# Fear of Missing Out and Social Media Use: Differential Effects of Priming on Attitudes Towards Products

Social media advertising has become ubiquitous. Consequently, social media platforms are increasing the level of advertising content that users may later encounter when navigating online shopping websites. It is unclear how the amplification of exposure to advertising through social media affects consumers’ attitudes to products sold online. Further, the roles of social media participation and proneness to experience fear of missing out (FOMO) on product attitude, remain largely unexplored. In this research (N = 980), we employed an online survey of U.S. Instagram users. These data were submitted to three-way moderation regression analyses with attitude toward the product as the dependent variable. Consumers who are more active on social media and had high (versus low) FOMO formed more favorable attitudes toward online products after being exposed to Instagram content (versus not exposed). The theoretical and practical implications for cognitive processing research and advertising strategy and study limitations are discussed.

More than 35% of US adults use Instagram today; over 60% of those use the platform daily (Pew Research Center, 2019). This makes Instagram the second most popular social media platform after Facebook. Today, Instagram serves as a popular source of information about products, brands, and trends (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). With more than 500 million daily users of Instagram Stories, Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, contributes heavily to Facebook’s overall success and is seen as an essential driver for the company’s growth strategy (Amin, 2019). Further, consumers’ ability to share information, such as pictures, may help marketers and advertisers in their communication efforts about online products (Shao, 2009), which can lead to increased purchase intention (Alhabash et al., 2016).

Social media content that is posted by firms and users alike has the potential to increase consumers’ product familiarity by providing repeated exposure to these products. This increase in perceived familiarity with the product consequently leads to priming effects (Humphrey, 2017), which have been found to be powerful drivers of consumer behavior in early marketing research (Zajonc, 1968). It is crucial for firms to understand when and how social media affects activation of accessible positive attitudes as consumers are more likely to buy products about which they have favorable (versus unfavorable) attitudes (Kim & Lennon, 2008). However, a topic that has not yet been scrutinized is whether exposure to social media content affects attitudes toward objects depicted when they are later displayed in online shops. Second, are there individual differences that affect the relationship between exposure and later attitudes to the product is a question that has not been studied. In this study we will focus on two individual differences that might affect the attitude formation process after exposure to Instagram content. The first difference we investigate is the degree of consumers’ active Instagram participation, i.e. whether consumers use Instagram actively (posters) or passively (lurkers); the second difference is consumers proneness to experience fear of missing out (FOMO). Although FOMO has received a lot of attention in communication research and has been linked to increased social media engagement (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013), there are only a few studies within the marketing domain. Additionally, no prior research has examined the connection of FOMO and social media engagement in a more detailed fashion by differentiating between degrees of social media participation.

In the following study, we employ theories of attitude accessibility (i.e., MODE model) to investigate how being exposed to social media content (specifically pictures on Instagram) affects the activation of accessible attitudes toward the depicted object when it is later portrayed as a product in an online shop. Further, we examine how these effects are dependent on the audience characteristics of active (versus passive) Instagram participation and consumers’ proneness to experiencing FOMO. Thus, we address a gap in the literature by linking Instagram content, the degree of Instagram participation, FOMO, and consequent product liking. We have chosen the context of Instagram because this platform has recently gained popularity as an image-based advertising tool for companies (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

## Accessibility of Attitudes

As a central outcome of interest, we examine attitudes toward products and the attitude formation process in online shopping contexts. *Attitudes* are defined as evaluative mental representations of an attitude object that range from negative to positive (Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997). Although theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action or the Theory of Planned Behavior (Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992) posit a strong relationship between attitudes and behavior, early research in cognition and behavior resulted in mixed findings regarding this relationship. That is, the attitude-behavior relationship was found to be unstable; more favorable attitudes did not always lead to consequent behavior (Wicker, 1969). However, because attitudes are represented on a continuum of not accessible at all to highly accessible (Rhodes & Ewoldsen, 2009), these differences in the attitude-behavior relationship might be dependent on attitude accessibility (Fazio & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). As accessibility increases, the likelihood of attitude activation increases, and therefore behavior is more likely to be affected by highly accessible attitudes versus attitudes low in accessibility. Thus, attitude accessibility has been used as an indication of attitude strength (Ewoldsen, Rhodes, & Fazio, 2015; Kwon & Nayakankuppam, 2015). Attitudes low in accessibility require more cognitive effort and controlled thoughts to be activated. In turn, attitudes high in accessibility require lower cognitive effort to be activated (Ewoldsen et al., 2015; Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986; Herring et al., 2013).

