Communitainment on Instagram: Fitness Content and Community-Driven Communication as Social Media Entertainment

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Abstract
This article discusses fitness content on Instagram as a form of social media entertainment (SME). A conceptual article that presents a literature review of studies on fitness postings on social media, it examines the research on communitainment values in online fitness content. While online entertainment on social media differs from traditional mass media such as television and movies, new concepts of social media–related entertainment have been described in the field of communication and media studies. Based on a literature review of online entertainment research on media effects and content-oriented approaches of so-called “social media entertainment” (SME), this article intends to discuss fitness postings and their corresponding community-driven communication as “communitainment.” Aspects of fitness content will be further explained in terms of (a) self-representation and self-disclosure, (b) community building, and (c) media use and well-being, thereby highlighting the new dynamics of fitness communitainment on social networking sites (SNSs).

Keywords
Instagram, social media entertainment, entertainment research, fitness, community building

Introduction
Instagram is the most popular image-sharing social media platform thus far (Schreiber & Kramer, 2016; Serafinelli, 2018). In 2019, around 1 billion people are using Instagram worldwide. “While Twitter was widely popular a few years ago,” as Alhabash and Ma (2017, p. 1) have recently put it, “newer social media such as Instagram and Snapchat are rising in popularity. Facebook remains popular among young adults, yet it is being abandoned by teens migrating to Instagram and Snapchat” (see also Duncan, 2016; Frees & Koch, 2018; Matthews, 2014). The smartphone in particular as an “indicator and motor of mediatization” and a medium of “intercorporeal relationship” with a user (Miller, 2014) accelerates a higher degree of variability and flexibility for computer-mediated communication (CMC) in everyday culture, thus constituting a certain driving force for a high daily range of networked online communication. Moreover, the entertainment-oriented use of online media is gaining in importance as well even within the complex structure of the converging media usage on social networking sites (SNSs) (Alhabash and Ma, 2017, p. 9; Frees & Koch, 2018, p. 406). The use of Instagram, as Alhabash and Ma (2017) write, “was significantly predicted by entertainment” (p. 6). However, Instagram is not only interesting because of its increasing daily range of usage among younger media users but also due to the platform’s constant adoption of different functions (images, videos, audios, direct messaging, Instagram stories, Instagram TV, and so forth), rendering it a multifacilitating communication platform for a variety of potential uses. As already pointed out elsewhere (e.g., Bartsch, 2017; Cunningham & Craig, 2016, 2017; Trepte & Reinecke, 2010; Utz, 2012), social media’s entertainment offerings are different from those of traditional mass media like television or film, due to their merging of production and consumption as well as forms of interpersonal and mass communication in an SNS environment. Social media promote the ongoing transformation of popular mobile screen entertainment, especially among younger media users (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p. 71), amalgamating media usage with other nonmediated leisure activities, traditional mass media forms of entertainment, and interpersonal communication (Bartsch, 2017, p. 10). Thus, new content forms...
and activities emerge on social media which put pressure on the previously assumed distinction between interpersonal communication, leisure activities, and media entertainment.

One new form of content and activity is fitness postings and their corresponding community-driven communication on social media platforms and Instagram in particular. The fitness community on Instagram is constantly growing; there are millions of posts with hashtags such as “#gym” (more than 150 million posts), “#fitspo” (over 63 million posts), #instafit (more than 45 million posts), and “#fitspiration” (over 17 million posts), incorporating regularly recurring challenges surrounding planks, squats, weights, push-ups, and yoga poses. The online popular press praises fitness-related content on SNSs as fun and exciting—and thus as an entertaining, pleasurable leisure activity—and publishes lists of top fitness accounts and influencers (The Editors of Men’s Health, 2019; Fitness Blogger, 2019; Martin & Vaas, 2019). They also ennable influencers’ strategies for creating personal brands both inside and outside the gym (Eldor, 2019). In the context of the fitness industry and marketing, fitness influencers (or “fitfluencers”) are among the frontrunners (Fitness Management, 2018). Furthermore, international celebrities like Dwayne Johnson and celebrity personal trainers like Don Saladino support the online fitness culture on social media while benefiting from the constantly growing fitness community.

Some research studies have argued, however, that fitness postings on SNSs have become a “popular leisure activity” (Jong & Drummond, 2016) which constitute a growing part of the everyday culture of today’s media users. Entertainment gratification has also been described as a hedonic motivation for the user to participate in online fitness communities (Stragier et al., 2016) or the use of fitness apps (Yuan & Kanthawala, 2015). Nevertheless, fitness-related content on social media has not been evaluated in further detail in terms of its constituting a new form of online entertainment. In addition, the idea of entertainment gratification seems to contradict a growing body of research that mostly identifies the negative influences on media users of fitness-related content on social media (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Fatt et al., 2019; Mabe et al., 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Only a few researchers also address the content’s positive effects (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018; Easton et al., 2018; Palmer, 2015).

