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# Selecting the right influencers and products to restore an organization's image

Restoring a company's reputation after an image crisis with the help of influencer marketing

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## ABSTRACT

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Even if literature on influencer marketing holds multiple studies with many different approaches to find the best suited influencer for a campaign, there still is no manifested approach, and further investigation on how to select the best suited influencer is needed. There are several factors like the promoted product itself or the organization's reputation that may have an important impact on the selection of an influencer. This study examines the effectiveness of influencer marketing and the promoted product's type on an organization's image after a corporate crisis. It is investigated, if an organization with corporate crisis needs to work with different influencers and products for an effective influencer campaign to better the organizational image than an organization with solid reputation. Therefore, the study distinguishes three independent variables: influencer type, product type, and organizational reputation. Regarding the organizational reputation, two automobile manufacturers, one with harmed reputation (VW) and one with solid reputation (BMW) are examined. Further, two types of social media influencers are distinguished. The influencer's type is defined as either niche- or lifestyle-focused. Influencers with specific expertise in their field are called niche-focused influencers and influencers that concentrate on promoting certain living patterns and self-images are called lifestyle-influencers in this study. At last, the promoted product's type is distinguished as either new or established. To summarize, the quantitative main study employed a 2x2x2 between subjects design in the form of an online questionnaire (n = 304).

In the online survey, four different variables of organizational image are investigated: trust, risk propensity, innovativeness, and social responsibility. The study finds that only the variable reputation has a main effect on all four image variables. Further, an interaction effect between product newness and reputation on the image variable innovativeness is proven. In summary, this study proves a relevance of corporate reputation for the organization's image but does neither find a different effectivity of niche-influencers and lifestyle-influencers on the corporate image nor a difference in the effectivity of new and old products on the organization's image. Further investigation on the best suited influencer and product for an influencer campaign by organizations in crises is necessary.

**Keywords:** Influencer marketing, influencer type, niche-influencer, lifestyle-influencer, product newness, corporate reputation, organizational image

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## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 Volkswagen's diesel crisis

In September 2015 the automobile industry experienced a huge scandal. Volkswagen, one of the most successful automobile manufacturers, announced that they violated the U.S.'s Clean Air Act with their "clean diesel" by deliberately equipping their Turbocharged Direct Injection diesel engine with a defeat device that "(...) was intended to bypass, defeat, or render inoperative elements of a vehicle's emission control system during emissions testing" (Blackwelder, Coleman, Colunga-Santoyo, Harrion, & Wozniak, 2016, p. 1). More than 500,000 Volkswagen diesel cars were affected. This had enormous consequences for the brand's reputation as their unethical and deceptive practices hurt Volkswagen's brand reputation around the world (Blackwelder et al., 2016). According to Prof. Dr. Klaus Töpfer, former Minister of Environment in Germany, "the diesel emission scandal is the very definition of the term worst case scenario [...] [resulting] in a loss in credibility and public trust, in Germany and around the world. Technical defects can be fixed by recalling [...], but repairing trust isn't so simple" (The Volkswagen Sustainability Magazine, 2016, p. 9). Matthias Müller, Volkswagen's (meanwhile: former) CEO even stated that his most urgent task now is to win back trust for the Volkswagen Group by leaving no stone unturned and with maximum transparency (The Volkswagen Sustainability Magazine, 2016). Later on in the diesel crisis, it became clear that not only Volkswagen inserted so called 'defeat device software' into their diesel vehicles to manipulate the emissions testing. Other brands did the same and the diesel crisis got an enormous reach. Ultimately 11 million vehicles across multiple brands worldwide were affected by the diesel crisis. Nevertheless there is not one automobile brand's reputation as impacted as Volkswagen's. The German automobile manufacturer still struggles with its reputation and now has the urgent task to repair its organizational image. As Chun (2005) states, organizational image is a key element of the overall organizational reputation. In this study the link between reputation and image will be investigated with the help of Volkswagen's diesel crisis as case study.

### 1.2 Influencer marketing as a crisis response tool

Further, possible crisis response tools and their effect on the organization's image will also be investigated. Literature already holds multiple investigations on crisis response strategies. Nevertheless, there is no study yet that concentrates on the effectiveness of influencer marketing as a possible tool to restore the organization's image. Influencer marketing is a form of word-of-mouth marketing that concentrates on influential individuals and orients marketing activities around them (Adweek.com, 2015). It is not a new form of marketing, being based on the concept of so called 'opinion leaders' who reach a significantly higher amount of people with their messages than others (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1948). Especially in times of increasing numbers of mobile internet and social media usage, these opinion leaders reach more people with less effort than ever before. Of course, companies make use of influencer marketing on social media to sell more products and to create brand awareness (Cheng, Bansal & Koudas, 2013). But in how far word-of-mouth marketing

and in particular influencer marketing is an effective tool for crisis communication to retrieve the organization's image still needs to be investigated.

Most studies on influencer marketing distinguish between mega and micro influencers. However, some researchers found that the influencer's reach is as important as a match between the influencer's interest and the marketed product's topic (Liengpradit, Sinthupinyo & Anuntavoranich, 2014). Therefore, this study defines different influencer types (niche-focused and lifestyle influencers) and thus distinguishes influencers in terms of their nature and interests. Considering influencer marketing as crisis response, it needs to be investigated if the influencer type (niche / lifestyle) has an impact on the organization's image.

### 1.3 Product communication as a crisis response tool

Besides the influencer type, the product itself might be another communication tool for crisis response because a product is able to communicate certain messages with the help of extrinsic and intrinsic product attributes (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005). Especially the intrinsic product attribute 'product newness' might be interesting for crisis response because an earlier study found that adopting new products is an elemental task for organizations, since innovation is a key driver for competition and survival in the market (Baregheh, Rowley & Sambrook, 2009). Whether a high degree of innovation (in this case linked to a new product) also impacts the survival on the market of a company with recent crisis or not will be investigated in this study by measuring the impact of the product's newness on the organizational image.

This study is expected to give insights in the usefulness of influencer marketing and the promotion of new products to overcome an organizational crisis and to repair the organization's image. As there was no earlier research on this specific topic, the study was relevant to get more scientific knowledge. The following research question derives:

**RQ: To what extend does the best suited combination of influencer and product for an influencer campaign by an organization with harmed reputation differ from the best suited combination of influencer and product for an influencer campaign by an organization with solid reputation?**

In the following, a theoretical framework aims to introduce relevant communication theories on organizational reputation, product newness, and influencer marketing. A clear definition of niche- and lifestyle influencers will be given. Further, hypotheses about the three mentioned factors and their possible interaction effects on the organization's image will be described. After this, the research method and instrument will be presented in detail and the results of the study will be submitted. This will be followed by conclusions and subsequent falsification or verification of the research hypotheses. The paper closes with a discussion of the study's limitations and with proposed aspects for further investigation.

In this chapter it is intended to give insights in the existing communication theories about reputation management, word-of-mouth marketing, and to discuss a gap in literature for further investigation. To fill this gap and to summarize the chapter, a research model for an empirical study is presented.

### 2.1 Organizational crisis

An organizational crisis can be defined as event characterized by high consequence, low probability, ambiguity and decision-making time pressure (Pearson & Clair, 1998). As Gillespie and Dietz (2009) state, an organizational crisis is either “[...] organization-level failure, as a single major incident, or cumulative series of incidents resulting from the action of organizational agents that threatens the legitimacy of the organization and has the potential to harm the well-being of [...] the organization’s stakeholders” (p.128). Further the crisis can either be based on values-related or performance-related issues (Dutta & Pullig, 2011). Performance-related issues are directly linked to the product itself. Schäfer (2017) defines Volkswagen’s diesel crisis as performance-related crisis, because it is directly linked to diesel engines with defeat device software. The impact of a performance-related crisis on consumers’ perception is serious and influences the consumers’ trust in the organization’s ability to fulfill product-related promises made (Dutta & Pullig, 2011). Hence, the most urgent key challenge for an organization with product-related crisis is to repair its harmed image.

### 2.2 Organizational image

According to Chun (2005), the organization’s image is an essential part of an organization’s overall reputation. Corporate reputation consists of three elements: identity, desired identity, and image (Chun, 2005). Hereby, the last component implies the customer’s perception of the organization and therefore is most relevant for this study. “The most common and recent definition of image in the context of reputation is a ‘summary of impressions or perceptions held by external stakeholders’ (Bromley, 1993; Davies & Miles, 1998)” (Chun, 2005, p.95). Hence, the organizational image is not defined as what the company believes, but what external stakeholders (especially customers) believe or feel about the company from their experiences and observations (Bernstein, 1984). The potential customer’s perception of an organization is decisive for the organization’s success because it ultimately influences the customer’s buying intention (Hegner & Jevons, 2016). “There is general agreement among practitioners and scholars alike that the way in which the public perceives a company is crucial in determining its success” (Berens & van Riel, 2004, p.161). A solid organizational image is thus essential for every successful company.

As mentioned before, it is important for companies to leave positive impressions and perceptions among potential customers because this ultimately influences the organization’s success (Hegner & Jevons, 2016). These impressions and perceptions that form an organization’s image may address various topics (Brown & Dacin, 1997). As Brown and Dacin (1997) state, there needs to be a differentiation between the overall impression of an organization and impressions addressing specific aspects of the organization. These aspects – or as other researchers call them, ‘corporate

associations' – can be perceived differently than the overall image. "[...] Image is not unidimensional, 'good' or 'bad'. Companies may have the same overall degree of favorability, but their character might not be the same" (Chun, 2005, p.100). Volkswagen's products may for instance be perceived as of high quality while the organization's overall image may be negative. Accordingly, the organizational image consists of different sub aspects that can individually be rated differently than the overall image.

Chun (2005) states that there are various definitions of an image's sub aspects in literature. Berens and van Riel (2004) differentiate three main conceptual streams of corporate associations that researchers have identified to discuss reputation. These main streams are based on the concepts of social expectations, corporate personality, and trust (Berens & van Riel, 2004). An example for the first main stream that deals with the social expectations that people have regarding a company is the approach by Brown and Dacin (1997) that specifies on two dimensions of corporate image: corporate ability and corporate social responsibility. The second main conceptual stream of corporate associations considers the different personality traits that people attribute to a company. Bernstein (1984) for instance, defines eight personality dimensions which an organizational image consists of: integrity, quality, imagination, reliability, service, social responsibility, technical innovation, and value for money. The last main conceptual stream by Berens and van Riel (2004) deals with the different reasons that customers have to trust or not to trust a company. This stream is of high relevance for organizations in crisis.

As Chun (2005) or Brown and Dacin (1997) state, the findings of a simple unidimensional image scale are not meaningful and there needs to be a differentiation between the overall impression of an organization and impressions addressing specific aspects of the organization. Chun (2005) further states that it depends on the researcher's school of thought what sub aspects of an image are seen as most relevant. As all image measurement approaches are seen as complements, which only show different point of views that do not exclude but supplement each other, it is possible to adopt single variables from different already existing multidimensional image researches. For this study, the variables trust, risk propensity, organizational innovation, and social responsibility form the base of the overall organizational image.

### 2.2.1 Image variable: trust

One relevant corporate image's sub aspect for this study is the organization's perceived trustworthiness. As Berens and van Riel (2004) state, "Trust can be defined as 'the subjective probability that one assigns to benevolent action by another agent or group of agents' (Nooteboom et al., 1997: 311)" (p. 172). Further, trust is an important element in the purchase decision making (Swan et al., 1988). Swan et al. (1988) state that a buyer-seller relation always includes some risk for the buyer "[...] if what a salesperson said, turns out to be false [...]" (p.2). That is why the researchers further say that "[...] risk is the factor that creates a need for trust [...]" (Swan et al., 1988, p.2). Especially the automobile industry is a sector with a higher risk for customers, because they often invest a big amount of money in a product. For Volkswagen this risk factor might further be even higher for potential customers because of the recent diesel crisis and the related customer deception. Therefore, trust in the organization is an important, needed and even decisive criterion to purchase an automobile.



Trust consists of three dimensions: reliability, honesty, and benevolence (Berens & van Riel, 2004). Reliability describes the ability to keep an implicit or explicit promise (Berens & van Riel, 2004). When Volkswagen introduced its 'clean diesel', VW was not able to meet the regulations of the U.S.'s Clean Air Act yet. Even though Volkswagen's managers knew about this inability, Volkswagen promised to meet the emission regulations but instead equipped its diesel with defeat device software to deceive customers. Hence, Volkswagen had no intention to truly fulfill the promises made about the emission values. This intention to fulfill promises can be defined as honesty, the second dimension of trustworthiness (Berens & van Riel, 2004). The third and last dimension of corporate trustworthiness describes the perceived willingness to behave in a way that benefits the interest of both parties (Berens & van Riel, 2004) and this was also harmed by Volkswagen because the company only had the intention to meet its own interests. Summarizing, Volkswagen seems to have enormously harmed all three dimensions of trust.

### 2.2.2 Image variable: risk-taking propensity

As already indicated, the organization's risk propensity is related to the perceived trustworthiness (Swan et al., 1988). Nonetheless, it is important to state that the organization's risk propensity does not describe the earlier mentioned customers' risk when buying a product but the organization's willingness to take risks. "Risk taking [...] reflects managers' preferences for bold acts to achieve organizational objectives" (Jambulingam, Kathuria & Doucette, 2005, p. 26). Especially the adoption of new technologies and products comes with a higher risk-taking propensity (Veitch & Gifford, 1996). In this case the adoption of Volkswagen's 'clean diesel' comes with a higher risk-taking propensity. "The logic is that a willingness to take risks will contribute to an organization's desire to develop and deploy new ideas [...]" (Jambulingam, Kathuria & Doucette, 2005, p.8). Hence, risk-taking is directly connected to the company's survival in the market.