It is important to closely examine activation and formation of attitudes, because, in consumer behavior research, attitude accessibility and its effects have been found to be associated with product choice (Hütter & Sweldens, 2018), information processing contexts (Kupor & Tormala, 2015), and increased number of exposures (Berger & Mitchell, 1989). Consequently, from a marketer’s perspective, understanding how positive attitudes are formed is important, as strong (i.e., more accessible) and positive attitudes are closely tied to consumption behavior (Kim & Lennon, 2008). To understand the roles of accessibility on attitudes toward products we consulted the Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants (MODE) model (Fazio, 1990). We provide a more detailed overview of the model in the following section.

## The MODE Model

The MODE model provides a theoretical framework for differentiating the means by which individuals process information: deliberate versus spontaneous processing (Fazio, 1990). Building on attitude accessibility literature, the MODE model proposes that motivation and opportunity to process information are two key determinants of whether accessible attitudes affect consequent behaviors (Fazio, 1990).

First, when individuals are highly motivated to process information, they put more cognitive effort into information retrieval relevant to the judgement of the attitude object and will deliberate more carefully. Therefore, for high-motivation-to-process consumers, accessible attitudes have decreased influence on consequent behaviors, because these individuals not only use these highly salient cues to form judgments, but additionally consult carefully curated past memories and experiences. When individuals are low in motivation to process information, accessible attitudes significantly influence consequent behavior, since individuals will make judgements based on strong, easy-to- retrieve attitudes without deliberating on them too much (Fazio & Olson, 2014).

Second, individuals need the opportunity or ability to process available information (Kruglanski & Sleeth-Keppler, 2007). This is crucial because if a person does not have the opportunity to process and consider available information, the individual relies predominantly on accessible information (Ewoldsen et al., 2015). It follows that when highly motivated individuals are given the opportunity to process available information, they will process it more carefully. However, if motivation is low and/or individuals are not provided with the opportunity to process information, they will judge attitude objects more spontaneously using highly accessible attitudes. For consumer behavior, these differences in processing and degrees of deliberation are important because prior research has found that, in some cases, enhancing motivation and opportunity to process brand-related cues fosters consumers’ attending to advertisements (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991).

In this study we equate incidental exposure to Instagram content before viewing an online shop as giving consumers the opportunity to process heuristic information (i.e., social information) about the product. We will elaborate on these exposure effects next. Then, we will review literature with respect to individual differences such as the degree of participation on Instagram and the proneness to experience FOMO might pose differences in motivation to process such information.

## Advertisement on Social Media and Priming Effects

Content, such as a picture on Instagram, that is distributed via social media and that users can interactively engage with is considered one form of social media advertising (Alhabash, Mundel, & Hussain, 2017). Research on the effects of content on social networking sites found that said content positively affects brand attitude (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016; Stephen & Galak, 2012). These results might be an effect rooted in priming and exposure effects (Tulving & Schacter, 1990; Zajonc, 1968). Prior research has proposed two different types of priming: perceptual and conceptual priming (Tulving & Schacter, 1990)*.* In this study we focus on *conceptual priming*, which is defined as actively evoking a conceptually related thought prior to exposure to the attitude object of interest (Tulving & Schacter, 1990). For example, when bringing to mind heuristic popularity cues (i.e., postings on Instagram) the concept of “popularity” becomes more salient (Mrkva & Van Boven, 2020) and consequent stimuli are processed with this concept activated (Lee & Labroo, 2004). Thus, by exposing consumers to a heuristic cue of seeing an object on a social platform, favorable attitudes about the object in a consequent online shopping content should be more accessible. Based on the MODE model, after the product stimulus is primed the product will be judged more spontaneously. Therefore, in our first hypothesis we aim to replicate prior research in mere exposure and priming research:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Priming (versus not priming) consumers with pictures of objects on Instagram will be positively associated with favorable attitudes toward these objects when they are displayed later as products in an online shop context.

