

**My Friend, the Content Creator:  
Consequences of Parasocial Relationships  
for Engagement in Emerging Social Media**

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*“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind.”*

- Jim Morrison, American singer-songwriter

# **1 General introduction**

## **1.1 Relevance**

The creation and consumption of user-generated content in social media are ever-increasing and continue to play a vital role in shaping consumer behavior and society (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). This burgeoning development entails far-reaching repercussions for brands and content creators, which can be ascribed to two main factors.

First, advances in communication and bandwidth technologies have paved the way for creating, disseminating, and consuming rich user-generated content (Daft and Lengel, 1986; Steinhoff *et al.*, 2019). Thus, emerging social media are particularly characterized by improved content quality (e.g., through utilizing professional, ready-to-use video- and photo editing software; Fox *et al.*, 2018), accelerated content dissemination, ubiquitous content accessibility (e.g., via mobile devices; Steinhoff *et al.*, 2019), and the enablement of simultaneous interactions between content creators and other users (e.g., via real-time video broadcasts; Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019). Taken together, emerging social media denote the proliferation and enhancement of user-generated content in *asynchronous* social media (i.e., timely separated content consumption and -creation) and the rise of *synchronous* social media (i.e., simultaneous content consumption and -creation).

Second, emerging social media allow for sophisticated monetization structures (Lin *et al.*, 2021). For instance, over 80 active content creators on the live-streaming platform “Twitch.tv” generated yearly average revenue of 500.000 USD, solely through users’ premium memberships and donations (Purtill, 2021). Further, services like “Patreon.com” assist creators in offering premium content in return for payment. This platform doubled its monthly generated

revenue (to 26 million USD) and individual content purchases (to 13 million) during the last two years, with more than 100 creators grossing monthly revenues of over 25.000 USD (Graphtheon.com, 2022). Content creation can depict a lucrative occupation, resulting in a competitive market of creators striving to produce superior content and captivate their audience in various genres (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017; Zhao *et al.*, 2018).

As a consequence of emerging social media, consumers engage with user-generated content for an increasing amount of time and across a broad scope of applications, such as consuming entertainment media and informing their purchase decisions (Hilvert-Bruce *et al.*, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2015). Thus, with consumers' continued reliance on peer-to-peer referrals and communication, brands face decreasing relevance of their marketer-generated content and control over their brand perception (Fournier and Eckhardt, 2019; Herhausen *et al.*, 2019). To compensate for this issue, brands incentivize creators to incorporate promotions in their content (i.e., influencer marketing), furthering the commodification within the context of user-generated content (Hughes *et al.*, 2019).

Taken together, user-generated content has become commercialized through the various monetization options of asynchronous and synchronous social media for content creators and brands. Against the background of the resulting relevancy for practitioners and academics alike, I will discuss the issues and knowledge gaps associated with emerging social media—tackled by this dissertation—below.

At the core of emerging social media stands the construct consumer engagement, which refers to consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resource investment in their brand interactions, resulting from motivational drivers (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Kumar *et al.*, 2019). For content creators, consumer engagement depicts the most critical performance indicator: the reach they generate through engaging their followers is directly linked to their non-monetary and monetary success (Karaguer *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, for brands, consumer engagement

entails a pivotal antecedent of brand loyalty and purchases (Manchanda *et al.*, 2015; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Due to the reduced effectiveness of traditional advertising and marketer-generated content, the influencer marketing market value has more than doubled as of 2019, amounting to 13.8 billion USD (Statista, 2021). Consequently, emerging social media take a crucial role in maintaining and cultivating meaningful consumer relationships and have developed into a key element of marketing strategies (Appel *et al.*, 2020), which was fittingly predicted in the following quote:

*“Social media is not just a spoke on the wheel of marketing. It's becoming the way entire bicycles are built.”*

(Ryan Lilly, Author and Speaker; Woods *et al.* 2015)

Despite drastically growing scholarly attention, the insights from research streams related to emerging social media remain scarce. Notable exceptions are prior studies that have identified consumers' motivational drivers for engaging with content creators in fast-growing synchronous social media (Hilvert-Bruce *et al.*, 2018; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017). However, the applied frameworks are fragmented and do not translate into actionable recommendations for content creators on how to spur consumers' motivation to engage. Further, studies have touched upon the constituting characteristics of synchronous social media but have overlooked defining them (Hamilton *et al.*, 2014; Lin *et al.*, 2021). Thus, fundamental differences to asynchronous social media remain unclear, and consumer engagement in synchronous social media lacks scientific understanding (Appel *et al.*, 2020).

Research on influencer marketing identified, among others, content characteristics (Hughes *et al.*, 2019), blogger characteristics (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019), and sponsorship disclosures (Karaguer *et al.*, 2021), which impact consumer engagement with the sponsored content and other beneficial brand outcomes. However, empirical findings typically highlighted influencer marketing's positive effects, disregarding potentially harmful effects on

the endorsed brand (e.g., de Jans *et al.*, 2020; Ki and Kim, 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019). Further, favorable brand outcomes are often limited to the duration of the influencer cooperation (e.g., Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Breves *et al.*, 2021). While empirical findings beyond the campaign remain unclear, their exploration is limited due to the narrow scope of current theoretical frameworks, necessitating further research. Moreover, conceptual literature highlights the interdependencies of different actors for engagement in networked environments (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2020). However, existing studies overlooked the non-dyadic characteristics of influencer marketing.

Considering emerging social media's substantial impact on content creators and brands, little is known about these social media forms' underlying nature and commodification. Accordingly, this dissertation asks *what* theoretical frameworks and terminology are suited to examine synchronous social media and *how* content creators can drive engagement in this context. Further, extant literature does not provide sufficient conceptual grounding for answering *what* detrimental consequences influencer marketing may entail and *how* endorsement campaigns can be evaluated more thoroughly by adopting a non-dyadic perspective.

This dissertation encompasses four studies that address the outlined research gaps to deepen understanding of consequences for consumer engagement in emerging social media. More precisely, the focal studies aim to contribute to theoretical and managerial knowledge by *analyzing* extant literature on the commodification of emerging content creation, *examining* motivational drivers of engagement in synchronous social media, *conceptualizing* potentially adverse effects, and *examining* the non-dyadic nature of influencer marketing.

The findings of this dissertation provide three key contributions to literature concerned with consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and branding. First, as synchronous social media depict an environment that enables consumers' value co-creation, this dissertation



establishes the required conceptual distinctions between asynchronous and synchronous social media. Importantly, the obtained insights translate to asynchronous social media to inform marketers how to enhance value co-creation in this context as well. Second, emerging social media foster consumers' illusionary, intimate relationships (i.e., parasocial relationships [PSRs]) with content creators, which bring forth an underlying explanation for the rise of user-generated content and the reduced impact of traditional advertising. However, based on the endorsement design, influencer marketing is ineffective beyond campaigns' duration and may even lead to detrimental brand outcomes. To shed light on this issue, we point scholars to relevant frameworks and potentially insightful research avenues. Lastly, the studies outline the significance for future studies to conceptualize and examine influencer marketing beyond a dyadic approach, that is, analyzing consumer engagement and related metrics on content creator- and brand-level jointly.

In terms of practical insights, the analyses inform content creators on *how* they should convey their communication to affect certain consumer engagement behaviors and maximize their contents' value proposition to their audience. Against this background, I provide recommendations for service managers to utilize synchronous social media to enhance the value of their marketer-generated content. Moreover, the findings alarm managers who employ influencer marketing, suggesting adjustments to an improved performance assessment of endorsing campaigns and countermeasures for potential adverse effects. At last, by analyzing how brands can drive consumer engagement in the context of influencer marketing, this dissertation unveils and conceptualizes predominant effects, which shed light on the overall effectiveness of influencer marketing.

## **1.2 Literature review**

Because this dissertation examines the proliferation of asynchronous social media and the rise of synchronous under the term emerging social media, I discuss related extant literature in the

following. As outlined, emerging social media enable users to pursue content creation as a legitimate occupation, while brands seek to implement influencer marketing into their digital marketing strategies. Accordingly, I dissect the subsequent literature review into a content creator- and brand/firm-perspective.

### **1.2.1 Consequences of emerging social media: engaging with content creators**

In social media, the specific mechanics of the respective platforms define the various behavioral manifestations of consumer engagement (e.g., commenting and liking content, following a creator; Bozkurt *et al.*, 2021). Only recently, platforms began to implement functionalities that enable consumer behaviors for content monetization, such as premium memberships and donations (Hamilton *et al.*, 2014). Fueled by the proliferation of social media, content creation evolved into a novel occupation, sparking scholarly attention of consumer engagement with user-generated content beyond a corporate brand context.

Initial studies on emerging social media focused on the research context of social live streaming (i.e., simultaneous broadcast and consumption of audio and video media in real-time) as it denotes a popular emerging social media form with highly lucrative monetization opportunities (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017). Quantitative analyses examined users' motivational drivers (e.g., Gros *et al.*, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce *et al.*, 2018; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017; Wohn *et al.*, 2019) and their impact on consumer engagement manifestations, such as users' viewing and donating behaviors. While these studies found consistent effects regarding particular user gratifications (i.e., users' cognitive and social need satisfaction as drivers of consumer engagement), other motivational drivers revealed contradicting results. Further research examined creators' switch to a different content category (Zhao *et al.*, 2018), emotions (Lin *et al.*, 2021), audience size (Lu *et al.*, 2021), and their effect on consumer engagement. Hu *et al.* (2017) revealed users' identification with broadcasters and their audiences as drivers of viewing behavior. Qualitative studies in this field primarily concerned the classification of live streaming as a new form of digital work (e.g., Wang, 2020; Woodcock and Johnson, 2019).

Furthermore, studies examined established concepts from media and communication theory and demonstrated parallels with social live streaming (Chen and Lin, 2018; Hamilton *et al.*, 2014).

Overall, previous literature draws on various conceptual foundations and deepens the understanding of specific constructs in the context of social live streaming. Albeit yielding important findings, the identified motivational drivers do not suggest *how* content creators can proactively spur motivation and satisfy users' needs to impact consumer engagement. Also, the studies describe characteristics of synchronous social media (e.g., social live streaming) but neglect the juxtaposition with asynchronous social media. Thus, the constituting characteristics of synchronous social media remain nebulous, warranting further research to illuminate its success factors. The state of extant research begs the question of *what* conceptual foundations explain the rise of synchronous social media best. Moreover, it is unclear whether the same theoretical grounding clarifies the proliferation of asynchronous social media and, if negated, what other theories have to be considered.

### **1.2.2 Consequences of emerging social media: engaging with brands**

Previous literature provides an extensive understanding of antecedents and consequences of consumer engagement for brands, including actionable implications for designing effective marketer-generated content (e.g., Lee *et al.*, 2018; Stephen *et al.*, 2015; de Vries *et al.*, 2012; Weiger *et al.*, 2018). However, the generated insights do not necessarily hold for the relationship between user-generated content and consumer engagement, which is gaining more and more importance over marketer-generated content (Appel *et al.*, 2020; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Thus, brands have turned to influencer marketing to generate consumer engagement and nurture consumer relationships.

Extant influencer marketing studies reveal interesting findings regarding such issues as its content characteristics (Hughes *et al.*, 2019), two-sided messaging (Uribe *et al.*, 2016),

blogger characteristics (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019), influencer/product congruence (Belanche *et al.*, 2021), and sponsorship transparency (Evans *et al.*, 2018; Karaguer *et al.*, 2021) and their effects on post and platform engagement, influencer source credibility, word-of-mouth behavior, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intentions. Typically, these studies highlight influencer marketing's positive effects. However, Influencer marketing's acclaimed positive effects are limited to the campaign's duration, while its potentially detrimental effects on the endorsing brand remain nebulous to date. (e.g., Uribe *et al.*, 2016; Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019). Thus, the understanding of its broader consequences beyond campaigns is scarce, calling for further research.

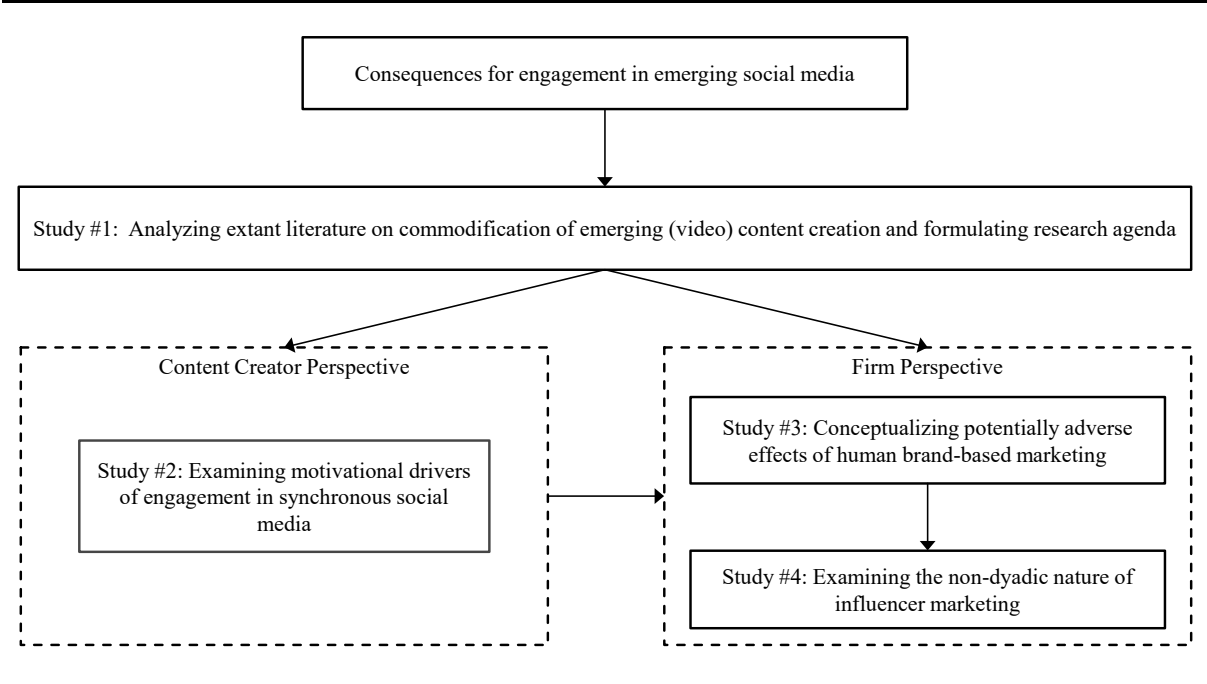
Often, researchers and marketers determine the success of an influencer campaign based on the generated consumer engagement (e.g., impressions, likes, comments) with the sponsored content (Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Valsesia *et al.*, 2020). Notably, the influencer acts as a brand message sender based on the brand-related information contained in their created content (Karaguer *et al.*, 2021). Unless a consumer's interaction is clearly directed at the influencer or brand, it is not certain with whom the consumer engages (i.e., the influencer or the brand). Prior research has neglected this inherent ambiguity of consumer engagement in the context of influencer marketing, which entails significant ramifications for evaluating influencer marketing's effectiveness and conceptual approach. Importantly, resolving the ambiguity requires a multi-actor perspective as consumer engagement with content creators and brands are interdependent. However, prior research does not provide sufficient knowledge on *what* theoretical frameworks represent an appropriate toolkit to disentangle this non-dyadic environment and *how* brands can counter potentially detrimental effects to drive consumer engagement effectively.

### 1.3 Research outline

This dissertation encompasses four studies that aim to illuminate consumer engagement in emerging social media for content creators and firms, respectively. Notably, insights about content creators' elevated role in this research context likewise denote implications for brands. That is, understanding motivational drivers of consumer engagement with content creators can assist firms in designing engaging content on their own and employing content creators as brand endorsers effectively. Figure 1 shows an overview of the dissertation framework, and Table 1 summarizes each study's research objective, key findings, and key contributions.

*Study 1* encompasses a literature overview regarding occupational (vs. exploitative) elements of (user-centric) video content creation. The specific choice of video media is based on the circumstance that content creators' monetization possibilities, beyond brand involvement, are the most mature in this context. Further, other commodification opportunities, with brand involvement (i.e., influencer marketing), are equally apparent in this context, allowing the joint identification of *what* theoretical and conceptual frameworks are most relevant on a content creator- and brand-level. The analysis of literature relies on scoping and theoretical reviews to address this question. The studies are examined based on utilized terminology, type, and domain of research, scholarly interest in the field, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, consideration of motivational drivers, as well as research outcome perspectives. The classifications reveal a highly scattered research field, warranting further conceptual analyses to align inconsistencies, particularly regarding terminology and applied frameworks. However, parasocial interaction theory and the construct PSR show repeated commercial impact. Moreover, the analyses indicate a need to deepen understanding of consumers' social interactions and derived value during media consumption. Among others, these findings were used to inform the following three studies.

**Figure 1. Dissertation framework**



*Study 2* focuses on video content creators in synchronous social media. It addresses the fragmented understanding of the research context by defining synchronous social media while considering contrastive elements of asynchronous social media. Then, incorporating previously identified motivational drivers for consumer engagement, the research model draws on self-determination theory to analyze *how* content creators should focus and convey their communication to impact consumer engagement (i.e., viewing and donating behaviors). Hence, this study fills the research gap of actionable recommendations for content creators to spur consumers’ motivation to engage. Notably, the communication foci depict a double-edged sword, as empirical findings reveal their countervailing effects on examined consumer engagement manifestations. Furthermore, study 2 underlines the need for a comprehensive understanding of value-creation, social interactions, and PSRs, as previously outlined in study 1.

**Table 1. Overview of studies**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Key Contributions</b>
Study 1: Streamers: the new wave of digital entrepreneurship? Extant corpus and research agenda	Analyzing extant literature on the commodification of emerging (video) content creation and formulating research agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highly fragmented terminology and conceptual foundations in the research field</li><li>• Social interactions stand at the heart of increased user adaptation and commercial structures</li><li>• Further research concerning the commodification of the audience is warranted</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrating the developing occupational aspects of content creation</li><li>• Highlighting most applied terminology and theories to align and focus future analyses</li><li>• Providing an overview of extant literature to reveal fruitful research avenues</li></ul>
Study 2: Content versus community focus in live streaming services: how to drive engagement in synchronous social media	Examining motivational drivers of engagement in synchronous social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Content creators' communication foci (i.e., content vs. community focus) depict a double-edged sword as it may drive or curb users' engagement behaviors</li><li>• Value co-creation depicts a crucial factor in explaining the success of synchronous social media</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Elaborating on the conceptual foundations of synchronous social media</li><li>• Identifying how content creators should employ their communication to drive engagement behaviors</li><li>• Providing actionable recommendations on analyzing and utilizing the effective design of future social media</li></ul>
Study 3: The invisible leash: when human brands hijack corporate brands' consumer relationships	Conceptualizing potentially adverse effects of human brand-based marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A dyadic consumer-brand perspective is insufficient to analyze the outcomes of endorsement campaigns</li><li>• Generated consumer engagement with the brand can be volatile due to its dependency on consumers' relationship with the endorsing content creator</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highlighting dynamics of human brand-based marketing to better evaluate its effectiveness</li><li>• Demonstrating how human brands become increasingly relevant for researchers and practitioners</li><li>• Providing the conceptualization of relationship hijacking to better understand and prevent adverse effects</li></ul>
Study 4: Blurred lines: disentangling the ambiguity of consumer engagement in influencer marketing.	Examining the non-dyadic nature of influencer marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parasocial relationships with the influencer entail a decisive driver of brand outcomes</li><li>• High consumer engagement with the influencer mitigates the effectiveness of influencer-induced consumer engagement with the brand</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highlighting the need of analyzing influencer marketing with a non-dyadic approach</li><li>• Providing an overview of influencer marketing's predominant effects and corresponding research avenues</li></ul>

*Study 3* builds upon the findings of studies 1 and 2 and applies PSRs to examine influencer marketing and its impact on consumer engagement from a firm perspective. This study follows an inductive approach to illuminate the potentially adverse effects of firms utilizing content creators to endorse their brand on social media. Hence, the analysis addresses the research gap of mixed findings of extant literature beyond the influencer campaign's scope. The analysis indicates that consumers' PSRs with content creators determine influencer campaigns' outcomes. Within the campaigns' duration, consumers perceive brands favorably due to a spillover effect of consumer engagement from the content creator to the brand. However, this effect ceases after the content creator-brand cooperation ends, shedding light onto (almost) exclusive short-term evidence of previous studies. Based on these interdependencies, the article conceptualizes the construct *relationship hijacking*. Detrimental consequences of relationship hijacking may manifest as the abundance of beneficial brand outcomes beyond the campaign, as outlined, and imply adverse effects on consumer engagement with the brand. Thus, this study deepens managerial insight on influencer marketing's performance evaluation, contributing to answering *how* marketers may counter detrimental effects and drive consumer engagement in emerging social media effectively.

*Study 4* centers on the role of consumer engagement and aims at unlocking scholarly acumen of influencer marketing's non-dyadic nature. Drawing on the results of studies 1, 2, and, particularly, study 3, this article incorporates PSR-induced consumer engagement with content creators and brands, respectively, to empirically test their role in impacting campaigns' brand outcomes. The findings generally show brand-beneficial effects, except the negative interplay of consumer engagement directed at the brand paired with consumer engagement directed at the content creator. Nevertheless, the results reveal that brands can effectively employ influencer marketing. By enhancing these findings with evidence of extant literature and study 3, this article discusses the prevalence of four potential effects in influencer



marketing. Given the obtained insight, this article derives potentially fruitful research avenues and refer to relevant literature for answering *what* constructs subsequent research should build upon and *how* engagement in emerging social media could be further illuminated.

Table 2 gives an overview of the studies' type, terminology, data, and analysis approach. As outlined, the state of research demands conceptual and empirical analyses. Further, consequences of emerging social media occur on content creator- and brand-level. Depending on these perspectives, the functions of content creators and brands change (e.g., content creators as direct beneficiary of consumer engagement vs. content creators as intermediary to influence consumer engagement with brands), which is mirrored in the terminology used in each study. Although, technically, the applied labels in this chapter (content creator and brand) would work in every context, they were adapted to enhance each studies' readability and comprehensiveness. The studies draw on different data and analytical approaches in order to examine the research context both conceptually and empirically. Study 1 conducts a literature overview, combining scoping review and theoretical review. Study 2 draws on data acquired through a two-wave online questionnaire. Study 3 entails a conceptual paper that adopts the concept of brand hijacking to the context of influencer marketing. Lastly, study 4 encompasses an empirical analysis based on an online survey.

**Table 2. Type, terminology, data, and analysis approach of the studies**

Study	Research Type	Perspective	Adjusted Terminology		Data source	Sample Size	Further Analytical Approaches
			Content Creator	Brand			
Study 1: Streamers: the new wave of digital entrepreneurship? Extant corpus and research agenda	Literature overview	Content creator and Brand	-	-	Studies on video content creation	75 extant studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping review</li> <li>• Theoretical review</li> </ul>
Study 2: Content versus community focus in live streaming services: how to drive engagement in synchronous social media	Empirical	Content creator	Streamer	-	Two-wave online survey among viewers of social live streaming services	N = 215	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heckman correction factor</li> <li>• Exploratory factor analysis</li> <li>• Fornell and Larcker Test</li> <li>• Heterotrait-monotrait method</li> <li>• Floodlight analysis</li> </ul>
Study 3: The invisible leash: when human brands hijack corporate brands' consumer relationships	Conceptual	Brand	Human Brand	Corporate Brand	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theory adaptation</li> </ul>
Study 4: Blurred lines: disentangling the ambiguity of consumer engagement in influencer marketing.	Empirical	Brand	Influencer	-	Survey among followers of social media influencers	N = 272	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmatory factor analysis</li> <li>• Floodlight analysis</li> </ul>

## 1.4 Structured abstracts

### 1.4.1 Study 1

**Purpose** – Video content creation by “amateur” private users has taken on professional (i.e. work) characteristics. The emergence of user-centric video sharing services (e.g. YouTube, Twitch, Mixer) has set the scene for the rise of micro-celebrities and influencers making video content creation a valuable source of income. The development of occupational and commercial elements within the activity has gained a significant amount of attention from the mainstream media but also from academic research.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper presents a literature review that aims to examine the nature of the available literature (75 articles) on the occupational characteristics of video content creation. The literature review examines the development of research and terminology of this topic, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks utilized in the examined research, and how the elements of work have been examined and perceived in the examined literature.

**Findings** – The results reveal an ongoing development of entrepreneurial aspects in the activity and highlight the need for further research on video content creation in a work context.

**Originality/value** – This study condenses the fragmented terminology and conceptual frameworks in the context of video content creation and highlights potentially fruitful approaches for scholars to generate additional theoretical and managerial knowledge.

### 1.4.2 Study 2

**Purpose** – Social live-streaming services are an emerging form of social media that is gaining in popularity among researchers and practitioners. By facilitating real-time interactions between video content creators (i.e. streamers) and viewers, live-streaming platforms provide an environment for novel engagement behaviors and monetization structures. This research aims

to examine communication foci and styles as levers of streaming success. In doing so, the authors analyze their impact on viewers' engagement with the stream.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This research draws on a unique dataset collected via a multi-wave questionnaire comprising viewers' perceptions of a specific streamer's communications and their actual behavior toward them. The authors analyze the proposed impact of communication foci on viewing and donating behavior while considering the moderating role of communication style using seemingly unrelated regressions.

**Findings** – The results show that communication foci represent a double-edged sword: community-focused communication drives viewership while reducing donations made to the streamer. By contrast, content-focused communication curbs viewing but drives donating.

**Practical implications** – Of specific interest for practitioners, the study demonstrates how streaming content providers (e.g. influencers) should adjust their communications to drive engagement in the context of synchronous social media such as social live-streaming services. Beyond that, this research identifies unique characteristics of engagement that can help managers to improve their digital service offerings.

**Social implications** – Social live-streaming services provide an environment that offers unique opportunities for self-development and co-creation among social media users. By allowing for real-time interactions, these emerging social media services build on ephemeral content to provide altered experiences for users.

**Originality/value** – The authors highlight the need to distinguish between engagement behaviors in asynchronous and synchronous social media. The proposed conceptualization sheds new light on success factors of social media in general and social live-streaming services specifically. To maximize user engagement, content creators in synchronous social media must consider their communications' focus (content or community) and style (utilitarian or hedonic).

### 1.4.3 Study 3

**Purpose** – Corporate brands increasingly use influential, high reach human brands (e.g. influencers, celebrities), who have strong parasocial relationships with their followers and audiences, to promote their offerings. However, despite emerging understanding of the benefits arising from human brand-based campaigns, knowledge about their potentially negative effects on the corporate brand remains limited. Addressing this gap, this paper deepens insight into the potential risk human brands pose to corporate brands.

**Design/methodology/approach** – To explore these issues, this conceptual paper reviews and integrates literature on consumer brand engagement, human brands, brand hijacking, and parasocial relationships.

**Findings** – Though consumers’ favorable human brand associations can be used to improve corporate brand outcomes, they rely on consumers’ relationship with the endorsing human brand. Given the dependency of these brands, human brand-based marketing bears the risk that the human brand (vs the firm) “owns” the consumer’s corporate brand relationship, which the authors coin relationship hijacking. This phenomenon can severely impair consumers’ engagement and relationship with the corporate brand.