Literature on organizational risk-taking is based on two different conceptualizations of risk. The first stream originates with the behavioral theory of the firm (Cyert & March, 1963). Risk-taking is viewed as by-product of search and exploration activities. However, this study adopts the second main stream, based on prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). "In this perspective, risk taking is viewed as an explicit choice between uncertain prospects, influenced by framing. Past performance influences risk taking because it may change whether decision makers frame choices as gains or losses" (Denrell, 2008, p. 429). Prospect theory originally describes an individual's decision making but was later extended to organizational risk taking (Denrell, 2008). In prospect theory, risk is conceptualized as involving two elements: uncertainty and consequences (Conchar et al., 2004). Consequences can further be defined as losses (Conchar et al., 2004). Risk here is thus about the expectation and the importance of losses (Conchar et al., 2004). Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) state that there are five different types of losses: financial, performance, physical, psychological, and social losses. Volkswagen's diesel crisis came with financial, performance, and social losses for the company.

Before consumers or organizations make a clear decision, they rate the perceived risk. Perceived risk processing occurs in three phases: risk framing, risk assessment, and risk evaluation (Conchar et al., 2004). "Risk framing occurs through assigning weights that reflect the importance to the individual of

avoiding risk, searching internal and external sources for information about the risk related to the choice situation, and preliminary editing of the choice alternatives to focus attention on a manageable risk consideration set” (Conchar et al., 2004, p. 423). In the second phase, information from the framing process will be further formed by managers’ individual characteristics to ultimately assess perceived-risk for each choice alternative. “In the risk evaluation phase, cognitive and affective factors moderate perceived risk to arrive at risk-taking propensity” (Conchar et al., 2004, p. 424). Hence, the outcome of the evaluation phase is the organization’s risk taking propensity, “[...] a willingness to make a choice at an acceptable level of perceived risk” (Conchar et al., 2004, p. 424).

When considering a purchase decision and the influence of organizational risk-taking propensity from the consumer’s point of view, the consumer takes the exact same phases of perceived risk processing. The organization’s risk-taking propensity then is a source for information about the risk related to the purchase decision that will be weighted in the risk framing phase. Therefore, a lower organizational risk-taking propensity will probably influence the consumer’s perceived risk of a purchase decision positively (Conchar et al., 2004).

### 2.2.3 Image variable: organizational innovation

Technical innovation is an image variable that is directly linked to risk taking (Naldi et al., 2007) and also relevant for this study. Baregheh, Rowley and Sambrook (2009) state that: “Innovation is the multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, service or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace” (p. 1334). For Volkswagen, the “clean diesel” was such an improved product to compete in the market. “Companies generating new products based on technological innovations typically take risks, as the demand for the new product is unknown” (Naldi et al., 2007, p. 34). Nevertheless, organizational innovation is fundamental for the company’s success. Some scholars even state that innovation capability is the most important determinant for firm performance (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). Miller defines an entrepreneurial firm as “[...] one that engages in product market innovation, undertakes somewhat risky ventures, and is first to come up with proactive innovations, beating competitors to the punch” (p.771). Crossan and Apaydin (2010) define Innovation as “[...] production or adoption, assimilation, and exploitation of a value-added novelty in economic and social spheres; renewal and enlargement of products, services, and markets; development of new methods of production; and establishment of new management systems. It is both a process and an outcome.” (p. 1155).

### 2.2.4 Image variable: social responsibility

A fourth image variable for this study is the corporate social responsibility. Corporate social responsibility attempts to achieve commercial success in ways that honor ethical values and respect people, communities and the natural environment (Schäfer, 2017). Corporate social responsibility indicates the positive impacts of businesses on their stakeholders (Turker, 2009). Further, corporate social responsibility considers social and economic performance as independent components (Montiel, 2008).

Previous studies about product-harmed crises found that an organization's social responsibility significantly moderates consumer attribution and affects brand evaluations and purchase intentions (Klein & Dawar, 2004). According to Schnietz and Epstein (2005), an organization is likely to overcome a crisis with less financial losses if potential customers perceive the company as socially responsible. Klein and Dawar (2004) state that the consumers' strong perceptions of a company's social responsibility initiatives impact attributions regarding stability of the crisis and locus of control. Hence, a strong social responsibility might impact the consumers' perception of the crisis positively.

To summarize, this study focuses on the organization's image after a crisis and defines four image variables for further investigation: trustworthiness, risk propensity, organizational innovation, and corporate social responsibility.

### 2.3 Organizational Reputation

Another main focus of this research is the organization's reputation. As stated before, the organization's image is one of the three essential parts that corporate reputation consists of (Chun, 2005). More and more researchers are interested in the topic of corporate reputation because it can be considered from different perspectives of multiple academic disciplines. For marketers, corporate reputation is particularly interesting because it affects the way in which stakeholders, as for example consumers, react to the company (Chun, 2005). As a corporate reputation can be either solid or harmed, it is likely that these two conditions that are oppositional lead to different consumer reactions, too. For instance, a solid and thus a positive reputation might affect the consumers' reaction to the organization positively. Hence, reputation might be a decisive factor to understand how consumers form their perception of the organization. Further Chun (2005) defines the term image to include the consumers' perceptions of a company. A connection between reputation and image therefore can be hypothesized.

**H1:** A positive reputation has a more positive effect on the organization's image compared to a negative reputation.

As Chun (2005) further states, an "organizational image might be quicker to change by means of advertisements than reputation is, which requires more time and consistent effort to build internally and externally" (p. 96). That is a reason why many researchers investigated the different crisis response strategies in detail to find the best suited way to improve corporate reputation. This study concentrates on product communication and influencer marketing as possible tools to gain back a solid reputation.

### 2.4 Product newness

Especially in a product-related crisis, the product itself holds an important role. The promoted product is an essential part of an organization's marketing communication process because it is able to communicate a certain message to potential customers. "Intentionally or not, all manufactured products make a statement through shape, form, color, texture etc. They communicate with users and can never be contextually neutral." (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003, p. 3). Demirbilek and Sener (2003)

state that products are sending messages via a part of language structures that deal with meaning, called semantics. Product semantics is defined as “[...] the study of symbolic qualities of man-made shapes, in the cognitive and social context of their use” (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003, p.3). When planning a marketing campaign, it is important for marketers to know the product’s symbols and attributes that are forming this language. “The semantic functions provide the designer with the possibility to communicate a clear message through the product” (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003, p. 4). This message is either a statement about the product itself or about the human being who owns it (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003). Besides that, the communicated message can also be about the brand. Product designers and marketers are able to design and market specific products that reflect the company’s identity (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003). The product itself is thus a direct tool for corporate communication to persuade the consumer’s brand perception. So, the product designers’ main concern is not only to ensure that the product accomplishes the purpose for which it was intended, but to impose unexamined attitudes and marketing messages on audiences (Buchanan 1989).

As mentioned before, different product attributes form the base of the message sent by a product. To obtain the best results of a marketing campaign, it is very important for marketers to know what attributes are able to communicate which message. All product attributes can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic attributes (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005). Product attributes that physically exist in the marketed product (i.e. size, design, and form) are called intrinsic attributes and attributes that do not exist in physical forms (i.e. price, brand) are called extrinsic product attributes (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005). To create an effective marketing campaign it is important to consider the sent messages by intrinsic product attributes. One very interesting intrinsic product attribute for this study is the product newness. “Product newness is defined as the degree to which the product being developed was new to the company and new to the market” (Bonner, 2010, p.486).

According to this definition, recent new products of Volkswagen are electric-drive vehicles as for example the E-Golf, E-up! or Passat GTE. Even if the technology of electric engines has its origin already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, newest battery technology made it relevant for the mass market just recently. By now, most automobile manufacturers mainly sell fuel engines. As research shows, adopting new products is an elemental task for organizations because innovation is a key driver for competition and survival in the market (Baregheh, Rowley & Sambrook, 2009). As innovation is defined as one of the four image variables of this study, the following hypothesis can be derived.

**H2:** A new product has a more positive effect on the organizational image than an established product.

As Baregheh, Rowley and Sambrook (2009) state, new products are tools to react to changes in the company’s environment. It is assumable that a corporate crisis might be such a change. Therefore, a possible interaction between the factors product newness and reputation can be hypothesized. It is likely that it is more effective for an organization with harmed reputation (with recent crisis) to market a new product that is not related to the crisis than to market an established product. Especially if the crisis is product-related (for instance Volkswagen’s diesel crisis), it might be useful for the company to react to the crisis by promoting new products. This led to the following hypothesis.

**H3:** A new product has a more positive effect on the image of an organization with harmed reputation than an established product.

## 2.5 Word-of-mouth marketing

Not only the product might be a crisis response tool, but the marketing type could be an essential one too. One very powerful form of marketing is Word-of-mouth marketing or “buzz” marketing. The Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association defines word-of-mouth marketing as “the act of a consumer creating and/or distributing marketing-relevant information to another consumer” (Matsumura, Yamamoto & Tomozawa, 2008). Kardes, Cronley and Cline (2011) add an important detail to this definition by stating that: “Word-of-mouth is the act of one consumer talking to another about a brand, and it can happen face-to-face and indirectly via phone, mail, or the internet.” (p.467). This last addition already shows that there are many different kinds of word-of-mouth marketing. Due to globalization and new technologies, this form of marketing spreads faster and farther than ever before (Kardes, Cronley & Cline, 2011). Berger and Schwartz (2011) state that word-of-mouth is so ubiquitous that it generates 3.3 billion messages per day.

Word-of-mouth marketing normally reaches friends and one’s social contacts. It has a very powerful character because one usually trusts friends and their opinions the most (Gass & Seiter, 2014). Further, word-of-mouth marketing is most successful when it seems authentic, spontaneous and peer-driven (Gass & Seiter, 2014). Its power of persuasion can be very high. “[...] Persuasion involves one or more persons who are engaged in the activity of creating, reinforcing, modifying, or extinguishing beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations, and/or behaviors within the constraints of a given communication context.” (Gass & Seiter, 2014, p.33). A word-of-mouth message is a very effective medium to do so, because people perceive the sender as independent of the market and thus to be a reliable source (Arndt, 1967). According to Nielsen (2015), 83% of consumers trust recommendations from friends and family. If a consumer thus logs into Instagram and sees a friend confessing his love to a brand, this is very likely to be a reliable statement for the consumer.

In recent years, marketers adapted this powerful marketing for their needs. If one now logs into Instagram, there are not only friends showing their favorite products but also celebrities talking about specific products. Both are examples of a word-of-mouth strategy being called influencer marketing. The only difference between them is that the celebrity usually gets paid for his/her statement by advertisers. “This blurring of the lines between what is a genuine endorsement and what is a paid one through content-rich platforms is what makes influencer marketing so powerful” (Woods, 2016). Consumers seem to not fully be able to make clear distinctions between paid and true recommendations. A study in 2016 by Twitter and analytics firm Annalect even found that 56% of users trust recommendations from friends and 49% rely on influencers (Swant, 2016). Thus, consumers trust in influencers nearly as much as in friends and that is why influencer marketing became a very important word-of-mouth strategy for marketers.

As already indicated, very important channels for word-of-mouth marketing are online social networking sites. Different platforms like Facebook, Instagram or YouTube give consumers the opportunity to easily reach an enormous amount of other users. In times of online social media, the

amount of one's social contacts is steadily growing. One does not only reach good, real-life friends via word-of-mouth messages but also online contacts, once added on Facebook as a friend. Thus, the reach of word-of-mouth messages becomes much bigger due to social media and one-to-many-communication is easier than ever before. The number of social media users further is expected to increase enormously as mobile device usage grows in popularity (Bouwman, 2018). Therefore, influencer marketing is an important field for advertisers and relevant for more scientific investigation.

## 2.6 Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is not a new form of marketing. In 1948 already, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet identified "opinion leaders" who get their ideas from mass media and pass them on to the people around them. Opinion leaders usually reach a bigger amount of people with their messages than others (Matsumura, Yamamoto & Tomozawa, 2008). As stated before, in times of online social media it is much easier to reach a large number of people. Influencer marketing can thus be described as a form of marketing focusing on particular individuals that have influence over potential customers and orienting marketing activities around these individuals (Adweek.com, 2015). It has two main goals, which are the creation of brand awareness and the positive impact on potential customers' purchase intention (Cheng, Bansal & Koudas, 2013). Whether there are other benefits of influencer marketing, like the mentioned reputation retrieval after an organizational crisis, needs to be investigated. Apart from the goals of influencer marketing, the discussion about how to find the most effective influencer for a campaign is a very important topic, too. Before looking at the different approaches to find them, it is important to exactly define an influencer.

### 2.6.1 Influencer attributes

In existing literature, there are various definitions of an influencer. Bakshy et al. (2011) put different definitions together to form their statement that "Influencers are loosely defined as individuals who disproportionately impact the spread of information or some related behavior of interest" (p. 2). Nevertheless, they also state that this definition is fraught by ambiguity, because the different natures of the influence and also the various types of influencers need to be noticed (Baskhy et al., 2011). Many researchers categorize influencers by measuring an influencer's network centrality. Network centrality describes the degree to which social networking members are connected (Liengpradit, Sinthupinyo & Anuntavoranich, 2014) which implies the number of followers, as well as the degree to which an influencer interacts with followers on social media (Robbins, 2017). Regarding the level of centrality, Robbins (2017) states that there are so called mega and micro influencers. Mega influencers have over 100.000 followers online and/or offline and are often unable to respond individually to all followers due to their large number (Robbins, 2017). Further, mega influencers produce a significant social media engagement such as likes, views, shares, and comments (Robbins, 2017). In contrast, micro influencers have 1.000 – 10.000 followers and are thus more responsive to followers. This study focusses specifically on mega influencers, due to their larger reach and in order to eliminate possible side-effects due to differences between mega and micro influencers.

