Wang et al.'s research showed that "broader smiles do not always lead to more positive interpersonal judgments" (Wang et al., 2017, p. 801). Even though broad smiles often resulted in high ratings of the stereotyped dimension of *warmth*, they were also associated with low judgments of the stereotypical dimension of *competence* (Wang et al., 2017). Along with this, consumers' conditions also played an important role in this process. If consumers were more promotion-focused, it was more likely that individuals with broad smiles in the advertisement context were perceived as stereotypically warm. However, if consumers showed signs of prevention-focus, that means these consumers did not want to engage with the advertising, marketers presenting a high smile intensity were more likely perceived to be incompetent (Wang et al., 2017). Regarding the risk level linked with consumption, different outcomes facing individuals' smile intensity were observed. In a low-risk consumption setting, high levels of smile intensity led to greater degrees of the marketer's *warmth* perception, which then resulted in increased purchase intentions. On the other side, when it came to a high-risk consumption environment, broad smiles were more likely to be associated with decreased *competence* levels and resulted in lower purchase intentions of consumers (Wang et al., 2017).

Comparable results are highlighted in the research of Chen and Wyer (2020). Referring to the quick review presented in chapter 2.3 of this paper, the authors examined the effects of influencers' smile intensity on status perception in the print advertising context. By doing so, Chen and Wyer (2020) found that – independent of gender – both female and male marketers were perceived as warmer and more likable when smiling in advertisements. However, influencers' smiles also had effects on their perceived *competence* and status (Chen & Wyer, 2020). On the one hand, smiling in the advertisement context led to a decreased *competence* perception for both female and male influencers (Chen & Wyer, 2020). On the other hand, when it came to prestigious products, a deviation from social norms resulted in higher status perception and related, higher willingness to

pay for the promoted goods (Chen & Wyer, 2020). That indicates, female marketers that by nature are expected to convey rather a warm and caring image in the form of smiling, are supposed to present highly prestigious products without a smile, whereas male influencers that are assumed to convey masculinity need to advertise precious products with a great smile intensity (Chen & Wyer, 2020).

Leading over to the social media environment, Kim and Read (2021) studied the effects of broad versus closed-mouth smiles of social media influencers on consumers' attitudes toward the influencer and brand. In addition, consumers' feelings, and related behavioral intentions in the form of "liking" the influencers' social media postings have been researched. The results confirmed that a greater smile intensity entailed increased perceptions of the influencer's *warmth* as well as more pleasing attitudes towards the social media influencer (Kim & Read, 2021). In addition, Kim and Read's (2021) findings revealed that greater levels of influencers' smiles were positively related to consumers' intentions to "like" influencers' social media posts, as consumers experience stronger feelings of admiration towards the influencer. But differing from previously presented studies in this section, Kim and Read (2021) found a positive relationship between influencers' smile intensity and judgments of their *competence*, which could be due to the fact of prior studies examining traditional marketers compared to this research studying the social media context.

In the same manner, Kim and Read (2022) investigated the impact of influencers' smiles on consumers' behavior and attitudes with regard to influencer marketing. As in their former study, the researchers validated that "perceived *warmth* of influencers and feelings of admiration sequentially mediated the impact of smile intensity on ad attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, and online behavioral intention" (Kim & Read, 2022, p. 435). In detail, influencers' smile intensity was positively linked with consumers' attitude formation towards the advertisement as well as towards the promoted brand. Furthermore, influencers' content presenting high levels of smile intensity results in higher purchase intentions and a stronger likability of consumers to share or "like" the social media posting (Kim & Read, 2022). In addition, Kim and Read examined the moderating roles of product categories and advertising messages on the impact of smile intensity and behavioral outcomes. There, contrasting to prior studies, the researchers found that there existed no significant relationship between product category and smile intensity on consumers' willingness to interact with influencers' posts, which can be translated into the effects of smile intensity dominating those of the product category (Kim & Read, 2022). Similarly, according to

their research, influencers' smile intensity had stronger effects on consumers' behavior and attitudes than textual cues, that is the posting text or posting caption, underneath social media postings (Kim & Read, 2022).

Owing to the above-presented findings, this paper argues that social media influencers' smile intensity affects the stereotype content transfer between influencers and the brands they promote. As Kim and Read (2021) stated, greater smiles lead to increased *warmth* perceptions in the social media context. With this in mind, this paper argues that influencers who are judged stereotypically warm are more likely to transmit perceptions of the stereotype dimension of *warmth* toward advertised brands if the influencer presents the promoted brand with a high smile intensity. Therefore, hypothesis 3a) states:

H3a: For influencers with a high smile intensity, the stereotype transfer effect between influencer warmth and brand warmth is higher.

However, since Kim and Read (2021) found that the judgment of social media influencers' *competence* is also positively affected by smile intensity, this paper expects that influencers who are perceived competent are more likely to transfer stereotypes of *competence* to brands if these promote brands with a high smile intensity. Thus, this paper hypothesizes that:

H3b: For influencers with a high smile intensity, the stereotype transfer effect between influencer competence and brand competence is higher.

2.7 Stereotyping Effect on Consumer Behavioral Intentions

In terms of the prior presented hypotheses, this paper expects a stereotype content transfer from the social media influencer stereotype dimensions of *warmth* and *competence* to brands promoted by the influencer. To break it down further, it is argued that perceived influencer *warmth* and influencer *competence* are transmitted to the advertised brand so that the brand is judged by similar levels of *warmth* as well as *competence*. Besides, it is assumed that these effects are mediated by social media influencers' smile intensity as well as how well the influencer fits the brand.

Nonetheless, the expected findings will be of far less managerial interest if these do not impact consumers' behavioral intentions towards the product and/or brand. Referring to previous research, the effects of stereotypes, influencer-brand congruence, and smile intensity on purchase intentions

(Chen & Wyer, 2020; Diamantopoulos et al., 2017; Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2013), brand/ product attitudes (Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Kim & Read, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020), and consumers liking and sharing social media content (Kim & Read, 2021; Kim & Read, 2022) have been analyzed. Additionally, some papers focused on the outcome variable word-of-mouth (WOM, Dhun & Dangi, 2022; Hickman & Ward, 2013; Lee et al., 2022b).

This study decided on evaluating the impact of the above-mentioned processes on Instagram users' online word-of-mouth intentions towards the brands advertised by the influencer as well as related purchase intentions through a change in brand attitude.

2.7.1 Brand Attitude

Attitudes can be defined as “predispositions, shaped through experience, to respond in an anticipated way to an object or situation” (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 88). They act as bridges connecting thoughts with actions and can be applied to individuals, objects, as well as messages (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). According to Fill and Turnbull (2016), attitudes can be divided into three different components: the *cognitive*, *conative*, and *emotional* constituents.

The cognitive attitude component thereby refers to individuals learning some kind of behavior, as knowledge and opinions about specific products are formed (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Marketing measures thereby are important to achieve certain levels of consumers' attention and further, awareness, in order to reinforce this knowledge (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Second, the affective component relates to individuals' feelings about subjects and/or objects (e.g. other consumers, brands, products, and messages, Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Here, advertising and marketing communications are used to stimulate positive sentiments that make the consumer like a brand or product (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Last, the conative attitude component covers individuals' behavior towards subjects and/or objects, which again can be strengthened through marketing communications (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). To be more precise, at this level, the actual responses of consumers toward brands and/or products are measured (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). In the social media context, this can refer to consumers' “liking” or commenting on specific online postings, following some influencers on social media, buying something, or the like (Kim & Read, 2021; Kim & Read, 2022).

Even if there exist these three above-mentioned attitude characteristics, this study mainly focuses on the conative part of attitude formation towards brands, as further behavioral changes, namely Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and purchase intentions initiated by attitude change, are investigated.

Breves et al. (2019) for example found that the perceived influencer-brand fit positively impacted consumer behavior mediated by changes in consumers' attitudes, and Wang et al. (2012) showed that consumer attitudes towards products were positively related to buying intentions. In the same fashion, Lee et al.'s (2022b) results demonstrated that high levels of influencer-brand congruence had favorable effects on consumers' attitudes towards advertising and brands in general and that this further affected consumers' WOM intentions. These conclusions also have been confirmed by recent findings of Dhun and Dangi (2022).

With reference to the additional variable chosen in this study, influencers' smile intensity, Kim and Read (2021) stressed that high levels of influencer smile intensity positively influenced consumers' attitudes towards influencers, which was mediated by perceived influencer warmth and *competence*. This in turn affected the attitude formation toward brands and associated with this, further behavioral changes (Kim & Read, 2021). The same effects also have been observed in a subsequent study by Kim and Read (2022). There, the authors again showed that smiling in the social media advertising context resulted in favorable attitudes towards the ad and brand and that the stereotype dimension of *warmth* played a significant role in this process as well as in later observed behavior changes (Kim & Read, 2022).

Last to mention is a research by Arghashi et al. (2021) that provided insights into the relationship between brand attitudes and word-of-mouth communications. This study found that brand identification and brand image are significant factors in shaping positive attitudes towards social media brands and consumer satisfaction and consumer satisfaction was found to be a stronger predictor of social media brand love than brand attitude. The study also highlighted the sequential mediation role of consumer satisfaction and brand attitude in the relationship between brand identification/image and brand love, emphasizing the importance of these factors in developing consumer attachment and positive brand outcomes. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest the need to focus on building brand identification, brand image, and consumer satisfaction to foster brand loyalty and positive consumer behavior in the competitive social media landscape (Arghashi et al., 2021).

2.7.2 Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth refers to “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service” (Arndt, 1967, p. 3).

According to Dichter (1966), there exist four distinctive motives, in which word-of-mouth communication is likely to take place. The first relates to consumer product involvement. There, shoppers feel a severe connection with the product and experience a strong need to share their consumption experience with thirds, since their level of involvement is rather high. The second motive refers to consumers’ self-involvement, where the product is used for individuals to express themselves. The third covers the dimension of other involvement. Thereby, individuals want to help others by sharing their unique knowledge about certain information. And finally, the fourth and last motive of word-of-mouth communication contains message involvement. At this stage, consumers are referring to the content provided by commercials, advertisements, and public relations (Dichter, 1966). Over the years, further studies, such as Engel et al. (1993) and Sundaram et al. (1998), built on this classification and added additional dimensions. However, the basic categorization of word-of-mouth motives remained the same.

With the above-mentioned assortment in mind, the theory behind WOM communication steadily gained importance over the years and is often used as an advertising measure. As Gelb and Johnson (1995) summarized in their paper, the importance of WOM lies especially in its more reliable and personal character compared to traditional mass media. Therefore, implementing WOM processes makes especially sense for companies that are referring to low-risk products, and where awareness and product trials wanted to be achieved (Gelb & Johnson, 1995).

However, in light of the latest developments of the Internet and social media, a second stream of word-of-mouth has evolved: eWOM (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) defined this process based on Hennig-Thurau et al.’s (2004) study as “any statement based on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product, service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (through web sites, social networks, instant messages, news feeds...)” (p. 13). Referring to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 41), “eWOM communication on Web-based consumer-opinion platforms” emerged for several reasons. These are among others consumers

helping other consumers and/or companies, consumers gaining social benefits through peer exchanges and acquiring post-purchase information and evaluations, as well as individuals seeking external approval for their purchase decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

With all this in mind, it is not surprising that word-of-mouth communications influence consumers' purchase behavior (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). Park and Lee (2009) for example found that negative electronic word-of-mouth had a stronger impact on consumer behavior than positive eWOM and that experience goods are more affected by the eWOM effect than search products. To add to this, Gruen et al. (2006) discovered the positive effect of eWOM on consumer loyalty and value perception toward brands and products.

