



**EXPLORING THE NATURE OF CONSUMER-INFLUENCE BY FITNESS BRAND AMBASSADORS
ON FEMALES IN CAPE TOWN**

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Declaration

I, *Lara Ann Bester*, confirm that:

I am a registered student of Vega School of Brand Leadership, studying at the Cape Town campus.

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the *BCom Strategic Brand Management Honours* degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lara Ann Bester', is positioned on the right side of the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

ABSTRACT

Brands are not always aware of the effects their product advertising can have on consumers. When supplement brands make use of fitness models or competitive athletes to promote their products, they do not always keep in mind that it could potentially affect the consumer in a negative manner. Body conscious consumers who have an interest in making lifestyle changes, are prone to be affected by these advertisements, whether it is to motivate them to purchase a product, feel inspired, or to create distressed thoughts about themselves.

This study aimed to explore the true nature and effect that fitness brand ambassadors have on their target market, and if there is a potential negative impact that the portrayal of these ambassadors in advertisements, or on social media could have on women in Cape Town.

The study followed a triangulation approach, with great emphasis on quantitative data collection. The study also made use of 5 interviews to give the findings a deep and rich understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative data collection method made it easier for the researcher to analyse and interoperate the data as well as present it in the research.

The findings were analysed and the researcher could identify patterns and trends from the data that had been collected.

After conducting the study, the researcher found that there is a strong connection between the advertisements of fitness brand ambassadors, and the negative impact it has on consumers.

The researcher also found that more than half of the consumers had been influenced to purchase a product that was advertised by fitness ambassadors.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1. Chapter 1: Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.1. Background of the study	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.2. Rationale.....	2
1.3. Problem statement.....	3
1.4. Purpose statement	4
1.4.1. Research objectives	4
1.5. Research questions	5
2. Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
2.1. Introduction.....	6
2.2. Paradigm	6
2.3. Brand ambassadors influence on consumer purchasing behavior	7
2.4. Importance of brand endorsements on target markets	7
2.5. Theoretical frame work	8
2.5.1. Cognitive perspective theory	8
2.5.2. Social learning theory	9
2.6. Existing Literature pertaining to research objectives	9
2.6.1. How endorsements have negatively affected consumer's health	12
2.6.2. Contact point that endorsed celebrities use to influence the target market.....	13
2.7. Conclusion	14
3. Chapter 3: Research Methodology.....	15
3.1. Introduction	15
3.2. Research paradigm	15
3.3. Research design.....	1Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.1. Questionnaires	16
3.3.2. Interviews	16
3.4. Population and sampling	18
3.4.1. Population.....	18
3.4.1.1. Unit of analysis	18
3.4.1.2. Target and accessible population	18
3.4.2. Sampling	18
3.4.2.1. Non-probability sampling.....	18

3.4.3. Sample size.....	18
3.5. Data collection methods	19
3.6. Data analysis	21
4. Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results	22
4.1. Introduction	22
4.2. Data collection method.....	22
4.3. Detailed discussion on findings	23
4.4. Analysis and interpretation of data	30
4.5. Summary of findings	31
4.6. Validity, reliability and trustworthines	34
5. Chapter 5: Conclusion	37
5.1. Introduction	37
5.2. Concluding answers to the research questions.....	37
5.3. Anticipated contributions	39
5.4. Limitations	39
5.5. Ethical considerations	40
REFERENCES:	41
Appendices:	45
A: Consent Form	45
B: Questionnaire.....	47
C: Interview Ambassadors.....	49
D: Interviews Body Conscious Consumers.....	50
E: Interview Sample 1	51
F: Interview Sample 2	52
G: Ethical Clearance	54
H: Safe Assign Report.....	55

1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter comprises an overview of the research study, including a background to the study, the rationale, problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions and research objectives.

1.1. Background of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the true nature of consumer influence by fitness brand ambassadors in Cape Town. In today's world of branding, most competitive brands use celebrity endorsements to create brand awareness in order to influence customers to buy their products (Byberg, 2015). Brands that aim to promote wellness and weight loss use fitness celebrities as an effective advertising strategy, however, the nature and extent to which customers aspire to look the same way can have negative effects on their emotional and physical well-being. Fitness brand ambassadors are professional athletes, or athletes that could represent what a brand stands for. These athletes take great care to stay in their desired body shape, or to keep fit for their sport that they take part in. Supplement companies such as USN expect these ambassadors to stay in shape in order to represent the desired 'fit and healthy' image their products aim to offer. Fitness ambassadors are contracted by supplement companies such as USN to post as often as possible, using correct handle and tagging conventions. Ambassadors should partake in event appearances as they must be visible to the public eye and be seen to support their sponsors. Ambassador should conduct themselves in a way that is aligned with the brand image and they are also required to support other ambassador, whether on social media or through physical support.

Furthermore, in order to be effective, it is said that a correlation should exist between the ambassador's image and the brand image (Byberg, 2015).

The endorser should be able to fulfil the objectives of familiarity, relevance, esteem and differentiation. The term familiarity means that the fitness ambassador is recognised by the target market and that they find him or her likeable and trustworthy. Relevance refers to the link from the endorser to the product and the audience. Esteem stands for the credibility the fitness ambassador claims and offers, and differentiation means that he or she stands out above the rest (Byberg, 2015).

If the fitness ambassador meets the criteria it is argued that ambassador endorsement can be a successful marketing strategy in order to raise awareness, increase sales and revenues, and differentiate the firm's products from those of competitors (Byberg, 2015).

Brands use various platforms to promote their products, such as Instagram and Facebook, to create a message so powerful and emotionally loaded that consumers cannot help to purchase their products. Social media advertising is very likely to be well received, because customers have more trust in their fitness idols opinions (Coetzee et al. 2015). This ultimately leaves body conscious customers with an emotion so strong that it drives them to purchasing action. The study aims to explain how fitness brands benefit from celebrity endorsement, but also how it may have a negative effect on body conscious consumers.

These brands appeal to the emotional path in the buying decision. They get their consumers to buy their products, because consumers want to associate themselves with these brand ambassadors and aspire to look like them, which is not always a realistic expectation. A connection between the brand ambassador and the consumer develops, where the consumer wants to resemble the image, culture and personality of the brand (Coetzee et al. 2015). This can lead to physical or psychological stress and fear, for example feeling left out or not fitting in the fitness society.

1.2. Rationale

Brand ambassadors play a vital part in advertising these products and in return has a major effect on the purchasing behaviour of customers, which will ultimately affect the brand image, brand perception and sales of the company (Fatima & Lodhi, 2014). The type of consumer buying behaviour involved in buying supplements is seen as dissonance buying behaviour. The customers are thus highly involved with their purchasing decision as there is few differences between competing brands (Chand, 2014).

In relation to this study, endorser companies such as USN, use these ambassadors to create marketing messages so powerful and emotionally loaded that consumers cannot help to purchase their products. This type of advertising is very likely to be well received, because they have more trust in these opinion leaders (Coetzee et al. 2015). These body-conscious consumers are then left with an emotion so strong that it drives them to action.

There has been little previous literature regarding this specific topic. Theories and past research has shown the extent to which celebrity ambassadors has influenced brand equity and consumers health, as well as the importance of brand endorsements on target markets, but there has been no literature regarding the influence that fitness ambassadors have on body conscious consumers, particularly so in Cape Town.

This topic was selected to generate new knowledge and gain a better understanding as to what effect brand advertising campaigns might have on consumers in the fitness industry in order for supplement companies such as USN to understand the potential effect their advertising strategies might have on their consumers. The knowledge drawn from this study will also help body conscious consumers understand how social media advertisements affect their perceptions of themselves.

The research study contributes to the body of knowledge by drawing conclusions from the findings as to what the effects are on customers when presented with a product that has been advertised by a fitness ambassador. This study can be used as secondary research for other researchers who are studying the influence of fitness brand ambassadors on consumers in Cape Town.

1.3. Problem statement

The problem is that some brands use professional fitness athletes as ambassadors to market their products, but this is not necessarily a realistic expectation to which body-conscious people can aspire to. However, these fitness ambassadors go through extreme measures to achieve a certain physique in order to partake in fitness and figure competitions. These physiques are not maintainable, leaving body conscious consumers uneducated and at risk of developing various psychological and physical disorders.

Brand ambassadors are vital to representing their company in an accurate, favourable way (Thygesen, 2016). Supplement brands use these ambassadors to advertise their products to the market.

By using various verbal and visual platforms such as social media and magazines, these ambassadors create an unrealistic perception of what is acceptable in society. The average body conscious consumer is then bombarded with information that could be unhealthy in the long-term.

The problem with the lack of knowledge on this subject is that the average body conscious woman is not aware of the possible impact that branding might have on their self-perception. The potential effects of these advertising strategies need to be presented to supplement companies in order to understand how their attempt to build brand equity and awareness could affect consumers and in the future, create a credible brand that cares for their potential and current consumers through their various advertising campaigns.

1.4. Purpose statement

The purpose of the study is to obtain insights into how supplement brands use perceptions that are perceived as unrealistic for most consumers, which are created by ambassadors, to enhance the sales of their products. Additionally, what effect these extreme role-models have on body-conscious consumers in terms of their physical and psychological health.

1.4.1. Research objectives

Below is a breakdown of the research objectives this study aims to achieve:

- The primary research objective of this study is to explore the true nature and effect that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity.
- This study also aims to determine what potentially negative effect the portrayal of fitness brand ambassadors may have on the health and well-being of their target market, as well as the major contact points used by fitness brand ambassadors to influence the target markets behaviour and;

- The study will also help gain a better understanding of the affects that brand ambassadors of endorsers such as Ultimate Sports Nutrition (USN) have on the purchasing decisions of their products, by using social media and various other platforms.

1.5. Research questions

In order to achieve the above-mentioned research objectives, the following research questions will be answered. The main research question underpinning this study is:

- What is the true nature of influence that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity?

In addition to the main research question, the following secondary research questions will be investigated:

- What potentially negative impact does the portrayal of fitness brand ambassadors have on the health and wellbeing of their target market?
- What are the major brand contact points used by fitness brand ambassadors to influence consumer behaviour of their target market?