## Effects of Individual Differences on Priming

Consumers participate in social media platforms, such as Instagram, in diverse ways. For example, users can choose to actively or passively interact with Instagram content. Active social media users (*posters*) are defined as users who actively participate within the platform by posting and sharing content and information. Passive users (*lurkers*) are defined as users who consume rather than post and share information (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011). Prior research studies about posters and lurkers revealed that lurkers and posters perceive user-generated content (i.e., movie ratings) very differently (Schlosser, 2005). That is, posters were only influenced by negative (not by positive) reviews, whilst lurkers (as opposed to posters) were less affected by negative reviews (Schlosser, 2005). Others showed that higher levels of social media activity are related to higher consumer connectedness and innovativeness (Morrison, Cheong, & McMillan, 2013). These differences imply that active and passive users might process information differently. We are interested in differences in attitude formation in the context of online shopping behaviors between active and passive Instagram users (i.e. posters or lurkers). Consumers’ goals, identities, and values are key antecedents that determine whether social media users are lurkers or posters (Bolton, 2013). For example, prior research found that one of the reasons why lurkers lurk is because they do not feel a sense of belonging to the group in which they are lurking (Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004). Thus, priming negative meta-cognitive cues (e.g. lack of belonging for lurkers) via social media (e.g. Instagram) will lead to less favorable attitudes toward an attitude object (Schwarz, 2004). That is, users transfer negative attitudes from one object to another after they have been conceptually connected (Lee & Labroo, 2004; Tulving & Schacter, 1990).

In contrast to negative mental connections lurkers form toward Instagram, posters have been found to engage in more conversational dialogue on platforms, and thus might feel a higher sense of belongingness (Schlosser, 2005). Thus, active users might hold more positive mental representations of social platforms, such as Instagram. They will, therefore, form more favorable accessible attitudes toward the product after being conceptually primed with Instagram content. Hence, we propose our first extension to prior research in the priming and exposure literature:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Users with a high degree of participation in Instagram (active users), who are primed with pictures of objects on Instagram will form more favorable attitudes toward these objects when they are displayed later as products in an online shop context than users with a lower degree of participation in Instagram (passive users).

Most investigations of FOMO focus on health issues, such as problematic internet use (Wolniewicz, Tiamiyu, Weeks, & Elhai, 2018). However, advertising and marketing studies on FOMO are scarcer. One study found a relationship between FOMO and brand excitement and liking (Kang, Son, & Koo, 2019), another used a qualitative approach to understand how FOMO appeals might be useful for marketing strategies (Hodkinson, 2019). The latter study (Hodkinson, 2019) found that such FOMO appeals elicit significant cognitive and affective reactions from consumers and impose an anathema to wellbeing by affecting self-evaluative outcomes like experienced shame. Thus, there might be important consumer decision making implications of FOMO, because FOMO is tightly linked to feelings of being socially disconnected from an important social group (Abel, Buff, & Burr, 2016; Hodkinson, 2019). This has also been demonstrated in recent literature, which indicated that the FOMO experience is linked to interdependent self-construal (Dogan, 2019). That is, individuals who construct their personality based on feeling interdependent with others are more likely to experience FOMO. This speaks to the relevance of FOMO when marketing popular brands and products. Based on the aforementioned differences between lurkers and posters, there may be an interaction between the degree of social media participation and proneness to experience FOMO with respect to the priming- attitude relationship. However, previous research has not yet examined these relationships, and therefore we ask the following research question:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** Will there be a three-way interaction between proneness to experience FOMO, degree of participation within Instagram, and priming with pictures of objects on Instagram with respect to attitudes toward these objects when they are displayed later as products in an online shop context? If so, what are interactive effects on attitude toward the product.