Regarding consumers' social media presence, eWOM communications also play a significant role on online platforms such as Instagram and the like. Dhun and Dangi (2022) provided an overview of the state of research and explained that influencer marketing plays a fairly important role in eWOM communication processes. This is due to influencers' perceived higher levels of credibility and transparency compared to traditional advertising, as well as consumers' chance to co-create value by liking, commenting, and sharing the provided content (Dhun & Dangi, 2022). Nonetheless, as stated by the authors, influencer-brand congruence plays a critical role in the process (Dhun & Dangi, 2022).

A research by Hickman and Ward (2013) analyzed social identity effects with regard to brands, brand judgments, and related consumer judgments and their influence on negative WOM (NWOM). There, the authors stressed that highly engaged consumers towards a certain brand, who rate an out-group brand low, were likely to perceive users of this out-group brand as also low on the stereotypical dimensions of *warmth* and *competence*, and further tend to spread NWOM towards the out-group brand (Hickman & Ward, 2013). In similar manners, Demiray and Burnaz (2019) investigated user commitment and community identification on Facebook and found that identification with brands led to users' community commitment online, which then positively impacted word-of-mouth behavior online. To go into more detail, one aspect that might have influenced the degree of commitment and identification was the perceived congruence of brand and advertising (Demiray & Burnaz, 2019). In a study by Lee et al. (2022b), in which the impact of micro-influencer-product fit on consumer behavior and advertising effectiveness was examined, the researchers observed a positive relationship between influencer-product congruence on

electronic word-of-mouth. These findings however were not able to be confirmed by Dhun and Dangi (2022), who neither found a positive significant relationship between social media influencers' credibility and consumers' intention to eWOM engagement nor between influencer-brand congruence and the intention to engage in WOM communications.

Given the presented findings, this study assumes a positive relationship between influencer stereotypes (influencer *warmth* and *competence*), brand stereotypes (brand *warmth* and *competence*), influencer-brand congruence, and influencer smile intensity, which results in a favorable brand attitude and further eWOM intentions. These effects are expected even if the study of Dhun and Dangi (2022) was not able to provide positive significant results between influencer-brand fit and eWOM. Since others have found influencer-brand congruence and the process of stereotype content transfer to have positive effects on consumers' behavioral outcomes (e.g. Demiray & Burnaz, 2019; Kim & Read, 2022; Lee et al., 2022), it is believed that influencer ratings with regards to the stereotype dimension *warmth* indirectly impact consumer brand attitude and related, intentions to engage in eWOM communications. Given that, it is hypothesized that:

H4a: Influencer warmth evaluations indirectly and favorably influence brand attitude and eWOM intentions towards the promoted brand through brand warmth.

The same process is expected for the influencer stereotype dimension *competence*. Therefore, the next hypothesis is as follows:

H4b: Influencer competence evaluations indirectly and favorably influence brand attitude and eWOM intentions towards the promoted brand through brand competence.

2.7.3 Consumer Purchase Intentions

Prior literature summarized the concept of consumer purchase intention as individuals liking certain products and/or services and experiencing the willingness to buy these. The process behind this can be classified by four different measures: consumers "planning to buy, having a budgeted money to buy, considering to buy, and having the tendency to buy" (Arifani & Haryanto, 2018, p. 3).

With regards to the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), Diamantopoulos et al. (2017) analyzed the effect of explicit and implicit country stereotypes on product preferences and found that explicit

prejudices of both SCM dimensions, *warmth* and *competence*, positively reflect on consumers' purchase intent. Explicit country stereotypes thereby refer to consciously held beliefs and attitudes about countries that individuals are aware of and can report through direct questioning, while implicit country stereotypes are unconscious or automatic associations and biases that individuals may not be aware of or able to reveal through self-report measures and are assessed indirectly through tasks like the Implicit Association Test (IAT) that measure response latencies and strengths of associations between concepts (Diamantopoulos et al., 2017). In Kervyn et al.'s (2012) modification of the Stereotype Content Model, the Brand as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), the authors also researched the effects of stereotypes on purchase intentions, only with a focus on brands. Thereby, Kervyn et al. (2012) found that well-meant brands are judged higher on *warmth* than negative-perceived brands, while skilled brands are rated high on *competence* levels compared to low-ability brands, and that both well-intentioned (warm) and high-ability (competent) brands are classified by consumers' strong willingness to purchase those brands.

Moving over to the mediator, smile intensity, Wang et al. (2017) determined the effect of broad versus slight smiles of marketers in an advertising context on, among other things, consumer purchase intention. The study showed that in a low-risk consumption environment, marketers' broad smiles were translated into perceived *warmth* and led to higher purchase intentions. However, the opposing effect occurred, if broad smiles were presented where consumption risk was high (Wang et al., 2017). Kim and Read (2022) also examined the effects of smile intensity but with a focus on social media influencers. As mentioned several times in previous sections of this paper, influencers' smile intensity was found to predict ad and brand attitudes, and through this, consumers' intentions to buy products and/or services of the advertised brand (Kim & Read, 2022). This effect is mediated by the stereotypically perceived *warmth* of the social media influencer (Kim & Read, 2022).

To follow up on these thoughts, this paper expects consumers to experience purchase intentions towards the promoted brand after the stereotype content transfer successfully took place. Owing to the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF, Kervyn et al., 2012), it is argued that consumers perceiving brand *warmth* (*competence*) are more likely to build up purchase intentions through brand attitudes than consumers only having low prejudices towards brands. Because of this, it is expected that transmitting the influencer stereotype dimensions of *warmth* and *competence* to brands evokes these effects. Moreover, as Wang et al. (2017), as well as Kim and

Read (2022), highlighted, influencers' smile intensity additionally positively impacts consumer purchase intents. Thus, this paper assumes:

H5a: Influencer warmth evaluations indirectly and favorably influence brand attitude and purchase intentions through brand warmth.

And in the same manner:

H5b: Influencer competence evaluations indirectly and favorably influence brand attitude and purchase intentions through brand competence.

Until now, this paper only mentioned the examination of the indirect effects of stereotype content transfer on consumer behavior through changes in brand attitude. Nonetheless, it is also expected that there might exist direct adjustments in consumers' behavioral intentions. Hence, hypotheses 6a) to 7b) are stated as follows:

H6a: Perceptions of influencer warmth have an indirect and positive influence on eWOM intentions, mediated by brand warmth.

H6b: Perceptions of influencer competence have an indirect and positive influence on eWOM intentions, mediated by brand competence.

H7a: Perceptions of influencer warmth have an indirect and positive influence on purchase intentions, mediated by brand warmth.

H7b: Perceptions of influencer competence have an indirect and positive influence on purchase intentions, mediated by brand competence.

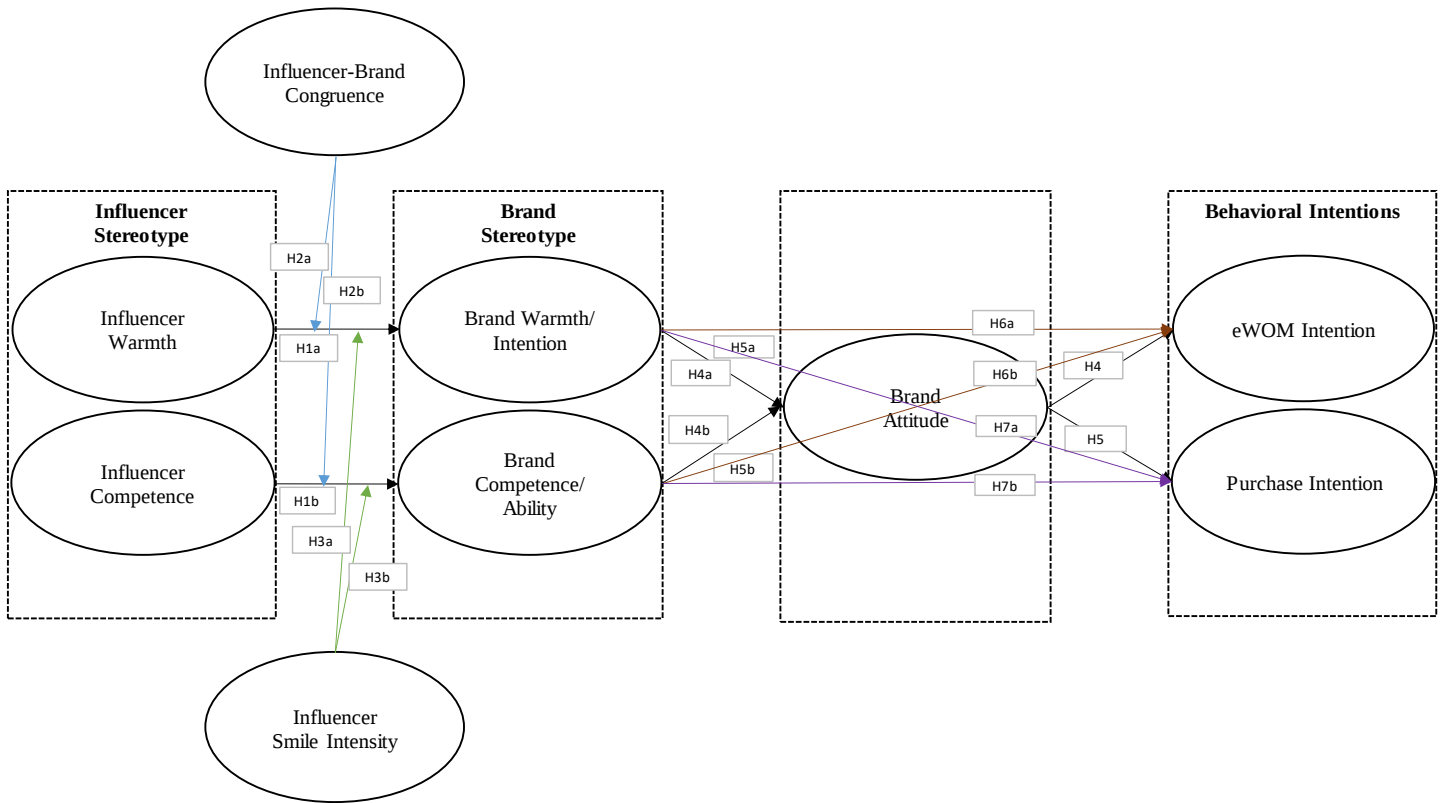


Figure 1: Research Model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This chapter provides an overview of the pretest and actual study setup, outlining the methodology and procedures used to gather data and address the research objectives in this paper.

3.1.1 Pretest

The pretest phase of the study was conducted from 06.03.2023 to 10.03.2023, involving a total of 94 participants. Among the respondents, 59 identified as female, while 35 identified as male. One objective of the pretest was to engage a similar target group to that which would later participate in the actual study. This initial stage allowed for the refinement of research instruments, evaluation of feasibility, and exploration of potential challenges before proceeding to the main study.

For both studies, the pretest as well as the main study, a convenience sample was chosen, in which the respondents mainly consisted of Austrian and German participants with a few exceptions. The

questionnaire of the pretest and main study were then spread online via various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook as well as Snapchat.

In the pretest, participants were presented with four different promotional pictures of two influencers (a celebrity female influencer and an unknown male influencer) promoting two brands (PUMA and Vapiano). However, each advertising image contained a so-called random-generator who by chance assigned a smiling versus non-smiling promotional picture to the respondent. Because of this, some participants saw both influencers with both brands in a smiling condition, whereas others saw both with a non-smiling facial expression or even mixed.

Due to those four different conditions (two influencers $\times$ two brands), the pretest revealed that participants showed signs of boredom effects. Also, feedback was provided that the questionnaire was too long and that the respondents lost motivation to continue answering the questions. Furthermore, the results of the pretest demonstrated that there were no significant differences in gender. Consequently, in the actual study, the second influencer was taken out and the study focused only on the popular female influencer.