**Originality/value** – This paper sheds light on the role of human brands in strategic brand management. Though prior research has highlighted the positive outcomes accruing to the use of human brands, the authors identify its potential dark sides, thus exposing pivotal insight.

### 1.4.4 Study 4

**Purpose** – Consumers’ growing reliance on social media-based peer-to-peer communication in their purchase decision-making has given rise to influencer marketing, with which brands aim at exploiting consumers’ parasocial, illusionary, intimate relationships between consumers and influencers to their benefit. However, despite the proliferation of influencer marketing,

understanding the extent to which consumers' positive influencer relationships favorably contribute to the brand remains tenuous. Addressing this gap, this paper deepens the scholarly acumen of influencer marketing and disentangles the consequences of consumers' parasocial relationships with influencers.

**Design/methodology/approach** – To investigate these issues, this paper draws on a unique dataset comprising users' perception of parasocial relationships, their respective engagement with the brand and the influencer, and brand-related outcome variables (i.e., purchase intention and brand loyalty).

**Findings** – Consumers' parasocial relationships can spill over positive associations to an endorsed brand, effectively impacting brand-focused engagement and brand outcomes. However, a firm's return on investment may be limited when the benefits accruing from consumers' favorable influencer relationships do not spill over to the brand.

**Originality/value** – This paper sheds light on consumer-brand relationships in the influencer marketing context. Though prior literature has primarily examined influencer marketing's favorable outcomes, our study is among the first to highlight potential unfavorable ones.

**Practical implications** – This study offers managerial insight into the effectiveness of influencer marketing for consumer relationship management. More precisely, managers should employ influencers who have built strong parasocial relationships with their followers to achieve sustainable brand outcomes. However, this analysis also uncovers potentially detrimental effects of influencer-induced engagement and informs managers on corresponding countermeasures.

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## **2 Study 1: Streamers: the new wave of digital entrepreneurship? Extant corpus and research agenda**

(with Maria Törhönen, Welf H. Weiger and Juho Hamari)

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Keywords: Streaming; Entrepreneurship; Work; Digital Economy; Professionalization; YouTube; Twitch



## 2.1 Study 1: Introduction

The pervasive growth of information and communications technology fuels the convergence of work and leisure. The development of digital economies (e.g. sharing economy, platform economy), digital environments (e.g. virtual worlds and games) and the digital collaborative culture (e.g. social media and participatory culture) has enabled the rise of entrepreneurial-like content creation and distribution through digital platforms. Consequently, work and occupational life is becoming more game-like (i.e. gamification) (Huotari and Hamari, 2017; Vesa *et al.*, 2017), while leisure activities start to take on work-like characteristics where work and play are transforming into a hybrid form, frequently coined as playbor (Fuchs, 2014; Kücklich, 2005) or digital labor (Fuchs, 2014; Kücklich, 2005; Scholz, 2012; Terranova, 2000).

“Amateur” video content creation by private individuals (such as in YouTube and Twitch) has become a popular area of such forms of hybrid entrepreneurship, which is afforded by digital platforms that have become characterized by their long-tail nature (Anderson, 2006) and provide legitimate business opportunities for these amateur individuals (Tassi, 2018). The production and distribution of this type of asynchronous (pre-recorded video) and synchronous video content (live video content) became a popular co-creative activity for private amateur individuals through the emergence of dedicated video sharing platforms such as YouTube in the late 00’s. YouTube as a platform provided a way for individuals to express themselves through (asynchronous, pre-recorded) video formats and offered social recognition through the platform. With the development of YouTube advertising in 2010, the content creators were granted access to advertising revenue, which allowed the activity to begin to develop more professionalized features. Further developments of synchronous “live streaming” technology and innovative streaming and video sharing services such as Twitch and Mixer, have enhanced the professionalization and revenue potential for content creators through dedicated

support/partner programs and systems. This has generated a global phenomenon around digital video content and nurtured the development of professionalized video content creator culture, as one of the most advanced manifestation of playbor (Fuchs, 2014; Kücklich, 2005).

Income generated from video content creation is typically a combination of different revenue streams derived from platform-specific monetization services, external partnerships and collaborations, potential merchandise sales and cross-platform content syndication and interaction (Rose, 2019). The platform-specific monetization structures are one of the main sources of income for video content creators and have become more and more versatile during the last decade. Most of these revenue sources are made accessible through different forms of partnership and affiliate programs, which are based on a contractual exchange between the creator and the platform. For example, Twitch provides two different forms of collaboration for their creators, the affiliate program (lower-level access to revenue and services) and partnership program (higher-level access to revenue and services). Access to these programs is based on specific visibility, viewer engagement and activity metrics on the platform, and in Twitch is heavily gamified to incentivize creators to develop their presence and retain them on the platform (Siutila, 2018; Twitch, 2020). Most platform-specific partnership programs offer variations of similar revenue sources including, advertising revenue share, donations, and subscription services. Advertising revenue share is derived from ad placements during the creator's content delivery, donations are either hard currency or virtual currency gifts from viewers and subscription share is derived from different types of subscription packages provided by the platform and the creator.

In addition to platform provided revenue streams, video content creators also increasingly take on the role as a spokesperson for different brands (Lancaster, 2018), and generate additional revenue through sponsorships, endorsements, and other means of brand

collaborations as another prevalent commercial aspect of video content creation. Video content creators may generate these opportunities on their own, which requires significant entrepreneurial effort, or they can join a multi-channel network, that represents content creators and establishes, e.g. commercial collaborations, for them (Kozlowski, 2013). Content creators also sell merchandise related to their activities and have begun to further utilize cross-platform interaction to develop a level of digital “celebrity”, also known as “micro-celebrity” or “influencer culture” (Khamis *et al.*, 2017), by utilizing other social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat etc. to build a community and to further monetize their content creation (Aleti *et al.*, 2019). However, the increasing occupational elements of such activities are still not acknowledged as legitimate forms of work, regardless of the increasing media coverage of issues related to the entrepreneurial aspects of this activity such as increasing fatigue and mental health issues related to work load as well as fame and fortune resulting from engaging in such activities (Parkin, 2018). Indeed, extraordinarily little support and organizational structures are provided for content creators at large.

These elements of commercialization, merged with the hedonistic and expressive nature and background of these activities, make this form of playbor highly strategic and entrepreneurial at its core, but at the same time emphasizes the elements of commodification of the activities and individuals, resulting from the multitude of different revenue models available. This dichotomy between creative entrepreneurial work (Banks and Deuze, 2009; Bruns, 2009; Fish and Srinivasan, 2011; Senft, 2009) and commodifying labor (van Dijck, 2009; Postigo, 2014; Scholz, 2012; Smythe, 1977; Terranova, 2000) has been a topic of debate around digital content creation for numerous years and highlights the complex nature of hybrid work, where labor and leisure merge.

Video content creation represents a novel hybrid form of work and play that has been enabled by developments of digital technology as well as trends in culture, economy, and society. It represents the most popular manifestation of playbor, which warrants the need for a thorough understanding how it may act as legitimate forms of work/profession and for further investigation into its current established forms and structures. To increase the knowledge about this complex phenomenon and the merger of work and play involved, this systematic literature review will examine existing literature (75 papers) highlighting occupational, commercial or strategic aspects of this activity, and analyses the elements and structures of work and labor emerging from the reviewed sources. The research will aim to provide an overview of the available literature on this subject and the nature of the collected literature. By examining the types of sources and literature included in the data of the paper (research interest, domain of research) and the associated terminology utilized in the examined literature, this research will aim to provide an answer to the following research questions:

*RQ1.* How has the research on the occupational elements of video content creation developed?

*RQ2.* How are the occupational elements of video content creation evident in the development of associated terminology?

The associated terminology as well as the associated definitions will be analyzed for nuances of work and occupational developments. The terminology was selected for the analysis, as it is considered a reflection of the conceptual organization of a special subject as well as a necessary medium of expression and professional communication (Cabr , 1989). Therefore, the terminology could provide information about the current framing of the activity as work, but also reveal if the already established terminology for this activity is associated with the occupational aspects and developments of the activity.

The theoretical frameworks and outcomes of each examined paper were also analyzed in order to examine the framing of this activity as work and the types of theoretical and conceptual foundations that may have been used to examine elements of work within video content creation. The outcomes of the sources were categorized and analyzed, and the perception of the activity as creative entrepreneurial work or as commodifying labor was examined to answer the following research questions:

*RQ3.* What theoretical frameworks have been utilized in the examination of video content creation as an occupational activity?

*RQ4.* How are the occupational activities related to video content creation perceived within the examined literature in relation to the discussion of the activity as exploitative work or as an entrepreneurial form of creative labor?

A further understanding of the development of the professional practices, socio-economic relationships and innovative services related to video content creation provide valuable information about the processes and motivations behind this form of digital labor where the elements of leisure and work collide, and where the likelihood of stability and success are still relatively small. These insights could legitimize and provide structure for video content creation as a digital profession and extend our understanding of modern work and the contrasting processes related to the transformation of work such as gamification.

## **2.2 Study 1: The review & methods**

### **2.2.1 Study 1: The review procedure**

As the development of video content creation has largely been labelled by technology and popular global platforms, there is a lot of fragmentation in the terminology used to depict the activity. Most common terminology seems to be associated with specific processes or activities

(e.g. delivery of asynchronous or synchronous video content) and specific platforms or content types (YouTuber, vlogger etc.) and the existing knowledge of the terminology associated with this activity was used to develop the search string for this literature review. In order to depict the commercial or professionalized aspects of this activity, the researchers also utilized the term “influencer” as a more commonly used term associated with strategic and commercial aspects of digital content creation (Khamis *et al.*, 2017). The terms identified for the literature review, can be found from Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Study 1: Terminology associated with video content creation**

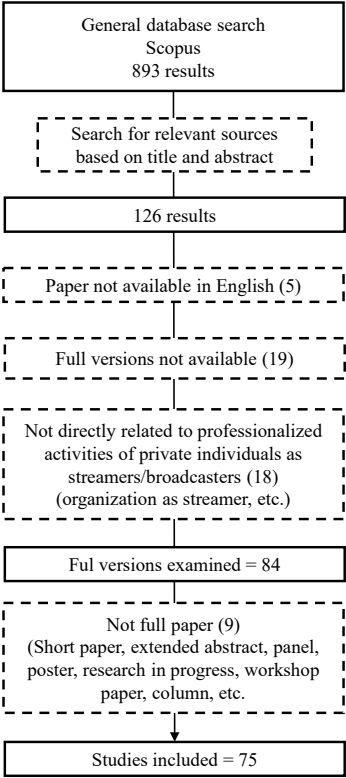
<b>Asynchronous video content creator</b>	<b>Asynchronous video content creation</b>	<b>Synchronous video content creator</b>	<b>Synchronous video content creation</b>	<b>Generic terms</b>
Vlogger	Vlogging	Live streamer	Live streaming	Influencer
YouTuber		Streamer	Streaming	
		Twitch streamer	Twitch streaming	

This literature review was conducted as a combination of a scoping review (Paré *et al.*, 2015) and a theoretical review (Paré *et al.*, 2015), in order to gain further insight into the research questions of this study and collect a representative sample for the analysis. A scoping review is primarily used to gain further insight into the nature and range of research on a specific topic (Paré *et al.*, 2015). The utilization of the scoping review process allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of the current extent of research on this topic as well as the nature of the research. The scoping review process was utilized to answer *RQ*'s 1, 2 and 4. In order to extend the review, the scoping review was combined with elements of a theoretical review, to answer *RQ* 3. The theoretical review processes allowed the research team to identify, and analyze relevant theoretical frameworks within the texts (Paré *et al.*, 2015) and extend the understanding of the topic based on them. The search for relevant literature was conducted

using the identified search words (Table 3) on the title, abstract, keywords and full text, in order to gather an extensive sample of relevant literature. The search words were used to perform queries using the Scopus notation and the following search string for the data collection: ((ALL (streamer) OR ALL (youtuber) OR ALL (vlogger) OR ALL (influencer)) AND (ALL (twitch) OR ALL (youtube))). The search string development proved challenging due to the dispersed terminology associated with the activity, as well as the homonymous nature of specific terms such as “stream\*” and “Twitch”. Some of these homonymous terms and more generic terms such as “live” had to be either removed from the string or further specified, in order to gather more relevant results for the topic of this research. In the end, the terms “Twitch” and “YouTube” were utilized as identifiers in the search string to specify relevant sources to the topic. The Scopus database was selected to be used in this literature review, as it offers a comprehensive abstract and citation database of international peer-reviewed resources. This allowed the researchers to focus on one database with extended coverage rather than numerous more specialized databases.

The initial search identified 893 sources, of which 126 were selected for further review based on their title and abstract. The title and abstract had to reflect a commercial or occupational association to video content creation or structures that support the commercial or occupational development of video content creators (e.g. viewer engagement practices). These sources were further examined using a pre-determined selection criterion (peer-reviewed papers in an international publication, available in English, focusing on the occupational activities/aspects of private video content creators) and a final sample of 84 sources were identified for further analysis. During the final review of sources, 9 papers were also removed as they were not full articles. The full review process can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Study 1: Flowchart of the analysis process**



Each source was reviewed and coded by the members of the research team based on pre-determined units, which consisted of bibliometric identifiers (authors, title, year, source title, volume, issue, and abstract), paper type units (empirical/non-empirical paper, method, theoretical/conceptual framework), and topic or outcome specific units (domain of research, theme of outcome). Each article was also reviewed individually for common terms used to describe the activity of video content creation and the definitions for the content creator or the content creation activities. The analysis of terms and definitions was conducted using mixed methods, by combining more quantitative data analysis and content analysis (Bryman, 2012; Krippendorff, 2004) to identify emerging themes and connections.



## 2.3 Study 1: Results

### 2.3.1 Study 1: Research interest

This section responds to *RQ1* (How has the research on the occupational elements of video content creation developed?). The research interest related to video content creation has developed significantly during the last decade, with significant growth in the number of relevant publications appearing after 2014 and continuing to signal positive growth, as seen in the trendline for relevant publications per year in Figure 3.

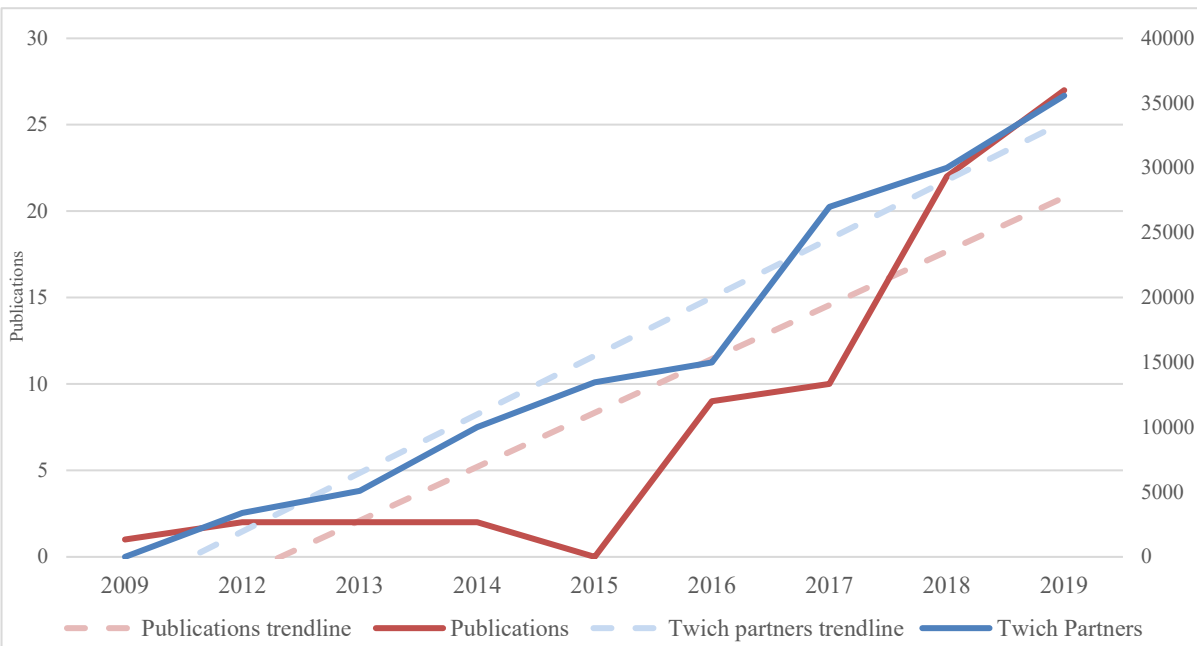
The increase in publications per year can be seen to follow a similar trend to the development of professionalized aspects of video content creation, which is highlighted in Figure 3, through the examination of growth in Twitch partners per year (TwitchTracker, 2020). Annual growth in the number of publications related to occupational aspect of video content creation and the growth in the number of Twitch partners indicate a similar trend in the development of the phenomenon, but it should be noted that the increase in research interest may also reflect the slight lag associated with academic publishing.

The examined research articles were mostly based on empirical evidence as seen in Table 4, and the non-empirical papers were primarily conceptual papers, focusing on larger concepts (e.g. celebrity, economy) through specific examples/cases and themes, or papers developing frameworks or models, but with no clear empirical data. A full list of publications and their details can be found in Appendix A. The empirical articles examined in our review were primarily based on survey data, platform-specific data collected through API's and video content analysis. Interviews, other digital content analysis (e.g. forums, profile pages), and observations/ethnography were also popular data in the examined publications. It should be noted that some publications examined more than one data set, which is reflected in Table 4.

All empirical and non-empirical papers were included in the further analysis due to their relevance to the topic of this research.

Each paper was also categorized based on the research domain of the focal/underlying topic and its relation to the phenomenon of video content creation as seen in Table 5. Most empirical research articles examined behavior or psychology behind activities related to video content creation. Such papers either examined the behavior of the video content creators themselves such as motivation (Gros *et al.*, 2017; Hou, 2019; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017; Törhönen *et al.*, 2019; Zhao *et al.*, 2017; Zimmer, 2018), or the interaction and behavior of the viewer in relation to the video content creator (Lee *et al.*, 2019; McRoberts *et al.*, 2016). Another major domain of research was the media production of video content. Papers in this domain examined themes such as the practices of video content creation (Aran *et al.*, 2014; Bishop, 2019; Scolari and Fraticelli, 2019; Tang *et al.*, 2016) as well as the performance elements (Bhatia, 2018; Wotanis and Mcmillan, 2014; Zhang and Hjorth, 2019) within video content. Different digital media formats and structures were also examined in relation to video content creation and papers in this category primarily focused on the structures (e.g. economy, restrictions) and elements in different video sharing platforms (Cullen and Ruberg, 2019; Lessel *et al.*, 2018; Postigo, 2014; Siutila, 2018; Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019; Wattenhofer and Wattenhofer, 2015) or the way in which elements such as popularity can be formed within these structures and services (Jia *et al.*, 2018; Koch *et al.*, 2018).

**Figure 3. Study 1: The comparison of amount of publications per year and Twitch partners per year, and the corresponding trendlines.**



More direct characteristics of work and occupational elements were examined in the domain categories related to celebrity, the commercial aspects of video content creation and work and entrepreneurship. Celebrity was examined in particular in the context of micro-celebrity and through examination of specific examples and channels (Garcia-Rapp and Roc-Cuberes, 2017; Jerslev, 2016; Raun, 2018; Rihl and Wegener, 2019). The commercial aspects of video content creation primarily focused on the brand effect of video content creators (Munnukka *et al.*, 2019; Xiao *et al.*, 2018) and advertising or marketing such as the value of video content creators in advertising and marketing efforts (Gerhards, 2019; Xiao *et al.*, 2018), whereas the papers in the work and entrepreneurship domain examined the value and structure of work and entrepreneurship in video content creation.

**Table 4. Study 1: Type of studies analyzed**

<b>Non-Empirical papers</b>		<b>N=9</b>				
(Berryman and Kavka, 2017; Brownlee, 2019; Cunningham and Craig, 2017; Jerslev, 2016; Keating, 2013; Partin, 2019; Raun, 2018; Wang <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Zhao, 2016)						
	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>		<b>Mixed Method</b>		
	<b>Papers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Papers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Papers</b>	
<b>Survey data</b>	(Chen and Lin, 2018; Gerhards, 2019; Gros <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Lee and Watkins, 2016; Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Lessel <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Munnukka <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Rihl and Wegener, 2019; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017; Törhönen <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Xiao <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Zhao <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Zhou <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	14		0	(Biel and Gatica-perez, 2013; Hou, 2019; Lu <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Tang <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Wohn <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	5
<b>Platform data</b>	(Arnett <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Churchill and Wu, 2016; Jia <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Kaytoue <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Koch <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Tu <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Wattenhofer <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Zhu <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	8		0	(Ashman <i>et al.</i> , 2018; McRoberts <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	2
<b>Interview data</b>		0	(Boxman-shabtai, 2019; Johnson, 2019; Johnson and Woodcock, 2019a, 2019b; Li, 2018; Martínez and Olsson, 2018; Wang, 2020; Woodcock and Johnson, 2019)	8	(Bishop, 2019; Cunningham and Craig, 2019; Friedländer, 2017; Hou <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Lu <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Tang <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	6
<b>Video content</b>	(Aran <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Ferchaud <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Fietkiewicz <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	3	(Fägersten, 2017; García-rapp, 2016; García-Rapp, 2017; Garcia-Rapp and Roc-Cuberes, 2017; Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009; Hou, 2019; Jorge <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Mardon <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Nicoll and Nansen, 2018; Postigo, 2014; Scolari and Fraticelli, 2019; Wotanis and Mcmillan, 2014)	12	(Bhatia, 2018; Biel and Gatica-perez, 2013; Friedländer, 2017; McRoberts <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	4
<b>Observations/ethnography</b>	(Sjöblom <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Yu <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	2	(Faas <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Garcia-Rapp and Roc-Cuberes, 2017; Guarriello, 2019; Hou, 2019; Johnson, 2019; Johnson and Woodcock, 2019b; Postigo, 2014; Wang, 2020; Woodcock and Johnson, 2019; Zhang and Hjorth, 2019; Zimmer, 2018)	11	(Ashman <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Bishop, 2019; Friedländer, 2017)	3
<b>Other digital content</b>		0	(Cullen and Ruberg, 2019; Deller and Murphy, 2019; Garcia-Rapp and Roc-Cuberes, 2017; Hou, 2019; Pellicone and Ahn, 2017; Postigo, 2014; Scolari and Fraticelli, 2019; Siutla, 2018; Wotanis and Mcmillan, 2014)	9	(Bhatia, 2018; Bishop, 2019; Cunningham and Craig, 2019; Friedländer, 2017)	4

**Table 5. Study 1: Domains of research**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Total of studies</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Empirical studies</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Non-empirical studies</b>	<b>%</b>
Behaviour & interaction	18	24	18	27.3	0	0
Media production – content practices and performance	18	24	15	22.7	3	33.3
Celebrity/popularity in video content creation	12	16	10	15.2	2	22.2
Work/entrepreneurship	7	9.3	5	7.6	2	22.2
Digital media - formats & structure	6	8	6	9.1	0	0
Commercial effects (branding & advertising/marketing)	6	8	6	9.1	0	0
Online communities	4	5.3	3	4.5	1	11.1
Economy & industries	4	5.3	3	4.5	1	11.1

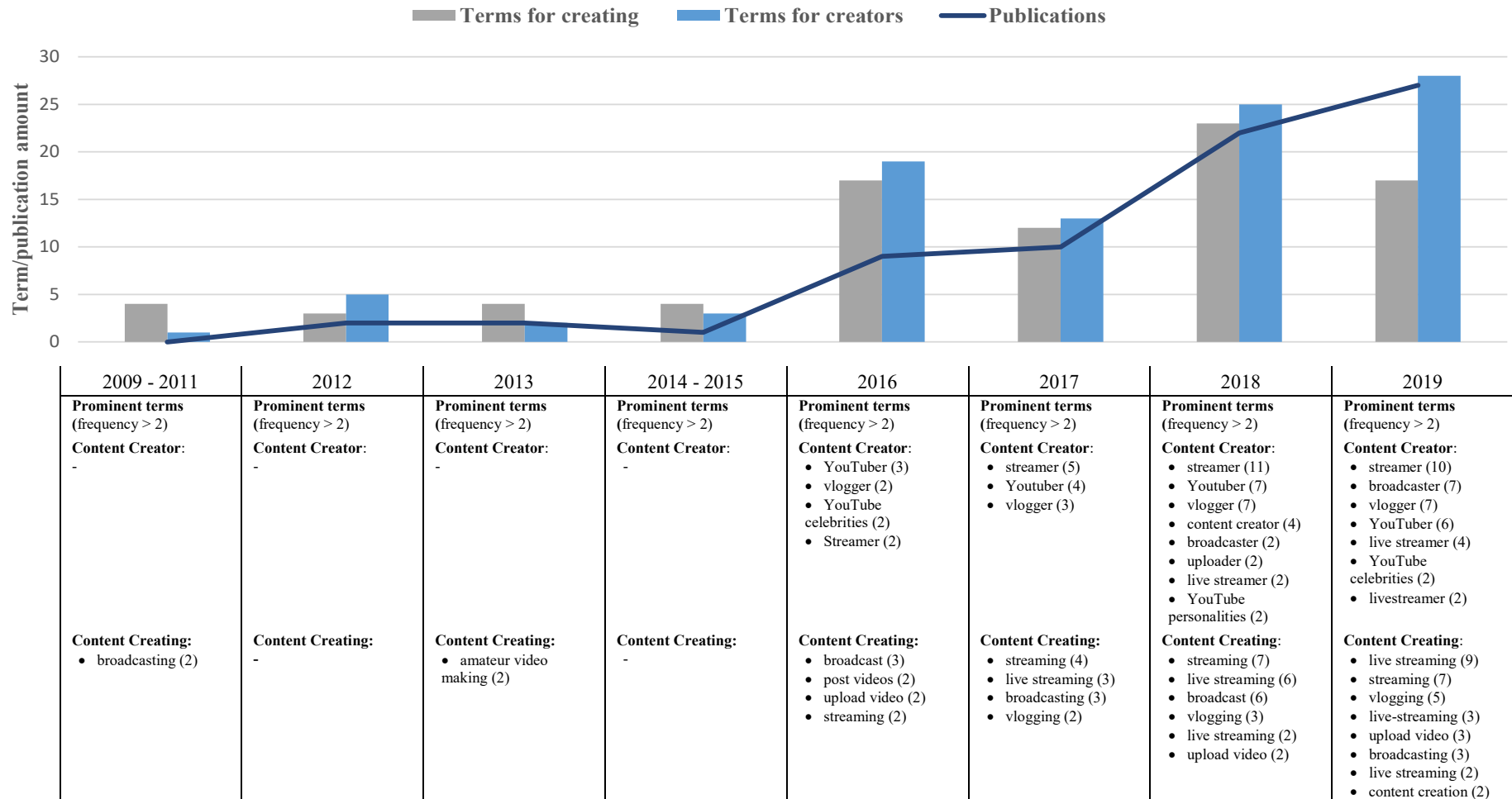
### 2.3.2 Study 1: Terminology & definitions

This section answers *RQ2* (How are the occupational elements of video content creation evident in the development of associated terminology?). For this study, the collection and analysis of terms and associated definitions of those terms was conducted to examine if elements of work, or the professional structures within the activity were evident in the development of the terminology, or within the established terminology. Terminology and terms are often used to describe human activities and possess the communicative power to organize and structure activities and reveal relationships forming within them (Cabr e, 1989). In order to distinguish and analyses the terminology used in the scope of digital video content creation, the papers were categorized based on the type of content or content creation they examined (synchronous, asynchronous, both or undefined), and terminology for content creation and content creator was collected from each paper. While some sources used different terminology synonymously to describe the same activity or the creator, these variations were also collected for analysis. The development of the terminology was contrasted to the number of publications per year and most

prominent terms per year (Figure 4). Table 6 also lists the most frequently used terminology. The full list of analyzed terms per year can be found in Appendix B.