2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of the study is to obtain insights into how supplement brands use perceptions, created by ambassadors, to enhance the sales of their products and what effect extreme role-models have on body-conscious consumers in terms of their physical and psychological health.

The aim of this literature review is to examine the prior research that has been conducted in this field. Firstly, the paradigm will be discussed, followed by a detailed discussion on existing literature relating to brand ambassadors influence on consumer purchasing behaviour as it has been outlined and examined in previous studies.

Subsequently, the importance of brand endorsements on target markets will be briefly discussed. Then, theoretical foundation of former studies will be discussed followed by a description of the research problem that was investigated in previous studies. Former studies will be reviewed afterwards as to how these endorsements have negatively affected consumer's health. The research reveals which contact points these endorsed celebrities use to influence the target market. Lastly, a conclusion will be conducted based on the literature.

2.2. Paradigm

The selected paradigms for this research study are both positivism and interpretivism, for which the relevance and purpose will be outlined. As mentioned previously, data will be collected by means of structured interviews, closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended interviews.

An interpretivist approach to social research is much more qualitative. Using the open-ended (unstructured) interviews, the conclusion is that individuals are intricate and complex, and different people experience and interpret the same objective reality in different ways (Revised Sociology, 2015). Thus, the open-ended interviews will give lengthy and descriptive answers and insight with regards to my primary objective. This approach is used because the social context, agreements and norms of body-conscious consumers are vital elements in evaluating and understanding purchasing behaviour.

Structured and closed-ended questions will result in valid and reliable representativeness of the population by statistically analysing the results. This requires a positivist approach, which is the dominant paradigm in this research study. Positivists believe that individuals are shaped by society and that social facts shape individual actions (Revised Sociology, 2015). The researcher would like to look for relationships or correlations between two variables, fitness brand ambassadors and the target market in order to construct graphs that will visually represent the data. This prefers quantitative methods which allow for the researcher to remain detached from the respondents. The main objective is to identify trends between respondents in order to come to a conclusion that supports my primary research question.

2.3. Brand ambassadors influence on consumer purchasing behaviour

Previous finding(s) support the fact that celebrities can have a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward ads and brands (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014). These results are advantageous to an endorser brand who sponsors a celebrity as the celebrity is widely recognized, perceived to be more credible and produce greater influence on evaluation of the brand and its purchase intentions (Choi & Rifon, 2007). The lifecycle of celebrity popularity varies a lot. People tend to commensurate the personalities of the celebrity with the brand thereby increasing the recall value.

McCracken's (1989) definition of a celebrity endorser is, "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement, is useful, because when celebrities are depicted in a company's marketing strategy, they bring their own culturally related meanings, there to, irrespective of the required promotional role."

2.4. Importance of brand endorsements on target markets

Endorsement is a channel of brand communication in which the celebrity takes on the role of a brand ambassador, acts as the brand's spokesperson and certifies the brand's position. This is achieved by extending his or her personality, popularity, stature in the society or expertise in their field to the brand. In a market with lots of local, regional and international brands, celebrity endorsement provides a distinct differentiation (Amima & Khalid, 2014).

To be truly effective, the celebrities that are chosen as endorsers should be knowledgeable, experienced or qualified in order to be viewed as an expert in the category (Amima & Khalid, 2014). Celebrities that are associated with a controversy or ill-behaviour can cause negative impact to the endorsements (Amima & Khalid, 2014). Any act that gives the endorser a negative image among the public that they market their products to can affect the brands endorsed. The brand, in most instances, takes a bashing.

2.5. Theoretical frame work

This study will be based within the frame work of two theories, namely cognitive perspective theory and social learning theory. These theories will help understand how consumers form positive or negative opinions of celebrities and the endorsed product.

2.5.1. Cognitive Perspective Theory:

According to this study, psychologists consider how people interpret the events and stimuli around them, and the shaping of their actions according to their individual understandings (Amima & Khalid, 2014). These understandings, expectations, thoughts and perceptions are known as cognitions. Cognitions are referred to as a mental process. This involves decision-making and language. A person's interactions are strongly affected by the images a person forms in his/her mind and begin shaping perceptions, self-image, responses and behaviour. This will determine how the person will respond to a celebrity endorsing a product. Furthermore, this study seeks to explain how the mind takes information, processes it and produce output in the form of codes, words and behaviours.

This theory supports celebrity endorsement of products and the negative effect it has on consumers, because the more consumers are exposed to the information given by celebrity brand ambassadors, the more they are influenced and perceive the information as true and suitable for them to guide in the consumption of the products.

2.5.2. Social Learning Theory:

This theory aims to explain learning and social behaviour which proposes that a new behaviour can be learned by observing and imitating others (Amima & Khalid, 2014). It states that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of direct reinforcement.

In addition to the observation of behaviour, learning can also occur through the observation of rewards and punishments. When a particular behaviour is rewarded regularly it will most likely continue, and in contrast, if a particular behaviour is constantly punished, it will most likely desist. The social learning theory expands on traditional behaviour theories in which behaviour is governed only by reinforcements, by placing importance on the significant roles of various internal processes in the learning individual.

This theory explains how the use of celebrity brand ambassadors in advertisements affects or influences the target audience consumption intentions, because they observe them from various platforms such as social media and want to imitate their behaviour and consume what they endorse (Wikipedia Contributors, 2017).

2.6. Existing Literature pertaining to research objectives:

In a study conducted by Pramjeeth and Khupe on *The Influence of Celebrity Endorsement on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour of Alcohol in the South African Market*, they found that celebrity endorsements have become a common marketing strategy. This study highlights the qualities of the celebrity that individuals aspire to such as physique, lifestyle or health, by linking the celebrity to the brand. This approach is essential to create a perception between the brand and the celebrity, in the mind of the consumer (Pramjeeth & Khupez, 2016).

The approach is necessary to increase the attractiveness of the product and the likelihood of influencing the consumer preferences and purchase behaviour regarding the product being advertised.

People are often fascinated by and obsessed with celebrities and at times secretly feel familiar with them, because celebrities often reinforce their desired image or self-identity.

The instant recognition of celebrities in advertising campaigns can make an advertisement stand out from the advertising clutter in the competitive environment. It is therefore said that associating a celebrity with certain brands may assist in enhancing a brand in the mind of the consumer through brand association and recall, which ultimately increases brand equity.

Celebrities should maintain a positive reputation that will transfer only positive associations to the product their promoting. Negative traits and behaviours can overshadow the endorsers brand equity.

Marketers spend enormous amounts of money on celebrity endorsements with the hope that these celebrities will motivate consumers to purchase their products as celebrities are considered to be people that others look up to and desire to emulate. There are three types of endorsements that exist, namely: explicit, implicit and imperative:

- Explicit endorsement communicates the message that the celebrity endorser only endorses the product and does not utilise it.
- Implicit endorsement occurs when the message communicated informs the consumer that the endorser utilises the product.
- In an imperative endorsement, the endorser motivates the consumer to use the product.

Endorsements should be driven by various other factors in a bid to attract consumers such as the personal characteristics of the public figure utilised for the endorsement (Boyd, 2010). It is said that this is the reason why models and famous celebrities are often used to endorse products/services. However, there were research conducted by Marketing Charts Staff that revealed TV advertisements containing celebrities underperformed those without celebrities.

The study further highlights that 45 percent of adults in the United States believe that celebrities can make either a large difference to issues they are promoting, but 51% feel that they make little or no difference. Respondents were more aware of the potential negative impact (55%) celebrities can have on the issue they're promoting.

In addition, due to the nature of the study that sought to comprehend the effect celebrity endorsement has on consumers purchase intentions of alcohol, the methodology used in the research was an explanatory approach where qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, adopting purposive and random sampling techniques.

Through analysis of the data that was collected, a greater understanding was achieved relating to the factors that influenced the alcohol purchase and the appropriateness of the use of a celebrity to achieve the advertising aims.

The respondents for this research consisted of one hundred and ten consumers of alcohol in the Western Cape Province of South Africa and eight senior marketing executives of the alcohol producer, with data being collected using close ended questionnaires for the consumers and an in-depth interview with the senior marketing executives. Thematic data analysis was conducted on the in-depth interviews. The survey data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. A pilot study was conducted on a sample group of ten respondents for the quantitative study.

The results showed that the most important factors that were considered by the respondents when purchasing a product in general were the brand name (27%), the price (27%) and quality (23%). The findings were in line with Kotler, Armstrong and Okonkwo who explained that brand equity is an important factor in the consumers purchasing behaviour, because a consumer will base his or her purchasing decision on their own perception of brands and their value (Pramjeeth & Khupez, 2016). Occasion played a 9% role in the purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, the respondents believed that celebrity endorsements are more likely to influence their purchasing decision to buy clothing, health and beauty products and sports apparel, respectively 90%, 80% and 73%, and that furniture endorsed by a celebrity does not persuade them to buy the advertised furniture.

There were only 18% of respondents who felt that celebrity endorsement affected their alcohol purchases (Pramjeeth & Khupez, 2016). However, it is said that many celebrities are endorsing alcohol as these partnerships create enormous gains for both the celebrity and alcohol brands, with the brand experiencing increased awareness and even sales while the celebrity enjoys being associated with an alcohol category that symbolizes luxury and status.

This study therefore serves as evidence that consumers are persuaded by celebrities and that they have an influence on their purchasing decisions, one way or another.

2.6.1. How endorsements have negatively affected consumer's health:

In a study conducted by Badero on *The Effects of Media on Body Image*, he concluded that endorsements have negative effects on female consumer's health.

