Understanding Social Media Shopping

Instagram and the reconfiguration of the practice of shopping

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LUND
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Abstract

In the recent past, social media has gradually evolved from a platfrom for communication and personal exchange to a space where contemporary consumer desires are awakened, directed, and also fulfilled. Instagram, in particular, is one of the social media platforms that has made specific design decisions to combine the social and entertaining aspects of the native, virtual social media experience with shopping and consumption. At the same time, Instagram and similar platforms have become an integral and meaningful part of many people's daily routines.

Based on these considerations, this dissertation examines the consequences of introducing social media to the practice of shopping. Using a sociomaterial practice approach, it examines how social media – as a sociomaterial assemblage – reconfigures shopping. Drawing on a digital ethnography centering on Instagram as the research field for collecting empirical material, it conceptualizes and vividly illustrates how social media shopping is emerging as a new form of shopping, what defines, enables, and constrains it, and shows how social media ultimately shapes practical shopping enactments.

Moreover, this work conceptualizes the social media shopper as a hybrid actor that is shaped and constituted by both virtual and analog, both human and non-human entities. It presents how this actor, referred to as the "social media shopper", is gradually taking shape in and through practice, while also pointing to the consequences that this form of shopping has for its practitioners' everyday lives. It is shown that social media shopping can be both a leisure activity and a demanding profession – often resulting in practitioners having to meet different demands at the same time. For example, they often feel challenged as they must simultaneously cater to their audience and their personal relationships, or maintain individuality and authenticity while adhering to specific social media scripts.

As such, this work expands our understanding of how humans and technologies interact and constitute each other. This dissertation also allows us to more critically understand the role that technology plays in everyday life by illuminating both positive and negative implications. By showing how social media contributes to the blurring of previously established boundaries and roles – such as buyer/seller or digital/analog etc. – it demonstrates that social media is decisively contributing to shopping becoming an integral part of the mundane and ordinary life of a mostly young, very social media-savvy consumer group. This dissertation therefore offers new insights into the understanding of novel, technology-driven consumption habits, and sheds light on a special group of consumers who have firmly integrated social media into their everyday lives. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discussion on the transformation and digitalization of retail.

Key words social media shopping, Instagram shopping, shopping practice, practice theory

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Spotlight on social media: "Social shopping 2.0"

"Today, people are doing it just for the '*gram*" (Kozlowska, 2018, n.p.). A survey commissioned by Barclaycard found that nearly one in ten UK customers admits to buying clothes deliberately with the aim of taking a photo for social media, only to return them after snapping the perfect shot for Instagram (Ritschel, 2018). While this phenomenon of "wear and return" might represent an extreme of the Instagram age (Kozlowska, 2018), it is only one of many examples of how social media is transforming shopping.

Already back in 2015, reality TV personality and social media star Kylie Jenner created a veritable social media shopping hype by launching the first @kyliecosmetics lipstick line, which sold out in just a few seconds. More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, trending hashtags like #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt have not only generated billions of video views worldwide, but also emptied supermarket shelves as consumers began repurchasing the very items they had seen in "trending" videos on social media platforms. Bella Hadid's "Penne alla Vodka", and equally simple recipes like "Baked Feta Pasta", took social networks by storm and found countless imitators. All this makes social media's impact on contemporary shopping practice hard to ignore. Indeed, these and many other examples show that social media is instrumental in increasing awareness of consumer goods and brands, often rapidly and even exponentially. At the same time, viral social media content in particular – which is frequently connected to such goods, features or advertises them – creates a certain desirability around these very products or brands.

As a result, social media has become a space where contemporary consumer desires are created, guided and also fulfilled. While the classic e-commerce model refers to a shopping experience via a distinct website or brand app, social media enables consumers to have countless potential brand experiences on a single platform. Several studies and reports from industry experts already point to the relevance of this development for social media-savvy consumers, and predict that it could have long-term implications and evolve rapidly. Indeed, media magazines and research institutes predict a swift increase in (direct) sales via social media in the coming years. According to the consulting firm Accenture, sales via "social commerce" could almost triple from the most recent figure of $492 billion in 2021 to as much

as $1.2 trillion in 2025. Currently, China is considered the absolute pioneer in this business. According to the same study, 463 million people in China alone already earn money from their social media activities, and even more buy on or via social media. But this development is a global one – and, as Accenture goes on to say, "this is just the start" (Murdoch, Wright, Fang Grant, Collins, & McCracken, 2022; n.p.).

How can this new phenomenon be understood? What does it include (and exclude) and how do we conceptualize this new mode of shopping? Within the academic discussion, shopping driven by and enabled through social media is frequently associated with electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and with digital platforms where shoppers actively show and discuss their recent purchases or shopping experiences, as well as with review and rating systems connected to online shops that are used by consumers to provide and collect product-related information (e.g., Hajli, 2015; Li, 2017; Shanmugam et al., 2016).

Research has used various terms to refer to this emerging form of shopping: "social commerce" (or "s-commerce" for short) and "social shopping" are the most commonly used names. To explain the distinction between these terms, Marsden (2011) suggests that social commerce can be best understood as "adding a social layer to retail", while "social shopping", on the other hand, is the more consumer-centric term, as it points towards what people do (Marsden, 2011). "Social media shopping" was coined by industry professionals (e.g. Hutchinson, 2022; Salzano-Birch, 2022) and it is seldom used by academics, but when it is, it is typically as an alternative phrasing for s-commerce, rather than as a separate concept in itself (e.g. as in Abdul Talib & Mat Saat, 2017; Kian, Boonb, Fongc, & Aid, 2017).

In line with Marden's (2011) thoughts on "social shopping" as a consumer-centric term, I will in this dissertation refer to the phenomenon under study as "social media shopping". This choice of term reflects my intention to focus on, and understand, the shopper – the consumer, the user, the creator, the influencer – and their doings and sayings, practical enactments, and position in the social commerce ecosystem. Based on these considerations, then, *"social media shopping" is used here to refer to consumers' shopping activities that are enabled by, or closely interlinked, with social media.*

This view on the phenomenon under study has certain implications. First, focusing on the consumer allows me to leave out company-related activities. Indeed, a consequence of conceptualizing the object of study as "social media shopping" is that it excludes certain aspects of social commerce. It does not look at the way brands or retailers use social media to identify and engage with potential customers, how they advertise on social media, or the way they build and improve technical structures, or use third-party commerce enablers to sell their products and services on social media, to name a few examples of what both industry professionals and academics have covered under the umbrella of s-commerce (e.g., Baghadi, 2016;

Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Mikolajczyk, 2021). From this perspective, social media shopping is not the same as social commerce. Social media shopping is, however, the *consumer side of social commerce,* and therefore a specific part of it.

Second, this conceptualization of social media shopping is open in terms of shopping activities. It neither limits shopping to purchasing, nor initially separates social and commercial activities. Instead of seeing social activities as "drivers" or "supporters" of behavioral intentions towards commercial activities (as implied in e.g., Hajli, Sims, Zadeh, & Richard, 2017; Hung & Li, 2007; Lever, Mulvey, & Elliot, 2017), social media shopping, as the term is used here, does not draw a clear line between these categories of activities, nor does it focus on studying causal relationships. From this perspective, social media shopping can include commercial activities such as buying on or via social media from retailers and brands. It can also involve customer-to-consumer trade relationships; for example, when users offer and/or buy (pre-used) clothes on their personal social media profiles, or when everyday shoppers or social media influencers publicly recommend (non-)sponsored products (e.g. as in Abidin, 2016a, 2017; Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Thus, and in line with the vast majority of studies on s-commerce, social media shopping can include recommending, promoting (both examples of eWOM) and even selling products. In addition, the concept of social media shopping, as used here and further developed throughout this dissertation, encompasses a variety of exchange-related activities such as browsing social media platforms (e.g., as in Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017) or other profiles for shopping inspiration, displaying and showcasing purchased products on one's personal social media profile (e.g. as in Abidin, 2016a; Hund & McGuigan, 2019), or interacting with other users and their content in the form of "liking", "commenting", "sharing" or "re-posting". As will be shown in the course of the analysis, proposing such an open concept of shopping activities implies that the boundaries between buying, selling, leisure and entertainment are fluid and blurred.

Third, and as implied in many previous studies that center on shopping and technology (e.g., Elms et al., 2016; Fuentes et al., 2017; Samsioe & Fuentes, 2021), it does not regard the object of study as a phenomenon tied solely to the web. At least parts of the activities involved in this form of shopping – including social interactions – are often, but not solely, of virtual nature and consist of visual and written rather than spoken discourse. To clarify, the concept of social media shopping proposed in this dissertation allows us to understand it not just as an activity solely associated with the virtual, but as a specific variation of shopping that encompasses multiple activities that take place both on- and offline.

As I will explain in more detail later, this understanding of the phenomenon under study is, first, more focused than other conceptualizations in the current literature. Further, this conceptualization, in conjunction with the chosen research approach, allows me to understand the interplay of technology and humans and how they

mutually condition and configure one another, which has received rather little attention in the current s-commerce literature.

Techological developments that enabled social media shopping

Despite a lack of clarity regarding the terminology and scope of the concept, in previous research there is a broad agreement that shopping enabled by, or closely interlinked with, social media has its roots in social networking and, in addition, in Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Huang & Benyoucef, 2017; Liang & Turban, 2011; Lin et al., 2017; Shanmugam, Sun, Amidi, Khani, & Khani, 2016). Web 2.0, which esentially refers to "developments in online technology that enable interactive capabilities in an environment characterized by user control, freedom, and dialogue" (Calliandro, 2017, p. 2; O'Reilly, 2005), has inherently altered the ways in which people communicate, collaborate and live (Busalim & Hussin, 2016), as these technologies and corresponding tools and applications initally allowed bidirectional communication in online settings (Baghdadi, 2016). Moreover, they provided users with a variety of novel methods for creating and sharing user-generated content (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011) – an essential element of social media – which ultimately facilitated greater collaboration and exchange among users (Lai & Turban, 2008). Hajli (2014) speaks of the transformation of users into "content creators" enabled through technology, leading, according to Hajli and Sims (2015), to the empowerment of users.

In line with this, the vast majority of studies that have explored social media and its connection to shopping share the position that technology enables shoppers to seek inspiration and advice from an endless number of other users, and likewise faciliates the provision of shopping guidance for others. It enables shoppers to act as commercial mediators (Hund & McGuigan, 2019) and trustworthy peers (Shin, 2013), and allows participants to actively shape both their own and other users' shopping experiences.

Thus, in the context of shopping, technology is, according to these studies, used to mimic and expand on offline shopping experiences, and to blend the social aspects of shopping and consumption with the native, virtual social media experience (Pahwa, 2017).

The commercialization of social media

Within marketing practice, social media was once used primarily for brand building and customer engagement (Williams, 2017). Today, this is no longer exclusively the case. Social media has become a "force to be reckoned with" for many retailers and has visibly changed the sales landscape (Williams, 2017, n.p.). Marketers first acknowledged its commercial potential, and especially that for selling, when consumers started to share the things they were buying on social media with friends and peers (Uzialko, 2017). Although Baghadi (2016) not long ago claimed that none of the major social media networks has figured out how to bring commercial transactions *directly* to their platforms, all relevant players in social media including Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, TikTok and co. have (at the time of writing) at least experimented with the integration of services specifically for shopping purposes into their sites. While some attempts have failed (e.g., Twitter removed its "buy now button" only two years after its launch), others have already successfully established commercial features (e.g., Facebook's "Marketplace" feature and Pinterest's "shoppable pins"), or are currently in the process of launching and establishing them (e.g., TikTok's "live shopping"). Indeed, and as noted by Erdly (2021), the development of shopping features on social media platforms is currently "chasing up the priority list" (n.p.).

To date, three platforms dominate the social media shopping scene: Facebook, Instagram and, more recently, TikTok (Fernie, 2021). Part of this is likely due to these social networks' size and their respective user numbers, but Instagram in particular has made a variety of distinct design decisions to blend social media and shopping, and therefore set the stage for this novel form of shopping (Small, 2018). Indeed, in early 2017, Instagram's "social media shopping game" gained momentum. The social media platform not only transformed the product discovery experience by introducing "Instagram shopping", it also considerably shortened the path to purchase, as brands began to transform their profiles into virtual storefronts. They did this by using their accounts to showcase images that show products in their "natural habitats" (Koss, 2018, n.p.). In addition, brands and retailers also started to include links to their online shops in their profile bios[1] to redirect potential customers to a shoppable gallery version of their Instagram feeds (Berber, 2016; Koss, 2018), and more recently used "shoppable posts" to directly tag the products featured on their social media content.

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[1] The profile bio is a space below the username on an Instagram profile page that is generally used to add a description to the profile.

As a visually driven platform with nearly one billion active users worldwide, who share countless images, reels[2], stories[3], comments and likes, Instagram is one of the most progressive social networks that blurs the lines between entertainment, social interactions and commerce.

Social media and consumers: A new form of shopping?

The changes and developments in shopping described above are, of course, only made possible by the broader digitalization of everyday life. Social media – including blogs, online communities and content-sharing platforms of all kinds – have gained crucial relevance for contemporary everyday life. Indeed, one could say, social media and everyday life are becoming increasingly intertwined.

Particularly, users increasingly search for news and information updates, seek entertainment (globalwebindex, 2020), and communicate and exchange information on social networks (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). Indeed, and as aptly stated by industry research, "when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, social media became the primary way of communicating and socializing for many people all over the world, almost overnight" (globalwebindex, 2020, p. 9). Accordingly, the average time spent per day on social networks has grown significantly within the recent past. According to industry research, European users[4] spend on average about two hours engaging with social media during a typical day, and younger generations[5] more than three hours a day (globalwebindex, 2020).

However, it is not only the time spent on social platforms, but also users' attachment to mobile devices that makes social media shopping a highly relevant topic. An earlier study from the same research institute found that nearly 58% of global users[6] classify mobile phones as their most important device for accessing the web. This finding points to a shift from online shopping being a PC- or laptop-centric activity, to a mobile-first activity. This significant change in users' device preferences laid the groundwork for social media shopping, since mobile devices and the corresponding software and applications enabled a seamless combination of commercial transactions, shopping-related activities and social functions (globalwebindex, 2017).

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[2] Reels refer to a distinct type of short video that can be recorded, edited and watched within the app.

[3] Stories or Instagram stories is a posting format within the app that is available for 24 hours after posting before it automatically disappears.

[4] The study included users born between 1955 and 2003.

[5] European users born between 1997 and 2003; the study refers to these users as "Gen Z".

[6] The study included users born between 1955 and 2003.