# Methods and Materials

## Open Science Statement

All stimuli, full survey instrument (including items used), script of analysis, and supplemental information (e.g. factor loadings of constructs of interest and detailed sample composition) can be found online on our Open Science Framework (OSF) website: https://bit.ly/2PbiFvs.

## Procedure

We employed the online survey method to investigate our stated hypotheses and research question. We used a 4 (product: “artsy wall clock” versus “basic wall clock” versus “monstera plant” versus “basil plant”) by 2 (store: IKEA versus The Home Depot) by 2 (priming: no priming versus priming) between-subject factorial design, where participants were randomly assigned to one of 16 conditions. Two different kinds of house plants were chosen as the product stimuli because of their popularity amongst millennial shoppers (Boone, 2018) and their hedonic character. Two different wall clocks were included based on their relative low popularity on Instagram and their utilitarian character. By including two house plant and wall clock types in this study, we aimed to address possible product biases. Similarly, we addressed potential channel (store) biases by including IKEA and The Home Depot in the study. Thus, we aimed to minimize effects of previous experience or attitude toward the stores.

After being provided informed consent and indicating adherence to quality expectations of the researchers, participants answered questions about their previous online shopping experience, attitudes toward popular products, and attitude toward Instagram. Following that, participants in the priming condition were exposed to an Instagram mock-up post of one of the products displayed in the online shop. In the no priming condition, participants were not exposed to any additional stimuli before viewing the online shop stimuli. The online shop mock-up did not include prize information. Next, participants reported on attitude toward the product and store familiarity. Last, participants answered questions about FOMO, their degree of participation within Instagram and a series of demographics questions. This study was reviewed and approved by the University’s Institutional Review Board.

## Data Collection, Sample, and Cleaning

Data were collected in a two-step process: We collected data for the “house plants”-conditions (N = 836) using the Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) participant pool. Then we collected data for the “wall clocks”-conditions (N = 421) using the Dynata participant pool (www.dynata.com). We employed probability sampling, and participants were compensated based on their respective panel memberships. However, the first sample (“house plants”) included three priming conditions (“no priming”, “priming with 14 likes”, and “priming with 14,183 likes”) whereas the second sample (“wall clocks”) only contained two priming conditions (“no priming” and “priming with 14,183 likes”). Based on a full between-subjects design, we dropped the priming condition with only 14 likes from the first sample, to match the studies’ design. No participants were excluded based on missing data points. The final sample was composed of N = 980 participants who reside in the United States, who are between 18 and 35 years old, and who have an active Instagram account.

## Measures

Dependent variable.Attitude toward the product(α = 0.94) was assessed using a nine-item, seven- point semantic differential scale (e.g., “not worth having” = 1 to “worth having” = 7) based on Benedek and Miner (2002).

Independent variable. We manipulated priming condition by showing participants in the priming condition a screenshot of the product embedded in an Instagram frame prior to viewing the online shop stimulus. Participants in the no priming condition were not exposed to this additional Instagram stimulus.

Moderating variables. Degree of participation within Instagram (α = 0.87) was assessed using a six- item, six-point semantic differential scale (e.g. “passive” = 1 to “active” = 6) based on prior research (Bolton, 2013; Schlosser, 2005; Shao, 2009). Fear of missing out (α = 0.84) was assessed using an eight-item, seven-point Likert-type scale (e.g., “I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to”), based on Abel et al. (2016) and Przybylski et al. (2013).

Covariates. We assessed several control variables to account for possible confounds. We assessed experience with online shopping (α = 0.89) using a three item, seven-point Likert-type scale (e.g. “I shop online frequently”, “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 7) (Khalifa & Liu, 2007). Attitude toward popular products (α = 0.92) was assessed using a six-item seven-point Likert-type scale (e.g. “Buying a popular product makes me feel good”, “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 7) based on prior research (Burton, Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, & Garretson, 1998). Attitude toward Instagram (α = 0.90) was assessed using an adapted version of the Facebook Intensity Scale (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). We included six items on a seven-point Likert-type scale (e.g. “Instagram is part of my everyday activity”, “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 7). We included store familiarity (α = 0.92) using a three item, seven-point semantic differential scale (e.g. “unfamiliar” = 1 to “familiar” = 7) (Kent & Allen, 1994).