Figure 2: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Male Unknown Influencer Promoting Vapiano

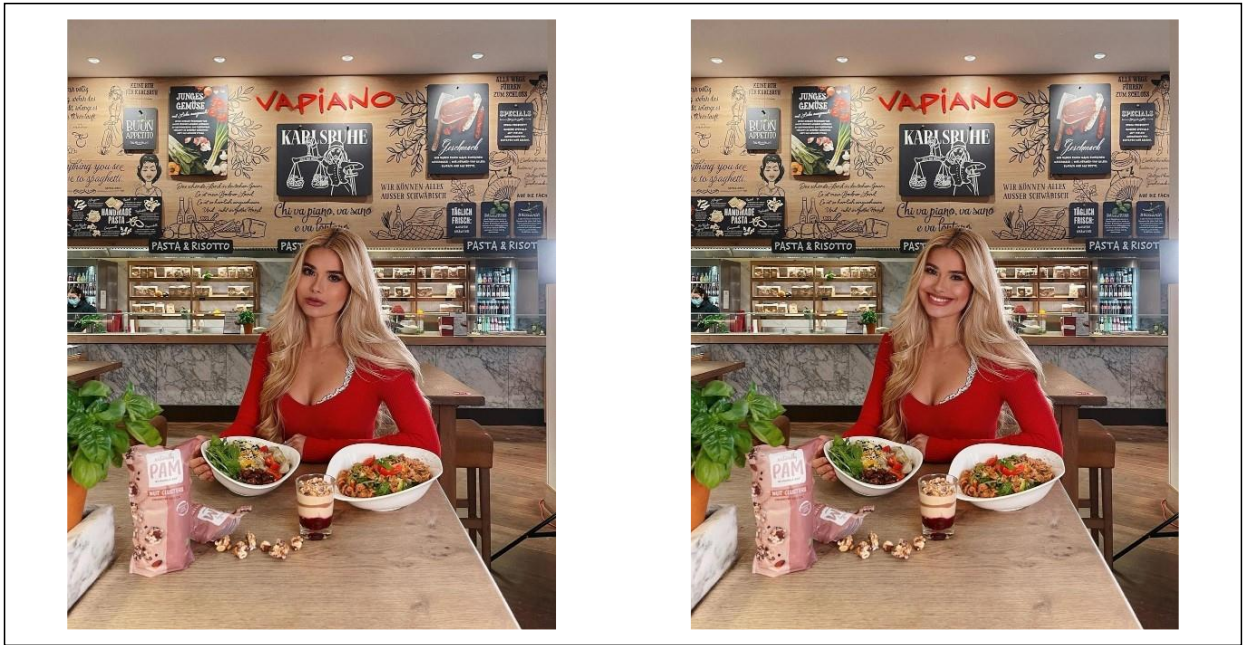


Figure 3: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Female Celebrity Influencer Promoting Vapiano

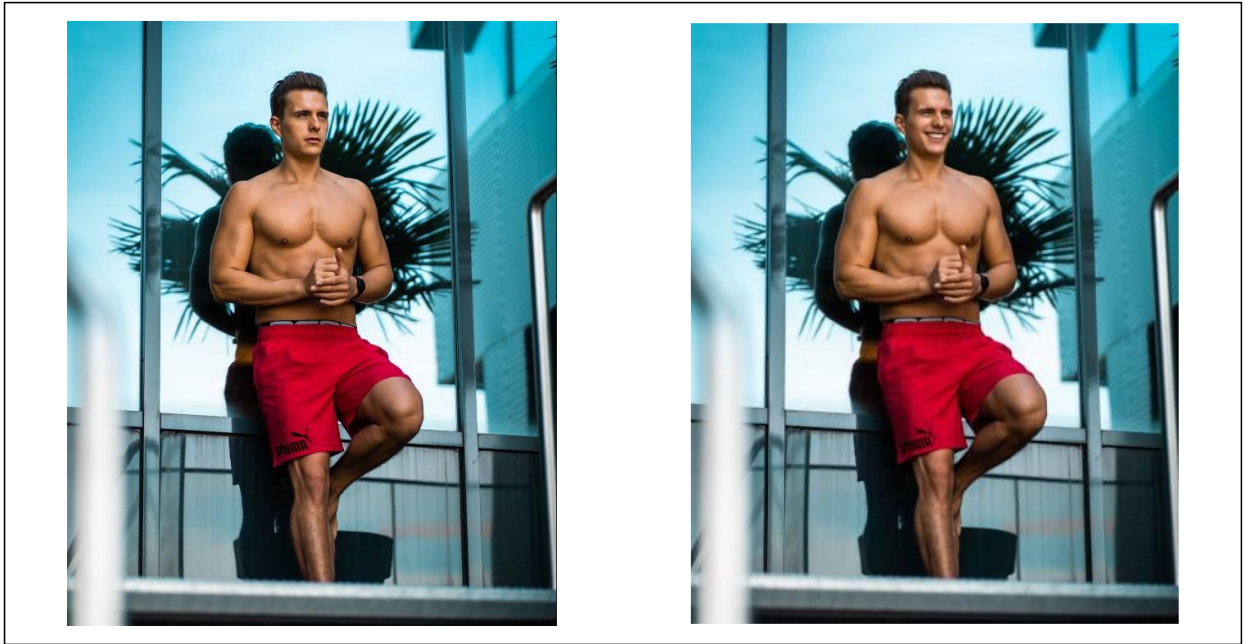


Figure 4: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Male Unknown Influencer Promoting PUMA



Figure 5: Manipulation of Smile Intensity of Female Celebrity Influencer Promoting PUMA

3.1.2 Final Study

For the purpose of testing the above-mentioned hypotheses a quantitative research design in an economically advanced country, namely Austria, was adopted. In 2023, in the period between March 17 and March 31, a total number of 493 participants was recruited from which 263 respondents (169 female, 92 male, 2 diverse) fully completed the questionnaire. The respondents to the survey were informed in advance that the study aimed to learn about people's attitudes toward social media advertising. Nonetheless, the respondents did not know about the relevance of the influencer's smile intensity or the fit of the brand and influencer.

The questionnaire consisted of eighteen hypotheses-related multiple-choice questions and six sociodemographic questions. In the hypotheses-related questions, the order of all answer alternatives was randomized in order to prevent possible order effects. With regards to the language of the survey, the questionnaire was originally developed in English since prior adopted scales from previous papers were utilized. However, as the survey was mainly transmitted to Austrians as well as Germans, the questionnaire was translated from a native speaker into the German language. Therefore, two versions of the questionnaire (English and German) were provided in order to not exclude potential respondents.

The two brands used in the pretest, PUMA and Vapiano, were kept the same in the main study since all respondents from the pretest knew both brands, and almost all had already bought or consumed products from both brands. The reason behind initially choosing PUMA as a brand was that the female celebrity influencer, that was then picked for the actual study, had an active long-term advertising cooperation with the fitness brand at the time of the study. Thereupon, PUMA was seen as being a good match for the influencer, which should reflect in H2a and H2b, where it is proposed that influencer-brand congruence strengthens the stereotype content transfer effect. Besides, PUMA belongs to the top three sports brands worldwide (Hubert, 2022) and was therefore assumed to be known by all participants, which the pretest confirmed.

The second brand, Vapiano, was also chosen because of a promotional cooperation between the female influencer and the restaurant chain in the near past at the time of the survey period. In contrast to PUMA, Vapiano was assumed to be a bad match, since the lifestyle presented by the female influencer consists most of mindful living, workout tutorials, and healthy, often vegan recipes. For that purpose, the Italian-inspired fast-food restaurant chain was considered a worse fit than PUMA. By pretesting both brands, this assumption could be confirmed.

In addition to the influencer-brand fit, the effect of the influencers' smile intensity on the stereotype content transfer was tested. For this, as already briefly mentioned above, the influencer's facial expression was manipulated. For both brands, an already existing promotional picture of the influencer was taken from Instagram. Afterward, with the help of artificial intelligence, the facial expressions were adapted in a way, that one time the influencer promoted the brand with a broad, open-mouth smile and the other time with a neutral, closed-mouth facial expression. Whether a respondent was assigned to the or the other condition happened by chance.

To sum up, the questionnaire of the main study was structured in two essential parts. The first section dealt with the sports brand PUMA and the second with the restaurant chain Vapiano. Both individual parts were set up the same. First, the promotional image was presented to the respondent with a note to carefully look at the picture. On the next page, the participant's familiarity with the brand, as well as the purchase history, was asked. Afterward, questions regarding the strength of the influencer's smile intensity, evaluations of the influencer's as well as the brand's *warmth* and *competence* perception, and the influencer-brand fit were asked. As a last part of both sections, brand attitude, eWOM intentions, and purchase intentions were surveyed.

To measure the stereotype dimensions of influencers as well as brand *warmth* and *competence*, a scale introduced by Fiske et al. (2002) and refined by Kolbl et al. (2019) and Diamantopoulos et al. (2021) was used. Influencer-brand congruence was tested with a scale of Dhun and Dangi (2022) and the influencers' smile intensity was simply asked with a seven-point scale proposed by Wang et al. (2017). The scales for both attitude toward the brand and eWOM intentions were taken from Dhun and Dangi's (2022) study. And finally, participants' purchase intentions were measured using a scale of Dodds et al. (1991) and Diamantopoulos et al. (2021). All constructs but smile intensity used a five-point scale, ranging from not at all (one) to extremely (five).

3.2 Measurement and Descriptive Analysis

Chapter 3.2 presents a complete summary of the variables used in the study, intending to establish a clear grasp of the essential factors under consideration.

To examine the dimensionality, reliability, and validity of the measures, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with IBM SPSS Amos 26 was used. The model, however, did not suit the data very well (CHIN/Df = 3.738; RMSEA = .102; CFI = .415; GFI = .394; AGFI = .348). Standardized item loadings ranged from .16 to .93 across constructs, showing substantial connections for some variables, whereas composite reliabilities ranged from .23 to .96, indicating also great internal consistency for some of the constructs. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .07 to .82, outperforming the squared inter-construct correlations (i.e., shared variances), indicating unstable discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Table 1).

Construct	Scale	Factor Loading	Reliability
Brand Warmth PUMA	The attribute friendly describes PUMA	.215	$\alpha = .895$; CR = .323; AVE = .150
	The attribute good-natured describes PUMA	.210	
	The attribute kind describes PUMA	.161	
	The attribute warm describes PUMA	.696	
Brand Competence PUMA	The attribute capable describes PUMA	.287	$\alpha = .813$; CR = .230; AVE = .070
	The attribute competent describes PUMA	.276	
	The attribute efficient describes PUMA	.272	
	The attribute intelligent describes PUMA	.220	
Brand Warmth Vapiano	The attribute friendly describes Vapiano	.721	$\alpha = .895$; CR = .821; AVE = .534
	The attribute good-natured describes Vapiano	.727	
	The attribute kind describes Vapiano	.731	
	The attribute warm describes Vapiano	.745	
	The attribute capable describes Vapiano	.767	$\alpha = .857$;