Taken together, advanced Internet technologies, and more specifically the progress of social media platforms and rising smartphone ownership, have implications for contemporary shopping habits (e.g. see for example Fuentes, Bäckström, & Svingstedt, 2017; Fuentes & Sörum, 2018; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017; Hund & McGuigan, 2019). In light of rapid developments in business practice, as well as growing academic interest in the phenomenon, social media shopping has long ceased to be a short-lived trend, and the rate of everyday use of social networks and mobile devices suggests an impact on routinized day-to-day practices.

If mobile technologies such as social media have become an omnipresent part of many peoples' everyday lives, how do they become integrated into the practice of shopping, as they are embedded into daily routines? How does this affect related activities and consumption situations? What are the consequences and potential implications when users use social media shopping to jump on the bandwagon of the currently hyped influencer culture to become (semi-) professional social media shoppers?

Given these various questions and potential areas of research, it is not surprising that this new form of shopping has gained considerable attention among practitioners and academics alike.

Previous research on shopping on or via social media

What do we already know about this particular mode of shopping? As previously mentioned, the phenomenon I refer to as social media shopping has mainly been discussed in the field of s-commerce[7]. However, and as Yadav et al. (2013) observe, "there is much confusion about what the term social commerce means" (p. 312). To date, it has been used to refer to a variety of business-related activities, but also to activities that focus on how shoppers engage with digital marketplaces.

Studies that center on company-related activities tend to focus on website design and on the creation and optimization of social commerce environments, or social commerce features. This can be, for example, online communities or forums where shoppers can interact with each other, co-create and share content, or the implementation of review and rating systems in an online store (e.g. Baghdadi,

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[7] Most studies that focus on shopping and social media fall within the s-commerce literature. However, there are also a few studies that understand this type of shopping somewhat more generally as a form of online shopping (e.g. Koay, Teoh & Soh, 2021; Lubis, Amelia, Ramadhani, Pane, & Lubis, 2019; Muhammad & Hartono, 2021; Pan, Alharethi, & Bhandari, 2019). Some of these online shopping studies that center on the commercial aspects of social media also differentiate according to the platform they focus on. For example, some studies speak of "Facebook commerce" or "f-commerce" (e.g. Jian, Fakhar, Imran, & Abdul Waheed, 2022) as a distinct form of online or s-commerce, to name a few examples.

2016; Gonçalves Curty & Zhang, 2013). Accounts of consumer-related activities often focus on purchases and transactions in online environments guided or influenced by "social content" (Yadav et al., 2013). Despite these differences, studies in this field share the common understanding that s-commerce, fundamentally, combines commercial activities, or e-commerce activities, and online sociality. While online sociality can take various forms, in most cases, it is associated with the exchange of (product) information directly related to a purchasing decision. In this sense, s-commerce is understood as a particularly collaborative form of shopping that uses publicly visible recommendations, reviews and ratings to reduce existing information asymmetries between buyers and sellers. As summarized by Curty and Zhang (2012), "consumers make informed decisions based on information not only from the firms, but also from other consumers. Firms can make more profits by attracting and alluring potential buyers via positive recommendations by existing consumers" (p. 1).

While a more thorough literature review is presented in chapter two, here I will briefly review the main streams of research within this field. Academic research on this topic can be broadly categorized into information technology literature and traditional marketing literature.

A considerable body of work that refers to the phenomenon under study as social commerce has focused on defining or describing the nature of this relatively new form of shopping enabled by and mediated through technology (e.g. Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Liang & Turban, 2011; Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017; Stephen & Toubia, 2010; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016); other studies have investigated its development and evolution (e.g. Curty & Zhang, 2012; Wang & Zhang, 2012). Much of this research has looked at the characteristics and design features of social commerce websites, and investigated how these elements shape consumer participation (e.g. Baghdadi, 2016; Curty & Zhang, 2012; Curty & Zhang, 2013; Hajli, 2015; Li, 2019). These studies not only provide detailed accounts of the fundamental characteristics of s-commerce sites, they also shed light on a variety of commercial activities undertaken by both marketers (e.g., marketing activities, advertising, providing customer service) and consumers (e.g., writing reviews, ratings, information sourcing, collaborating, buying) (Liang & Turban, 2011).

Previous research has also focused on social influence issues, and more specifically on how sociability and (online) sociality attract consumers to engage with s-commerce sites (e.g. Li & Ku, 2017; Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011; Tajvidi, Wang, Hajli, & Love, 2017; Yahia, Al-Neama, & Kerbache, 2018). Using theories related to social interactions and social processes, these studies looked at how factors such as social support (e.g., Liang et al., 2011), social presence (e.g. Lu, Fan, & Zhou, 2016), self-presentation (e.g., Li & Ku, 2017) and trust (e.g. Dong-hee, 2013) influence particular outcome measures including consumer attitudes, perceptions and purchasing intentions. For instance, previous research has highlighted the importance of trust in both the platform and the seller, and has shown that perceived

trust can stimulate commercial activities (e.g., Hajli et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2016; Yahia et al., 2018). In line with this, much research has focused on the importance of emotional and informational support from other shoppers in terms of consumer feedback and user content, and its impact on various commercial outcome measures (e.g., Hajli & Sims, 2015; Tajvidi et al., 2017).

Taken together, previous s-commerce research has already provided much knowledge about how website features and functionalities that enable and promote interactions between consumers can be used by retailers and marketers. Such research has also provided interesting knowledge about the impact of sociality on purchasing decisions in an online context. However, as will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, there is a lack of understanding of how this particular form of shopping has been integrated into daily life and the consequences of this.

Problem discussion

Despite the increasing interest in this topic, few scholars to date have examined shopping related to social media from a consumer perspective. More specifically, there are three important shortcomings in previous research.

First, the bulk of research within this domain focuses on the business side of this form of shopping, discussing, for example, the elements of s-commerce platforms and technical and design features of social commerce websites (e.g. Baghdadi, 2016; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Ismail, Dahlan, & Hussin, 2017), features of social commerce businesses (e.g., Kim, 2013), or potential ways of enhancing user engagement in social commerce contexts (e.g. Herrando, Jiménez-Martínez, & Martín-De Hoyos, 2017).

Second, where studies have approached the issue from a consumer perspective, the focus has often been on attitudes and behavioral intentions. In fact, assessing purchasing intentions seems to be the "ultimate outcome" of many models used in the s-commerce literature (Wang & Yu, 2017, p. 180): The majority of research in this field so far has evaluated consumers' purchasing intentions and factors that influence these intentions (e.g., Kim & Park, 2012; Wang & Yu. 2015; Hajli & Sims, 2015; Hsu et al., 2016; Lu, Fan & Zhou, 2016; Aladwani, 2018; Shanmugam et al., 2016; Lu, Fan & Zhou, 2016; Hajli, 2015; Huang & Benyoucef, 2017; Li, 2017; Erdogmus & Tatar, 2015). Only a few scholars have recognized exchange-related activities as part of social commerce, and few have investigated activities that are not inherently commercial by nature (e.g., Ko, 2018; 2013; Pöyry et al., 2013, Yadav et al., 2013). In fact, most studies seem to share the notion that typical social media activities such as sharing "thoughts, information about a news event, photos or jokes for amusement" (Liang & Turban, 2012, p. 7) are part of sociality but are of limited

relevance to understanding social commerce, and thus the emergence of these activities is rarely studied in detail. Moreover, current research has largely overlooked the details of participation in this form of shopping, what makes engagement meaningful, and how it relates to broader cultural realities.

Third, and connected to the issues mentioned above, our understanding of this topic is primarily based on quantitative approaches and positivistic research approaches. Most studies in the field of s-commerce incorporate theoretical models that present the relationship between one or more variables on certain predictable outcomes, where this outcome usually equates to a commercial transaction. While qualitative approaches are almost non-existent, some of these theoretical models, such as the theory of planned behavior (e.g., Hajli et al., 2015), the stimulus organism response model (e.g. Erdoğmuş & Tatar, 2015), the technology acceptance model (e.g. Hajli & Lin, 2015) and the theory of reasoned action (e.g. Kim & Park, 2013) have been almost over-studied and overused (Nadeem, 2016). Mainly rooted in consumer psychology, these texts regard shoppers as rational actors and information processors who make decisions based on information, benefits and costs. From this perspective, shopping is assumed to be mainly an economically motivated, rational task, leaving social and cultural aspects aside.

In summary, while previous research has provided valuable insights into certain aspects of the phenomenon under study, it does not make the connection between practical enactments and other, mundane aspects of everyday life. If we accept that social media is intimately connected to daily life, having become part of everyday routines, it needs to be understood as more than just a tool that allows users to do certain things and that supports certain doings and sayings. We need research that goes past intentions and perceptions and focuses instead on the activities of users and, in particular, on the interactions and entanglements between humans and technology. We need to deepen our understanding of how this new form of shopping takes shape, and what is enabling, influencing and constraining its performance. We need to understand how shopping is being transformed by social media and how it relates to other everyday practices as users integrate this type of shopping into their daily lives. What is needed is research that seeks to understand the implications of integrating technology into everyday practices.

Such knowledge is necessary in order to understand the role that social media can play in consumers' practices and decisions and to gain an advanced understanding of social media practice itself. Thus, such knowledge is also relevant for brands and retailers to be able to manage branding and marketing activities related to social media. The complexity of shopping, including its underlying meanings and an understanding of what is needed to perform practical enactments, must also be taken into account in order to further develop existing social media platforms, create future platforms, or even establish new or related business models. Moreover, such a consideration of the phenomenon is important to shift the focus from understanding commercial agendas to a more nuanced and critical consideration of

the implications of introducing social media to shopping practice for individual users, and for society as a whole.

A sociomaterial practice approach

In order to address the shortcomings in the existing research, and by regarding social media shopping as a regularly and repeatedly carried out everyday life performance, the present study positions itself within the growing body of literature that conceptualizes shopping as a social practice (e.g. Elms, de Kervenoael, & Hallsworth, 2016; Fuentes, 2011; Fuentes, 2014; Fuentes, Enarsson, & Kristoffersson, 2019; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017; Hagberg, 2016; Keller & Ruus, 2014; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). This line of research suggests that there is not just one way of shopping. On the contrary, shopping-as-practice research emphasizes that there are a variety of shopping modes (ways or forms of shopping), each of which is distinguished by a distinct composition of activities, meanings, materials and competences. Thus, the shopping-as-practice approach assumes that shopping encompasses much more than buying; it views shopping as tied to a web of many other related practices. Based on these considerations, shoppers are viewed as skilled practitioners who actively partake in a variety of social practices and, moreover, are part of different social formations whose commonly shared rules and understandings guide their practical enactments.

Furthermore, by putting a specific emphasis on sociomateriality, this dissertation aligns with posthuman practice theories. Sociomaterial approaches regard the social and the material as "equal" and intertwined (e.g. see Orlikowski, 2007, 2010; Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). Materiality is seen as a heterogeneous assemblage of human and non-human, physical and virtual elements that constitute how social practices, such as shopping, take shape. More specifically, these elements work together to constitute the "making" of social practices, as well as their practitioners. Based on the overarching assumption that social media is an integral part of everyday life and that the two are entangled and mutually dependent, I deliberately do not regard social media as a mediating technical system that, by virtue of its material properties, "simply" enables or supports certain forms of human activity and social action. Rather, a sociomaterial practice approach allows us to take a different stance on the object of study, and depart from the understanding of technology as linear and mediating, as proposed in many s-commerce studies.

By viewing social media as a sociomaterial assemblage that involves a variety of actors and agents in its creation, we can develop our understanding of how people and technologies interact with and constitute each other; how they develop and are made in and through practice. Sociomateriality as a theoretical standpoint and alternative approach to existing accounts of shopping on or via social media, then,

can provide a clear understanding of how social media configures and continues to reconfigure everyday practices and their practitioners, because it enables an examination of all elements involved and how they interact with each other.

Aim, research questions and contributions

Against this background, this dissertation sets out to empirically explore how social media shopping is performed in everyday life. The aim of this study is to contribute to and expand the discussion of s-commerce by exploring how social media, as a disruptive technology that has become an integral and meaningful part of many people's daily routines, reconfigures the practice of shopping. The first research question reads as follows:

RQ1: How is social media used in shopping practice?

In order to answer this question and to develop an understanding of *what* is needed to perform it, I use Shove, Pantzar and Watson's (2012) conceptualization of social practices as consisting of *materials, meanings* and *competences*[8]. Focusing on these three elements makes it possible to grasp which aspects are involved in social media shopping, and to examine how shopping practice changes with regard to changes in one of these three dimensions. From this perspective, and following Hargreaves' (2011) framing, social media shopping is understood as an accumulation of images that includes meanings, symbols and experiences, and that requires the use of distinct objects (e.g., a mobile device such as a smartphone, access to the Internet) as well as skills and knowledge (e.g., knowledge of social media directives, technology usage) that are dynamically linked by practitioners through both regular and repeated enactments.

Whereas the first research question can be answered empirically, the response to the second is based on an analytical discussion. Christensen and Røpke (2010) point out that practices are embedded in the ever-changing dynamics of social, economic, cultural and technological contexts. As mentioned already, for social media shopping, the most important changes have been technological and social.

Shopping is just one of many practices which have been affected by the changes described earlier in this chapter. Previous research has already documented that broader technological innovations including the Internet (Elms et al., 2016), mobile

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[8] As will be explained in detail later, the distinction between meanings, materials and competences should be understood as an analytical one. This distinction, which has also been used by many other many practice theory researchers (e.g., Burningham, Venn, Christie, Jackson, & Gatersleben, 2014; Severine Gojard & Bérangère Véron, 2018), allows me to structure the empirical material, and later also the analysis, in a reasonable, practical way.

phones (Christensen & Røpke, 2010; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017) and different forms of media (e.g., Bräuchler & Postill, 2010) as well as social media (e.g. Middha, 2018; Woermann, 2012) have reconfigured social practices.

Drawing on this existing research, the present study seeks to enhance our knowledge of how the engaging qualities, characteristics and distinct features of social media, enabled through mobile devices and materialized in a distinct sociomaterial assemblage, define, enable and constrain not only shoppers' on- and offline shopping activities, but also their experiences, meanings and emotions, their strategies and tactics, tools, know-how and understandings (see also Elms et al., 2016), and therefore looks into the social and cultural complexities of shopping. Building on the first research question, the second question is:

> RQ2: How do social media platforms, as sociomaterial assemblages, shape shopping practices and their practitioners?

In answering these questions, the present work provides both a conceptualization of how social media shopping takes shape, and a rich and detailed empirical illustration of the phenomenon. It offers new insights for understanding a novel, technology-driven form of consumption, and thus adds to the broader discussion of retail change and the digitalization of shopping.