The early terminology, as seen in Figure 4, reflects the emergence of the activity, with lesser fragmentation in terms from 2009 to 2015. Greater fragmentation of terminology appears with the increased research interest in the topic in 2016 as clearly seen in Figure 4. The terminology becomes more nuanced and descriptive of synchronous technology (live streaming) and popular platforms (YouTuber) or content (Vlogger). The development of terminology seems to reflect the increased popularity of the term “*streamer*” (29) or “*streaming*” (21), which have also become popular descriptive terms for video content creation in mainstream media. Upon closer examination of the available definitions, these terms seem to be used to describe the wider cultural context of video content creation (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017). Other established, specialized terms frequently examined in the reviewed literature, are *Vlogger/Vlogging* (which is abbreviated from Video blogger/video blogging) and *YouTuber*, which depict specific content types or the use of specific platforms and have been associated with the more established occupational content creation activities within mainstream media (Jerslev, 2016).

**Figure 4. Study 1: Number of terms for content creator and content creation per year displayed in columns and yearly growth of publications examined on the trendline**



The term “*broadcaster/broadcasting*” seems to be the most prominent term within the analysis with a direct association with our previous understanding of media work (Newby, 2006), where the term has been used to describe a broadcast media professional or the activity of delivering media content. In the collected data, the popularity of the term stays consistent with the increasing fragmentation and development of terminology, and from the occupational terms seems to be consistently used to describe the activity of creating video content. Based on the examination of available definitions for the terms, it seems to also be used as a descriptive term for the activity of media content delivery and the provider of content, for example: “Unlike other social media, the content on a live streaming platform is *broadcast* and viewed synchronously. *Broadcasters* can broadcast their own screens and receive live comments from viewers around the world.”(Zhao *et al.*, 2018). The examined definitions did not reveal a connection between the occupational characteristic of this specific term and the activity of video content creation within this review.

Other occupational or commercial terms associated with the content creator/content creation were terms reflecting celebrity (*YouTube celebrities*), the influencer culture (*YouTube influencer*) and entrepreneurship (*entrepreneurial broadcasters, entrepreneurial online video creators, entrepreneurial content creators*). The inner conflict of professional-amateur work within this activity is evident with the prominence of the term “amateur” (*amateur filmmaker, amateur videographers, amateur video making*) and hybrid terms such as “*semi-professional*” and “*amateur-experts*”. The occupational nuances seem to be more evident in the terminology for the content creator, also known as the professional, and the terminology for video content creation seems more fragmented and mechanically descriptive of the process of video content creation with terms such as upload video, create video content, post video and produce video.



**Table 6. Study 1: Terminology frequency**

<b>Terminology Synchronous</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Terminology asynchronous</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Terminology Both/unidentified</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Terminology content creator</b>					
Streamer	24	Vlogger	18	Streamer	5
Broadcaster	10	YouTuber	17	YouTuber	3
Live streamer	4	YouTube Celebrity	6	Vlogger	4
Live-streamer	1	Content creator	3	Content creator	2
Livestreamer	2	YouTube creator	3	Live streamer	2
		Creator	3		
		Uploader	2		
<b>Terminology content creation</b>					
Streaming	16	Vlogging	13	Content creation	2
Live streaming	14	Upload video	7	Live streaming	5
Broadcasting	13	Post video	4	Streaming	5
Live-streaming	6	Produce video	2	Broadcasting	2
Livestreaming	2	Upload content	2	Upload video	2
		Upload vlog	2		
		Broadcast	2		
		Amateur video making	2		
		Video blogging	2		
		Produce vlog	2		

A further analysis of the available definitions for the terms seem to have various ways in describing the occupational elements of this activity, and most are associated with the commercial aspects rather than the elements of organized work. For example, various definitions reflect the interaction with viewers and the revenue through interaction e.g. “In the live streaming platforms, online streamers can interact with viewers via various objects like audio, video, and text, and they attract a large scale of viewers by singing, chatting or shout-wheat. In return, every viewer can purchase and send virtual gifts during the live process, which is one of the most important business models in these live streaming platforms.” (Tu et al., 2018). And other definitions highlight the brands collaborations and commercial partnerships appearing in video content: “[a vlogger is define as an endorser] enjoys public recognition and

uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good, service, or brand by appearing with that good, service, or brand in a vlog post” (Munnukka *et al.*, 2019, p. 227).

### **2.3.3 Study 1: The theoretical and conceptual frameworks**

This section responds to *RQ3* (What theoretical frameworks have been utilized in the examination of video content creation as an occupational activity?). The examined literature presented great fragmentation in terms of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, which could be associated with the relatively novel and developing nature of the topic of video content creation as a hybrid form of labor and its commercial aspects. Only three frameworks were directly associated with elements of labor or work (Foucauldian neoliberal theory, affective labor, Hochschildt’s concept of emotional labor), which requested for a more thorough examination and analysis of the other theoretical and conceptual frameworks currently associated with the hybrid playbor evident in video content creation.

The prevalence of behavioral and psychological research within the examined literature was also evident in the analysis of theoretical and conceptual frameworks and the most frequent theoretical and conceptual frameworks (see Table 7) primarily focused on the psychological understanding of this phenomena or the examination of interactions and relationships within in the activity such as parasocial interaction (PSI) (Horton and Wohl, 1956) or parasocial relationships. The theoretical understanding of motivation was also evident in utilized theoretical frameworks such as Uses and Gratifications and Self-determination theory. In order to investigate the type of behavior examined in relation to video content creation, and its association to work, the empirical studies that utilized the most used motivation theories to examine specific motivational aspects, were analyzed further.

**Table 7. Study 1: Theoretical and conceptual frameworks**

<b>Theoretical framework</b>	<b>N</b>
Uses and Gratifications theory	5
Affordance theory	2
Field Theory	2
Self-determination theory (SDT)	2
<b>Other theoretical frameworks:</b>	
Big-Five framework of personality traits, Social comparison theory, Genre Theory, Credibility theory, Cognitive transactional theory, Balance theory, Media richness theory, Social presence theory, Cognitive load theory, Critical media industry studies (CMIS), Foucauldian neoliberal theory, Haidt's theory of moral emotions, The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT), Self-presentation theory, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Flow Theory	
<b>Conceptual framework</b>	<b>N</b>
Parasocial interactions	4
Parasocial relationships	3
<b>Other conceptual frameworks</b>	
Concept of persona, concept of mimesis, social support provision, affective labour, algorithmic gossip, Hochschild's concept of emotional labour, parasocial attributes	

Note: Nine studies utilized more than two theoretical or conceptual frameworks.

**Table 8. Study 1: Studies examining motivation**

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Theoretical/conceptual framework</b>	<b>Topic of examination</b>	<b>Motivations examined</b>
(Zhao <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	Self-determination theory	Video content creation	Challenge, task enjoyment, self-presentation, extrinsic reward, self-esteem, social benefits, feedback
(Törhönen <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Self-determination theory	Video content creation	Relaxation, self-expression, social interaction, altruism, skill development, career development, reputation, income
(Zimmer, 2018)	Uses and Gratifications	Video content creation	Entertainment, information, social interaction, self-presentation (Celebrity)
(Hou <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Uses and Gratifications	Viewing/consumption	Interactivity, social status, humour, sex appeal, flow, entertainment, social interaction, endorsement
(Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017)	Uses and Gratifications	Viewing/consumption	Affective (entertainment), cognitive (learning& information gathering), personal integrative, social integrative, tension release
(Gros <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	Uses and Gratification	Viewing/consumption	Entertainment, information, socialisation
(Wohn <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	Social support	Viewing/endorsement	Entertainment, support (content improvement), learning, attachment, interaction, support (offline actions)

Upon further inspection (see Table 8), out of the seven papers that examined motivation, three papers examined the motivation behind video content creation (e.g. Task enjoyment, social interaction, enjoyment etc.) and each of those papers also examined motivations related to work (e.g. income or extrinsic reward from the activity, challenge and skill or career development).

The rest of the examined papers focused on the viewing/consumption behavior on video content platforms and its relation to video content creators. The examined motivational aspects examined in viewers primarily focused on the elements that motivate further viewing and engagement behavior, and only one of the papers (Wohn *et al.*, 2018) had examined the motivation to view and endorse a video content, which would provide direct monetary value for the content creator.

#### **2.3.4 Study 1: The outcomes and the nature of occupational video content creation**

This section responds to *RQ4* (How are the occupational activities related to video content creation perceived within the examined literature in relation to the discussion of the activity as exploitative work or as an entrepreneurial form of creative labor?). As discussed earlier in this paper, digital content creation activities associated with digital economies such as the platform economy (Andersson Schwarz, 2017) have also been associated with commodifying or exploitative features (Scholz, 2012; Smythe, 1977; Terranova, 2000), as they are often seen as “free” and afford several enjoyable/entertaining experiences, and create dimensions with social and communal aspects. However as the occupational elements and user centric revenue models of online platforms develop, these activities have also been increasingly considered as novel forms of creative work in related research (Banks and Deuze, 2009; van Dijck, 2009; Fuchs, 2014). As the development of this type of framing can extend our understanding of this digital activity as work, the outcomes of the examined sources were categorized based on their

perception of the activity as commodifying/exploitative work, as productive creative work or as other/neutral.

Although the debate around exploitative/commodifying aspects of digital platforms and interaction has been ongoing for the last decade (van Dijck, 2009; Fuchs, 2014; Postigo, 2014; Scholz, 2012; Smythe, 1977; Terranova, 2000), the development of this perspective in the context of video content creation seems to have stabilized in the last few years (see Table 9). From the analyzed papers, ten provide outcomes related to the exploitative nature of the activity, with three papers highlighting issues related to commodifying the increased sense of intimacy generated through video content creation and the digital environments, and three papers focus on the commercial impact of video content creators on children or young people. The papers draw on concepts such as affective labor (Woodcock and Johnson, 2019) and neoliberal work (Ashman *et al.*, 2018) but also utilize more novel concepts such as parasocial intimacy (Johnson and Woodcock, 2019b) and autpreneurs (Ashman *et al.*, 2018) to reflect on the commodifying nature of the activity.

**Table 9. Study 1: Research outcomes perspective**

Year	Commodifying digital labour		Neutral/other approach		Creative work	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
2019	3	30	13	28.3	11	57.9
2018	3	30	15	32.6	4	21.1
2017	1	10	7	15.2	2	10.5
2016	2	20	5	10.9	2	10.5
2014	0	0	2	4.3	0	0
2013	1	10	1	2.2	0	0
2012	0	0	2	4.3	0	0
2009	0	0	1	2.2	0	0

**Table 10. Study 1: Thematic categories of outcomes**

<b>Occupational aspects of video content creation</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Commercial aspects of video content creation</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>n</b>
Professional strategies and practices	13	Commercial elements within video content creation	10	Motivation (to produce or consume)	7
Elements/creation of popularity	9	The commercial effect of interaction or relationships	7	Content structure	4
Occupational elements/structures	7	Authenticity and its commercial effects	2	Interaction within video content creation	4
Celebrity (forms and structures)	5	Economic structures	2	Performance elements of video content creation	3
Video content creation as work	5			Video content creation and identity	3
				Video content creation and regulations	3
				Video content creation and community	2
				Social impact of video content creation	1
				Video content creation and learning	1

Instead the perception of video content creation as a novel form of creative work has gained significant popularity over the last few years, and significant growth in this perception can be seen during 2019. The examined papers in this category highlighted themes such as new forms of celebrity, through concepts such as celebrification (Jerslev, 2016) and micro-celebrity, and also the branding effect and role of video content creators as unique influencers to their audiences. The papers in this category also examined practices and performance elements within video content creation, as well as strategies involved in the activity. The papers considered as neutral/other, either did not present the activity as purely work or did not represent either of the ends of the dichotomy between exploitative work or creative work.

The outcomes of the examined literature were also categorized based on the underlying theme of the examined outcome and the final categories were grouped based on their alignment to three groups: occupational/commercial/other. It should be noted that some outcomes represented more than one thematic category, this was most prominent in papers examining

behavior or social interaction and the effects of those on elements such as commercial gain or popularity.

The analysis discovered numerous outcomes highlighting commercial aspects and occupational strategies as seen in Table 10. The themes presented in the occupational category primarily highlighted the development of professional strategies and practices that could further the occupational elements of this activity, such as incorporation strategies related to collaborations, cross platform use and algorithms (Arnett *et al.*, 2019; Bishop, 2019; Koch *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, the commercial category highlighted findings related to the different elements enabling commercial gain from video content creation such as platform elements and (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019) and the impact of relationships and interaction in relation to commercial gain, such as the role of parasocial interaction and relationships on commercial gain (Munnukka *et al.*, 2019; Rihl and Wegener, 2019; Wohn *et al.*, 2018; Woodcock and Johnson, 2019).

## **2.4 Study 1: Discussion**

This literature review examined the existing literature on the increasing professionalization of video content creation (75) and the perceptions of the activity as a form of labor or work, by analyzing the research interest, the development of terminology, theoretical and conceptual frameworks utilized in the existing literature and the outcomes of the literature. Although the findings indicate a significant development in the research interest in this topic, they also reveal fragmentation in the associated terminology as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks utilized to examine the topic. The results also indicate some overarching narratives, especially in relation to the importance of social interaction and their impact on the commercial development of the activity as well as the development of this activity as a form of entrepreneurial work.

### 2.4.1 Study 1: The development of occupational video content creation

The increasing popularity and development of amateur video content creation can be seen in the development of the research interest on the occupational, commercial and strategic aspects of this activity. The amount of empirical and non-empirical research papers has clearly increased after 2016 and the research highlights an interest in the domain of social interaction and behavior within the activity as well as on the media production aspects of the activity.

The terminology for video content creation was found to be fragmented. Moreover, the increase in publications has enhanced this fragmentation, instead of providing clarity and structure to the terms associated with the activity. The terminology analysis revealed various nuanced terms related to the occupational and commercial aspects of the activity (e.g. celebrity, entrepreneurship, amateur content production) and the findings seem to indicate an ongoing development of terminology for this nascent phenomenon, which may be associated with the emergent nature of this activity and the occupational aspects associated with it.

However, the findings yield interesting observations about the culture of occupational video content creation, by underlining the development of a hybrid form of work and play in terms mixing the “amateur” and “professional” elements e.g. “*semi-professional*” and “*amateur-experts*”. The fragmentation and overlap of terminology for video content creation as a leisure activity and the more occupational aspects of video content creation may point to a certain trade-off between work and leisure terminologies. This suggests the way future hybrid forms of work may be represented but may also lead to issues in recognizing the activity as more legitimate form of work, or the lack of necessary visibility and support for the occupational sides of the activity, which may lead to issues related to work life balance (Parkin, 2018).



#### **2.4.2 Study 1: The commercial agenda within video content creation**

The analysis of theoretical frameworks utilized to examine the occupational and commercial elements of video content creation within the examined sources, also revealed fragmentation in the development of more theoretical and conceptual understanding of this activity and a lack of theoretical and conceptual frameworks directly related to the examination of occupational structures and elements within this activity. Similarly, as in the research domains, most theoretical and conceptual frameworks emphasized the analysis of behaviors and social interactions within video content creation, which were also evident in the outcomes of the examined sources. However, a deeper analysis of the use of the theoretical frameworks and the outcomes of the sources revealed commercial and occupational implications and uses.

Analyzing the motivational theories used in the sources revealed that most of those papers examined some occupational elements as motivations to generate video content. Similarly, papers using the conceptual framework of parasocial interaction or parasocial relationships were found to deliver implications related to the commercial impacts of these. Although the analysis indicated that various sources examined this potential commercial impact of social interaction and behavior, the findings also revealed that the activity was primarily perceived as neutral or creative entrepreneurial work, rather than commodifying at its core. However, it should be noted that the sources that examined the more commodifying elements of video content creation did emphasize the added commodifying impact generated by the intimate nature of video content creation and the social relations present in the activity.

Based on the findings of this study and the overall fragmentation seen in the results, the occupational structures of video content creation seem to be developing rapidly, but further research on this topic is necessary in order for more legitimate professional aspects and structures to develop within the digital economies and environments. There is a clear need for

more economic research on the structures of video content creation in different regions and within the digital spheres. It is also evident that the management of parasocial relationships and the audience is becoming a more significant determinant in the pursuit of commercial gain and a career in video content creation, increasing the level of strategy, entrepreneurial skill as well as social skill required in this hybrid digital profession. As the occupational characteristics of the activity develop and more services become available with user-centric revenue share and interactive features, there is a need to extend the understanding of social interaction (e.g. parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships), the value and workload associated with managing them. This calls for more research focusing on the value creation and the digital economy forming around the activity, as well as the organizational structures, managerial and entrepreneurial aspects of the activity. This type of research could alleviate some of the current evident issues in the occupational endeavors of video content creators, such as mental health issues, fatigue and unstructured work conditions (Parkin, 2018). They could also enhance the understanding of the material and the immaterial value associated with this type of content creation, as well as audience work/interaction associated with the attention economy. This in turn could provide more information about what these types of hybrid forms of work, such as playbor, mean in the future and how they contribute to the future organization of work and also to the power-balance between different entities involved in the commercial processes related to these activities.

## **2.5 Study 1: Conclusions**

Online video content creation as an amateur media production activity, merges elements of work and play. Whereas the research interest in the characteristics of work within video content creation has clearly increased within the last decade, there seems to be a need for more variety in research but also more structure in the type of research that is conducted related to this

emerging digital profession. This is especially evident in the findings related to the domains of research, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and outcomes examined in the reviewed literature, which highlight a trend in the examination of social interaction and behavior within the activity but also their association and impact on the commercial objectives of the activity. These findings emphasize the importance of social interaction in the creation of commercial gain, which require a level of strategy and community management from the video content creator and extend the entrepreneurial aspects of this activity, however more research is needed in the future, examining how these activities are organized, where the value of this type of activity is formed and the power-balance of different entities (e. g. platforms, service providers, content creators and audiences).

The findings of the study also found that video content creation as an occupation is increasingly perceived as creative entrepreneurial work, instead of commodifying labor, but it should be noted that this paper primarily focused on examining the perception of the activity of video content creation, not the activity of consuming video content creation or being susceptible to commercial content within it. The commodification of the audience is another aspect of this activity that could be examined further in the future, as the platforms for sharing video content become more user centric in their approach. Further research is therefore needed on the economic structures surrounding video content creators as entrepreneurs and their forms of work, but also on the material and immaterial value of their audiences.

The examination of terminology and definitions within the reviewed literature indicates the emergence of dedicated terminology for the activity, that has taken on descriptive terms of our previous understanding of media production work. However, the terms examined in the reviewed literature describe the activity instead of specific occupational activities or clearly emerging professions. The term “Streamer/streaming” seems to have established itself as a term

to depict the overall cultural context for the activity at large, whereas more specific terms such as “vlogger/YouTuber/live streamer” depict the development of sub-cultures within this activity. The fragmentation of terminology also examined in the reviewed literature, presented some limitations to this study, as the fragmented terminology used in the context of video content creation, especially regionally, limits the results of this study to examine sources found based on the most popular terms for the activity. However, it should be noted, that this study aimed to examine the most common terminology and the nuances of work within the development of that terminology. The use of English in this study also limits the terminology to only English sources, and therefore may limit the cultural and geographical context of this study.

As the literature review for this study was conducted as a combination of a scoping review and theoretical review, the aim of the study was to gather a representative sample of available literature which would provide an initial indication of the nature of the research available of this topic (Paré *et al.*, 2015). It should be noted that the sample may not include all available literature on this topic, and a systematic literature review should be carried out as this activity develops further and gains more extensive research. Furthermore, this study did not include research on the amateur video work within the field of mature video content. Mature video content creation was excluded from this study to better define the activity into amateur video content creation that is accessible and allowed for wider audiences and that can be distributed through the most prominent video sharing platforms such as YouTube and Twitch. We acknowledge that the occupational characteristics of video content creation are evident in mature amateur video content, but the characteristics, platforms and regulations would require a separate examination in the future.

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### **3 Study 2: Content versus community focus in live streaming services: how to drive engagement in synchronous social media**

(with Welf H. Weiger, Maria Törhönen, and Juho Hamari)

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Keywords: Streaming; Influencers; Engagement; Social Media; Community; Content

### 3.1 Study 2: Introduction

Live streaming—the simultaneous broadcast and consumption of digital media in real time (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017)—is a rapidly growing social media service fueled by emerging technologies. Its recent gains in popularity are evidenced by the burgeoning interest of both viewers (Statista, 2020) and marketers (Appel *et al.*, 2020) in social live-streaming services. For instance, the most successful video game streaming platform Twitch, accounted for over 2.1 million concurrent viewers in 2020, an increase of 69% compared to the previous year (TwitchTracker, 2021).

The key aspect differentiating social live streams<sup>1</sup> from other popular media forms, such as TV or video on demand (Schweidel and Moe, 2016), is that the streaming and the consumption of content occur in real time. This allows for real-time social interactions between content creators (i.e., streamers) and their respective viewer communities through, for example, live chat features. By utilizing such social media functionalities, streamers allow the community to shape and co-create their content; this unique multilateral communication is a critical factor in the swift growth of demand for live streams (Aleti *et al.*, 2019; Hamilton *et al.*, 2014).

Live streaming attracts an ever-expanding army of content creators from a wide range of genres, including gaming, music, and crafting. Indeed, the number of streamers on Twitch increased by 90% in 2020, well exceeding the rise in viewership (TwitchTracker, 2021). Moreover, nearly 88% of viewers are distributed among just 10% of streamers, resulting in an unbalanced “superstar market” (Zhao *et al.*, 2018). This fierce competition is intensified by the fact that live streams represent promising revenue channels through novel monetization structures (Törhönen *et al.*, 2021). For example, the video game streamer Ninja earns over

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<sup>1</sup> Note that we use the terms “social live streams” and “live streams” interchangeably in this paper.

\$500,000 a month through ad revenue, sponsorship deals, and viewer donations and subscriptions (Webb, 2019).

Nascent research in this area has thus far tended to focus on how a viewer's motivation for watching live streams leads to engagement behaviors that affect the stream's financial outcomes, either indirectly (through viewing activities) or directly (through subscriptions and donations) (e.g., Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017; Lin *et al.*, 2021). At the same time, other related research has examined how the linguistic style of social media influencers drives word of mouth (Aleti *et al.*, 2019). Though their findings are indeed important, these studies have neglected to address how streamers should communicate with their viewers to increase non-monetary and monetary engagement. To close this gap, this study examines the impact of different streaming communication foci and styles on streamer-beneficial user engagement (i.e., viewing and donating).

Communication focus refers to the objects around which streamers choose to center their content. This is in congruence with research identifying verbal elements as key success factors for driving customer behavior in online environments where the scope of sensory experiences is limited (Bleier *et al.*, 2019; Elder *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, a streamer can practice community-focused communication, emphasizing interaction with viewers by responding to questions and requests posted in the live chat, and/or content-focused communication, prioritizing the live stream's focal activity, such as gameplay commentary (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019). Here we examine whether these communication foci affect viewership and donations. This leads to the first research question:

*RQ1.* How do community-focused and content-focused communication influence user engagement with the stream?



At the same time, this research considers a streamer's communication style, which is understood as the unique ways in which they interact with viewers. Accordingly, community- and content-focused communication can be conveyed in a style that is either predominantly educational (utilitarian superior) or entertaining (hedonically superior) (Roggeveen *et al.*, 2015). This is in line with prior research that has identified educational and entertaining aspects of live streaming as drivers of viewer engagement (e.g., Hamilton *et al.* 2014). Hence, we expect that the choice of communication style—that is, whether the streamer provides utilitarian or hedonic value—may play a role in how communication foci affect the engagement outcomes mentioned above (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; van der Heijden, 2004). Arguing that the extent by which useful aspects exceed entertaining ones determines the informational value that a viewer draws from the stream, this study concentrates on the moderating role of utilitarian superiority (Andel *et al.*, 2020; Cheung and Huang, 2011; Diwanji *et al.*, 2019; Roggeveen *et al.*, 2015; Scheibe *et al.*, 2016). Hence, the second research question is as follows:

*RQ2.* How does a utilitarian-superior communication style moderate the impact of communication focus on user engagement?

To address these research questions, we analyze data from a two-wave questionnaire dealing with viewers' perceptions of streamer communications and their actual engagement toward a specific stream(er). The empirical results show that community-focused communication is positively associated with viewing but negatively influences donations to the stream, which is even exacerbated when combined with a utilitarian-superior style. In contrast, content-focused communication positively influences donating—a beneficial effect that can be leveraged when paired with a utilitarian-superior style—but harms viewing activities.

This study contributes in various ways to research on engagement in social media in general and the emerging literature on live streaming specifically. First, we elaborate on the

conceptual foundations of engagement in synchronous social media, an emerging form of social media service that allows for the real-time creation and consumption of content and facilitates value co-creation. In doing so, we discuss how synchronous social media provide a platform for simultaneous customer engagement behaviors. Second, this study represents the first empirical account on communication foci and styles as levers for driving engagement with live streams. More precisely, this study expands research on the impact of marketer actions on engagement in asynchronous social media (e.g., social networking sites such as Facebook; Aleti *et al.* 2019; Weiger *et al.* 2018) by identifying how content creators should design their communications to drive engagement in the context of synchronous social media (i.e., social live-streaming services such as Twitch). Third, the conceptual foundation and findings from our empirical study provide implications for researchers and marketing managers beyond the context of social live streaming. Thus, we reveal clear directions for research concerned with communication tactics in synchronous social media and give actionable advice for practitioners concerned with the marketing of service and product brands and how they can deploy live-streaming features for enhancing the distribution of their offerings.

This paper is organized as follows: we first establish a foundation by conceptualizing engagement behaviors in asynchronous and synchronous social media, then presenting social live-streaming services as the research context. This is followed by the development of the research model and the underlying hypotheses. Using a multi-wave survey study, we then empirically evaluate the hypotheses. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results and implications of the findings for researchers, society, and practitioners.

### **3.2 Study 2: Conceptual foundations of engagement behaviors in asynchronous and synchronous social media**

Although technology-facilitated real-time interactions are not a new phenomenon (see, e.g., Internet Relay Chats), those enabled by synchronous social media are unique in that they center on publicly available, collectively consumed and created content. This constitutes a novel form of social media that allows for new facets of engagement behaviors, namely simultaneous social interactions and co-creation (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019). In the following, we connect such engagement in synchronous social media to conceptual literature on customer engagement behavior both within and beyond the social media context.