While some approaches to categorize influencers are based on the influencers' network attributes only (like the influencer's network centrality), there are other approaches that focus on the influencers'



personal attributes as for example their interests. Researchers like Liengpradit, Sinthupinyo and Anuntavoranich (2014) for example state that the concept of network centrality is as relevant as the campaign's specific topic and the influencer's interest in this topic to find suited influencers for companies. Kumar and Mirchandani's (2012) Stickiness Index measures a potential influencer's degree of word-of-mouth messages on a particular topic. Hereby, influencers that "[...] like to talk about a particular product category" can be located (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012, p. 57). According to Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) these influencers with high interest in a specific product category are most effective because they reach the right target group. Hence, it is not effective to only identify the influencer with biggest connection but to also determine the influencer's interests. Otherwise the target group would not necessarily match the campaign's product (Liengpradit, Sinthupinyo, Anuntavoranich, 2014). Besides the often used categorization by an influencer's network centrality, the influencer type can thus also be categorized regarding the influencer's topic and main focus (Bakshy et al., 2011). Influencers can be niche or lifestyle focused (Robbins, 2017).

### Niche-focused influencers

Influencers that concentrate on a niche topic often have specific knowledge as well as big interest in their field. Even though there are not many studies that focus on the exact differentiation between niche- and lifestyle-focused influencers, there are studies that focus on an influencer's expertise, which is a similar approach. For this study, niche-focused influencers are characterized as having high expertise in a certain field. Gass and Seiter (2014) state that expertise is one of the three primary dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill) of credibility. Further, they state that opinion seekers (in this case consumers) usually trust in people with high knowledge on the specific topic the most (Gass & Seiter, 2014). "To be credible, a persuader must know his or her stuff or, at least, appear to know his or her stuff" (Gass & Seiter, 2014, p.80). In the automobile industry, influencers with high expertise are automobile experts like the German mega influencer Jean Pierre Kraemer, who has high technical knowledge, more than 518,000 followers and focuses only on automobiles. Another popular example is the German influencer Nico Pliquet with 10,400 followers on Instagram. Both of them publish automobile reviews and specifically focus on technical features.



| figure 1: Example of a Porsche advertisement on Instagram by niche-focused influencer Nico Pliquet

### Lifestyle influencers

Besides niche-focused influencers, there also are lifestyle influencers (Robbins, 2017). These influencers do not concentrate on their interest in one specific topic but on promoting certain living patterns and self-images. The message that they are communicating is thus very different from the one communicated by a niche-focused influencer. Further, Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) state that some media characters serve as role-models and consumers have a high wishful identification with these media characters. Wishful identification is defined as the desire to become like a media character (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). The concept of media characters as role models matches this study's lifestyle influencer characterization. That is to define lifestyle influencers as role-models promoting certain living patterns and self-images.



| figure 2: Ford advertisement on Instagram by lifestyle-focused influencer Shanti Joan

Lifestyle influencers do not have expertise in one specific topic (except for promoting living patterns and self-images). Nevertheless, opinion leaders and thus influencers in general are perceived as more knowledgeable than the average person (Dlodlo, 2014). To be influential, an influencer's expertise does not always have to be in the field in which they are attempting to persuade (Gass & Seiter, 2014). Researchers showed that in some cases endorsements by influencers benefit from a halo-effect "that allow them to carry their credibility to new, unrelated fields" (Gass & Seiter, 2014, p.82). Some automobile manufacturers explicitly concentrate on this halo effect and try to promote a certain lifestyle that should be linked to the marketed vehicle. Figure 2 for instance shows a Ford advertisement by German lifestyle-influencer Shanti Tan. However, it is likely that a purchase decision with a bigger risk for the consumer (for example a purchase decision for a product with a high value) needs a higher perceived influencer credibility (Gass & Seiter, 2014). In the automobile industry, the products usually have a high value and thus create a bigger risk for the consumer to buy it. Further Gass and Seiter (2014) state that expertise is an important element of credibility. Looking back at the definitions of niche-focused and lifestyle influencers, the following hypothesis is derived.

**H4:** Niche-focused influencers have a more positive effect on the automobile manufacturer's image than lifestyle influencers.



But of course, in order to find the best matching influencer, it is also necessary to consider the interaction effects between influencer attributes and the respective other factors, such as the newness of the marketed product. Established types of automobiles with well-known product attributes usually already represent a certain lifestyle and match the description of high-value products above, requiring a high level of trust for the influencer promoting the product. Therefore, the following research hypotheses is set up.

**H5a:** An established product has a more positive effect on the organization's image if marketed by a niche-focused influencer.

Regarding the product's newness, it is also important to state that new products probably are better promoted by lifestyle-influencers because a research by Holak and Lehmann (1990) on customer acceptance and intention to buy a new product showed that the predominant concern of individuals when buying a new product is maintaining a life-style. "One might conclude [...] that consumers are more concerned with a new item's compatibility with their living patterns and self-images than they are with more specific information about its operating features or benefits related to perceived relative advantage" (Holak & Lehmann, 1990, p.11). When thinking about the right influencer for promoting a new product, it is thus likely that a lifestyle-focused influencer is more suitable than a niche-focused influencer.

**H5b:** A new product has a more positive effect on the organization's image if it is marketed by a lifestyle influencer.

As seen before, another relevant factor for this study is the organization's reputation. Looking back at the statement of Gass and Seiter (2014) on the consumer's need for a higher credibility in the case of a purchase decision with high risk, it becomes clear that buying a product by a company that suffers from a crisis also poses a higher risk. Especially if the crisis is product-related, the consumer will have a high need for an influencer to be credible. It is thus assumable that a niche-focused influencer might be better suited to promote products of a company in crisis.

**H6:** Niche-focused influencers have a more positive effect on the image of organizations with harmed reputation than lifestyle influencers.

Regarding all three factors (influencer type, product newness, and reputation) together, it is assumable that the same conditions as mentioned for hypothesis 5a and 6 might lead to hypothesis 7. If a company with bad reputation because of a recent crisis still wants to promote its established products that might actually be linked to the crisis itself, the consumer's risk to buy this product might be even higher and a niche-focused influencer with high expertise who recommends the product might still be the best match. Therefore, the following hypothesis on the interaction of the factors influencer type, product newness, and reputation is derived.

**H7:** Niche-focused influencers promoting an established product by a company with harmed reputation have a more positive effect on the organization's image than lifestyle influencers promoting an established product by a company with harmed reputation.

## 2.7 Research model

To conclude the theory chapter, the following research model is set up. On the left side, the independent variables ‘influencer’, ‘product newness’, and ‘reputation’ are presented. The arrows represent their effects on the organization’s image and the image is pictured as consisting of the four variables ‘trustworthiness’, ‘risk propensity’, ‘organizational innovativeness’, and ‘social responsibility’.

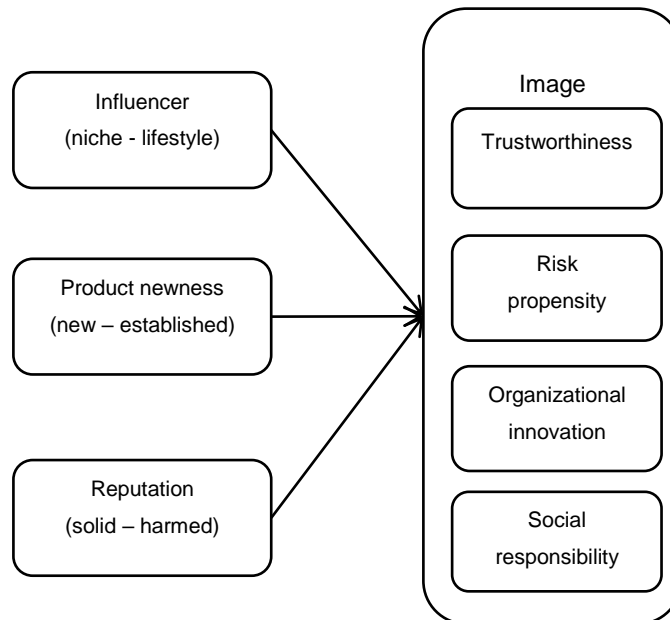


figure 3: research model

Table 1  
Overview of all research hypotheses

Number	Hypothesis
<b>H1</b>	A positive reputation has a more positive effect on the organization’s image compared to a negative reputation.
<b>H2</b>	A new product has a more positive effect on the organizational image than an established product.
<b>H3</b>	A new product has a more positive effect on the image of an organization with harmed reputation than an established product.
<b>H4</b>	Niche-focused influencers have a more positive effect on the automobile manufacturer’s image than lifestyle influencers.
<b>H5a</b>	An established product has a more positive effect on the organization’s image if marketed by a niche-focused influencer.
<b>H5b</b>	A new product has a more positive effect on the organization’s image if it is marketed by a lifestyle influencer.
<b>H6</b>	Niche-focused influencers have a more positive effect on the image of organizations with harmed reputation than lifestyle influencers.
<b>H7</b>	Niche-focused influencers promoting an established product by a company with harmed reputation have a more positive effect on the organization’s image than lifestyle influencers promoting an established product by a company with harmed reputation.

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## METHOD

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### 3.1 Research design

For this study, a quantitative research design was used. An online survey with a 2x2x2 between subject design was implemented by using the online survey software Qualtrics. With an online survey, a big amount of participants could easily be reached and the respondents' anonymity could be guaranteed which ultimately leads to a higher reliability because of a reduction of respondents who answer in a socially desirable way (Lewis et al., 2009). The link to the online survey was spread via the researcher's social network accounts. For the main study there were eight different research scenarios. Each scenario contained a combination of one influencer (niche- / lifestyle-focused), one hint at the marketed product's newness (new product / established product), and one company with either harmed or solid reputation. An overview of the 2x2x2 between subject design and its scenarios for the main study is presented in the tables below.

Table 2

*Overview of all research scenarios*

	Niche influencer		Lifestyle influencer	
	Jean Pierre Kraemer		Sami Slimani	
	Solid Reputation (BMW)	Harmed Reputation (VW)	Solid Reputation (BMW)	Harmed Reputation (VW)
New Product	1	3	5	7
Established Product	2	4	6	8

### 3.2 Stimulus materials

To construct the stimulus materials for the main study, it was necessary to implement a short preliminary study. This pre study focused on three aims: the measurement of the existing reputations of Volkswagen and the control group Renault, the investigation of the perceived product's newness, and the measurement of different influencer perceptions to ultimately find suited products and influencers for the main study.

For the preliminary study, a printed survey was set up. All in all, six different product advertisements with either new or established products, three lifestyle influencers, three niche-focused influencers, and two general product pictures of a Volkswagen vehicle and a Renault vehicle were included in the survey. All stimulus material for the preliminary study is presented in the appendix. In total, 16 questionnaires were completed. There were 8 male and 8 female participants for the preliminary study and the average age was 22.13 years.

### 3.2.1 Influencer: niche versus lifestyle

As this study differentiates between lifestyle influencers and niche-focused influencers, it was relevant to measure in how far consumers perceive different influencers as either lifestyle- or niche-focused.

Looking back at the definition of niche-focused influencers, it is obvious that their most important characteristic is high expertise in their field. It was chosen to adopt three male niche-focused influencers to the preliminary study: Nico Pliquett, Jean Pierre Kraemer, and Daniel Abt. They were all German automobile experts and described themselves as supercar drivers because they own high-class automobiles. The results of the prestudy showed that niche-focused influencer Jean Pierre Kraemer was perceived as the influencer with highest expertise. Sami Slimani was rated by the participants as the influencer with lowest expertise on automobiles. Further the perceived expertise in general was rated as assumed before: all niche-focused influencers scored significantly better than lifestyle-focused influencers.

Table 3

*Means of perceived expertise of the influencers*

Influencer	Mean	Standard deviation
Jean-Pierre Kraemer	1.71	.76
Nico Pliquett	2.23	.78
Daniel Abt	1.80	1.07
Sami Slimani	4.00	.76
Daniel Aminati	3.56	.85
Nico (Inscope 21)	3.85	1.02

Notes. 1 is a very high level of expertise, 5 is a very low level.

Considering the definition of lifestyle influencers, the researcher had to find influencers that consumers perceive as role-models, promoting certain living-patterns and self-images. The selected lifestyle influencers for the preliminary study were three male influencers who promoted their lifestyle on Instagram: Sami Slimani, Daniel Aminati, and Nico (Inscope21). In the preliminary study, it was aimed to measure in how far consumers perceived these influencers as a role-model. In general, the scores showed rather negative or neutral values and there was no clear distinction between a wishful identification with niche-focused influencers and lifestyle-focused influencers even if lifestyle influencer Daniel Aminati scored highest and niche influencer Nico Pliquett scored lowest. It was chosen to not take the construct 'wishful identification' into account to select the second influencer for the main study. Instead, the influencers with highest and lowest expertise (niche influencer Jean Pierre Kraemer, and lifestyle influencer Sami Slimani) were adopted to the main study.

Still the factor 'wishful identification' was again queried during the main study because the preliminary study results were not reliable because only 16 participants answered the questionnaire. Further different aspects like for example the participant's gender or the participant's previous knowledge about the influencer might also have had an impact on the ratings.

Table 4

*Means of wishful identification with the influencers*

Influencer	Mean	Standard deviation
Jean-Pierre Kraemer	2.56	1.18
Nico Pliquett	2.18	1.04
Daniel Abt	2.39	1.02
Sami Slimani	2.53	1.09
Daniel Aminati	2.76	1.21
Nico (Inscope 21)	2.33	1.35

Notes. 5 is a very high level of wishful identification, 1 is a very low level.

### 3.2.2 Product: new versus established

Six different advertisements were investigated to see which one was perceived as newest and oldest. To avoid unreliable results, all advertisements showed the same car, a Volkswagen Golf. They were only differentiated through a caption underneath the picture or an annotation within the picture. All advertisements can be found in the appendix. The first advertisement type contained a “New” annotation to emphasize the product’s newness. As an opposite the next advertisement showed a “Classic” annotation. These two ads were relatively unspecific and did not give information on the product type. The other four advertisements emphasized the product’s type. As indicated before, the product itself is already able to communicate a certain message to the potential customer that influences the customer’s perception of the brand. It was assumed that an electric-drive vehicle would be perceived as a new product and a diesel vehicle would be perceived as an older product. Therefore, it was chosen to investigate two advertisements that contained an information about either an electric or a diesel engine inside the picture. The last two advertisements also emphasized the difference between diesel and electric engine, but did not include anything in the picture itself but underneath it in the picture’s caption.

