



Figure 1. Image derived from <http://toolsandtoys.net/hand-painted-instagram-logo-nike-roshe-shoes/>

Strong is the New Sexy: A Case Study Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in the Instagram Marketing of Nike

Natasha Nefzer

6518745

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Utrecht University

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Supervisor: dr. Trenton Hagar

Second Supervisor: dr. Roos Beerkens

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Abstract

Gender stereotypes are frequently used as a marketing tool in advertising and substantially contribute to the distribution of ideal images of masculinity and femininity. Since marketing continually develops and has recently undergone a trend towards online and social media marketing, the target audience increasingly includes younger people who are still in the process of their identity formation. Furthermore, online platforms, such as Instagram, provide a larger and more open base for discussion and therefore also demand a more modern portrayal of social categories, such as gender. The present text aims to investigate whether social media marketing still makes use of traditional gender stereotypes and thus influences the process of identity formation of its younger audience. Thereby, the author provides an updated level of knowledge about the circulation of gender stereotypes through online marketing channels. This was investigated with the use of the official Nike Instagram account as a case study. The sample, consisting of all publications on the account in the year 2018, was analysed through a combination of semiotic and content analysis, with a variable-system proposed by Bell and Milc (2002). The system provides eight different variables, which each give an implication about potential stereotypical gender depictions. The findings of this research are in line with the outcomes of similar studies, conducted about traditional marketing channels. Regardless of its modern surroundings, Nike's Instagram marketing does not correspond with standards of contemporary gender equality and still portrays the male participants in a more diverse fashion and higher frequency than their female counterparts.

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1. Introduction

The importance of advertisements for today's society is growing continually and thereby influences the circulation and presentation of specific idealised images, also concerning masculinity and femininity (Zarate, Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier & Penz, 2004): “it is currently advertising that is showing individuals models of man and the world” (p. 169). Global companies, such as Nike, are often trying to sell their product by presenting an optimal image in their advertisements, which then suggests to the consumer they need the product to achieve similar results (Zarate et al., 2004). This concept is not only implemented in traditional marketing strategies, using channels such as print magazines or television commercials but also in social media marketing. The more a specific stereotype, such as beauty or character ideal is communicated through the media, the higher is the pressure on the consumers, as they are confronted with the idea that they have to conform to those norms to be accepted by society and to be regarded as beautiful (Kugelmann, 2005). This can be especially problematic for social media marketing, as it often addresses a very young target audience, the so-called virtual generation that is already growing up with social media approximately from the age of 12 (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010). “Having role models is not only about imitation but rather about comparative processes, a referential model, a benchmark, which helps to measure where you are standing. Of course, young people are more reliant on this” (Kals, 2012, n.p.). Zarate et al. (2004) also outline that advertisements provide a representation of the ideal and absolute, as well as a representation of distance “that inevitably separates people from this absolute, but simultaneously allows them to enter into a relationship with it” (p. 169). Therefore, marketing does not only influence the customer's consumption but also their identity formation.

Thus, it is essential to investigate the portrayal of social categories, such as gender, in advertising. In order to find out which kinds of (idealised) images are published through different advertising channels, it needs to be examined how men and women are portrayed. This could be either in

a way which is realistic and enables the consumers to identify with the representation or in a stereotypical fashion which depicts an unnatural, stylised version of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, the following master's thesis will be concerned with the stereotypical depiction of male and female participants in commercial advertisements on the Instagram account of the sports retail manufacturer Nike. In this context, the terms masculinity and femininity do not refer to the biological sex- male and female, but to the socially constructed dimension of gender (Oakley, 2016, p. 115). "Gender is the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person, and, obviously, while there are mixtures of both in many humans, the normal male has a preponderance of masculinity and the normal female a preponderance of femininity" (p. 115). Stereotypes are often based on social categories, such as gender. They are actively constructed generalisations and assumptions about a specific group of people: "More specifically, there is an agreement that an ethnic stereotype is a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of the members of a particular social category" (Hamilton, 2015, p. 13).

To conduct research for this thesis, the current study looks at one main advertisement channel of Nike, their official Instagram account, regarding the depiction of women and men. The analysis investigates whether the social media postings are generally using stereotypical images and if they are reinforcing or revisiting those established social cannons. Nike was chosen as a subject of examination, as it is the biggest global sports retail company with worldwide revenue of 36,4 Billion US Dollars in 2018, as well as the most valuable sports business brand with 26,9 Billion US Dollar brand value (Duncan, n.d.). On April 2, 2019, the Instagram account has published an overall number of 724 postings. Compared to some of their global competitors, such as Reebok (2.447 postings on April 2, 2019), PUMA (2.601 postings April 2, 2019) or Under Armour (2.855 postings April 2, 2019), Nike seems to select more carefully which advertising images they publish. This impression is supported furthermore by the fact that the company's first posting on Instagram was

already published on the 29th of December 2011, about two years after the app had launched officially. Therefore, the sports retail brand had made use of Instagram as a marketing tool for over seven years at the moment the research was conducted. The account has a number of 84,9 Million followers (@nike, n.d.), which shows the large number of potential customers Nike can reach through this marketing channel. Even Nike's biggest competitor Adidas is not able to develop a comparable reach, with a number of 23,2 Million Followers (@adidas, n.d.). Additional to their official main Instagram Account, multiple other accounts which are targeted towards one specific topic or audience, have been published. This includes the accounts @NikeRunning (n.d.), @NikeWomen (n.d.), @NikeSportswear (n.d.) and @Nike Training (n.d.).

According to previous research on gender stereotypes within the field of advertisements, it has been discovered that women and men are often represented through specific stereotypical lenses, which contribute to the ideals of a society concerning masculinity and femininity. Generally, it can be said that women are frequently portrayed as rather passive, less credible and less intelligent (Browne, 1998). Additionally, they often represent more decorative roles, for example in advertisements for beauty products or fashion, or family-related roles, such as the mother or wife (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Contrarily, men are repeatedly portrayed as "constructive, powerful, autonomous and achieving" (Browne, 1998, p. 84). Grau and Zotos (2016) also state that the representation of men focuses less on their age and physical appearance and instead emphasises their portrayal as professional, independent and strong.

As a variety of studies have been conducted on the depiction of women and men in print and video commercials already (cf. Goffmann, 1976; Kim & Lowry, 2005; Furnham & Voli, 1989; Kang, 1979) this study focuses on a less-researched aspect: an analysis of whether stereotypes are still used in contemporary marketing campaigns and how those strategies are adapted to social media marketing. In the first step, an overview of the academic discussion within the fields of gender

studies, the sports industry and online marketing will be provided to establish a theoretical base for the paper. Afterwards, the method, the subject of examination and the research procedure will be described in detail. Furthermore, an analysis of all 2018 publications on the Nike Instagram account will be given, and a discussion of those results will be provided. In the last step, the main findings will be concluded, and an overview of the limitations of this study, as well as possibilities for further research, will be given.

2. Overview of Academic Discussion

2.1 Instagram

Instagram was selected as the object of investigation, as it has developed into one of the most essential online marketing tools for many companies around the world. According to a study conducted by Stelzner (2018), 66% of all marketing departments use Instagram as a channel for their advertisements and customer communication. Instagram is a social media platform on which users can “capture and share their life moments with friends through a series of (filter manipulated) pictures and videos” (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014, p. 595). Additionally, Instagram enables users to connect and establish social interactions through the comment function or the messenger tool. Within the application, the users can perform different actions, such as tagging other people in their pictures or using hashtags to describe their pictures in more detail. Additionally, “users consume photos and videos mostly by viewing a core page showing a “stream” of the latest photos and videos from all their friends, listed in reverse chronological order” (Hu et al., 2014, p. 560).

Instagram launched in 2010 and has become one of the most successful social media platforms of today, with a number of one billion recent followers (Tessmann, 2019). 60% of the users log-in at least once per day to keep updated about the newest uploads (Smith, 2016). Those numbers exemplify the importance of Instagram for many people within their daily lives, as well as for

many companies as a critical element of their marketing strategy. This can also be seen in the 84 million followers of the official Nike Instagram account (@nike, 2019, n.p.) and illustrates the relevance of the marketing channel between Nike as a company and its customers.