## Plan of Analysis

Data were analyzed using the R (version 3.5.2) software. To evaluate the interactive effects of Instagram advertising priming effects, degree of participation within Instagram, and FOMO on attitude toward the product (H1, H2, and RQ3), we submitted the data to regression analyses. We included priming condition (no priming versus priming) as categorical, and Instagram participation and FOMO as continuous independent variables, including their interaction. We further included product type (monstera, basil, and artsy wall clocks) as dummy coded control variables, since significant correlations between products and attitude towards the product might affect findings. Further, we included attitude toward Instagram, attitude toward popular products, prior online shopping experience, and store familiarity as control variables in our model, because differences between participants might affect consequent results.

Because constructs were assessed differently (attitude toward product on seven-point semantic differential, type of Instagram engagement on six-point semantic differential, and FOMO on seven-point Likert scale) all variables were standardized before submitting them to regression analyses. In a second step, we submitted data for priming condition and no priming condition to two separate linear regression analyses with attitude toward the product as dependent variable and FOMO and degree of participation as independent variables; including their interactions. We did this to inspect intervals of significance for each of the conditions using the Johnson-Neyman Technique (Krishna, 2016).

# Results

## Descriptive Statistics

Participants were predominantly female (69%). Most participants identified as Caucasian (71%), had completed some college with no degree (29%), and had an annual household income between $10,000 and $49,999 (44%). The median age was 26 years, which is appropriate considering that most Instagram users are between 25 and 34 years old (NapoleonCat, 2019). Table 1 summarizes means, standard deviations, construct reliabilities, square roots of average variance extracted (𝐴𝑉𝐸), and intercorrelations of all variables in the model. Internal consistencies of all measures were assessed by Cronbach’s alpha (𝛼 > 0.82). 𝐴𝑉𝐸 of all constructs of interest exceeds their correlations with other constructs, which indicates good discriminant validity of measures (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

## Two-way Interaction

Results for regression analysis with three-way interaction are summarized in Table 2. In support of H1 we found a significant and positive main effect of priming versus no priming conditions on attitudes toward the product. Thus, there is a positive effect of priming on the attitude formation process. Further, we found significant main effects of participation, attitude toward popular products, store familiarity, basil, and artsy wall clocks. That is, participants, who reported more active participation in Instagram, who have a more favorable attitude toward popular products, and are more familiar with the store brand they viewed formed more favorable attitudes toward the product. Last, basil house plants were perceived as more favorable and artsy wall clocks as less favorable as compared to basic wall clocks).

Contrary, to our second hypothesis (H2), we did not find interaction effects of degree of participation within Instagram and priming condition. However, answering our research question (RQ1), we found a marginally significant three-way interaction effect between participation, FOMO, and priming (Figure 1). Variance Inflation Factors (VIF < 5) indicated no multicollinearity. We were interested in investigating interaction effects of participation and FOMO stratified by condition to further assess intervals of significance for FOMO as moderator of the participation effect on attitudes.

## Intervals of Significance

No priming condition. In the no priming condition, we found significant positive main effects of participation, attitude toward popular products, store familiarity and negative main effects of artsy wall clocks. There was no significant interaction effect between proneness to experience FOMO and degree of participation within Instagram (Table 3). According to Johnson-Neyman Technique findings (Figure 2), the slope for Instagram engagement was only significant (p < 0.05) for standardized values of proneness to experience FOMO between [-1.86, 1.30]. That is, for participants who were not primed there was a significant effect of social media participation on attitudes toward the product when they reported lower levels of proneness to experience FOMO (range = [- 2.20, 2.60]).