In their seminal article, van Doorn *et al.* (2010) defined customer engagement behavior as “behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (p. 254). It is worth noting that although such initial engagement research specified the exclusion of purchase behaviors, more recent studies have also considered monetary, transaction-related behaviors such as purchases and donations to be manifestations of customer engagement (Meire *et al.*, 2019; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Due to the broad conception of engagement, social media research has associated it with a wide variety of activities directed toward a brand. These range from consumptive and rather private behaviors—for example, reading a brand’s post (e.g., Manchanda *et al.*, 2015) or following a brand on social media (John *et al.*, 2017)—to more productive and rather public behaviors, such as liking or commenting on a brand’s post (e.g., Wirtz *et al.*, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2018). In the novel context of real-time interactions, these engagement behaviors become increasingly intertwined. Against this background, the following sections characterize engagement in asynchronous and synchronous social media to provide a conceptual foundation for this study’s research context.

### **3.2.1 Study 2: Differences between engagement in asynchronous and synchronous social media**

Traditional social media services such as networking (e.g., Facebook), content sharing (e.g., YouTube), and microblogging (e.g., Instagram) are characterized by an inherent temporal separation of content creation and consumption—that is, they are asynchronous. More precisely, this means that content is not consumed immediately upon creation and the creator receives no live audience feedback. For instance, when a content creator posts a video on YouTube, it must be uploaded, converted to an optimal streaming format, and published on his/her profile before it is disseminated across followers' newsfeeds or suggested to non-followers based on the platform's algorithm. Afterward, users can decide to engage with the video by, for example, watching it or liking and commenting on it.

The aforementioned disparity between content creation and consumption does not apply to emerging synchronous social media services, as they allow content to be consumed *while* it is being created. For instance, when a content creator's stream goes live on Twitch or TikTok, followers are notified instantly and can watch in real time. While viewing the live stream, they can interact with the creator or other viewers via communication tools such as live chats. In the same vein, the content creator receives feedback in real time and can therefore react to users' interactions and comments, allowing more personalized social interactions to evolve. This example illustrates that in the context of synchronous social media, content creation and consumption become a singular instance and a collective co-creation experience (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019).

### **3.2.2 Study 2: Constituting characteristics of synchronous social media**

In light of the foregoing discussion, we propose the following constituting characteristics and consequences of engagement in synchronous social media. First, synchronous social media

enable communications among viewers in the form of real-time n:n interactions, as opposed to the temporally separate 1:n interactions typical of asynchronous social media platforms (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). Such real-time n:n interactions facilitate increased collective value creation in the context of social media brand communities (Schau *et al.*, 2009), representing a novel dimension of interaction and communication possibilities. Furthermore, synchronous social media foster social dynamics (Moe and Trusov, 2011), as they allow content creators to interact with and follow exchanges among users in real time, adapting their content accordingly. As a result, content is better tailored and thus more relevant to viewers.

Second, synchronous social media allow for a more direct means of communication between content creators and users. Although this necessarily implies that creator-user touchpoints are limited, the exchanges that do take place are more intensive and authentic. The limited nature of interactions in synchronous social media is accentuated by the content's ephemerality, as it is only briefly accessible. This impermanence results in an "in situ experience" that entails the creation of a unique, collectively observed event, fundamentally changing the user perception of social experiences (Bayer *et al.*, 2016), thus demanding a renewed view of academia's understanding of such experiences. This is in line with previous research, which has identified the ephemerality of goods and services to be a critical factor in explaining consumer behavior across various contexts, including luxury brands (Berthon *et al.*, 2009) and pop-up stores (Robertson *et al.*, 2018). It is noteworthy that it is the emerging synchronous social media that are characterized by ephemeral content; newer platforms, such as Snapchat and Twitch, focus increasingly on evanescent social experiences. In contrast, asynchronous social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, typically host social information archives. However, these traditional services have started to adapt by implementing ephemeral features that allow users to live stream or post content that disappears after 24 hours (e.g., Instagram Stories).

Third, synchronous social media allow for increased co-creation of value as compared to traditional social media. From a service-dominant (S-D) logic informed engagement perspective (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019), a user becomes the co-creator of value by engaging with the content creator and other users in the synchronous social media service. While this also holds true for traditional social media, the conditions in synchronous social media are more favorable for facilitating co-creation. Co-creation describes users' perceived value arising from interactive, collaborative, or personalized brand-related activities for or with participants in service systems (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 2016). Building on the previous constituting characteristics, synchronous social media represent an ideal service to facilitate such brand-related activities. Real-time n:n communications with other users, authentic creator-user touchpoints, as well as dynamic adaptation of content based on live user feedback entail a paramount foundation to facilitate interactive, collaborative, and personalized activities. Thus, synchronous social media are capable of establishing and facilitating the benefits of co-creation, which has been identified as a key success factor of digital service offerings (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2018; Sjödin *et al.*, 2020).

These constituting characteristics uncover drivers of continuous growth in synchronous social media but they also highlight it as a potent instrument for corporations to enrich their digital service offerings (Jaakkola *et al.*, 2015). In sum, engagement in synchronous social media can be understood as real-time interactions revolving around the content creator or the creator's community while the content is being created and disseminated.

### **3.3 Study 2: Research Framework**

#### **3.3.1 Study 2: Research context: engagement behaviors in social live-streaming services**

Social live-streaming services (SLSs) represent a typical form of synchronous social media and the research context for this study; the following section examines representative manifestations

of engagement behavior on such platforms. Prior research has established that engagement behaviors in social media enhance firm performance, as they improve customer-brand relationships (Ma *et al.*, 2015), and sales (Manchanda *et al.*, 2015). Beyond the possibility of generating such “social dollars” through engagement-fueled sales, dedicated platforms also offer individual content providers a means of monetization based on their reach (Schumann *et al.*, 2014) and content delivered (Manchanda *et al.*, 2015; Park *et al.*, 2018). Against this background, SLSs such as Twitch have emerged. By design, they allow for real-time engagement behaviors and are therefore defined as platforms facilitating broadcasts of concurrent content creation and consumption (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017). In other words, while the streamer produces the video content, it is simultaneously consumed by users who in turn interact with the streamer or other users. Streamers typically use microphones and webcams to communicate with users, allowing for readily adaptable content creation and for social interactions that are highly vivid and responsive.

Accordingly, SLS platforms utilize the unique characteristics of synchronous social media to enable the different characteristic engagement behaviors that define the success of a social live stream, namely viewing and donating. First, they allow for the simultaneous viewing and creating of content, which facilitates other real-time interactions. Hence, the number of viewers (or passive users) is a more meaningful performance indicator than it is in asynchronous contexts, such as total number of impressions of written content and total views on an on-demand video. Second, viewers can donate to streamers via various means. Typically, a donor’s (user)name is displayed prominently during the video stream. Furthermore, the donor often has the option to attach a message that will be read aloud or highlighted, thus granting deeper involvement with the streamer in return for the support. Engaging with donations can also enable viewers to actively shape and influence content, as the associated messages give them a chance not only to communicate appreciation but also to pose questions regarding the

streamer's content, personal life, or opinions. Third, direct communication is made possible via a live chat that is exclusive to a single stream and allows viewers to engage with the streamer and other audience members in real time. Being able to read this live chat, the streamer can react to the current discussion and respond to questions. Such real-time communications may be especially valuable for viewers, as situational and contextual factors are taken into consideration. However, the real-time nature of live streams forces the streamer to choose the degree to which their communications center on the stream's focal content and/or community of viewers. At the same time, the streamer is faced with a trade-off between communication styles.

### **3.3.2 Study 2: Theoretical research model**

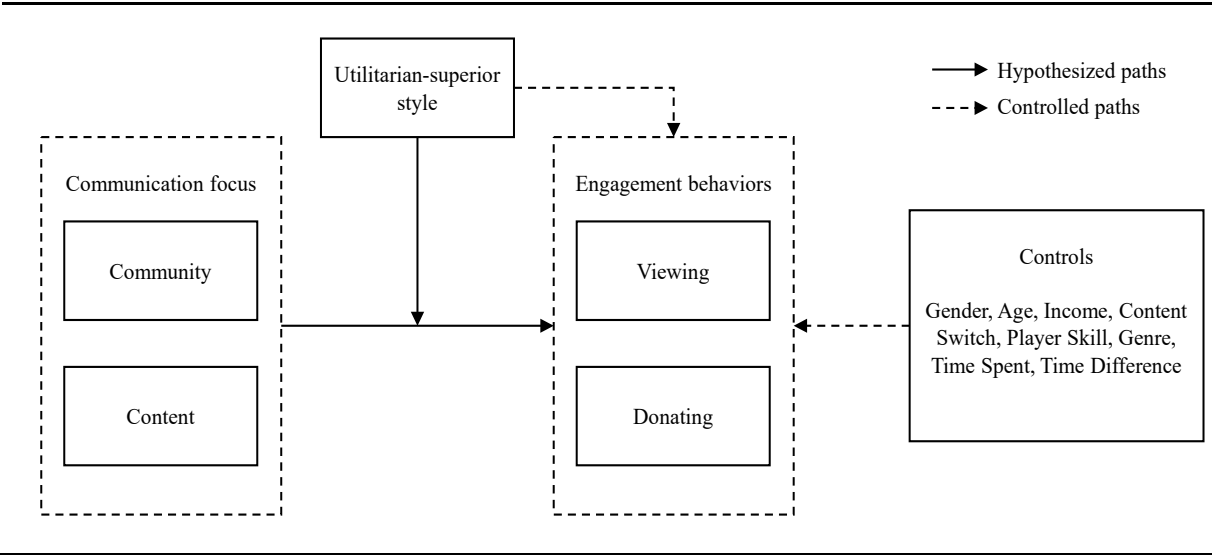
The goal of this study is to examine how streamers can drive engagement based on their communication foci under consideration of their communication styles. As discussed above, views and donations represent two important manifestations of engagement behavior and are thus considered dependent variables in the research model (see Figure 5).

In line with prior social media research (e.g., Weiger *et al.*, 2018) this study draws on self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan and Deci, 2000) to explain how a streamer's communication foci can assist viewers in satisfying psychological needs and spur internal motivations for engagement behavior. More precisely, these behaviors are internally motivated as they satisfy the need for relatedness (i.e., perceptions of belonging to a social group) and the need for competence (i.e., to feel effective in one own's behavior) (Deci and Ryan, 2008). This is consistent with previous research that has identified the satisfaction of social integrative and cognitive needs as the prevalent motivational drivers for engaging with live streams (Hilvert-



Bruce *et al.*, 2018; Hu *et al.*, 2017; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017).<sup>2</sup> For instance, to satisfy the need for relatedness, viewers interested in gaming may engage with live streams where the focus is on collaborative gameplay which enhances perceptions of belonging to a community (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2017). Further, viewers may satisfy their need for competence by engaging with live streamers who focus on skill-building through their communication on the focal content. To link the theoretical underpinnings of self-determination theory to prior findings of live-streaming literature, the focal research model thus incorporates *community-focused* and *content-focused communication* as the main drivers of viewer behavior. Note that we conceptualize communication foci as two co-existing tactics employed by streamers that are independent of each other. As such, it is possible that high (low) community-focused and high (low) content-focused communication occur for one streamer at the same time.

**Figure 5. Study 2: Research model**



<sup>2</sup> Note, while this study focuses on relatedness and competence needs, SDT also considers the need for autonomy (i.e., desire to experience behaviors as self-chosen and expressing the self) as a third basic psychological need (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Engaging with live streams represents a self-chosen and interest-driven leisure activity, for which autonomy levels are uniformly high among individuals (Leveresen *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, previous research on social live streaming has also concentrated on how the satisfaction of the needs for relatedness and competence drives behavior.

Moreover, the two communication foci can be carried out in different styles, meaning that a streamer adopts either a particularly utilitarian or hedonic style, but usually not both at the same time (Cheung and Huang, 2011). This study concentrates on utilitarian value, as it should play a more powerful role in guiding viewer behavior because it supports user self-development (e.g., Scheibe *et al.*, 2016; Diwanji *et al.*, 2019). That is, the research model considers *utilitarian-superior style* as a moderator representing a hedonic–utilitarian spectrum with utilitarian-superior style at the upper end and hedonic-superior style at the lower end. Besides these main variables of interest, the model controls for user demographics and streamer-specific variables, such as genre or recent content switches. The following section discusses how streamers can employ communication foci and styles to drive engagement with their stream.

### **3.3.3 Study 2: Hypotheses**

*The impact of community-focused communication.* Prior research has identified social integration to be critical for non-monetary live stream engagement (e.g., Hilvert-Bruce *et al.* 2018). Hence, if streamers focus their communication on social interactions with their viewers (i.e., their community) it is likely to affect viewer engagement. Such community-focused communication refers to frequent referencing and inclusion of as well as calling out to specific viewers to establish a sense of social belonging (Deci and Ryan, 2008). This steady interaction with the audience makes a viewer feel like part of the community (Schau *et al.*, 2009). Thus, streamers who employ community-focused communication have the potential to satisfy users' need for relatedness, which spurs internal motivation to view their streams more (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Hence:

*H1:* Community-focused communication has a positive effect on viewing.

In the same vein, such communication may cause viewers to financially support the streamer by donating to express their appreciation for the streamer's efforts of upkeep of the community. Accordingly, one might argue that financially supporting or "reimbursing" the streamer might make users feel more as a part of the community by accumulating social capital (Mathwick *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, initial research suggests that sense of a community and social integrative needs are positively associated with donations (Gros *et al.*, 2017; Guarriello, 2019; Hilvert-Bruce *et al.*, 2018). The consensus of these studies' findings is that donations provide means to satisfy relatedness needs as for each donation, the donating user's name and message is prominently displayed and highlighted by the streamer. Thus, viewers are motivated to donate as it enables them a means of asking questions, socializing, and greater involvement with the streamer.

However, if the streamer readily provides such social interactions via high community-focused communication (e.g., proactively calling out viewers of the stream and thereby integrating them in the community), viewers might reduce their donations as they no longer appear to be necessary because their relatedness needs are already satisfied. In other words, with higher community-focused communication on part of the streamer, viewers don't feel the need to "exploit" donations as a means of social integration in the stream's community.

Furthermore, adjacent research on reciprocal behavior in the context of free service provision has found that users feel reduced indebtedness and therefore are less likely to engage in reciprocal behavior when they perceive the costs on part of the service provider to be low (Schumann *et al.*, 2014). Translated to the context of the present study, it is reasonable to assume that a streamer can easily and spontaneously grant viewers the feeling of belonging to a streamer's community. Thus, viewers may not perceive community-focused communication as a complex and costly task that incurs strong feelings of indebtedness. Considering this, viewers should be less inclined to provide monetary reimbursement for streamers with a heavy

community focus. Along these lines, we anticipate viewers to curb their associated monetary activities if the streamer is concerned only with social aspects, as pure socializing requires no intense preparation or resources. Moreover, monetary reimbursement in such cases might yet undermine satisfying the need for relatedness, because paying to be part of the community threatens members' accrued cultural capital and status (Schau *et al.*, 2009).

Although we have discussed competing reasonings for the relationship between community-focused communications and donations, we argue that the potential negative effect dominates the potential positive one because the decreased relevance of donations as an interaction tool and the simplicity of employing community-focused communication undermine reciprocal monetary behavior on part of the viewers. Consequently, we propose that the net effect of streaming with a strong community focus on donating will be negative:

*H2: Community-focused communication has a negative effect on donating.*

*The impact of content-focused communication.* Streamers also frequently elaborate on the central activity of the stream and showcase the associated skills required (e.g., gaming). Therefore, viewers turn to live streams to satisfy their cognitive needs as well (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017). By focusing their communications on the stream's content, streamers help their viewers learn more about it, supporting individual self-development in that specific field. Based on SDT it can be suggested that if an activity promotes an individual's self-development, it may satisfy the need for competence and the individual will engage in that activity more often and/or longer, which in this case means increased viewing behavior (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that a viewer who experiences high satisfaction of the need for competence would want to ensure that the streamer continues to provide such helpful content in the future. Therefore, the viewer is likely to reciprocate by engaging in monetary activities

to support the stream and help maintain its quality and longevity. Thus, the following pair of hypotheses is proposed:

*H3:* Content-focused communication has a positive effect on viewing.

*H4:* Content-focused communication has a positive effect on donating.

*The moderating role of utilitarian-superior communication style.* This study draws on the concept of utilitarian and hedonic values from marketing literature (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Chiu *et al.*, 2014) to consider these two aspects in the context of a streamer's communication style. While utilitarian value describes how useful, beneficial, practical, and intelligent a service or product is, hedonic value describes how pleasant, agreeable, and harmonious it is (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Roggeveen *et al.*, 2015). Recent findings of streaming literature and adjacent research fields affirm the consideration of this concept. Although using different terminology for important drivers of user behavior, such as perceived learning, extraversion, conscientiousness, satisfaction, information rewards and social presence (Andel *et al.*, 2020; Diwanji *et al.*, 2019; Scheibe *et al.*, 2016), their semantic contents align with utilitarian and hedonic values.

Employing a more utilitarian style combined with a community focus might enable the streamer to support more intensive and collaborative interactions among community members further satisfying relatedness needs (Weiger *et al.*, 2018). For instance, content creators frequently reference and encourage viewers to engage with their other social media presences (e.g., Discord and Subreddits), which are designed to enhance further community exchange and access to useful information. Beneficial embedment of such channels during the live stream, such as showcasing content created by community members or organization of viewer events may result in empowerment and co-creation of value in the community (Manchanda *et al.*,

2015; Schau *et al.*, 2009). We therefore postulate that a more utilitarian style could enhance the positive effect of community-focused communication on viewing because users want to participate in the stream more often. At the same time, it could mitigate the negative effect on donating, as viewers want to reimburse the streamer for his/her demonstrated efforts. This results in the following two hypotheses:

*H5a:* A utilitarian-superior style enhances the positive effect of community-focused communication on viewing.

*H5b:* A utilitarian-superior style mitigates the negative effect of community-focused communication on donating.

Pairing a more utilitarian style with content-focused communication should enhance its satisfaction of the need for competence (Deci and Ryan, 2008), as communicating in such an educational and helpful way may assist viewers in processing the information more quickly. This in turn should augment the positive influence of content-focused communication on viewing and donating (Guay *et al.*, 2008). Hence:

*H5c:* A utilitarian-superior style enhances the positive effect of content-focused communication on viewing.

*H5d:* A utilitarian-superior style enhances the positive effect of content-focused communication on donating.

### **3.4 Study 2: Empirical study**

#### **3.4.1 Study 2: Study design and sample**

We conducted a two-wave online survey between June and August 2018 among Twitch users. Participants were recruited through various internet forums and other social media focusing on gaming or streaming, such as Reddit. In the light of examining success factors of SLSs and the

requirement of participants' familiarity with a streamer to properly evaluate his/her communication, respondents were presented with a selection of the 15 most followed streamers on Twitch (average: > 2.9 million followers) at the beginning of the first-wave questionnaire. Because it represents the most popular content category, we focus on videogame streamers (Hilvert-Bruce *et al.*, 2018; Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017). As participants were instructed to select the streamer they know best, all subsequent questions of both surveys referred only to this streamer.

The first survey addressed the perception of said streamer and his/her communication focus and style as well as certain control variables. At the end, participants could opt in to take part in the second wave four weeks later. All respondents were given the opportunity to take part in a raffle to win vouchers (4 x \$25 in the first survey; 2 x \$50 in the second). In the follow-up survey, they were asked to report their behavioral manifestations toward the streamer, including viewing behavior and financial activities. By conducting two temporally separated questionnaires to collect data on the independent and dependent variables, this study aims to reduce concerns regarding common method variance (Hulland *et al.*, 2018).

In the end, respondents who did not meet our criteria for the study were excluded from the sample: 329 respondents participated in only the first wave of the survey, two participants failed to answer the questions conscientiously, and 24 respondents did not invest enough time to answer the survey thoroughly (the 10th percentile). The final sample consisted of  $N = 215$  eligible respondents (92% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 23.4$  years). To account for any non-response bias due to self-selection/attrition in the two-wave survey, we employ Heckman self-selection correction as described below.

### 3.4.2 Study 2: Measurement

We measured the intensity and quality of community-focused and content-focused communications with two and four self-developed items, respectively. A factor analysis employed using Stata/MP 16.1 confirmed the expected factor structure, with community-focused communication explaining 34.17% of the variance and content-focused explaining 47.03%. All items fulfill the minimum criteria of having primary factor loadings of 0.40 or above and no cross-loading higher than 0.30, with the item “The streamer commentates his/her gameplay well.” being the only exception as it yields a cross-loading of 0.31. However, because it demonstrates a high primary loading of 0.80, we decided not to eliminate the item. See Table 11 for the final solution of this exploratory factor analysis including the items used and the respective factor loadings for each retained factor.

We examine construct reliability and validity of the community-focused and content-focused communications construct measurements using SmartPLS (v. 3.3.3). As Table 11 shows, both Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability measures are above the cut-off value of 0.7, which indicates construct-level reliability (Hulland *et al.*, 2018). Second, to examine convergent validity, we rely on the procedure suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) which yields an average variance extracted (AVE) for community-focused communications of 0.93 and an AVE of 0.75 for content-focused communications. As both AVE values exceed 0.50, we have established convergent validity as well. Furthermore, we achieve initial evidence for discriminant validity because the AVE for community-focused and content-focused communications are larger than the shared variance between the two constructs (Hulland *et al.*, 2018). Finally, we follow prior research and rely on the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) method to examine discriminant validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). The estimated HTMT ratio for community-focused and content-focused communications is 0.59 and the upper limit of the 97.5% bias-corrected confidence interval of the HTMT ratio is 0.75. As both values are below



the recommended cut-off value of 0.85, we are confident that our proposed measures for community-focused and content-focused communications also achieved discriminant validity.

Utilitarian and hedonic values were measured with semantic differentials using 15 items adapted from Batra and Ahtola (1991) scale to capture contrary adjective pairs for utilitarian values (e.g., harmful–beneficial) and hedonic values (e.g., pleasant–unpleasant). To measure utilitarian-superior style, the hedonic value mean scores were subtracted from the utilitarian ones. Viewing outcomes were measured by the average weekly time a user had spent watching the chosen stream during the four-week period between surveys. We measured donation outcomes using a binary variable indicating whether a participant had donated during the observation period, either through actual currency (\$) or with Twitch’s virtual one, Bits (1 = donation, 0 = no donation). We chose to use a binary indicator variable to capture donations for two reasons. First, donations with actual and virtual currency were a rare occurrence during the observation period, resulting in a quasi-bimodal distribution due to extreme zero inflation. Second, due to increasing volume discounts granted by Twitch when acquiring “Bits”, actual currency cannot be converted into Twitch’s virtual currency using a fixed exchange rate, which further prevented us from constructing a continuous measure. Therefore, due to these methodological reasons, we opted to focus on the incidence of donations. All other constructs were measured on seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Table 11. Study 2: Rotated component matrix resulting from factor analysis**

Item	Factor 1: Content Focus	Factor 2: Community Focus	Cron. Alpha / Comp. Rel.
<b>The Streamer ...</b>			
... commentates his/her gameplay well.	<b>0.80</b>	0.31	0.89/0.89
... explains his/her decisions well while playing the game.	<b>0.84</b>	0.29	
... commentates his/her gameplay frequently.	<b>0.81</b>	0.19	
... frequently explains his/her decisions while playing the game.	<b>0.84</b>	0.29	
... interacts well with his/her chat.	0.22	<b>0.94</b>	0.93/0.93
... interacts frequently with his/her chat.	0.25	<b>0.93</b>	
<i>Explained Variance</i>	47.03%	34.17%	

**Table 12. Study 2: Measures**

Variable (literature support)	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Community Focus (own)</b>	.89
<b>The Streamer<sup>a</sup> ...</b>	
... interacts frequently with his/her chat.	
... interacts well with his/her chat.	
<b>Content Focus (own)</b>	.93
<b>The Streamer<sup>a</sup> ...</b>	
... commentates his/her gameplay well.	
... commentates his/her gameplay frequently.	
... explains his/her decisions well while playing the game.	
... frequently explains his/her decisions while playing the game.	
<b>Utilitarian Style<sup>b</sup> (adapted from Batra and Ahtola 1991)</b>	.89
Useless–Useful	
Harmful–Beneficial	
Unimportant–Important	
Meaningless–Meaningful	
Unintelligent–Intelligent	
Not educational–Educational	
Unhelpful–Helpful	
<b>Hedonic Style<sup>b</sup> (adapted from Batra and Ahtola 1991)</b>	.91
Unpleasant–Pleasant	
Disagreeable–Agreeable	
Awful–Nice	
Bad–Good	
Unsociable–Sociable	
Negative–Positive	
Dislikable–Likable	
Dissonant–Harmonious	

**Notes:** All items were measured on seven-point Likert scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). <sup>a</sup> The streamer name and pronouns were adjusted accordingly for each survey. <sup>b</sup> Semantic differentials with bipolar adjective pairs.

In addition, various sociodemographic control variables such as gender (1 = female, 0 = male), age, and income were considered. We also controlled for content switch with a dummy variable specifying whether the streamer changed his/her focal game between the two surveys (1 = switch, 0 = no switch), as such a switch might affect a viewer's intention to watch the stream or contribute financially (Zhao *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the model accounts for the participant's appraisal of the streamer's gaming skills, the genre of the focal game (strategy based = 1, action based = 0), and the exact number of days between the first and second survey to control for the time difference. Finally, time spent describes how much time each participant had spent watching streams on Twitch in general. The measures used for multi-item constructs are displayed in Table 12 along with their reliability scores, while Table 13 presents summary statistics.

### 3.4.3 Study 2: Model

The analysis procedure proposed for testing the causal relationships discussed above incorporates different regression approaches. The equation modeling viewing behavior uses negative binomial regression, as this dependent variable follows a count distribution and is likely overdispersed (i.e., the mean is lower than its variance) (Long and Freese, 2014). To model monetary outcomes, a logistic regression is appropriate because the dependent variable is binary, indicating whether the participant has engaged in financial activities directed toward the specified stream.<sup>3</sup> We used seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) to estimate the following two equations with Stata/MP 16.1 simultaneously:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that viewing may impact donating. We tested this possibility by including viewing as another covariate in the donating model. This analysis reveals that viewing does not have a significant impact on donating and the effects of the other variables remain the same in terms of significance and direction.

<sup>4</sup> As it is reasonable to question whether both communication foci interact, we also tested their interactions in both equations. The interaction effects were not significant while the main effects remained unaffected in terms of direction and significance. Accordingly, we did not include the interaction between both foci in our main analysis.