2.2 Defining the basic terms

As this work is concerned with stereotypical gender depictions in social media advertisements, it is essential to define both the term gender, as well as the term stereotype in more detail. As already mentioned in the introduction section, this work discusses gender as a social and cultural construct, which is, due to its performativity, a highly individual category that is undergoing rapid change within the academic field of gender studies (cf. Butler, 1990; Oakley, 2016; Newman, 2002). Newman (2002) draws attention to the difference between the biological sex of a person, his or her gender, and the gender roles which are constructed by society:

“In contemporary Western models, ‘sex’ is defined as the biological status of a person as either male or female based on anatomical characteristics, whereas ‘gender’ is used to refer to socially constructed roles and cultural representations. ‘Gender role’ refers to the socially ascribed characteristics and expectations: attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and values associated with being male or female in a particular culture” (Newman, 2002, p. 353)

Another aspect of gender, which is especially crucial for advertisements, as they can be seen as staged representations of gender, is its performativity. Judith Butler first coined the term gender performativity in 1990. In her book *Gender Trouble*, she claims gender is an active construction, realised through repetitive performativity. Moreover, she states that gender performativity is not

necessarily linked to freedom of choice (Butler, 1990). It often goes along with painful and oppressive gender ideals being performed repeatedly throughout society (Butler, 1992).

Moreover, Lippmann (1922) was the first social scientist using the concept of stereotyping. In his article *The public opinion*, he refers to stereotypes as “pictures in our head” (Ashmore & Del Boca, 2015, p. 2) and states that they mainly serve to simplify the perception of the world. As human beings in contemporary society are confronted with a large amount of information, it is easier for them to stick with norms that have been pre-defined by society.

Overall, there has been much disagreement on how to define the term stereotype accurately. As the definition of Ashmore and Del Boca (2015) comprises all aspects which are relevant for this research, the following definition will be used: “An ethnic stereotype is a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of the members of a particular social category” (p. 13). They specify the definition furthermore by saying that most of the time it is not one character trait which is ascribed to a group of people, but already a broader set of character traits.

2.3 Gender stereotypes

Despite the general disagreement on finding an appropriate definition for the term stereotype, “there has been considerable agreement about the meaning of the term sex stereotype” (Ashmore & Del Boca, 2015, p. 13): “(1) sex stereotypes are limited to beliefs about women and men that are widely shared; and (2) sex stereotypes include only those attributes that are thought to differentiate women from men” (p. 16). William and Bennett’s (1975) approach to gender stereotypes is similar. In their study, they investigated which adjectives were agreed upon as stereotypical attributes for either males or females. Thereby they came up with the definition of gender stereotypes as “the constellation of psychological traits generally attributed to men and women respectively” (p. 327) and a method for measuring stereotypes, the so-called adjective list.

According to William and Bennett (1975), stereotypical definitions vary between male and female perception. For example, men would characterise the stereotypical male as coarse, masculine, severe, self-confident, stern, strong and tough. Differently, from that, women would instead use adjectives, such as adventurous, aggressive, forceful, masculine and tough. Even though both definitions use different adjectives, they show a definite relation to the aspect of power, portraying men as being independent, successful and occupying an active role. Similar results can be found when looking at the stereotypical female. Men would describe their female counterparts as attractive, emotional and feminine. Women, on the other hand, would speak about the stereotypical female as affectionate, emotional, feminine and nagging. Furthermore, William and Bennett's (1975) work also highlights the limitation of research on stereotypes: "Ratings of stereotypes, when averaged in this fashion, exaggerate or amplify the salient features of the personality pattern rather than showing the typical regression toward the means found in average personality profiles" (p. 336).

When looking at gender stereotypes in advertising, Goffman's (1988) framework forms the base for multiple studies within the field of gender and media studies. With his analysis, he provided a conceptual framework for the study of gender stereotypes in the media. Overall, Goffman (1988) claims that women are often depicted as inferior and subordinate in advertisements. To analyse this, he introduced the six categories relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, family, ritualisation of subordination and licensed withdrawal (p. 204).

Relative size refers to the "gender difference in height and picture posing" (Döring, Reif & Poeschl, 2005, p. 956). Normally, men are presented either as a larger part of the picture or as taller than the women (Bell & Milic, 2002). Feminine touch states that women are often portrayed touching either their own body, someone else's body or the outlines of an object. "In contrast, men were generally depicted as purposefully grasping objects" (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 204). The category function ranking refers to the depiction of traditional gender norms, such as the woman being

portrayed within a more domestic setting and the man being portrayed at work. When both a man and woman are shown in an advertisement, the man more often takes over the role of the executor, whereas the woman operates in the role of the assistant. The category family refers to families often being represented through either a mother-daughter or father-son relationship, portrayed as both having a close bond to each other (Bell & Milic, 2002). Ritualisation of subordination describes the positioning of male and female characters within the image frame of an advertisement. Generally, Goffman found a tendency of women “to be presented in inferior positions and poses” (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 204). Licensed withdrawal is concerned with the process in which “women in advertisements were symbolically being given the opportunity to withdraw from the scene around them because they were implicitly or explicitly under the care of a male protector who acted as a surrogate parent” (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 205). Goffman’s theory was revised in 1997 by Kang, who added a seventh category to the theoretical framework: body display. Body display describes the fact that women often tend to wear either revealing, very little, or no clothes at all, when being represented in the media. Therefore, female representations are in many cases highly sexualised (Bell & Milic, 2002)

Generally, it can be said that previous research suggests that gender stereotypes are often used in contemporary advertising as a marketing tool. This can, for instance, be explained with the simplicity of stereotypes. According to Döring et al. (2015), they are easily understandable, and it can be assumed that most people who are confronted with the advertisement will be familiar with the depicted stereotypes. This facilitates the decoding of the advertisement’s message and enables the marketers to create pictures which are “positively evaluated by the recipients” (Döring et al, 2015, p. 956). Furthermore, Bell and Milic (2002) explain that advertising always aims to portray something absolute and ideal, in the shiniest and most colourful depiction possible, to convince the

viewer that the consumption of their product will lead to similar results for them. Hereby, gender stereotypes serve as a useful base.

Matthes et al. (2016) have also investigated how male and female characters are represented in advertising. Even though it was hypothesised that the main characters of most commercials would be male, there was no overall predominance of male characters found. When examining the gender of the person recording the voice-over of the commercial, the results were more significant: “The share of male voiceovers (61.8 %) was, in fact, significantly higher ($p < .01$) than the share of female voiceovers (32 %)” (p. 318). Their results also show that the depiction of women in advertisements is generally higher in commercials for products such as “toiletries, beauty products, personal care, and cleaning products” (p. 318). Interestingly, the hypothesis that men are often represented in advertisements for cars and technology could only be confirmed for a few countries and showed no significant results for other countries.

2.4 Sports Marketing and Nike

The sports industry is one of the largest global players in advertising and marketing, as athletics play an important role in many people’s daily lives and therefore offers a large target audience for corresponding companies (Morgan & Summers, 2005). Fullerton and Merz (2008) define sports marketing as “marketing *through* sport; that is using sport as a promotional vehicle or sponsorship platform for companies that market consumer, and to a lesser extent, industrial products” (p. 91). This demonstrates that sports marketing often goes beyond simply advertising a product or brand, but rather advertising the entire experience and lifestyle surrounding sports.

Nike’s marketing strategy, which is developed by the advertising agency *Wieden and Kennedy*, is famous for its innovative style” (Goldman & Papson, 1998, p. 1). The Nike slogan *Just Do It* is as highly implemented into the consumer’s brains and represents the idea of self-empowerment

and tells the consumer to take a risk and realise their goals (Goldman & Papson, 1998). Even though Nike has chosen the strategy to represent itself as one global brand with the same ethic, value, management and theme in every country, their marketing is still targeted specifically to the country in which it is published: “The aim is to sell a global brand through marketing that appeals to local tastes” (p. 4).

2.5 Gender Representations in Sports Advertising

As the following paper is concerned with the depiction of stereotypes on the official Nike Instagram account, portrayals of masculinity and femininity in sports advertising have to be explored in more detail. According to Namie and Warne (2017), the sports industry is one of the fields in which traditional gender stereotypes are still very present. Bruce (2013) describes it as “an overwhelmingly male and hegemonically masculine domain that produces coverage by men, for men and about men” (p. 128). In American television, women in sports are crucially underrepresented compared to male athletes with a media-coverage of only 3.2% (Cooky et al., 2015). Furthermore, Namie and Warne (2017) have investigated representations of female athletes in sports nutrition advertising and have found out females are outnumbered in their appearance by their male counterparts in both the commercials, as well as the television advertisements that were analysed. In the sample of commercials, “95% included males, while only 30% included females [...] meaning females were outnumbered nearly four to one” (n.p.).

Although women are significantly underrepresented in sports nutrition advertising, their representation was found to be rather positive. Instead of emphasising their sexuality, their athletic ability was put into focus (Namie & Warne, 2017). It can also be seen that this form of representation varies by the media channel through which the marketing is executed: “the greatest gains in

degree and variety of representation among these athletes appeared on websites, online commercials, and in social media” (Coughlan, 2016, n.p.).