Negative self-esteem and body dissatisfaction about one's body can lead to a range of physical and mental health disorders. These disorders include: disordered eating, obesity, body dysmorphic disorder, depression and low self-esteem. It can lead to unhealthy consequences such as steroid abuse, surgery and unbalanced diet habits. The frequent exposure to media advertisements encourages both young and old females to evaluate their bodies. This leads to eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, due to excessive dieting, over training and other health compromising behaviours, in order to relieve perceptions of inadequacy or to help them feel that they are thin and fit enough to fit into society's rules. Media has a large impact on the attitudinal aspect of body image and on the perception of media ideal. However, the crucial concern lies with the extent to which society's perception of the perfect body becomes a central aspect of a person's identity (Badero, 2011). Exposure to media ideals might lead to obsessions to get that desired body shape. A person could try every possible means to make these ideal images their personal image. In the Western world, the mass media sends out powerful messages to look thin. Society's expectation shapes people's beliefs about the ideal body image, which could have a harmful effect (Badero, 2011). Society tells us what kind of body to strive for. People see images of perfect bodies on almost every platform, such as TV, magazines, newspapers and the internet.

This study serves as evidence that media advertisements can negatively affect the way consumers view themselves, and the need to strive for those perfect body images leads to a range of unhealthy consequences.

2.6.2. Contact points endorsed celebrities use to influence the target market:

In a study conducted by Rosén and Waller on *Consumer Brand Touch Points*, which was based on a case study of Hennes & Mauritz in Sweden and Germany, nine controllable touch points were researched and analysed. These touch points were summarised according to how consumers react when exposed to various advertisements, namely brochures, newspapers, posters, radio advertisements, TV-advertisements, online ads, flyers, direct mail and SMS advertisement.

Supplement companies favour outdoor ads as a way to reach potential and existing customers. These ads are used at big outdoor events in the form of stands, exhibitions and ambassadors wearing branded clothing at certain events (Rosén & Waller, 2011). In the study conducted by Rosén and Waller, it is evident that the respondents shows a positive reaction towards these outdoor advertisements (Rosén & Waller, 2011).

It was said that the use of famous ambassadors could trigger a purchasing decision if the consumer was aware of and fond of the ambassador in question. If consumers found the advertisements' layout and design appealing, this was thought to influence their purchasing pattern in a positive way. On the other hand, during the German interviews it was said that the use of too thin models creates a negative image (Rosén & Waller, 2011). There were also comments about posters only appealing to women, leaving men uninterested in its content.

In this research study, I will aim to gain more insight into these nine various ways brand ambassadors such as celebrities, get into contact with consumers in order to fulfil a marketing objective, through means of questionnaires.

2.7. Conclusion

The literature provides a foundation from which the current study can draw from. Recent studies have shown that celebrity endorsements of health products have a negative impact on female perception of themselves, affecting their self-esteem, which affects their mental and physical health. The literature also provides insight into how celebrities that endorse products, can have a positive or negative affect on the sales volume of the organisation. The current study aims to provide evidence as to how female consumers are affected by the advertisements of weight loss products, and how organisations use various contact points to target and persuade these consumers to purchase the products. Former research found that celebrity endorsement strategies have become a vital component of the marketing communication strategy that organisations use in today's competitive environment. The results of former literature reveal that personalities of celebrities are very strong and they can quickly change perceptions of a brand. Endorsers who have demographic characteristics similar to those of the target audience are viewed more viable and persuasive

3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This research used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The selected paradigms for this research study are both positivism and interpretivism, in order for the researcher to discover the causal relationships between fitness ambassadors, supplement brands and body conscious consumers. The research design aimed to generate new knowledge and gain deep, rich insight into the phenomenon that was being studied. As the aim of this research was to explore the influence that fitness ambassadors have on consumers buying behaviour, this supported the use of the positive paradigm, along with quantitative data being collected to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative data that was collected, thus supports interpretivist paradigm as the study aims to understand consumers perceptions of fitness ambassador advertisements, and what effect it has on their well-being.

3.2. Research Paradigm

These views guide our thinking, our beliefs, and our assumptions about society and ourselves, and they frame how we view the world around us, which is what social scientists call a paradigm (Schwandt, 2001).

The selected paradigms for this research study were both positivism and interpretivism, for which the relevance and purpose will be outlined. As mentioned previously, data was collected by means of structured interviews, closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended interviews.

An interpretivist approach to social research is much more qualitative. Using the open-ended (unstructured) interviews, the conclusion was that individuals are intricate and complex, and different people experience and interpret the same objective reality in different ways (Revis Sociology, 2015). Thus, the open-ended interviews gave a lengthy and descriptive answers and insight with regards to the primary objective. This approach was used because the social context, agreements and norms of body conscious consumers are vital elements in evaluating and understanding purchasing behaviour.

Structured and closed-ended questions have resulted in a valid and reliable representativeness of the population by statistically analysing the results. This required a positivist approach, which was the dominant paradigm in this research study. Positivists believe that individuals are shaped by society and that social facts shape individual actions (Revised Sociology, 2015).

The two variables that were studied, in order to look for relationships or correlations, was fitness brand ambassadors and the target market. To represent this data visually, graphs were constructed. This preferred quantitative methods which allowed for the researcher to remain detached from the respondents. The main objective was to identify trends between respondents in order to come to the conclusion that supports the primary research question.

3.3. Research design

The difference between an interview and a questionnaire is that an interview is mostly implemented with explorative and qualitative research, while a questionnaire is an explorative and descriptive technique used primarily with quantitative research (Lowies, 2015).

3.3.1. Questionnaires:

The questionnaire started with the biographical details first, followed by easy-to-answer questions and avoiding difficult questions. The researcher provided clear instructions and directions to complete the questionnaire, including submission dates. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire used for this study is attached as appendix B.

3.3.2. Interviews:

When interviewing participants, the researcher used open-ended questions to get lengthy and descriptive answers. Each participant's language, knowledge, cultural background and age was taken into consideration when asked the specific questions related to the study. Questions were short and specific, avoiding two-in-one questions. The participants were given consent forms, and the interviews distributed through email. The interview questions used for data collection is attached as appendix C and appendix D.

The study followed a triangulation research design as a strategy to increase the validity of evaluation and the research findings. The triangulation research design was used to combine the advantages of both the qualitative and the quantitative approach (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

Qualitative research is mainly exploratory research. It is used in research studies to gain an understanding of underlying opinions, reasons and motivations. Qualitative research provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or theories for potential quantitative research. Quantitative research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data. It is also used to transform data into useable statistics. Quantitative research is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other variables – and generalise results from a larger sample population (Wyse, 2011).

The study followed deductive reasoning. This method of reasoning is where true premises develop a true and valid conclusion. Deductive reasoning uses general principles to create a specific conclusion. Deductive reasoning is also known as 'top-down reasoning', because it goes from general and works its way down more specific (Study.com, 2017). Exploratory research was conducted, because this is the most appropriate research design for this topic as there are high levels of uncertainty and ignorance about the subject, and because the topic is not very well understood as there is little existing research conducted on this matter (Van Wyk, n.d.).

To fully explore the true nature of impact that celebrity endorsers have on consumers buying actions and cognitive responses, the researcher had to make use of both qualitative and quantitative designs in order to gain an in depth understanding of the underlying factors that influence body conscious customers. The researcher gathered information and drew generalisations from the data collected. The research objective was to explore the nature and impact that fitness celebrities have on body conscious consumers in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity.

3.4. Population and sampling

A sample is a set of people or products representative of and selected from a population. Sampling is the process of drawing samples of the population (Lowies, 2015).

3.4.1. Population:

3.4.1.1. *Units of Analysis:*

The individuals that were under investigation in this study is referred to as the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis for this study is:

People who regularly partake in exercise and make use of supplements.

3.4.1.2. *Target and Accessible Population:*

The population selected for this study are body conscious customers who purchase USN supplements in Cape Town, South Africa, as well as USN brand ambassadors who promote the company's products.

3.4.2. Sampling:

3.4.2.1. *Non-Probability Sampling:*

There are two main types of sampling techniques, namely probability and non-probability sampling. This study followed a non-probability sampling technique. This is the deliberate selection of particular members of the population. The motivation behind this method is that it leads to an in-depth understanding and insight into this phenomenon, rather than the generalisation of the findings to the broader population.

3.4.3. Sample size:

The sample of the study are members of Virgin Active Health Club in Durbanville and Bellville. The unit of analysis were female individuals aged 18-60.

Convenience sampling will be used in exploratory research where the researcher is interested in getting an inexpensive approximation of the truth (StatPac, 2014).

The sample size included two ambassadors of USN and 116 female participants who are health conscious and regularly partake in exercise, and who are interested in making lifestyle changes.

3.5. Data collection methods

To gather information regarding people's opinions, feelings, motivations and attitudes, the researcher conducted a questionnaire as one of the data collection methods for this study. Questionnaires provide quantitative and qualitative methods of data gathering. The evidence, data or information that were found was expressed in numerical or descriptive terms.

The questionnaires were made up of open and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions made it easy to analyse the data in order to draw generalisations of the sample. Closed-ended questions are also less time consuming to complete and answers can be compared more easily. The open-ended question(s) was be limited, but gave a deeper understanding of the participants emotions and motivations behind their purchases.

The advantages of using open-ended questions is that respondents can express themselves freely and it is useful for exploratory evaluations (Evaule, 2006). The questionnaire started off with demographic information questions first, for example; name, surname, and age, in order to identify the participant.

The questionnaire was presented in one section only, with no subheadings under each focus question. This made it easier to analyse data according to the researcher's main question and sub-questions. The first questions were closed-ended questions to gather information about the participant. The questions that followed were a mixture between closed-ended and open-ended questions focusing on the influence that ambassadors have on the participants self-image and how they are affected by these role models and advertisements. Information were gathered on how consumers feel when presented with images on social media about the ideal body type and aimed to gain insight about whether it creates negative feelings towards themselves. The last questions on the questionnaire aimed to gather information about how ambassadors influence participants to purchase certain supplement products. These questions provided data to determine how consumers are influenced by brand ambassadors advertising strategies and to what extent it has impacted them.

While preparing the questionnaire, the researcher kept the following in mind:

- The researcher introduced herself and explained the aim of the questionnaire,
- The researcher explained the ethical concerns of the research study, and made the participant aware of what their rights are,
- The researcher ensured that each question stayed relevant to the research study and did not dwell off the topic,
- The researcher ensured that each question was clear and easy to understand and only used academic language,
- The researcher did not ask leading questions that could risk the validity of the data.