Taken together, the dissertation shows how social media shopping – as a specific mode of shopping – develops as practice. In addition, it offers an analysis of how the social media shopping practitioner as a specific type of actor takes shape in and through practice, while pointing towards the consequences that social media shopping has on the day-to-day lives of practitioners.

In doing so, the dissertation makes several contributions to two bodies of academic literature. First, it provides new insights for the s-commerce literature. Adopting a sociomaterial practice perspective allows for a shift in perspective: It enables us to see aspects of the study object that previous studies have not yet considered or fully addressed. Second, this study contributes to the literature on shopping as a practice (e.g. Elms et al., 2016; Fuentes, 2011; Fuentes, 2014; Fuentes et al., 2019; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017; Hagberg, 2016; Keller & Ruus, 2014; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019) not only by empirically illustrating a new mode of shopping, but also by advancing our understanding of how materials, and specifically, social media – as a complex sociomaterial assemblage – configure both practical enactments and practitioners. In this context, it is shown, among other things, that while social media contributes to increased consumption, its sociomaterial composition is by no means purely persuasive, merely enticing consumers to shop more. On the contrary, this work also illustrates how social media and shopping practice are mutually dependent and jointly constituted by a range of diverse actors and agents. Therefore, this work distances itself from the perspective that social media might simply "control" users and clearly points to a reciprocal relationship.

Methodologically, the present study is grounded in a digital ethnography. Ethnographies have a history in practice theory research (Pink et al., 2016), being mainly concerned with everyday life activities – the core of any practice (Christensen & Røpke, 2010). The collection of the empirical material is based on a multi-method approach. I use Instagram as an example of a social media platform that enables and promotes various shopping activities, and combine digital observations with media go-along interviews with users who actively use social media to shop.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of previous research related to the phenomenon of social media shopping. The chapter begins with a discussion about what shopping on or with social media is, and how researchers have made use of different terms to describe the phenomenon. Following this, I review the two most prominent streams of research within the current s-commerce literature. While one concentrates on the characteristics of social commerce and its design features, and therefore highlights firm-related activities and centers on evaluating its business potential, the other focuses on consumers. Finally, this chapter ends by outlining the research gap.

What is social commerce? Definitional debates in the s-commerce literature

The phenomenon under study has mainly been discussed in the field of social commerce, or s-commerce for short. Despite increasing recognition in academia, research in this area is still at an early stage of development (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that there is no universal or specific definition of the exact scope of social commerce (Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Liang & Turban, 2011), and that there are slight variations in terminology. Indeed, while writing my literature review it became clear that, to quote Kian and colleagues (2017), "there is lack of a standard definition of social commerce" (p. 215). For instance, Olbrich and Holsing (2011) define social commerce as the "linkage of online shopping and social networking" (p. 15), Yamakami (2014) frames it as "a multi-user expansion of single-user e-commerce" (p. 284), Tedeschi (2006) regards social commerce as a merger between online shopping and social media, Aladwani (2018) speaks of "purchasing through social media" (p. 2) and for Mikolajczyk (2021) it is "the process of selling products or services directly on social media" (n.p.), to name a few among the many examples from both academics and industry practitioners.

No.	Definition	Reference
1	The activities by which people shop or intentionally explore shopping opportunities by participating and/or engaging in a collaborative online environment	(Curty & Zhang, 2011)
2	The delivery of e-commerce activities and transactions via the social media environment, mostly in social networks and by using Web 2.0 software.	(Liang & Turban, 2011)
3	Social commerce is a subset of electronic commerce that uses social media, online media that supports social interaction and user contributions, to enhance the online purchase experience."	(Kim, 2013)
4	Social commerce is a form of commerce mediated by social media involving convergence between the online and offline environments	(Wang & Zhang, 2012)
5	The use of Internet-based media that allow people to participate in the marketing, selling, comparing, curating, buying, and sharing of products and services in both online and offline marketplaces, and in communities	(Zhou et al., 2013)
6	Social commerce is the use of social networking in the context of electronic commerce or even mobile commerce.	(Dar & Shah, 2013)
7	A new stream in e-commerce, which encourages the social interaction of consumers through social media	(Hajli, 2013)
8	A multi-user-based e-commerce that involves multiple people during an e-commerce transaction.	(Yamakami, 2014)
9	Technology-enabled shopping experiences where online consumer interactions while shopping provide the main mechanism for conducting social shopping activities	(Shen & Eder, 2011)
10	Social commerce and social shopping are forms of Internet-based "social media" that allow people to participate actively in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities	(Stephen & Toubia, 2010)
11	Social commerce defined as word-of-mouth applied to e-commerce	(Wu, Shen, & Chang, 2015)
12	Social commerce is a special kind of e-commerce that allows the interaction between merchants and consumers in a social environment such as Facebook,	(Sturiale & Scuderi, 2013)
13	Doing commerce in a collaborative and participative way by using social media through an enterprise interactive interface.	(Baghdadi, 2013)
14	S-commerce refers to the conduct of e-commerce activities using social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to aid in encouraging online purchases	(Smith, Zhao, & Alexander, 2013)

Figure 1. Some definitions of s-commerce from previous studies. Source: Busalim and Hussin, 2016, p. 1077.

Even though these diverse definitions exist (see also Figure 1), the majority of previous research that uses the term "social commerce" shares the understanding that it combines *social activities enabled through social media* (platforms, websites, features or tools) and *commercial activities.*

However, there is no common agreement regarding what is considered as *social media* or as a "collaborative online environment" that enables sociality, as Curty and Zhang (2011) frame it. To clarify, the understanding of what a social commerce website/platform/environment is varies among academics. Some scholars have investigated social commerce in relation to *actual social media platforms* such as Instagram (e.g. Herzallah, Muñoz-Leiva, & Liébana-Cabanillas, 2022; Pookulangara, Parr, Tanoff, & Nix, 2017) or Facebook (e.g. Jian et al., 2022), thus examining social media platforms that "incorporate commercial features to allow transactions and advertisements" (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016, p. 96). Others have studied e-commerce websites *enhanced with social features and tools* as examples of s-commerce sites (e.g., an online shop with an integrated rating or review feature) (e.g., Amblee & Bui, 2011; Liang & Turban, 2011). While defining such websites as spaces "where people can collaborate online, get advice from trusted individuals, find goods and services, and then purchase them" (Liang & Turban, 2011, p. 6), these scholars share the understanding that e-commerce websites and online marketplaces such as Amazon or eBay are also social commerce sites.

In addition, the understanding of what constitutes *social activities* varies slightly among scholars. Commonly included activities when studying social commerce are the creation of user-generated content in the form of electronic word of mouth, including "recommendations" and "information sharing and gathering" (e.g. Amblee & Bui, 2011; Hajli, 2014b; Herrando et al., 2017; Kim & Park, 2013; Li,

2019; Liang et al., 2011; Shen, 2012; Wang & Yu, 2017). Generally, in the context of s-commerce, social activities are commonly understood as activities that influence or affect commercial outcomes.

The understanding of what is meant by *commercial consumer activities* is, however, clear. For the majority of s-commerce researchers, commercial activities are first and foremost purchasing and group purchasing (e.g. Hajli et al., 2017; Kim & Park, 2013; Ng, 2013). Despite different areas of focus, much of the current research on social commerce agrees that social commerce encompasses both "buying" (consumers) and "selling" (brands and retailers) on or via social websites/platforms/ environments (e.g. Hajli & Sims, 2015; Herrando et al., 2017; Herzallah et al., 2022; Ko, 2018; Ling & Husain, 2013). As a result, the concept of s-commerce typically encompasses both consumer- and business-related activities.

Furthermore, there is slight controversy regarding the terminology. While the majority of scholars stick to the terms "social commerce"/"s-commerce", industry press tends to use "social commerce" and "social shopping" interchangeably (e.g. Lammertink, 2022; Mileva, 2022; Turiak, n.d.). Some scholars distinguish between "social commerce" and "(online) social shopping". Although "social shopping" has been coined by Arnold and Reynolds (2003) in a different context, for Stephen and Toubia (2010) "social shopping connects customers, social commerce connects sellers" (p. 215)[9]. Bohra and Bishnoi (2016), as well as Shen (2012), are among the few scholars who use the term "social shopping" in the context of shopping on or via social media. While for Bohra and Bishnoi (2016), social shopping is the outcome of the influence of social media on e-tailing, Shen (2012) regards social commerce as a technology-enabled shopping experience. For her, social shopping is seen as part of this experience, and it is primarily associated with users' online interactions. According to her research, these interactions (social activities) can spark commercial activities (e.g., discovering items, gathering and sharing information, and making collaborative shopping decisions).

The term "social media shopping", as it is used in this dissertation, appears predominantly in the industry press (e.g. Hutchinson, 2022; Salzano-Birch, 2022). In academic discussions, the term appears less frequently, but when it does, it is mostly in combination with "social commerce" (e.g. as in Abdul Talib & Mat Saat, 2017; Kian et al., 2017). To be clear, rather than developing social media shopping as a concept, "social media shopping" in these studies is merely used as an alternative term for social commerce. However, as indicated in the introduction and as will become clear throughout this dissertation, I use "social media shopping" in a different sense; drawing on practice theory, I turn it into a specific concept. By conceptualizing social media shopping as a specific mode of shopping, I

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[9] Notably, this particular definition limits social commerce to contexts where sellers are consumers, but not companies. Thus, this definition regards social commerce as C2C relationships only.

demonstrate that social commerce and social media shopping are not the same thing, although there is some overlap. As explained at the outset, social media shopping looks at the consumer side of s-commerce and thus at a specific part of it. Therefore, I offer a more clearly defined alternative to address the conceptual confusion and complexity around the different terms and definitions that are used to describe the phenomenon.

Research streams within s-commerce literature

Previous research on s-commerce has focused on a variety of different aspects. For example, scholars have examined the *elements of s-commerce platforms* and the architecture and design features of social commerce websites (e.g., Baghadi, 2016; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013), or the *features of social commerce businesses* (e.g., Kim, 2013). Much work has also been devoted to defining or describing the *nature of social commerce* (e.g. Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Liang & Turban, 2011; Lin et al., 2017; Stephen & Toubia, 2010; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016), or the *development and evolution* of it (e.g. Curty & Zhang, 2012; Wang & Zhang, 2012).

Looking more closely at research that focuses on the consumer, two relevant research streams can be found within contemporary literature. The following sections illustrate how scholars have made an effort to study consumption behavior by using *commercial intentions and attitudes* as a proxy. As will be shown in detail in the following sections, many contributions to the s-commerce literature have investigated consumer behavior by examining the effect of user interactions and social influence, and their relation to particular commercial outcomes.

Social commerce websites and social commerce constructs: Characteristics, design features and market potentials

Much of the academic discussion has focused on the perspective of businesses or social commerce marketers. This research has, for example, assessed different *business models* associated with the social commerce industry (e.g., Kim, 2013), developed *guidelines for successful social commerce businesses* (e.g. Ling & Husain, 2013), or pointed towards the *advertising potential* of social networks (e.g., Li, Lin, & Chiu, 2014). In addition, a considerable body of research in this field has looked at the technical characteristics of social commerce websites and has investigated how marketers/retailers can optimize their social commerce design features to best exploit their potential for selling goods and services (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013, 2017).

Several studies have attempted to understand the elements of s-commerce platforms and the architecture and design features of social commerce websites (e.g., Baghadi,

2016; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). For example, Baghadi (2016) points out that social commerce websites should have a user-centric design with an interactive user interface to facilitate user interaction, promote identification and engagement, and enable community building. The author emphasizes that providing a technical solution that allows shoppers to create user-generated content differentiates social commerce platforms from e-commerce websites. In the s-commerce literature, these technical solutions are often referred to as "social commerce constructs". Social commerce constructs refer to the (technical) communication infrastructure of s-commerce sites that determines what users can actually do on a particular platform. Hajli (2005) names online forums, communities, ratings, and review and recommendation features as distinct functionalities that allow users to produce and share shopping-related information.

Yadav et al. (2013) further add features such as "likes", "liked by", "also bought by" and "check-ins" that function as social signals on s-commerce sites, and that can serve as guidance for shoppers to assess whether a product or service is desired by a certain group, or by a person with whom an individual identifies or conforms (Yadav et al., 2013). Previous research suggests that marketers should encourage users to actively use these functions to collect their target audiences' opinions and listen to their suggestions (Lin et al., 2017), but also to foster electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in order to reduce users' perceived uncertainty and risk when making online purchasing decisions (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Indeed, eWOM is a recurring research theme in the current s-commerce literature. Several studies have shown that eWOM on social media plays a particular role in shoppers' decision-making processes (e.g. Amblee & Bui, 2011; Huang & Benyoucef, 2017; Hung & Li, 2007; Wang & Yu, 2017), and understanding the implications of eWOM seems to be key for web designers, firms and marketers alike.

Collectively, besides providing guidance for businesses on leveraging their social commerce activities, these studies all suggest that s-commerce websites should be designed and constructed in a way that enables a broad range of social interactions, as it is assumed that social interactions can create value for shoppers (Yadav et al., 2013). Without further specifying the nature and manner of this value at this point, this literature suggests that it is social interactions, and the resulting online sociality, that distinguish this form of shopping from e-commerce, as well as from other traditional offline shopping modes. In addition, and as will be discussed in the following paragraphs, these studies share the notion that social interactions "influence" consumer behavior and transactions in the social media marketplace.

Consumer behavior on social commerce websites: User interactions, social influence and commercial intentions

S-commerce studies share the premise that it is mostly sociality that draws shoppers towards using s-commerce sites (Li & Ku, 2017) and that the social interactions that occur on these sites affect their shopping. As indicated earlier, a large part of the s-commerce research rests on the assumption that an individual's social environments (both on- and offline) influence their "perceived needs". Based on this understanding, the literature claims that the distinct features of a social network's infrastructure, along with individuals' interactions with and within this infrastructure, can serve as "social signals" that can guide other users' shopping practices. These often very visible signals enable users to learn about new products from other members of the network/platform and to see what others have "liked", "pinned" or bought and what places they have visited, which eventually prompts them to consider the same products or services (Yadav et al., 2013). In this sense, the idea of visibility and observability with regard to other users' shopping makes social platforms/environments/constructs sources for inspiration and product discovery.

Furthermore, another commonly accepted reason why social interaction can affect shopping is that shoppers use their social networks to seek confirmation for their purchasing decisions in order to conform to expectations, and avoid rejection by others (Yadav et al., 2013).