In this context, and precisely because of the ambivalent status of social media’s fitness culture, my aim is to discuss fitness content as a form of “social media entertainment.” The article takes the form of a conceptual paper that presents a literature review of studies on fitness postings on social media in order to examine the research on entertainment-related values in online fitness content. For a broader view, the literature review takes into account studies of fitness-related content not only on Instagram but on other SNSs (e.g. Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter) as well. Even though Instagram is now the major image-sharing SNS, a considerable body of research has also investigated other platforms which will be considered for the purpose of this article.

Moreover, and in the light of the community’s attribution of fun and pleasure to fitness communication on SNSs, I will discuss fitness content on social media like Instagram as “communitainment” (Cunningham & Craig, 2016, p. 5413). Initially, Cunningham and Craig discussed the notion of communitainment as an alternative means of analyzing forms of social media entertainment (SME). Meanwhile, they have abandoned the term in favor of the more general notion of SME (Cunningham & Craig, 2016, p. 5413). Even if both terms refer to the same phenomena, the specific combination of communication, community building, and entertainment, I would argue, seems to be characteristic of fitness content on an SNS like Instagram. Thus, I will use the term “communitainment” to emphasize the community-driven aspects within the broader conceptual realm of entertainment on social media. Based on an extensive literature review, I will outline my idea of communitainment in correlation with media psychology-driven research on media entertainment and media effects in the field of media and communication studies and emphasize a conceptual understanding of “fitness communitainment” on SNSs.

My argument proceeds as follows: First, I briefly discuss different approaches in the context of online and SME research to unpack basic assumptions and different aspects of forms of entertainment on social media. Second, I discuss my understanding of communitainment based on Cunningham and Craig (2016) in correlation with Trepte’s and Reinecke’s (2010) approach to online entertainment. Third, I situate fitness content on social media within the theoretical and analytical context of online entertainment on SNSs by emphasizing three basic perspectives: self-representation and self-disclosure; community building; and media use and well-being. Finally, I present some preliminary conclusions.

Social Media and Entertainment Research

Media entertainment is a highly complex cultural phenomenon. While nearly everyone knows what constitutes entertainment in our everyday media culture, the term can scarcely be described in a few sentences, let alone conceptualized using one single theoretical and analytical approach (Früh, 2003, p. 10). The highly subjective understanding of media entertainment evokes a variety of different forms, functions, and characteristics, depending on what media entertainment means to its users. Klemm (2007, p. 2) calls media entertainment a chameleon,

Completely subjective; specific to the group and culture; dependent on one’s age, the situation and the mood. Things that once made us laugh make us shake our heads later. Things that
amuse us today can bore us tomorrow. What’s more, the forms and formats of entertaining media products have changed considerably over time. (Klemm, 2007, p. 4)

In the context of entertainment research, media entertainment can also be understood in a broader sense as (a) a form of communication; (b) a function of (mass) media; (c) a social form; (d) an aesthetic category; and (e) the result of economic processes and practices. Media entertainment is thus commonly understood in terms of its functions, attributes, or differences (Hügel, 2003). In the field of media and communication studies, however, media entertainment is typically defined by the characteristics of a “user’s entertainment experience” rather than by specific media types or content: it “can be described as a form of media use that is intrinsically rewarding for the user, which means that it is enjoyed or appreciated for the sake of the media experience itself” (Bartsch, 2017, p. 2). From this perspective, analysis of media entertainment has mostly emphasized enjoyment (in terms of pleasurable reception phenomena like catharsis, variety, stimulation or fun (Bosshart & Macconi, 1998)) or highlighted specific physiological, cognitive, and affective aspects (Vorderer et al., 2004). Others have provided a model of enjoyment in the context of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) that comprises the need satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness associated with psychological well-being (Tamborini et al., 2010).