Brand Competence Vapiano	The attribute competent describes Vapiano	.779	CR = .861; AVE = .608
	The attribute efficient describes Vapiano	.785	
	The attribute intelligent describes Vapiano	.788	
Influencer Warmth PUMA	The attribute friendly describes the influencer (PUMA)	.466	α = .885; CR = .516; AVE = .210
	The attribute good-natured describes the influencer (PUMA)	.466	
	The attribute kind describes the influencer (PUMA)	.453	
	The attribute warm describes the influencer (PUMA)	.449	
Influencer Competence PUMA	The attribute capable describes the influencer (PUMA)	.378	α = .805; CR = .378; AVE = .132
	The attribute competent describes the influencer (PUMA)	.373	
	The attribute efficient describes the influencer (PUMA)	.367	
	The attribute intelligent describes the influencer (PUMA)	.334	
Influencer Warmth Vapiano	The attribute friendly describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.803	α = .937; CR = .887; AVE = .663
	The attribute good-natured describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.807	
	The attribute kind describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.821	
	The attribute warm describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.826	
Influencer Competence Vapiano	The attribute capable describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.788	α = .904; CR = .870; AVE = .626
	The attribute competent describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.791	
	The attribute efficient describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.792	
	The attribute intelligent describes the influencer (Vapiano)	.794	
Influencer-Brand Fit PUMA	I think the influencer is compatible with the brand	.427	α = .869; CR = .459; AVE = .175
	I think there is a good fit between the influencer and the brand	.425	
	I believe the influencer is relevant with the brand	.416	
	I think there is a good match between the influencer and the brand	.405	
Influencer-Brand Fit Vapiano	I think the influencer is compatible with the brand	.834	α = .921; CR = .903; AVE = .701
	I think there is a good fit between the influencer and the brand	.836	
	I believe the influencer is relevant with the brand	.837	
	I think there is a good match between the influencer and the brand	.841	
Brand Attitude PUMA	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is appealing	.569	α = .915; CR = .651; AVE = .272
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is good	.528	
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is pleasant	.517	
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is favorable	.499	
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is likable	.491	
eWOM Intentions PUMA	I am interested in sharing this post with my friends/family on Instagram	.660	α = .881; CR = .773; AVE = .405
	I will recommend this Instagram post to others	.654	
	I am interested in liking and commenting on the Instagram post	.646	
	I am willing to spread e-word of mouth about this brand or product on my Instagram page (for example, information related to the brand or its product or your experience with the brand)	.628	
	I am willing to share this brand's posts on my Instagram profile	.591	
Purchase Intentions PUMA	It is very likely that I will buy this brand	.678	α = .943; CR = .770; AVE = .455
	I will definitely try this brand	.676	
	The probability that I will purchase this brand is very high	.674	
	I am willing to buy this brand	.671	
Brand Attitude Vapiano	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is appealing	.895	α = .929; CR = .959;
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is good	.896	

	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is pleasant	.906	AVE = .823
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is favorable	.911	
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is likable	.928	
eWOM Intentions Vapiano	I am interested in sharing this post with my friends/family on Instagram	.848	$\alpha = .916$; CR = .931; AVE = .729
	I will recommend this Instagram post to others	.850	
	I am interested in liking and commenting on the Instagram post	.857	
	I am willing to spread e-word of mouth about this brand or product on my Instagram page (for example, information related to the brand or its product or your experience with the brand)	.857	
	I am willing to share this brand's posts on my Instagram profile	.857	
Purchase Intentions Vapiano	It is very likely that I will buy this brand	.864	$\alpha = .954$; CR = .930; AVE = .770
	I will definitely try this brand	.876	
	The probability that I will purchase this brand is very high	.877	
	I am willing to buy this brand	.892	

Table 1: Construct Measures & Psychometric Properties

		N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	
		Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Brand Warmth PUMA	(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)					
	The attribute friendly describes PUMA	263	1	5	2.83	0.06
	The attribute good-natured describes PUMA	263	1	5	2.48	0.07
	The attribute kind describes PUMA	263	1	5	2.70	0.07
	The attribute warm describes PUMA	263	1	5	2.67	0.07
Brand Competence PUMA	(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)					
	The attribute capable describes PUMA	263	1	5	3.45	0.07
	The attribute competent describes PUMA	263	1	5	3.38	0.07
	The attribute efficient describes PUMA	263	1	5	3.59	0.07
	The attribute intelligent describes PUMA	263	1	5	2.85	0.07
Brand Warmth Vapiano	(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)					
	The attribute friendly describes Vapiano	263	1	5	3.36	0.07
	The attribute good-natured describes Vapiano	263	1	5	2.76	0.07
	The attribute kind describes Vapiano	263	1	5	3.18	0.07
	The attribute warm describes Vapiano	263	1	5	3.21	0.07
Brand Competence Vapiano	(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)					
	The attribute capable describes Vapiano	263	1	5	3.12	0.07
	The attribute competent describes Vapiano	263	1	5	3.16	0.06
	The attribute efficient describes Vapiano	263	1	5	3.24	0.06
	The attribute intelligent describes Vapiano	263	1	5	2.79	0.07
Influencer Warmth (PUMA)	(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)					
	The attribute friendly describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	3.29	0.07
	The attribute good-natured describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	2.89	0.07
	The attribute kind describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	3.22	0.07

	The attribute warm describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	3.00	0.07
Influencer Competence (PUMA)	<i>(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)</i>					
	The attribute capable describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	3.43	0.07
	The attribute competent describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	3.19	0.07
	The attribute efficient describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	3.28	0.07
	The attribute intelligent describes the influencer (PUMA)	263	1	5	2.74	0.06
Influencer Warmth (Vapiano)	<i>(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)</i>					
	The attribute friendly describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	3.14	0.09
	The attribute good-natured describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	2.79	0.08
	The attribute kind describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	3.06	0.08
	The attribute warm describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	2.95	0.08
Influencer Competence (Vapiano)	<i>(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Fiske et al., 2002; Kolbl et al., 2019)</i>					
	The attribute capable describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	2.75	0.07
	The attribute competent describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	2.73	0.07
	The attribute efficient describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	2.77	0.07
	The attribute intelligent describes the influencer (Vapiano)	263	1	5	2.66	0.07
Influencer-Brand Fit PUMA	<i>(Dhun & Dangi, 2022)</i>					
	I think the influencer is compatible with the brand	263	1	5	4.09	0.06
	I think there is a good fit between the influencer and the brand	263	1	5	4.06	0.06
	I believe the influencer is relevant with the brand	263	1	5	3.67	0.08
	I think there is a good match between the influencer and the brand	263	1	5	3.94	0.06
Influencer-Brand Fit Vapiano	<i>(Dhun & Dangi, 2022)</i>					
	I think the influencer is compatible with the brand	263	1	5	2.63	0.07
	I think there is a good fit between the influencer and the brand	263	1	5	2.52	0.08
	I believe the influencer is relevant with the brand	263	1	5	2.33	0.07
	I think there is a good match between the influencer and the brand	263	1	5	2.52	0.07
Brand Attitude PUMA	<i>(Dhun & Dangi, 2022)</i>					
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is appealing	263	1	5	3.59	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is good	263	1	5	3.49	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is pleasant	263	1	5	3.33	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is favorable	263	1	5	2.85	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is likable	263	1	5	3.28	0.07
eWOM Intentions PUMA	<i>(Dhun & Dangi, 2022)</i>					
	I am interested in sharing this post with my friends/family on Instagram	263	1	5	1.44	0.05
	I will recommend this Instagram post to others	263	1	5	1.48	0.05
	I am interested in liking and commenting on the Instagram post	263	1	5	1.76	0.07
	I am willing to spread e-word of mouth about this brand or product on my Instagram page (for example, information related to the brand or its product or your experience with the brand)	263	1	5	1.56	0.06
	I am willing to share this brand's posts on my Instagram profile	263	1	5	1.32	0.05
	<i>(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Dodds et al., 1991)</i>					

Purchase Intentions PUMA	It is very likely that I will buy this brand	263	1	5	2.78	0.08
	I will definitely try this brand	263	1	5	2.84	0.08
	The probability that I will purchase this brand is very high	263	1	5	2.78	0.08
	I am willing to buy this brand	263	1	5	3.22	0.08
Smile-Intensity PUMA	<i>(Wang et al., 2017)</i>					
	How strong do you rate the influencer's smile intensity?	263	1	7	4.19	0.14
Smile-Intensity Vapiano	<i>(Wang et al., 2017)</i>					
	How strong do you rate the influencer's smile intensity?	263	1	7	4.26	0.14
Brand Attitude Vapiano	<i>(Dhun & Dangi, 2022)</i>					
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is appealing	263	1	5	3.19	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is good	263	1	5	3.09	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is pleasant	263	1	5	3.07	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is favorable	263	1	5	2.87	0.07
	The brand mentioned in the Instagram post is likable	263	1	5	3.03	0.07
eWOM Intentions Vapiano	<i>(Dhun & Dangi, 2022)</i>					
	I am interested in sharing this post with my friends/family on Instagram	263	1	5	1.42	0.05
	I will recommend this Instagram post to others	263	1	5	1.45	0.05
	I am interested in liking and commenting on the Instagram post	263	1	5	1.68	0.07
	I am willing to spread e-word of mouth about this brand or product on my Instagram page (for example, information related to the brand or its product or your experience with the brand)	263	1	5	1.48	0.05
	I am willing to share this brand's posts on my Instagram profile	263	1	5	1.35	0.05
Purchase Intentions Vapiano	<i>(Diamantopoulos et al., 2021; Dodds et al., 1991)</i>					
	It is very likely that I will buy this brand	263	1	5	2.69	0.08
	I will definitely try this brand	263	1	5	2.77	0.08
	The probability that I will purchase this brand is very high	263	1	5	2.61	0.08
	I am willing to buy this brand	263	1	5	2.97	0.08

Table 2: Measurement Scales & Descriptive Statistics

3.2.1 Brand Familiarity

Brand Familiarity: PUMA

The variable of familiarity with the brand PUMA in the study is considered nominal and encompasses three distinct values: “Yes”, “No”, and “I do not know”. The analysis revealed that out of the total participants, a substantial majority of 254 respondents (96.6%) were familiar with the brand PUMA. Only a small proportion of the participants, consisting of 8 individuals (3.0%), indicated unfamiliarity with the brand. Additionally, one participant (0.4%) reported that he or she was not sure about knowing the brand PUMA. These findings provide insights into the distribution of brand familiarity within the sample population.

Brand Familiarity: Vapiano

In the study, the variable of familiarity with the brand Vapiano is considered nominal and has three separate values: “Yes”, “No”, and “I do not know”. According to the results of the analysis, a sizable majority of 207 respondents (78.7%) were familiar with the brand Vapiano. A lower fraction of the participants, 53 people (20.2%), claimed they were unfamiliar with the brand. Furthermore, 3 participants (1.1%) stated that they were unsure if they knew the brand Vapiano.

3.2.2 Purchase History

Purchase History: PUMA

The variable “Purchase History with Brand PUMA” was assessed using a nominal scale, with three distinct values: “Yes”, “No”, and “I do not know”. The analysis of the data revealed that a significant majority of the participants, specifically 225 respondents (85.6% of all participants), reported having purchased products from the brand PUMA in the past. On the other hand, 25 respondents (9.5% of all participants) indicated that they had not made any purchases of PUMA-branded products. Additionally, 13 participants (4.9% of all participants) stated that they were unsure whether they had previously bought PUMA products or not.

Purchase History: Vapiano

The variable “Purchase History with Brand Vapiano” was also evaluated on a nominal scale with three separate options: “Yes”, “No”, and “I do not know”. The data analysis found that a considerable number of the participants, namely 166 respondents (63.1% of all participants), had previously dined at a Vapiano restaurant. On the other hand, 95 respondents (36.1% of all participants) indicated that they had not consumed any products from Vapiano. Additionally, 2 participants (0.8% of all participants) stated that they were uncertain whether they had experienced meals at restaurants of the Italian-inspired restaurant chain.

3.3 Analysis and Results

3.3.1 The Relationship between Influencer Stereotypes and Brand Stereotypes

To evaluate hypotheses 1a and 1b, which focus on a positive relationship between the influencer and brand stereotypes, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using IBM SPSS Amos 26 have been performed.

Regarding the absolute fitness of the model, the required threshold for relative Chi-Square (CHIN/Df), goodness of fit (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is not satisfied. The CHIN/Df value of 7.712 is above the required value of 5, GFI is .433, not exceeding .900, AGFI is .354, also not surpassing the .900 threshold, CFI is .462, below the required .900, and RMSEA is at a .160 level, above .060 (Lei & Wu, 2007). Consequently, it is concluded that the model assessing the impact of influencer *warmth* and *competence* on perceived brand stereotypes is not adequately fitting.