Based on these considerations, previous research has been concerned with understanding how (online) sociality affects consumer behavior on social media. More precisely, anchored in consumer psychology, s-commerce scholars have put much effort into measuring social commerce behavior by testing a variety of different social-oriented factors such as perceived social benefits and self-presentation (e.g., Li & Ku, 2017), relationship quality (e.g. Hajli, 2014b; Liang et al., 2011; Tajvidi et al., 2017) and perceived closeness and familiarity within a social network (e.g. Ng, 2013), and the relation of these factors to shopping outcomes. However, the concepts most frequently applied to the study of online sociality and its impact on shopping are social support, social presence and trust. Social commerce intention is commonly used as a representative variable for studying social commerce behavior in the context of s-commerce. As Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara (2013) add, although intentions do not automatically mean that actual purchases will be made, these studies share the notion that intentions do possess predictive power with regard to certain outcomes.

Social support and purchasing intentions

Within the academic discussion, social support is a recurring concept associated with s-commerce. Studies suggest that experiences and information provided by consumers with first-hand knowledge of a product or service who report on these

personal experiences on social media platforms become important support indicators for other potential shoppers (e.g. Do-Hyung, Jumin, & Ingoo, 2007; Hajli, 2013). For example, the work of Hajli and Sims (2005) illustrates that online communication among users, including *emotional support* (e.g., listening and talking to others, providing comfort and encouragement) as well as *informational support* (e.g., receiving suggestions or solving problems), has a direct effect on users' social commerce intentions. Similarly, Li (2017) shows that social support affects familiarity, which then enhances trust in product recommendations and finally also increases shoppers' intentions to partake in social commerce. In a similar vein, Aldawani's (2018) work indicates a relation between social support – and more specifically, the "perceived quality of social support" – and consumers' purchasing intentions in social commerce settings.

In accordance with these examples, several s-commerce studies have adopted social support theory to provide evidence that the provision and use of social resources by non-professionals in terms of emotional and/or informational support are important factors that influence commercial intentions on social media (e.g. Aladwani, 2018; Hajli, 2015; Hajli & Sims, 2015; Li, 2019; Shanmugam, Sun, Amidi, Khani, & Khani, 2016; Tajvidi et al., 2017).

Social presence and purchasing intentions
Another concept and its relation to purchasing intentions frequently adopted by s-commerce scholars is *social presence*. This concept is used in the literature to represent the social climate and can be understood as the extent to which an individual is perceived as a "real person" in a media environment (Li & Ku, 2017). Previous research has claimed that social presence is closely related to perceived warmth and a sense of human contact, as well as the sociability of a medium or media environment (Lu et al., 2016). Such research assumes that the social atmosphere is a distinct aspect which motivates users to engage in s-commerce activities (Li & Ku, 2017). Lu et al. (2016), for instance, also shed light on the nature of social presence on s-commerce sites. Their study suggests that the user interface of the s-commerce site, including the multimedia content and the textual features, can create a sense of human sociability.

In addition, the perception of other shoppers and their visible actions – for instance, through status updates, presentation features and participation in online discussions – along with the possibility to interact with a seller, influences users' shopping experience on social media. Similar to studies about social support in s-commerce settings, research that has used the concept of social presence to study consumer behavior in relation to social media platforms/environments/constructs illustrates that the social climate of a social commerce marketplace strongly affects users' trust in a seller and simultaneously shapes shoppers' beliefs, attitudes and purchasing behaviors (e.g. Hajli, 2014b; Herrando et al., 2017; Li, 2019; Li & Ku, 2017; Lu et al., 2016; Shen, 2012).

Social trust and purchasing intentions

Besides social support and social presence, *trust* is another recurring concept within behavioral s-commerce studies (e.g. Dong-hee, 2013; Hajli et al., 2017; Kim & Park, 2013; Li, 2019; Lu et al., 2016; Yahia et al., 2018). Research in the s-commerce domain seems to agree that social-oriented factors and trust are closely connected, and that trust in other shoppers' recommendations, ratings and referrals is an important factor that affects users' purchasing intentions on social commerce sites (e.g. Dong-hee, 2013). Based on the assumption that shoppers aim at reducing uncertainty by relying on familiarities, and that trust can smooth out the process of exchange when individuals do not know each other (Hajli, 2013), previous research has also investigated the role of trust in both the seller and the social platform/environment/construct (e.g. Hajli et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2016; Shanmugam et al., 2016; Yahia et al., 2018). For example, Yahia and colleagues (2018) considered users' perceptions of trust in the vendor, and which factors influence this trust. Their study found that not only price advantages and product differentiations, but especially a seller's reputation increases trust in the vendor, which was then found to positively influence shoppers' purchasing intentions. Similarly, Hajli et al. (2017) and Lu et al. (2016) show that purchasing intentions largely depend on users' trust in the vendor. In addition, users' perception of the s-commerce platform (e.g., the platform's ease of use and reputation) affects trust, and furthermore their acceptance to use social media platforms for shopping purposes (Yahia et al., 2018).

Activities beyond purchasing: Sharing, networking and collaborating

As the review above illustrates, most studies discussing social commerce approach the phenomenon in a somewhat narrow sense, focusing on individual factors and their effect on purchasing intentions. There are, however, a few studies that have recognized exchange-related shopping activities in a more holistic manner. Yadav et al. (2013), for example, take a broader approach, examining all the steps in the shopper's decision-making process, and suggesting that a careful examination of the "path from social interaction to transaction" is needed to understand consumers' shopping behavior on social media (p. 314). Claiming that social commerce environments promote a variety of activities that may influence a focal transaction in either a direct or an indirect manner, they point towards a set of consecutively performed shopping activities. In line with the latter, the authors show that social networks can function as sources of inspiration, as shoppers can discover new products and services recommended by other users.

Further, user-generated content in the form of ratings and reviews can serve as guidance for pending purchases, and such content can help shoppers to find information on where and when to buy (Yadav et al., 2017). In addition to these text-based recommendations and online discussions, the literature has also acknowledged that the sharing of visual content, such as photos and videos, is a

means of sharing product experiences with others (Turban, Strauss, & Lai, 2016). Turban et al. (2016) further note that some shoppers share extensive product guides and demonstrations in the form of videos or step-by-step instructions, and use the interactive features of social networks as "sounding boards" to share their consumption experiences, and to bond with and help others (Yadav et al 2017, p. 317).

Thus, and in line with Ko (2018), it becomes clear that shoppers engage in social commerce not only for commercial and goal-oriented purposes, but also because of the social, fun and playful aspects involved. On this point, Pöyry et al. (2013) claim that the experiential benefits and hedonic motivations have high priority for social commerce participation, as they enable both browsing in terms of "scanning and monitoring, either directly on the actual page or, more often, through the user's newsfeed view" (p. 227), and active participation in the creation of content, including posting comments on other users' content, asking questions and sharing recommendations.

Similarly, Hassan, Toland, and Tate (2015) show that consumers' motivation to participate in this form of shopping is grounded in both commercial/economic and social reasons. In their qualitative study of a community of lifestyle bloggers, the authors illustrate that the main drivers for engaging in social commerce activities are loyalty, self-esteem, perceived happiness, and a feeling of commitment to the community they are affiliated with. The results show that the sense of virtual community among members impacts participation in e-commerce activities (Hassan et al., 2015). Thus, social factors including communication and interaction with other members of the social setting not only encourage participation in social media shopping contexts, they can also be the main drivers, which makes activities motivated by commercial desire – such as receiving promotional information, searching for product-related information – secondary objectives (Ko, 2018). These findings are in line with Pöyry et al.'s (2013) research which shows that hedonic motivations, which imply seeking fun, play, enjoyment and experiences, have a considerable impact on social commerce participation behavior.

Arguing for a broader approach

This review shows that most studies have investigated social commerce from a managerial perspective. Scholars in this field seem to share the view that research should help practitioners to assess the marketing potential of social media in the first instance. While I am not criticizing this approach per se, these studies share a set of common assumptions that, while useful for illuminating certain aspects, tend to obscure others.

First of all, we have seen that our understanding of consumer behavior in the context of social commerce is largely based on shoppers' intentions to perform actions directed towards attaining particular outcomes. These correlational studies show that certain actions are more or less likely, and therefore aim at forecasting consumer behavior. Central to this approach is that shopping influenced by and related to social media is understood as a "cause reasoning action", which implies that shopping is regarded as a rational, linear and to a large extent controllable process. This implies that such studies treat shoppers as rational agents who are driven by rational and economic choices, rather than acknowledging shoppers as skilled shopping practitioners (see Fuentes, 2014) who actively participate in a variety of social practices and who are part of several social formations, whose commonly shared rules and norms guide their behavior. Thus, the prevailing view on human agency in the current s-commerce literature is rather one-sided. In a similar vein, little is known about the role of technology in shaping shopping or about non-human agency and how technology and humans "work together" to actively contribute to shaping shopping on or via social media.

Furthermore, research on social commerce tends to overlook the social and cultural complexity of shopping. Even though some s-commerce studies have recognized additional shopping activities and consumer objectives besides purchasing aims, the current body of literature seldom makes these exchange-related activities – activities other than purchasing – the central subject of discussion. Activities are indeed a fundamental part of shopping, but there is a substantial body of work that has shown that activities constitute only one aspect of shopping (e.g. Elms et al., 2016; Fuentes, 2014; Gram & Grønhøj, 2016; Gregson, Crewe, & Brooks, 2002). Previous contributions to the s-commerce literature seem to exclude important elements that constitute shopping, including internalized know-how, feelings and emotions, and materials beyond the actual user interface. There is a lack of an approach that challenges the assumptions of previous research to develop a discussion that focuses on *how* and *why* social media shopping is carried out by its practitioners, while also examining the interplay between and entanglement of humans and technology.

A large part of many people's lives already takes place online, specifically on social media. Shopping, it seems, is one arena where this is clearly noticeable: through social media, shopping is moving closer to consumers' everyday lives. It changes what users regard as relevant, what they regard as meaningful, what motivates them, and how and what they consume, which comes with implications for other practices. A deeper understanding of social media shopping, how it is practiced, and how it is connected to other aspects of everyday life helps to understand a particular contemporary user group whose lives are profoundly shaped by technology and by social media in particular. Considering that there are already generations that have grown up with technologies, and that coming generations are likely to be even more impacted by innovations in technology, there is no denying that we need to understand these realities in order to understand social change.

Against this background, the present study proposes to move from the existing positivistic approaches to social commerce and the currently predominant view anchored in traditional marketing literature, and to contribute with research that makes social practices the unit of analysis (see Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005, 2014). The next chapter sheds further light on this perspective. It begins with an explanation of consumption and shopping from a sociocultural perspective, before moving on to theories of social practice and their connection to shopping and consumption, an emerging approach which addresses many of the shortcomings found within the current body of literature.

Chapter 3 – A practice theory approach to social media shopping

In this chapter, I draw on practice theory to develop a theoretical framework for understanding social media shopping as a routine, everyday enactment shaped by social media. Social media is conceptualized as a sociomaterial assemblage that simultaneously enables, constrains, facilitates and ultimately configures[10] this mode of shopping, including its practitioners. In this regard, this work shares the view that practices themselves, as well as their sociomaterial elements such as bodies, technologies, and other material and immaterial entities, are interconnected and mutually formative (Morley, 2016).

To begin with, and in order to establish a clear distinction from the s-commerce literature that largely focuses on consumer behavior from a psychological perspective, I provide a review of the literature that has illustrated the sociocultural aspects of shopping.

Practice theory is applied as a conceptual framework. Practice theory is a social theory that has its roots in cultural studies. Researchers following this tradition are not specifically interested in people's individual attitudes, motivations or beliefs. Instead, the focus is on how social processes operate in complex contexts (Reckwitz, 2002). Thus, practice theory offers an alternative to theories of individual choice and traditional consumer behavior. It provides a tool to operationalize the context of shopping and consumption by incorporating broader social structures, activities and concerns (Molander, 2011). The object of study is contextualized through the logic of practices in order to understand the overarching, tacit social network of which it is a part.

Finally, I propose a sociomaterial perspective on shopping. This scholarly stance can be seen as a specific way of looking at practices that assumes a constitutive

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[10] In this dissertation, the term "configure" is understood as "to define, enable and constrain" (Woolgar, 1990, p. 69). Thus, it is closely related to "shaping". The term "reconfigure" corresponds to the notion of change, where something existing, something routinized or established is altered (in whole or in part) by certain influences (in this case, the introduction of social media to shopping practices), resulting in the components that make up the practice being changed or rearranged in some way. A new configuration emerges, including changed definitions, enablers and constraints.

intertwining of the material and the social (Gherardi, 2012, 2016; Orlikowski, 2007, 2010). Drawing on this discussion, I conceptualize social media as a sociomaterial arrangement in which everyday practices, including shopping, and also practitioners/actors are the result of an intertwining of physical and digital materiality, of the social and the material. The chapter concludes with a summary of this approach, reiterating its relevance to this study.

A shift in perspective: Sociocultural approaches to shopping

The idea that "shopping [...] is one of those activities which has had a hard time breaking in to certain academic fields" put forward by Gregson et al. (2002, p. 597) no longer seems to apply. More than two decades later, shopping has received scholarly attention from a variety of research fields, ranging from human geography (e.g., Gregson et al., 2002) and sociology (e.g. Gojard & Véron, 2018) to marketing (e.g. Badrinarayanan & Becerra, 2019; Griffith, 2003), to name a few. While there is widespread agreement that there exist different forms of shopping or different ways of performing shopping, the existing literature varies regarding the understanding of what shopping is, and its theoretical perspective and focus. Indeed, as Griffith (2003) puts it: "Defining shopping can be as vexing as understanding why we shop" (p. 264).

In retail and marketing research, the most widely used theoretical approaches to shopping are either grounded in psychology or come from the field of economics (Fuentes & Hagberg, 2013). This type of traditional marketing study, which prevails in the current body of s-commerce literature, treats consumers as rational, calculating individuals who primarily aim to obtain certain benefits from participating in the various modes of shopping.

In the 1970s, researchers began to express their rejection of such approaches and initiated a debate concerning the need for new perspectives in consumer research (e.g. Belk, 1975). This sea change in consumer behavior research resulted in new modes of academic research, where formerly rather fixed academic disciplines and their inherent distinctions began to blur. Literature resulting from what has been referred to as the "interpretive turn in consumer research" (see Sherry, 1991) generated a new multi-disciplinary stream within consumer research that emphasized the social and cultural complexities of consumption.