In addition to the understanding of entertainment in the more positive media psychology research as being driven by pleasure-seeking through consumption in hedonistic terms, negative emotions, or serious issues, have also been addressed in entertainment research. In their model of the “complexity of the entertainment experience,” Vorderer et al. (2004, p. 393) identify five different manifestations of experiences in media entertainment: (a) serenity, exhilaration, and laughter; (b) suspense, thrill, and relief; (c) sadness, melancholy, thoughtfulness, and tenderness; (d) sensory delight; and (e) achievement, control, and self-efficacy. Moreover, Oliver and Bartsch (2010) have described an approach to consumption in terms of eudaimonic gratifications called “appreciation.” This approach, which focuses on moving or thought-provoking types of entertainment, was developed “to help account for the domain of more serious, poignant, and pensive media experiences and gratifications” (Oliver and Bartsch, 2010, p. 54). These formulations share the conceptual basis that media entertainment needs to be theorized and analyzed from a reception-based perspective, asking how and why particular content is viewed by its audience and users as entertaining (Vorderer, 1996).

In this context, media and communication studies scholars are interested in the user’s reasons for consuming entertainment programs as described, for example, in the uses and gratifications approach (Katz & Foulkes, 1962) to explain media audiences’ self-reported motivations for the use of particular programs. The mood management theory (Zillmann, 1988), in turn, assumes that audiences use media programs for pleasure-seeking and the avoidance of pain. Trepte (2004), on the contrary, has discussed the audience’s use of entertainment media in terms of social identity theory, to show how media consumption is used to elaborate on the image of the self. In terms of entertainment experience, a variety of models highlight certain effects and processes of audience involvement through their “transportation” into narrative worlds (Green et al., 2004), identification with characters (Cohen, 2006), or being “in flow,” a form of absorption into a challenging and goal-oriented activity (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Lee (2004) applies the psychological concept of “presence” to understand the user’s interaction with certain forms of media in a sensory or nonsensory way.

However, all these approaches emphasize forms of entertainment that do not occur in the context of social media. Traditional research on media entertainment in the field of media and communication studies refers to media such as film, television, or computer games (Bartsch, 2017, p. 10; Trepte & Reinecke, 2010, p. 213; Utz, 2012, p. 140). On SNSs, common approaches to entertainment research can only partly be applied to an understanding of the new forms of online and SME. Social media dissolve distinctions between mass media and interpersonal communication, between production and consumption of media content, and between media usage and leisure activities in everyday culture. “As a consequence, social media seem to have absorbed entertainment-related functions of formerly private, interpersonal communication channels, for example socializing, creative expression, and self-presentation functions” (Bartsch, 2017, p. 10).

In response, Trepte and Reinecke (2010) present a theoretical model to understand forms of online entertainment on social media as well, that takes into consideration users’ particular activities such as production and participation, motivation (e.g., self-representation), and forms of entertainment experience such as pleasure and well-being (Figure 1). On the internet and on social media in particular, users are involved in activities that combine practices of communication with aspects of entertainment in the context of “strategic actions to create and maintain a desired image” of the self (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011, p. 2; cf. also Goffman, 1959). Due to the feedback-driven logic of SNSs, users experience a certain level of satisfaction, pleasure, or affinity by means of the reactions of others to their user-generated content (UGC) (Trepte and Reinecke, 2010, p. 219). At the same time, this communicative practice affects forms of hyperpersonal self-modeling in CMC (Walther, 2007) on social media for entertainment purposes (Trepte and Reinecke, 2010, p. 220; Utz, 2012, p. 145). Higher forms of interactivity and participation, involving a more active user role in the context of digital and online media, are considered both entertaining and rewarding. As seen in the context of (online) computer games in particular, interactivity—defined as a form of interactive communication “that offers individuals
active control and allows them to communicate both recipro-
cally and synchronously” (Liu, 2003, p. 208)—is an impor-
tant function in terms of online entertainment (Klimmt &
Hartmann, 2006).

Furthermore, a higher form of self-disclosure directly or
indirectly affects the user’s entertainment experience (Trepte
& Reinecke, 2010, p. 223; Utz, 2012, p. 149). The strategic
use of hyper-personal functions in CMC such as controllabil-
ity, editability, time, and attention management (Walther,
2007, p. 2541) are connected to the pleasure-seeking quali-
ties of online entertainment (Utz, 2012, p. 150). The com-
munication of private information is seen as a precondition,
not only for the participation in social media platforms
(Tufekci, 2008) but also for the receipt of gratification in
terms of entertainment (Trepte & Reinecke, 2010). Use of
social media, though, is motivated by a variety of reasons,
from the establishment and maintenance of social connec-
tions and the need for affiliation to the desire to appear indi-
vidualistic by creating, posting, and controlling personal
content (Krämer & Winter, 2008; Reich & Vorderer, 2013).
Basic functions of SNSs such as the representation of per-
sonal information, social identity gratifications, and commu-
nication with peers for community building are strongly
connected to entertainment aspects of social media (Barker,
2012).