Not surprisingly, the advertisement with “New” annotation in the picture was perceived as promoting the newest product. In contrast, the advertisement with caption mentioning an established diesel engine was rated as promoting the oldest product. These two advertisements were adopted to the main study.

Table 5

*Means of perceived product newness*

Advertisement	Mean	Standard deviation
Annotation “NEW!”	3.00	1.75
Annotation “CLASSIC!”	2.05	1.44
Caption modern engine	2.95	2.17
Caption classic Diesel engine	1.56	.62
Info-box new	2.66	1.65
Info-box classic	1.94	1.75

Notes. 7 is a very high level of perceived product newness, 1 is a very low level.

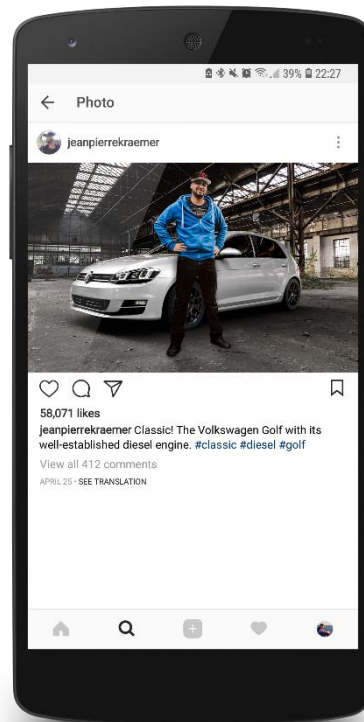
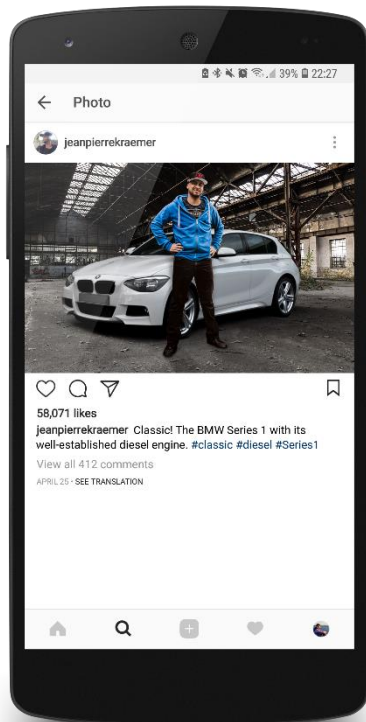
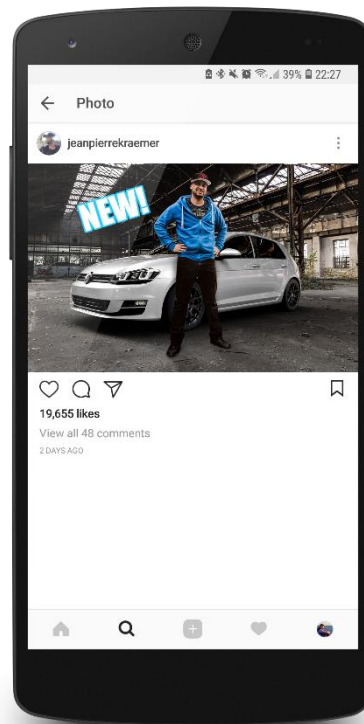
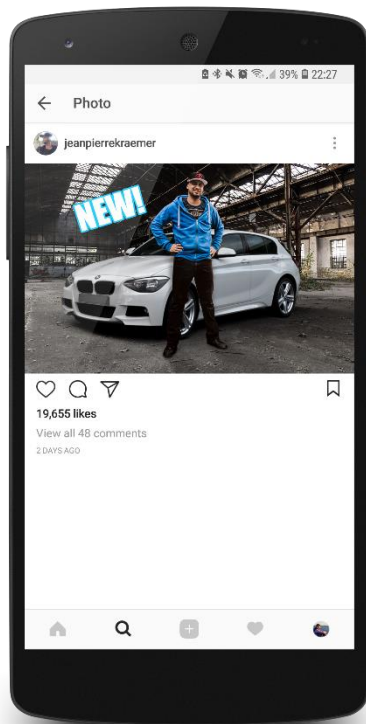
### 3.2.3 Reputation: solid versus harmed

Besides the influencer perception and the perceived product's newness it was also relevant for the preliminary study to measure the perceived company reputation of Volkswagen and Renault. It was chosen to adopt Renault, a French automobile manufacturer without current organizational crisis as a control group for this study. Hereby, it can be seen in how far there is a difference in the impact of an influencer campaign on an organization's reputation in general and after a crisis. The measurement of Volkswagen's and Renault's perceived reputation showed rather surprising results. It was noticeable that even if Renault did not suffer from a corporate crisis recently, its reputation was perceived as being only slightly better than Volkswagen's reputation. In general, both companies scored relatively neutrally. However, Renault's ratings tend to barely be in the positive rating area while Volkswagen's ratings show a minimal tendency towards a rather bad perception of VW's reputation.

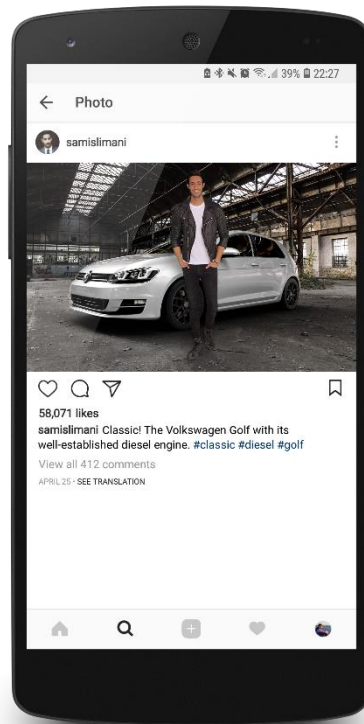
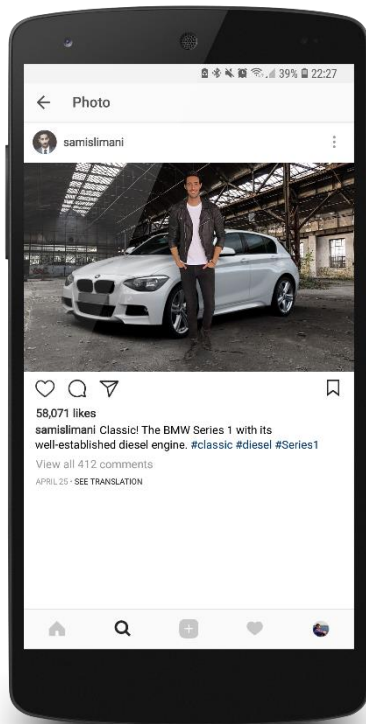
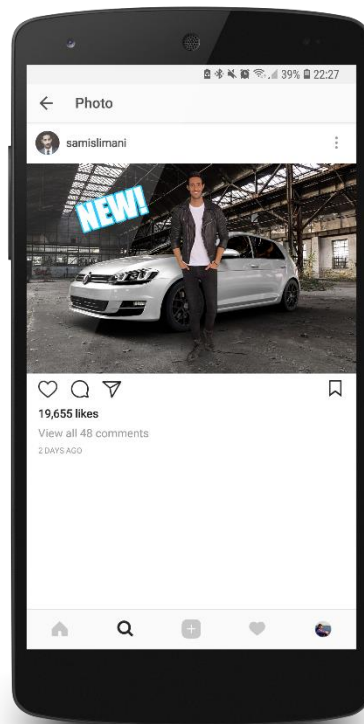
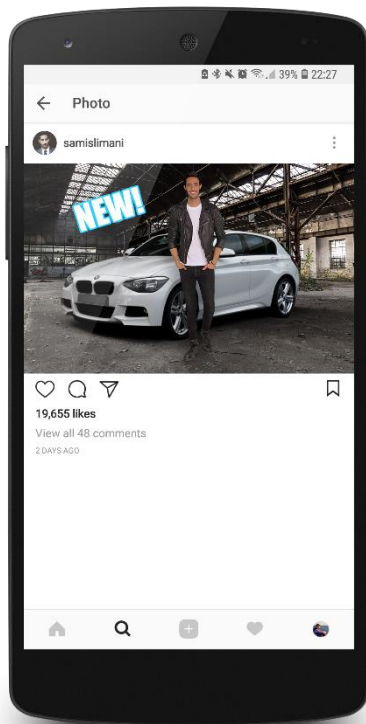
#### Country of origin effect

The preliminary study also already queried the images of Volkswagen and Renault by showing a product by each company without any manipulation. Just as for the factor 'reputation', there were some rather surprising results for the image measurement. Even though Renault did not suffer from a crisis recently, the image scores were rather negative and the ratings for VW were slightly better. In this context, it may be important to mention, that all participants were of German nationality. A country of origin effect might therefore be a possible explanation for the rather low scores of Renault. A country of origin effect occurs if the origin of the product influences its attractiveness to consumers positively or negatively (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). In this case, the German participants rated a product by a French automobile manufacturer negatively. To avoid a country of origin effect in the main study, it was chosen to adopt a second German automobile manufacturer (BMW) to the main study.

To summarize, it was chosen to adopt the influencers Jean Pierre Kraemer (niche influencer) and Sami Slimani (lifestyle influencer) to the main study, as well as the advertisement with 'new' annotation inside the picture and the advertisement with a caption underneath the picture mentioning the established diesel engine. Further it was chosen to adopt the German automobile manufacturer BMW as organization with solid reputation instead of Renault. Volkswagen remains the investigated organization with harmed reputation.



| figure 12: main study - stimulus material for all scenarios with niche influencer Jean Pierre Kraemer



| figure 13: main study - stimulus material for all scenarios with lifestyle influencer Sami Slimani



### 3.3 Measurement instrument

The online survey for the main study contained three parts: an introduction, the questionnaire, and some questions about demographical data along with a thank you text for participating. This section describes the used scales for the questionnaire and its reliability in detail.

#### 3.3.1 Factor analysis and analysis of reliability

Regarding the data reduction, a factor analysis and an analysis of reliability was made. The degree of the sample's suitability was measured by calculating the Kaiser, Meyer, and Olkin (KMO) value and the scale's reliability was determined with the help of Cronbach's alpha. It was also tested whether all item communalities were bigger than 0.3 and whether all factor weightings were bigger than 0.5.

Table 6

*Results of the factor analysis and the analysis of reliability*

	KMO	Communalities > 0.3	Factor weightings > 0.5	Cronbach's alpha $\alpha$
Trust	.775	✓	✓	.822
Risk-taking propensity	.634	✗	✗	.689
Innovation	.724	✓	✓	.702
Social responsibility	.616	✗	✗	.630
Perceived reputation	.788	✓	✓	.840
Expertise	.874	✓	✓	.911
Wishful identification	.854	✓	✓	.881
Product newness	.689	✗	✗	.645

As table 6 shows, three constructs did not show satisfactory results. The image constructs risk-taking propensity, and social responsibility both have a rather low validity and a questionable reliability. It was chosen to exclude one item of each construct to increase the reliability. As there would have been only two items left per construct, the low validity was accepted for the study but it was kept in mind as a strong limitation of the study results. The construct product newness also showed a low validity and a questionable reliability. The first item of product newness had to be excluded from the analysis to increase the construct's reliability. Still, there were two more items that decreased the construct's validity but it was decided not to exclude them since there would have only been two items left in the construct. In the following all items will be presented per construct.

#### Image variable: trust

To measure customers' trust in organizations, Goldsmith, Lafferty and Newell (2000) developed the corporate credibility scale. As already indicated in the theoretical framework, trust can be divided into honesty, reliability, and benevolence. The following items deal with these different parts of trustworthiness and were included into the questionnaire ( $\alpha = .822$ ).

- I trust the *Volkswagen Group*.
- The *Volkswagen Group* makes truthful claims.

- The *Volkswagen Group* is honest.
- I do not believe what the *Volkswagen Group* tells me.

#### Image variable: risk-taking propensity

The variable risk propensity was measured with the help of Jambulingam, Kathuria & Doucette's (2005) risk taking dimensions. The following items were adapted. To better the scale's reliability, item 3 had to be excluded from the analysis ( $\alpha = .689$ ). Nevertheless, the scale's reliability remains questionable.

- Taking gambles is part of the *Volkswagen Group*'s strategy for success.
- The *Volkswagen Group* takes too many risks in its business.
- Taking chances is an element of the *Volkswagen Group*'s business strategy.
- The *Volkswagen Group*'s strategy can be characterized as having a strong tendency to take risks.

#### Image variable: organizational innovation

Calantone et al. (2002) conceptualized firm innovativeness as a firm's ability to change and adopt innovations. These researchers also developed a scale to measure a firm's innovativeness and its relation to firm performance, and organizational learning (Calatone et al., 2002). For this study, the developed items by Calatone et al. (2002) were adapted to measure the organization's innovation. The following items were selected ( $\alpha = .702$ ). Item 4 had to be excluded from the analysis to increase the construct's validity.

- The *Volkswagen Group* frequently tries out new ideas.
- The *Volkswagen Group* seeks out new ways to do things.
- The *Volkswagen Group* is creative in its methods of operation.
- The *Volkswagen Group* is often the first to market with new products.

#### Image variable: social responsibility

Literature holds multiple ways to measure corporate social responsibility. For this study it was relevant to measure Volkswagen's perceived social responsibility by potential customers and not their actual corporate social responsibility. Maignan and Ferrell (2000) developed a suited scale to measure the extent to which businesses meet the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities imposed on them by their stakeholders. It considers three primary stakeholders: customers, employees, and public (Maignan & Ferrell, 2000) and was therefore well suited for this study. The following items were adapted. To higher the scale's reliability, item 1 had to be excluded from the analysis ( $\alpha = .630$ ). Still, the scale's reliability remains questionable.