A sociocultural approach to shopping acknowledges that "shopping has multiple embodiments, holding central its ability to place individuals in contexts of humanistic interactions providing deeper meanings to participants than simple observation of buyer behaviour patterns can detail" (Miller et al., 1998, in Griffith,

2003, p. 243). Thus, in this understanding, shopping encompasses more than acts of purchasing and manifests itself in a range of various different activities. For example, researchers have drawn attention to the qualities of browsing the marketplace (e.g. Sherry, 1990), and have pointed to the enjoyment of place and atmospherics that comes from "just" spending time in and interacting with a retail venue as important aspects of shopping (e.g. Peñaloza, 1998; Sherry et al., 2001), to name a few examples.

In addition, scholars who have looked at shopping from a sociocultural perspective are in agreement that shopping cannot be grasped without understanding the social and cultural context in which it takes place. Social and cultural factors are regarded as the main influences framing consumer experiences. From this perspective, the meanings individuals ascribe to shopping shape and frame their actions, feelings and thoughts (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Particularly the social aspect, roughly conceptualized as social interactions, or even "shopping *for* social interactions", is a recurring theme in some of these studies. Researchers have pointed towards the rewards consumers receive from meaningful social interactions, including small talk, stories, companionship, etc. (Griffith, 2003) and the role of such rewards in shaping shopping experience, as motivational means and ends. Besides social factors, there are also other motivations that guide shopping. Depending on the mode of shopping, the benefits shoppers receive can range from utilitarian to hedonic shopping values (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Spaid & Flint, 2014). Shopping can be a leisure activity (e.g., strolling through a flea market) as well as a necessity (e.g., provisioning a household). Notably, these forms of shopping are not necessarily mutually exclusive; they can coexist and change over time and are highly dependent on the context in which they unfold (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005).

Furthermore, sociocultural research considers retail locations not only as places that facilitate commercial transactions, but as spaces where identities (e.g., Jackson & Holbrook, 1995), gender (e.g., Gregson & Crewe, 1998), ethnicity (e.g. Friend & Thompson, 2003), experiences (e.g. Bäckström, 2011, 2013; Kozinets, 2002; Peñaloza, 1998) and meanings (e.g. Bäckström, 2013; Jackson & Holbrook, 1995) are both created and reproduced.

In line with the latter, one of the core assumptions within this research is that consumers have agency. In contrast to the psychological approach to shopping, individuals are seen as self-determined agents who actively construct their identities through their choice of consumption activities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In fact, the idea that shoppers are identity seekers and have agency to create their identities through their interactions with the marketplace is a reoccurring theme in these studies (e.g. Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Miller, Jackson, Thrift, Holbrook, & Rowlands, 1998). From these examples, it becomes evident how the understanding of shopping from a sociocultural perspective differs from what Griffith (2003) calls the "traditional dictionary definition of visiting shops to look over or purchase

goods" (p. 264), which is largely consistent with the dominant perspective on shopping in the s-commerce literature.

The following sections tie in with these considerations, beginning with an introduction to practice theory before providing an overview of the literature that has conceptualized shopping as a complex, situated social practice.

A practice theory approach to shopping and consumption

Introduction to practice theory – A subtype of cultural theory

The emergence of "practice theories" or "theories of social practice" can be traced back to the interpretative and cultural turn of social theories in the 1970s (Ortner, 1984; Warde, 2005). As Schatzki (2001) clarifies, there is no unified practice approach. Practice theory can be described as a label that is used to refer to an influential orientation within the social sciences that embraces the work of diverse authors who are joined by a common interest in seemingly ordinary phenomena of the "everyday" and "life-world" (Reckwitz, 2002).

Scholars tend to distinguish between the first and second generation of practice theorists. Pioneers within this field include Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens. For example, Bourdieu's work on habitus and practice, the British sociologist Anthony Gidden's discussion of human activities and social organization in his "structuration theory", and Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections on "language games" and "knowledge as ability" are often identified with the early practice theory tradition (Schatzki, 1996).

As for the second generation of practice theorists, scholars such as Theodore R. Schatzki, Andreas Reckwitz and Alan Warde are repeatedly mentioned in the academic discussion. As Ortner (1984) notes, practice theory "seeks to explain the relationship(s) that obtain between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we call 'the system' on the other" (p. 184). Thus, broadly speaking, practice theory is concerned with the dynamic relationship between established social and cultural structures, and social beings acting within this structure. As will be discussed in greater detail, practice theory assumes that not only does structure shape human action, but humans with their individual beliefs and motives likewise shape and transform social structure. Thus, scientific work labeled as "practice theory work" take a closer look at the circular relationship between social structure and human agency.

Despite the fact that practice theory has its roots in multiple disciplines, scholars following this orientation share a number of assumptions (Nicolini, 2017). As Schatzki (2001) points out, academics within the field of practice theory agree that

fundamental features of human life – such as human activity, sociality, science, knowledge, meaning, language, power, human transformation and social institutions – must be understood as occurring through, and rooted in, practices and the connections between them.

Even though practices are generally associated with "doings" and "sayings", there is variation in the understanding of what precisely a practice is. While some scholars focus on the elements that comprise a practice (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Shove & Pantzar, 2005), others tend to concentrate on how these components are connected (e.g., Schatzki, 2001; Warde, 2005). When conceptualizing practices, Reckwitz's (2002) work is widely cited. The author defines social practices as

> "a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (p. 249).

This definition highlights important recurring characteristics of practice theory-based research. First of all, work within this field makes routines and the habitual character of everyday life a subject of discussion (e.g. Elms et al., 2016; Hargreaves, 2011; Keller & Ruus, 2014).

In addition, the body, seen as the "carrier" of social practices (Reckwitz, 2002), as well as cognitive capabilities, knowledge and the mind, plays a significant role in the performance of practices. As Nicolini (2017) points out, from a practice perspective, human action and activity are not seen as primarily organized by personal decisions, but rather by intelligibility and sense making, as well as by *learned* practical knowledge. This implies that performances are referred to as practices when they show social consistency and social history, and thus produce a perceivable normative dimension (ibid.) Practitioners are therefore frequently referred to as skilled agents who actively negotiate their role within a certain structure, perform a wide range of practices, and develop competence through repeated performance (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove & Pantzar, 2005). Despite the learned and routinized features of practices, their constant reproduction, and what Warde (2005) calls "considerable inertia" (p. 140), it is important to emphasize that practices are performed neither completely unconsciously nor completely reflectively.

Since practices are usually entangled with the material arrangements they contribute to creating (Nicolini, 2017), the material dimension of practices, or what Reckwitz (2002) refers to as "things and their use", needs to be addressed (p. 5). Because, as trivial it might sound, "carrying out a practice very often means using particular things in a certain way" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 252). As Reckwitz (2002) further argues, objects are centrally and inevitably involved in the production and re-production of practices.

The present study shares the notion that "practices consist of active integrations of material, competence and meaning", as proposed by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012, p. 24). From this theoretical vantage point, some of the most obvious examples of practices include cooking a meal, teaching a class, trading online, driving (Nicolini, 2017) and, as will be illustrated later on, shopping.

Consumption as a moment in practices

In 2005, the sociologist Alan Warde first introduced practice theory to consumption studies. According to Warde (2005), "consumption is not itself a practice but is, rather, a moment in almost every practice" (p. 137). This position suggests that consumption is a by-product in the composition and re-production of everyday practices (Molander, 2011), rather than an actual objective or outcome of personal choice (Warde, 2005). Drawing on Alfred Marshall's claim that "activity generates wants", Warde (2005) argues that it is practice, rather than individual needs, desires or intentions, that creates wants and thus guides human behavior. As Molander (2011) clarifies, an approach that conceptualizes consumption through the logic of practices aims at understanding the wider implicit social context of which consumption is a part. Hence, practice approaches towards consumption offer what Warde (2014) refers to in one of his other accounts as an "alternative framing to models of individual choice" (p. 286). Thus, and in contrast to both traditional marketing and sociocultural research, practice theory suggests a different perspective on consumer behavior: In order to understand consumption patterns and routinized behavior, one has to move from aiming to understand individual choices, towards understanding standards of practices (Warde, 2005).

Guided by Warde, theories of social practice have been increasingly used in consumption studies (Keller & Ruus, 2014), as they offer "the possibility to study consumption not only in functional, rational and symbolic perspectives, but also through a prism of habits, routines and internalized social and cultural norms" (Gram & Grønhøj, 2016, p. 512). As Halkier, Katz-Gerro, and Martens (2011) point out in their foreword to the 2011 special issue of the *Journal of Consumer Culture*, titled "Applying Practice Theory to the Study of Consumption", the body of work that combines diverse consumer research concerns with theoretical input from practice theory is diverse.

First and foremost, the work of Elizabeth Shove and her colleagues is particularly noteworthy (e.g. Shove et al., 2012; Shove, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2007), focusing for example on the dynamics of continuity and change in practices (e.g. Hand & Shove, 2004; Hand, Shove, & Southerton, 2005; Shove & Pantzar, 2005, 2007) or the use of resources (e.g. Hand & Shove, 2007; Shove, 2003). Indeed, much of the consumption-oriented research that adopts a practice theory perspective focuses on sustainability, and discusses, for instance, energy consumption (e.g. Gram-Hanssen, 2009; Shove, 2004) or waste disposal (e.g. Närvänen, Mesiranta,

Sutinen, & Mattila, 2018). In addition, there is a growing stream of research on food consumption (e.g. Molander, 2011; Närvänen, Kartastenpää, & Kuusela, 2013; Närvänen, Saarijävi, & Simanainen, 2013), as well as on entertainment media consumption (e.g. Fuentes, Hagberg, & Kjellberg, 2018; Magaudda, 2011). As Halkier et al. (2011) note, practice theoretical perspectives have also found their way into marketing, including market studies (e.g. Kjellberg, 2008; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006, 2007), and have been used to theorize green consumers (e.g. Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Fuentes, 2014) and value creation (e.g. Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009), to name a few examples.

Inspired by this research, the following paragraphs center on shopping as the central practice under investigation and illustrate how it has been conceptualized in previous practice theory work.

Conceptualizing social media shopping

Practice-oriented research has shown that shopping is a complex social practice involving multiple meanings, various materials, cognitive techniques, specific embodied knowledge, bodily movements and "shopping talk" (see Fuentes, 2014, Gregson et al., 2002). As Bulmer and colleagues accurately summarize, shopping research has demonstrated that shopping is "a complex, skillful, highly gendered, socially embedded, and situated practice, which can also be a considerable source of pleasure as well as anxiety" (p. 109). Based on previous practice theory studies, the following sections lay out how the shopping-as-practice literature has theorized the phenomenon. To make the connection to social media, or more precisely to social media shopping, special attention is paid to the material dimension of shopping. Because, as Fuentes (2014) aptly explains, modes of shopping can "involve both human and non-human elements, both the economic and the cultural, the rational and the emotional" (p. 486) and is therefore best understood as a sociomaterial practice (ibid.). My study aligns with this framing. The remainder of this chapter will elaborate on my practice theory approach to social media shopping and highlight, among other things, the importance of the concept of sociomateriality for this dissertation.

Shopping-as-practice

Shopping practice involves diverse activities

From a practice theory perspective, and in line with other sociocultural approaches to shopping, shopping is not the same as buying. Instead, buying can be one of many shopping activities that constitute shopping. More specifically, shopping has to be

understood as being tied to a web of related practices such as transportation, cooking and other household practices, and to diverse social activities and individual life paths.

Spitzkat and Fuentes (2019), who investigated how shopping at pop-up sales takes shape, found that shopping can entail such activities as waiting in line to access a venue, browsing and rummaging. The specific shopping mode they conceptualize as "frenzy shopping" can even include more unusual activities such as hoarding items and "fighting" for desired products. Kelsey and colleagues (2019), who also focused on a form of sale shopping they refer to as "yellow-sticker shopping", present related findings and similarly expose less conventional shopping activities. Their work shows that this particular form of shopping can involve "waiting around" inside a store, looking for sale items in other shoppers' carts, or following staff in order to be among the first to find items that have been reduced in price.

Shopping modes that are tied to technologies often entail altered or additional activities. For example, when shoppers use self-service check-outs, weighing and scanning items are among the typical activities transferred from staff to shoppers. When mobile shopping, shoppers read product reviews, compare prices online and use digital payment methods (Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017). When used in-store, mobile phones are also frequently used for obtaining various kinds of additional information. According to Fuentes et al. (2017), "googling" products, comparing prices and locating products inside a store are examples of activities associated with in-store shopping aided by mobile devices. At this point, I would like to emphasize that shopping activities do not necessarily change fundamentally just because a technology is involved. Browsing, for example, is an activity that is mentioned in very many studies as a central shopping activity (e.g., Bäckström, 2013; Elms et al., 2016; Fuentes et al., 2017; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). Browsing can take place both on- and offline. What changes, therefore, is not the activity itself but rather, e.g., how, where and when it is performed.

Thus, from a practice perspective, shopping is far more complex than simply the notion of "buying". Fuentes (2014) regards shopping as a family of practices oriented towards aquiring products, which includes additional activities that may or may not lead to a purchase. Thus, and depending on the distinct assemblage of meanings, materials and competences (Shove et al., 2012), this also means that different forms of shopping can emerge.

Shopping practice entails multiple meanings
Adoping a practice perspective on shopping acknowledges that the cultural meanings involved in shopping practice can be diverse. Shopping can be driven by various desires, such as the seeking of experiences, including pleasure and play, as well as by utilitarian or economic motives (e.g., see Elms et al., 2016; Gregson et al., 2002). Depending on the situation and the individual, the motives involved can

range from the wish to be a responsible and environmentally conscious consumer (e.g., see Fuentes et al., 2019), to the ideal of finding a good bargain (e.g. see Kelsey et al., 2019; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019), to the desire to socialize and create meaningful social bonds. For example, previous literature has found that shopping can be a recreational activity for some practitioners that is frequently used to spend time with others and strengthen interpersonal relationships (e.g., see Aslan, 2021; Bäckström 2011). Hanging out, getting to know each other, chatting and spending time with each other against the backdrop of shopping, to name a few examples, can create a sense of community-like togetherness that is valued by many shoppers (Aslan, 2021).

Conversely, shopping can be something exceptional or special. For example, the purchase of symbolically charged items – things that are seen as indulgent – can be associated with special rituals and meanings (e.g., see Elms et al. 2016). Accordingly, special meaning is often attributed to prestige products; that is, those that are particularly valuable or expensive.

However, the price tag alone does not necessarily determine the symbolic value of shopping and the associated experiences. It can be just as meaningful to find a special or unique item at a second-hand store, or to strike a special bargain at a flea market. In fact, in the current body of literature, shopping has frequently been associated with bargains or bargain hunting (e.g., Aslan, 2021; Bäckström, 2011; 2013; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). Bargain hunting, on the one hand, can be closely associated with special shopping skills, and shoppers often feel both confident and smart when they are challenged by the "thrill of the hunt" (e.g., see Spitzkat & Fuentes, "frenzy shopping").