In addition to the media psychology-based research on
entertainment, Cunningham, Craig, and Silver have also
elaborated on more of a content- and media function–driven
approach which they call “social media entertainment”
(Cunningham & Craig, 2016, 2017; Cunningham et al.,
2016; Cunningham & Silver, 2013). They consider this “an
emerging proto-industry based on previous amateur creators
professionalising and engaging in content innovation and
media entrepreneurship across multiple social media
platforms to aggregate global fan communities and incubate
their own media brands” (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p.
71). Focusing mainly on YouTube and related audiovisual
do-it-yourself-platforms, they try to differentiate SME from
the established media of film and television based on their
varying media functions, creative actors, and content. SME
formats “differ sharply from established film and television,
and are constituted from intrinsically interactive audience-
centricity and appeals to authenticity and community in a
commercialising space” (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p. 72).
Proclaiming a “spirit of youthful rebellion against estab-
lished entertainment formats” (Cunningham & Craig, 2017,
p. 73), the authors emphasize the role and function of new
industry players such as SME creators, managers, producers,
agents, and analysts, “who have helped launch and grow this
protoindustry” (Cunningham & Craig, 2016, p. 5413). In
general, their analytical framework addresses the negotiation
of authenticity within a brand culture by following Banet-
Weiser’s (2012) concept of the “politics of ambivalence in
brand culture.” In this sense, “contemporary brand culture is
characterized by the blurring between the authentic self and
the commodity self, and this ‘blurring is more expected and
tolerated’” (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p. 73).

From this perspective, Cunningham and Craig (2017, p.
74) discuss the role, function, and value of the SME creator,
the community, and the brand in a discourse on the ambiva-
lent relationship between authenticity and commodity
(Figure 2). Within a particular community, SME content is
seen as contrasting with professionally created productions
such as TV or film, “with its heavy legacies of intermedia-
tion, fictionalised abstraction from the everyday and
encrusted barriers to entry” (Cunningham and Craig, 2017,
p. 74). Even if SME is also recognized as being fictionally
abstracted to a certain degree; however, it is perceived as

**Figure 1.** Online Entertainment (Trepte & Reinecke, 2010, p. 219).
being more authentic than professional media content, due to the more interactive form of communication on social media. “Every SME creator is subject to a level of fan and subscriber response and feedback that, in its almost real-time intensity and transparency, is without parallel in screen entertainment” (Cunningham and Craig, 2017, p. 74). An SME creator’s claim to authenticity is constantly tested within the community by means of discursive negotiations. “Authenticity is not established in a monadic relationship, but a dialogic relationship with the fan base of the SME creator through their ‘affective’ and ‘relational’ labour” (Cunningham and Craig, 2017, p. 74). Moreover, this dialogic relationship between authenticity and community building takes place in a discursive relationship with brand culture. SME creators “look to reinforce the brand relationship as a secondary relationship as they negotiate their authenticity with their community” (Cunningham and Craig, 2017, p. 74). Thus, commodity (or the “commodified self” through self-branding) constitutes a secondary trait in the negotiation of authenticity (or the “authentic self”) of a particular SME creator within a community or fan base. In the context of the community-based characteristics of SME, Cunningham and Craig (2016) have also discussed the notion of communitainment.

This term reflects the dynamics of a protoindustry facilitated by networked communications technologies (social media platforms), primary strategies of communication as much as content (intense interactivity), more discursive and communicative content genres and formats (most notably, vlogging), and driven by an ethos of community (an ecology where fans, subscribers, and supporters directly constitute the communities that trigger the sustainability of content creator careers) (p. 5413).

Cunningham and Craig initially discussed the idea of communitainment as an alternative approach to the field of cultural production of SME. They soon discarded the term to support the more general notion of SME. However, “communitainment,” a portmanteau combining communication and community with entertainment, provides a conceptual perspective that I would argue combines aspects of both the media psychology-driven research in media and communication studies and a media industry and screen studies-oriented approach to SME. Thus, I will use this description to highlight the merging of communication, aspects of community building, and entertainment within the realm of SME. With this in mind, I will further outline what I refer to as communitainment, particularly relating to fitness content and its community-driven communication as a form of entertainment on social media.