- The *Volkswagen Group* strives to lower its operating costs.
- The managers of the *Volkswagen Group* try to comply with the law.
- Fairness toward co-workers and business partners is an integral part of the *Volkswagen Group*'s employee evaluation process.
- The *Volkswagen Group* aims to reduce the amount of wasted energy and material during the production process.

### Perceived reputation

To measure the perceived reputation of Volkswagen and Renault the Reprtrak scale, a short-form measure of corporate reputation by Ponzi, Fombrun and Gardberg (2011) was used. The following items were adopted to the study ( $\alpha = .840$ ).

- *Volkswagen* is a company I have a good feeling about
- *Volkswagen* is a company that I trust
- *Volkswagen* is a company that I admire and respect
- *Volkswagen* has a good overall reputation

### Expertise

Ohanian (1990) developed a scale for measuring celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. The scale is not based on a Likert scale but on five-point semantic differentials. For this study, the following items about the endorsers' perceived expertise were selected ( $\alpha = .911$ ).

- He/she is an an automobile expert - not an automobile expert
- He/she is inexperienced with automobiles – experienced with automobiles
- He/she is knowledgeable – unknowledgeable
- He/she is qualified – unqualified
- He/she is skilled - unskilled

### Wishful identification

Wishful identification describes a psychological process through which an individual desires or attempts to become like another person (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). The scale by Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) measures this identification and implies a 5-point Likert scale for responding (strongly agree – strongly disagree). The following items were adopted to the study ( $\alpha = .881$ ). Item 5 had to be excluded from the analysis to higher the construct's validity.

- He/she is the sort of person I want to be like myself.
- Sometimes I wish I could be more like him/her.
- He/she is someone I would like to emulate.
- I'd like to do the kinds of things he/she does.
- I would never want to act the way he/she does.

### Product newness

To measure the perceived product's newness, the novelty measurement scale by Cox and Cox (2002) was used. The scale is not based on a Likert scale but on seven-point semantic differentials. For this study, the following items were adopted. To higher the scale's reliability, the first item had to be excluded from the analysis ( $\alpha = .645$ ). Nevertheless, the scale's reliability remains questionable.

- New - old
- Original - unoriginal
- Unusual - common

- Familiar - novel
- Typical - atypical

### 3.4 Research procedure

For the main study, an online survey was set up by using the online software survey tool Qualtrics. The survey concentrated on Instagram as communication medium because it is a visual and image focused platform and therefore Instagram is well suited for influencers to deliver their messages prominently. In the beginning of the study the respondents got to read a short instruction with information on the research topic, the length of the survey and the statement that all data would be treated anonymously. The respondents then saw a manipulated Instagram post and were asked to look at it closely. They had as much time as they needed to look at the Instagram post. Once they clicked to get to the next part of the survey, the respondents were not able to go back to look at the Instagram posting again. Now, the respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire. At the end of the survey, there was a thank you text along with an email address to contact the researcher. The whole questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

### 3.5 Participants

For the main study, there originally were 508 participants. Unfortunately, a large number of participants did not answer the whole questionnaire and therefore 171 participants had to be excluded from the analysis. Then the scenario with the lowest number of participants was taken as role model and the number of participants from all other scenarios was aligned to the smallest scenario to ultimately get the same number of participants in each scenario. This was necessary to get comparable results for the different scenarios in the analyses. Hereby, another 33 participants had to be excluded from the sample. For the analysis of the main study  $n = 304$  participants were left. The average age of these participants was 32.48 years. The youngest participants was 14 years old and the oldest participant was 67 years old. In the sample, there were 116 male and 188 female participants. 57 participants were owner of a Volkswagen vehicle and 30 participants owned a vehicle by BMW.

Table 7  
*Demographics of the main study sample*

	N	Min	Max	Mean
Age	304	14	67	32.48
Gender				
<i>Male</i>	116	-	-	-
<i>Female</i>	188	-	-	-
Car owners	249	-	-	-
<i>VW</i>	57	-	-	-
<i>BMW</i>	30	-	-	-

Notes. N = number of participants.

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## RESULTS

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This chapter contains the results of the different analyses that are done. First, the manipulation checks are described. Then the descriptive statistics are presented and the different findings of the analyses of variance are described in detail. An interpretation of the results is following in the next chapter.

### 4.1 Manipulation checks

In the preliminary study, the independent variables manipulated for the stimulus material were partly tested. Nevertheless, the stimulus material for the main study was adapted because among other things the second investigated organization switched from Renault to BMW. Therefore a manipulation check was needed. The manipulation checks needed to be done for the factors 'influencer', 'product newness', and 'reputation'.

#### 4.1.1 Reputation

For the factor reputation, the Reprtrak scale by Ponzi, Fombrun and Gardberg (2011) with a five point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree) for response was used. A high score thus represented a better reputation than a low score. The organization's reputation could either be established (BMW) or harmed by a recent crisis (VW). In general, the descriptive statistics showed that all scenarios with BMW scored higher than the scenarios with VW. Nevertheless, the mean values of the scenarios were close to each other and both reputations were perceived relatively neutral. The highest mean value (3.47) was reached by scenario six which included a lifestyle influencer, and an established product by BMW. In contrast, the lowest mean value (2.81) was reached by scenario four which contained a niche-focused influencer promoting an established product by VW. The matching descriptive statistics can be found in table 7 in the appendix.

To determine whether these differences between the reputation of VW and BMW were significant, a between subject manipulation check was made. The independent samples t-test indicates that the effect was statistically significant ( $t_{\text{Welch}}(294.996) = 4.743, p < .001$ ) and the manipulation is thus verified.

#### 4.1.2 Influencer

##### Expertise

The factor influencer was measured with the help of two constructs. The first construct addressed the influencers' expertise. In the theory chapter it was supposed that a niche-focused influencer will be perceived as of higher expertise than a lifestyle influencer. The scores again reached from one to five (strongly disagree – strongly agree) and a higher score represented a lower perceived expertise. The mean values showed that all scenarios with a niche-focused influencer indeed scored lower than the scenarios with a lifestyle influencer. The scenario with highest mean value (3.59) was scenario eight which combined a lifestyle-influencer with an established product by VW. In contrast, the scenario with lowest mean value (2.37) was scenario three which included a niche-focused influencer promoting a new product by VW.

The independent t-test showed that the found difference was statistically significant ( $t_{\text{Welch}} (268.902) = 10.510, p < .001$ ) and this manipulation was also verified.

#### Wishful Identification

The second construct to measure the factor influencer was the 'wishful identification' with the influencer. For this construct, it was supposed that participants will identify more with a lifestyle influencer than with a niche-focused influencer because lifestyle influencers serve as role models. Instead, the results show that three of four scenarios with niche-focused influencer Jean Pierre Kraemer scored higher than the scenarios with lifestyle influencer Sami Slimani. The condition with highest mean value (2.43) was scenario three with a niche-focused influencer who promotes a new product by VW. In contrast, the lowest mean value (1.88) was reached by scenario six which included a lifestyle influencer marketing an established product by BMW.

The independent t-test results showed that the found difference for this manipulation again was statistically significant ( $t (302) = -2.441, p = .015$ ). It is thus proven that there is a statistically significant difference between niche-focused and lifestyle influencers concerning the wishful identification with them. Nevertheless, this difference is not as expected before and the manipulation hence is only partly verified.

#### 4.1.3 Product newness

The perceived product newness was measured with seven-point semantic differentials. The scores reached from one to seven and a high score represented a new product while a low score represented an old product. The descriptive statistics already showed that the scenarios that contained a new product were not identified as promoting new products. For instance, scenario four reached the highest mean value (3.05) although it included a niche-focused influencer who promotes an established product by VW. If the participants would have noticed the 'new' heading in the advertisement, the scenario with highest mean value had to be one of the four scenarios that contained a promotion for a new product. The scenario that was rated as containing the oldest product instead was recognized correctly. Scenario six scored lowest (mean value of 2.52) and contained a lifestyle influencer and an established product by BMW. As two of the scenarios with an established product were perceived completely oppositional, the factor 'product newness' seems to not be clearly noticed by the respondents.

The independent t-test results verified this assumption that the found difference was not statistically significant ( $t (302) = -.404, p = .686$ ). The manipulation for the variable 'product newness' was not successful.

#### 4.2 Hypotheses testing

To test the formulated hypotheses of this study, descriptive statistics and analyses of variance have been done. The descriptive statistics for the image variables 'trustworthiness', 'risk propensity', 'organizational innovation', and 'social responsibility' show that there often is a response pattern visible. The scenarios that contained a company with solid reputation (BMW) scored higher than the scenarios with an organization with harmed reputation (VW). Nevertheless, the difference between the

scores of VW and BMW varies in size. Detailed tables with all descriptive statistics can be found in the appendix.

#### 4.2.1 Main and interaction effects

The descriptive statistics suggest that there might be a significant effect of the factor ‘reputation’ on the organization’s image. To determine if the found differences are statistically significant, univariate analyses of variance have been done. . It is tested how the response behavior changes per scenario and whether the measured differences can be explained by the three factors “influencer”, “product newness”, and “reputation”, by their interaction or whether they are not statistically significant. The model underneath summarizes all analyses of variance that are done regarding the four image variables.

The results of the ANOVA for the factor ‘influencer’ show that there is no statistically significant effect on the variable trust ( $F(7,296) = .000, p = 1$ ), risk ( $F(7,296) = .225, p = .636$ ), innovativeness ( $F(7,296) = 1.328, p = .250$ ), and social responsibility ( $F(7,296) = .132, p = .717$ ). The difference is not statistically significant at all and Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Similar results were visible for the factor ‘product newness’ because the effects on the image variables trust ( $F(7,296) = .197, p = .657$ ), risk ( $F(7,296) = .900, p = .344$ ), innovativeness ( $F(7,296) = .832, p = .362$ ), and social responsibility ( $F(7,296) = .394, p = .531$ ) were not statistically significant.

Consequently, Hypothesis 2 was not supported, too.

For the factor ‘reputation’ the effects on the image variables trust ( $F(7, 296) = 52.410, p < .001, \eta^2 = .150$ ), risk, ( $F(7,296) = 33.746, p < .001, \eta^2 = .102$ ), innovation ( $F(7,296) = 14.752, p < .001, \eta^2 = .047$ ), and social responsibility ( $F(7,296) = 30.413, p < .001, \eta^2 = .093$ ) were all statistically significant. Hence, hypothesis 1 was verified.

Table 16

*Results of the three main effects in the analysis of variance*

		F	p	Partial $\eta^2$
Influencer niche – lifestyle	Trust	.000	1.000	.000
	Risk	.225	.636	.001
	Innovativeness	1.328	.250	.004
	CSR	.132	.717	.000
Product newness new - established	Trust	.197	.657	.001
	Risk	.900	.344	.003
	Innovativeness	.832	.362	.003
	CSR	.394	.531	.001
Reputation Solid - harmed	Trust	52.410	.000	.015
	Risk	33.746	.000	.102
	Innovativeness	14.752	.000	.047
	CSR	30.413	.000	.093

Between the factors ‘product newness’ and ‘reputation’ there was a statistically significant interaction effect on the image variable ‘innovativeness’ ( $F(7,296) = 4.262, p = .040, \eta^2 = .014$ ). The nature of this interaction effect is pictured in figure 15.

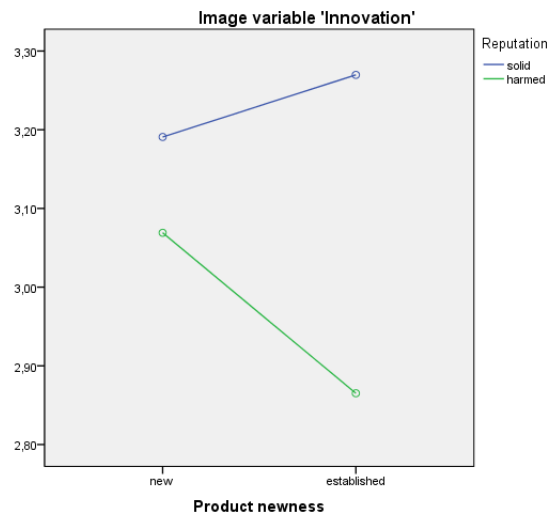


figure 14: Interaction effect of the factors product newness and reputation on the image variable innovativeness

For all other image variables, there was no statistically significant interaction between the factors 'product newness' and 'reputation'. Therefore Hypothesis 3 is falsified. The same results were found for the interaction effect between the factors 'product newness' and 'influencer' and Hypothesis 5a and 5b are not supported, too. For the interaction between the factors 'influencer' and 'reputation' there also was no statistically significant effect. Hypothesis 6 therefore is falsified, too. At last, an interaction effect between all three factors ('influencer', 'product newness', and 'reputation') could also not be seen and hypothesis 7 is also falsified.