Scholar Janet S. Fink, explored a similar topic in her publication *Female athletes, women's sport, and the sport media commercial complex: Have we really “come a long way, baby”?* (2013). Other than Namie and Warne (2017), Fink (2013) suggest that female athletes are rarely depicted as athletes in advertising. Instead there is a focus on “their (hyper) sexuality and/or attractive, feminine qualities, or their roles outside of sport such as wives, mothers, girlfriends, and so on due to the belief that female athletes’ athletic accomplishments, in and of themselves, are not sufficiently marketable” (p. 338).

2.6 Gender and Social Media

Even though there has been a considerable amount of research conducted on gender stereotypes in advertising, there has only been little research performed on the depiction of gender stereotypes on social media platforms. Döring, Reif and Poeschl (2015) have, for instance, investigated the portrayal of gender stereotypes in selfies¹ published on user’s personal Instagram accounts and compared them to traditional advertisements in print magazines. Interestingly, they conclude that “male and female Instagram users’ selfies do not only reflect traditional gender stereotypes but are even more stereotypical than magazine adverts” (p. 955). Additionally, they found out that “young females’ selfies more often use social-media-specific gender expressions like the kissing pout implying seduction/sexualisation and the faceless portrayal (implying a focus on the body solely), while young males’ selfies more often contain muscle presentation (implying strength)” (p. 961). In a similar study, Oberst et al. (2016) have examined whether male and female Facebook users stereotypically portray themselves on their profiles. Differently, from what Döring et al. (2015) investigated on

¹ A selfie is defined as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself” by the Oxford Dictionaries (2013, p. 1)

Instagram profiles, Oberst et al. (2016) found out that “users tend to present themselves online in a less gender-stereotypical way than they actually see themselves in an offline context” (p. 562). Additionally, this difference is more significant for women than for men (p. 562). As previously discussed, there has been only limited research conducted so far, which is concerned with gender depictions in social media advertising, marketed by companies, such as Nike. Therefore, the present paper aims to close this gap and contribute to knowledge in the academic field on gender representation in commercial advertising channels, including social media.

2.7 Research Question

Based on the overview of academic literature which has already been published in the field (cf. Browne, 1998; Zarate et. al, 2004; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Stelzner, 2018), and its main findings regarding social media marketing, sports advertisements and stereotypical gender depiction, one main research question was formulated:

How does the depiction of men and women on the official Nike Instagram account differ in regard to stereotypical attributes?

In order to be able to analyse the different components of the question individually, the following two sub-questions were introduced:

Sub-Question 1: *How are the male and female models represented within the image frame?*

Sub- Question 2: *Are those representations reinforcing or revisiting gender stereotypes?*

3. Method

In order to be able to answer the research question, a qualitative approach based on Bell and Milic's (2002) work on gender advertisements was chosen. By using a combination of semiotic and content analysis, Bell and Milic (2002) investigated the (stereotypical) representation of male and female models on 827 advertisements in US print magazines. Content analysis can be defined as "a qualitatively oriented technique by which standardised measurements are applied to metrically defined units and these are used to characterise and compare documents" (Cullum-Swan & Manning, 1994, p. 462). As it is used especially to analyse documents by comparing them to each other, it is suitable for the analysis of advertising images. Semiotics, on the other hand, is concerned with how meaning is conveyed through signs and signifiers. The concept is based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), who introduced the idea that signs, in this case, the images of the advertisement, are signifiers who represent a particular concept, the so-called signified, which is dependent on the context in which an image is portrayed (Nailer 2011). Semiotics provide a conceptual toolkit which helps to understand how "meaning [is] produced, conveyed, and interpreted in messages that are primarily visual" (Ciumacenco, 2014, p. 183). The use of a semiotic analysis is especially useful for the investigation of advertisements, as they function through a process of coding and decoding meaning, which is also a central element of semiotics (Nailer 2011).

Due to the similarities in research content, Bell and Milic's (2002) coding system will be used as the methodological base for the analysis. The system consists of the following eight variables, which are all concerned with the depiction of the models within the image frame: represented participants, gaze, framed distance, narrative presentation, conceptual presentation, vertical and horizontal angle, as well as modality (Bell & Milic 2002).

3.1 Semiotic and Content Analysis

In order to perform their analysis, Bell and Milic (2002) introduced eight categories, as outlined in table 1 below:

Variable	Values
Represented participants	Male Female Body part Female group Male group
Gaze	Gaze at the viewer Gaze away from the viewer No gaze
Framed Distance	Intimate/personal distance: the camera is too close to capture all of the participant's body Social distance: the participant or model is shot in full length and there is little or no space to depict the model's context Public distance: the participant is shown in full shot and there is space around them showing the context
Narrative presentation	Actor- participants could be actors represented as doing something to another participant Narrative Goal- participants could be goals or targets of another participant's action Behaver/ Expressor- the participant could be a 'beholder' or 'expressor' performing a non-transitive action such as smiling or running Reactor- the participant could be reacting to a model, object, or situation represented in the image Absent- participants with no actantial role

Conceptual Presentation	<p>Classificational- Participants represented in a classification way were compared or contrasted with other participants</p> <p>Analytic- Participants represented in an analytic way were shown with their physical parts articulated to a degree that emphasised part-whole relationships</p> <p>Symbolic- participants could be presented in a symbolic or metaphoric way, which was usually achieved by formally highlighting one of their attributes for display and implying its similarity to something else</p> <p>Absent- no proposition, comparison, contrast, or other abstract relationship illustrated</p>
Verticle Angle	<p>High- participants shot from above</p> <p>Medium- participants at approximately the same height as the (implied) observer</p> <p>Low- participants shot from below</p>
Horizontal Angle	<p>Frontal- participants appear near or in front of the vanishing point</p> <p>Oblique- participants are positioned significantly to the left or right of the vanishing point</p>
Modality	<p>Standard- a typical ‘glossy’ advertisement</p> <p>Factual- an advertisement borrowing from scientific and naturalistic coding orientations</p> <p>Fantasy- an advertisement borrowing from certain genres of art</p>

Table 1. Overview of all variables and corresponding values, adapted from Bell and Milic (2002, p. 213)

3.2 Subject of Examination

The subject of examination includes all postings that were published on the Nike Instagram account in the year 2018. The main page of the account looks as following (figure 2):

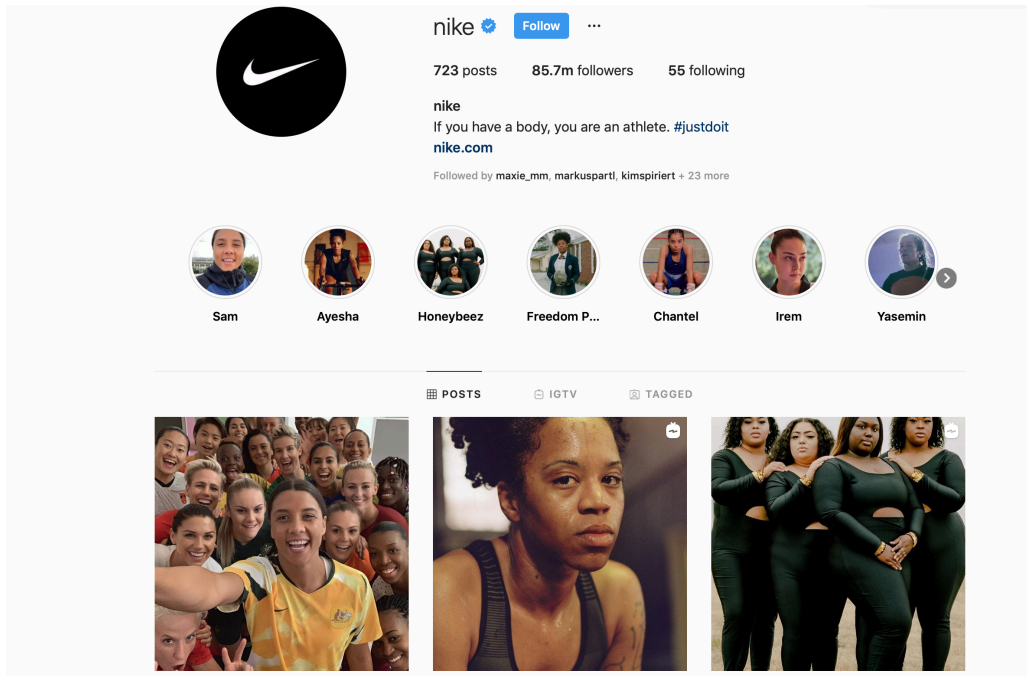


Figure 2. Image derived from Nike Instagram account (2019). Screenshot of the main page on 14th of March 2019. Serves the purpose to exemplify the structure of the company's Instagram account.