These questionnaires were created on Google Form. The reason being is that it makes data collection and data analysis easier for the researcher. Google Form works well with quantitative research as closed-ended questions are presented in graphs. The questionnaires were formed by using ten drop down questions, and distributed by sharing the Google Form link via social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it measures the consumers attitudes towards health and fitness advertisements and the impact it has on each consumer.

Interviews are usually a vital part of any project to investigate the usage and impact of digitised resources (Eccles & Meyer, 2012). The interviews conducted provided rich qualitative data.

In addition, data was collected by means of interviews to gain a further understanding of how fitness brand ambassadors attempt to advertise health and weight loss products, and influence body conscious consumers. This gave a deep and insightful understanding of what brand ambassadors do and aim to do when advertising products for USN. The interviews were more engaging and the two ambassadors could give their honest opinions to each question.

During the interview, the researcher asked questions to determine how these ambassadors go about their advertising strategy and whether or not they believe in the products that they are promoting. The researcher also aimed to gather information on what lifestyle these ambassadors follow on a daily basis in order to determine how realistic these fitness goals are for a normal body conscious consumer to reach.

The method of distribution was through email. The reason for distributing these interview questions through email is that not all ambassadors had the time to meet for a face-to-face interview.

The researcher sent a document detailing the purpose of the assignment, along with the ethical form, under which the ten questions followed. Each respondent was asked to send back their answers within the deadline given, which were 7 days after receiving the email.

The researcher also arranged for interviews with the participants that were concluded face-to-face. These interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The researcher also distributed the interview questionnaires through email, as not all participants could meet for a face-to-face appointment.

3.6. Data analysis

The data obtained through the quantitative research was analysed through statistical means by using descriptive and inferential statistics (Lowies, 2015). The researcher presented the information in a descriptive manner by means of pie charts.

The data obtained through qualitative research cannot be analysed statistically, so the researcher transcribed the findings from the open-ended qualitative questions and interviews. After the data had been transcribed it was copied and transformed into a written format, so that it could be analysed further in order to identify patterns and important information related to the questions. The researcher then started grouping these patterns and themes which came from the data. This is referred to as content analysis. A conclusion was drawn and findings were presented in the form of a written report by the researcher.

4. CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of chapter four is to present the analysis, and interoperate the findings that were obtained from the data that has been collected. During the data collection period, 116 surveys were sent out through Google Form, of which all 116 participants responded within their given time frame. Furthermore, this section of the research aims to answer the study's main and secondary research questions, through using various techniques to interoperate the results.

Three interviews were conducted with body conscious consumers. The interviews had five open-ended question that were distributed through email.

Another two interviews were conducted with USN ambassadors, both male and female, which consisted of eight open-ended questions. These interviews were distributed through email.

This study aims to identify whether there is a nature of influence that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity, and weather this might have a negative impact on body conscious consumers.

4.2. Data collection method

The data that has been obtained during this research, was collected through anonymous surveys using Google Form. A hyperlink was sent out to participants using social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and via email which directed them straight to the survey. The researcher ensured that each human participant was informed that the surveys where anonymous, and that they do not have to feel obligated to complete it whatsoever.

The sample size where 116 participants, all of which were woman between the ages of 18-60, who considered themselves as being body conscious. Each of these respondents were asked to submit the questionnaires within 1 week after receiving the link.

Each survey had 10 multiple choice questions, and one open-ended question, to ensure that participants feel the need to complete the survey and that it does not take up too much time.

Three interviews were conducted with body conscious consumers. The interviews had five open-ended questions that were distributed through email.

Another two interviews were conducted with USN ambassadors, both male and female, which consisted of eight open-ended questions. These interviews were distributed through email.

4.3. Detailed discussion on findings

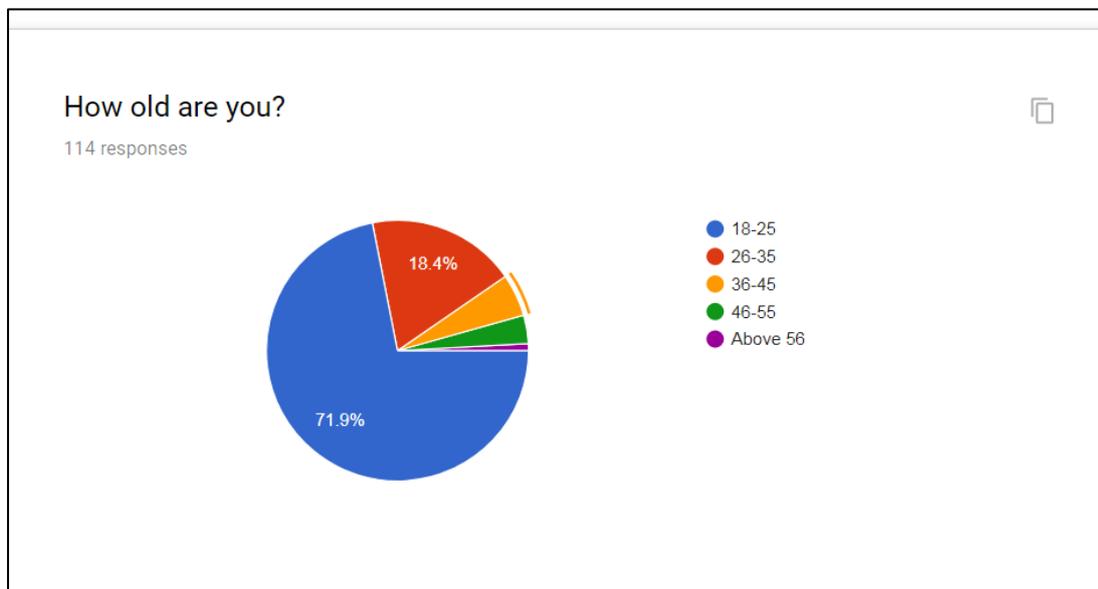


Figure 1 - Age of participants.

As seen in figure one, the first question is aimed at finding out in which age category the participants are. This question was aimed at identifying who is impacted the most by supplement advertising. From the research conducted, it is said that 72.2% of responders were between the ages of 18 and 25; 18.3% were between the ages of 26 and 35; 5.2% of responders were between the ages of 36 and 45; 3.5 % of responders were between the ages of 46 and 55, and 0.9% of responders were 56 and above.

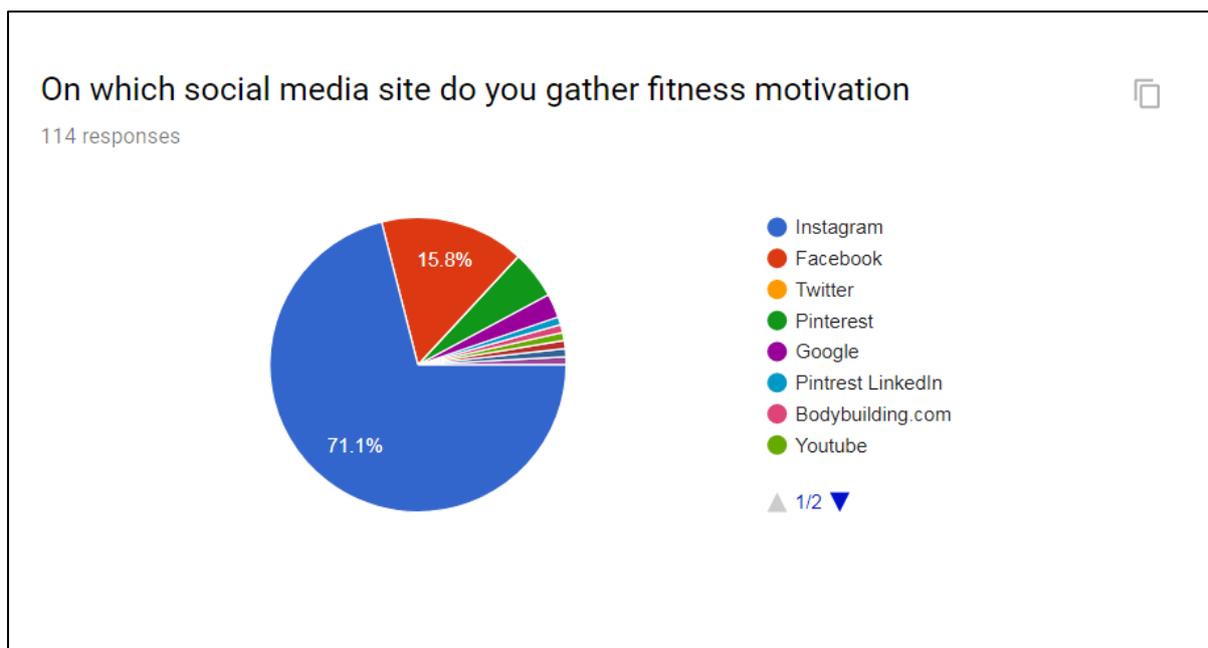


Figure 2 – Social media site on which participants gather fitness motivation.

Figure two aimed to identify from which social media network the participants felt like they gathered the most fitness motivation, which asked the participants to choose between Instagram, Facebook, Twitter or list any other site that was not mentioned. From the data collected on question two, it is said that 70.4% of respondents find motivation on Instagram, 16.5% on Facebook, 5.2% on Pinterest, 2.6% on Google, 0.9% on Pinterest LinkedIn, 0.9% on Bodybuilding.com, 0.9% on YouTube and 0.9% found motivation from magazines.