Still, the CFA was performed in Amos, and in a first step, all variables measured for influencer *warmth* across both brands, PUMA and Vapiano, were brought together. The same was then done for all variables measuring brand *warmth*. Here as well no differentiation between the two distinct brands was made. Next, a structural equation modeling analysis was conducted. The *warmth* exhibited by the influencer demonstrated a statistically significant and positive influence on the perception of brand *warmth* ($\beta = .548$, $p < .001$), providing support for hypothesis H1a.

Similarly, the variables assessing influencer *competence* were combined for both PUMA and Vapiano brands, without distinguishing between the two. The variables measuring brand *competence* were also merged without differentiation between the individual brands. Here as well, the perceived *competence* of the influencer had a significant positive impact on the perception of brand *competence* ($\beta = .796$, $p < 0.001$), lending support to hypothesis H1b.

			Estimate	P	Hypothesis	Support
Brand_Warmth	←	Influencer_Warmth	0.548	***	H1a	Yes
Brand_Competence	←	Influencer_Competence	0.796	***	H1b	Yes

Table 2: Structural Model Estimation Results

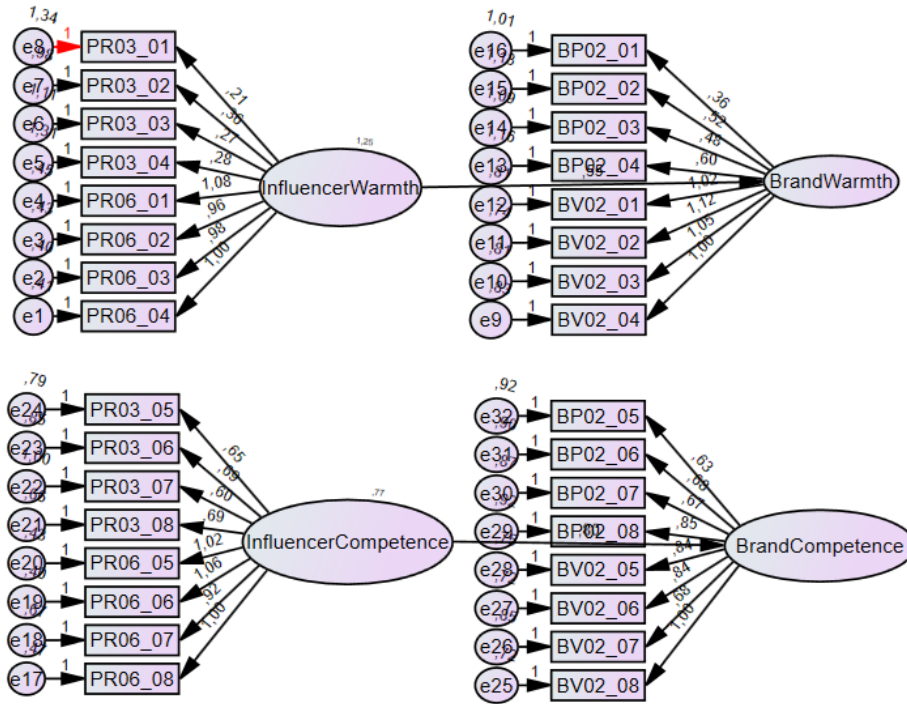


Figure 6: Structural Equation Model H1a & H1b

3.3.2 The Impact of Influencer-Brand Fit in the Stereotype Content Transfer

For testing the impact of influencer-brand fit in the stereotype content transfer process (H2a and H2b), four moderation analyses ($PUMA \times warmth$, $PUMA \times competence$, $Vapiano \times warmth$, $Vapiano \times competence$) were performed using Model 1 of the PROCESS macro with 5.000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2022). As variables, the average values of influencer and brand stereotypes for each of the two brands were used because the two stereotype dimensions were asked with four subcategories each, as can be seen in Table 1. For PUMA and Vapiano, the four categories within each dimension were summed up, and the mean value was computed. This averaged value was subsequently utilized in all following analyses. The same procedure was applied to all other variables, including the influencer-brand fit, that were queried with several categories.

Starting with the brand PUMA, the study examined the moderating effect of influencer-brand fit on the association between influencer *warmth* and PUMA's brand *warmth*. The findings revealed a non-significant negative moderating effect of influencer-brand fit on the relationship between influencer *warmth* and brand *warmth* ($b = -.015$, $t = -.258$, $p = .797$), providing no support for H2a for PUMA. To gain further insights into the nature of these moderating effects, a simple slope

analysis was conducted. The effect size of influence-brand fit is depicted in Figure 7 at the end of this chapter.

Next, the same procedure was applied to the independent variable influencer *competence* and the dependent variable brand *competence* of PUMA. The results did not provide support for H2b for PUMA either, as the findings revealed a non-significant negative moderating effect of influencer-brand fit on the relationship between influencer *competence* and brand *competence* ($b = -.098$, $t = -1.682$, $p = .0939$). To gain further insights into these moderating effects, here as well a simple slope analysis was performed. The effect size can be observed in Figure 8, also presented at the end of this chapter.

With regards to the brand Vapiano, the same analyses were carried out as for the sports brand PUMA. For this purpose, two moderation analyses for brand *warmth* and brand *competence* using Model 1 of the PROCESS macro by Hayes, with the influencer-brand fit as the moderator variable were undertaken.

Starting with Vapiano's perceived brand *warmth*, the findings demonstrated that influencer-brand fit had a significant positive moderating effect on the association between influencer *warmth* and brand *warmth* ($b = .166$, $t = 4.433$, $p < .001$), providing evidence for H2a for Vapiano. A simple slope analysis was performed to obtain more insight into the nature of these moderating effects. Figure 9 at the end of this chapter depicts the effect magnitude of influence-brand fit.

Finally, the identical method was then used for Vapiano's independent variable influencer *competency* and dependent variable brand *competence*. Again, as with testing H2a for Vapiano, the findings revealed a significant positive moderating effect of influencer-brand fit on the relationship between influencer *competence* and brand *competence* ($b = .132$, $t = 3.194$, $p = .002$), providing support for H2b for the brand Vapiano. These results are also presented graphically and can be found at the end of this chapter.

To summarize the results just reported, neither H2a nor H2b could be confirmed for the fitness brand PUMA. However, this was different for the restaurant chain Vapiano. Here, both analyses were able to show positive moderation effects for H2a and H2b, which is why H2a and H2b can be confirmed for Vapiano.

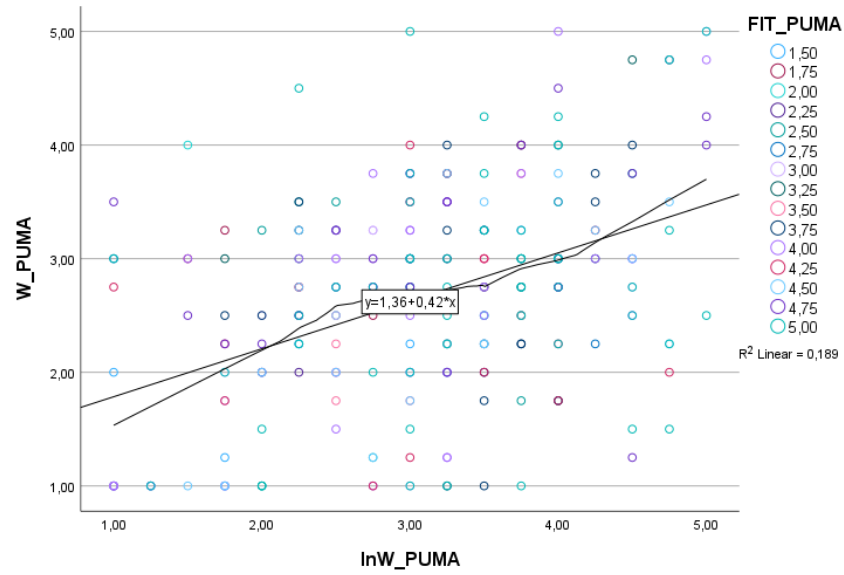


Figure 7: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between PUMA Warmth and Influencer Warmth

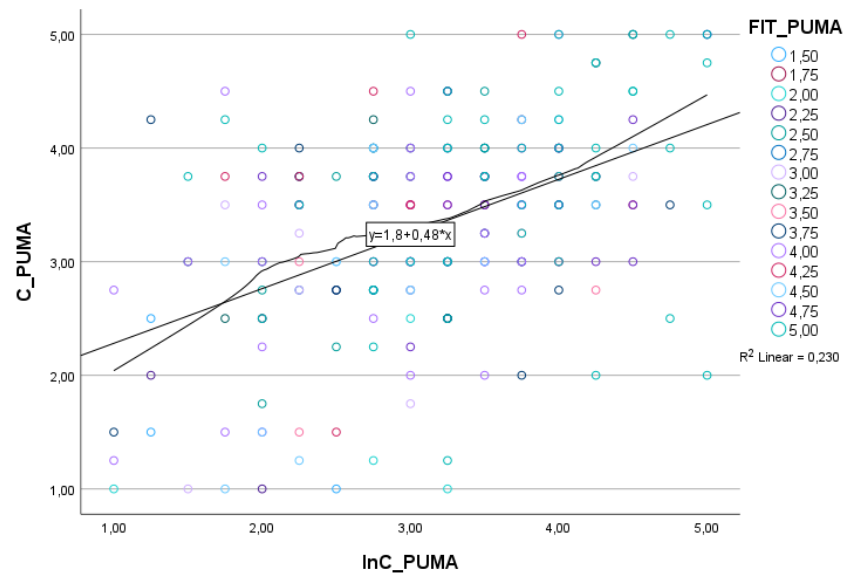


Figure 8: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between PUMA Competence and Influencer Competence

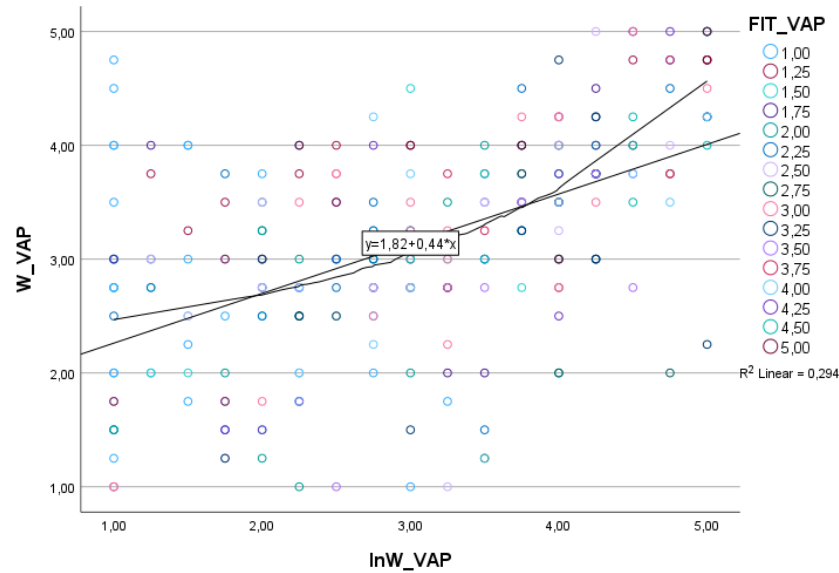


Figure 9: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between Vapiano Warmth and Influencer Warmth

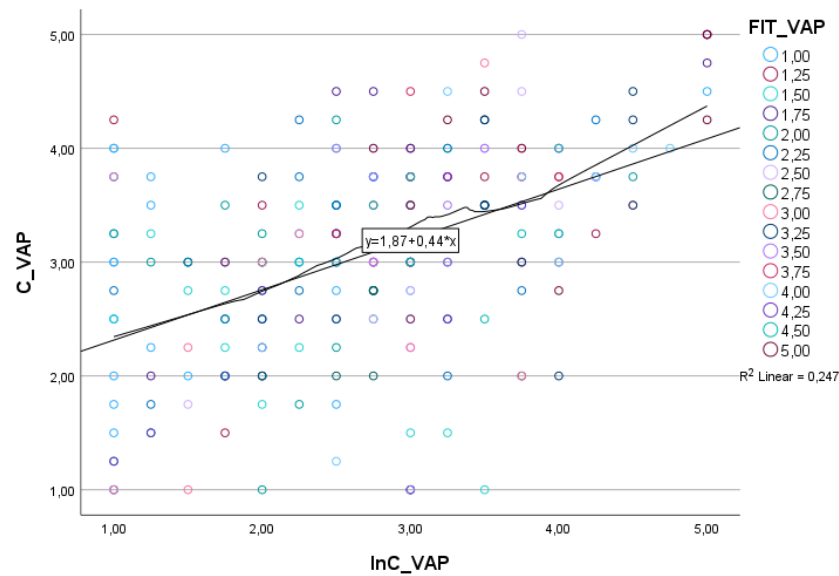


Figure 10: Moderation Effect of Influencer-Brand Fit on the Relationship between Vapiano Competence and Influencer Competence

3.3.3 The Impact of Smile Intensity in the Stereotype Content Transfer

To investigate H3a and H3b, additional moderation analyses for both brands were conducted by using Model 1 of the PROCESS macro with 5.000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2022). The variables utilized in these analyses were consistent with those employed in the previous chapter, including the average influencer and brand stereotypes for PUMA and Vapiano. Additionally, the influencer's smile intensity was included as the moderator in the analyses.