It consists of four different components. On the upper left side of the page, the logo of the company offers the users access to Nike's Instagram Stories, a tool which allows the publication of live stories that are online for 24 hours and can be saved on the profile afterwards (@nike, 2019, n.p.). Nike's old publications can be found under the icons below, labelled with the names of the protagonists shown in the stories, such as *Sam* or *Chantel* (@nike, 2019, n.p.). Next to the Nike sign, the company's account description, their overall number of postings, followers and followings are listed. The account description states: "If you have a body, you are an athlete" (@nike, 2019, n.p.). Underneath those three components, the company's Instagram feed is depicted. The feed consists solely of images and videos. The publications are always accompanied by a textual caption, that provides further information and thereby complements the visual representation. This can be seen in the image below (figure 3):

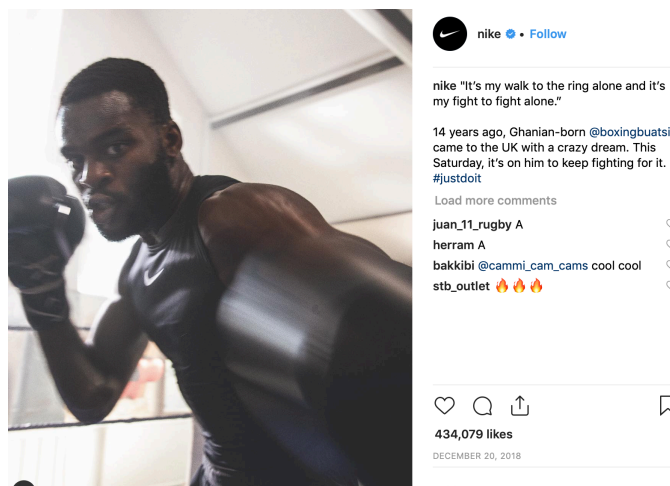


Figure 3. Image derived from Nike Instagram account (2019). Screenshot of a posting, published on 20th of December 2018. Serves the purpose to exemplify the structure of a posting.

The analysis is focused exclusively on the image and video content, which was published on the account in 2018. The tool *Instagram Stories* was left out of the investigation. This decision has been made, as there is only minimal research on its function and importance for the Instagram marketing of a company yet. A similar decision has been made regarding the textual captions of the postings. As they are not directly related to the gender depiction of the models in the pictures and videos, they will not be considered.

As mentioned above, the sample size of this research includes all postings which were published in the year 2018 to provide a closed timeframe for the analysis. As the postings of 2018 are still comparably recent, they enable valid results about contemporary gender depictions on social media profiles. In 2018, 49 postings were published overall, out of which 23 were videos and 26 images. As this research is concerned with the portrayal of stereotypical femininity and masculinity, three publications have been left out of the analysis. They are only portraying Nike products without the use of a model or actor, thus they are not relevant for this research. Therefore, the exact sample size consists of 46 publications, including 25 pictures and 21 motion pictures.

3.3 Procedure

In the first step, all postings were classified according to the categories proposed by Bell and Milic (2002). In order to increase the reliability of the study, the concept of decentralisation (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2007) was used to make the researcher aware of her own limitations and the possibility of creating inappropriate bias, when inserting her personal opinion. Each posting on the Nike Instagram account which was published in the year 2018, was analysed individually concerning the variables *represented participants, gaze, framed distance, narrative presentation, conceptual presentation, vertical angle, horizontal angle* and *modality* (Bell & Milic, 2002). The analysis was started with the first post in January 2018 and ended with the last post in December 2018.

In the second step, tables were created to obtain an overview of each category, and compare the variables and their values to each other. Thereby, the percentage of postings that fell under one value was calculated, and the separate values were compared to each other in the tables. The tables developed in this work followed the structure Bell and Milic (2002) used in their study. As this analysis is concerned with social media postings, which were published both in video and image form, three tables were composed for each variable: one table for the results found in the pictures, one table for the results of the videos and one table for the overall results. Thereby, it was aimed to investigate whether there is a difference between gender depiction in images and videos.

In the results section of this thesis, only the tables for the overall results are presented, to ensure a clear overview. When differences between the results of the images and the results of the videos were noticed, those differences were mentioned in the results section. All tables that are not displayed in the thesis, can be found in the Appendix. The structure of the tables can be illustrated with the example of the variable *Conceptual Presentation*:

Pictures (25)

	Classificational	Analytic	Symbolic	Absent	Total
Male	1 (5)	3 (17)	7 (39)	7 (39)	18 (100)
Female	-	-	3 (60)	2 (40)	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	-	2 (100)	-	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	-	-

Videos (21)

	Classificational	Analytic	Symbolic	Absent	Total
Male	2 (22)	1 (11)	3 (33)	3 (33)	9 (100)
Female	-	1 (25)	2 (50)	1 (25)	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	3 (100)	-	-	-	3 (100)
Mixed Group	2 (40)	-	3 (60)	-	5 (100)

Overall (46)

	Classificational	Analytic	Symbolic	Absent	Total
Male	3 (11)	4 (15)	10 (37)	10 (37)	27 (100)
Female	-	1 (11)	5 (55)	3 (33)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	3 (60)	-	2 (40)	-	5 (100)
Mixed Group	2 (40)	-	3 (60)	-	5 (100)

Tables 2,3 and 4. Overview of all three tables of the variable Conceptual Presentation

On the left-hand side, the represented participants are listed. Overall, there are five values, describing the represented participants in the postings: Male, Female, Female Group, Male Group and Mixed Group. They are based on the values, given by Bell and Milic (2002), but are adapted to the content which is published on Nike's Instagram account. Bell and Milic (2002) for example,

propose the value *Body Party* for the represented participants. As there were no postings on the company's social media platform which solely portrayed the body part of a participant, this value was left out. As can be seen in the table, there were also neither images nor videos, which portrayed a female group. Nonetheless, the value *Female Group* was still included in the tables, as there were multiple representations of a *Male Group* found in the analysis, which already shows a difference in gender representation. Therefore, the value *Female Group* is relevant for the research. This observation will be elaborated on further in the results section.

The first row on top of the table lists the possible values for the variable that is currently investigated. In the case of *Conceptual Presentation*, those values are *Classificational*, *Analytic*, *Symbolic and Absent*. In the last column, the value *Total* is shown, which gives an overview of the number of postings that were published for the represented participants shown in each row.

For instance, in the first row where the male group is listed, a total number of 27 is written down. This means, 27 postings representing a male participant were published on the account in 2018. The column *total* served the purpose of easily comparing the numbers and percentages to each other and ensuring a clear overview of all results.

The numbers in each column describe the results of the investigation, phrased in numerals. In the case of *Conceptual Presentation*, each Instagram posting was classified into one of the values proposed in the table above. Thereby, numbers were calculated. In the first column of the second row, for example, it can be seen that three postings portrayed a male participant in a classificational conceptual presentation. In order to put those numbers into perspective, the percentage for each column was calculated individually and was shown in the parentheses. As there was an overall number of 27 postings depicting male participants, those three postings formed 11% of the total 100%.

Since Bell and Milic's (2002) variable system was designed to analyse still images, some values had to be added to enable an analysis of both the pictures and videos. Therefore, four additional values were added respectively to the categories *Gaze*, *Narrative Presentation*, *Vertical Angle* and *Horizontal Angle*. As video productions often use multiple camera angles, frames and settings, it is sometimes not possible to only assign one of the values suggested by Bell and Milic (2002), to an entire video. For the variable *Gaze*, the value *Alternating Gaze* was added, to provide an appropriate category for postings in which the participant both gazes at the viewer and away from the viewer. When investigating the variable *Narrative Presentation*, the value *Compilation* was added because, in multiple video publications, the protagonists did not only occupy one narrative role but switched between different ones. For the variables *Vertical* and *Horizontal Angle*, the value *Alternating* was introduced to provide a category for videos which are using different camera angles.

Additionally, two other variables were adjusted to the content of the analysis. For the variable *Represented Participants*, the value *Mixed Group* was added because some of the pictures and videos depict a group with both male and female participants. As those mixed-group portrayals can also provide implications of gender depictions, especially when being compared to solely male or female groups, the value was subjoined. Furthermore, the variable *Framed Distance* was modified slightly. In their work, Bell and Milic (2002) only provide values which either describe the participant as being portrayed in an extreme close-up, where no context is visible or in a full body shot. As some publications show close-ups of the participant's body, which still depict some of the background of the scenery, the value *partial intimate/personal distance* was created by the researcher. *Partial intimate/personal distance* describes pictures or videos in which the camera is too close to capture all of the participant's body, but the context can still be guessed.

4. Results

Overall it can be seen in the data collection that the depiction of male and female participants in social media advertising varies from each other significantly. The following results section provides an overview of the most crucial results for each variable.