Table 17

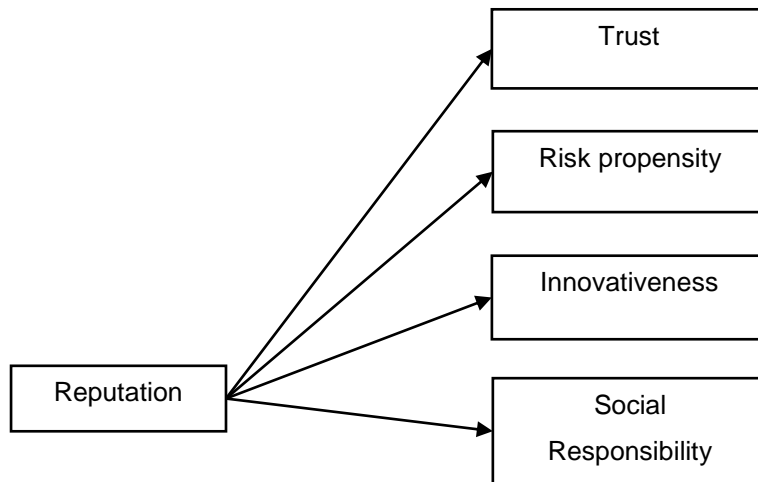
*Results of the interaction effects in the analysis of variance*

		F	p	Partial $\eta^2$
Product newness * Reputation	Trust	.239	.626	.001
	Risk	.056	.813	.000
	Innovativeness	4.262	.040	.014
	CSR	.394	.531	.001
Product newness * Influencer	Trust	.032	.859	.000
	Risk	.900	.344	.003
	Innovativeness	.187	.666	.001
	CSR	.682	.410	.002
Influencer * Reputation	Trust	.049	.824	.000
	Risk	.056	.813	.000
	Innovativeness	1.116	.292	.004
	CSR	.795	.373	.003
Influencer * Reputation * Product newness	Trust	.160	.690	.001
	Risk	.056	.813	.000
	Innovativeness	.113	.737	.000
	CSR	1.188	.277	.004

To summarize, only the factor 'reputation' showed a statistically significant main effect on the organization's image and Hypothesis 1 was the only one that could be verified. Even though the factors product newness and reputation showed an interaction effect on the image variable innovation,



hypothesis 3 still had to be rejected because all other image variables did not show this interaction effect.



| figure 15: adapted research model

#### 4.2.2 Sorted cases: Age groups

In the end of the data analysis, a last analysis with sorted cases has been done. Therefore, the data was sorted by the age of the respondents. Overall, six age groups have been made. The first age group included all participants aged under 21 years and contained  $n = 29$  respondents. The second age group was represented by respondents aged from 21 to 30 years and was the biggest group with  $n = 132$ . This age group probably was that big because it was the researcher's age group. For the third group all participants aged between 31 and 40 years were assorted ( $n = 56$ ). All participants aged from 41 to 50 years were grouped in age group 4 ( $n = 43$ ) and the last age group that was important for the analysis consisted of respondents from 51 to 60 years. Only age group 6 (61 to 70 years) had to be excluded from the analysis because there were only  $n = 6$  participants included.

There were some interesting results for the different age groups. For the factor 'influencer', there was a statistically significant effect for age group 4 on the image variable risk propensity ( $F(7,35) = 4.905$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $\eta^2 = .123$ ). Age group 5 showed a similar effect for the factor 'influencer' on the image variable 'risk propensity' ( $F(7,30) = 4.284$ ,  $p = .047$ ,  $\eta^2 = .125$ ). For the image variable 'innovation', there also is a statistically significant finding. In this context, especially age group 3 needs to be mentioned because for this group an interaction effect between the factors 'product newness' and 'reputation' was statistically significant ( $F(7,48) = 7.520$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $\eta^2 = .135$ ). Even though it is not statistically significant, it needs to be mentioned that age group 4 shows a marginal effect for the same interaction ( $F(7,35) = 4.095$ ,  $p = .051$ ,  $\eta^2 = .105$ ). Moreover, for age group 1 there also was a marginal effect of the factor 'product newness' on the image variable innovation ( $F(7,21) = 4.065$ ,  $p = .057$ ,  $\eta^2 = .162$ ) that was not statistically significant but important to mention. The last statistically significant result was found for age group 4 and was related to an interaction effect between the factors 'influencer' and 'reputation' on the image variable 'social responsibility' ( $F(7,35) = 4.431$ ,  $p = .043$ ,  $\eta^2 = .112$ ).

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## DISCUSSION

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### 5.1 Interpretation of the study results and reflection on literature

Looking back at the theoretical chapter and the literature that was used as a base for the study, there are certain conformities and several dissimilarities with the results of this study. In the following, all results will be discussed in detail and a possible explanation for the mismatching findings will be given.

#### 5.1.1 Main effects

The first main focus of this study was the organization's reputation. As seen in the theory chapter, previous research on reputation focuses on its relation to the organizational image, stating that image is an integral part of the overall reputation (Chun, 2005). This study also investigated the connection between reputation and image and in particular concentrated on the effect of corporate reputation on the organizational image. A differentiation between a solid and a harmed reputation was made and it was hypothesized that a positive reputation has a more positive effect on the organization's image. The findings indeed showed that there was a statistically significant effect of reputation on the company's image. Hypothesis 1 could therefore be verified and the findings match to the statements about reputation and image by Chun (2005).

Second, this study also emphasized the role of the product as possible communicator. In line with the findings of earlier researchers on the ability of products to communicate through intrinsic and extrinsic cues (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005), it was assumed that the product's newness is one of the intrinsic cues that is able to communicate a certain message to consumers. The study hypothesized that a new product has a more positive effect on the perceived organizational image than an established product. The study results instead did not show any statistically significant influence and hypothesis 2 was not proven. The unsuccessful manipulation of the factor might be one important explanation for the study findings to not be in line with the statements of other researchers about intrinsic and extrinsic cues. Another possible explanation is the degree of newness itself. As mentioned in the theory chapter, "product newness is defined as the degree to which the product being developed was new to the company and new to the market" (Bonner, 2010, p.486). Nevertheless, the perceived degree of a car's newness without any context might be too subjective.

Third, the study also emphasized the topic of influencer marketing. Previous research on influencer marketing often focused on a differentiation between macro and micro influencers and on how their effectiveness as marketing tools varies. This study instead concentrated on the influencer's nature and differentiated between niche-focused and lifestyle influencers. Niche-focused influencers were defined as having high expertise in a certain field. Indeed, the study results showed that the selected niche-influencers were perceived as of higher expertise than lifestyle-influencers because the scores were statistically significantly higher. For lifestyle influencers, it was assumed that the participant's wishful identification with lifestyle influencers is particularly high because they were defined as influencers who promote certain living patterns and self-images and therefore serve as role models. The study showed that lifestyle influencers did not score higher than niche-focused influencers in terms of wishful identification. The earlier assumption of lifestyle influencers to score higher for the construct wishful

identification might not consider that participants also identify with niche-focused influencers and that niche-focused influencers may be perceived as role models too. So, wishful identification probably is not the best construct to represent the defined characteristics of a lifestyle influencer.

Considering the expected effect of the influencer type on the organization's image, it was assumed that a niche-influencer has a more positive impact on the automotive company's image than a lifestyle influencer. This was based on Gass and Seiter (2014) who state that to promote a product with higher risk (for instance a product with high value) an opinion leader (influencer) with high credibility is needed. For this study, an automobile was defined as product with higher risk for the consumer because it has a rather high value. Further, a niche-influencer was defined as the influencer type with highest expertise and according to Gass and Seiter (2014) expertise is an important element of credibility. The results of this study showed that there was no statistically significant effect of the influencer type on the organization's image. Therefore, hypothesis 4 had to be rejected. Looking back at the statements about expertise by Gass and Seiter (2014), there might be an explanation for the study's findings. As Gass and Seiter (2014) say, an influencer's expertise does not always have to be in the field in which the influencer attempts to be influential to be perceived as knowledgeable. If the influencer is an expert in one certain field, it often occurs that people assume this influencer to be an expert in another field, too. This effect is called "halo-effect" (Gass & Seiter, 2014). In this study, lifestyle-influencers might have been perceived as of high expertise regarding the promotion of certain living patterns and self-images. According to Gass and Seiter (2014) this expertise might have been transferred to the field of automobiles and that explains why there possibly was no differentiation between a niche-focused influencer and a lifestyle influencer.

#### 5.1.2 Interaction effects

As an earlier study found that new products are tools to react to changes in the company's environment (Baregheh, Rowley & Sambrook, 2009), a hypothesis regarding the interaction between product newness and reputation was set up. In this case, a corporate crisis (harmed reputation) was characterized as a change in the company's environment and it was hypothesized that a new product has a more positive effect on the organization's image regarding a company with harmed reputation. The study did not find a statistically significant effect and hypothesis 3 also was not supported. These findings again might be biased by the unsuccessful manipulation for the factor product newness. Another explanation for this result might be based on the underlying literature for this hypothesis. The statement by Baregheh, Rowley and Sambrook (2009) on the product's ability to communicate and to react to changes in the company's environment lacks a clear definition of what exactly changes in the company's environment are. In their article, Baregheh, Rowley and Sambrook (2009) only give some examples of the mentioned changes. For instance, a new market trend can be characterized as a change in the company's environment and new products are tools to react to this market trend (Baregheh, Rowley & Sambrook, 2009). Whether a corporate crisis also matches the mentioned change in the company's environment or not is questionable.

Further, the possible interaction between the influencer type and the product's newness was hypothesized with two hypotheses. First, it was assumed that an established product has a more positive effect on the organization's image if it is marketed by a niche influencer. Second, it was also

suggested that a new product has a more positive effect on the organization's image if it is marketed by a lifestyle influencer. Again, both hypotheses 5a and 5b had to be falsified as there was no statistically significant effect. Looking back at the underlying literature, the article by Holak and Lehmann (1990) on the consumers to be more concerned with a new item's capability with their living patterns and self-images than with more specific information about its operating features or benefits does not clarify whether this weighs for every item. Holak and Lehmann (1990) do not differentiate between different product categories. As Gass and Seiter (2014) state that a purchase decision with a bigger risk for consumers needs a higher perceived influencer credibility, it is likely that there are various product categories that might require different consumer needs. Therefore, it might have been vague to only base the hypotheses about the interaction between influencer type and product newness on the article by Holak and Lehmann (1990) that misses a clear differentiation between various product categories.

Regarding the studied interaction of organizational reputation and influencer type, it was hypothesized that niche-focused influencers have a more positive effect on the image of organizations in crisis than lifestyle influencers. The base for this hypothesis again was Gass and Seiter's (2014) statement about the positive impact of an opinion leader with high credibility on a consumer when it comes to purchase decisions with high risk. In this case, a purchase decision for a product of a company with product-related crisis was classified as of high risk for the consumer. The findings of the study again were not statistically significant and hypothesis 6 had to be rejected, too. Therefore, the results were not in line with the statement by Gass and Seiter (2014) and the mentioned halo-effect could again be one possible explanation for the results.

A last important emphasis of this study was the combination of influencer type, product's newness, and the marketed organization's reputation. It was assumed that a niche-focused influencer who promotes an established product by a company with harmed reputation has a positive effect on the company's image. The findings of the study were not statistically significant and hypothesis 7 remained unsupported, too. As this hypothesis derived from Gass and Seiter's (2014) statement about the consumer's need for credibility when buying a product with higher risk too, the earlier mentioned halo-effect could again be an explanation for this result.

## 5.2 Answering the research question

Looking back at the proposed research question, the study results did not show any clear answer. Further research is needed to come to a conclusion if organizations in crisis need to engage different influencers and promote different products than organizations with solid reputation.

## 5.3 Limitations and future research

Several limitations must be stated for this study. First, the factor product newness seemed to be biased. As mentioned before, the manipulation was not successful at all. This was already shown in the factor analysis and the analysis of reliability. Usually the construct must have been excluded from the analysis but as this was a main focus of the study, the construct was kept in the analysis but the results are not meaningful. Possible reasons for this are the product newness scale itself or the

position of the product newness scale in the questionnaire. As the product newness scale was the last part of the questionnaire before querying the demographical data, it is assumable that the participants did not remember the 'new' annotation in the picture or the manipulated caption underneath the Instagram post on the first side of the online study. Furthermore it is also possible that the participants had specific knowledge about the pictured products in the Instagram post. The shown cars were not actually new but established products by VW and BMW. For future research on the intrinsic product attribute newness, it is important to find a better suited scale and stimulus material.

Another important limitation of this study is the probable mismatch between participants of the study's sample and the influencer's target group. Based on the broad research sample, it is likely that not all participants were interested in the topic of automobiles and therefore did not know and recognize the niche influencer who concentrates on this topic. It is possible that participants would have rated the niche influencer's expertise higher if they had known him.

Further it also would have been interesting to see if there were different findings for the wishful identification with lifestyle influencers in the case of a match between study sample and influencer target group. Especially the construct wishful identification might be impacted by the broad study sample. It is for example assumable that women identify more with female influencers or that participants with interest in the automotive industry identify more with automobile experts. For future research it is important to focus on a concrete target group that matches with the selected influencer and the overall topic.

Another possible limitation for this study might be the influencer selection. Especially lifestyle influencer Sami Slimani might have not been very suited to find significant results because of his polarizing nature. There probably were controversial opinions about him because he did not meet male stereotypes. This might be an explanation for the low ratings concerning the participant's identification with him.

A last limitation that needs to be mentioned is the fact that the study took place in Germany and that the results might have been influenced by a country of origin effect. Just as assumed for the preliminary study, it is possible that Volkswagen scored relatively high because it is a German automobile manufacturer. If the study had been done in the United States, there might have been lower scores for VW.

## 5.4 Conclusion

To summarize, this study found that the organization's reputation has an impact on the organization's image. Further, this was the first study to investigate whether influencer marketing is a suited tool for crisis communication and whether the intrinsic product attribute newness is able to communicate a certain message to consumers. Regarding the product newness, the study's results were not meaningful because the manipulation was not successful. Further research in this field is necessary to find an answer to the questioned function of products to communicate a specific message. Unlike other studies on influencer marketing, this study did not categorize influencers in terms of their network centrality (micro/macro) but differentiated between two influencer types. Niche-focused and

lifestyle influencers were distinguished and regarding the influencer's expertise a clear difference was proven. Niche-focused influencers were perceived as of greater expertise. Regarding influencer marketing as a crisis communication tool, there were no meaningful results either. It was not proven that organizations in crises need to engage different influencers for an influencer marketing campaign than organizations with solid reputation. Nevertheless, the core message of this study is that there is a strong impact of the organization's reputation on the organization's image and besides the widely applied approach to find the best suited influencer by only focusing on the influencer's network centrality (micro/macro), there also is another approach that focuses on the influencer's type. Further, it can be assumed that the combination of the best suited influencer type and the best suited product for an influencer campaign by an organization might be related to the organization's reputation. Even though this study could not prove this connection, there still is this assumption because the study results were strongly limited by the unsuccessful manipulation of the factor product newness. Future research could focus on the mentioned relation.