To provide a better structure, it is also started here with the analysis of the brand PUMA. The study looked at how the intensity of the influencer's smile influenced the relationship between influencer *warmth* and PUMA's brand *warmth*. The findings demonstrated that the influencer's smile intensity on the promotional picture had a non-significant negative moderating effect on the association between influencer *warmth* and brand *warmth* ($b = -.019$, $t = -.728$, $p = .469$), providing no evidence for H3a for PUMA. Additionally, a simple slope analysis was performed to obtain more insight into the nature of these moderating effects. Figure 11 at the end of this chapter depicts the effect magnitude of influencer smile intensity.

Concerning PUMA's *competence* stereotype dimension, the same procedure was performed. There, the investigation focused on examining the impact of influencer smile intensity on the relationship between influencer *competence* and PUMA's brand *competence*. The results revealed that the intensity of the influencer's smile in the promotional picture did not significantly moderate the association between influencer *competence* and brand *competence* ($b = -.043$, $t = -1.868$, $p = .063$), thereby failing to support H3b for PUMA. To gain a deeper understanding of these moderating effects, a simple slope analysis was conducted. Figure 12, presented at the conclusion of this chapter, portrays the magnitude of the effect of influencer smile intensity.

The same was done for Vapiano. Starting with the examination of Vapiano's *warmth* stereotype dimension, the data revealed that the influencer's smile intensity had a significant positive moderating effect on the association between influencer *warmth* and brand *warmth* ($b = .065$, $t = 3.224$, $p = .001$), indicating H3a for Vapiano. To gain a better understanding of the nature of these moderating effects, once more a basic slope analysis was done. Figure 13 at the end of this chapter demonstrates the size of the effect of the influencer's smile intensity.

Finally, for Vapiano's independent variable influencer *competence* and dependent variable brand *competence*, the same procedure was employed. The data demonstrated a substantial positive moderating effect of influencer smile intensity on the association between influencer *competence* and brand *competence* ($b = .055$, $t = 2.662$, $p = .008$), providing support for H3b for the brand Vapiano. These findings are also displayed graphically at the end of this chapter (see Figure 14).

Based on the above-reported findings, it can be summarized that similar to Hypotheses 2a and 2b, Hypotheses 3a and 3b do not hold true for the PUMA sports brand. Notably, it is intriguing to

observe that H3a and H3b are once again supported in the analysis involving Vapiano, aligning with the previous analysis of H2a and H2b.

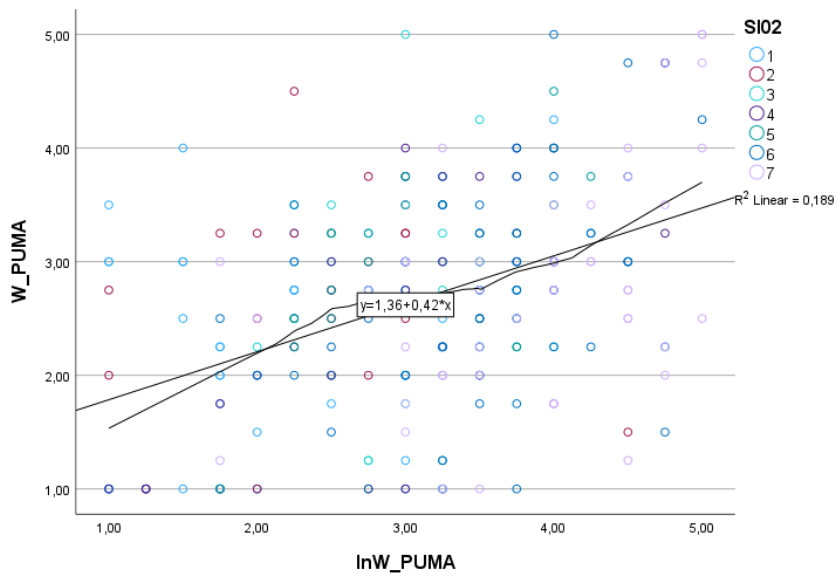


Figure 11: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between PUMA Warmth and Influencer Warmth

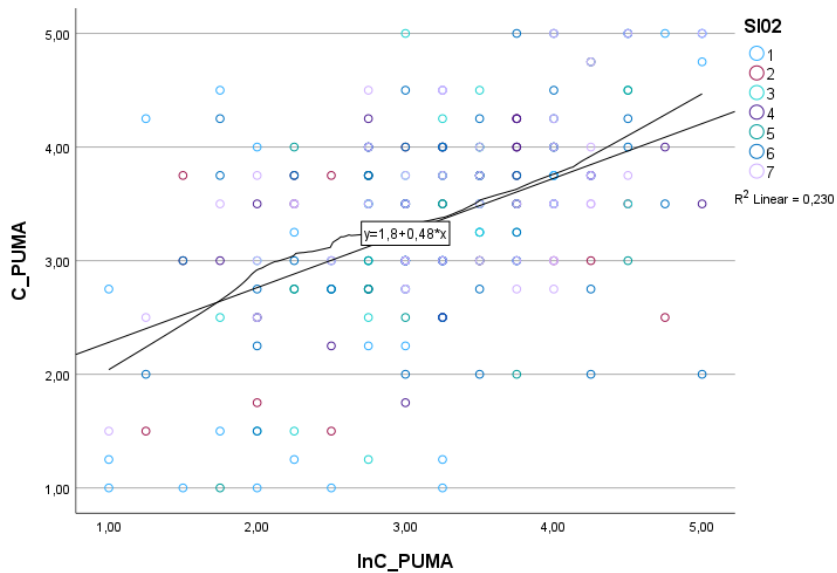


Figure 12: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between PUMA Competence and Influencer Competence

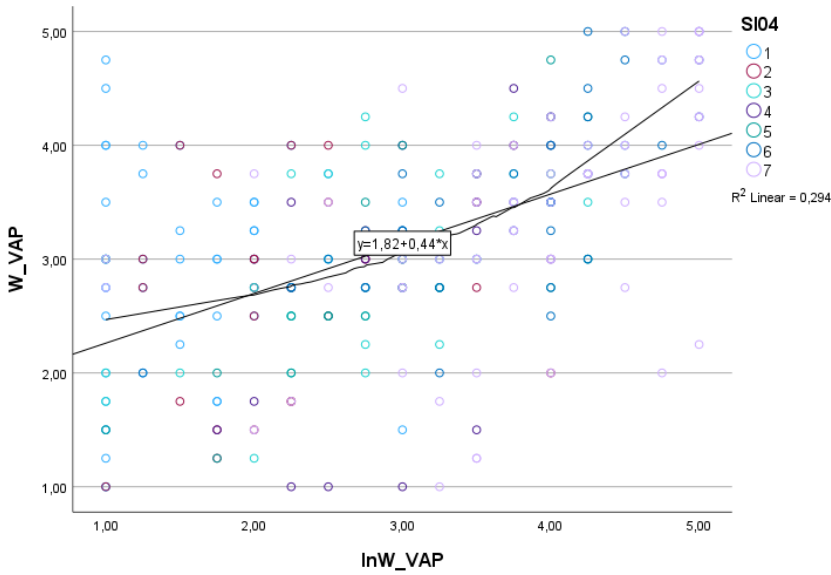


Figure 13: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between Vapiano Warmth and Influencer Warmth

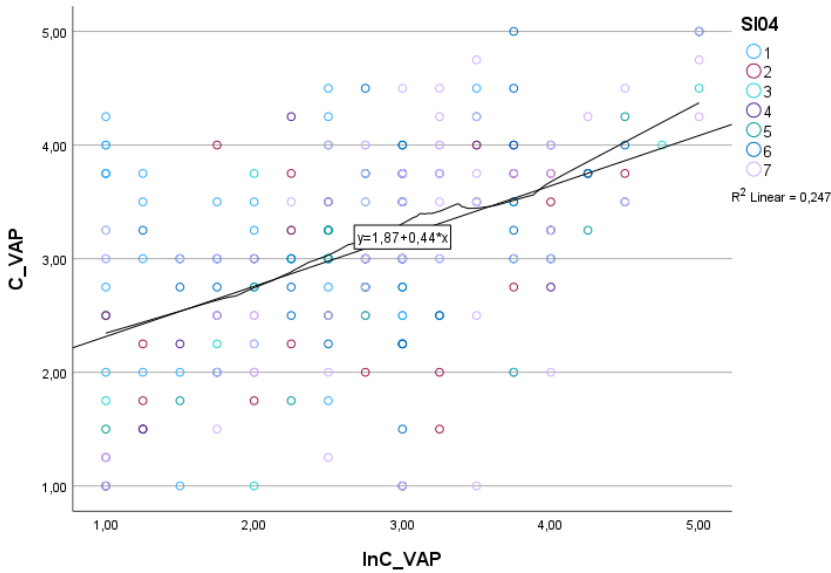


Figure 14: Moderation Effect of Smile Intensity on the Relationship between Vapiano Competence and Influencer Competence

3.3.4 The Impact of the Stereotyping Effect on Consumer Behavioral Intentions

To test the potential effects of the stereotype content transfer process on consumers' behavioral intentions with regard to eWOM and purchase intentions, several mediation as well as serial mediation analyses were conducted. The analyses were performed using Model 4 and Model 6 of the PROCESS macro with 5.000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2022).

Indirect Impact of Influencer Stereotypes on Consumer Behavioral Intentions

To analyze H4a, which assumes an indirect influence of influencer *warmth* evaluations on brand attitude and further on consumers' eWOM intentions through brand *warmth*, a serial mediation analysis (Model 6) was undertaken. As a dependent variable, the aggregated eWOM intentions were used. The independent variable consisted of the average influencer *warmth* ratings and as mediators, brand *warmth* evaluations and brand attitude were selected.