On the other hand, bargain hunting or being thrifty can also be related to an entirely different set of emotions and meanings. Previous shopping literature has shown that, depending on the social and financial conditions, bargain shopping can be a necessity. In this case, it is not about enjoyment, not about the hunt itself, but about buying consciously (e.g., see "budget shopping", Aslan, 2021; "charity shopping", Gregson et al., 2002). Here, it becomes clear that shopping can also be a very ordinary enactment. It is often a necessity (e.g., provisioning the household), and it can be a stressful and challenging task that causes anxiety and stress. The latter can be related to a variety of causes. As Elms et al. (2016) illustrate, crowded streets or stores, as well as other shoppers, can be disruptive factors that interfere with shopping in an unpleasant manner.

Taken together, the meanings attached to shopping are potentially unstable (Gregson et al., 2002) and usually dependent on the specific context and situation. While research has shown that such meanings are often closely interlinked with desirable objects, posessions and their connections with social relations, it has also highlighted that meanings are made in and constituted through practice (Gregson et al., 2002).

Shopping practice requires competences and know-how

Researching shopping from a practice perspective acknowledges that the performance of shopping requires certain competences. Competences include the ability to search for and critically assess information regarding prices and quality, choose between alternatives, and balance personal desires with self-discipline, for instance (Christensen & Røpke, 2010). At the same time, it requires distinct knowledge about roles and behaviors – also with regard to social norms and understandings of how shopping *should* be performed – that practitioners need to internalize. Thus, as part of "consumer socialization", certain forms of shopping practice have to be learned in the first place. As Keller and Ruus (2014) illustrate, parents teach their children how to *behave* in a store, how to carry out negotiations and how to make a purchase. Also, social interactions between actors require a particular know-how. Practitioners need to understand and internlize rules and associated skills in order to become successful shopping practitioniers (Gram & Grønhøj, 2016; Keller & Ruus, 2014).

Nevertheless, shopping practice is flexible and dynamic, as it is continually refined, modified and adjusted to meet the individual's requirements (Elms et al., 2016), which often involves the aqusition of new or specific shopping skills. The latter has been exemplified in Spitzkat and Fuentes (2019) and in Fuentes at al. (2019). These researchers showed that shoppers are able to adapt to new situations and identify distinct strategies in order to participate in shopping in the first place (e.g., carefully planning shopping trips, bringing suitable containers to transport products from packaging-free grocery stores), or to make their shopping more convenient (e.g., bringing large bags to pop-up sales).

Shopping practice encompasses a variety of different shopping modes

Following on from this discussion, and as indicated earlier, this work shares the perspective that there is not only one way of performing shopping. Instead, the practice of shopping consists of a range of diverse variations of how shopping is enacted. Shopping practitioners engage in various different forms of shopping, depending on the specific context and situation. Gregson and colleagues (2002) draw on an example from Daniel Miller (1998) to further explain the differences between various shopping modes. While more or less ordinary forms of shopping, such as grocery shopping, are frequently guided by lists and determined by specific products (materials), and can be characterized by activities such as comparing offers and choosing between alternatives (competences) in order to ensure the routinized replenishment of stocks to provide for the family (meanings), shopping for clothes involves an entirely different composition of these three elements. As Gregson et al. (2002) explain: "Frequently highly methodical, careful, and comparative, [clothes shopping] involves lengthy amounts of 'just looking' and trying on, but it is also about the framing of an embodied self and negotiations of 'fashion'" (p. 614). In this context, Gregson et al. (2002) speak of "modes" of shopping as distict ways of

performing or engaging in the practice of shopping. Indeed, previous practice theory literature has successfully demontrated not only that such different forms of shopping exist, but also that there is variation in their corresponding activities and the elements that constitute their enactment with regard to the type of shopping (e.g., "convenience shopping", "social shopping", "on-the-side shopping", "alternative shopping" and "budget shopping", see Aslan, 2021; "leisure shopping", see Bäckström, 2011; "mobile shopping", see Fuentes & Svigstedt, 2017; "yellow-sticker shopping", see Kelsey et al, 2019; or "frenzy shopping", see Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019).

Shopping practice is subject to change

As has already been indicated, shopping practice is dynamic. Previous research has documented that shopping practice has developed over time, as it has been subject to a dynamic process of change (e.g. Elms et al., 2016; Hagberg, 2016). Broadly speaking, practice change occurs when "the elements of which [practices] are composed change or as relations between these elements are reconfigured" (Morley, 2016, p. 83). Shopping is no exception here. For example, research has shown that shopping practice is subject to change when new material artefacts are introduced to the practice (e.g. shopping bags, see Hagberg, 2016), or when important materials are removed (e.g. packages, see Fuentes et al., 2019). Similarly, technological advancements (which for example replace or complement existing materials) have also led to alterations in shopping practice. For instance, Fuentes and colleagues (2017) have illustrated how the introduction of smartphones to shopping practice significantly shapes how shopping is performed. Yet another example of far-reaching practice change is du Gay's (2004) work on self-service technologies which offers evidence for the extensive re-materialization of stores, including new constitutions of the actors involved, and more recently, Samsioe and Fuentes (2021) examined how shoppers integrate digital grocery-shopping platforms into their food-shopping routines.

In sum, these studies have illustrated that changes in one (or more) of the elements proposed by Shove and colleagues (2012) – meanings, materials or competences – can lead to variations in how shopping is performed, and may also result in the emergence of altered, or even new modes of shopping.

Against this backdrop, the material dimension of shopping practices, which has only been briefly addressed so far, will be examined in more detail in the next few paragraphs. The following sections outline a theoretical discourse on what it means for the practice of shopping when a new technology, or a new sociomaterial assemblage – such as social media, as conceptualized below – is introduced to the practice.

Social media as a sociomaterial assemblage

In a shopping context, the material dimension of practice is often associated with physical "things" and "objects", such as shopping carts, lists, products or credit cards (e.g., see Cochoy, 2008; Christensen & Røpke, 2010). In line with this, and as Fuentes and Svingstedt (2017) observe, practice theory studies often refer to materials as being comprised of objects, tools, infrastructures and the body itself, and thus focus on "the hardware and corporeal elements involved in performing a practice" (Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017, p. 139). On this note, Scott and Orlikowski (2014) add that even though "materiality is a component in many practice studies, it has typically been cast in a mediating or supporting role" (p. 879). This aligns with Morley (2016), who notes that practice-based research tends to focus on what the physical, human body does. Such approaches may well be limited, especially if we are seeking a more comprehensive examination of "what people do collectively beyond their bodies"; for example, through and with technologies such as social media. As the author further explains, these "extended" relationships cannot be recognized if technologies are regarded as tool-like elements involved in or merely supporting doings and sayings (Morley, 2016). Rather, we need an understanding of materialities that goes beyond their mediating or supporting qualities; an understanding of them as configuring practices. The concept of sociomateriality offers such an understanding.

Originally, sociomateriality was primarily associated with organizational and work practices (e.g., Orlikowski, 2007, 2010). In general terms, a central theme of sociomateriality is the impact of technology on social life and social practices (Gherardi, 2016). However, what makes this line of research distinct is that it assumes that the social and the material (or technical) are inextricably linked or intertwined. The idea of being "intertwined" indicates that no clear distinction can be made between the two, and accordingly such research challenges the dichotomy of the social and material as independent spheres. Orlikowski (2007) speaks of the social and the material as "constitutively" intertwined in everyday life (p. 1437), and further elaborates: "A position of constitutive entanglement does not privilege either humans or technology (in one-way interactions), nor does it link them through a form of mutual reciprocation (in two-way interactions). Instead, the social and the material are considered to be inextricably related – there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social" (ibid.). The social and the material do not only shape one another; they are also jointly constituted (Barad, 2003; Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). While a substantialist ontology holds that the social and the material exist as separate entities that interact with and affect each other, a relational ontology assumes that the social and the material are constitutively intertwined (Gherardi, 2016).

Applying a relational, sociomaterial view on social media shopping has a number of implications. First of all, we need to distinguish between "materials" as in human-centered practice theory accounts, and "materiality" as in posthuman practice theories. A sociomaterial view assumes that materiality encompasses more than just artifacts that influence or mediate how shopping is enacted. As has been shown in previous practice-theoretical studies on shopping, objects – or what Reckwitz (2002) calls "things and their use" – are typically part of the material dimension. In the context of technology, we need to broaden this view. Scott and Orlikowski (2014) suggest an understanding of materiality as "a process of materialization that configures reality" (p. 879). The authors continue, "even concepts, rules, language, or software (often cited as examples of immateriality) cannot exist without material realization – whether embodied in thought, produced in action, or expressed in texts, machines, or running code" (ibid.). Drawing on the latter, the materiality of social media shopping can be seen as a heterogeneous assemblage of both human and non-human, both physical and virtual elements. Thus, materiality is by no means the same as tangibility. Social media, as a technology bound to physical devices, may not be tangible, yet, following the logic of sociomateriality, it is material.

Second, and following Scott and Orlikowski (2014), referring to the work of Karen Barad (2003), "practices are constituted – simultaneously and inseparably – by both meanings and materialities" (Scott & Orlikowski, 2014, p. 879). Applied to shopping, this means that materiality plays a central role in the "making" or "construction" of how the practice takes shape. At the same time, materiality is constructed through practice. As Scott and Orlikowski (2014) further explain, the material realization of practices allows for outcomes to emerge. Thus, "a practice can have no meaning or existence without the specific materiality that produces it" (ibid.). On a related note, Gherardi (2016) speaks of sociomateriality as "the 'glue' that connects all the elements of a practice" (p. 39). Based on these considerations, social media cannot be considered as an independent entity, or a "space" where shopping "simply" takes place. Social media assemblages and shopping practice conform to the logic of meaning and matter: Materiality and practice co-constitute each other. At the same time, the performance of this variation of shopping brings its materiality to life.

The idea of practice enactment leads on to that of performativity. Indeed, practices "use" materials and transform them. As Scott and Orlikovski (2014) summarize, "performativity is based on the idea that the world is created in practice" (p. 879). As the authors further observe, the idea of performativity has been invoked to study the enactment of identities, geographies and markets, and this research has shown that such realities are realized and constructed in ongoing practices (Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). Following the logic of performativity, reality must be then viewed as contingent, dynamic and dependent on practical performance (Law, 2004).

Finally, and related to the above arguments, adopting a sociomaterial view of shopping practice also has implications for the understanding of agency and actors. On the concept of actors, Anderson and colleagues (2008) differentiate between *actants*, "those who act", or in other words "acting entities", and *actors*, "those to whom actions are attributed" (p. 83). The current study shares Anderson et al.'s (2008) notion that actors are "more or less stabilized entities to which actions can be attributed" (Araujo, Kjellberg, & Spencer, 2008, p. 10). If we accept that materiality has an impact on practices, we can conclude that materials, including human and non-human actants, have some sort of agency. More specifically, and recalling the notion of "carriers of practice" as suggested by Reckwitz (2002), from a sociomaterial perspective, materials have agency as they can be carriers of practices, too. Indeed, and referring to Shove and colleagues (2007), objects are not passive tools that serve purely to carry out practices; they can actively contribute to shaping the practice. Indeed, and following Orlikowski (2007) who refers to Bruno Latour,[11] agency is not an exclusively human attribute. Rather, the capacity to act is "realized through the associations of actors (whether human or nonhuman), and thus relational, emergent, and shifting" (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1438).

This discussion leads us to the process of acquiring agency, or the "making" of an acting entity. In previous research, this issue has been addressed by Michel Callon, who coined the concept of "agencements", as well as by various market studies scholars who continued to develop his ideas. Closely related to this is the idea of "agencing" (Cochoy, 2014; Cochoy, Trompette, & Araujo, 2016), which conceptualizes the process of acquiring agency. Research that has made use of these two concepts has shown that agency emerges through interactions and changing contexts within the sociomaterial fabric. From a sociomaterial perspective, agency is acquired and maintained through a dynamic, continuous (re)arrangement of the elements involved (Hagberg, 2016). As Hagberg (2016) explains, both formation of the configuration (practice) and the resulting entity (actor) should be understood as an ongoing process. To quote him directly, "this arranging is a constant process with uncertain outcomes and local differences not controlled by a single source, but the result of multiple efforts and adaptations" (Hagberg, 2016, p. 128). Accordingly, agency must also be understood as a more or less unstable construct that is subject to the dynamic interplay of the totality of the sociomaterial fabric. The capacity to act is distributed among the elements of the sociomaterial fabric.

Drawing on this, and turning to social media shopping once more, the sociomaterial fabric of the mode of shopping at hand, including its actants (e.g., software, algorithms, platform features) and actors (e.g., shopping practitioners, marketers,

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[11] Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law are considered the most influential representatives of actor network theory (ANT), a school of social science which developed in the field of science and technology studies in the 1980s. Although ANT is not explicitly addressed in this research project, it should be noted that the works cited in this passage draw on the fundamental ideas of this school.

brands), configures what users do and, by extension, how shopping is enacted (for a similar argument, see Marabelli & Page, 2018). At the same time, this means that humans do not have full control over how shopping on social media and its practitioners takes shape, nor is it solely the non-human elements that configure enactments and/or actors. Instead, I share the view that agency is distributed among the elements of a practice (for a similar argument on distributed agency see Fuentes et al., 2019; Hagberg, 2016).

Based on this discussion, I consider social media as a sociomaterial arrangement in which everyday practices, including shopping, are the result of an intertwining of physical (e.g., users, smartphones, objects) and digital materiality (e.g., the interface of social networks, digital artefacts such as discourse, images or social media metrics). Actants and actors must be seen as part of the sociomaterial assemblage that constitutes practices and practitioners in recurring enactments.

Summary of the theoretical framework

How do these three theoretical considerations – the sociocultural-, the practice theory- and the sociomaterial perspective – come together? First, I drew on studies that emphasize the sociocultural aspects of shopping to make a clear distinction between the stance on social media shopping proposed in this study and the consumer psychology-based conceptualizations of shopping found within most of the s-commerce literature. In doing so, I emphasize that shopping enabled through or closely interlinked with social media is not limited to commercial acts and corresponding activities. As explained earlier, the sociocultural view emphasizes the connection between shopping and complex social and cultural processes such as identity construction and meaning making. As previous research has shown, the notion of identity is especially important in relation to social media (e.g.; Marabelli & Page, 2018). These aspects receive little attention in current research on the topic. Thus, a sociocultural view of shopping broadens the discussion and shows that shopping and its associated doings and sayings are dependent on these sociocultural processes while also contributing to their reproduction.