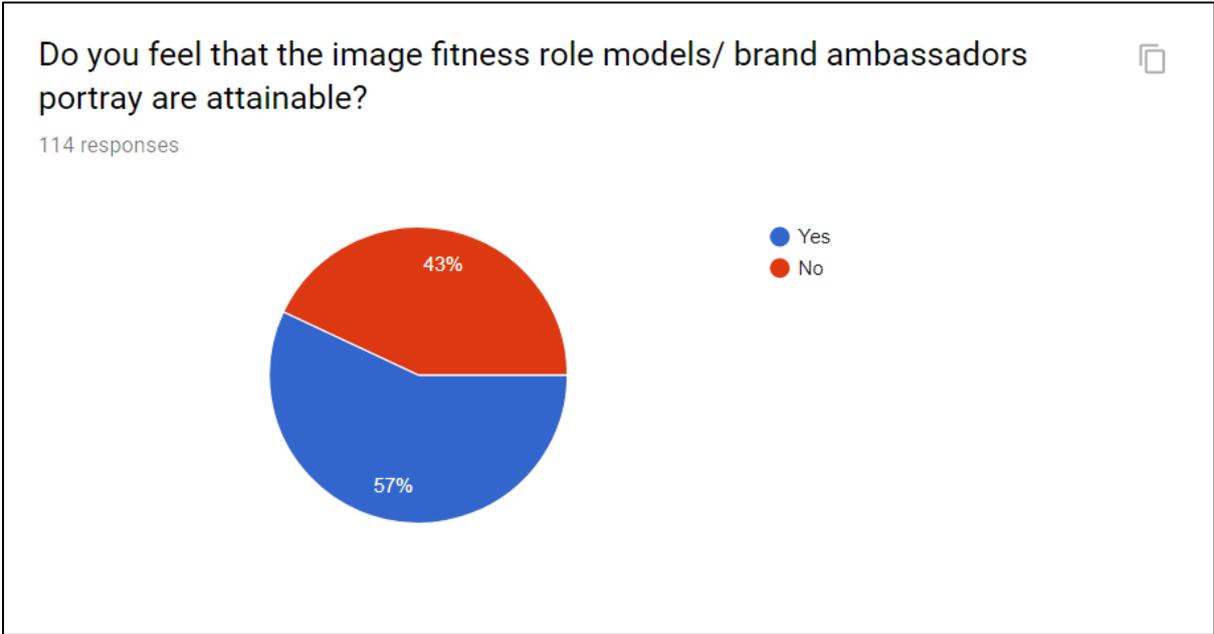


Figure 3 – Do participants feel that the image fitness role models/ambassadors portray are attainable.

Figure three deals with how participants felt about the image fitness role models or ambassadors portray, and weather it is attainable. The participants had to answer either “yes” or “no”. It is evident that from the above information, 57% of respondents feel its attainable, and 43% feel that it is not.

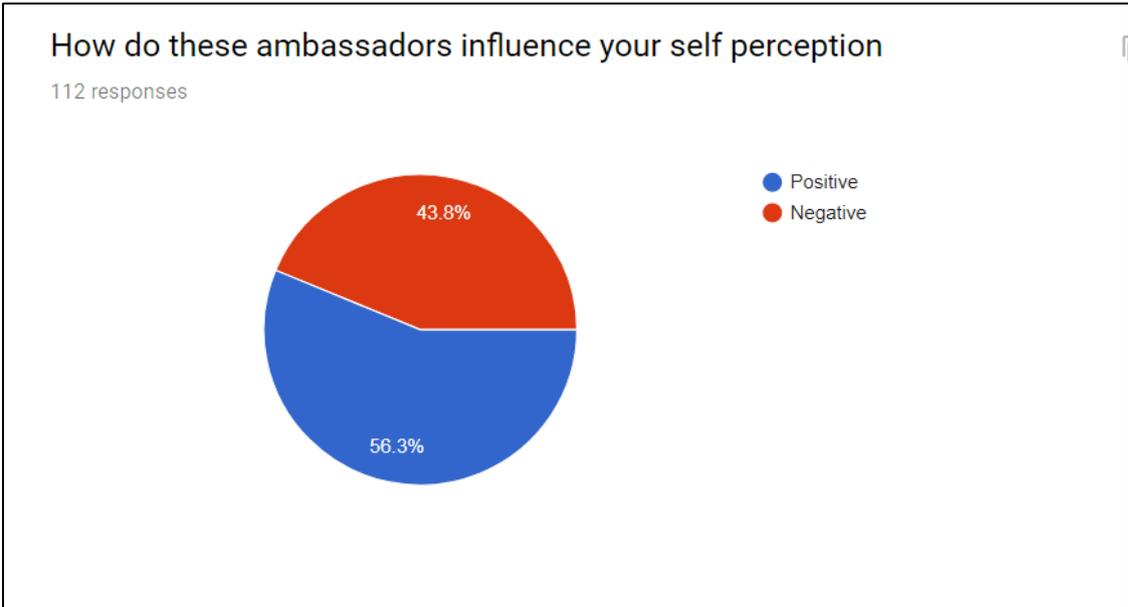


Figure 4 – How do these ambassadors influence participants self-perception.

Figure four relates to how these ambassadors influence the participants self-perception. The respondent was asked to select either *positively* or *negatively*. It was found that 43.8% felt it impacted them negatively, and 56.3% felt it impacted them positively.

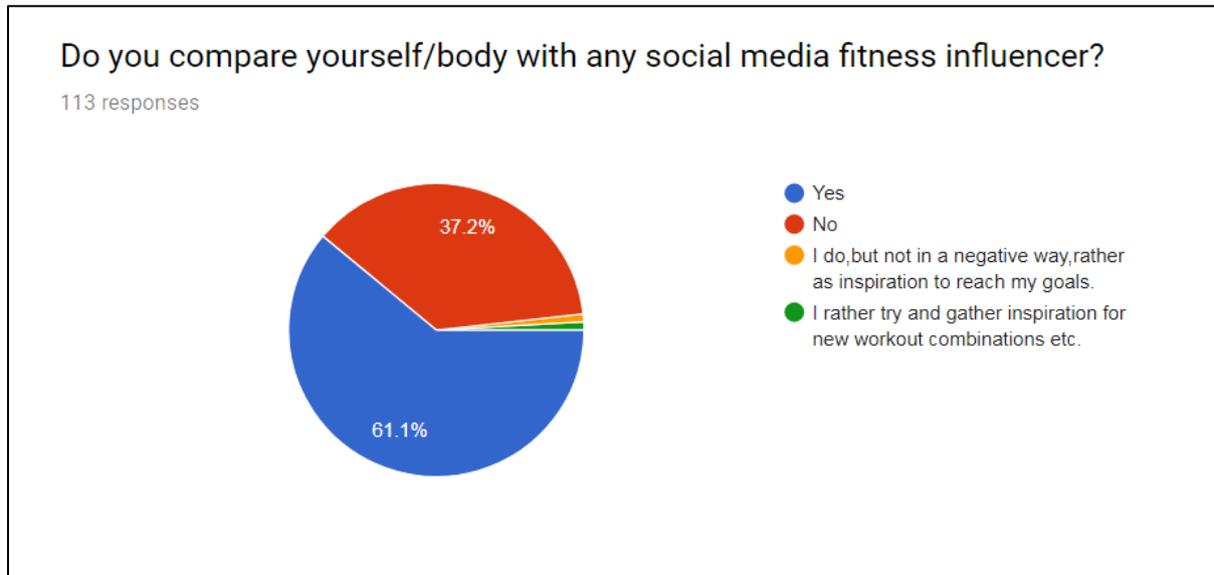


Figure 5 – Do participants compare themselves or their bodies with social media influencers.

As seen in Figure five, the question 5 deals with whether or not the respondents compare themselves with any social media influencer. The participant had to select either “yes” or “no”, or provide another answer to the question, by elaborating.

61.1% of respondents said yes, and 37.2% responded no to the question, however, 0.9% said they do, but it does not affect them in a negative manner, it only acts as inspiration for them to reach their goals, and 0.9% said it help them gather inspiration for new workouts.

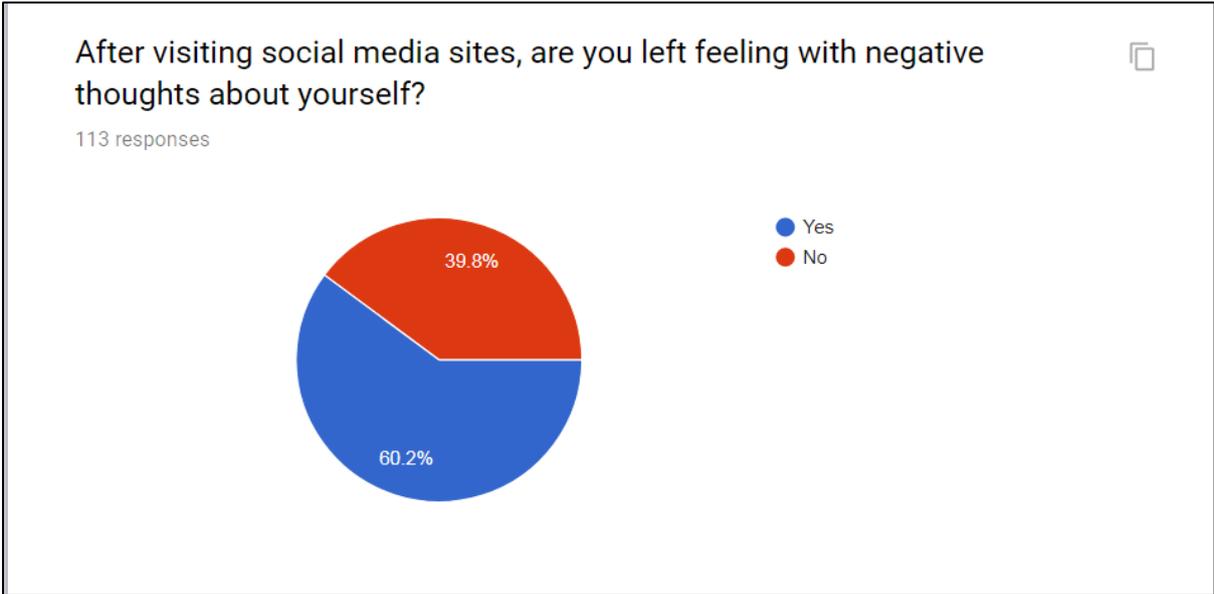


Figure 6 – Are participants left with negative thoughts after visiting social media sites

Figure six deals with whether or not the participants feel that social media sites leave them with negative thoughts about themselves. The participant had to select “yes” or “no”. 60.2% of the participants responded “yes”, that it does affect them in a negative manner, and 39.8% responded “no”, it does not affect them at all.