With regards to the brand PUMA, the findings support H4a by showing a statistically significant indirect effect of influencer *warmth* perception on eWOM intentions towards PUMA via brand *warmth* evaluations and brand attitude ($b = .024$, $t = 3.000$). Differing from this, the direct impact of influencer *warmth* ratings on eWOM intentions turned out not to be significant ($b = -.011$, $p = .822$). This means that the effect of influencer *warmth* ratings on eWOM intentions towards PUMA is not significant when the influence of brand *warmth* evaluations and brand attitude is not taken into account. Overall, these findings suggest that when influencers are perceived as warm, they can positively influence consumers' eWOM intentions towards PUMA through their impact on both brand *warmth* evaluations and brand attitude. However, when the mediating role of brand *warmth* evaluations and brand attitude is not considered, the direct impact of influencer *warmth* ratings on eWOM intentions towards PUMA becomes non-significant (see Appendix, Figure 6). Nevertheless, H4a can be confirmed for the PUMA, as it suggests an indirect effect.

The same procedure was run for the *warmth* evaluation of the Italian-inspired restaurant chain, Vapiano. According to the study, the relationship between influencer *warmth* evaluations and eWOM intentions towards Vapiano is serially mediated by brand *warmth* judgments and brand attitude. The outcomes, therefore, support H4a by demonstrating a strong indirect influence of the influencer *warmth* stereotype dimension on eWOM intentions through brand *warmth* and brand attitude ($b = .070$, $t = 4.191$). But still, same as above with PUMA, the direct effect of influencer *warmth* on eWOM has proven to be non-significant ($b = .058$, $p = .201$). Again, it can be said that influencer *warmth* judgments only impact eWOM intentions towards a brand if the mediators brand *warmth* and brand attitude are also taken into account.

As H4b is merely a variant of H4a, the analyses for both brands, PUMA and Vapiano, were conducted using the same methodology (PROCESS macro, Model 6). The average value of eWOM intentions was again used as the dependent variable. Average influencer *competence* ratings made

up the independent variable, and brand *competence* ratings together with brand attitude were chosen as mediators.

The results for the brand PUMA corroborate hypothesis 4b by demonstrating a statistically significant indirect effect of influencer *competence* assessments via brand *competence* evaluation and brand attitude on eWOM intentions towards PUMA ($b = .041$, $t = 3.270$). In contrast, once more, the direct effect shows that there is no significant difference between influencer *competence* ratings and eWOM intents ($b = -.048$, $p = .428$).

Next, the analysis was performed for Vapiano, using the same approach. Based on the findings, brand *competence* judgments and brand attitude act as a series of mediators in the interaction between influencer *competence* evaluations and eWOM intentions towards Vapiano. The results show an indirect and favorable influence of influencer *competence* evaluations on brand attitude and eWOM intentions through brand *competence*, which supports H4b ($b = .036$, $t = 3.257$). Additionally, it was discovered that, unlike the analysis with PUMA, the direct impact of an influencer *competence* perception on eWOM intentions towards Vapiano is significant ($b = 0.112$, $p = .032$). Therefore, the relationship between the perceived influencer *competence* and eWOM intentions towards Vapiano is partially serially mediated by brand *competence* ratings and brand attitude.

Another serial mediation study utilizing PROCESS (Model 6) was carried out to evaluate H5a, which postulates an indirect influence of influencer *warmth* ratings on brand attitude and further on customers' purchase intentions through brand *warmth*. The average value of purchasing intentions was employed as the dependent variable. The average influencer *warmth* ratings served as the independent variable, and brand *warmth* ratings and brand attitude were chosen as mediators.

For the brand PUMA, the results demonstrate a statistically significant indirect effect of influencer *warmth* perception on purchase intentions towards the promoted brand PUMA, via brand *warmth* evaluations and brand attitude ($b = .093$, $t = 3.700$). The direct impact of influencer *warmth* ratings on purchase intentions, however, was found not to be significant ($b = -.047$, $p = .496$). This implies that the influencer stereotype dimension of *warmth* only influences purchase intentions towards PUMA if the above-mentioned mediators are considered as well.

With regards to Vapiano, the results show that both brand *warmth* and brand attitude serve as mediators in the interplay between influencer *warmth* evaluations and purchase intents for Vapiano.

The findings support H5a ($b = .136$, $t = 4.956$) by demonstrating an indirect and positive impact of influencer *warmth* assessments on brand attitude and purchase intentions through brand *warmth*. Additionally, the direct effect of influencer *warmth* ratings on purchase intentions when the mediators are present is also determined to be significant ($b = -.146$, $p = .028$). However, contrary to the assumption made in the hypothesis, the direct effect implies purchase intentions decrease as influencer *warmth* evaluations increase. But still, these results fit together with those from the analysis above utilizing PUMA as a brand. Even if the effect there proves to be non-significant, the direction of the effect was the same.

As with hypothesis 4b, H5b is merely a modification of H5a. Therefore, both PUMA's and Vapiano's analyses were based on the same procedure that relies on the PROCESS macro (Model 6). The cumulative purchase intentions towards the promoted brand, which is the dependent variable, remained constant. The recently added independent variable now included influencer *competence* ratings and the mediators consisted of brand *competence* ratings and brand attitude.

The findings for the fitness brand PUMA support H5b since they show a statistically significant indirect effect of influencer *competence* assessments on purchase intentions for PUMA through brand *competence* and brand attitude ($b = .131$, $t = 3.875$). Up against this, the direct effect turned out to be non-significant ($b = -.101$, $p = .205$) and therefore indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between influencer *competency* evaluations and eWOM intents when the mediators are absent.

The same analysis was then once more conducted for Vapiano. Here again, the results of the study demonstrate that brand *competence* and brand attitude both function as mediators in the interaction between influencer *competency* evaluations and purchase intentions. The findings show an indirect and advantageous influence of influencer *competence* assessments on brand attitude and purchase intentions through brand *competence*, supporting H5b ($b = .089$, $t = 3.671$). When the mediators are present, the direct impact of influencer *competence* ratings on purchase intentions was also shown to be significant at a .05 level ($b = -.169$, $p = .026$). Also, in this case, the direction of the effect contradicts the assumption made in the hypothesis.

Direct Impact of Influencer Stereotypes on Consumer Behavioral Intentions

The findings presented above already indicate some interesting insights with regard to consumers' behavioral intentions. Yet, H4a, H4b, H5a as well as H5b proposed that the assumed effects would

only take place through a change in brand attitude. With hypotheses 6a to 7b, this study wants to examine whether perceived influencer stereotypes would lead to a perception of the same stereotype dimension in the promoted brand and whether this would finally result in behavioral intents with respect to eWOM and purchase intentions. To test these presumptions, simple mediation analyses utilizing Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) were performed.

Starting with the examination of H6a, as the dependent variable, eWOM intentions towards the advertised brand (PUMA and Vapiano) were taken. The independent variable consisted of the influencer *warmth* stereotype dimension and matching, the mediator included the perceived brand *warmth*.

For PUMA, the results support hypothesis 6a by showing a substantial indirect influence of influencer *warmth* on eWOM intentions ($b = .106$, $t = 3.161$). However, as expected after the results communicated above, the direct effect of influencer *warmth* on eWOM intentions towards PUMA proves to be non-significant ($b = .042$, $p = .403$). This means, that influencer stereotypes alone do not statistically significantly differ from eWOM intentions. However, it must be said that this result is quite plausible since it takes a brand to spread eWOM behavior about a brand.

With regard to the second brand, Vapiano, the findings of the analysis look somehow different. By demonstrating a significant indirect effect of influencer *warmth* on eWOM intentions towards Vapiano, the data again support hypothesis 6a ($b = .085$, $t = 3.963$). However, differing from the analysis with PUMA, the direct effect of influencer *warmth* on eWOM intents turned out to be statistically significant ($b = .111$, $p = .013$). This not only contradicts the results of the same study utilizing PUMA instead of Vapiano as a brand but also the outcome of H4a, where a second mediator, namely brand attitude, was included.

Next, to test H6b, the direct and indirect effects of influencer *competence* and brand *competence* on eWOM intentions towards PUMA and Vapiano were analyzed. For this, influencer *competence* was chosen as the independent variable and consumers' eWOM intentions were picked as the dependent variable. In addition, as a mediator variable brand *competence* was used.

The findings for the sports brand PUMA confirm hypothesis 6b since they demonstrate a significant indirect effect of influencer *competence* perception on eWOM intentions through brand *com-*

petence ($b = .069$, $t = 2.126$). The direct impact of the variable influencer *competence* on the variable eWOM intentions towards PUMA, however, turned out to be non-significant at a 95% confidence level ($b = .103$, $p = .094$).

The results of the analysis of Vapiano's *competence* stereotype dimension appear to be similar to Vapiano's *warmth* dimension. The data again confirms hypothesis 6b ($b = .048$, $t = 1.932$), showing a significant indirect effect of influencer *competence* on eWOM intentions towards Vapiano. Additionally, also with the *competence* stereotype dimension, it was found that the direct impact of influencer *competence* on eWOM intentions is statistically significant ($b = .188$, $p = .000$). Again, this outcome is contrary to the findings of the same study using PUMA.

Subsequently, hypotheses 7a and 7b were tested by using the same approach. Both hypotheses assumed a relationship between influencer stereotypes, with regards to *warmth* (H7a) and *competence* (H7b), and purchase intentions towards PUMA and Vapiano with the mediating role of brand stereotypes. Therefore, the dependent variable consisted of the mean value of purchase intentions, the independent variable contained the average influencer stereotypes, and the mediator included brand stereotypes.

When testing hypothesis 7a with the brand PUMA, it was found that the indirect effect of influencer *warmth* on purchase intentions towards PUMA is positively statistically significant ($b = .139$, $t = 3.186$). Also found to be significant was the direct effect of influencer *warmth* and purchase intentions towards PUMA ($b = .162$, $p = .046$). Consequently, brand *warmth* serves as a partial mediator between the perception of influencer *warmth* and the intention to buy PUMA-branded products. Again, the results contradict what was previously found in H5a. When brand attitude was used as another mediator in the analysis, the direct effect between influencer *warmth* and purchase intentions towards PUMA was neither significant nor positive.

When conducting the same study with the brand Vapiano, a significant positive relationship was also found between influencer *warmth* evaluations and purchase intentions ($b = .194$, $t = 4.364$), which supports hypothesis 7a for Vapiano. Unlike PUMA, however, the direct effect turned out not to be significant ($b = .015$, $p = .836$). Moreover, here as well, the findings are in conflict with those from H5a. Thus, if the brand attitude is considered as an additional mediator, the relationship between influencer *warmth* and purchase intentions towards Vapiano is statistically significant but negative.

Finally, the relationship between social media influencer *competence* and purchase intentions, with brand *competence* as a mediator, was analyzed. The indirect influence of influencer *competence* on purchase intentions towards the brand PUMA proved to be positively statistically significant when testing hypothesis 7b ($b = .246$, $t = 3.966$). Therefore, H7b can be supported for the sports brand PUMA. Besides, consistent with the results of the analysis of H5b, the direct effect of influencer *competence* on purchase intentions towards PUMA turns out not to be significant ($b = .073$, $p = .434$). It should also be noted that the *warmth* and *competence* stereotype dimensions of the same brand do not lead to identical results.

When analyzing the same question for Vapiano, comparable results were found as in the study with PUMA. The findings support hypothesis 7b by showing a statistically significant indirect influence of perceived influencer *competence* on purchase intentions towards Vapiano ($b = .206$, $t = 4.473$). Nonetheless, once more the direct relationship between influencer *competence* and purchase intentions turned out to be non-significant when the mediator brand *competence* was absent ($b = .020$, $p = .811$).

To summarize again all the previously communicated results of the analysis from H4a to H7b: For both brands, both the *warmth* and *competence* dimensions led to significant behavior change intentions among respondents. All examined indirect effects were significant, therefore H4a to H7b can be confirmed. The direct effects of influencer stereotypes on behavior change intentions were mostly not significant for both brands. And also in the analysis of these results, it could be seen once again that influencer stereotypes have a positive effect on brand stereotypes.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter tries to offer a comprehensive overview of the research outcomes, stressing the most important findings and interpretations in light of the study's goals. I will reflect on the research questions, summarize the findings, and present the conclusions as well as recommendations for future research. In addition, the limitations of this research will be demonstrated.