Priming condition. Findings in the priming condition differed from findings in the no priming condition. We found significant positive main effects for social media participation, attitude toward popular products, and store familiarity and negative main effects of artsy wall clocks, similar to the no priming condition. However, results also indicated a positive main effect of basil house plants and a statistically significant interaction effect between proneness to experience FOMO and participation (Table 3). That is, participants high in proneness to experience FOMO expressed the most favorable attitudes toward the product as participants reported more active participation within Instagram. In contrast, participants low in proneness to experience FOMO expressed the least favorable attitudes toward the product as participation increased. This was also reflected by findings of Johnson-Neyman Technique, which indicated that the slope for participation was significant (p < 0.05) only for standardized values of proneness to experience FOMO values between [-0.72, 2.60], and thus higher levels of FOMO (Figure 2).

# Discussion

In summary, this study provides findings that are important for consumer research and theory and for advertising and marketing practice. First, we provide additional evidence that prior exposure on social media results in differences in product evaluations; we thereby replicate early findings in mere exposure and priming literature. Second, we extend research in exposure and priming literature by providing support for the notion that FOMO and the degree of participation within Instagram interact to influence differences in product evaluations. We further elaborate on these findings in the next section.

## Priming Effects of Social Media Content

First, we found that consumers who were exposed to social media content prior to online shopping evaluated products more favorably than consumers who were not exposed. Thus, our findings confirm prior studies, which indicated that social media advertising might act as a priming mechanism and affect brand choice (Humphrey, 2017). The priming effect found in our study is also in line with literature of mere exposure and information processing, which states that consumers who are more often exposed to products have an easier and more positive information processing experience; so-called processing fluency. This ultimately leads to more positive product evaluations (Shulman & Bullock, 2019; Zajonc, 1968).

These findings have important implications for theory and practice. For consumer research theory, our findings show that mere exposure enables consumers to process information more spontaneously and favorably. When evaluating products online, consumers rely on heuristic cues (e.g., seeing the product on Instagram) and the pleasantness of their processing experience, as proposed by literature in processing fluency (Buechel & Townsend, 2018; Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004). This is further demonstrated in our results by the positive effect store familiarity, as an additional heuristic cue, had on the attitude formation process. Some prior research found that stimuli that are perceived as familiar are easier to process and therefore liked more (Whittlesea, 1993). However, recent research that proposed a Salience Theory of Mere Exposure argues for salience of stimuli (instead of perceived familiarity) that actually drives the processing experience and consequent effects on the attitude formation process (Mrkva & Van Boven, 2020). Although we did not account for salience of the product and therefore cannot confirm the Salience Theory of Mere Exposure, our results are in line with the familiarity hypothesis. However, future research could employ eye-tracking methods to account for effects of the store and the possibly familiar (or more salient) product picture in the online shop. For practitioners, these findings generally speak for the effectiveness of advertising strategies involving active Instagram measures. However, further findings of this research project call for caution in using social media advertising. We elaborate about this in the following section.

## Individual Differences and Their Influence on the Priming Effect

In this study we replicated prior research on exposure and extended findings by showing that product evaluations depend not only on whether consumers were primed, but also on their individual differences, such as the degree of active participation within the social media platform and proneness to experience FOMO. Posters (versus lurkers) make different decisions online and with respect to social media content (Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar, 1998). These perceptual differences ultimately help cluster individuals in two consumer groups. Specifically, when accounting for their proneness to experience FOMO, we show that posters high in proneness to experience FOMO have more favorable attitudes toward the product after being exposed to social media content. The opposite was found for lurkers high in proneness to experience FOMO. These differences might be explained by mental connections individuals form during the processing experience.

Additional post-hoc analyses showed that higher levels of social media engagement (e.g. Instagram) led to more positive attitudes toward the platform (𝛽 = 0.38, *p* < 0.01) more favorable attitudes toward popular products (𝛽 = 0.08, *p* < 0.02). This means that lurkers have a less favorable attitude toward Instagram and do not believe Instagram content to be trustworthy, and therefore might retrieve negative

attitudes more readily than posters and misattribute them to the product (Ewoldsen et al., 2015; Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005; Schwarz, 2004). By contrast, posters, who were found to have a more positive attitude toward Instagram and believe Instagram content to be more truthful, misattribute these more accessible positive attitudes toward the product after mere exposure by transferring these positive attitudes toward the platform to the product (Roskos-Ewoldsen & Fazio, 1997; Schwarz, 2004).