**Communitainment and Fitness-Related Content**

Social media platforms involve a specific form of media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; van Dijck & Poell, 2013) that shapes the media cultural conditions of communication and content production and distribution within an environment of connected platforms. As Klinger and Svensson (2015, p. 1246) have shown, social media’s “network media logic” affects content production, specific content that is tied to certain interests and individual preferences and generated by different types of users (from “lay people” to professional influencers and media producers). Social media can be described as “persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 49). Thus, “content creators,” as I use the term here, are defined as users who hold an account on an SNS that allows them “the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In general, the notion of the content creator encompasses both everyday social media users and influencers. Nevertheless, when I speak of influencers as content creators, I refer to a certain type of social media user who uses an account on an SNS for online exposure mostly in a commodifiable form (e.g., advertorials, self-branding, and advertising partnerships). Due to their distinctive “type of internet-enabled visibility” (Marwick, 2013, p. 114) influencers acquire an online
following and have gained “opinion leadership” within a community on social media (Enke & Borchers, 2018, p. 6).

In principle however, social media users are a form of “intermediaries,” since they put content into cultural circulation in “networks of like-minded others,” while media usage addresses highly selective peer groups by means of interactive and participatory communication and “practices of updating.” “So where mass media consumption to a larger extent is bound to geographically defined communities, social media platforms are bound to communities of peers and like-minded others” (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1250). Social media constitutes and accelerates the creation and distribution of content in “collaborative communities,” thus institutionalizing what Bruns calls the “hybrid role of produsers” who are involved in merged activities of production and usage in a shared, mediated socio-cultural realm (Bruns, 2008, p. 21). While they also affect entertainment offerings in the flexible, hybrid media system of 21st-century media culture (Chadwick, 2015), social media’s forms and practices of entertainment constitute what I refer to as communitainment.

Based on the previously mentioned aspects of the discourse on entertainment research, communitainment, as I discuss here, refers (a) to the users’ self-representation and self-disclosure in terms of content production, distribution, and reception within (b) an online community of like-minded peers (e.g., on Instagram). Experience-related aspects of entertainment, however, rely on pleasure-seeking through challenging, goal-oriented activities correlated to updating practices and feedback-driven communication in terms of “making progress.” This is correlated to (c) aspects of well-being, and takes into account both the beneficial and negative effects of media use through the potential influence of problematic body ideals in particular. In this regard, we need to differentiate between users who take an active part in a certain community by posting fitness content (content creators) and those who are mainly viewers of content, so-called “lurkers.”

**Self-Representation and Self-Disclosure**

Self-representation and self-disclosure are main aspects in the context of online entertainment on social media (Toma, 2017; Trepte & Reinecke, 2010; Utz, 2012). Gratification can be achieved through “direct effects” by means of selective self-representation and feedback from others (Utz, 2012, p. 149). Likes, comments, or contacting others with reference to certain posts can have effects on well-being, since they “refer to the manner in which individuals benefit from each other on their encounters, interactions, empathy, or mutual support” (Trepte & Scharrow, 2017, p.304). Moreover, similar to an understanding of media entertainment based on play through interactive media (e.g., computer games), entertainment gratification can be attained by “making progress” and “comparing (oneself) to others” (Vorderer, 2001, p. 253). Although this has not yet been examined in more detail in the context of fitness-related postings (e.g., self-representation of training progress or reference to certain fitness challenges), it seems plausible that similar factors also use gratification in the fitness community.

However, in the context of fitness-related postings, most research studies address rather passive approaches such as viewing posts or following particular accounts on Instagram and other SNSs (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018; Easton et al., 2018; Fatt et al., 2019; Palmer, 2015; Raggatt et al., 2018). From this perspective, gratification can be achieved through “indirect effects” by means of other users’ self-representation and self-disclosure (Utz, 2012, p. 148). Feeling informed or motivated by other users’ updating practices (for fitness content, see Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018; Easton et al., 2018; Raggatt et al., 2018) can be described as “ambient awareness”; that is, “awareness created through regular and constant reception, and/or exchange of information fragments through social media” (Kaplan, 2012, p. 132). Utz (2012, p. 149), in turn, indicates that ambient awareness can be correlated with entertainment gratification on social media as well.

Nevertheless, fitness content also produces negative reactions. As Deighton-Smith and Bell (2018) show with their analysis of content on Instagram, opposing comments seem to appear relatively often within the community. Moreover, as Palmer (2015, p. 436) displays, users who upload content only to exhibit their body advancements (to “trophy their progress”) particularly provoke dislikes; “consequently their personality must be shown to be modest or entertaining, or else they risk not being accepted by users.” Entertainment gratification, then, can be achieved when particular personality traits are attributed to certain fitness content creators by their followers. A rather positive relationship emerges between a particular content creator and his or her followers if the creator is perceived as reliable and authentic. While most prefer to follow “ordinary users,” users with a professional or commercial background are also accepted if their updating practices appear reasonable and authentic, or less superficial (Easton et al., 2018, p. 5; Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 7; Palmer, 2015, p. 437; Raggatt et al., 2018, p. 8). Authenticity and forms of commercialization seem not to exclude each other as long as the user’s qualifications have not been called into question. Especially in the context of fitness influencer commodification in terms of self-branding is discussed and tested with the influencer’s community (follower or fan base).