- (1)  $\text{Viewing}_i = \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Community Focus}_i + \beta_2 \text{Content Focus}_i + \beta_3 \text{Utilitarian Style}_i + \beta_4 \text{Community Focus} \times \text{Utilitarian Style}_i + \beta_5 \text{Content Focus} \times \text{Utilitarian Style}_i + \beta_6 \text{Gender}_i + \beta_7 \text{Age}_i + \beta_8 \text{Income}_i + \beta_9 \text{Content Switch}_i + \beta_{10} \text{Player Skill}_i + \beta_{11} \text{Genre} + \beta_{12} \text{Time Spent}_i + \beta_{13} \text{Time Difference}_i + \varepsilon_{1i})$ , and
- (2)  $\text{Logit}(\text{Donating}_i) = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \text{Community Focus}_i + \gamma_2 \text{Content Focus}_i + \gamma_3 \text{Utilitarian Style}_i + \gamma_4 \text{Community Focus} \times \text{Utilitarian Style}_i + \gamma_5 \text{Content Focus} \times \text{Utilitarian Style}_i + \gamma_6 \text{Gender}_i + \gamma_7 \text{Age}_i + \gamma_8 \text{Income}_i + \gamma_9 \text{Content Switch}_i + \gamma_{10} \text{Player Skill}_i + \gamma_{11} \text{Genre} + \gamma_{12} \text{Time Spent}_i + \gamma_{13} \text{Time Difference}_i + \varepsilon_{2i}$ .

#### 3.4.4 Study 2: Non-response bias

All participants in the final sample had opted to take part in the second online survey in addition to the first one. This automatically excludes all respondents who only participated in the first wave of the survey, which is a typical challenge for researchers in multi-wave survey designs (Kraemer *et al.*, 2020). More precisely, this decision may be affected by certain individual characteristics, leading to a self-selected, potentially biased sample due to unit non-response. To control for such non-response bias, we follow prior research and employ Heckman correction (Heckman, 1979; Hulland *et al.*, 2018). In the first step, we estimated a probit model with the participation decision as dependent variable (1 if the participant participated in the follow-up survey, 0 if not). Accounting for determinants of the selection decision, we included dummy variables indicating whether the participant was enrolled in a university and which streamer was chosen in the first survey. Then, in the second step, we calculated the inverse Mills ratio based on the estimates from the probit model and added it as another control variable in the equations for viewing and donating to correct for non-response bias due to the multi-wave survey design.

**Table 13. Study 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations**

Measure	M/%	(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Viewing	9.62	(9.92)	1.00												
2. Donating	7%	NA	0.11	1.00											
3. Community Focus	5.40	(1.23)	0.16	0.03	1.00										
4. Content Focus	5.59	(1.38)	0.16	0.07	0.05	1.00									
5. Utilitarian Style	-1.09	(1.06)	0.08	0.07	0.22	0.54	1.00								
6. Female	8%	NA	-0.05	0.13	0.06	0.11	0.12	1.00							
7. Age	23.43	(6.46)	0.01	-0.03	0.07	-0.02	0.01	-0.03	1.00						
8. Income	2.69	(2.10)	0.07	0.00	0.02	-0.09	-0.01	-0.06	0.50	1.00					
9. Content Switch	0.26	(0.44)	0.22	0.06	0.03	0.07	-0.04	0.02	0.04	0.05	1.00				
10. Player Skill	6.29	(1.24)	-0.02	0.01	0.24	0.11	0.26	0.02	0.08	0.05	-0.19	1.00			
11. Strategy Game	49%	NA	-0.17	-0.03	0.01	-0.07	-0.04	-0.12	0.15	0.16	-0.12	0.09	1.00		
12. Time Spent	19.51	(17.74)	0.70	0.12	0.07	0.14	0.14	-0.07	-0.06	-0.01	0.17	-0.04	-0.12	1.00	
13. Time Difference	29.88 <sup>a</sup>	(4.28 <sup>a</sup> )	-0.07	-0.01	0.07	-0.09	-0.12	-0.15	0.04	0.03	-0.05	0.06	0.26	-0.05	1.00

**Notes:** Correlations greater than or equal to  $|\cdot| \geq 0.13$  are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed). <sup>a</sup> In minutes; divided by  $10^6$  for better interpretability

### 3.4.5 Study 2: Results

We report the results including the unstandardized coefficients in Table 14. The results for the viewing model (left panel;  $R^2 = .112$ ) indicate that community-focused communication has a positive effect on viewing ( $\beta_1 = 0.092, p < .1$ ) and thus lending support to H<sub>1</sub>. However, against the expectations of H<sub>3</sub>, content-focused communication has a negative effect on viewing ( $\beta_2 = -0.129, p < .05$ ). As the interaction effect between community-focused communication and utilitarian style is not significant ( $\beta_4 = 0.012, p > .1$ ), H<sub>5a</sub> remains unsupported. The findings do however give partial support for H<sub>5c</sub>, as a utilitarian style indeed strengthens the main effect of content-focused communication ( $\beta_5 = -0.051, p < .1$ ), but this effect is negative instead of positive.

The results of the donating model (Table 14, right panel;  $R^2 = .167$ ) indicate that community-focused communication has a negative effect on donating ( $\gamma_1 = -0.761; p < .05$ ), lending support to H<sub>2</sub>. The results also support H<sub>4</sub>, as content-focused communication exhibits a positive influence on donating ( $\gamma_2 = 0.909; p < .01$ ). H<sub>5b</sub>, however, is not supported, as the negative effect of community-focused communication on donating is exacerbated instead of mitigated when paired with a utilitarian-superior style ( $\gamma_4 = -0.646; p < .01$ ). Finally, in line with H<sub>5d</sub>, the positive effect of content-focused communication on donating is further enhanced when combined with a more utilitarian style ( $\gamma_5 = 0.530; p < .05$ ).

Regarding the effects exerted by the remaining variables, it is worth noting that the main effect of utilitarian-superior style on viewing is positive and significant ( $\beta_3 = 0.150; p < .01$ ), which suggests that viewing can in fact be increased using an educational communication style, but not when it is focused on the content of the stream.

**Table 14. Study 2: SUR estimates**

Independent variables	Dependent variables					
	Viewing			Donating		
	Coefficient	SE		Coefficient	SE	
Constant	1.642***	0.586		-8.230**	4.000	
Communication foci						
Community Focus	0.092*	0.054	H <sub>1</sub> (+)	-0.761**	0.358	H <sub>2</sub> (-)
Content Focus	-0.129**	0.055	H <sub>3</sub> (+)	0.909***	0.329	H <sub>4</sub> (+)
Moderator						
Utilitarian Style	0.150***	0.042		0.203***	0.255	
Interactions						
Community Focus × Utilitarian Style	0.012	0.028	H <sub>5a</sub> (+)	-0.646***	0.235	H <sub>5b</sub> (+)
Content Focus × Utilitarian Style	-0.051*	0.031	H <sub>5c</sub> (+)	0.530**	0.215	H <sub>5d</sub> (+)
Controls						
Female	0.014	0.158		1.840**	0.826	
Age	0.005	0.006		-0.012	0.032	
Income	0.006	0.021		0.075	0.159	
Content Switch	0.142	0.098		0.437	0.680	
Player Skill	0.019	0.041		0.228	0.340	
Strategy Games	-0.195**	0.089		-0.160	0.761	
Time Spent	0.032***	0.004		0.025**	0.012	
Time Difference <sup>a</sup>	-0.014***	0.100		0.264***	1.010	
Inverse Mills Ratio	-0.214	0.311		2.585	2.192	
R <sup>2</sup>	.112			.167		

**Notes:**  $N = 215$ ; unstandardized results based on two-tailed  $t$  tests. The highest variance inflation factor (VIF) is 3.9, which is well below the recommended cutoff of 5 (O'Brien, 2007). The postulated direction of effects is indicated in parentheses <sup>a</sup>Multiplied by  $10^6$  for better interpretability. \*  $p \leq .10$ , \*\*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

### 3.4.6 Study 2: Post-hoc floodlight analysis

To gain additional insights into the significant interaction effects on viewing and donating, we conducted a set of floodlight analyses using Stata/MP 16.1 (Spiller *et al.*, 2013). This involved estimating the effects of community- and content-focused communication on the dependent variables at increments of 0.05 across the observed range of the moderating variable, utilitarian-superior style  $[-4.20, 1.5]$ . These marginal effects are plotted in Figure 6 along with the 95% confidence bands to identify the Johnson–Neyman point: the value of the moderating variable at which the interaction effect turns significant. This analysis is meaningful in the context of

this study, as the moderating variable was operationalized as the degree to which viewers perceived a streamer's communication style to be more utilitarian than hedonic.

Panel A of Figure 6 reveals that a spotlight test would yield a significant negative effect ( $p < .05$ ) of content-focused communication on viewing when utilitarian-superior style is above approximately  $-0.85$ . For values below that point, the confidence band contains zero and thus content-focused communication has no impact on viewing. Accordingly, combined with a pronounced utilitarian style and even with a slightly pronounced hedonic style, content-focused communication undermines viewing.

The effect of community-focused communication on donating, as according to the level of utilitarian-superior style, is depicted in Panel B of Figure 6. It shows that the negative impact of community-focused communication turns significant for values above approximately  $0.10$ . This represents an actionable finding for streamers, as combining community-focused communication with a utilitarian style mitigates donating when utilitarian begins to outweigh hedonic style. This finding strengthens the decision to reject  $H_{5b}$ , which predicted that a utilitarian-superior style would mitigate the negative effect of community-focused communication on donating.

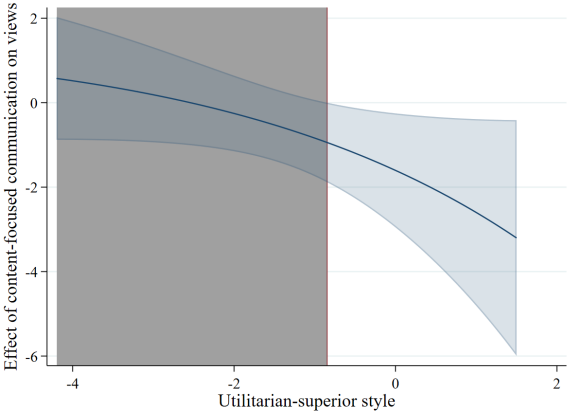
Finally, Panel C of Figure 6 reveals that a spotlight test would yield a  $p$  value greater than  $.05$  for the positive effect of content-focused communication on donating for values of utilitarian-superior style above approximately  $-0.50$ . In other words, a streamer's communication style does not have to be entirely utilitarian for content-focused communication to demonstrate a positive effect on donating. In fact, a streamer's communications can be slightly hedonically superior and still be able to boost monetary outcomes.



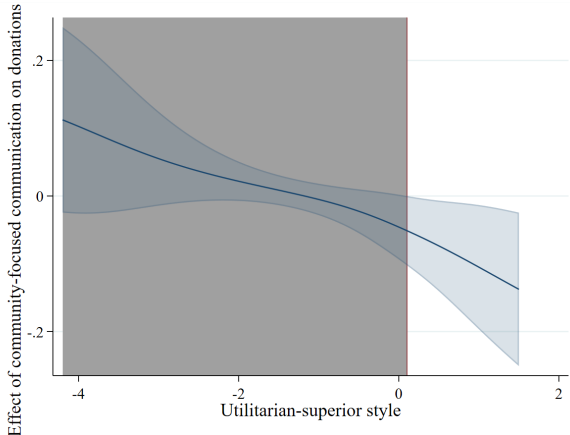
**Figure 6. Study 2: Floodlight analysis: effects community- and content-focused communication for various levels of utilitarian-superior style**

**Note:** The shaded belt around the line for the coefficient estimates represents the confidence band, indicating the 95% confidence intervals of the marginal effect at given values of utilitarian-superior style. The shaded box represents the range of absolute values of utilitarian-superior style below the Johnson-Neyman point where the marginal effect turns insignificant for each case.

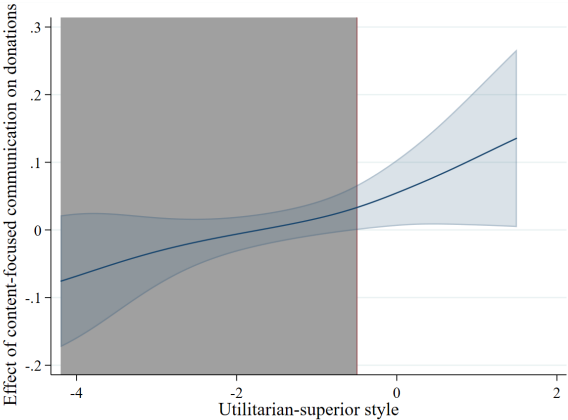
A: Marginal effect of content-focused communication on viewing for different levels of utilitarian-superior style



B: Marginal effect of community-focused communication on donating for different levels of utilitarian-superior style



C: Marginal effect of content-focused communication on donating for different levels of utilitarian-superior style



**3.5 Study 2: Summary**

This paper aimed to explain engagement behavior conceptually and empirically in the context of synchronous social media. Based on customer engagement literature both within and beyond the field of social media, this study represents an attempt to arrive at a broad understanding of

the manageable success factors of SLSs. In doing so, we examine how a streamer's communication focus affects viewing and donating while considering the moderating role of communication style.

### **3.5.1 Study 2: Drivers of a stream's viewership**

The empirical evidence partially supports the expected relationships. Community-focused communication appears to assist viewers in satisfying their relatedness needs, which leads them to increase engagement with the stream by watching it more frequently. Since SLSs facilitate the co-creation of value, it makes sense that viewers frequent streams more often that enable these processes through communication revolving around the community. Alarming, however, content-focused communication is negatively associated with viewing. These results seem to indicate that concentrating on the stream's focal content alone cannot entirely motivate viewers to engage with the stream in the long run. As a possible explanation, we suggest that communication with a heavy content focus helps viewers garner insights about the focal activity and its execution. It is therefore reasonable to assume that viewers defect because they have already acquired the knowledge desired and would now rather invest their time in trying to put their new skills into action, thereby spending more time engaging in the focal activity but less with the stream. Another interesting finding is that utilitarian-superior style alone translates into enhanced viewing but mitigates it when combined with content-focused communication. The latter phenomenon is in line with the previous reasoning; a utilitarian style facilitates the more effective processing of information shared through content-focused communication, thus exacerbating the negative effect on viewing.

### **3.5.2 Study 2: Drivers of a stream's donations**

As expected, community-focused communication has a negative impact on donating, possibly owing to its perception as being a low effort and low-cost approach that does not necessarily

warrant monetary reimbursement from the viewer. This result suggests that donating plays a subordinate role in viewers' participation and co-creation experiences, in contrast to viewing. Since donating does not stand at the heart of the experience, community-focused communication that is directed at creating co-created values does not trigger donations. Surprisingly, the interaction of community-focused communication and a utilitarian-superior style produces an undesirable effect for streamers concerned with boosting donations. Additionally, a utilitarian-superior style enhances satisfaction of the need for competence and thus strengthens the positive effect of heavily content-focused communication on donating.

### **3.6 Study 2: Implications**

The findings of this study provide clear implications for service researchers by conceptualizing and empirically testing the drivers of engagement behaviors in synchronous social media. In doing so, they also lend guidance to streamers regarding how to implement community and content focus in their communications best, depending on which engagement outcome they want to maximize (i.e., viewing or donating). Moreover, the study offers valuable insights for society and marketing managers by highlighting live streaming's potential for self-development and value co-creation.

#### **3.6.1 Study 2: Implications for researchers**

The findings of this study inform research concerned with conceptual differences of engagement in synchronous and asynchronous social media and identifying streamers' possibilities for managing different outcomes of their stream. First, the conceptual foundation of this article highlights the altered social experiences of synchronous social media content that result from its ephemerality and collective consumption. These unique characteristics translate into a heightened importance of content creators' communication and interaction skills as well

as increased social value for users. In turn, these differences highlight the importance of distinguishing between asynchronous and synchronous social media in future research.

Second, the floodlight analysis reveals the critical role of a streamer's communication style in understanding beneficial and harmful effects on engagement behaviors. Most importantly, this analysis underlines the consideration of particular scores of hedonic versus utilitarian values; researchers must consider the circumstances under which content creators' communication style becomes relevant or negligible. These findings further emphasize the need for an in-depth analysis of content creators' communication.

Third, within the broader scope of service marketing research, this study emphasizes service providers' real-time communications in digital and social media as a vital initiator of co-creation. The technological landscape of digital service communications and offerings provides a platform for facilitating interactions that ultimately determine consumer co-creation (Gustafsson and Witell, 2012; Pinho *et al.*, 2014). However, to examine the determinants of digitally enabled co-creation, prior research has mostly concentrated on *which* and *whether* different communication possibilities are enabled or used by the service provider, frequently neglecting *how* the content and style of service providers' communications should be designed (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2018; Sjödin *et al.*, 2020; Verleye, 2015). This approach seems surprising as S-D logic dictates that co-creation may vary across contextual contingencies, is subject to consumers' perception and thus cannot be sufficiently predicted by the mere existence of technological features.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, based on the results of our study, we suggest that future research on co-creation should consider the focus and style of service providers'

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<sup>5</sup> To clarify, following S-D logic, "brands cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and the offering of value propositions" (Vargo and Lusch 2016, p. 8). While the co-created value is solely determined by the beneficiary (e.g., consumer), the contents of brands' communication entail value propositions, consequently displaying a non-negligible, critical factor in the process (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

communications when examining the drivers of co-creation in digital and social media as it can play a pivotal role in the process.

### **3.6.2 Study 2: Implications for social live streamers**

*Communication foci represent a double-edged sword.* While community-focused communication is associated with greater viewership and fewer donations, content-focused communication is associated with less viewership and more donations. Streamers must therefore carefully consider whether to focus on building a viewer base or donation-based cash flow; although a certain communication focus may enhance one outcome, it could harm the other. If streamers elect to increase viewing, they should focus on interactions with users by, for example, referencing chat messages, welcoming new viewers to the stream, and posing questions to spark conversation. Furthermore, focal activities should not play a pivotal role in streamers' communications, as it could counteract such positive viewing outcomes. Thus, this strategy aims at creating a community around the stream by providing a sense of belonging and social value to users. If on the other hand streamers aim to increase cash flow, they can focus their communications on their focal activities, such as the games they play. By commentating events in the game and explaining specific decisions, streamers provide skill-building resources for interested users. This communication aims to make content the pivotal part of the stream, offering individual self-development for users.

*Communication style as an engagement lever.* Depending on their communication foci, streamers should carefully choose between adopting a utilitarian-superior or hedonically superior style. A more utilitarian style should be particularly embraced when focusing communications on content to boost donations. With the comments and explanations of the focal activity then carried out in an accessible and highly informative style, the positive effect of content-focused communication is further enhanced. In contrast, a utilitarian style should be

avoided when following a community-focused strategy, as it amplifies the negative impact of such an approach on a stream's monetary outcome.

### **3.6.3 Study 2: Implications for society**

This study underlines how engagement behaviors in synchronous social media provide different kinds of value than those in asynchronous social media. The implications for users are twofold and are mirrored in the communication foci. Real-time interactions and direct communication with the content creator as well as other users enable one to receive immediate feedback and advice. The donation feature, a prevalent mechanic in synchronous social media, facilitates asking questions about the content in real time and getting helpful answers from the streamer, while live chat enables discussions among users about events in the stream. Thus, nuances and details are elaborated upon in great detail, allowing for individual skill building on the spot.

The constituting characteristics of engagement behaviors in synchronous social media share the same characteristics of “third places,” as touched upon by Hamilton *et al.* (2014). Third places, such as cafes or bars, serve as alternative locations for people to come together and to form and maintain communities through informal public social interactions. The conversations that take place there are often driven by play, as participants talk about players’ “slyness, slowness, quickness, meanness, [and] allusions to long-remembered incidents in club history” (Hamilton *et al.*, 2014, p. 1318). Similarly, SLSs create participatory and social experiences to form online communities. Interestingly, the number of average daily viewers on the SLS platform Twitch skyrocketed between March (1.6 million) and April 2020 (2.5 million). It is conceivable that this increased engagement in synchronous social media is linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and its ramifications for societies worldwide. The limited possibilities for visiting cafes and restaurants might have driven individuals to seek alternative, virtual third places, such as SLSs.

### 3.6.4 Study 2: Implications for marketing managers

This study reveals implications for firms who want to incorporate synchronous social media in their digital marketing portfolio and managers of service offerings in general. First, our empirical findings can be extended to many digitally enhanced service environments where service providers offer engagement opportunities to their customers. For instance, Starbucks is empowering their frontline employees to act as brand ambassadors on social media (Geisel, 2015; Morhart *et al.*, 2013); various Starbucks baristas livestream the preparation of drinks from the Starbucks secret menu to their followers. Following our guidance regarding communication foci and style, can help service providers to facilitate the implementation of such initiatives, depending on which engagement metric they seek to increase. For instance, in case a service provider intends to increase awareness, they should advise their frontline employees to adopt a community focus and avoid a content focus while streaming to their followers to maximize views. Further, in case they seek to motivate donations for a prosocial cause, employees should be advised to focus on the content of their stream. Importantly, a particular communication strategy may positively influence key metrics, while simultaneously influencing other metrics negatively. Consequently, managers should strive to identify the most relevant outcomes and balance pros and cons to effectively design their frontline-employee-mediated communication strategy.

Second, our conceptual foundation shows how synchronous social media generate enhanced social experiences through real-time interactions. Thus, digitally distributed service offerings could be enhanced by employing live chats. For instance, though digital live sports broadcasters, like DAZN and NFL.tv, already employ (asynchronous) social media feeds displaying updates and comments by fans, their service offering could benefit through the implementation of live chats to facilitate more co-creation experiences. Additionally, it could increase the social experience of the service as it enables communication and exchange among

customers. The utilization of such functionalities might be particularly promising in the context of sports media as previous research identified collective social experience as an important motivational driver of watching live sports events (Hutchins *et al.*, 2019).

Third, as another key take-away, our conceptualization of synchronous social media reveals its potential for facilitating co-creation. Value co-creation has been identified as an important predictor of firms' performance metrics (e.g., consumer engagement; Jaakkola *et al.*, 2015; Verleye, 2015). Consequently, synchronous social media (e.g., social live streaming) depicts a powerful tool for marketing managers. In the following, we describe two real-life examples of a product and a service brand that successfully employed social live streaming in their marketing communication efforts to provide more tangible guidance for managing social media-based campaigns.

In a crowd-sourcing campaign, the luxury automobile brand Lexus enlisted Twitch viewers to vote on a vehicle's interior and exterior modifications and features (e.g., gaming consoles, monitors, and car wrap). Based on the poll results, Lexus manufactured a full-size car and revealed it in a subsequent live stream. This event was accompanied by additional social content and is part of Lexus' "All In" campaign which aims at celebrating those who fully embrace their passion (Koltun, 2021). Further, the fast-food restaurant chain Wendy's operates a Twitch channel to support promotional campaigns by giving out gift cards and merchandise to viewers who order from their exclusive menu which is based on various Twitch streamers' favorite Wendy's meals (The Square Deal, 2020). These examples showcase the facilitation of co-creation through personalized, interactive, and collaborative interactions enabled by real-time interactions and collective consumption of content. Thus, marketing managers should utilize synchronous social media to design campaigns that revolve around customer co-creation to enhance customer relationships (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019).



### 3.6.5 Study 2: Limitations and directions for future research

This study suffers certain limitations that provide fruitful avenues for future research. First, by focusing on streamers who rely on video game content, this study was able to generate insights on success factors of the most popular content category. However, the empirical question remains whether the findings can be generalized to other genres such as music, lifestyle, or crafting.

Second, the analysis relies on survey data, as it is important to capture how viewers perceive the streamers' communication foci and styles. However, future studies could manually code live stream interactions to uncover further dynamics in the interaction between streamers and their viewers during a single stream—a task that would be infeasible using surveys.

Third, future research endeavors might consider elaborating on the direct, limited, and ephemeral nature of communications in synchronous contexts. Artificially limiting the degree of content availability has become a distinguishing characteristic of social media platforms as it influences content creation and dictates user perception of social experiences (Fox *et al.*, 2018). Increasing the understanding of ephemeral content and interactions represents a particularly fruitful avenue of research that arises from the ever-growing consumer interest in dedicated social media.

Fourth, the interaction effect of community-focused communication and utilitarian-superior style on viewing was insignificant. This represents an unexpected result because the beneficial and helpful empowerment of the community was anticipated to spur co-creation and viewing. For this particular case, behavioral outcomes might not be impacted by *how* a message is conveyed, but rather by *whom* the message originates from. Therefore, examining constructs that capture the user's preference of the streamer on a more personal basis, like source credibility and likeability, as well as the strength of parasocial relationships (Labrecque, 2014)

might depict particularly fruitful avenues for research. These variables that indicate a degree of congruence have been identified as reliable predictors in adjacent research fields of user-generated content and social media influencers (e.g., Chung and Cho, 2017; Hughes *et al.*, 2019) and might assist in creating a holistic picture of drivers in synchronous social media, and social live streaming in particular.

As another limitation, our sample exclusively considered streamers with high reach to determine drivers of streaming success. It is conceivable that social live streams with smaller communities, function differently in impacting engagement behaviors. Such environments facilitate particularly intimate and personal interactions and arguably enhance value co-creation compared to streams with higher reach. Accordingly, the impact of antecedents on engagement behaviors may be different in such a context. Therefore, examining low versus. high reach content creators and their differences in driving engagement behaviors could depict an insightful trajectory of future research endeavors.

Finally, this study relied on data generated through a multi-wave field survey in an attempt to maximize external validity by focusing on real-life streamers. However, inherent to such an approach is the limited ability to manipulate the focal variables and exercise control over extraneous variables. Hence, we encourage future research to replicate these findings in a controlled experimental setting.

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#### **4 Study 3: The invisible leash: when human brands hijack corporate brands' consumer relationships**

(with Linda D. Hollebeek, Welf H. Weiger and Maik Hammerschmidt)

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Keywords: Consumer engagement; Human brands; Human brand-based marketing; Parasocial relationships; Relationship hijacking

#### 4.1 Study 3: Introduction

In the last 15 years, social media's growing ubiquity has led to a multitude of corporate brands being endorsed, promoted, and discussed by media personas (i.e., human brands; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). In this environment, consumers not only engage with marketer-generated content, but also with content generated by those media personas (Goh *et al.*, 2013; Smith *et al.*, 2012), yielding a complex branding landscape. In particular, social media's ever-evolving modes of (a)synchronous communication (e.g., through live stream-based real-time interactions; (Giertz *et al.*, 2021) fuel the development of consumers' parasocial relationships (PSRs), defined as their illusionary, intimate relationships with human brands (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019). Given the capacity of PSRs to nurture consumer-brand relationships (Labrecque, 2014), firms are increasingly leveraging consumers' existing PSRs with high-reach human brands to endorse their corporate brands on social media (Audrezet *et al.*, 2020; Hughes *et al.*, 2019).

We refer to using human brands to endorse corporate brands as *human brand-based marketing*. Irrespective of whether human brands appear in marketer-generated or their own content, human-brand based marketing concerns the expected spillover of a consumer's engagement with a human brand to their engagement with the promoted corporate brand (Bowden *et al.*, 2017), thus highlighting *consumer brand engagement's* pertinent role. Consumer brand engagement, defined as a consumer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resource investment in their brand interactions (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Kumar *et al.*, 2019), is widely acclaimed to exert a relationship-building effect (e.g., by raising brand loyalty/satisfaction, and purchase; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Pansari and Kumar, 2017), including in the social media context (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Weiger *et al.*, 2017).

Human brand-based marketing encompasses specific sub-types (e.g., celebrity endorsement and influencer marketing), which can be classified based on the distribution and appearance of the corporate brand message. While celebrity endorsement utilizes human brands as the corporate brand's face and messenger in campaigns distributed on dedicated (e.g., television) advertising media, influencer marketing employs human brands as message creators for the corporate brand on the influencer's own social media pages (e.g., blog posts, Twitter posts; Karaguer *et al.*, 2021; Knoll and Matthes, 2017).