To analyze shopping as a social and cultural phenomenon, I make use of practice theory as an analytical lens through which to make sense of the empirical material and examine how practitioners, or actors, act in relation to (external) social and material structures such as social media, and to develop an understanding of how these structures are integrated into existing routines and/or contribute to creating new ones. Social media is seen as a co-constituted assemblage that configures how practices (such as shopping) take shape. Accordingly, practice theory offers a contingent perspective on social media shopping.

Finally, I have presented the sociomaterial perspective as a specific way of looking at practices – a relational epistemological position that assumes a constitutive intertwining of the material and the social (Gherardi, 2012, 2016; Orlikowski, 2007, 2010). This perspective, one might say, adds an "ontological layer". In this view, the distinction between people and artifacts, or between materials and meanings, is only analytical; these entities are intertwined and condition each other in practice (Orlikowski, 2007). The division of activities, meanings, materials and competences as proposed by Shove and colleagues (2012), and as used in my analysis, must be seen as an analytical distinction. It serves to structure the analysis and enables comparison with other shopping-as-practice accounts in order to elaborate the specificities of this shopping mode. Ontologically, however, priority is given to neither humans nor non-humans, to neither the material, the cultural nor the social.

Based on these considerations, the proposed theoretical framework offers certain advantages to meet the aim of this study. Assuming that social media is a part of everyday life and that the two are mutually dependent, social media is seen not only as a purely technical system that enables or supports certain forms of human activity/social action due to its material properties. Rather, this view allows us to depart from a linear understanding (as suggested in most of the s-commerce literature) and broaden our focus. By viewing social media as an sociomaterial assemblage that involves a variety of social actors and actants in its creation, we can develop our understanding how humans and technologies interact with and constitute each other.

Sociomateriality as a theoretical standpoint, then, can provide a clear understanding of how social media configures and continues to reconfigure everyday practices because it is able to examine "both sides" and how they interact with each other. By emphasizing that everything material is social because it is created through social processes, this perspective also allows us to understand the process of how social media is interpreted and used in the context of shopping. Thus, the focus is not only on "the outcome" (a particular composition of doings and sayings), but also on the process that constitutes this form of shopping and its practitioners.

Chapter 4 – Capturing digitalized shopping modes

In this chapter, I map out the methodological choices I have made to investigate social media shopping[12]. The chapter begins with an introduction to ethnographic research, before moving on to a discussion on digital ethnography and its suitability for the present study. The study design was inspired by Halkier's (2017) advice for practice-oriented research. Halkier (2017) suggests relying on several methods, and creating a methodological design that "contains a mix of procedures that are aimed at getting to know the more tacit, embodied and material elements as well as the more explicit, discursive and conversational ones" (p. 202).

This chapter is divided into several parts. Part one is devoted to the context of the present study and introduces Instagram as the research field. In part two, I illustrate how I immersed myself in the "world of social media shopping" as a form of participant observation in order to become familiar with the field and Instagram's (shopping) functionalities, its actors and vocabulary. Part three discusses the suitability of interviews for studying practices and provides insights into the media go-along interviewing technique. To capture aspects of social media shopping that might be difficult to articulate, I used online observations of my interview participants' social media activities and their profiles, and observations of the public accounts of selected social media influencers. The chapter ends with a section on the ethical considerations made in this study, and one that focuses on the analytical choices.

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[12] In accordance with the considerations laid out in the theoretical chapter, this thesis is oriented towards social constructivism as the underlying research paradigm. Since the previous chapters have already dealt intensively and very specifically with practice theory and sociomateriality, I deliberately refrain from going into detail here about the fundamental understanding of reality and knowledge that underlies these theoretical considerations.

Digital ethnography: Researching shopping practice on- and offline

An introduction to ethnographic research

Ethnographic research is grounded in the researcher's desire to understand people's worldviews and their ways of life in the context of mundane and ordinary everyday experiences (Crang & Cook, 2007). Studies adopting this research methodology focus primarily on understanding human behavior, thought and emotion, and do not aim to produce results that can be used to predict patterns of behavior (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003) – an aspect that clearly distinguishes this approach from the methodological stances currently prevalent in the literature on s-commerce. Furthermore, ethnographic research often answers questions concerning the "whys" and "hows" of human behavior and puts an emphasis on experience. It was therefore highly suitable for collecting empirical material to answer my first research question, which centers on *why* and *how* consumers use social media to shop. In addition, ethnographers have noted that practice theory directs researchers' attention towards ethnography, since it is concerned with understanding sets of *doings* and *sayings* in everyday life contexts, and therefore implies a methodology that is able to identify what is actually happening during the performance of a practice (e.g., Hargreaves, 2011; Pink et al., 2016). Ethnographies are indeed a recurring element in practice theoretical studies, and this methodology has also been used to study practices related to digital phenomena (e.g., Elms et al., 2016; Närvänen et al., 2013) and practice change initiated through social media (e.g., Woermann et al. 2012). What these studies have in common is that they all implicitly illustrate that conducting ethnographies in a digital setting varies in many ways from more traditional ethnographic research. As I will show later on, this presents both theoretical and methodological challenges for ethnographers concerned with social media environments.

Ethnography in a digital, fluid and mobile world

Without any doubt, the digital has become part of our contemporary world and has also filtered through to research methods. It affects not only *what* we research, but also *how* we conduct our research. Publications labeled as social media ethnographies (e.g. Postill & Pink, 2012), digital ethnographies (e.g. Pink et al., 2016), Internet ethnographies (e.g. Hine, 2015) or similar have demonstrated the various options for applying the broad methodological palette of ethnographies to online fields. Despite – or because of – this growing popularity, the common understanding of how to conduct ethnographic research in a digitalized world varies significantly. Thus, it is not surprising that there exist various different ethnographic

styles and labels that merely share the common feature that they are all concerned with online phenomena, and work with some kind of online data (Varis, 2015). At the same time, these studies "convincingly demonstrate how ethnography is a flexible method[13] that on the one hand can be effectively adapted to online environments, but on the other hand continuously needs to be reshaped according to the features and mutations of online environments" (Caliandro, 2017, p. 3).

As Caliandro (2017) further points out, the contemporary Internet structure has evolved into a very complex space, characterized by fragmentation and fluidity. In particular, the interactive nature of Web 2.0, increasing smartphone ownership, and the plethora of new technologies have contributed to a transformation of the web towards a mobile, more dispersed context. In light of these developments, Hine (2015) proposes an understanding of the Internet as an embedded, embodied, everyday phenomenon which demands methodological agility and flexibility. Consequently, studying online environments and practices in a social media context requires us to rethink traditional ethnographic categories and their boundaries (Caliandro, 2017) and calls for an adaptation or extension of existing ethnographic methods.

As Varis (2015) points out, ethnographic research concerned with the digital offers an array of qualitative methods for capturing and assessing human behavior and reactions as they happen. As will be discussed in more detail later on, I agree with scholars who do not see much value in "virtualizing" traditional ethnographic methods that were originally developed offline by simply applying them to the online world (for a similar viewpoint see Hine, 2005). It is reasonable to adopt Roger's (2009) recommendation and consider the digital, and in this specific case social media, not as an object of analysis but as a "source of data, method and technique" (p. 7). Taking this approach has first allowed me to use the natural, embedded logic of social media, the native functions social media platforms offer, and the digital devices that enable them, and integrate them into my study design. Furthermore, it has allowed me to view social media as a part of a wider set of environments and societal structures that shape practices: Instead of putting social media per se at the center of analysis, I shift the focus to the ways in which social media is part of several activities, materials, meanings and competences, which together constitute practical enactments.

Thus, I follow Postill and Pink's (2012) approach to ethnographies with or on social media: The core idea of ethnographic research remains the same, but digital ethnographies acknowledge the openness of ethnographic places instead of limiting them to a closed community. It means purposefully incorporating digital technologies and tools into collaborative knowledge production, and it requires the

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[13] As will be illustrated in more detail later on, I do not regard ethnography as being comprised of a single method, as implied in this quotation.

researcher to consciously spend time online. This includes staying updated on social media, participating in discussions, collaborating, engaging, sharing, exploring, interacting (on- and offline), etc., and finally, archiving and preparing the collected material for analysis (Postill & Pink, 2012). The following chapters illustrate how these ideas were applied in the present study.

Study design

From a social media network to a shopping platform: Instagram as a new type of data source for researchers

The rise of Instagram

Instagram initially started as a photo-sharing platform and has seen rapid growth with regard to its active user base since its launch in 2010. The app's key features are quite simple: Users are able to upload, capture, record, edit and publish photos and short videos, share them with others, and "like", "save" or "comment on" other users' content. On the "newsfeed", they can browse through a stream of content published by accounts they follow. In the "Instagram stories" section, they can see snippets from other users' daily lives in the form of short video clips, often manipulated with augmented reality filters or color-grading filters. On the "explore page", users can explore popular and tailored content, and search for other profiles, audio and songs, hashtags and locations. Lastly, users can view and edit their own profiles. Instagram has a website with limited functionality, but most activities happen on the mobile app. Photos and videos are typically, but not exclusively, captured via mobile phones and content frequently resembles a documentary of users' day-to-day lives.

An interesting aspect that differentiates Instagram from other social networks it that following on the app is unidirectional. When profiles are made public, users can follow others without permission, and there is generally no mutual expectation of following back (Marwick, 2015). As Marwick (2015) further explains in her work on the selfie culture on Instagram, "this model creates an environment more conducive to fans or curious strangers than to known 'friends', as users can blithely add any account that looks interesting to their stream" (p. 143).

While it is difficult to find accurate statistics, Instagram is currently ranked among the most frequently downloaded applications. To date, Instagram's user base has shared a total of 50 billion images, and both the audience and the overall reach of the platform are experiencing dynamic growth in most countries (Aslam, 2022, n.p.). As an app which is free to download and available for almost all mobile devices and operating systems, Instagram can be seen as a collaborative,

participatory, open and public environment which is easily accessible and has become a subject of discussion in many recent research articles (e.g. Abidin, 2014; Abidin, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Herzallah et al., 2022; Hund & McGuigan, 2019; Marwick, 2015).

Instagram and shopping

When Instagram developed into the number-one "choice [of platform] for fashion and lifestyle content creators, and as the platform's user base mushroomed to more than one billion, the drive to capitalize on these dynamics intensified" (Chadha, 2018; Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 19). At present, it offers marketers a variety of options to stage their brands or present their companies, interact with their followers, reach their target audiences and monitor a variety of social media KPIs. At the moment, Instagram is the social media platform which is most closely linked to shopping. In early 2018, the company expanded the app's features and released "Instagram shopping" in Europe. Instagram shopping is a distinct post format designed to enable consumers to discover and learn more about featured products without leaving the app. This function allows retailers to post pictures that feature up to five products on a single post (usually an image), so called "tap-to-view tags". To access further information about the featured items, users simply tap on these visual "taps" to bring up additional (commercial) information. By clicking again, users can be re-directed to the company's web shop to view additional pictures and product descriptions (Instagram Business, 2017). Instagram Shopping is a special feature that can hardly be found in this form on any other social network, because Instagram was one of the first social media platforms that offered retailers a platform where they can not only advertise, but also link to their websites to sell their featured products.

In addition, Instagram is a social platform characterized by advertising and social media influencers, who are gradually replacing traditional celebrity endorsements. Collaborations between brands and so-called Instagram bloggers or (micro-) influencers are often used to promote brand content or products in order to help brands "turn social likes into real-life buys" (Small, 2018, n.p.). A large number of social media influencers, or as I call them "professional social media shoppers", have not only professionalized their shopping and turned it into a profession, as Small (2018) notes, but many of these users have become commonly consulted sources for shopping advice and recommendations, and represent a source of inspiration for many other Instagram shoppers.

Immersed in "Insta-life": Making sense of cultural references

An important aspect of the ethnographic research tradition is to see the world through the eyes of the practitioners under study, which requires the researcher to become part of their subjects' culture. In this context, Denzin and Lincoln (2005)

stress "deep understanding" as an important aspect of ethnographic work. As a first step in developing this deep level of understanding of the phenomenon under study, and to make sense of cultural references related to social media shopping, I began my fieldwork by immersing myself in "Instagram culture".

Inspired by danah boyd's (2016) strategies for capturing ethnographic data in online settings, and Postill and Pink's (2012) approach towards social media ethnographies, I consumed popular Instagram content on a daily basis. I followed trending hashtags and influencers, and watched IGTV[14], tutorials and many other video formats. I browsed the discovery section and consumed viral content. I witnessed how an Instagram page dedicated to a black and white polka dot dress (@hot4thespot) became popular; how Charlotte Tilbury's "Pillow Talk" lipstick became one of the most sought-after beauty products on social media; and how tooth whitening kits with UV lamps for smartphones and the "Dyson Airwrap", an expensive high-end hair styling tool, became a "thing" on social media. I shopped products promoted by influencers, clicked on ads, and bought second-hand items from people I followed. My use of this approach, and my efforts to keep up with emerging Instagram trends and shopping news, does not mean that I personally liked all the content I came across, or that I started preparing all my meals according to influencer cookbooks, or used the popular software Adobe Lightroom and trending story filters for my own Instagram content; but it helped me to make sense of talking points that came up in my interviews.

Notably, for participating in social media shopping, I used my private Instagram account, which clearly had an impact on *what* I encountered in terms of content. Even though Instagram remains silent about the details of their algorithm (as will be discussed in chapter six in more detail), it is well known that users' behavioral patterns affect what they see. Each user's Instagram feed differs, and is based not only on whom they follow, but also whom they interact with and what they have previously watched, liked or commented on (Warren, 2020). Thus, it is clear that a different researcher would have seen different products and ads and, most likely, encountered different trends. Thus, instead of starting off with a blank canvas, the content I came across, and the products I shopped while actively participating in social media shopping, reflected my personal interests and tastes as shopper, not that of a detached researcher.

Even though I am aware that my participation in social media shopping was not a structured endeavor, as these shopping-related activities often overlapped with other social media activities, it reflected an authentic social media environment, similar to what other ordinary users or everyday shoppers might encounter. Notably, I did

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[14] IGTV was a standalone video app developed by Instagram. The basic functionality was also available within the Instagram app and website and enabled longer videos. However, the name is hardly used anymore. Successive updates to the app have led to the videos being referred to as "Instagram video" or "reels" at the time of publication of this dissertation.

not specifically collect empirical material during this phase, but immersing myself in "Insta-life" helped me to develop a sense of what is happening on the platform, to try out the features, adopt the language and learn the wording used by social media shoppers, and finally to gain a deeper knowledge of what boyd (2016) calls "cultural references" which are important for building rapport with practitioners (here, specifically, interviewees), and understanding the context of the phenomenon under study.