4.1 Theoretical Implications

This paper aimed to learn about the impact of brand user – or more specifically – influencer stereotypes on the perception of brand stereotypes, and whether influencer-brand fit and/or influencer

smile intensity matter in this stereotype content transfer process. By bringing the concepts of influencer and brand stereotypes as well as influencer smile intensity and influencer-brand fit together and measuring their effect on consumers' behavioral intentions with regard to brand attitude, eWOM, and purchase intentions, this study is to the best of my knowledge the first that applies these concepts in the mentioned procedure. The findings of the study show that there exist positive relationships between influencer and brand stereotype ratings when an influencer promotes a brand. With regards to the moderator influencer-brand fit, however, the results do not indicate clear directions as they differ for both brands used in the study. The same can be said about the moderator variable influencer smile intensity.

The findings, which rely on the conceptual insights from Fiske et al.'s (2002) stereotype content model (SCM), imply that stereotypes of both influencers and brands are related drivers of brand behavior. Influencer stereotypes thereby play a major role in this, as these are responsible for transferring prejudices to the brand promoted by the influencer. These results were expected since the study of Antonetti and Maklan (2016) was able to present similar outcomes. However, against prior assumptions, the relationships between the individual influencer *warmth/ competence* characteristics and the specific brand *warmth/ competence* dimensions were stronger for the "bad fit" brand, Vapiano.

Referring to prior research (e.g. Belanche et al., 2021; Dhun & Dangi, 2022; Schouten et al., 2020), the brand PUMA, which was rated as more congruent for the chosen influencer by the participants of the study, was expected to reflect higher effect sizes of the correlation coefficient. Nonetheless, the effects found for both brands, PUMA and Vapiano, indicate satisfactory values between medium and large effect sizes.

Concerning the moderator influencer-brand fit, as already briefly mentioned above, the findings were not able to illustrate a clear picture. The examination of the impact of influencer-brand fit was divided into four parts. Each brand was analyzed individually, and, in addition, the stereotypes were divided into the distinct dimensions of *warmth* and *competence*. While influencer-brand fit was neither statistically significant in predicting PUMA's *warmth* stereotype dimension nor in the prediction of PUMA's perceived competence level, the analysis of Vapiano showed exactly the opposite results. There, the moderator had a statistically significant influence in foretelling Vapiano's perceived brand *warmth* as well as brand *competence*. The fact that the results of the

study differ for both brands means that it is not possible to explain exactly what the findings might be due to. Nevertheless, the study's outcomes are relevant since they demonstrate, that even if influencer-brand and/or -product fit are important for an influencer to be rated as credible (Belanche et al., 2021) and might lead to higher purchase intentions (Schouten et al., 2020), it cannot automatically be said that the influencer then is also more effective in transferring his or her stereotypes to the brand. These outcomes are interesting insofar as one might be tempted to draw wrong conclusions.

Moving over to the second moderator that was included in this study: influencer smile intensity. As stated in H3a and H3b, it was proposed that an influencer's smile intensity would strengthen the stereotype content transfer for both stereotype dimensions, *warmth* and *competence*. Interestingly, this assumption again was only supported for the brand Vapiano. For both of PUMA's stereotype dimensions, this presumption was contradicted as non-significant results were found. As a possible explanation for these outcomes, it could be argued that as 96.6 percent of all participants of the study stated to know the brand PUMA, most of the respondents had already formed an opinion about the brand. Therefore, manipulations of the influencer's smile intensity did not affect their perceptions of the brand. Vapiano on the other side was known only by around 80 percent of the respondents, which could have been the reason why influencer-brand fit as well as the influencer's smile intensity were able to moderate the stereotype transfer process.

Even if the moderators did not reflect significant values, through the use of influencer and brand stereotypes as the main explanations of consumers' behavioral intentions, this study offers the first empirical assessments of the validity of the prediction of Fiske et al.'s (2002) SCM on customers behavior. Influencer *warmth* evaluations indirectly and favorably influence brand attitude and eWOM intentions towards the promoted brand through brand *warmth* for both brands. The same is true for influencer and brand *competence* evaluations. Here, too, the findings apply to both brands, PUMA and Vapiano. In addition, for PUMA as well as Vapiano, influencer *warmth* evaluations indirectly and favorably influence brand attitude and purchase intentions through brand *warmth*. The same effect can be observed here for the influencer and brand *competence* dimension. However, the study did not intend to only deal with the results of consumers' changes in their behavioral intentions when the mediator variable brand attitude was included. Therefore, the same analyses were performed once more, only this time no additional mediator variable with regard to changes in attitude was added. For PUMA and Vapiano, the outcomes of the study confirm that if

an influencer is perceived as stereotypically *warm*, the promoted brand is also perceived as stereotypically *warm*, which in turn leads to increased eWOM intentions towards the promoted brand. The same effect was observed for both brands when examining the brands' *competence* dimension. Along with this, the results revealed that if an influencer is perceived as stereotypically *warm/competent*, both promoted brands are also perceived as stereotypically *warm/competent*, which in turn leads to increased purchase intentions.

4.2 Managerial Implications

The theoretical implications of this study have significant implications for brand managers seeking to leverage influencer marketing as part of their overall brand strategy. The findings highlight several key managerial considerations that can enhance the effectiveness of influencer campaigns and drive positive consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions.

Firstly, the study underscores the importance of aligning influencer and brand stereotypes to positively influence consumer perceptions. If an influencer is perceived to convey certain *warmth* and skill levels, these dimensions will be reflected to a similar extent in the advertised brand. Accordingly, marketers should keep this phenomenon in mind when planning digital campaigns in which influencers will be included. Hiring a competent but less likable social media influencer might lead to consumers also forming unpleasant attitudes toward the brand. This procedure however also applies in a positive setting where a liked influencer spills over the emotions towards him/her to the advertised brand.

Additionally, the study emphasizes the role of influencer smile intensity as a potential factor in stereotype content transfer. While the results were not conclusive across the brands examined, brand managers should explore other relevant factors beyond smile intensity to optimize the effectiveness of stereotype transfer in influencer campaigns.

The study also highlights the importance of brand attitude as a mediating factor between influencer, brand, and customer behavioral intentions. Through influencer marketing initiatives, brand managers should concentrate on cultivating favorable brand attitudes as these attitudes indirectly and favorably influence brand attitudes, electronic word-of-mouth intentions, and purchase intentions.

Furthermore, the research points out that even though influencer-brand fit is important for influencer credibility and purchase intentions (Belanche et al., 2021; Schouten et al., 2020), it does not

automatically guarantee the effectiveness of stereotype transfer from the influencer to the brand. Brand managers should be cautious not to draw incorrect conclusions solely based on the fit between the influencer and brand, as the effectiveness of stereotype transfer may vary across different dimensions and brands.

Moreover, the study provides empirical support for the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) and its application to consumer behavior. Brand managers can leverage influencer and brand stereotypes as key drivers of brand behavior and consumer responses. By understanding and utilizing these stereotypes effectively, brand managers can shape consumer perceptions and drive positive behavioral outcomes.

On the whole, the study's theoretical implications offer valuable insights for brand managers in optimizing influencer marketing strategies, even if it was not able to find any statistically relevant results concerning influencer smile intensity and influencer-brand fit. It emphasizes the importance of strategic alignment, brand attitude cultivation, and understanding the nuances of stereotype transfer in influencer campaigns. By considering these managerial implications, brand managers can enhance the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior and drive positive brand outcomes.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research

Of course, this study is also characterized by some limitations, future research should address in order to provide better insights and more comprehensive results. First of all, because of restricted capabilities, this paper only included one influencer in the research. It is advised that future research should focus on introducing a second or even a third influencer to get a better and deeper understanding of the topic. Also, relying on several social media influencers would provide possibilities to compare the effects found and maybe detect interesting patterns that would have been hidden otherwise.

Also, this study only referred to a female social media influencer. Even if the pretest did not discover any gender differences, with regard to the richness of the results, including influencers of all genders might be a good idea for future investigations on that topic.

Along with this, future studies might also refer to unknown micro-influencers to see whether and to what extent the stereotype transfer process takes place and whether there are significant differences between well-known and unknown social media influencers. Since the female influencer utilized in this study is worldwide known – not only on social media but also on TV and out-of-home media – the surveyed participants might have had already biased opinions towards the influencer in advance. Hence, participants' ratings of the influencer's smile intensity might not have had any effect as the preconceptions towards the influencer might have been too strong. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that, with regard to the moderator variables influencer-brand fit and influencer smile intensity, bias may have occurred due to attitudes toward the influencer.

In the same fashion, this research was based only on established, well-known brands, namely PUMA and Vapiano. PUMA was known by 96.6 percent of the respondents of the study, and Vapiano reached a level of awareness of 78.7 percent. Thereupon, it is possible that the participants already had such strong associations with the brands, so that they might have answered the questions about the *warmth* and *competence* stereotypical dimensions independent of those of the influencer who had promoted the brands. This assumption holds especially for PUMA with an awareness level of nearly one hundred percent.

Finally, it can be said that another limitation of this study might have been that it was performed only in an advanced market with almost only participants from Austria and Germany. Other countries with different levels of wealth, as well as cultural characteristics, might have come to conclusions that differ from those of this study.

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Appendix

Descriptive Statistics												
	N Statistic	Range Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean		Std. Deviation Statistic	Variance Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error			Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
BF01	263	2	1	3	1,04	,013	,211	,044	6,037	,150	39,987	,299
BF02	263	2	1	3	1,22	,027	,444	,198	1,716	,150	1,921	,299
BF03	263	2	1	3	1,19	,031	,506	,256	2,612	,150	5,846	,299
BF04	263	2	1	3	1,38	,031	,501	,251	,696	,150	-1,075	,299
Valid N (listwise)	263											

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Brand Awareness and Purchase History of PUMA and Vapiano

Descriptive Statistics											
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
W_PUMA	263	1,00	5,00	2,6702	,05875	,95274	,908	,013	,150	-,266	,299
C_PUMA	263	1,00	5,00	3,3194	,05303	,86005	,740	-,543	,150	,578	,299
W_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	3,1293	,05931	,96178	,925	-,217	,150	-,398	,299
C_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	3,0779	,05450	,88381	,781	-,409	,150	,018	,299
FIT_PUMA	263	1,50	5,00	3,9420	,05518	,89486	,801	-,745	,150	-,078	,299
FIT_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	2,5019	,06776	1,09888	1,208	,410	,150	-,643	,299
ATT_PUMA	263	1,00	5,00	3,3057	,06184	1,00286	1,006	-,618	,150	,067	,299
eW_PUMA	263	1,00	5,00	1,5118	,04694	,76116	,579	1,934	,150	4,120	,299
PI_PUMA	263	1,00	5,00	2,9068	,07539	1,22255	1,495	-,039	,150	-1,087	,299
InW_PUMA	263	1,00	5,00	3,0979	,06049	,98105	,962	-,224	,150	-,538	,299
InC_PUMA	263	1,00	5,00	3,1568	,05282	,85654	,734	-,182	,150	-,124	,299
InW_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	2,9867	,07366	1,19450	1,427	-,084	,150	-1,069	,299
InC_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	2,7262	,06119	,99241	,985	,034	,150	-,435	,299
ATT_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	3,0479	,06180	1,00228	1,005	-,343	,150	-,397	,299
eW_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	1,4768	,04773	,77403	,599	1,792	,150	3,076	,299
PI_VAP	263	1,00	5,00	2,7605	,07628	1,23701	1,530	,148	,150	-,953	,299
SI02	263	1	7	4,19	,137	2,230	4,971	-,216	,150	-1,481	,299
SI04	263	1	7	4,26	,144	2,338	5,467	-,180	,150	-1,574	,299
Valid N (listwise)	263										

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics Grouped Variables