Given its rising relevance, human brand-based marketing is receiving growing scholarly attention, with most studies examining its favorable effects on the corporate brand, including through sponsored blogging (Hughes *et al.*, 2019), human/corporate brand congruence (Knoll and Matthes, 2017), brand alliances (Kupfer *et al.*, 2018), and sponsorship disclosures (Evans *et al.*, 2018; Stubb and Colliander, 2019), to name a few. Though prior research has produced valuable insight (e.g., by identifying human brand success factors), it tends to highlight the positive outcomes of human brand-based marketing (e.g., Ki *et al.*, 2020), thus largely overlooking its potential adverse effects. Further, the literature predominantly takes a dyadic approach by featuring consumers' engagement with the corporate brand, thus largely neglecting the role of human brands and their existing PSRs with consumers. This is surprising, as consumers' strong PSRs with human brands are likely to impact the effectiveness of the communication process (Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019). In a recent study, Leung *et al.* (2022) propose that influencers (i.e., human brands) are valuable for acquiring new customers but unable to retain customers for the corporate brand, thus calling for studies along these lines. Addressing this gap, we inductively draw on insight derived from the engagement and PSR literature (e.g., Hollebeek *et al.*, 2020) to better understand the impact of consumers' human brand-based PSRs on their engagement with corporate brands.

Our conceptual insights contribute to multiple research streams. First, by exploring the potential threats of human brand-based marketing for the corporate brand, we contribute to branding/human brand research by unveiling the phenomenon of human brand-based *relationship hijacking*. We describe the relationship hijacking concept as the human brand (vs. the firm) unrecognizably "owning" the consumer's brand relationship, which in turn may reduce, or even nullify, the corporate brand's intended relationship-building effect. Through our insights, we broaden scholarly understanding of the brand hijacking concept by extending its scope to consumers' pre-existing relationship with the corporate brand. In other words, we add brand relationships as a brand hijacking "target," thus contributing to hijacking research.

Second, the paper furthers the engagement literature by identifying that a consumer's engagement with a corporate brand's *stakeholder* (e.g., an influencer or employee) can prevail over that with the corporate brand itself. Specifically, consumers' engagement with the corporate brand may appear volitional, although it is instigated by and dependent on another stakeholder, thus representing an *invisible leash* on consumers. We also offer suggestions for managers regarding how to minimize the potentially negative effects of human brand-based marketing.

The paper unfolds as follows. In section 2, we review foundational literature on human brand-based marketing and brand hijacking that underlies our theoretical reasoning, followed by the development of the relationship hijacking concept and its effects in section 3. The paper concludes with section 4, in which we discuss key implications that arise from this research, including those for policy-makers in terms of understanding and shaping the impact of human brands on society.

## **4.2 Study 3: Literature review**

### **4.2.1 Study 3: Human brands and parasocial relationships**

Like corporate product and service brands, media personas may constitute brands in their own right, as they represent names or symbols that have the capacity to elicit consumer associations, distinguishing them from others (Ki *et al.*, 2020; Thomson, 2006). Accordingly, a *human brand* refers to "the persona, well-known or emerging, who [is] the subject of marketing, interpersonal, or inter-organizational communications" (Close *et al.*, 2011, p. 923).

Human brands feature differing levels of consumer attachment to or engagement with the brand (Fletcher *et al.*, 2000; Thomson, 2006), which may range from the individual's mere awareness of the persona, to their perception of having a close, friend-like relationship with the persona (Dibble *et al.*, 2016; Steinhoff *et al.*, 2019). The latter, which is described as a PSR, is particularly likely to arise in the social media context, which permits various modes of communication, including public posting, real-time private messaging/live streaming interactions, or commenting/liking (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2021; Chung and Cho, 2017). Based on parasocial interaction theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956), PSRs offer a means to transfer positive feelings to objects and humanize corporate brands, thus offering an avenue to build consumers' corporate brand engagement (Appel *et al.*, 2020; Steinhoff *et al.*, 2019; Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019), leading to their frequent adoption in firm-based marketing activity.

### **4.2.2 Study 3: Effects of human brand-based marketing**

Prior research on human brand-based marketing, primarily in the form of celebrity endorsement and influencer marketing, has examined several initiatives and their outcomes for the human brand-utilizing firm. Table 15 shows the studied elements, outcome variables, and effects noted in key empirical studies. In terms of the elements used in human brand-based campaigns, we identify a key role of human brand/product congruence (Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Choi and Rifon,



2012) and the human brand's persuasiveness and reputation (Ki and Kim 2019; Zhou and Whitla, 2013). In terms of impact, prior research has tended to concentrate on campaign- and product level outcomes (e.g., attitude toward the ad or purchase intent; Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Choi and Rifon, 2012) relating to the endorsed offerings (Knoll and Matthes, 2017). However, only few studies to date examine corporate brand-level outcomes, including the consumer's liking of or attitude to the corporate brand (de Jans *et al.*, 2020; Stubb and Colliander, 2019; Zhou and Whitla, 2013).

Table 15 suggests that human brands are mostly effective in enhancing consumer responses at the campaign and endorsed product/service "micro" level. However, if we look beyond the campaign or product and focus on more holistic outcomes for the endorsed corporate brand, extant research reveals a less favorable picture. While one study identifies a positive impact of human brand-based campaigns on corporate brand liking (de Jans *et al.*, 2020), others find that strong human brands can undermine the consumer's corporate brand attitude by overshadowing or dominating the consumer's attention (vs. that given to the advertised brand; Ilicic and Webster, 2014; Zhou and Whitla, 2013). Relatedly, if human brands fall from grace (e.g., through a scandal/negative publicity), their reduced reputation can damage their likeability and perceived trustworthiness as an endorser, thus also negatively impacting the endorsed corporate brand (Zhou and Whitla, 2013).

**Table 15. Study 3: Empirical human brand-based marketing research suggesting detrimental effects for the corporate brand**

Study	Examined human brand	Examined elements of human brand-based campaign	Effects on...		Mechanism for explaining effects
			...campaign and product level outcomes	...corporate brand level outcomes	
Choi and Rifon (2013)	Celebrity	Celebrity/consumer congruence Celebrity/product congruence	Positive effects on attitude toward the ad and endorsed product purchase intention	No significant effect on corporate brand attitude	-
Zhou and Whitla (2013)	Celebrity	Celebrity's moral reputation	Negative effect on attitude toward endorsed products	Negative effect on corporate brand attitude	-
Ilicic and Webster (2014)	Celebrity	Celebrity focus in campaign	-	Negative effect on corporate brand attitude	-
Erfgen et al. (2015)	Celebrity	Celebrity endorsements (vs. non-celebrity endorsements)	Negative effect on ad recall	-	Consumer's familiarity with celebrity
Knoll and Matthes (2017)	Celebrity	Celebrity endorsements (vs. non-celebrity endorsements)	Positive effect on endorsed product/service; no significant effect on attitude toward the ad	-	-
Ki and Kim (2019)	Influencer	Influencer's persuasiveness	Positive effect on purchase intention and product-related WOM	-	Consumers' desire to mimic influencer
Stubb and Coliander (2019)	Influencer	Disclosure type of sponsored content	-	Non-disclosure of sponsored content positively impacts corporate brand attitude, while explicit sponsorship disclosure does not	Perceived credibility of influencer
de Jans et al. (2020)	Influencer	Influencer posts (vs. corporate brand posts)	-	Positive effect on corporate brand liking and negative effect on corporate brand awareness	Consumer's admiration of the influencer
Belanche et al. (2021)	Influencer	Influencer/product congruence	Positive effect on attitude toward the endorsed product, purchase intention and WOM intention	-	Consumer/product congruence

Though no research has fully examined the effects of human brand-based marketing on consumers' corporate brand relationship to date, existing studies point to the potentially detrimental effect of human brands on corporate brands' relational outcomes. Moreover, the findings compiled in Table 15 hint to the crucial role of the relationship consumers have with human brands in impacting the health and stability of their relationship with the corporate brand, thus casting doubt on the literature's focus on human brand-based marketing's positive effects. Evidence from adjacent disciplines supports this observation. For example, Palmatier *et al.* (2007) acknowledge that a customer's loyalty to a firm might be illusory because it is, in fact, "owned" by particular (e.g., "star" or "unicorn") salespeople. Yim *et al.* (2008) describe this phenomenon as a "hostage effect," in which strong consumer-staff relationships may lead consumers to follow the employee if they defect to a competing firm.

Taken together, we propose that a consumer's human brand relationship strongly affects the relational outcomes for the corporate brand, which may not be salutary *per se*, as principally assumed in the literature to date. To examine this tension between human and corporate brands, we next review brand hijacking research.

### **4.2.3 Study 3: Brand hijacking**

We draw on the *brand hijacking* literature to frame our assertion regarding the (potentially problematic) dependency of consumers' corporate brand relationships on their human brand relationships. Fueled by social media's omnipresence, the *hijacking* concept, defined as the "[...] unauthorized use and/or transformation of the brand that manifests itself in forms of non-collaborative brand co-creation [...]" (Siano *et al.*, 2022, p. 118), is increasingly applied in the marketing literature. The idea of hijacking can be used to explain how human brands proactively shape consumer-perceived corporate brand value (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020) by facilitating a perceived value spillover effect and *hijacking* corporate brand messages or meaning (Cova and Pace, 2006; Fournier and Avery, 2011; Wipperfurth, 2005). While existing

scholarly acumen of brand hijacking tends to be limited to a single corporate brand communication element (e.g., Greenpeace campaigners parodying and reinterpreting Nestlé's KitKat 'Take a Break' advertising; Armstrong, 2010), we argue that hijacking's scope may extend to the consumer's *entire* corporate brand *relationship*, as developed in the next section.

### **4.3 Study 3: Conceptual development: human brand-based relationship hijacking**

#### **4.3.1 Study 3: Concept of human brand-based relationship hijacking**

Informed by our review, we argue that the hijacking concept, as discussed in published research to date, is too narrow and fails to encompass the full impact of human brands on corporate brands. We draw on the PSR and engagement literature to adapt brand hijacking theory and extend its scope to corporate brand relationships, as outlined, by conceptualizing the notion of *human brand-based relationship hijacking*.

We view relationship hijacking as a collaborative phenomenon (vs. non-collaborative as in the case of brand hijacking), as it transpires through corporate brands purposefully employing human brands to generate consumers' corporate brand engagement. While the literature to date stresses engagement's *fully* voluntary nature (e.g., customers choosing to engage with their preferred brand; Fletcher-Brown *et al.*, 2021), engagement may, in fact, reveal differing levels of consumer volitionality. That is, while it *can* be fully volitional, it can also contain a less voluntary element (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2020). In the human brand-based marketing context, a consumer's corporate brand engagement may be boundedly (vs. fully) volitional as it emerges –at least to some degree– through the individual's human brand-based PSR. That is, a consumer's corporate brand engagement is governed by the human brand acting as an intermediary in the corporate brand-consumer communication process (Ki and Kim, 2019).

For example, consumers' corporate brand relationships can be positively impacted by a human brand if their positive associations with the latter (e.g., through high source credibility)

are transferred to the corporate brand (Stubb and Colliander, 2019). As noted, we argue that human brand-induced engagement is less volitional, since a consumer's PSR manifests as a friend-like relationship with a human brand, the desire to become more like the human brand, and stronger engagement in parasocial activities. Thus, consumers are inclined to make more favorable attributions to the corporate brand *on account of* their strong PSR with the human brand (Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019), revealing an relationship-building engagement spillover effect (Bowden *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, consumers' human brand relationship may determine and dominate their corporate brand relationship.

We, therefore, define relationship hijacking as:

*A prevalence of human brand engagement over corporate brand engagement resulting from the contingency of corporate brand engagement on a consumer's parasocial relationship with the human brand.*

#### **4.3.2 Study 3: Effects of human brand-based relationship hijacking**

Our conceptualization of relationship hijacking suggests that engagement, generated through human brand-based marketing, involves not only the consumer's engagement with the focal corporate brand, but—to an extent—also-covers consumer's PSR with another party (i.e., the endorsing human brand). This non-dyadic nature, which constitutes relationship hijacking, entails different dynamics for the formation of engagement. We, therefore, propose the following principal relationship hijacking effects.

First, human brands can impact consumers' resource investment in the corporate brand in multiple ways. That is, either a consumer's human brand engagement, or the human brand's affiliation with the corporate brand, can affect the consumer's corporate brand relationship. For instance, when human brands are caught in negative publicity, this will tend to harm consumers' PSR, in turn potentially impacting their corporate brand engagement (e.g., as showcased by the Tiger Woods scandal; Knittel and Stango, 2014; Zhou and Whitla, 2013). Likewise, upon termination of the corporate brand's campaign, the human brand will stop endorsing the

corporate brand, thus likely weakening the consumer's corporate brand relationship. Consumers could even defect from the corporate brand and shift their resources toward offerings provided or launched by the admired human brand (e.g., Kanye West leaving Nike and partnering with Adidas; Gorsler, 2021; Kupfer *et al.*, 2018).

Second, the dependency on the human brand can directly impair a consumer's corporate brand engagement, either by declining positive engagement or by developing negative engagement (Bowden *et al.*, 2017). These unfavorable outcomes can manifest in different ways, including through reduced engagement (Zhou and Whitla, 2013), oppositional engagement (Thompson and Sinha, 2008), or the inability to impact engagement (Knoll and Matthes, 2017).

#### **4.4 Study 3: Discussion, implications and further research**

##### **4.4.1 Study 3: Discussion and theoretical implications**

Our analysis reveals that corporate brands face an inherent risk when deploying human brands for marketing purposes, which is subject to a dearth of research to date. In particular, human brand-based marketing may falsely suggest the existence of a favorable, strong consumer/corporate brand relationship, while the relationship is, in fact, owned by the human brand. Therefore, a consumer's bond with a human brand may *hijack* the corporate brand/consumer relationship, leading to the firm's potential over-rating of its human brand-based marketing campaign and posing a strategic risk. That is, the human brand-based campaign's performance can, in fact, be deceptive or illusory: It may erode as soon as the human brand stops partnering with the firm.

In other words, as human brand-based performance metrics rise, corporate brands may evaluate their campaigns as effective, though their outcomes may be primarily owned by the human (vs. the corporate) brand. This over-estimation can bear devastating consequences, as it may generate sub-optimally allocated marketing budgets incurred by a failure to acknowledge

the extent to which engagement-boosting effects hinge on human brand-based PSRs. Correspondingly, we recommend future scholars to further elucidate the relationship hijacking effect in the following ways.

First, we recommend researchers to empirically deepen the understanding of the relationship hijacking effect by determining the share of illusory (vs. actual) beneficial outcomes of human brand-based campaigns. Importantly, these studies should assess both short- and long-term outcomes, which may be investigated by using cross-sectional and longitudinal research methods, respectively. That is, corporate brand performance metrics should extend beyond individual campaigns to avoid falsely attributing engagement-based changes or fluctuations. For example, upon termination of the human brand-corporate brand collaboration, the human brand's decaying carry-over effects should be accounted for as the induced positive corporate brand associations fade.

Second, our findings suggest that the success of human brand-based marketing campaigns is determined by their ability to create strong links between the focal human- and corporate brand (Choi and Rifon, 2012). For example, high thematic congruence of the human brand, corporate brand and the endorsed offering facilitates the spillover of positive associations (Bowden *et al.*, 2017; Erfgen *et al.*, 2015) through an effective leveraging of consumers' PSRs. Moreover, long-term campaigns can facilitate the development of strong human-corporate brand associations, reducing a potential relationship hijacking effect. Analyzing human brands' single corporate brand (vs. multiple brands) endorsement may also be fruitful in explaining the spillover of consumers' positive associations to the corporate brand. That is, a consumer's engagement transfer from the human to the corporate brand may be more effective for an exclusive cooperation (vs. multiple cooperations), warranting further exploration of exclusivity in human brand-based marketing communications. Sample research questions include: Will such exclusivity generate more favorable consumer responses, from the corporate brand's

perspective? How might this effect pan out for corporate service brands (e.g., Uber) comprising multiple sub-brands (e.g., Uber Eats/Uber Freight)?

Third, we suggest that the firm's assessment of human brand-based marketing should extend to other stakeholders beyond consumers alone (e.g., employees, suppliers, the media; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2020). Prior research shows that the deployment of influencers can impact corporate reputation negatively (Kim *et al.*, 2021), which could potentially affect employee or supplier engagement, thus rendering these stakeholder relationships susceptible for being hijacked by a powerful human brand. For example, employees may also have a strong attachment to the endorsing human brand that dominates employees' loyalty to the firm, which may lead employees to exit the firm when the human brand terminates the partnership with the firm (Tavassoli *et al.*, 2014). This case can be further extrapolated to network-based human brands that exist beyond incentivized campaigns. For instance, CEOs may embody key representatives who shape stakeholder relationships in their firm's network through their internal/external communications (Koporcic, 2020). As outlined, the instigated engagement can manifest favorably or detrimentally, thus potentially revealing the individual's illusory engagement with the corporate brand. Therefore, the extent to which the relationships that firm representatives build with their stakeholders can impact these stakeholders' corporate brand engagement offers a fruitful avenue for further research. Since our analysis highlighted relational intimacy as a key driver of relationship hijacking, future studies may wish to examine the concept across different firm sizes (e.g., small/medium-sized enterprises) and firm stakeholders (e.g., employees/distributors).

#### **4.4.2 Study 3: The impact of human brands on society**

We argue that the prevalence of human brand-based communication extends existing branding campaigns. Our findings further underscore that human brands are increasingly relevant to shape the public opinion and guide consumer decision-making, aligning with the growing



consensus of branding in a hyperconnected world and an ever-reducing significance of marketer-generated content (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020).

Our analysis suggests another potential dark side of human brand-based PSRs. While we focused on the spillover effect to corporate brand relationships, human brands may also influence a consumer's perception and opinion regarding other topics (Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019). In turn, while a consumer's mindset on a specific subject may, at first glance, appear volitional, it is ultimately owned by the human brand, who may change it at their will, revealing the human brand's *invisible leash* with respect to the consumer. Consequently, policymakers and social media platforms are challenged to identify and combat manipulative or (deep) fake personas without censoring free speech and sanctioning human brands in general.

The prevalence of human brand-based communication (vs. non-human communication; e.g., governmental/institutional communication) begs the question regarding what values, ideologies, and symbols human brands transmit to society, communities, and stakeholders. Though human brands can influence consumer choices, they can also be used to raise awareness of social injustice or environmental sustainability. At the same time, they run the risk of spreading misinformation, thus harming society. Therefore, the ability of human brands to make an impact in different areas may vary and thus, requires further consideration of other factors, including mode of communication, platform utilization, or consumer influenceability, thus offering a further trajectory for future research to shed light on human brand's impact on society.

#### **4.4.3 Study 3: Limitations and further research**

This study is subject to several limitations that reveal additional research avenues. First, we applied an inductive analytical approach in this conceptual study. Consequently, the proposed

relationship hijacking concept and its effects warrant future empirical testing and validation (e.g., through experimental or survey research).

Second, by focusing on strong PSRs fueled by social media, this study limited its focus to a relationship hijacking-prone context (e.g., owing to its regular adoption of branded personas). Therefore, our findings may apply differently in other, non-social media contexts (e.g., traditional offline marketing platforms), offering an opportunity for further study. Moreover, social media platforms differ in terms of their purpose, functionality, and communication (e.g., through video/photo sharing, real-time/asynchronous communication, or ephemeral/long-lasting content availability; Giertz *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, consumer perceptions of human brands and their respective social experiences will depend on social media platform characteristics. Consequently, researchers may wish to examine to what degree relationship hijacking exists in other (e.g., online/offline) settings (e.g., blog-based endorsement). For example, though non-celebrity micro-influencers may have less relationship hijacking power, they may nevertheless be perceived as trustworthy or authentic corporate brand endorsers. As these micro-influencers tend to be far less expensive for firms—while also lowering the risk of hijacking— they may offer a suitable alternative to celebrity human brands.

Third, further research may wish to assess the relationship hijacking effect from alternate or related theoretical perspectives, such as the homophily effect (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2021), congruity theory (e.g., Islam *et al.*, 2018), or the (digital) extended self (Belk, 2013). The adoption of these may uncover additional nuances that help improve scholarly understanding of the proposed concept and ultimately assess the effectiveness of human brand-based marketing and the relevance of human brands.

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## **5 Study 4: Blurred lines: disentangling the ambiguity of consumer engagement in influencer marketing**

(with Welf H. Weiger)

Intended for submission to *Journal of Interactive Marketing*

Keywords: Influencer marketing; Parasocial relationships; Social Media; Consumer engagement

## 5.1 Study 4: Introduction

In the last decade, *consumer engagement* (CE)—defined as a consumer’s (e.g., cognitive, emotional, behavioral) resource investment in brand interactions (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Kumar *et al.*, 2019)—has developed into a key performance indicator for firms (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). That is, engaged consumers typically show elevated brand loyalty, satisfaction, and purchase behaviors (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017), thus contributing to enhanced brand performance, particularly in social media (Beckers *et al.*, 2017; Colicev *et al.*, 2018; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Manchanda *et al.*, 2015; De Vries *et al.*, 2017; Weiger *et al.*, 2017).

Deploying social media to cultivate consumer-brand relationships is a complex endeavor, as consumers not only engage with marketer-generated- but also with user-generated content about the brand (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Against this background, particularly influential users elicit specific consumer associations and can thereby shape consumers’ relationships to brands (Ki *et al.*, 2020). With consumers increasingly relying on peer-to-peer communication to inform their purchase decision-making (Hughes *et al.*, 2019), the branding space has therefore expanded, and the firm’s role as a primary source of purchase-relevant information tails off (Steinhoff *et al.*, 2019).

Facing the challenge of driving CE and building rich consumer relationships, brands are adopting *influencer marketing*—understood as brands incentivizing influential users (e.g., high-reach content creators) to endorse their brand in social media (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Influencer marketing offers brands the opportunity to exploit influencers’ *parasocial relationships* (PSRs) with consumers. More precisely, PSRs refer to consumers’ illusionary, intimate, and reciprocal relationships with the influencer (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019), which represent a potent driver of brand sentiment (Chung and Cho, 2017; Labrecque, 2014).

The rise of influencer marketing has spawned significant scholarly attention, with existing studies revealing its beneficial impact on campaign outcomes, such as purchase intention (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Torres *et al.*, 2019), brand awareness (Hughes *et al.*, 2019), attitude towards the endorsed product (Belanche *et al.*, 2021), and WOM (Ki and Kim, 2019), while findings on brand outcomes beyond the campaign's scope are limited and inconsistent (e.g., positive (Evans *et al.*, 2018) vs. negative (Veirman and Hudders, 2019) effects on brand attitude). While these studies identify specific content and influencer characteristics as drivers of favorable and unfavorable brand outcomes, insights into explanatory mechanisms remain scant.

For marketer-generated content and advertising campaigns, in which the brand occurs as the sole actor, brand-focused CE is a decisive success metric (Stephen *et al.*, 2015; Weiger *et al.*, 2018). However, endorsement campaigns are characterized by a separation of the advertisement's message creator (i.e., influencer) and the advertisement's information (i.e., brand-related) (Karaguer *et al.*, 2021). Typically, brand-related information does not fully account for a sponsored content piece but is rather weaved into the influencer's regular communication (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Thus, attributing the generated CE is ambiguous, as it may be influencer-focused or brand-focused. Surprisingly, extant empirical analyses have so far neglected the consideration of a non-dyadic perspective, despite representing a defining characteristic of the research context (Ki and Kim, 2019). For instance, researchers examined CE with the sponsored content (e.g., liking, commenting a post) as a single success metric (Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Valsesia *et al.*, 2020). This simplified perspective overlooks the multifaceted nature of influencer marketing and leaves valuable insights for campaigns' performance evaluation untapped. To alleviate this shortcoming, recent conceptual studies point to the interplay and interdependency of consumers' resource investment with the endorsing brand (i.e., influencer) and the endorsed brand (Giertz *et al.*, 2022; Leung *et al.*,

2022). Accordingly, this research examines CE beyond the dyadic and aims at explaining influencer marketing's favorable and unfavorable outcomes along these lines.

This study examines the impact of PSRs on influencer-focused and brand-focused CE and their effects on endorsement campaigns' brand outcomes. In doing so, we aim at improving researchers' and practitioners' understanding of influencer marketing and answering the following research questions:

*RQ1:* How do PSRs impact influencer-focused and brand-focused CE?

*RQ2:* How do influencer-focused- and brand-focused CE relate to brand outcomes?

Furthermore, the outlined conceptual guidance by extant literature points to parallels with empirical findings in the context of celebrity endorsement, which suggest that high CE with the endorser curbs the effectiveness of brand-focused CE on brand outcomes (Erfgen *et al.*, 2015; Ilicic and Webster, 2014). We pursue this issue for gathering additional insights about CE's interplay from a non-dyadic perspective:

*RQ3:* How does influencer-focused CE moderate the impact of brand-focused CE on brand outcomes?

To answer these questions, we draw on a unique data set comprising users' perception of their PSRs, their respective CE with the brand and the influencer, and brand-related outcome variables (i.e., purchase intention and brand loyalty). Our empirical analyses show that PSRs are a pertinent factor to predict users' engagement with brands and influencers. Further, brand-focused CE positively impacts brand-related performance outcomes and, however, high influencer-focused CE curbs this effect.

This paper makes three main contributions. First, it offers enhanced insight into the role of consumers' PSRs with social media influencers and their effect on purchase intention and

brand loyalty. While findings of existing literature were limited to influencer marketing's positive impact on purchase intention (e.g., Chung and Cho, 2017; Ki and Kim, 2019), we provide further evidence for enhanced brand outcomes beyond the campaign's scope.

Second, our analyses show that influencer-focused CE may negatively affect influencer marketing's performance. More precisely, we identify an overshadowing scenario—previously observed in the field of celebrity endorsement—and argue for its potentially more pronounced role in the context of influencer marketing. Hence, we shed light on an important mechanism, informing engagement-, influencer marketing-, and celebrity endorsement literature.

Third, we discuss how the ability to transfer positive associations from PSRs to the brand primarily determines influencer marketing's success, demonstrating a potentially harmful dependency on PSRs. Based on the attained insight, we propose four effects that classify the predominantly occurring outcomes of employing influencer marketing. Along these lines, we develop a set of pertinent avenues for research that may unveil further acumen of influencer marketing-based return on investment, thus offering valuable practical implications.

## **5.2 Study 4: Conceptual background**

To understand how influencer marketing affects consumer-brand relationships, we next review important literature in these respective sub-areas. We first define influencer marketing and address its dynamics while differentiating it from other digital marketing activities in section 2.1. Section 2.2 discusses PSRs, which have gained prominence through social media's proliferation in the last decade and illuminate the mechanics of influencer marketing.