## Product Type Effects on Attitudes

Our findings indicated product type effects on attitude, such that there were significant differences between basic wall clocks and basil plants as well as artsy wall clocks. Basil house plants were perceived more favorable and artsy wall clocks were perceived less favorably. This might be due to specific roles these products play (i.e., more and less hedonic/utilitarian). Basic wall clocks might be liked better than artsy wall clocks based on their simple and clear design. This would also be explained by fluency effects, fluent stimuli (basic versus artsy wall clocks) are processed more hedonically and therefore liked better (Shulman & Bullock, 2019).

In a similar vein, house plants (i.e., basil house plants) might be processed easier because they might be generally perceived as more hedonic (based on the product type “house plant” versus “wall clock”) and familiar. Because basil house plants might be used for cooking as well as decoration, individuals are more exposed to them prior to the experiment and therefore process more familiar stimuli (basil house plants) more fluently than less familiar stimuli (monstera house plants, basic and artsy wall clocks); this results in a more hedonic processing experience and ultimately more liking (Reber et al., 2004). However, these potential explanations based on fluency need to be tested further, because we did not measure familiarity or fluency in this study.

## Managerial and Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to theory and practice by establishing that individual differences between consumers, especially their proneness to experience FOMO and their social media engagement differentially affect product perceptions. This is of importance when defining target audiences in online advertising strategies. In that, we conclude that standardized advertising strategies that lack sufficient differentiation between different populations among a target audience are not advisable. Marketers and advertisers need to be cognizant of the audience that is exposed to social media content when designing social media content and advertising campaigns. For example, marketing strategies on social media that are interactive in nature might be more suitable when marketing products via Instagram. These strategies would allow for active users to interact with the brand and product, which ultimately exposes them to said product, and therefore fosters more positive attitudes toward the product later on.

## Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations that need to be addressed by future research to gain a more nuanced understanding of the effects of Instagram advertisements. First, Instagram is not the only medium or social media platform that allows for repeated product exposure to consumers. Future research should investigate whether Instagram as a specific platform leads to these results or if the fact that the pictures were shown on social media in general produced these effects. Additionally, future research should tease out the active role social media plays in the relationship between individual differences and attitudes toward the product; in other words, future research should examine whether there are additive effects of the priming stimulus when it is framed as a social media post versus not.

Our online survey design might lack ecological validity. We only exposed participants to a screenshot of an anonymized picture on Instagram; however, results might be different when individuals see these pictures on their own Instagram feed and when holding their own smartphone device. Future research should design studies that allow for more ecological validity and manipulate the source of the Instagram content. This research only provides preliminary findings of possible effects.

In addition, our study did not use markers or heuristics of the source of the Instagram content. That is, by blinding the source (e.g. user- versus firm-generated content) we examined main effects of exposure. However, future research should investigate whether there are differences in product perception when posts are created by close friends, general users, product mavens, influencers, and general firm-generated content. Therefore, our study findings open possibilities of further research, which should further explore the differences in modes of processing (deliberate versus spontaneous) for different product types to fully understand how consumers process online information and what role social media is playing.

# Conclusion

This research investigated attitude activation and judgements of products online. Specifically, we replicated prior research in mere exposure and priming research and extended these findings by examining the importance of individual differences in consumers’ degree of social media participation and proneness to experience FOMO. We investigated these questions by consulting literature and theories that stem from attitude activation. The current research provided evidence for positive priming effects on product evaluations in online shops. Our results inform strategies to create effective social media advertisings. Further, studies of the effects of FOMO are scarce in the marketing literature, even though the phenomenon is frequently linked to marketing. This research provides initial evidence that FOMO as a dominant and contemporary consumer experience requires more scrutiny in marketing literature.

References

Tables

Figures