4.1. Represented Participants

	Pictures	Videos	Overall
Male	18 (69)	9 (43)	27 (57)
Female	5 (19)	4 (17)	9 (18)
Body Part	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Female Group	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Male Group	2 (8)	3 (9)	5 (8)
Mixed Group	0 (0)	5 (22)	5 (10)
None	1 (4)	2 (9)	3 (6)

Table 5. Overview of overall results for variable Represented Participants

The first variable describes the gender and number of the characters who are portrayed within the frame of the images and videos which were published on Nike's Instagram account. The results show a significant dominance of male protagonists, both in the pictures and in the videos. Reviewing the images specifically, the difference between postings depicting male protagonists (69%) and postings portraying female protagonists (19%) can be considered as high. Similar results can be found when looking at the video publications. In 43% of all published motion pictures, a man is shown, whereas in only 17% of the videos a woman is in the centre of attention. In the whole sample, women are just portrayed individually and not in a group, whereas men are depicted together in 8% of the images and 9% of the videos.

4.2 Gaze

	Gaze at the viewer	Gaze away from the viewer	Alternating gaze	No gaze	Total
Male	3 (11)	19 (70)	4 (15)	1 (4)	27 (100)
Female	-	7 (78)	1 (11)	1 (11)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	2 (40)	2 (40)	1 (20)	5 (100)
Mixed Group	-	3 (60)	2 (40)	-	5 (100)

Table 6. Overview of overall results for variable Gaze

This variable builds upon the concept of the gaze of the participants, which enables the viewer to engage in a specific relationship with the image:

“They may smile, in which case the viewer is asked to enter into a relation of social affinity with them; they may stare at the viewer with cold disdain, in which case the viewer is asked to relate to them, perhaps, as an inferior relates to a superior; they may seductively pout at the viewer, in which case the viewer is asked to desire them” (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 209).

When investigating the participant’s gazes on the Instagram publications, the results for male and female participants were similar. 70% of all male participants and 78% of all female participants are portrayed as gazing away from the viewer and are therefore not engaging directly with the audience. In only 11% of the postings, the male protagonist engages with the viewer by gazing at him or her directly, whereas for the female participants there is no direct engagement. For both male and female participants, there is only one publication in which there is no gaze at all. In both images, the athlete is portrayed from the back, and therefore their gaze is not observable.

The results solely for the videos give a different impression. For the female protagonists, comparable outcomes were found. 75%, so the clear majority, depicts the women as gazing away from the viewer and in 25% of the videos an alternating gaze, changing between a direct and indirect gaze, was found. Interestingly, there was no video published in which the women only gazed at the camera directly. For the male video protagonists, the distribution was more equal. 56% of the videos depicted a direct gaze between participant and spectator, whereas 44% showed at least an alternating gaze.

4.3 Framed Distance

	Intimate/ personal distance	Partial intimate/ personal distance	Social Dis- tance	Public Dis- tance	Mixture	Total
Male	8 (30)	8 (30)	-	5 (18)	6 (22)	27 (100)
Female	4 (45)	-	-	2 (22)	3 (33)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	3 (60)	-	-	2 (40)	5 (100)
Mixed Group	-	2 (40)	-	-	3 (60)	5 (100)

Table 7. Overview of overall results for variable Framed Distance

The variable *Framed Distance* describes how the characters are portrayed in the frame of the image, how close they are to the camera and whether one of their body parts is emphasised or they are represented as a whole. The framed distance of male and female participants shows significant differences. In 45% of all postings that display a female character, “the camera is too close to capture all of the participant’s body” (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 193), and only 22% of the publications show the woman’s entire body within the frame of a context. When looking specifically at the framed distances of the images, the same results can be found: here, even 80% of the pictures display the female

characters from an intimate distance, and only one image portrays a woman within a context and reveals her entire body. In Figure 4 for instance, the female athlete is depicted from an intimate distance.



Figure 4. Image derived from Nike Instagram account (2019). Screenshot of a posting, published on 26th of October 2018

Only her head, her upper body and parts of her legs are visible. The background is blurry and can not be identified as a particular scenery. It can only be assumed from the caption, her clothing and body posture that she is portrayed in a wrestling competition. Therefore, this posting was assigned the value intimate/personal distance. Differently, from the female participants, the male characters are portrayed more heterogeneously. 30% of the postings show them from an intimate distance, 30% depict a close-up of their body, but still, show them in an apparent context, and 22% use a mixture of the possibilities mentioned above.

4.4. Narrative Presentation

	Actor	Narrative Goal	Behavior/ Expressor	Reactor	Absent	Compilation	Total
Male	3 (11)	2 (7)	15 (55)	1 (4)	3 (11)	3 (11)	27 (100)
Female	-	-	5 (55)	2 (22)	-	2 (22)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	2 (40)	1 (20)	-	2 (40)	-	-	5 (100)
Mixed Group	1 (20)	-	2 (40)	-	-	2 (40)	5 (100)

Table 8. Overview of overall results for variable Narrative Presentation

When examining the variable *Narrative Presentation*, the researcher looked at the role of the participants and how that role is embedded in the narrative that the image or video tries to tell. Displaying the actor or the narrative goal requires the characters to participate in a relationship with other characters, for example by symbolising the goal that someone else wants to attain. The reactor also performs an active task, as he responds to an object or a situation which is portrayed in the image or video. The role of the behavior/expressor and the characters who are displayed as absent are both more passive and do not involve another participant to be shown. The behavior/expressor performs an action which can be classified as non-transitive, an example for this could be the runner depicted below (figure 5):



Figure 5. Image derived from Nike Instagram account (2019). Screenshot of a posting, published on 22nd of April 2018

When comparing the *narrative presentation* of the male and female protagonists, a significant variation can be found. Every role that can possibly be performed is covered by at least one male character. 55% of them are portrayed as behavior/expressor, which mainly shows them executing individualistic tasks. Respectively 11% of the images depict the male protagonists as actors, absent or in a compilation of multiple roles. 7% portray them as the narrative goal of another character within the image or video, and only 4% show them as reactors.

Differently, from that, the female characters are only shown as either behaviors/expressors (55%), reactors (22%) or a compilation of different roles (22%). Here, it can be seen that most female characters are portrayed in more passive functions, such as reacting to a situation or expressing their feelings.

4.5 Conceptual Presentation

	Classificational	Analytic	Symbolic	Absent	Total
Male	3 (11)	4 (15)	10 (37)	10 (37)	27 (100)
Female	-	1 (11)	5 (55)	3 (33)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	3 (60)	-	2 (40)	-	5 (100)
Mixed Group	2 (40)	-	3 (60)	-	5 (100)

Table 9. Overview of overall results for variable Conceptual Presentation

The variable *Conceptual Presentation* allows the researcher to analyse how the participants are portrayed with the help of a conceptual structure. This could, for example, be realised through a classificational presentation, in which the protagonist is compared or contrasted with other protagonists within the image or video. Another possible form of portrayal is the analytical presentation, in which the focus is put on the depiction of the protagonist's body by, for instance, explicitly highlighting one body part. When being presented in a symbolic way, the participants function as a symbol or metaphor for something else. An example for this can be seen on this image of US athlete Simone Biles who is portrayed doing the splits in front of an American flag. Biles is not only depicted as a female, but she functions as a symbol for the United States (figure 6).



Figure 6. Image derived from Nike Instagram account (2019). Screenshot of a posting, published on 1st of November 2018

Again, it can be seen that the male participants are portrayed in a broader variety of ways. 37% of the images show a male protagonist with the use of a symbolic presentation and another 37% represent the male protagonist as absent. 15% depict him through an analytical concept, and only 11% use the classificational style. Differently, from that, most female participants are either portrayed in a symbolic fashion (55%) or as absent (33%). Only one image makes use of the analytical conceptual presentation (11%), and no image or video shows women in contrast or comparison to other women.

4.6 Vertical Angle

	High	Medium	Low	Total
Male	1 (5)	11 (61)	6 (34)	18 (100)
Female	-	2 (40)	3 (60)	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	2 (100)	-	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	-

Table 10. Overview of picture results for variable Vertical Angle

The variable *Vertical Angle* is concerned with the camera angle from which a picture or video is shot. When the participant is depicted from above, the vertical angle classifies as high. When the image is shot from below, the vertical angle is rated as low, and a medium vertical angle is shot from a position in which the participant and the viewer are on the same height. As the majority of video publications makes use of alternating angles, this section focusses mostly on the results of the pictures, which are listed in the table above.

When looking at the results (table 10), it can be seen that the male participants are mostly portrayed from a medium angle (61%), whereas the majority of the female participants were shot from a lower angle (60%). Therefore, the male protagonists are depicted mostly on the same level

as the viewer, whereas the female participants are more often portrayed from below. This can, for instance, be seen in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Image derived from Nike Instagram account (2019). Screenshot of a posting, published on 25th of August 2018

Serena Williams, even though her whole body is portrayed in the image, is shot slightly from below. This chosen angle, combined with the portrayal of the backside of her body, emphasises her body shape, especially her curves.