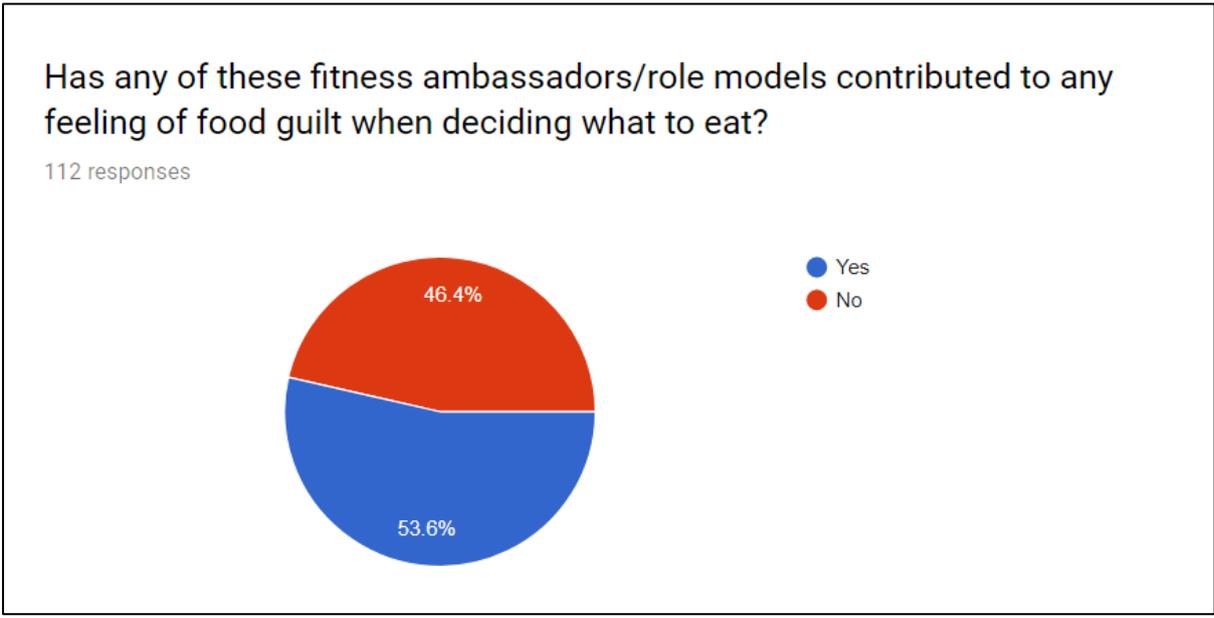


Figure 7 – Has any fitness role model/ ambassador contributed to any feeling of guilt after deciding on what to eat.

Figure seven aimed to establish whether or not fitness ambassadors or role models contributes to any feeling of guilt when the respondent decided on what she is going to eat. In response, the participant had to either select “yes” or “no”. 53.6% of respondents said “yes” and 46.4% responded “no” it does not contribute to any feeling of guilt.

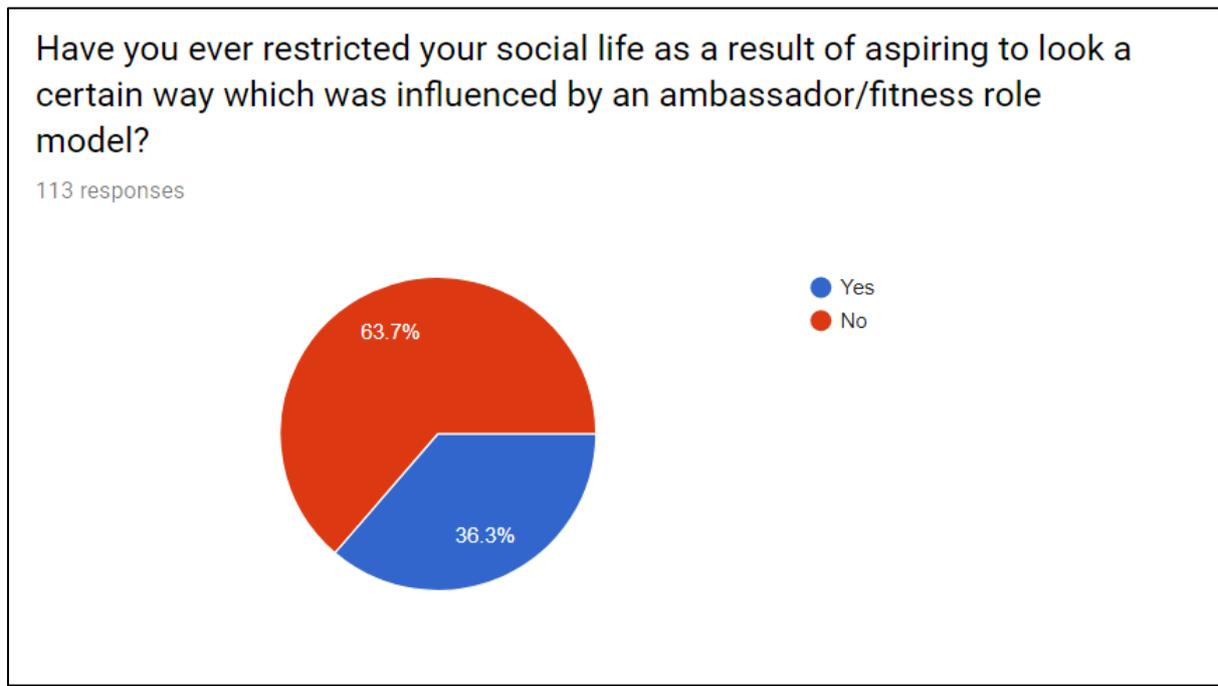


Figure 8 – Have participants ever restricted their social life as a result of aspiring to look like a fitness influencer.

In figure eight, the respondent was asked if they have ever restricted their social life as a result of aspiring to look a certain way which could have been influenced by a fitness ambassador or role model. The respondent had to select either “yes” or “no” 63.7% responded “no”, that they have not restricted their social life, and 36.3% said “yes” to the question.

Do you feel that these extensive advertisements of weight loss and ideal body images could negatively affect younger generations to come that is exposed to social media sites?

113 responses

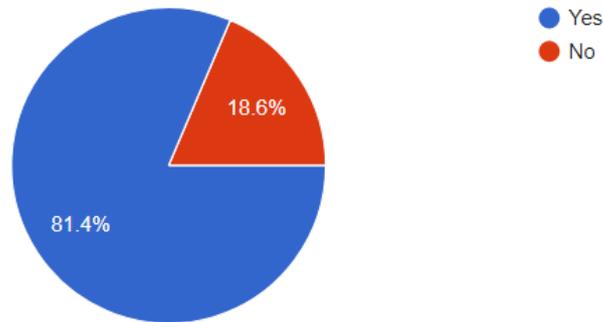


Figure 9 – Can extensive advertising of weight-loss and ideal body image negatively affect younger generations to come.

In figure nine, the respondent was asked if they feel that extensive advertisements of weight loss and ideal body image could negatively affect younger generations to come that are exposed to social media sites. The respondent had to answer “yes” or “no” 81.4% felt that extensive advertising of weight loss will affect how younger generations to come, and 18.6% said “no”, that it would not affect them.

Have you ever purchased a supplement product, because you want to achieve the same results as your fitness role model has in the past?

113 responses

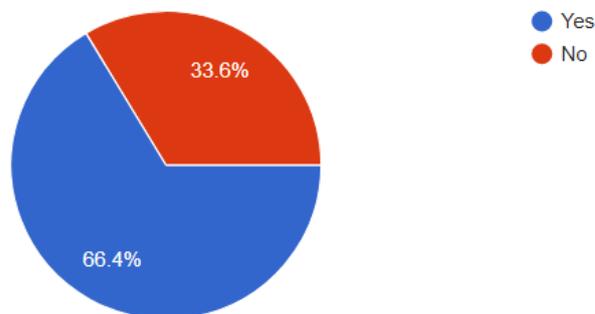


Figure 10 – Have participants ever purchased a supplement product to achieve the same results as their fitness influencer.

As shown in figure ten, the survey deals with whether or not brand ambassadors have influenced the participants to buy a certain product, because they wanted to achieve the same results. The participant had to answer either “yes” or “no”. From the data collected at question 10, 66.4% of respondents said “yes”, that ambassadors have influenced them to buy a product, and 33.6% said “no”, they have not.

4.4. Analysis and interpretation of data

In question one, respondents were asked to state which age group they belonged to. The largest portion of respondents said they were between the ages of 18-25 and the second largest portion said they were between the ages of 26-35, followed by 36-45 being the 3rd portion and 46-55 being the forth. The least number of respondents said they were over 56 years of age. This affects the study positively, as it has been identified that most of the participants are young female adults. This gives the researcher the understanding of who is mostly affected by weight loss advertising.

The second and third question aimed to identify where the respondents gathered their fitness motivation from and whether they feel that the image fitness role models or ambassadors is attainable or not. The largest portion of respondents (70.4%) said they gathered their motivation from Instagram, whereas 16.5% said Facebook were their favoured social media site to look for inspiration from ambassadors or fitness models, however, 56.5% said they felt it the image these models/ambassadors portray are attainable, and 43.5% felt that it is not.

In the fourth question, respondents were asked to answer whether or not ambassadors influence their self-perception positively, or negatively. Although the majority of respondents (56.3%) answered that it affects them positively, 43.8% said it affects them negatively, which still is a large portion of respondents.

Question 5 aimed to identify whether or not respondents compare themselves to social media influencers. 61.4% answered yes, whereas 36.8% answered no, and a number of respondents said they do, but it does not affect them in a negative way. Respondents also said that they gather inspiration for new workouts from their fitness influencers.