### **5.2.1 Study 4: Influencer marketing**

Influencer marketing can be defined as brand communication activities where brands incentivize influential users (e.g., high-reach content creators) to endorse their brand by representing and advocating for it in social media (Lou and Yuan, 2019). This definition aligns



with Hughes *et al.*'s (2019) characterization of sponsored blogging, a primary example of influencer marketing. Though influencers receive monetary incentives for their brand communication efforts, they often adapt the brand message to match their regular communication style (Karaguer *et al.*, 2021). However, it is the overt incentivizing of content endorsing the brand's offerings (i.e., products/services) that differentiates influencer marketing from organically generated word-of-mouth (e.g., user-generated content) by consumers (You *et al.*, 2015).

Influencer marketing thus blends paid and earned media into a unique brand communication approach (Lovett and Staelin, 2016). Prior examples of combining paid and earned media, such as paid placements in search engines or display advertising containing consumer reviews, are more likely to be perceived as paid media by consumers due to their persuasive nature (Vernuccio and Ceccotti, 2015; Weiger *et al.*, 2018). However, in influencer marketing, the brand message originates from the influencer (vs. the marketer), rendering this kind of brand communication activity more authentic and credible (Wojdynski and Evans, 2016). Authenticity and credibility, in turn, facilitate the development of consumers' emotional and cognitive brand attachment and brand choice (Kupfer *et al.*, 2018; Morhart *et al.*, 2013). Accordingly, a brand's message is integrated into the influencer's organic interaction with their followers, revealing an essential distinction from celebrity endorsement (Erdogan, 1999; McCracken, 1989). To avoid perceptions of deceptive advertising, most platforms require influencers to disclaim any sponsorship (FTC, 2017; Giuffredi-kähr *et al.*, 2022). However, the blending of sponsored and regular content complicates the attribution of CE to a particular actor, which denotes the *blurred lines* of engagement in influencer marketing. Given its idiosyncratic nature, insight into influencer marketing's brand performance implications requires understanding the influencer's intermediary role in the brand communication process (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020).

### 5.2.2 Study 4: Consumers' parasocial influencer relationships

The ubiquitous usage of social media has changed how consumers form brand relationships, particularly in the case of influencer marketing, as outlined. Social media and its various modes of communication (e.g., public posting/private messaging) inherently allow for consumers' intimate, reciprocal, immediate, and frequent interactions with influencers, thus facilitating the development of strong personal bonds (Chung and Cho, 2017; Labrecque, 2014). Further, emerging social media forms, such as social live streaming, may enhance the immediacy and intimacy of consumer-influencer interactions through real-time communication (Giertz *et al.*, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2021). Hence, influencers are conducive to creating consumer-based PSRs, defined as consumers' illusionary, intimate, and reciprocal involvement with an influencer (Dibble *et al.*, 2016; Labrecque, 2014; Steinhoff *et al.*, 2019). According to parasocial interaction theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956), PSRs offer a means for humanizing brands and strengthening digital consumer-brand relationships (Steinhoff *et al.*, 2019).

PSRs are typically conceptualized as a state of being either "on" or "off," thus limiting their conceptual richness. To overcome this shortcoming, Tukachinsky and Stever (2019) discuss different relationship-building stages that evolve from the initiation stage (i.e., impression formation of the media figure) to an ultimate integration stage (i.e., establishing/maintaining a relationship). Nevertheless, not every consumer encounter with a media persona initiates a PSR, as relationship formation depends on several consumer, influencer, and situational characteristics (Klimmt *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, key PSR forming antecedents focus on consumer identification with the influencer through shared values and attitudinal similarities (Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019). Homophily (i.e., individuals being attracted to those who are perceived to be similar to themselves) depicts the center of these

meaningful bonds, which is typically achieved more easily by human (vs. non-human) entities<sup>6</sup> (Hamilton and Sherman, 1996; Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019). Consequently, influencers' consumer relationships tend to elicit stronger consumer attachment (Thomson, 2006), thereby often dominating brands' endeavors to establish consumer relationships (Giertz *et al.*, 2022; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020).

### **5.3 Study 4: Research framework**

#### **5.3.1 Study 4: Theoretical research model**

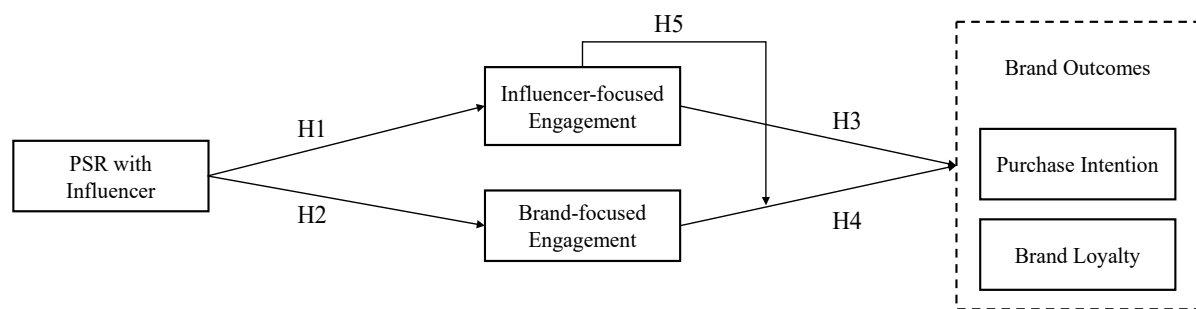
The study aims at illuminating the impact of PSRs on influencer marketing campaign outcomes. Thus, PSRs represent the independent variable of our research model (see Figure 7). Based on our review, we highlighted CE as a decisive factor for brand outcomes and the need to examine and distinguish PSRs' effects on influencer- and brand-levels. Hence, influencer-focused CE and brand-focused CE entail the mediator variables of the model. As illustrated, brands conduct endorsing campaigns for various reasons, including revenue and branding objectives. Accordingly, we consider purchase intention and brand loyalty to represent these objectives in terms of this study's dependent variables (i.e., brand outcomes).

Furthermore, extant literature indicates that consumers' overall evaluation of an endorsement campaign is determined by the engagement with influencer and brand individually *and* their interplay. More precisely, consumers' investment in their attachment to the endorser may distract from their investment with the brand (Erfgen *et al.*, 2015; Knoll and Matthes, 2017). Accounting for this, we also incorporate influencer-focused CE as a moderator to examine its impact on the effectiveness of brand-focused CE.

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<sup>6</sup> PSR formation is not exclusive to human entities. Social media facilitate frequent exposure and self-disclosure of information, intensifying the intimacy and immediacy of brands' communication (Kim and Song, 2016). This being said, identification (e.g., based on users' similar value systems) is compatible with non-human entities and PSRs can evolve between consumers and brands (Labrecque, 2014).

**Figure 7. Study 4: Research model**



### 5.3.2 Study 4: Hypotheses

Consumer-based PSR consequences include the illusion of a friend-like relationship with an influencer, more frequent exposure to the influencer, and desire to become more like the influencer (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005; Kim and Song, 2016; Knoll and Matthes, 2017). Recipients' PSR-based effects are often categorized on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels (Dibble et al., 2016; Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019), thus aligning with CE's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014, 2019). Accordingly, we postulate:

*H1*: PSRs have a positive effect on influencer-focused CE.

Pioneering research suggests that strong celebrity attachments may facilitate the transfer of positive feelings to a sponsored object, such as a brand (Erdogan, 1999; Thomson, 2006). The possible spillover effect (Bowden *et al.*, 2017) may be caused by influencer-based PSRs as users make more favorable attributions to behaviors and opinions of their friends and individuals they sympathize with (Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019). This is in line with previous empirical studies that have shown PSRs indirect positive effect on brand outcomes (Breves *et al.*, 2021; Lou and Yuan, 2019), as, for instance, PSRs increase source trustworthiness which

leads to viewing the endorsed offering and brand more favorably (Chung and Cho, 2017).

Hence:

*H2: PSRs have a positive impact on brand-focused CE.*

High influencer-focused resource investment is characterized by increased cognitive processing and time spent regarding the influencer's content (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Typically, only a small share of the influencer's content entails communicating the endorsed offering. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that engaged consumers recognize the endorsed offering more frequently and intensely than less engaged ones. Further, consumers' heightened cognitive processing of the influencer's content applies to the given information on the endorsed offering, making consumers' need recognition and consideration more likely, ultimately resulting in more favorable brand evaluations (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Moreover, higher influencer-focused CE can elevate consumers' perception of trust and expertise, which may increase consumer behavior with the endorsed brand and long-term sales (Brettel *et al.*, 2015; Mattke *et al.*, 2020). Thus, as part of the influencer's content, brand-based communication may be more effective for highly engaged consumers, translating to increased brand outcomes.

*H3: Influencer-focused CE has a positive impact on brand outcomes.*

Numerous studies identify brand-focused CE as a critical construct in the social media context, as consumers' resource investment in their brand interactions is characterized by, for instance, brand preference (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014), value co-creation processes (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014) motivation to seek out other brand-related experiences (Santini *et al.*, 2020), and enhanced self-brand connection (Labrecque, 2014). Thus, CE fosters satisfaction with and trust in the brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2015), better the consumer-brand relationship (Alexander *et al.*, 2017), and, ultimately, leads to increased brand performance (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). We propose that these arguments also apply in our research context:

*H4: Brand-focused CE has a positive impact on brand outcomes.*

Prior research has shown that celebrities can dominate the advertised offering or brand, coined as an overshadowing-, vampire-, and eclipsing effect (Erfgen *et al.*, 2015; Ilicic and Webster, 2014). Thus, employing celebrities in traditional media advertisements (i.e., offline banner and TV campaigns) can negatively impact brand recall and -attitude. As a possible explanation, Erfgen *et al.* (2015) point to Feldman and Lynch's (1988) accessibility-diagnostics framework: If an advertisement contains different information, its overall consumer evaluation depends on that piece of information most accessible and diagnostic to the individual. Therefore, using a familiar celebrity (vs. an unknown endorser) yields an overshadowing effect for the brand (Erfgen *et al.*, 2015). We argue that consumers' familiarity with an endorser is mirrored in CE's emotional and cognitive resource investment and that the overshadowing effect is more pronounced in this research context for two reasons. First, influencer marketing campaigns are exclusively seeded to consumers familiar with the endorser (i.e., influencers' followers). Second, social media facilitate deep bonds between users and influencers, leading to stronger relationships than traditional media (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, we postulate that the overshadowing effect exceeds previously considered outcomes and impacts purchase intentions and brand loyalty. In other words, the impact of brand-focused CE is mitigated by high influencer-focused CE.

*H5: Influencer-focused CE mitigates the positive impact of brand-focused CE on brand outcomes.*

## **5.4 Study 4: Empirical study**

### **5.4.1 Study 4: Study design and sample**

Leung *et al.* (2022) and Giertz *et al.* (2022) propose that long-term influencer-corporate brand cooperations and campaigns entail a pivotal factor to facilitate the positive spillover from

influencers to brands. The limited extant findings beyond influencer marketing's campaign scope may be rooted in the analysis of short-lived endorsements and depict a shortcoming of previous studies and, equally, current business practices. Thus, in cooperation with a German influencer agency, we selected three influencers ( $M_{\text{followers}} > 258,000$ ) of their portfolio, who endorsed a particular brand for at least six months. Moreover, it allowed us to consider different industries (fashion, food, beauty), comparable campaign budgets, and similar content design in terms of frequency and used media. To empirically test the hypotheses, we conducted a survey among users of the platform Instagram between October and November 2021, distributed by said influencers. The questions related to one influencer and a specific brand that they endorsed. Participants answered questions about their engagement and parasocial relationships with the influencer and engagement, loyalty, and purchase intention regarding the brand, followed by control variables.

The initial sample consisted of 369 participants that finished the questionnaire. Those participants who failed attention checks did not answer each question or took the survey not conscientiously were eliminated from further analyses. The final sample consists of  $n = 272$  participants (90% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 28.7$  years).

#### **5.4.2 Study 4: Measurement**

Measures for PSRs were taken by adapting a scale from Chung and Cho (2017). Using Stata/MP 16.1, we conducted a factor analysis that revealed PSRs as a latent variable with factor loadings of the respective items above the recommended value of 0.5 (Hulland *et al.*, 2018). Also, we examined Cronbach's alpha of the construct, which was above 0.7 and indicated composite reliability (Hulland *et al.*, 2018). We used the factor score for later analyses.

**Table 16. Study 4: Rotated component matrix resulting from factor analysis**

CE Item	Factor 1: Brand- focused CE	Factor 2: Influencer- focused CE	Cron. Alpha.
The post about [brand]. makes me think a lot about [brand].	<b>0.82</b>	0.22	0.87
The post about [brand]. stimulates my interest to learn more about [brand].	<b>0.85</b>	0.22	
I feel very positive when I see a post about [brand].	<b>0.89</b>	0.10	
I am happy when I see a post about [brand].	<b>0.90</b>	0.07	
I would be proud to use [brand]'s products.	<b>0.87</b>	0.14	
I would spend a lot of time using [brand]'s products compared to other products of [brand]'s category	<b>0.73</b>	0.17	
When I am on [influencer]'s profile I think a lot about [pronoun].	0.09	<b>0.57</b>	0.94
When I am on [influencer]'s profile it stimulates my interest to learn more about [pronoun].	0.05	<b>0.73</b>	
I feel very positive when I see [influencer]'s content.	0.17	<b>0.81</b>	
I am happy when I see [influencer]'s content.	0.25	<b>0.82</b>	
I enjoy following [influencer].	0.16	<b>0.77</b>	
I spent a lot of time with [influencer]'s content.	0.23	<b>0.65</b>	
<i>Explained Variance</i>	56.09%	41.96%	

We adapted Hollebeek *et al.*'s (2014) scale concerning CE's three (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) sub-dimensions in the social media context for influencers and brands, using two items for each dimension. A factor analysis confirmed the two-factor structure, with influencer-focused CE explaining 41.96% of the variance and brand-focused CE explaining 56.09%. All items exceeded primary factor loadings of 0.5 and remained below cross-loadings of 0.3, thus fulfilling minimum criteria. Specific results of this confirmatory factor analysis containing the items used and their factor loadings are depicted in Table 16. Further, we examine Cronbach's alpha of both constructs, which shows values above the recommended cutoff value of 0.7, indicating construct reliability (Hulland *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, we adopted measures for purchase intent (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Bleier *et al.*, 2019) and brand loyalty (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996) from established scales. We measured every multi-item construct on seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly



disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The results of the reliability checks and items used are shown in Table 17. Table 18 displays summary statistics.

**Table 17. Study 4: Measures**

Variable (literature support)	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Parasocial relationships</b> <sup>a</sup> (adapted from Chung and Cho 2018):	.91
I share similar point of views as [influencer].	
I can identify myself with [influencer].	
I share similar moral values as [influencer].	
I like the recommendations of [influencer].	
I feel like [influencer] fits my interests.	
I sense that I belong to [influencer]'s community.	
I feel comfortable in [influencer]'s community.	
<b>Influencer-focused engagement</b> <sup>a</sup> (adapted from Hollebeek et al. 2014):	.94
When I am on [influencer]'s profile I think a lot about [pronoun].	
When I am on [influencer]'s profile it stimulates my interest to learn more about [pronoun].	
I feel very positive when I see [influencer]'s content.	
I am happy when I see [influencer]'s content.	
I enjoy following [influencer].	
I spent a lot of time with [influencer]'s content.	
<b>Brand-focused engagement</b> <sup>a</sup> (adapted from Hollebeek et al. 2014):	.87
The post about [brand] makes me think a lot about [brand].	
The post about [brand] stimulates my interest to learn more about [brand].	
I feel very positive when I see a post about [brand].	
I am happy when I see a post about [brand].	
I would be proud to use [brand]'s products.	
I would spend a lot of time using [brand]'s products compared to other products of [brand]'s category.	
<b>Purchase intention</b> <sup>a</sup> (adapted from Ajzen and Fishbein 1980):	.94
It is likely that I buy the advertised product of [brand].	
It is likely that I buy other products of [brand].	
<b>Brand Loyalty</b> <sup>a</sup> (adapted from Zeithaml et al. 1996):	.84
In the future, I will only buy from [brand].	
I recommend [brand] to others.	
I am sure that I will buy [brand] instead of other brands.	

Notes: All items were measured on seven-point Likert scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*).<sup>a</sup> The brand name, influencer name, and pronouns were adjusted accordingly for each survey.

**Table 18. Study 4: Descriptive statistics and correlations**

Measure	<i>M/%</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Purchase Intent	3.34	(1.84)	1.00												
2. Brand Loyalty	3.27	(1.52)	0.87	1.00											
3. Influencer CE	5.72	(0.95)	0.12	0.20	1.00										
4. Brand CE	3.30	(1.58)	0.82	0.80	0.03	1.00									
5. PSRs	5.22	(1.12)	0.35	0.36	0.67	0.31	1.00								
6. Female	90%	NA	-0.08	-0.09	-0.08	-0.11	-0.13	1.00							
7. Age	28.72	(6.40)	0.07	0.05	-0.13	0.04	-0.09	0.03	1.00						
8. Income	2.88	(0.99)	-0.10	-0.11	-0.16	-0.08	-0.09	0.06	0.38	1.00					
9. Social Media Use	6.49	(0.75)	-0.04	-0.10	0.09	-0.06	0.02	-0.02	-0.17	-0.08	1.00				
10. Instagram Use	6.24	(1.00)	-0.06	-0.09	0.08	-0.07	0.02	0.13	-0.16	-0.10	0.64	1.00			
11. Brand Aware	1.43	(0.50)	-0.22	-0.24	-0.01	-0.31	-0.08	-0.07	-0.15	0.00	0.01	0.04	1.00		
12. Food Influencer	29.8%	(17.74)	0.32	0.39	0.17	0.31	0.16	-0.39	0.03	-0.28	0.00	-0.05	-0.03	1.00	
13. Beauty Influencer	31.9%	(4.28)	-0.20	-0.25	-0.08	-0.14	-0.02	-0.20	0.12	0.18	-0.02	-0.04	-0.16	-0.45	1.00

The considered sociodemographic control variables entail age, income, and gender (1 = female, 0 = male). Additionally, the model accounts for the participants' social media usage behavior in general and Instagram specifically. We controlled for a consumer's awareness of the brand that was part of the endorsement campaign. Lastly, we created two binary variables that indicated whether the responses related to the "food influencer" (87 participants) or "beauty influencer" (81 participants) of this study. Thus, these variables indicate cluster-specific effects in reference to the largest cluster "fashion influencer" (104 participants) and control for part of the within-cluster error correlation (Cameron & Miller 2015).

### 5.4.3 Study 4: Model and results

To test the postulated relationships, we employed seemingly unrelated regression. We additionally use cluster-robust standard errors to fully control for within-cluster correlation of the error and heteroskedasticity (Cameron and Miller, 2015). We estimated the results of the following regression equations simultaneously:

- (1) Influencer-focused  $CE_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PSRs_i + \beta_2 Gender_i + \beta_3 Age_i + \beta_4 Income_i + \beta_5 Social\ Media\ Usage_i + \beta_6 Instagram\ Usage_i + \beta_7 Brand\ Awareness_i + \beta_8 Food\ Influencer_i + \beta_9 Beauty\ Influencer_i + \varepsilon_{1i}$ , and
- (2) Brand-focused  $CE_i = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 PSRs_i + \gamma_2 Gender_i + \gamma_3 Age_i + \gamma_4 Income_i + \gamma_5 Social\ Media\ Usage_i + \gamma_6 Instagram\ Usage_i + \gamma_7 Brand\ Awareness_i + \gamma_8 Food\ Influencer_i + \gamma_9 Beauty\ Influencer_i + \varepsilon_{2i}$ , and.
- (3)  $Purchase\ Intention_i = \delta_0 + \delta_1 Influencer\ CE_i + \delta_2 Brand\ CE_i + \delta_3 Brand\ CE \times Influencer\ CE_i + \delta_4 Gender + \delta_5 Age_i + \delta_6 Income_i + \delta_7 Social\ Media\ Usage_i + \delta_8 Instagram\ Usage_i + \delta_9 Brand\ Awareness_i + \delta_{10} Food\ Influencer_i + \delta_{11} Beauty\ Influencer_i + \varepsilon_{3i}$ , and
- (4)  $Brand\ Loyalty_i = \zeta_0 + \zeta_1 Influencer\ CE_i + \zeta_2 Brand\ CE_i + \zeta_3 Brand\ CE \times Influencer\ CE_i + \zeta_4 Gender + \zeta_5 Age_i + \zeta_6 Income_i + \zeta_7 Social\ Media\ Usage_i + \zeta_8 Instagram\ Usage_i + \zeta_9 Brand\ Awareness_i + \zeta_{10} Food\ Influencer_i + \zeta_{11} Beauty\ Influencer_i + \varepsilon_{4i}$ .

**Table 19. Study 4: SUR estimates**

Independent variables	Dependent variables										
	Influencer-focused CE		Brand-focused CE		Purchase Intention		Brand Loyalty				
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE			
Constant	-0.394***	0.524	-0.304***	0.056	2.076**	0.995	3.392***	0.477			
<i>Independent variables</i>											
PSRs	0.608***	0.071	H <sub>1</sub> (+)	0.228***	0.055	H <sub>2</sub> (+)					
Influencer-focused CE						0.158***	0.016	H <sub>3</sub> (+)	0.255***	0.002	H <sub>3</sub> (+)
Brand-focused CE						1.540***	0.053	H <sub>4</sub> (+)	1.174***	0.067	H <sub>4</sub> (+)
<i>Interaction</i>											
Influencer-focused CE × Brand-focused CE						-0.145**	0.061	H <sub>5</sub> (-)	-0.098*	0.056	H <sub>5</sub> (-)
<i>Controls</i>											
Female	0.127***	0.047		0.019	0.074	0.334**	0.167		0.356***	0.071	
Age	-0.006***	0.002		-0.001	0.008	0.024**	0.011		0.011	0.008	
Income	-0.074	0.047		0.009	0.098	-0.064	0.116		-0.003	0.088	
Social Media Usage	0.068***	0.022		-0.068	0.087	0.09***	0.007		-0.08*	0.044	
Instagram Usage	0.017	0.032		-0.019	0.061	-0.036	0.091		-0.022	0.076	
Brand Awareness	0.064	0.083		-0.582**	0.232	0.13	0.175		-0.051	0.151	
Food Influencer	0.137***	0.047		0.503***	0.087	0.109***	0.037		0.351***	0.112	
Beauty Influencer	-0.068***	0.016		-0.192**	0.084	-0.322***	0.033		-0.346***	0.041	
R <sup>2</sup>	.446			.247		.694			.705		

**Notes:**  $N = 272$ ; unstandardized results based on two-tailed  $t$ -tests. The highest variance inflation factor (VIF) is 1.8, well below the recommended cutoff of 5 (O'Brien, 2007). The postulated direction of effects is indicated in parentheses \*  $p \leq .10$ , \*\*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

The results (see Table 19) reveal a significant positive effect PSRs on influencer-focused engagement ( $\beta_1 = 0.608, p < .01$ ) and brand-focused engagement ( $\gamma_1 = 0.228, p < .01$ ), lending support to H1 and H2. Further, the main effect of influencer-focused engagement shows a significant positive on purchase intention ( $\delta_1 = 0.158, p < .01$ ) and brand loyalty ( $\zeta_1 = 0.255, p < .01$ ), confirming the expectations of H3. In line with H4, the main effect of brand-focused engagement also exhibits a significant positive effect on purchase intention ( $\delta_2 = 1.540, p < .01$ ) and brand loyalty ( $\zeta_2 = 1.174, p < .01$ ). At last, the positive impact of brand-focused engagement is mitigated when paired with influencer-focused engagement indicated by significant and negative interaction effects (for purchase intention:  $\delta_3 = -0.145, p < .05$ ; for brand loyalty:  $\zeta_3 = -0.098, p < .1$ ), supporting H5.

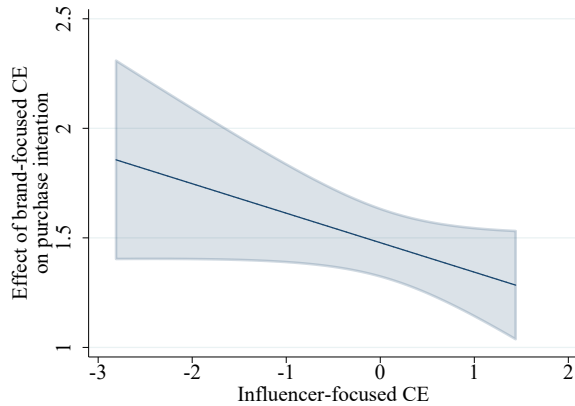
Notably, the regression coefficient of the interaction term shares a similar magnitude as the main effect of influencer-focused engagement on purchase intention. Hence, the main effect of influencer-focused engagement is nearly compensated by its mitigating impact on brand-focused engagement.

#### **5.4.4 Study 4: Post-hoc floodlight analysis**

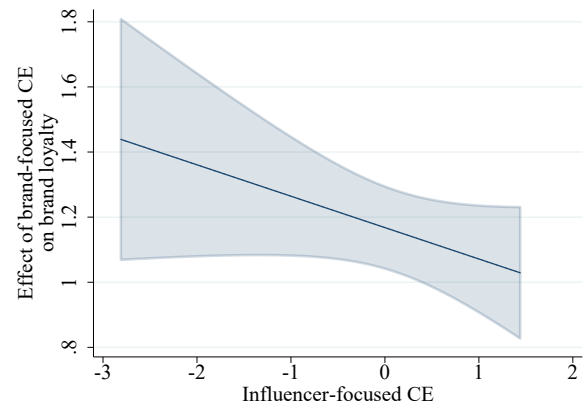
For gaining additional insights into the interaction effect of brand-focused and influencer-focused CE, we conducted a post-hoc floodlight analysis. It allows us to examine for what values of influencer-focused CE the interaction becomes significant. Thus, we can further illuminate the scenarios in which the mitigating effect on brand-focused CE is relevant. We plotted the marginal effects of brand-focused CE on the dependent variables for different values of influencer-focused CE, using increments of 0.05 across the observed value range  $[-2.81, 1.48]$ . The results are shown in Figure 8 with Panel A relating to purchase intention and Panel B for brand loyalty.

**Figure 8. Study 4: Floodlight analysis: Effects of brand-focused engagement for various levels of influencer-focused CE**

A: Marginal effect of brand-focused CE on purchase intention for different levels influencer-focused CE



B: Marginal effect of brand-focused CE on brand loyalty for different levels influencer-focused CE



For both dependent variables, the interaction effect is significant ( $p < .05$ ) at all given values of influencer-focused CE, lending more support to H5. Hence, regardless of how strongly consumers are engaged with influencers, it mitigates the effect of brand-focused CE on the observed brand outcomes; and even more so, when they demonstrate very high levels of influencer-focused CE.

#### 5.4.5 Study 4: Discussion

As a primary objective, this paper intended to illuminate the role of CE in influencer marketing. We applied a non-dyadic perspective to analyze the interdependencies of consumers' resource investment with influencers and brands in this environment. Ergo, we examined the effects of PSRs on different engagement metrics and the interplay of the latter. The empirical results confirm our expected relationships and provide insights on influencer marketing's benefits and drawbacks.