4.7 Horizontal Angle

	Frontal	Oblique	Total
Male	9 (50)	9 (50)	18 (100)
Female	-	5 (100)	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-
Male Group	2 (100)	-	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-

Table 11. Overview of picture results for variable Horizontal Angle

The *Horizontal Angle* of an image or video can either be frontal or oblique. When portraying the participants from a frontal angle, they “appear near or in front of the vanishing point”

(Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 193). The viewer and the participant are positioned frontally towards each other and share the same gaze and eyeline. Therefore, the viewer can see the subject directly and be part of the world of the image. Differently, from that, the oblique horizontal angle positions the participants “significantly to the left or right of the vanishing point” (Bell & Milic, 2002, p.193). When the picture or video is shot from an oblique angle, the viewer is more detached from the picture because he or she does not share the same view as the participant. That could, for example, be the case when the participant is portrayed from the back or the side. Just as with the category *vertical angle*, the analysis of the *horizontal angle* will primarily focus on the results of the images, as almost all videos use alternating horizontal angles.

The differences between the portrayal of the male and female participants through a horizontal angle is crucial. All images that depict a woman are shot from an oblique perspective. Therefore, none of the female participants is portrayed either in the centre of the image or engages directly with the viewer. Differently, from that, the male participants are represented in a half-half allocation. 50% of the images depicting a male character are shot from a frontal horizontal angle, and 50% are shot from an oblique horizontal angle. Therefore, it can be seen that the male participants are, again, shown from varying perspectives. This leads to a higher possibility for the viewer to actively engage with the images portraying a male participant. The image below shows an example of a male participant being depicted from a frontal horizontal angle. French Football player Kilian M’Bappe looks straight at the camera and therefore, also engages directly with the viewer (figure 8)



Figure 8. Image derived from Nike Instagram account (2019). Screenshot of a posting, published on 15th of July 2018

4.8. Modality

	Standard	Factual	Fantasy	Total
Male	13 (48)	11 (41)	3 (11)	27 (100)
Female	4 (44)	4 (44)	1 (11)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-
Male Group	4 (80)	1 (20)	-	5 (100)
Mixed Group	4 (80)	1 (20)	-	5 (100)

Table 12. Overview of overall results for variable Modality

The term *modality* describes the type of advertising. This can, among others, be realised through the saturation of colours and thereby influences whether an advertisement is represented as more natural or more unrealistic. Images shot in black and white, for example, classify as low-modality and are therefore assigned to the value fantasy. Images or videos with a standard modality, are described by Bell and Milic (2002) as “typical ‘glossy’ advertisement[s]” (p.193). Slightly modified images, who appear either as more naturalistic or as more scientific, are described with the term factual modality.

Overall it can be said that most advertising images and videos on the Nike Instagram account are portrayed with a standard modality. Nonetheless, both male and female participants are

represented with a variety of either high, low or medium modality. The majority of them (41%, 44%) are depicted in a more naturalistic or scientific modality.

5. Discussion

The following analysis aims to investigate whether social media marketing, which can be regarded as the most recent domain in marketing, still makes use of traditional and stereotypical gender portrayals as a tool to sell their products. In the first step, the general impression of the publications will be discussed. Afterwards, the results will be put into perspective, regarding the overall topic of the present paper, gender stereotypes. In the last step, the two sub-questions and subsequently, the main research question will be answered.

5.1. General impressions

The first, superficial impression of the account is positive. It includes images depicting both male and female athletes, there are no sexual or objectifying images of either gender, and the central message of the account seems to be to motivate, encourage and strengthen both male and female viewers to work for their goals. This corresponds with Nike's main message, which is also stated on the upper right side of their Instagram page: "If you have a body, you are an athlete" (@nike, 2019, n.p.). Overall, there are only three pictures which put a Nike product in the foreground and aim to display and market this specific good. All other publications portray male and female (celebrity) athletes, either doing sports or at least wearing sportswear. It seems as if the brand aims to create an atmosphere of motivation and self-empowerment for the viewers, by depicting successful athletes and their accomplishments. This is realised through the depiction of a highly diverse sample of participants. The publications depict athletes in all different kinds of conditions, age-groups, skin colours and body shapes. Even though the majority of postings portray athletes, who have an

outstandingly fit and healthy body shape, other images and videos display people who have to deal with much harder conditions, such as the loss of their arm or leg.

Moreover, men and women are shown at different stages of their sports career. For some of the participants, sport is their profession, lifestyle and centre of their being, whereas others are portrayed only at the beginning of their athletic or weight-loss journey or already at its end. Besides the portrayal of non-sports related celebrities, such as rapper Kendrick Lamar and recognised sports players, such as soccer player Kilian M' Bappe, other athletes, who do not fall under the category of celebrities are depicted as well. Therefore, the potential of identification for all different kinds of viewers is increased significantly.

Nevertheless, only one image depicts an athlete who does not have a regular body shape. All other posts, portray male and female participants with well-toned, fit and aesthetic bodies. This has also been discussed in previous research. Zarate et al. (2004) for example argued that most advertisements portray an ideal image to convince the audience that they need to buy a specific product to achieve similar results. In this context that would be represented with the portrayal of models with a fit and aesthetic body shape, who are supposed to motivate the viewers to buy Nike clothes and start working out, to look just as fit and well-toned. This is also in line with the findings of Fullerton and Mertz (2008) who stated that sports marketing does not only aim to sell a specific product but instead wants to lead their target audience to change their lifestyle towards being more fit and healthy.

5.2 Gender Stereotypes

Even though the first superficial impression of the Nike Instagram account was mostly positive and does not present an obvious portrayal of traditional gender stereotypes, the depiction of men and women can still not be considered as equal. This can be seen in the analysis of almost every variable investigated. The only variable which does not provide different results for both genders, is the

variable *Modality*, as most postings are edited with a standard modality. This can be explained with the conventions of the advertising genre, which is trying to portray their world in the brightest and shiniest colours possible to convince the consumer to buy their products (Bell and Milic, 2002).

One of the most crucial results can be found for the variable *Represented Participants*. 57% of the publications on the Instagram account depict male protagonists and another 8% show an exclusively male group. Compared to that, women are only portrayed in 18% of the postings and are never shown within a group. Here, a clear inequality can be seen. Not only are the male participants shown more frequently, but they are also portrayed in different constellations. Therefore, the space of representation for the female characters is significantly smaller and restricts a broad and diverse representation. This impression corresponds with the findings of Bruce (2013) and Cooky et al. (2015) that sports marketing is an area which is predominantly centred around ideas and representations of masculinity and in which women are often underrepresented.

When looking at the self-representation of the brand Nike on Instagram, it was found that multiple accounts were created to speak to different audiences. One of those accounts, @nikewomen, is specifically targeted towards a female audience and consists exclusively of postings with female participants (@nikewomen, 2019, n.p.). This could explain the lack of publications portraying female characters on the main Instagram account @nike (2019, n.p.). Nevertheless, the official account of the company is not targeted particularly towards customers with a specific gender but addresses everyone who identifies with the brand. By creating an individual account for their female customers, but not creating another one exclusively for their male customers, inequality between the portrayal of male and female characters in their overall social media marketing is created. This contradicts the hypotheses of Namie and Warne (2017) and Bruce (2013), who all state that sports marketing is mostly male-dominated and still often works with traditional gender stereotypes in advertisements. Nonetheless, their findings are in line with another result found in this study, which

confirms that Nike's Instagram page predominantly portrays male characters and thereby contributes to the expectations formulated in the literature (Namie & Warne, 2017; Bruce, 2013).

Furthermore, the analysis of various other variables shows the female participants are represented in a less diverse way, than the male participants. This can be seen especially in the results of the variables *Narrative Presentation* and *Conceptual Presentation*. As Nike frequently uses celebrities or well-known athletes as the participants in their advertising, many images and videos portray them after the win of a prestigious competition, such as the French soccer team after scoring a goal at the World Cup in 2018. Therefore, the main narrative constellation which is used, is the portrayal of an athlete in motion, either after already succeeding at reaching their goal or throughout the process of achieving this goal. Even though most of the postings tell a similar story, the presentation of male and female participants still varies. When looking at the variable *Narrative Presentation*, it can be seen that the male participants are presented in every role that was suggested by Bell and Milic (2002), whereas their female counterparts are only depicted in two different functions. Interestingly, most female characters are occupying more passive roles, such as reacting to a situation or expressing their feelings. When looking at the images, they are either portrayed performing an individual sport, such as gymnastics or are displayed in a close-up that is emphasising on their emotions. This corresponds with the study of William and Bennett (1975), in which they state that females are often perceived as, and therefore also expected to be, very emotional. Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that the purpose of the Instagram account is to evoke emotions on the side of the viewer, and thereby motivate them to change their lifestyle or achieve their personal sport-related goals. Therefore, the predominantly emotional portrayal of the female participants is related to the stereotype of women as being over-emotional but can be explained with the context of the postings, as part of a specific marketing strategy.