Question 6 aimed to identify whether or not respondents felt negative thoughts after visiting social media sights, and a significant 60.5% said *yes*, they do feel negative thoughts, whereas 39.5% answered *no*, that they don't.

In question 7, respondents were asked to answer whether or not ambassadors or fitness models have contributed to any feeling of guilt when deciding what to eat. 53.1% answered *yes*, that they do feel guilty as a result of fitness ambassadors or models, and 46.9% said *no*, it does not affect their feelings.

In question 8 respondents were asked if they have restricted their social life as a result of aspiring to look a certain way which was influenced by an ambassador or fitness model, 64% said they have not restricted their social life, and 36% said *yes*, they have restricted their social life to look a certain way.

In question 9, respondents were asked if they feel that these extensive advertisements of weight loss and ideal body image could negatively affect younger generations to come that is exposed to social media sites. The majority (81.6%) said *yes* it would affect them, and 18.4% said *no*, that it would not.

In the last question, question 10, respondents were asked if they have ever purchased a supplement product, because they wanted to achieve the same results as their fitness role model. A significant 65.8% of respondents answered *yes*, that they have been influenced to purchase a supplement product due to the fact that they want to achieve the same result as their aspiring fitness model, and 34.2% of the respondents said that they have not been influenced.

4.5. Summary of Findings

The main research question underpinning this study is: What is the true nature of influence that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity, and in addition to the main research question, there are two secondary research questions that were investigated, namely: What potentially negative impact does the portrayal of fitness brand ambassadors have on the health and wellbeing of their target market and what are the major brand contact points used by fitness brand ambassadors to influence consumer behaviour of their target market.

The following main findings contribute to answering the research questions at hand:

- From the data that was collected for this research study, question one, two and three aimed to give the researcher insight into who the respondents were, and where they gathered their fitness motivation. The third question aimed to identify whether or not respondents felt that the image of fitness models is attainable, and as a result, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 18-25 and gathered inspiration from Instagram and Facebook. These respondents also felt that fitness role models portray an attainable look which respondent can aspire to. However, after conducting three interviews with body conscious respondents, they all felt that it is not attainable for the average woman who exercises three to four days a week.
- Question four and five aimed to understand whether or not ambassadors have influenced how these body conscious consumers view themselves, and if they compare themselves and their bodies to these ambassadors. From the research, 56.3% said it impacted them positively, whilst 61.4% said they do compare themselves. This ties back to the theory highlighted in chapter 2, named cognitive perspective theory, whereby psychologists consider how people interpret the events and stimuli around them, and how this shape their actions and thoughts according to their individual understandings (Amima & Khalid, 2014). This theory supports celebrity endorsement of products and the potentially negative effect it has on consumers, because the more consumers are exposed to the information given by celebrity brand ambassadors, the more they are influenced and perceive the information as true and suitable for them to guide in their thoughts about themselves.
- In question six, 60.5% of consumers said their left with negative thoughts about themselves, after visiting social media sites, and in question seven, 53.1% of consumers said that they have felt guilty when deciding on what to eat, as a result of their fitness influencer. These questions answer the first secondary research question, as the negative effects the portrayal of fitness brand ambassadors have on the health and wellbeing of their target market.

- In a study conducted by Badero on *The Effects of Media on Body Image*, the researcher concluded that endorsements can have negative effects on female consumer's health, and that media can have a large impact on the attitudinal aspects of body image and the perception of what the perfect media ideal is for a person to look like. This study supports question six and seven's findings in a positive manner, as the data collected from the survey indicates that this is true.
- However, in question eight, only 36% of consumers said they have restricted their social life to look a certain way that has been influenced by their fitness role model. From the data collected at this question, it is evident that consumers are not becoming obsessed to the extent that they would limit the way they enjoy themselves at events. However, from the interviews conducted with body conscious consumers, it was evident that they felt the images portrayed by fitness ambassadors are not always "honest" and a true representation of themselves. These respondents felt that the influence these ambassadors have on a woman's body image could be problematic.
- Respondents also felt that these ambassadors only post the photos where that enhance their best features, as well as edit photos with filters or photoshop. These images are not seen as realistic to the participants. The participants also felt that ambassadors only post photos that would get them the most likes, rather than thinking of the effect it could have on consumers. This links back to the secondary question, as there are potential negative effects that could arise due to fitness ambassador advertisements.
- Consumers feel that they do see themselves in a negative manner, as they do not achieve the same results as their influencer. This links back to the study conducted by Badero on *The Effects of Media on Body Image*, as a person who is exposed to media ideals might develop obsessions to get that desired body shape. Woman might try every possible means to make these ideal images their personal image.

- In question ten, 65.8% of consumers said they have been influenced to purchase a supplement product that had been advertised by a fitness ambassador in order to achieve the same results. This answers the main question, as the true nature of influence that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town- in their attempt to build brand equity- is that consumers take their opinion seriously, and would purchase the same products in order to achieve the same results. However, after analysing and interoperating the data that has been collected, women between the ages of 18 and 45 strongly agreed that the results would be attainable, if one followed a five to six-day workout regime, accompanied with a strict diet and eating program. This question is also supported by the *Social Learning Theory* as seen in the literature review. The theory aims to explain learning and social behaviour which proposes that a new behaviour can be learned by observing and imitating others (Amima & Khalid, 2014). This theory ties back to the main question as it explains how the use of celebrity brand ambassadors in advertisements affects or influences the target audience consumption intentions, because they observe them from various platforms such as social media and want to imitate their behaviour and consume what they endorse (Wikipedia Contributors, 2017).
- After conducting and transcribing 2 interviews with ambassadors, both male and female, the researcher found that both ambassadors use Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to represent the brand. This answer the second, secondary research question, as ambassadors have confirmed they use Instagram, Facebook and Twitter as their main points of contact. The ambassadors also confirmed that they make use of USN branded apparel to attract the attention of consumers of potential consumers.

4.6. Validity, reliability and trustworthiness

As the study follows a triangulation research design, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are used, therefore validity, reliability and trustworthiness are of concern to this study.

The study consists of more quantitative closed-ended questions, and therefore trustworthiness had to be examined throughout the study. Trustworthiness for quantitative studies is referred to as validity and reliability. However, in qualitative studies, this concept is vague because it is put in different terms. It is appropriate to address how the researcher will establish that the research study's findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable.

Credibility is how confident the researcher is in the truth of the research study's findings. Transferability is how the researcher proves that the research study's findings are appropriate to other contexts.

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. This means that the findings are based on the participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations from the researcher. This involves making sure that researcher bias does not skew the interpretation of what the research participants said to fit a certain narrative. As for dependability, this is the extent to which the study could be repeated by other researchers and whether or not the findings would be consistent (Statistical Solutions, 2017).

In terms of the qualitative research method, the researcher made sure to check for validity and reliability within the study. Validity in research is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings. A valid study should demonstrate what actually exists and a valid instrument or measure should measure what it is supposed to measure. There are many types of validity. There are two major forms of validity that involves many types (Brink, 1993). They refer to "internal" and "external" validity, terms which are used in most nursing research textbooks. Internal validity is used to refer to the degree to which the research findings are a true reflection or of reality rather than being the effects of extraneous variables. External validity addresses the degree or extent to which such reflections of reality are legitimately applicable across many groups.

Reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability and repeatability of the researcher's data as well as the researcher's ability to collect and record information accurately. It refers to the ability of a research method to produce the same results over repeated testing periods over time, and for the research findings to stay consistent (Brink, 1993). The researcher ensured that the questions were written in such a way to avoid confusion and misunderstanding by participants.

5. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to conclude the research study, by providing conclusive answers to the research questions. This chapter will therefore provide an answer to each of the research questions, based on the findings detailed in chapter 4. Chapter 5 will also discuss the ethical consideration, anticipated contribution as well as the limitations of the study.

The aim of the study was to explore the true nature of influence that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity, and in addition to the main research question, there were two secondary research questions that were investigated, namely: What potentially negative impact does the portrayal of fitness brand ambassadors have on the health and wellbeing of their target market and what are the major brand contact points used by fitness brand ambassadors to influence consumer behaviour of their target market.

5.2. Concluding answers to the research questions

116 valid responses from women between the ages of 18 and 60, and five interviews -all of whom had either an interest in fitness or worked as an ambassador- contributed to the data collection for this study.

From the findings and data analysis, it is evident that the researcher could answer all three questions pertaining to this study.

The findings answer the main research question, to explore the true nature of influence that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity and related sub question which were- what potentially negative impact does the portrayal of fitness brand ambassadors have on the health and wellbeing of their target market and what are the major brand contact points used by fitness brand ambassadors to influence consumer behaviour of their target market.

The true nature of influence these fitness ambassadors and models have on their consumers, are that 61.1% of respondents said yes, they do compare themselves with these ambassadors, and 56.3% felt it impacted them positively. From the data collected through the interviews with ambassadors, it was evident that these ambassadors wanted to influence their target market to achieve the same results, or feel inspired to achieve those results. However, from the interviews conducted with the three respondents, the researcher could recognise a pattern, as all three respondents said they believe fitness ambassadors do not always portray their true selves on their fan pages, as some might edit their photos, or stand in lighting that would enhance their body features more than it would in real time. The respondents also said that the influence these ambassadors could have on other female fitness enthusiasts might be negative, as people aspire to something that might not be real.

The secondary questions were successfully answered as 81.4% of the respondents who completed the survey said that the extensive advertising of weight-loss products from fitness ambassadors could have a negative effect on younger generations to come. The respondents who completed the interviews said that women are not always aware of the amount of effort and diet that had to go into a fitness ambassador's physique, and by exposing them to these results could easily lead to women fixating about small imperfections on their own bodies. This leads to women being insecure and hard on themselves as they can't understand why their efforts are not producing the same results. 56.3% of respondents also said that they have felt guilty when deciding on what to eat as a result of fitness ambassadors. This could lead to women developing a bad relationship with food. 60.2% of respondents said they feel negative thoughts after visiting social media sites, and being exposed to fitness related content, and as a result some women can potentially develop distorted thought patterns and a negative self-esteem which causes eating disorder as a result of being exposed to 'picture perfect' ambassadors on social media.