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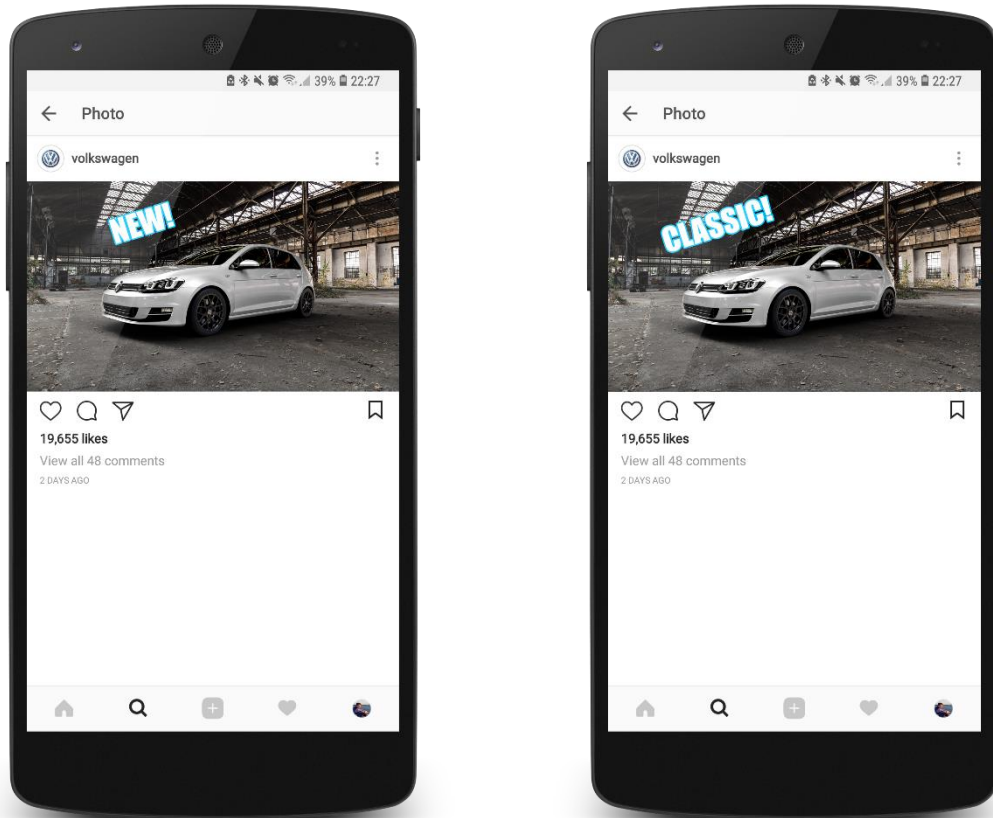
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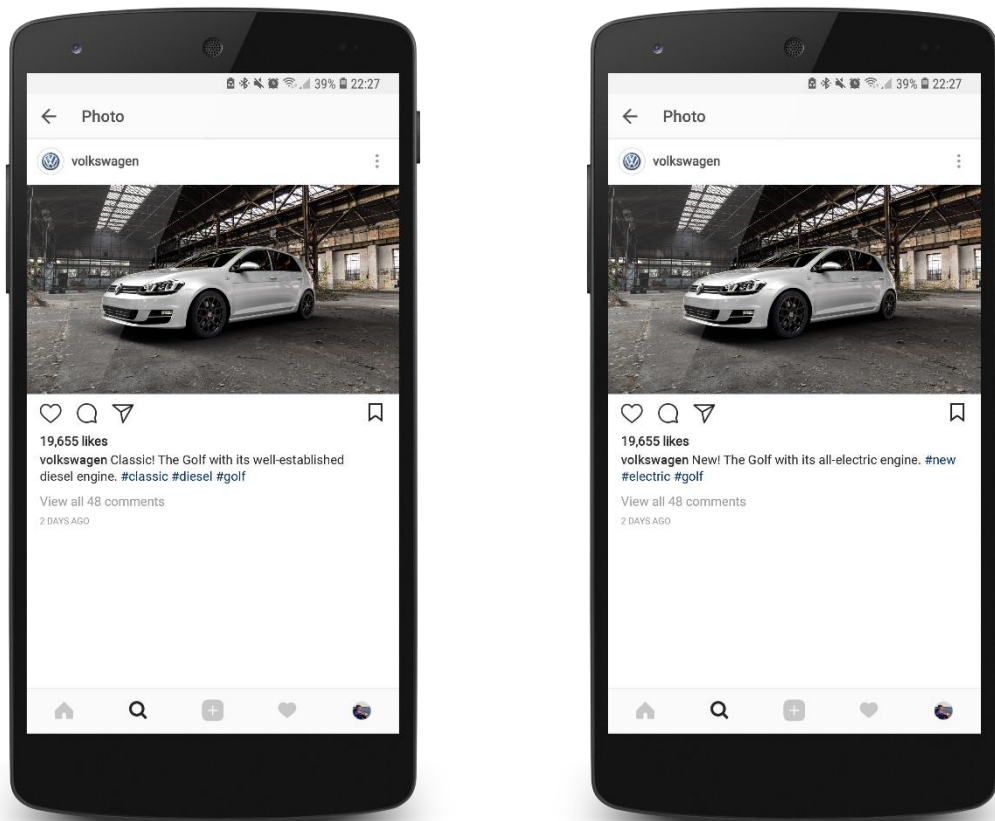
## APPENDIX

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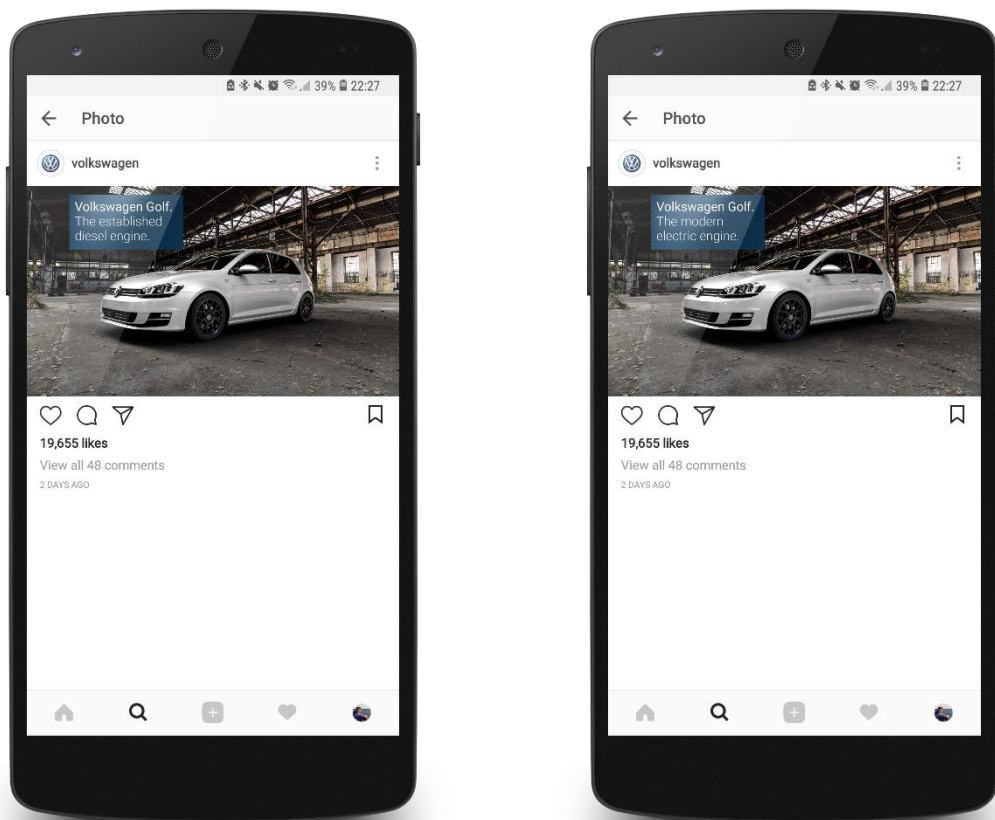
### Preliminary study – stimulus material



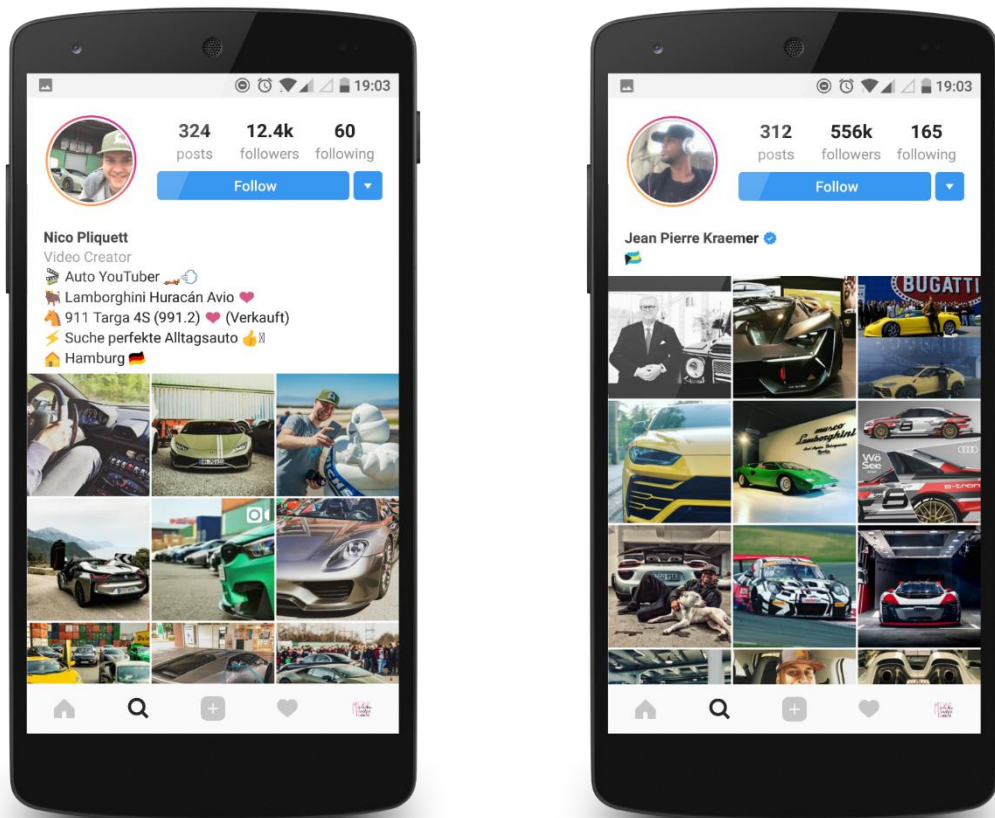
| figure 4: Preliminary study advertisements 'Annotation New!' and 'Annotation Classic!'



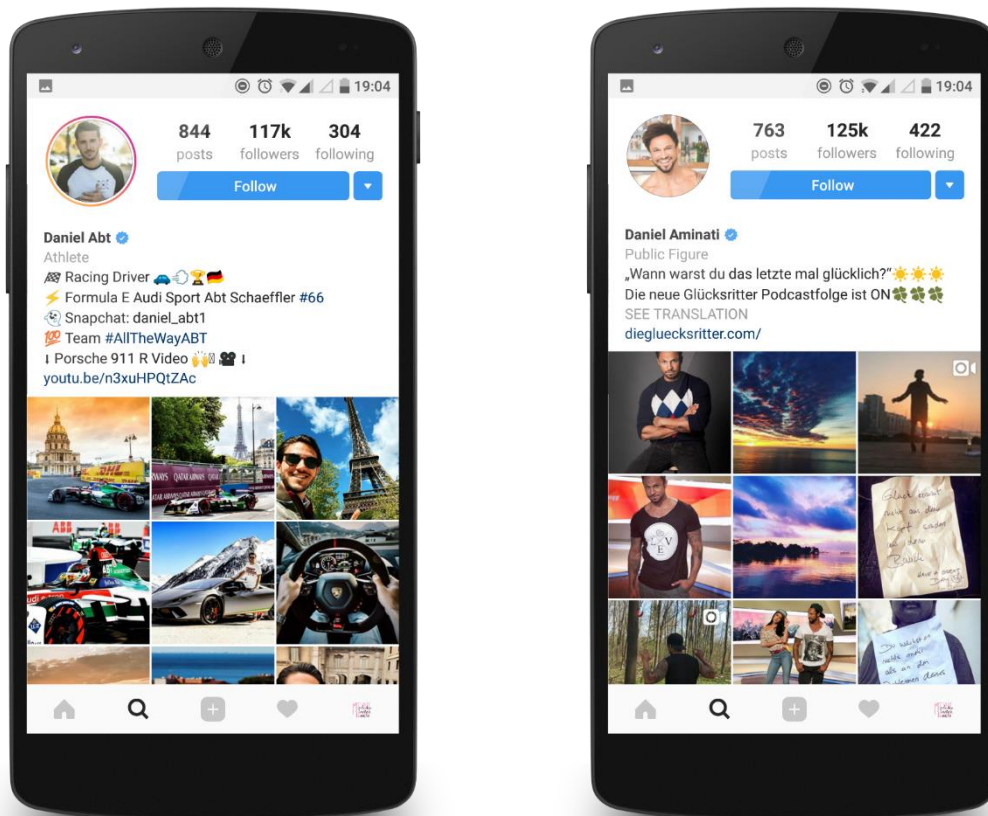
| figure 5: Preliminary study advertisements 'Caption modern engine' and 'Caption classic diesel engine'



| figure 6: Preliminary study advertisements 'Info-box new' and 'Info-box classic'