Similar results have been found for the variable *Conceptual Presentation*. The male participants are presented through all four different conceptual strategies, while the female participants are only portrayed as absent or symbolic. Therefore, they are either not engaged in any specific conceptual context at all, or serve the function to symbolically represent something other than themselves. Consequently, there is comparably little active engagement of the female participants, while at the same time the male participants are shown to be able to occupy different roles and appear in different contexts. This again leads to the impression that the representation of female participants is limited and compared to one of their male counterparts significantly less diverse. When contrasting those results with the study of Goffmann (1988), similarities can be found. The overall impression of the Instagram account shows that the female participants are put into an inferior position.

The results for the variables *Gaze*, *Vertical Angle* and *Horizontal Angle* also show a difference in how the male and female participants are represented. As already suggested by Goffmann (1988) in his category relative size, the female participants on the Nike account are also depicted from a different and inferior angle than the male protagonists. 60% of all postings with a female protagonist show the woman shot from below. Thereby, the characters appear taller, and their entire body is depicted. At the same time, an emphasis is put on specific body parts, such as the upper body or the backside of the woman. Differently, from that, the male protagonists are depicted mostly on the same level as the viewer. Thereby, a hierarchy is created again which portrays the male characters as superior to the female characters and as equal to the viewers. This corresponds with the findings of Grau and Zotos (2016), who stated that women in advertisements are more often portrayed with an emphasis on their bodies, whereas men are rather depicted with a focus on their professional and independent lifestyle. Similar ideas have been formulated by Fink (2013) about gender stereotypes in sports marketing. Fink discovered that female athletes are often portrayed with a specific focus on their bodies, which easily leads to them being perceived as sexy, instead of strong.

Comparable results were found regarding the *Horizontal Angle* of the postings. The female participants were shown exclusively from an oblique angle which creates a higher distance between them and the viewer. None of the female participants is portrayed either in the centre of the image or engages directly with the viewer. Other than that, the male participants were shown both from a frontal angle (50%) and from an oblique angle (50%). This leads to a higher possibility for the viewer to actively engage and identify with the images portraying a male participant. This opportunity is not given for the publications that are depicting female characters, as they are all shot from a perspective, where the woman is portrayed as more distant and passive. This, again, is in line with the outcomes of Brown (1998) and William and Bennett (1975) who describe the female stereotype as passive and therefore less credible.

5.3. Main Outcome

In order to be able to answer the main research question, the two sub-questions have to be answered in the first step. The first sub-question “How are the male and female models represented within the image frame?” was already answered broadly in the two sections above. Overall it can be said that this representation varies significantly and thereby an unequal portrayal of both genders is created. The male participants are presented as more active and engaging and are generally given more space on the profile, as they appear in more images and videos. Additionally, their representation is more diverse, as they are depicted in different narrative roles and contexts, are shot from different angles and in different constellations. Other than that, the female participants are not only portrayed at a smaller frequency but also only in a comparative lesser variety of positions, camera settings and concepts. Those main findings can be related to multiple studies on gender stereotypes in advertising, and sports advertising in particular, that have been conducted in the field so far (cf. Brown, 1998; William & Bennett, 1975; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Fink, 2013; Goffmann, 1988).

The second sub-question “Are those representations reinforcing or revisiting gender stereotypes?” can be answered on the base of the previous findings. Bell and Milic (2002) explain in their work that each of the variables that have been investigated and were used as a methodological base for this thesis give implications about whether the male and female participants are shown stereotypically. A considerable amount of those stereotypical attributes, which were outlined in the theoretical framework above, were retrieved from the results of this work. The female participants were, for instance, expected to be depicted more emotionally and passively, occupying mostly decorative roles (cf. Brown 1998, William and Bennett 1975). As already mentioned above, those presumptions can be confirmed by the results of this study. Other than that, the observation that female characters are often depicted in social or family related constellations (Grau & Zotos, 2016), cannot be confirmed at all. Contrarily, all female participants on the postings were shown exclusively by themselves and were never portrayed in a group. This finding also contradicts the presumption the female participants would be presented as less independent and strong, compared to their male counterparts. Even though their representation is more one-sided than the one of the male participants, the individual positioning of the women on the account portrays them as being successful out of their own resources and strength, instead of being reliant on someone else. Nevertheless, the lack of postings depicting female groups creates the impression that women are portrayed as more individualistic and less social, which does not correspond with previous research (cf. Brown, 1988; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Goffmann, 1988; William & Bennett, 1975).

The findings about male characters in advertising, as proposed for example by William and Bennett (1975), can be confirmed with the results of this study. As already stated above, the depiction of the male participants was very diverse and therefore gave the impression that the male characters can achieve their goals, take over multiple roles and be on the same level, as well as in active engagement with the viewer. All of those characteristics correspond with the idea of an active,

independent, strong and masculine character, as described in the literature (William & Bennett, 1975).

As has been discovered by former studies, female characters are often portrayed with a higher emphasis on their body, representing them in seducing, subordinate poses or with a high level of naked skin, whereas male characters are more often shown with a focus on their skills and independence instead (cf. Goffmann 1988, Grau & Zotos 2016). This impression cannot be fully confirmed, as the account does not depict male and female characters as outstandingly different in their body portrayal. Both genders are shown in athletic competition and therefore a certain level of emphasis on their outer appearance is inevitable and does fit with the overall purpose of the account. Even though the male and female participants are both portrayed in tight clothing matching the context of the sports they are performing there is no difference between the genders in this respect. The only result that slightly corresponds with such presumptions is the investigation of the *Vertical Angle* in which the female participants are depicted. As they are sometimes shot from below, in some of the images their curves are emphasised. Nevertheless, none of those depictions were perceived as objectifying or sexualised by the researcher.

The answers to both of the sub-question outlined in the previous paragraphs, already give a detailed response to the overall research question “How does the depiction of men and women on the official Nike Instagram account differ in regard to stereotypical attributes?”. Generally, it can be said that both the male and female participants are depicted through a stereotypical lens and the attributes that are ascribed to each of them, correspond with traditional gender stereotypes as having been described in previous research (Goffmann, 1988; William & Bennett, 1975). The female characters are underrepresented significantly in comparison to their male counterparts and therefore categorised as less important and credible. Furthermore, they are represented as less professional and instead emphasis is put on their outer appearance. Other than that, the male characters are

presented at a higher frequency, as more social and team-related, as well as more active and independent.

Nevertheless, other attributes, such as women not being independent, being portrayed as subordinate and sexualised were not found in the analysis. The finding that male and female characters are still shown in a different way, regarding their spatial presence and the diversity of their roles, positions within the image frame and embedding in a narrative and conceptual structure, provides an essential implication about the equality of both genders on the social media account. This inequality also corresponds with the stereotypical norms of male characters being expected to be more powerful, dominant and strong (Goffmann, 1988; William & Bennett, 1975).

6. Conclusion

The present thesis investigated the potential use of gender stereotypes as a marketing tool for advertisements on social media platforms. By performing a semiotic and content analysis on the case study of Nike's Instagram profile, the researcher has discovered that traditional gender stereotypes are still used. This gets especially clear when considering the frequency and diversity of the representations. Thus this thesis showed that even a global company like Nike, that is famous for its modern advertising, still unequally portrays male and female characters.

Overall, it can be said, that the results of this study are mostly in line with the outcomes of other studies on gender stereotypes in marketing. Social Media Marketing, just as traditional marketing, still makes use of stereotypical attributes to create an easily understandable and appealing picture for their audience. In the case of Nike, this is not achieved through the utilisation of obvious stereotypical representations, such as the housewife or the businessman. Instead, the stereotypical attributes are appropriated to the context of sports marketing and conveyed more subtly and subliminally. This is realised through different components, such as the number of represented participants, their gazes, the narrative and conceptual presentation, the use of vertical and horizontal angles and the

modality of the representations. In the analysis, it was found that there is a significant difference in how male and female participants are represented on the Instagram account. Men are portrayed as more active, engaging, dominant and powerful. Women, on the other hand, are depicted as less powerful, more passive and less diverse in their representations. This corresponds with the findings of various other researchers, who have investigated which stereotypical attributes are typically assigned to women and men and are therefore also used frequently in gender-related marketing strategies (cf. Brown, 1988; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Goffmann, 1988; William & Bennett, 1975). The most crucial difference has been found for the variable *Represented Participants*, as it illustrates the different power-relations of both genders on the Instagram account. The male participants are depicted on the majority of the publications, either individually or as part of a group, whereas the female participants are only shown in a small percentage of the overall publications and are represented in a less diverse fashion.