Indeed, the findings suggest that the overshadowing effect observed in celebrity endorsement research extends to the context of influencer marketing as engagement with the

more familiar stimuli (i.e., influencer) curbs the processing of engagement with the less familiar stimuli (i.e., brand). Importantly, the empirical evidence highlights the magnitude and scope of this detrimental effect. This result seems to indicate that influencer-focused CE may be less relevant to predicting the effectiveness of influencer campaigns. In turn, the success of an endorsement could be primarily determined by PSR-based spillover effects on favorable brand attributions, ultimately increasing brand-focused CE.

We argue that strong PSRs with influencers facilitate these spillover effects. However, they are not preconditioned and dependent on contextual factors, demonstrated by the mixed findings of endorsement campaigns' impact on brand-related outcomes (Evans *et al.*, 2018; Veirman and Hudders, 2019). Further, the empirical evidence suggests that influencer marketing's success is highly dependent on consumers' PSRs with influencers, hinting at additional harmful effects, which we discuss in the following chapter.

## **5.5 Study 4: Summary**

This study's findings guide influencer marketing and branding researchers by deepening the understanding of the potentially favorable versus unfavorable outcomes of endorsement campaigns and developing corresponding future research avenues. Accordingly, we contribute to improving the complex performance evaluation of endorsement campaigns and identifying its success factors, which also entails valuable insight for marketing managers looking to employ influencer marketing.

### **5.5.1 Study 4: Implications for researchers**

The empirical evidence provided in this study suggests that influencer marketing can be an effective tool for driving brand outcomes, underlining the pivotal role of PSRs in the process. At the same time, high engagement with the influencer can have adverse effects on brand loyalty and purchase intentions, which casts doubt on the effectiveness of influencer marketing,

mostly presumed by marketers and researchers (Goldenberg *et al.*, 2022; Lou and Yuan, 2019). Only if an influencer campaign generates brand-focused engagement can it be highly successful. Furthermore, our analyses illustrate the brand's dependency on how influencers can create and maintain strong relationships with their audience.

The latest conceptual studies echo these concerns about the reliance of influencer marketing's success on PSRs, affirming the underlying non-dyadic approach of this analysis. For instance, Leung *et al.* (2022) discuss influencer marketing as an opportunity to achieve short-term goals and a threat to long-term objectives. Further, Giertz *et al.* (2022) demonstrate potential problems of brand-focused CE instigated by influencers, suggesting that influencers may even hijack brands' consumer relationships. Although our empirical findings partially rebut influencer marketing's potential threat to brand performance, we acknowledge our facilitative study design to uncover favorable brand outcomes by examining long-term cooperations. Taken together, this research provides an improved understanding of mechanisms to illuminate influencer marketing's opportunities and challenges.

Based on our analyses and previous findings, we now build on the generated insights to introduce a classification of influencer marketing's prevalent effects on consumer behavior. Further, we assign proposed brand outcomes to each effect to guide future research endeavors better (see Table 20). Additionally, we consider different brand outcomes *during* and *after* the cooperation with the influencer to illustrate the potentially harmful consequences that arise through the dependency on PSRs. More precisely, manifestations for the brand differ according to consumers' engagement valence with the influencer's endorsed brand and brand outcomes. The classified outcomes are considered dynamic (vs. static) states. That is, consumers' *cross-state* switching is possible (Bowden *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, not every consumer's relationship with a brand—despite potentially following the same influencer—will yield the same outcome *per se* since PSRs vary in their consequences for individual-specific behavior toward the



endorsed brand (Tukachinsky *et al.*, 2021). Below, we explain the effects contained in the classification.

*True endorsement effect.* A true endorsement effect is observed when influencer-based PSRs foster positive brand engagement and enhanced brand outcomes. The true endorsement effect covers influencer marketing's most desirable outcome. In this scenario, the benefits accruing from PSRs spill over to become positive brand associations and manifest in positive engagement directed at the endorsed brand as well as elevated purchase intentions and brand loyalty (Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Kupfer *et al.*, 2018). Even after the conclusion of the brand alliance between influencer/brand (i.e., when the influencer stops actively endorsing the brand), consumers are likely to retain their positive brand-related relational state.

*Latent endorsement effect.* We identify a latent endorsement effect in a scenario where influencer-based PSRs yield positive brand engagement, which does not translate into brand outcomes. Here, PSRs spill over to become positive brand associations, as above, though these do not translate into purchase behavior or brand loyalty (e.g., as the consumer currently lacks the need to purchase the brand's offering or lacks access to it (Dowling *et al.*, 2020)). Thus, while purchase does not transpire, this scenario is still beneficial to the brand, as elevated CE may yield indirect or delayed positive effects (e.g., by exerting a social influence (Pansari and Kumar, 2017)). Even when the influencer stops actively endorsing the brand, the consumer continues to engage with the brand positively and is likely to buy its offers in the future.

*Overshadowing effect.* Influencer-focused engagement mitigating the impact of brand-focused engagement signifies an *overshadowing effect*. This effect is limited to the campaign's duration, for it can only occur when information about the influencer and the brand are presented together and, thus, are salient to consumers at the same time (Erfgen *et al.*, 2015; Ilicic and Webster, 2014). In this case, consumers evaluate influencer- (vs. marketer)-related

information as more accessible and diagnostic because influencers are perceived as more authentic (Goh *et al.*, 2013). Accordingly, as consumers perceive a higher familiarity with the influencer, fluent processing of consumers' engagement with the brand can be negatively affected. That is, the brand represents a less familiar stimulus, resulting in curbed effectiveness of brand-focused engagement on brand outcomes<sup>7</sup> (Erfgen *et al.*, 2015; Feldman and Lynch, 1988). Also, this effect is particularly prominent in the context of influencer marketing because PSRs imply the consumer's perceived intimate familiarity with the influencer.

*Relationship hijacking effect.* For the *relationship hijacking effect* (Giertz *et al.*, 2022), influencer-based PSRs yield increased brand engagement and positively impact brand outcomes. However, brand engagement is contingent on a consumer's PSR with the influencer in this scenario so that a consumer's engagement with the influencer prevails over the brand engagement. As a consequence, consumers may only show increased brand-related outcomes during the campaign and fade thereafter, as they were facilitated by consumers' PSR with the influencer. Accordingly, influencers are in full control of the consumer-brand relationship (e.g., by determining the relationship's outcomes) and, after the cooperation, may take their audience with them (e.g., to a competitive offering/brand), resulting in decreased brand outcomes. Notably, during the campaign, this effect is indistinguishable from the true endorsement effect, as it causes the same brand outcomes, indicating the deceptive nature of relationship hijacking (Giertz *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, if influencers fall from grace (e.g., by being subject to a public scandal; Knittel and Stango, 2014), consumers may experience a "parasocial breakup" (Tukachinsky and Stever, 2019), cutting all ties with the influencer and their endorsements, which can result in oppositional loyalty or boycott of the brand (Thompson and Sinha, 2008).

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<sup>7</sup> We acknowledge that similar arguments are applicable for the consideration of PSRs. It is conceivable that overshadowing occurs at an earlier stage of the process, meaning that PSRs impair the processing of the brand message and potentially reveal a direct, negative effect of PSRs on brand-focused CE. Thus, we urge future studies to clarify this process and further examine the mechanism of overshadowing.

**Table 20. Study 4: Classification of predominantly occurring effects and avenues for further research**

Effect	Definition	Impact of influencer-based PSRs on brand outcomes ...		Literature support	Future research avenues
		... during cooperation	... after cooperation		
True Endorsement	Influencer-based PSRs foster positive brand-focused CE and enhanced brand outcomes.	Brand-focused CE (+) Brand outcomes (+)	Brand-focused CE (+) Brand outcomes (+)	Breves <i>et al.</i> (2021) Chung and Cho (2018) Ki and Kim (2019) Lou and Yuan (2019) Torres <i>et al.</i> (2019) This study	How persistent is the true endorsement effect after the cooperation ends (what determines the decay of the true endorsement effect)? How can the existence of the true endorsement effect be identified? What contextual factors accelerate/slow down the development of the true endorsement effect? Which content/influencer characteristics spur the transferal of positive association towards the brand?
Latent Endorsement	Influencer-based PSRs yield positive brand-focused CE, which do not translate into brand outcomes.	Brand-focused CE (+)	Brand-focused CE (+)	Hughes <i>et al.</i> (2019) Swaminathan <i>et al.</i> (2020) Valsesia <i>et al.</i> (2020)	How persistent is the latent endorsement effect after the cooperation ends (what determines the decay of the latent endorsement effect)? What factors transform the latent endorsement effect to purchases? For which products/services is the latent endorsement effect worthwhile/neglectable?
Overshadowing	Influencer-focused CE mitigates the impact of brand-focused CE because of influencer- (vs. marketer)-related information as more accessible and diagnostic.	Mitigated effect of brand-focused CE on brand outcomes	NA	De Veirman and Hudders (2020) Erfgen <i>et al.</i> (2018) Ilicic and Webster (2014)	How do influencer/product congruence and influencer/consumer congruence impact the overshadowing effect? In which scenarios are influencer campaigns with less engaged audiences preferable? What share should brand-related information take in the influencers' communication?
Relationship Hijacking	The strong PSR with the influencer determines the engagement with the brand so that influencers maintain full control (i.e., hijack) of the consumer-brand relationship.	Brand-focused CE (+) Brand outcomes (+)	Brand-focused CE (-) Brand outcomes (-)	Hollebeek <i>et al.</i> (2019) Giertz <i>et al.</i> (2022) Leung <i>et al.</i> (2022) Zhou and Whitla (2013)	How can the relationship hijacking effect be accounted for in performance measurement? How should influencer campaigns be designed to facilitate the transformation of relationship hijacking into true endorsement? To what extent can long-term cooperations mitigate the relationship hijacking effect? How does high/low influencer/product congruence impact the prevalence and magnitude of the relationship hijacking effect?

### 5.5.2 Study 4: Implications for managers

The findings of this study illuminate the consequences of influencer marketing from a non-dyadic perspective. Thus, we inform managers on the mechanisms to employ influencer marketing in their digital marketing strategies successfully. The revealed and discussed negative consequences provide additional managerial insight on preventing and managing harmful effects for enhancing influencer marketing's effectiveness.

First, we argue that our study design was facilitative to reveal favorable brand outcomes as the examined long-term cooperations are prone to enable positive spillover effects of consumers' PSRs with influencers to the brand. Accordingly, we recommend marketers evaluate their influencer campaigns' performance with an appropriate scope that encompasses the process of spillover effects (Bowden *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, we note that positive brand outcomes might not reveal themselves in earlier stages of influencer cooperations and encourage managers not to evaluate conducted campaigns as ineffective prematurely.

Second, our study reveals the crucial role of PSRs in determining brand outcomes. This issue helps marketers to understand the ability of influencer marketing to achieve brand objectives. At the same time, the dependency on consumers' PSRs cast doubt on the longevity of achieved brand outcomes after the cooperation ends. Thus, campaign managers should be wary of stagnating or declining brand outcomes after the endorsement ends.

Third, in light of the potentially detrimental effects, the dependency of PSRs on influencer marketing's effectiveness should be considered in the endorsement campaigns' design. That is, rather than solely relying on positive spillover effects, managers could focus on influencers actively communicating specific details of the offering's/brand's value to persuade consumers. Thus, when the cooperation ends and positive associations between the influencer and brand fade, the potential negative effects could be mitigated. Nevertheless, previous

research shows the importance of influencer communication being perceived as credible and authentic (Chung and Cho, 2017; Ki and Kim, 2019). Managers should test different levels of advertising tone and depth of product/brand information given in the communication. Thus, the potentially detrimental effects could be countered, and campaigns could yield more favorable results.

## **5.6 Study 4: Summary and limitations**

This study affirms influencer marketing's position as a powerful marketing tool. At the same time, we reveal the mitigating overshadowing effect rooted in this non-dyadic environment, which informs marketers and scholars on previously overlooked mechanisms and highlights the need for complex measures to evaluate campaign performance. Further, we subsume influencer marketing's predominant effects that may entail sustainable, volatile, or even detrimental effects on brand outcomes.

Our analysis underlies certain limitations. First, the acquired data centered on long-term cooperations. Thus, it remains uncertain if the identified effects and underlying mechanisms hold true for shorter campaigns durations. In the same vein, we argued that the benefits of influencer marketing might be curbed for these short-term cooperations, which could be tested by following studies, revealing an additional research avenue.

Second, the generalizability of this study is questioned by our examination of the German influencer market. Further, our sample consists of a high share of female respondents. These circumstances might have biased our results, and we urge future analyses to replicate our findings in an international scenario with a more representative gender distribution.

Lastly, we identified consumers' PSRs with influencers as a crucial driver of brand outcomes. It is uncertain if influencers with different audience sizes generate comparable strengths of PSRs with their followers since perceived intimacy denotes a key indicator of these

relationships. Hence, the relevancy of PSRs might alter for macro (vs. micro) influencers to explain the underlying effects of influencer marketing. Despite denoting an additional limitation, the examination of influencers with different audience sizes may entail a fruitful trajectory for future research endeavors.

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## **6 Conclusion**

This dissertation was motivated by the lack of theoretical and managerial knowledge of engagement in emerging social media. For content creators, emerging social media offer novel occupation opportunities, while brands face the challenge of incorporating emerging social media as a key element of their marketing strategy. However, research to date revealed fragmented terminology and neglected the constituting characteristics of emerging social media in their applied frameworks. Likewise, recommendations for content creators and marketers on successfully driving consumer engagement remained vague. Accordingly, the four studies of this dissertation examined the consequences of consumer engagement in emerging social media conceptually and empirically. The results reveal valuable insight into emerging social media's underlying mechanisms and peculiarities and their implications for consumer engagement.

### **6.1 Research implications**

The presented results of this dissertation's studies illuminate the formation of consumer engagement in the context of emerging social media, highlighting conceptual frameworks and driving and thwarting factors in the process. This dissertation reveals three key implications for researchers. First, the articles pinpoint conceptual differences of asynchronous and synchronous social media that lead to altered social experiences and value co-creation. Second, the success of influencer marketing is highly dependent on consumers' PSRs as they can explain beneficial and potentially adverse effects on engagement. Third, the examination of influencer marketing should follow a non-dyadic research approach to illuminate the content creators' intermediary role in the brand communication process.

Study 1 highlights the most applied terminology and theories of commodifying content creation, which informs and guides future research endeavors, including the three subsequent



studies of this dissertation. Study 2 demonstrates that users' social interactions and derived value are the core of emerging social media's increased commodification. In particular, study 2 shows how synchronous social media facilitate value co-creation through direct communication with the content creator, resulting in particularly personalized and vivid interactions. Similarly, the real-time nature of synchronous social media forces users' collective content consumption, indicating heightened social experiences. These findings suggest that researchers should focus on these constituting characteristics to illuminate the increased consumer engagement in synchronous social media. Additionally, content creators' communication foci and style reveal countervailing effects on different engagement manifestations, pointing scholars to examine various consumer behaviors individually.

Studies 3 and 4 demonstrate how content creators become increasingly relevant for marketing researchers as consumers' PSRs with content creators are essential to determine the outcomes of endorsement campaigns. More precisely, PSRs explain the spillover of positive associations from the content creator to the brand, highlighting a crucial mechanism of influencer marketing for concerned researchers. While this provides insight into favorable brand outcomes, it also showcases the potentially adverse effects of influencer marketing. Consumer-brand relationships are highly dependent on PSRs with content creators, indicating volatile brand outcomes and detrimental consequences if content creators fall from grace (Knittel and Stango, 2014; Zhou and Whitla, 2013). Study 3 conceptualizes this issue as relationship hijacking and guides future research to illuminate previous studies' narrow findings and evaluate influencer marketing's effectiveness beyond campaigns' duration. Moreover, this article elaborates how relationship hijacking may extend to other environments, contributing to the management and sociopolitical literature.

Additionally, the findings of study 4 illustrate that the overshadowing effect (i.e., reduced effectiveness of consumers' brand interactions), which was examined in the adjacent

research field of celebrity endorsement (Erfgen *et al.*, 2015; Ilicic and Webster, 2014), applies with an extended scope for the context of influencer marketing. Overshadowing, just as relationship hijacking, is rooted in the interconnected nature of consumers, content creators, and brands. Accordingly, studies 3 and 4 reveal beneficial and adverse effects while highlighting the need to analyze influencer marketing through a non-dyadic lens. Taken together, study 4 provides a classification of predominantly occurring effects in influencer marketing and derives corresponding research avenues to unlock further scholarly insight.

## **6.2 Practical implications**

For content creators and managers alike, the studies of this dissertation reveal the mechanics and success factors for effectively driving consumer engagement in emerging social media. However, the findings also suggest detrimental effects on consumer engagement, which inform practitioners on preventing or managing these unintended consequences.

First, content creators should be wary of their employed communication. As outlined in study 2, communication foci depict a double-edged sword with countervailing effects on different engagement manifestations. Thus, to boost a particular engagement metric, content creators must design their communication accordingly and hazard the adverse consequences for other engagement metrics.

Second, studies 3 and 4 demonstrate how consumers' established PSRs may spill over to favorable brand outcomes. Thus, influencer marketing can depict a powerful tool for spurring consumer engagement and cultivating consumer relationships. However, the dependency on PSRs demonstrates how campaigns may be falsely evaluated as successful. Caused by relationship hijacking effects, influencer campaigns effectively generate consumer engagement with a brand during the cooperation, which fades or ceases to exist after the cooperation. Thus, studies 3 and 4 suggest countermeasures for preventing or minimizing these unfavorable

consequences. More precisely, marketers should design endorsement campaigns that facilitate the spillover of positive associations to the brand, for instance, by conducting long-term campaigns and carefully selecting content creators to achieve high content creator/brand congruency.

Third, paired with empirical findings of previous literature, studies 3 and 4 suggest that negative consequences of relationship hijacking are, at least to some extent, inevitable. Thus, marketers face the risk of overestimating influencer campaigns' effectiveness and attributing marketing budgets suboptimally. Accordingly, marketers need to develop performance evaluation tools or heuristics to identify and account for relationship hijacking effects. For instance, campaign managers may evaluate consumers' comments on a marketer-generated post as favorable brand outcomes. Still, the message may relate to the content creator endorsing the brand, which may be indicative of relationship hijacking.

Lastly, all four studies indicate the persisting relevance of content creators and their ability to influence consumer decisions through established PSRs outside of endorsement campaigns. Content creators should be aware of their role in shaping the values and beliefs of their audience and, therefore, their impact on society. In the same vein, policymakers of emerging social media ought to monitor what is communicated on their platforms and rigorously punish creators with harmful content, such as spreading misinformation. The persisting growth of emerging social media underlines this issue, and content creators should be wary of their ever-evolving influential impact on consumer behaviors, managerial decisions, and society in the years to come. In other words:

*“Where there is great power there is great responsibility.”*

- Winston Churchill

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# Appendix

## Appendix A. Study 1: Examined publications

Publication	Journal	Conference	Empirical	Non-empirical	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed	Survey	Platform data	Interview	Video analysis	Content analysis	Ethnography/observations
(Aran <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	x		x			x					x		
(Arnett <i>et al.</i> , 2019)		x	x			x			x				
(Ashman <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x				x			x			x
(Fägersten, 2017)	x		x		x						x		
(Berryman and Kavka, 2017)	x			x									
(Bhatia, 2018)	x		x		x						x	x	
(Biel and Gatica-perez, 2013)	x		x				x	x			x		
(Bishop, 2019)	x		x		x		x			x		x	x
(Boxman-shabtai, 2019)	x		x		x					x			
(Brownlee, 2019)	x			x									
(Chen and Lin, 2018)	x		x			x		x					
(Churchill and Wu, 2016)		x	x			x			x				
(Cullen and Ruberg, 2019)		x	x		x							x	
(Cunningham and Craig, 2017)	x			x									
(Cunningham and Craig, 2019)	x		x				x			x		x	
(Deller and Murphy, 2019)	x		x		x							x	
(Faas <i>et al.</i> , 2018)		x	x		x								x
(Ferchaud <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x			x					x		
(Fietkiewicz <i>et al.</i> , 2018)		x	x			x					x		
(Friedländer, 2017)	x		x				x			x	x	x	x
(García-Rapp, 2017)	x		x		x						x		
(García-rapp, 2016)	x		x		x						x		
(Garcia-Rapp and Roc-Cuberes, 2017)	x		x		x						x	x	x
(Gerhards, 2019)	x		x			x		x					
(Gros <i>et al.</i> , 2017)		x	x			x		x					
(Guarriello, 2019)	x		x		x								x
(Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009)	x		x		x						x		
(Hou <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	x		x				x	x		x			
(Hou, 2019)	x		x		x						x	x	x
(Jerslev, 2016)	x			x									
(Jia <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x			x			x				
(Johnson, 2019)	x		x		x					x			x
(Johnson and Woodcock, 2019a)	x		x		x					x			x
(Johnson and Woodcock, 2019b)	x		x		x					x			

(continued on next page)

Publication	Journal	Conference	Empirical	Non-empirical	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed	Survey	Platform data	Interview	Video analysis	Content analysis	Ethnography/observations
(Jorge <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x		x						x		
(Kaytoue <i>et al.</i> , 2012)		x	x			x			x				
(Keating, 2013)	x			x									
(Koch <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x			x			x				
(Lee and Watkins, 2016)	x		x			x		x					
(Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2019)		x	x			x		x					
(Lessel <i>et al.</i> , 2018)		x	x			x		x					
(Li, 2018)		x	x		x					x			
(Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	x		x			x		x					
(Lu <i>et al.</i> , 2018)		x	x				x	x		x			
(Mardon <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x		x						x		
(Martinez and Olsson, 2018)	x		x		x					x			
(McRoberts <i>et al.</i> , 2016)		x	x				x		x		x		
(Munnukka <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	x		x			x		x					
(Nicoll and Nansen, 2018)	x		x		x						x		
(Partin, 2019)	x			x									
(Pellicone and Ahn, 2017)		x	x		x							x	
(Postigo, 2014)	x		x		x						x	x	x
(Raun, 2018)	x			x									
(Rihl and Wegener, 2019)	x		x			x		x					
(Scolari and Fraticelli, 2019)	x						x				x	x	
(Siutila, 2018)		x	x		x							x	
(Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017)	x		x			x		x					
(Sjöblom <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	x		x			x							x
(Tang <i>et al.</i> , 2016)		x	x				x	x		x			
(Tu <i>et al.</i> , 2018)		x	x			x			x				
(Törhönen <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	x		x			x		x					
(Wang, 2020)	x		x				x			x			x
(Wang <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	x			x									
(Wattenhofer <i>et al.</i> , 2012)		x	x			x			x				
(Wohn <i>et al.</i> , 2018)		x	x				x	x					
(Woodcock and Johnson, 2019)	x		x				x			x			x
(Wotanis and Mcmillan, 2014)	x		x				x				x	x	
(Xiao <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x			x		x					
(Yu <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	x		x			x							x
(Zhang and Hjorth, 2019)	x		x		x								x
(Zhao, 2016)	x			x									
(Zhao <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	x		x			x		x					
(Zhou <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	x		x			x		x					
(Zhu <i>et al.</i> , 2017)		x	x			x			x				
(Zimmer, 2018)		x	x		x								x

## Appendix B. Study 1: Terminology development by year

Year	Terminology content creator	Terminology content creation
2009	Vlogger	Broadcasting (2), vlogging, video blogging,
2012	Content broadcaster, commenter, user, YouTube celebrity, streamer	Upload video/content, streaming,
2013	Amateur video-maker, vlogger	Amateur video making (2), post a video, Amateur film-making, vlogging
2014	YouTuber, YouTube performer, vlogger	Create video content, vlogging, video creation, produce vlogs
2016	Youtuber (3), vlogger (2), YouTube celebrities (2), streamer (2), amateur filmmaker, amateur videographers, YouTube vlogger, video blogger, entrepreneurial online video creators, entrepreneurial content creators, video creators, content provider, content creators, diaosi, content producer, Blogger, broadcaster, YouTube author, YouTube creator, commentator	Broadcast (3), post videos (2), upload video (2), streaming (2), amateur filmmaking, amateur creative production, uploading video, content production, creative content production, vlog content, author video  live streaming, live broadcasting, production, making videos, livestreaming, create video
2017	Streamer (5), YouTuber (4), vlogger (3), video creator, creator, YouTube Influencer, content creator, YouTube user, internet celebrities, online creator, broadcaster	Streaming (4), Live streaming (3), broadcasting (3), vlogging (2), upload vlog, upload content, posting video, video-sharing, produce materials, upload, live-streaming
2018	Streamer (11), YouTuber (7), vlogger (7), content creator (4), broadcaster (2), uploader (2), live streamer (2), YouTube personalities (2), amateur experts, actor, producer, SLSSs' streamers, video blogger, Youtube influencer, online streamer, content makers, Youtube celebrities, amateur performers, YouTube creators, creator, content producer, professional-amateur, digital creator, semi-professional video producer	Streaming (7), live streaming (6), broadcast (6), Vlogging (4), live-streaming (2) upload video (2), posting video, amateur content production, video blogging, upload material, broadcast live videos, streaming video, upload & share video, produce vlog, upload vlog, live video streaming, broadcast live content, online video streaming, sharing UG video, upload content, produce video, share video, content production
2019	Streamer (10), broadcaster (7), vlogger (7), YouTuber (6), live streamer (4) YouTube celebrities (2), livestreamer (2), showroom hosts, content providers, YouTube creators, amateur video creators, video creators, creators, entrepreneurial broadcasters, Online video content creators, video content creators, social video content creators, vBlogger, amateur producers, creator, live video streaming platform user, live-streamer, YouTube stars, amateur content producers, amateur content producers, YouTube bloggers, vidders, YouTube video blogger	live streaming (9), streaming (7), vlogging (5), live-streaming (3), upload video (3), produce videos, broadcasting (3), livestreaming (2), content creation (2), video content creation, social video content creation, amateur video-sharing, lifelogging, live video streaming, host daily streams, video sharing, upload content

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## My contribution to the research projects

Study	Co-authors	Contribution <sup>a,b</sup>				
		Idea	Concept	Data	Analysis	Manuscript
Study 1: Streamers: the new wave of digital entrepreneurship? Extant corpus and research agenda	Maria Törhönen Welf H. Weiger Juho Hamari	ΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔ	ΔΔΔ	ΔΔ	ΔΔΔ
Study 2: Content versus community focus in live streaming services: how to drive engagement in synchronous social media	Welf H. Weiger Maria Törhönen Juho Hamari	ΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔ
Study 3: The invisible leash: when human brands hijack corporate brands' consumer relationships	Linda H. Hollebeek Welf H. Weiger Maik Hammerschmidt	ΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔ	-	ΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔΔ
Study 4: Blurred lines: disentangling the ambiguity of consumer engagement in influencer marketing.	Welf H. Weiger	ΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔ	ΔΔΔΔΔΔ

<sup>a</sup> For indicating my contribution to each study, I subdivided the process from initializing to finishing the paper into the phases “idea”, “concept”, “data”, “analysis”, and “manuscript”. The individual phases may repeat depending on the respective review process. My estimated contribution to each project across the process is depicted in the corresponding cells. Notably, study 3 depicts a purely conceptual analysis and renders phase “data” obsolete.

<sup>b</sup> The estimated contributions range from Δ = “Entirely the contribution of my co-authors” to ΔΔΔΔΔΔΔ = “Entirely my contribution”

16.03.2022

Date, Signature

## Eidesstattliche Erklärung

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Datum, Unterschrift

Johann N. Giertz