The last secondary question relates to what contact points these ambassadors use to influence their target market. Both ambassadors who took part in the interview process said that they made use of Instagram, Facebook and Twitter as their main social media sites to represent USN. These social media sites, combined with branded clothing are their main points of contact. The ambassadors also partake in USN social events where they meet and greet customers or followers.

The insight drawn from those findings are that social media is a powerful tool used by most people to draw inspiration, and as a result, ambassadors use these sights to make an impact on their target market. Ambassadors use their influence to build brand equity, as they add a commercial value to the products that they promote and as a result, influence the consumers perception of the brand, by adding value to the brand's name, and not just the product.

5.3. Anticipated contributions

This research study explored the effect and true nature of influence that brand ambassadors have on their target market in Cape Town, in their attempt to build brand equity. The study is based on how ambassadors influence their target consumers, and also what potential negative impact does the portrayal of fitness brand ambassadors have on the health and wellbeing of their target market as well as the major brand contact points used by fitness brand ambassadors to influence consumer behaviour of their target market. This study may enable supplement brands such as USN to fully understand the true impact that their advertisements might have on their consumers, and whether or not it has built brand equity. The study might also facilitate knowledge towards consumers as the findings may reflect what consumer actually perceive as healthy is not necessarily true in the context of brand ambassadors. The study may also be used as secondary research for other researchers or scholars who are studying the true nature and effect that advertisements of health and fat loss products might have on consumers.

5.4. Limitations

There were various limitations that could arise in the study such as shortcomings, conditions or influences that cannot be controlled by the researcher that place restrictions on your methodology and conclusions (BCPS, 2016).

These limitations included the restriction of women between the ages of 18 and 55 as well as geographical restrictions as the study is only based on consumers in Cape Town.

The study's research methodology was based on questionnaires and interviews, and each participant could interpret the questions differently, which might affect the reliability and validity of the study. Participants might also rush through the questions and not answer each question truthfully.

Another limitation to the study, was the access to respondents, and some could not meet for a face-to-face interview, and thus interviews had to be distributed via email. There were also respondents who did not respond to the interview email, and thus there were limitations as to how many respondents participated in the interviews.

5.5. Ethical considerations

Ethics is a moral code of conduct which outlines behaviours and attitudes which are considered acceptable and unacceptable in a research study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

To ward off any ethical concerns, participants was informed that they can participate voluntarily and if they should feel uncomfortable at any stage of the data collection process they may forfeit their completion of the questionnaires or interviews.

The researcher ensured that all the participants privacy was taken into consideration, and that full consent was obtained from the participants prior to the study. The researcher avoided any bias and misleading information that could affect the credibility of the results of the study. The research participants were not subjected to harm in any ways whatsoever, and were informed that the findings are solely for academic purposes. The researcher also declared affiliations, sources of funding and acknowledge the works of other authors, where necessary (Dudovskiy, 2016). There were no use of offensive, discriminatory, or other unacceptable language in the formulation of the questionnaires and interviews. Participants could also choose to stay anonymous throughout the data collection and no pressure was put on any participants to complete their questionnaires or interviews.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me orally and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in this research proposal.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in Cape Town until October 2017.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of participant

Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study:

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. Age:
 - 18-25
 - 26-35
 - 36-45
 - 46-55

2. On which social media site do you gather motivation from:
 - Instagram
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Other

3. Do you feel that the image that your fitness role model/brand ambassador portray is attainable?
 - Yes
 - No

4. How do these ambassadors influence your self-perception?
 - Positive
 - Negative

5. Do you compare yourself/body shape with any social media fitness influencer?
 - Yes
 - No

6. After visiting social media sites, are you left feeling with negative thoughts about yourself?

Yes

No

7. Has any of these fitness ambassadors/role models contributed to any feeling of food guilt when deciding what to eat?

Yes

No

8. Have you ever restricted your social life as a result of aspiring to look a certain way which was influenced by an ambassador/fitness role model?

Yes

No

9. Do you feel that these extensive advertisements of weight loss and ideal body images could negatively affect younger generations to come that is exposed to social media sites?

Yes

No

10. Have you ever purchased a supplement product, because you want to achieve the same results as your fitness role model has in the past?

Yes

No

Appendix C: Interview Ambassadors

- How many times a week do you train in order to maintain your body goals?
- On which platforms do you represent your supplement sponsor USN?
- What is required of you as an USN ambassador? (in terms of body image)
- Do you use any of the supplement products given to you by your sponsor?
- Have you taken part in a Fitness stage competition?
- Have you or are you currently exceeding the general accepted level of supplement intake?
- How would you describe the impact that you want to have on your following?
- Does your following trust your opinion on the supplement brands that you use?
- The ultimate goal of advertising a USN product is to influence consumers to purchase the products, what points of contact do you use to make these consumers aware of the products? (Such as branding on clothes etc)

Appendix D: Interview Body Conscious Consumers

- If you look at your fitness role model, would you consider their achievements with regards to their bodies attainable? Do you think the average woman would be able to achieve those results, and how many days of the week would she need to train?
- How does the images of various fitness and body conscious models affect the way you see yourself? And what would you say would be the impact of such images on social media sites have on the average consumer who wants to change the way she looks and feels?
- To what extent do you feel fitness ambassador's body/fitness pictures a true representation of themselves? For example, do you think the photos go through a lot of editing before they are uploaded onto Instagram
- Do you feel that these photos are realistic?
- Do you feel your fitness role model has influenced you to purchase products you never otherwise would have bought, because you trust her opinion?

Appendix E: Interview Sample 1

- How many times a week do you train in order to maintain your body goals?
5 days a week. Monday-Friday. Weekends I try to do park runs/ walks.

- On which platforms do you represent your supplement sponsor USN?
I'm a Fitness Athlete. I compete in Fitness/Bodybuilding Competitions.

- What is required of you as an USN ambassador? (in terms of body image)
I try to keep my body in shape year-round if/when I'm not competing. I try to live a healthy lifestyle and portray a fit body to motivate others to follow.

- Do you use any of the supplement products given to you by your sponsor?
Yes, I do. I use many different Supplements Products such as BCAA's, Whey Proteins, Fat Burners, Recovery drinks/supplements etc.

- Have you taken part in a Fitness stage competition?
Yes, I have. I've been competing since 2013 till to date. I've done about 20+ shows. I've also won a few titles.

- Have you or are you currently exceeding the general accepted level of supplement intake?
No, I'm not exceeding my intake. I regulate my Supplements to the correct usage amounts.

- How would you describe the impact that you want to have on your following?
I would hope that they follow in my footsteps to use the correct Supplements (and Brand) to benefit their needs and or desires in creating a better and healthier lifestyle for themselves.

- Does your following trust your opinion on the supplement brands that you use?
Yes, because the proof is definitely in die pudding. I've had numerous followers' responses that are only positive and they've continued consuming the Supplement I recommended.

- The ultimate goal of advertising a USN product is to influence consumers to purchase the products, what points of contact do you use to make these consumers aware of the products? (Such as branding on clothes etc)
Through Social Media such as Facebook & Instagram. Wearing Branded Clothing and branded accessories while training or at Fitness Competitions. Having Promotions in Malls.

Appendix F: Interview Sample 2

If you look at your fitness role model, would you consider their achievements with regards to their bodies attainable? Do you think the average woman would be able to achieve those results, and how many days of the week would she need to train?

- Yes, it is attainable, but it will require a lot of hard work. At least 5 days a week of training and proper and healthy eating habits.

How does the images of various fitness and body conscious models affect the way you see yourself? And what would you say would be the impact of such images on social media sites have on the average consumer who wants to change the way she looks and feels?

- I think most photos on social media are not always the most “Honest” representation. Most fitness models only post what they want people to see. I believe most girls have a body image problem due to what they see on social media.

To what extent do you feel fitness ambassador’s body/fitness pictures a true representation of themselves? For example, do you think the photos go through a lot of editing before they are uploaded onto Instagram?

- I do think photos are being edited or filters are added most of the times. The modern day reality is that people chase “social media fame”. People base their worth on social media likes and the approval of other social media users. People feel the need to edit their photos to retrieve as many likes as possible and to portray the “perfect body” according to society.

Do you feel that these photos are realistic?

- Some fitness role models do have realistic and honest photos where they remind society that they also have flaws and insecurities.

Do you feel your fitness role model has influenced you to purchase products you never otherwise would have bought, because you trust her opinion?

- Definitely

Appendix G: Ethical Clearance



12 October 2017

Dear

Lara Bestee

ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and ethical considerations were reviewed by your supervisor and moderated by the campus research panel.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns. We hereby provide you with ethical clearance to proceed with your research methodology.

OR

Your research proposal posed the following minor concern:
Please mention how your research design will address this issue:

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

Supervisor Name:

Chad van Jaarsveldt

Supervisor Signature: _____

Campus Anchor Name: _____

Campus Anchor Signature: _____

Appendix H: Safe Assign Report

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EXPLORING THE TRUE NATURE OF CONSUMER-INFLUENCE BY FITNESS BRAND AMBASSADORS on females IN CAPE TOWN

Student Name: Lara Bester Student Number:17599028 Supervisor: Charl van Loggerenberg

Submitted in partial fulfilment of Bcom strategic brand management at Vega School, a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE) on 16 October 2017.

ABSTRACT

Brands are not always aware of the effects their product advertising can have on consumers. When supplement brands make use of fitness models or competitive athletes to promote their products, they do not always keep in mind that it could potentially affect the consumer in a negative manner. Body conscious consumers who have an interest in making lifestyle changes, are prone to be affected by these

RESM8419_2017_HSM1_VGCT1 - RESM8419_VGCT1

Final Research Report

Lara Bester on Sun, Oct 15 2017, 10:50 AM

 36% highest match

Submission ID: 299500de-b7dd-4955-9131-f811d87bba3b

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Word Count: 13,587 | **36%**

Attachment ID: 182331671

Citations (18/18)