However, since influencers play a vital part in community-driven fitness communication, additional concepts from the field of influencer studies may need to be considered for further research as well. As Abidin (2016, p. 87) has put it, practices of self-representation of “everyday Instagram users” are increasingly modeled “after Influencers,” thus constituting a form of “visibility labour” that appears to be
insidiously exploitative in the attention economy. At the same time, digital self-branding becomes a progressively subtle and unquestioned form of everyday culture which could be intensified by entertainment-related patterns in Instagram use. Furthermore, by taking a gender-specific perspective, fitness content frequently cultivates rather problematic gender prejudices. As Duffy (2016, p. 443) points out, “entrepreneurial enactment of creativity” in the context of professional influencer activity on SNSS constitutes what she calls “aspirational labour” which ensures an uneven reward system between male and female actors. From this perspective, the different practices of masculinized and feminized forms of self-branding as well as the corresponding consumption of branded goods needs to be addressed in further research; this should take place in the (e)merging field of everyday media practices and entertainment on SNSS such as Instagram, and in the fitness community in particular.

**Community Building**

Community building constitutes a basic aspect of social media and therefore also fitness-related content. Since December 2017, when Instagram introduced the function that allows users to follow particular hashtags, community building around certain hashtags seems to be growing in importance (Instagram, 2017). The empirical study by Raggatt et al. (2018) consisted of an online survey (n = 180) with closed and open-ended questions that captured qualitative and quantitative data. It emphasizes, for example, that the participants see certain fitness trends such as “#fitspiration” (a combination of fitness and inspiration, meaning to promote a healthier lifestyle through fitness) as community-driven communication among like-minded users. “This community offered participants a sense of support and sharing in each other’s health and fitness journey.” Participants felt a sense of accountability through a shared commitment to strive towards their health and fitness goals.” Some who were interviewed also mentioned the benefit of an online community “because they did not have access to such a community offline” (Raggatt et al., 2018, p. 7). To be “in touch” with and inspired by the progress and success stories of other ordinary users was more commonly reported by about a third of participants [. . .]. This inspiration was predominantly due to being able to relate to the person posting; they were perceived as a person who faced similar challenges and barriers to getting healthy. (Raggatt et al., 2018, p. 7)

Through its community-driven communication, the “#fitspiration” trend achieved rather positive effects:

About half of participants frequently commented that they enjoyed learning about health and fitness through their online communities. Being a part of the fitspiration trend reportedly gave participants greater access to healthy recipes, exercise ideas and knowledge about fitness and nutrition. (Raggatt et al., 2018, p. 8)

Similarly, Deighton-Smith and Bell (2018) point out that “#fitspiration” posts create a community-based perception by inspiring others. However, users displayed a certain sense of superiority as they countered hostility from others who were not predisposed to describe their level of fitness. They tended to “close ranks” within the community and dismiss opposing communication from “‘haters ‘doubters’ or ‘critics.’” Thus, community building is integrational in terms of its inspiration and support, while it also brings out exclusionary, “ostracizing” tendencies (for a broader discussion see Vorderer & Schneider, 2017).

In their mixed-method study comprising semistructured interviews with female participants aged 18 to 24 (n = 22), Jong and Drummond (2016) also discussed fitness postings on SNSS such as Instagram in terms of their influence on online health and fitness communication and information. While they consider fitness content on social media to be a contemporary form of popular leisure activity within an online fitness culture, the authors point out that users with “health credentials” backgrounds (such as personal trainers) enjoy a higher community value (Jong and Drummond, 2016, p. 7) through their status as “micro-celebrities” (Jerslev, 2016), as expressed by a relatively large number of followers. Raggatt et al. (2018, p. 8) also indicate that those interviewed show a certain level of wariness regarding a user’s expertise, since not all “advice” seems reliable or trustworthy. These users still prefer to follow “normal users” instead of fitness professionals.