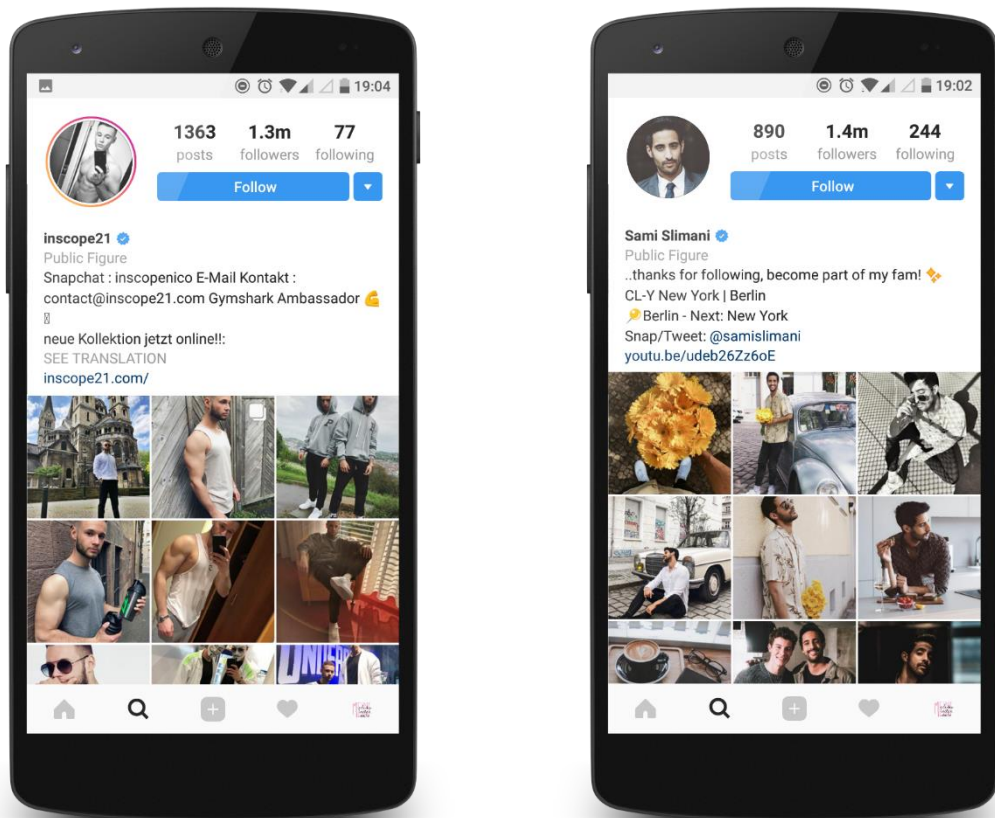


| figure 7: Preliminary study – niche influencer Nico Pliquet and niche influencer Jean Pierre Kraemer



| figure 8: preliminary study - niche influencer Daniel Abt and lifestyle influencer Daniel Aminati





| figure 9: preliminary study – lifestyle influencer inscope21 and lifestyle influencer Sami Slimani



| figure 10: preliminary study material for VW



| figure 11: preliminary study material for Renault

## Main study

Table 8

*Descriptive statistics Variable 'Reputation'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	4	3,2434	,68400
Scenario 2	38	4	3,2368	,85611
Scenario 3	38	4	3,0592	,74533
Scenario 4	38	4	2,8092	,83106
Scenario 5	38	4	3,3882	,72526
Scenario 6	38	4	3,4737	,54769
Scenario 7	38	4	2,9276	,83405
Scenario 8	38	4	2,8618	,91846

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

Table 9

*Descriptive statistics Variable 'Expertise'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	5	2,6895	,84814
Scenario 2	38	5	2,4158	,91164
Scenario 3	38	5	2,3737	1,02948
Scenario 4	38	5	2,4737	,98686
Scenario 5	38	5	3,3947	,57420
Scenario 6	38	5	3,4526	,67011
Scenario 7	38	5	3,4316	,70753
Scenario 8	38	5	3,5947	,66979

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

Table 10

*Descriptive statistics Variable 'Identification'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	5	2,1579	,76145
Scenario 2	38	5	2,2789	,84154
Scenario 3	38	5	2,4316	,86559
Scenario 4	38	5	2,3947	,69669
Scenario 5	38	5	2,1579	,90184
Scenario 6	38	5	1,8842	,82610
Scenario 7	38	5	2,2105	,94720
Scenario 8	38	5	2,0789	,78711

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

Table 11

*Descriptive statistics Variable 'Newness'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	4	2,8618	1,07127
Scenario 2	38	4	2,8816	,97040
Scenario 3	38	4	2,8158	1,05697
Scenario 4	38	4	3,0526	1,17714
Scenario 5	38	4	3,0197	1,06286
Scenario 6	38	4	2,5197	,81866
Scenario 7	38	4	2,5461	1,08094
Scenario 8	38	4	2,9868	1,17397

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

Table 12

*Descriptive statistics Image Variable 'Trust'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	4	3,0724	,63647
Scenario 2	38	4	3,0921	,62984
Scenario 3	38	4	2,6184	,69927
Scenario 4	38	4	2,5066	,65885
Scenario 5	38	4	3,1053	,65665
Scenario 6	38	4	3,0921	,47012
Scenario 7	38	4	2,5592	,72231
Scenario 8	38	4	2,5329	,66060

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

Table 13

*Descriptive statistics Image Variable 'Risk'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	3	3,1053	,54307
Scenario 2	38	3	3,1053	,69362
Scenario 3	38	3	2,6930	,57673
Scenario 4	38	3	2,6930	,69913
Scenario 5	38	3	3,2456	,57309
Scenario 6	38	3	3,0702	,62075
Scenario 7	38	3	2,7632	,70565
Scenario 8	38	3	2,6579	,72072

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

Table 14

*Descriptive statistics Image Variable 'Innovation'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	4	3,1908	,54349
Scenario 2	38	4	3,2763	,51264
Scenario 3	38	4	3,1184	,57168
Scenario 4	38	4	2,9671	,69060
Scenario 5	38	4	3,1908	,55274
Scenario 6	38	4	3,2632	,47201
Scenario 7	38	4	3,0197	,59667
Scenario 8	38	4	2,7632	,77970

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

Table 15

*Descriptive statistics Image Variable 'Corporate Social Responsibility'*

	N	N-Items	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	38	3	2,9123	,50036
Scenario 2	38	3	2,9298	,57557
Scenario 3	38	3	2,7193	,65083
Scenario 4	38	3	2,5088	,57337
Scenario 5	38	3	2,9649	,61897
Scenario 6	38	3	2,9474	,42818
Scenario 7	38	3	2,5088	,70917
Scenario 8	38	3	2,5526	,52720

Notes. SD= Standard deviation. N= number of participants.

## German questionnaire (main study)



Willkommen!

Für meine Masterarbeit im Fach Kommunikationswissenschaften an der Universität Twente untersuche ich die Images verschiedener Unternehmen und wie Influencer Marketing diese beeinflusst. Hierfür habe ich die folgende Umfrage entwickelt. Die Teilnahme wird ca. 10 Minuten dauern.

Bevor Sie an meiner Umfrage teilnehmen, möchte ich Sie darauf hinweisen, dass es keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten gibt. Ihre eigene Meinung ist gefragt. Außerdem werden alle Daten vertraulich behandelt und Sie bleiben absolut anonym. Sie können jederzeit ohne Angabe von Gründen die Umfrage beenden.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!

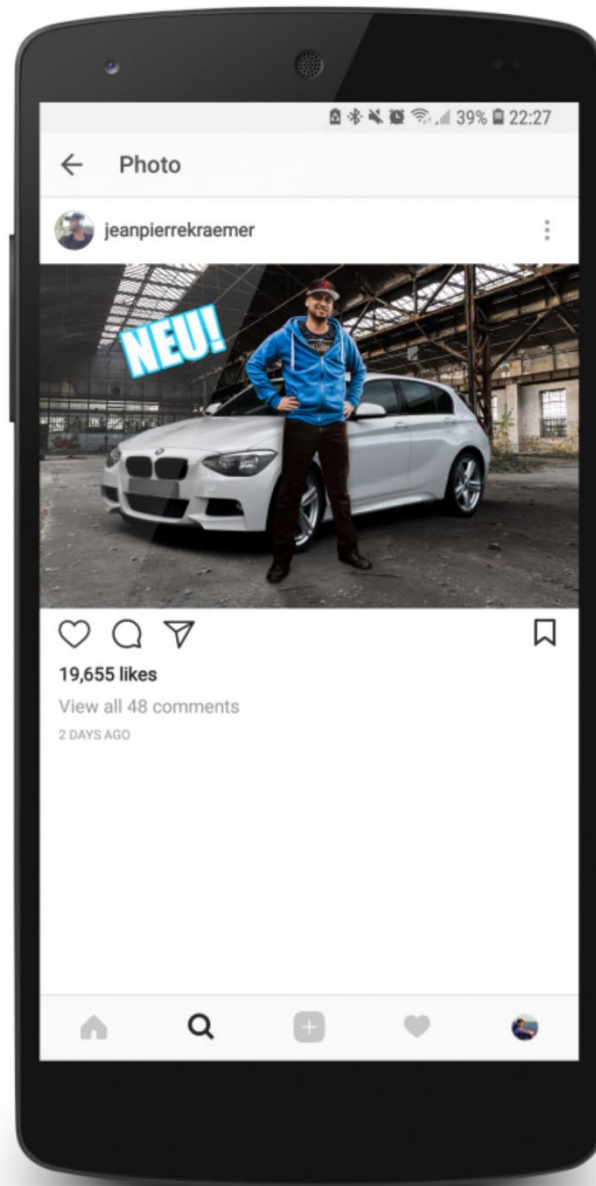


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Bitte betrachten Sie die folgende Abbildung genau.



In der Abbildung sahen Sie ein Instagram posting, in dem Jean Pierre Kraemer einen BMW bewirbt. Bitte bewerten Sie inwieweit Sie den folgenden Aussagen zustimmen.

	Ich stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Ich stimme nicht zu	neutral	Ich stimme zu	Ich stimme voll zu
Ich vertraue BMW.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW macht wahrheitsgemäße Angaben.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW ist ehrlich.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich glaube nicht, was BMW sagt.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Risiken einzugehen ist ein Teil von BMWs Geschäftsstrategie.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW geht übermäßig viele Risiken ein.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chancen zu ergreifen ist ein Teil von BMWs Geschäftsstrategie.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMWs Geschäftsstrategie kann als sehr risikofreudig beschrieben werden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW probiert regelmäßig neue Ideen aus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW sucht neue Wege um Dinge umzusetzen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMWs Vorgehensweise kann als kreativ beschrieben werden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW ist oft der erste Hersteller, der neue Produkte auf den Markt bringt.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW strebt es an, die Betriebskosten zu verringern.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager von BMW versuchen das Gesetz einzuhalten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fairness gegenüber Mitarbeitern und Geschäftspartnern ist Bestandteil von BMWs Mitarbeiterbewertungsprozess.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW versucht die Menge an verschwendeter Energie und Material in der Produktion zu verringern.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Klicken Sie bitte für jede untenstehende Aussage das Feld an, das Ihre Meinung am besten widerspiegelt.

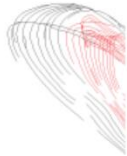
	Ich stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Ich stimme nicht zu	neutral	Ich stimme zu	Ich stimme voll zu
Ich habe ein gutes Gefühl, wenn ich an BMW denke.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW ist ein Unternehmen, dem ich vertraue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW ist ein Unternehmen, das ich bewundere und respektiere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
BMW hat insgesamt einen guten Ruf.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>





Klicken Sie bitte für jede untenstehende Aussage das Feld an, das Ihre Meinung am besten widerspiegelt.

Jean Pierre Kraemer ist...

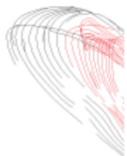


...ein Automobil Experte.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	...kein Automobil Experte.
...unerfahren mit Autos.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	...erfahren mit Autos.
...sachkundig im Umgang mit Autos.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	...nicht sachkundig im Umgang mit Autos.
...qualifiziert im Umgang mit Autos.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	...nicht qualifiziert im Umgang mit Autos.
...geschickt im Umgang mit Autos.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	...ungeschickt im Umgang mit Autos.



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Klicken Sie bitte für jede untenstehende Aussage das Feld an, das Ihre Meinung am besten widerspiegelt.



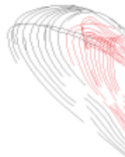
	Ich stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Ich stimme nicht zu	neutral	Ich stimme zu	Ich stimme voll zu
Jean Pierre Kraemer ist die Art von Person, die ich selbst auch sein möchte.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manchmal wünsche ich mir, ich könnte mehr so wie Jean Pierre Kraemer sein.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jean Pierre Kraemer ist jemand, den ich gerne nachahmen würde.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde gerne die Dinge machen, die Jean Pierre Kraemer macht.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich würde niemals so handeln wollen wie Jean Pierre Kraemer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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Bitte bewerten Sie das beworbene Fahrzeug. Klicken Sie das Feld an, das Ihre Meinung am besten widerspiegelt.

Ich sehe dieses Auto als...



neu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	alt
original	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nicht original
ungewöhnlich	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	gewöhnlich
vertraut	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nicht vertraut
typisch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	untypisch



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Kennen Sie den vorgestellten Influencer?

- ☐ Nein, ich habe noch nie von ihm gehört.
- ☐ Ja, ich habe schon einmal von ihm gehört.
- ☐ Ja, ich folge dem Influencer auf sozialen Medien.

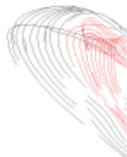


Wie ist Ihr Geschlecht?

- ☐ männlich
- ☐ weiblich

Wie alt sind Sie?

Welchen Beruf/Job haben Sie?



Besitzen Sie ein Auto und falls ja wie lautet die Marke?

Bitte vergessen Sie nicht auf den Folgepfeil zu klicken um die Daten abzuschicken. Andernfalls werden diese nicht gespeichert.