Similar results were found for the other variables, showing a clear tendency towards a domination and higher diversity of the male participants. Nevertheless, none of the representations obviously evokes a negative connotation, objectifies or sexualises either the male or female participants. Therefore, inequality between the depiction of the two genders was found, including the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes. However, the roles and narratives in which both male and female characters are embedded in are exclusively positive.

6.1 Limitations and Outlook

The main limitation of this study is the small sample size and thus, the limited insight that could be provided into the gender portrayal in sports social media marketing. Due to the spatial limitations of this thesis, only one case study with a sample size of one year has been determined. Therefore, the impression that was gained by the researcher cannot be generalised for overall sports marketing and

is also limited in providing results of the general Nike social media marketing. This becomes clear when looking at the company's Instagram publications in the year 2019 (@nike, retrieved 25th of March 2019). 93% of those postings depict female participants, whereas only one image portrays a male American football player. Furthermore, two pictures and one motion picture represent a female group, whereas there is no male group depicted. One video is especially interesting in the light of this analysis. It was published on the 24th of February 2019 and has gone viral with over 19 Million views so far (@nike, retrieved 25th of March 2019). The video with the title *Show them what crazy dreams can do* addresses the issue of female stereotypes and outlines how successful female athletes often have to cope with labels such as being crazy or over-emotional. Here it can be seen that a larger sample size, including an examination of the 2019 publications could already lead to a difference in results. Therefore, future research could investigate this sudden change in the representation of female athletes on Nike's Instagram page.

Further studies could, on the one hand, focus on Nike as a brand and investigate their entire Instagram channel, or possibly widen the sample size furthermore by also taking the other channels @nikewomen, @niketraining, @nikesportswear into consideration. In order to be able to generalise the results for overall sports marketing, the case study of Nike could be compared to other sports retail companies, such as Adidas, Reebok or Puma, to find out whether specific trends about stereotypical gender portrayal can be found in Instagram marketing.

Another limitation of the work is the methodological framework. As already mentioned in the method section, the categories, which were initially developed by Bell and Milic (2002) only provide a scheme for analysing still images. Therefore, the values had to be adjusted to the analysis of videos. In order to enable the investigation of both still and motion pictures, multiple variables have been added, and some of the existing variables have been modified during the research process. As the videos often make use of different angles and gazes, the three categories *Gaze*, *Vertical*

Angle and *Horizontal Angle*, could not be fully utilised and adapted to this particular analysis.

Consequently, preceding research could either focus exclusively on the images, complement the methodological framework with categories, which were specifically designed for the study of videos or perform two analyses, each for the images and the videos, with separate variables which are explicitly developed for the examination of either of them.

Additionally, the variable system of Bell & Milic (2002) builds a base for the analysis of marketing images and video content, but the eight variables only give limited insight into possible components that might influence the (non-) stereotypical depiction of male and female participants. Therefore, the system has to be appropriated to the context of each study and developed further, by introducing additional variables which are also related to stereotypical representations.

Since the semiotic content analysis was performed solely by one researcher, who was highly invested in the whole research process, potential bias cannot be entirely prevented. Even though, the researcher was aware of the concept of decentralisation (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2007), the engagement of a second researcher who is not familiar with the topic and the research-questions as a coder would be recommended for further research. Thereby wrong tendencies or preferences of certain interpretations could be reduced, and the reliability of the research increased.

However, the results of this study contribute to the field of social media marketing and sports advertising, in the way that they provide further insight into gender stereotypes in sports marketing in the year 2018. The case study chosen only includes information about one example but can serve as a benchmark for the sports marketing of other companies and as a general update about trends in the field.

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8. Appendix

List of Tables

Table 13 and 14: Tables for the variable Gaze (Pictures and Videos)

1. Pictures

	Gaze at the viewer	Gaze away from the viewer	No gaze	Total
Male	3 (17)	14 (78)	1 (5)	18 (100)
Female	-	4 (80)	1 (20)	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	1 (50)	1 (50)	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	-

2. Videos

	Gaze at the viewer	Gaze away from the viewer	Alternating gaze	No gaze	Total
Male	-	5 (56)	4 (44)	-	9 (100)
Female	-	3 (75)	1 (25)	-	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	1 (20)	2 (80)	-	3 (100)
Mixed Group	-	3 (60)	2 (40)	-	5 (100)

Table 15 and 16: Tables for the variable Framed Distance (Pictures and Videos)

1. Pictures

	Intimate/ personal dis- tance	Partial intimate/per- sonal distan- ce	Social Dis- tance	Public Distance	Total
Male	7 (39)	6 (33)	-	5 (28)	18 (100)
Female	4 (80)	-	-	1 (20)	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	2 (100)	-	-	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	-	-

2. Videos

	Intimate/ personal distance	Partial intimate/ personal distance	Social Dis- tance	Public Distance	Mixture	Total
Male	1 (11)	2 (22)	-	-	6 (67)	9 (100)
Female	-	-	-	1 (25)	3 (75)	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	1 (33)	-	-	2 (77)	3 (100)
Mixed Group	-	2 (40)	-	-	3 (60)	5 (100)

Table 17 and 18: Table for the variable Narrative Presentation (Pictures and Videos)

1. Pictures

	Actor	Narrative Goal	Behavior/ Expressor	Reactor	Absent	Total
Male	2 (11)	1 (6)	12 (68)	1 (6)	2 (11)	18 (100)
Female	-	-	3 (60)	2 (40)	-	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	-	-	2 (100)	-	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	-	-	-

2. Videos

	Actor	Narrative Goal	Behavior/ Expressor	Reactor	Absent	Compilation	Total
Male	1 (11)	1 (11)	3 (33)	-	1 (11)	3 (33)	9 (100)
Female	-	-	2 (50)	-	-	2 (50)	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	2 (67)	1 (33)	-	-	-	-	3 (100)
Mixed Group	1 (20)	-	2 (40)	-	-	2 (40)	5 (100)

Table 19 and 20: Table for the variable Conceptual Presentation (Pictures and Videos)

1. Pictures

	Classificational	Analytic	Symbolic	Absent	Total
Male	1 (5)	3 (17)	7 (39)	7 (39)	18 (100)
Female	-	-	3 (60)	2 (40)	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	-	2 (100)	-	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	-	-

2. Videos

	Classificational	Analytic	Symbolic	Absent	Total
Male	2 (22)	1 (11)	3 (33)	3 (33)	9 (100)
Female	-	1 (25)	2 (50)	1 (25)	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	3 (100)	-	-	-	3 (100)
Mixed Group	2 (40)	-	3 (60)	-	5 (100)

Table 21 and 22: Table for the variable Vertical Angle (Videos and Overall)

1. Videos

	High	Medium	Low	Alternating	Total
Male	-	2 (22)	-	7 (78)	9 (100)
Female	-	1 (25)	-	3 (75)	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	-	-	3 (100)	3 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	5 (100)	5 (100)

2. Overall

	High	Medium	Low	Alternating	Total
Male	1	13 (48)	6 (22)	7 (26)	27 (100)
Female	-	3 (33)	3 (33)	3 (33)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	2 (40)	-	3 (60)	5 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	5 (100)	5 (100)

Table 23 and 24: Table for the variable Horizontal Angle (Videos and Overall)

1. Videos

	Frontal	Oblique	Alternating	Total
Male	-	2 (22)	7 (78)	9 (100)
Female	-	-	4 (100)	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-
Male Group	-	-	3 (100)	3 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	5 (100)	5 (100)

2. Overall

	Frontal	Oblique	Alternating	Total
Male	9 (33)	11 (41)	7 (26)	27 (100)
Female	-	5 (66)	4 (44)	9 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-
Male Group	2 (40)	-	3 (60)	5 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	5 (100)	5 (100)

Table 25 and 26: Table for the variable Modality (Pictures and Videos)

1. Pictures

	Standard	Factual	Fantasy	Total
Male	10 (56)	7 (39)	1 (5)	18 (100)
Female	2 (40)	2 (40)	1 (20)	5 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-
Male Group	2 (100)	-	-	2 (100)
Mixed Group	-	-	-	-

2. Videos

	Standard	Factual	Fantasy	Total
Male	3 (33)	4 (44)	2 (22)	9 (100)
Female	2 (50)	2 (50)	-	4 (100)
Female Group	-	-	-	-
Male Group	2 (67)	1 (23)	-	3 (100)
Mixed Group	4 (80)	1 (20)	-	5 (100)

9. Anti-Plagiarism Statement



Faculty of Humanities
Version September 2014
Fraud and Plagiarism

PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;



- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.



Universiteit Utrecht

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.

Name: Natasha Nefzer
Student number: 6518745

Date and signature: Utrecht, 12.04.2019

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.