A different aspect of community building occurs with reference to influencers. A number of fitness influencers have brought together a “fan community” with their accounts on Instagram. Similar to those of other media celebrities (like TV or movie actors), fans constitute a community around a particular fitness influencer. They collect images from their official accounts, edit content (such as adding different filters with Photoshop), regroup images on the fan page, and tag the influencer, to stay in touch on the platform. While traditional forms of media entertainment such as TV soap operas long ago developed online fan communities (Baym, 2000), similar processes seem to also take place in the fields of SME and communitainment—even around fitness-related actors. Community building on a SNS, however, solidifies what Baym (2015) calls “relational labour.”

Relationships built through relational labor can entail all the complex rewards and costs of personal relationships independent of any money that comes from them. At the same time, the connections built through relational labor are always tied to earning money, differentiating it from affective labor, as the term is used in most Marxist traditions. (p. 16)

In the context of communitainment, the structural connection between building and maintaining mediated personal
relationships with the aspiration of earning money becomes even more fixed into the communication patterns of influencers. Entertainment on SNSs, as Cunningham and Craig (2017, p. 74) have put it as well, relies on this kind of dialogic relationship, which links the social with the economic as a secondary trait within the negotiation of community. The broader cultural implications for the self-representation of “everyday Instagram users,” for instance, need to be addressed in further research by combining “visibility labour” (Abidin, 2016) and “relational labour” (Baym, 2015) in particular.

**Media Use and Well-Being**

In the context of fitness or body idealization and forms of self-representation on social media, some research addresses the negative impacts on users. These impacts include an obsession with being skinny, the development of eating disorders, and general body dissatisfaction (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Mabe et al., 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Social media movement or trends on Instagram and other SNSs such as “#fitspiration” are compared in particular with “#thinspiration” (a combination of thin and inspiration) to show how both trends on social media predominate to produce the negative effects of psychological stress and body dissatisfaction (Alberga et al., 2018; Boepple & Thompson, 2016). While such social media fitness trends (including content produced by fitness influencers) accelerate and solidify a certain ideal type of thin and toned female body, male body type idealization occurs solely “with a high degree of muscularity” (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018, p. 1008; cf. also Barlett et al., 2008; Thompson & Cafrì, 2007; Tiggemann et al., 2007). Even if the “#fitspiration” trend has the potential to achieve positive effects (mainly through quotations about healthy eating and workouts that can inspire users; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), most research is concerned with its negative, or at least problematic, effects.

However, studies have also shown that a combination of images and texts provide a “more in-depth analysis” that highlights potentially positive aspects like self-regulation, personal commitment, community building, and social support (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018). Tiggemann et al. (2018, p. 135) have analyzed community activities by comparing “#fitspiration” and “#thinspiration” posts on Twitter in terms of particular body idealizations (“thin ideal” or “towards health and fitness”) to discover that the online communities of the trends actually showed “very little overlap.” Furthermore, through the use of semistructured interviews, Palmer (2015, p. 433) determined that male followers of “#fitspiration” use the content predominantly “for education, and to enhance their workouts.” Even if pictures of a particular body type have an effect on followers, their influence seems to somehow be balanced: “[I]f participants felt the men bore no relation to them in body shape, they did little else to explore that site or profile” (Palmer, 2015, p. 434). Although posts can have negative effects on followers’ body perception as well, Palmer (2015) asserts (p. 436) that these users try to compensate for their lesser body appearance and fitness level by attributing negative character traits to the male users, considering them “posers.”

In their interview study of “#fitspiration” mostly on Instagram, Easton et al. (2018), describe four themes: “1) A tool with the potential to support healthy living, 2) Unrealistic, untrustworthy content, 3) Negative effects on emotional wellbeing, and 4) Vulnerability and protective factors.” Besides negative effects like guilt, vulnerability and influences on eating behavior, they also identified positive effects. “#fitspiration” accounts provide “practical ideas and tips about healthy lifestyles” (e.g., recipes, workout, and exercise techniques); posts “boosted their motivation to attend a gym, follow a nutritious diet, and helped them to adopt a positive mind-set” (Easton et al., 2018). Jong and Drummond (2016) have also pointed out that “[a]ll participants found online fitness culture an effective way of sourcing health information, promoting engagement in exercise and a healthy diet, and igniting interest in implementing this information.”

Raggatt et al. (2018, p. 5) determined that the “majority of participants (n = 159, 90.3%) reported that fitspiration content inspired them to exercise or eat healthy.” (p. 5). Most commonly, participants accessed “#fitspiration” posts to improve their health and well-being (73.9%). Other reasons for access were for help with weight loss and appearance (53.9 %) and with finding inspiration to improve their body appearance (42.2 %). In answering open-ended questions, “[m]ost participants perceived fitspiration had influenced their health through thinking about, changing, or maintaining their diet and exercise behaviours” (Raggatt et al., 2018, p. 5). The authors point out that participants mainly emphasized their ideal of being fit, healthy, and strong:

The perceived ideal appearance for female participants was to look strong, fit and toned. The fitspiration trend had contributed to a shift in the ideal body image from thin to strong, and had reduced stigma around weight training and muscle building for females. (Raggatt et al., 2018, p. 6)

However, the so-called “healthier way” was sometimes tied to discrimination when participants rejected “fat acceptance” as equivalent to “laziness.” In addition, one quarter of participants “conveyed an underlying sense of feeling inadequate in terms of their appearance.” Others displayed a certain feeling of pressure, or explicitly displayed “critical awareness surrounding the potential for fitspiration to negatively affect body image by setting unrealistic goals” (Raggatt et al., 2018, p. 7). Finally, a recent study by Fatt et al. (2019) on men viewing “#fitspiration” posts on Instagram showed that the consumption of fitness posts had no significant correlation to body satisfaction, either positive or negative. Instead, what “is becoming increasingly
clear is that although fitspiration content is aimed at inspiring people to attain fitness and health, it may be more closely linked with appearance-focused motivations than health-focused motivations’ (Fatt et al., 2019, p. 10). Thus, fitness-related content seems to be more motivating in terms of body appearance than in terms of the achievement of a “healthier lifestyle.”

**Conclusion**

The proliferation of social media in nearly all aspects of contemporary everyday culture has also developed various forms of online entertainment on SNSs. As social media merges production with distribution and consumption, and mass media functions with leisure activities and interpersonal communication, new forms of content are evolving which address different aspects of online entertainment. Consequently, new concepts have been defined in the field of media and communication studies to describe different manifestations of SME. Based on Cunningham’s and Craig’s (2016) idea of communitainment, and in correlation with empirical research on online entertainment on SNSs, this conceptual article has discussed a body of research on fitness-related content on Instagram and other social media platforms in terms of three basic perspectives: self-representation and self-disclosure; community building; and media use and well-being.

Fitness-related content on social media like Instagram as communitainment has the potential for further analysis. While self-representation and direct and indirect forms of self-disclosure could be emphasized in correlation with entertainment gratification on social media, community building among like-minded users was correlated to entertainment-related aspects like enjoyment, relatedness, motivation, inspiration, and support. Nevertheless, in terms of media usage and well-being, fitness communitainment on social media demonstrates the most potential for conflicts between positive and negative influences on media users. Positive effects included self-regulation, personal commitment, social support, motivation to achieve a healthier lifestyle, and the provision of a source of health information. However, negative effects such as contribution to eating disorders, the development of problematic body idealizations, enhancement of psychological stress, and body dissatisfaction are also of serious importance. Since influencers play a prominent role in the context of fitness communitainment due in part to community-based negotiations between their authentic and commodified forms of self-representation, the dynamics between negative and positive media effects on users need to be further analyzed. This is especially the case since fitness postings and community-driven social media communication are described by the popular press as fun and enjoyable.

However, since fitness content on social media has not yet been analyzed in more detail with reference to new forms of entertainment on SNSs and Instagram in particular, this article can only provide a conceptual framework for the discussion of fitness in correlation with communitainment. Further research is needed to identify, for example, different forms and practices of communitainment (e.g., self-representation and self-disclosure in combination with private and commodified information from content creators) as well as specific community-based practices and characteristics (e.g., hashtag communities like “#fitspiration” versus the fan communities surrounding influencers and microcelebrities). In addition, more in-depth information is needed on the positive versus negative media effects of explicit and implicit forms of engagement with fitness-related content on social media (e.g., posting, commenting, and contacting versus viewing). This especially applies since fitness enthusiasts of different levels, forms of sport, and corresponding fitness activities conceivably have different motifs and tendencies to participate in online communities on SNSs, which could affect their types of response to particular postings. This article presents an early-phase conceptual approach in the form of a literature review that draws on existing research in the field of fitness content on Instagram and other SNSs. Further work needs to be done to acquire more precise empirical data on entertainment-related content on SNSs—and on Instagram in particular. This article merely opened up the discussion on fitness content on social media in the realm of entertainment. Further research can be expected to present more empirical data and to explain the connections between everyday media practices and entertainment-related usage of fitness content on SNSs in greater detail.

**Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge support from the German Research Foundation (DFG) and Leipzig University within the program of Open Access Publishing.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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