Interviews with social media shoppers

Although previous studies taking a practice approach have set out well-grounded reasons for using interviews to research practices (e.g. Bulmer et al., 2018; Fuentes et al., 2018; Gannon & Prothero, 2016; Keller & Ruus, 2014), there is an ongoing debate about the limitations of talk-based methods in studying everyday life and about how far people are actually capable of *talking* about their practices. Referring to the tacit and implicit aspects of practices, critics tend to stress that interviews are not sufficient to study social practices, and question the potential of interviewing methods to produce valid data (Martens, 2012). Hitchings (2012) observed that this line of argument is frequently based on the assumption that practices are performed in such a habitual manner that respondents are unable to express them, and particularly the unconscious aspects of them. In addition, the often formal and static interview situation and its physical constraints may "separate informants from their routine experiences and practices in 'natural' environments" (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 462). Due to these shortcomings of traditional interviews, Halkier (2017) notes the tendency for some researchers to consider participant observation as a more valuable source of research material when it comes to understanding practices.

While I agree that the interview as a stand-alone method seems insufficient to constitute ethnographies (see also Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012), research that responds to these concerns has shown that respondents *do* have the ability to talk about ordinary enactments, and that talking can provide access not only to narratives but also to actions (e.g. see Halkier, 2017; Hitchings, 2012). Thus, the question is not *if* informants can talk about practices, but *how* we as researchers can assist them in doing so. Thus, while we need to be aware that not all groups of people are able to talk freely during one-on-one interviews, and that some practices might be more difficult to access in interview situations than others (Hitchings, 2012), instead of dismissing interviews per se, the more fruitful approach might be to find alternatives to the traditional "sit-down interview" and its potential limitations. Clearly, the type of interview always depends on the type of research, but trying out and evaluating more creative or unusual interview methods seems to be another direct response to the critique of ethnographic interviewing for researching practices (e.g. see also Browne, 2016; Nicolini, 2009).

With this in mind, I chose to make use of the media go-along interview – a method that combines interviewing and observing an informant interacting with a personal communication device and an online service – over the traditional ethnographic interview (e.g. as found in Spradley, 1979). As further illustrated in the following sections, in my case, included in the interviews were my informants' smartphones and their personal Instagram accounts, which became important parts of the conversations.

The media go-along interview – a verbal-visual, material and empowering interviewing technique

Initially introduced as the "go-along" interview (Kusenbach, 2003), and further refined into the "*media* go-along" interview by Møller Jørgensen (2016), the interview technique used in this study can be best understood as a verbal-visual tour that makes technology and the interviewees' own media (here, media that they produce and that they consume) – or any particular media of interest – an integrated part of the interview (ibid.).

Having media to hand throughout the entire interview "allows the researcher and participant to navigate and talk about media in that they have sensorial access together and simultaneously. As such, it is a method for access and of a particular scope: It is a process of access, of entering the media service at hand, while producing empirical material on the processes within it" (Møller Jørgensen, 2016, p. 39). Thus, the interview is not detached from the natural setting which in many ways shapes what users can experience and do with the digital media service under study (Møller Jørgensen, 2016), but "actively explore[s] their subjects' stream of experiences and practices as they move through and interact with" it (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463). Against this backdrop, it becomes clear that the go-along has its roots in ethnographic research, where it is common that researcher and informant interact with each other while the latter is confronted with or accesses artefacts, places or cultural scenes (Møller Jørgensen, 2016).

However, instead of physically walking through a particular environment, my respondents took me on a tour through their Instagram accounts. Practically, this meant that I began each interview by asking my informants to open their Instagram profiles, and used a set of questions Møller Jørgensen (2016) refers to as "open touring invitations" and "thematic touring invitations" to prompt my respondents to guide me through their social media (shopping) activities. These open invitations were closely related to Spradley's (1979) idea of "Guided Grand Tour Questions" (p. 87). Such questions (e.g., "Can we have a look at your profile together so you can show me what kind of content you post?" or "Can you show me what kind of activities you do on Instagram?") were used to encourage the research participants to take up the role of a guide to "use narration and sensorial access to a cultural space" (Møller Jørgensen, 2016, p. 60). While these questions were relatively open, and allowed my informants to narrate a pathway through the app based on their

choices, I used thematic questions (e.g., "Do you follow brands or retailers - can you show me an example?", "How do brand collaborations work?", "How do you find them?") to strategically frame the narrative movement and to encourage them to talk about specific shopping-related activities that I came across during my observations of social media influencers, and my own experiences as a social media shopper. In that sense, these questions were specifically used to direct the conversation to certain functions or "places" within the app (e.g., "Let's have a look at this particular post!" or "Can you show me a profile of an influencer that you like to follow?").

In addition to these two types of questions, I used descriptive experience and example questions (Spradley, 1979) in my interview guide to talk about the respondents' previous experiences with social media shopping, and to encourage them to give me specific examples of their shopping activities enabled through or interlinked with social media (e.g., "Can you describe the last time you posted something you bought and shared it on IG? What was it? Where did you get it? Why did you choose this specific item? What was the *process* of posting it?").

A hybrid between interviewing and observing

An important advantage of the media go-along is that it creates an interview situation where it is not only the narration that is important; it also offers an opportunity to observe how informants actually use specific materialities that are of interest when researching a social practice – whether they are of a physical nature like the media device used to access the app, or digital media services like Instagram. In this sense, the media go-along can be seen as a hybrid between interviewing and observing and, borrowing from Carpiano (2009), "by fusing the two traditional methodological techniques of field observations and qualitative interviewing, the go-along simultaneously takes advantage of each method's strengths, while employing both to compensate for each other's limitations" (p. 265).

Due to its potential to examine practitioners' interpretations of social media shopping, while experiencing and performing certain aspects of it, the media-go along gave access to situated action. More specifically, in my media go-along interviews, I sat next to my informants rather than across from them, to make screen sharing first of all possible, and also less awkward (see Møller Jørgensen, 2016). Sometimes participants kept talking while they routinely scrolled and flipped through the app with their device close to them, and without paying attention to me observing what they were doing. At other times they invited me to get a glimpse of what they were looking at by holding their phone closer to me and allowing me to take a picture of their screen. Thus, besides interview data, I simultaneously collected visual material, and later, also field notes and reflections that I wrote down after each interview. Even though I experienced that taking pictures of my informants' screens during the actual interview sometimes interrupted the flow of

the conversation for a moment, these pictures added a visual layer to the narrative flow and made it possible to better connect narration and action, and to situate and ground the interview. Similarly, a few interviews took place at my informants' homes, which made it possible for them to show me recent purchases made through social media shopping or other relevant objects that I also documented with pictures.

Empowering informants

As previously indicated, a media go-along interview is shaped not only by the researcher and the media materiality, but also by the respondents themselves (Møller Jørgensen, 2016). In conventional interview approaches, the distribution of roles is often clearly allocated. While the interviewer asks questions and records information, respondents provide answers to the questions raised. The respondents' role is often limited to this, which leaves them "conceived as passive vessels of answers" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 7). The power relations in such situations can be balanced by conducting the interview in a collaborative manner, and in a way that allows all parties involved to leave their respective roles (e.g. interviewer and interviewee) and to collaborate in the production of meaning. This approach also involves encouraging informants to raise questions and express their opinions in order to stimulate an open discussion around the topic of interest (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). The media go-along moves beyond the traditional "question and answer" situation and stimulates a more elaborate, open and balanced dialogue, and can even serve as a "rapport builder" that helps to overcome potential perceived power disparities naturally inherited in research (Carpiano, 2009). This last point is especially important here, since social media profiles usually contain a degree of personal and sometimes even sensitive information about respondents (e.g., private messages, information about whom they interact with, personal preferences and interests). Thus, letting informants choose which images to look at, and what kind of content to focus on during the discussion, is part of empowering them. In my case, empowering my informants in this way resulted in some of them asking questions about my opinion on the topics discussed, and produced interview situations that were less formal and rather casual.

Limitations of the media go-along interview

Besides the benefits associated with the go-along interview, research has also pointed to certain limitations of this method. However, limitations such as logistics, safety concerns, significant time investments for the researcher, and environmental conditions, which are typically related to go-along methods that involve observations and tours in (large) physical places (see Carpiano, 2009; Garcia, Eisenberg, Frerich, Lechner, & Lust, 2012), seem irrelevant for the media go-along. Nevertheless, Møller Jørgensen (2016), who conducted research on a dating app, experienced that the media environment and the entire interview situation had the potential to be experienced as a source of harm, especially since social media can

be unpredictable in terms of what kind of content may come up next. Thus, the media-go along can always involve unplanned or unwanted encounters.

We may also ask whether an explanatory practice performed during an interview is reflective of a respondent's "usual" experience with the media environment. Some authors argue that explanatory practices are also part of everyday life, and that the media go-along as a jointly guided endeavor does not impair the participant's routinized actions (Møller Jørgensen, 2016). Other authors emphasize that this limitation can be overcome if the researcher intervenes as little as possible (Kusenbach, 2003).

In my particular case, I was aware of these possible pitfalls before the interviews; however, neither one was an issue. During my data collection phase, I came across two additional challenges that had not particularly been discussed in the literature. The first was the difficulty of leading an interview while simultaneously observing; the second was related to the degree to which certain activities can be demonstrated during an interview situation. While the former is a matter of practice, a more all-encompassing challenge was related to my respondents' ability to perform social media shopping "in its entirety" during the interview. As will be shown in the analysis, social media shopping comprises an array of activities that require preparation, that are time consuming and are usually performed at home or on the go in diverse locations. In addition, shopping can stretch over a period of time (e.g., the process from seeing an item to finally purchasing it), which makes certain aspects of this mode of shopping impossible to observe during the media go-along. However, it was possible to assess these aspects of social media shopping through conversations rather than observations.

Altogether, I found the media go-along to be a useful tool for inquiring into the interplay between structural conditions and individual agency for shaping action. It makes it possible to ask questions and observe at the same time, and allows researchers to examine the informant's experiences, interpretations and practical enactments related to a certain sociomaterial context. As a tool for eliciting responses from participants while they are actively exploring or interacting with and within particular contexts, I view this method as a promising tool for addressing the challenges mentioned in the literature regarding the potential of traditional interviews to assess social practices.

Recruitment and sampling of interviewees

The selection of my interview participants was based on Holstein and Gubrium's (2001) notion of assigned competence. Study participants needed to be competent practitioners of social media shopping. That meant that suitable candidates were required to be regular users of social media, and in particular Instagram; know about the phenomenon of shopping on or via social media; and lastly, have experience of engaging in this mode of shopping themselves. Thus, I did not initially look for

social media professionals (such as influencers), but shoppers who use social media on an everyday basis, and at least occasionally for shopping. My selection was a purposive sample based on the assumption of competence in social media shopping and the idea of using a selected number of cases that would best allow me to conduct an in-depth study.

Before I confirmed an interview, I asked each potential candidate to send me their Instagram handle in order to further assess their suitability. For example, I looked at their number of posts to estimate whether they were active users or not, and looked through previous posts to see if they had ever created their own shopping content that I could make a topic of discussion during the interview. However, as noted above, being a content creator was not a prerequisite, and from my own experience and participation in social media shopping, I was aware that not all activities related to the practice under study are observable by simply looking at a profile. Finally, all participants were asked for permission to be followed for additional online observations after the initial interviews.

Different tactics were used to reach out to potential interview candidates. I began with my own personal network, reaching out to prospective participants via my personal social media accounts and asking my friends and followers to share my call for participants. In addition, I posted in several local Facebook groups to get in touch with people who fulfilled my criteria for social media shoppers. After each interview, I asked my respondents whether they could recommend other potential candidates who might be interested in participating in the research project. Since this approach only led to four more contacts, of which two agreed to be interviewed, it would not be correct to speak of a proper snowball sampling (as for example suggested by Silverman & Patterson, 2014). In total, I interviewed 24 women, aged between 21 and 34 years, of whom eight were recruited through my personal network, 14 via Facebook groups, and the last two via recommendation by other study participants.

The interviews were held in English and lasted between 35 and 70 minutes. They took place either in public cafés or, depending on my respondents' preferences, at their homes in the area of Munich, Germany between June 2019 and December 2019. Respondents were rewarded with a small gift card for a fashion or beauty retailer, as compensation for their time and willingness to further participate in my ethnographic study after the interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards (see Table 1 in the appendix for an overview of the study participants, their demographics and background information).

Online observations of interview participants and social media influencers

In addition to immersing myself in popular Instagram culture, which provided a large part of the foundation for my fieldwork, I also conducted structured online observations. As Utekhin (2017) points out, on Instagram people represent their social world and what they are currently engaged with, in a relatively transparent and traceable manner. In fact, Instagram allows researchers to monitor, track and capture users' online activities. Instagram users represent their social world and themselves mostly through visual content such as images and videos, but also via written discourse, including hashtags, emojis and tags. These "naturally occurring traces of users' activities" (Utekhin, 2017, p. 185) are all relevant, observable aspects that provide rich ground for capturing what shoppers actually do when shopping on or via social media.

For the present study, I conducted online observations on the public profiles of a group of social media influencers and on my interviewees' Instagram profiles. Choosing a combination of these two user groups had several benefits: First, social media influencers who use Instagram mainly for commercial benefits tend to be more active compared to "non-influencers". Thus, starting my observations with "professional" content creators broadened my understanding of the diverse social media shopping activities in the first instance. In addition, on social media, influencers are generally considered experts when it comes to shopping advice (e.g. see Abidin, 2016a; García Rapp, 2016). Thus, it seemed obvious to follow and observe these "professional shoppers" in order to investigate how these users provide shopping advice, stage (sponsored) products and encourage other users to shop. In addition, this strategy further allowed me to observe consumers' reactions to, and interactions with, influencer content. More precisely, while observing the social influencers' profiles, I looked at *what* other shoppers (who were not part of my sample) said in their comments on the content, and *how* they did it (e.g., what wordings they used and which emojis they chose when reacting to shopping-related content).

The online observations of my informants' profiles focused on their social media habits, and especially shopping-related activities. In line with my first research question, which seeks to understand how social media is used in shopping practice, and therefore involves mapping out activities, I paid attention to what shoppers posted on their personal timelines and what they shared on their story updates. This included scrolling through my news feed, which featured my informants' latest content, reading comments and conversations on their in-feed content, and watching their stories on a regular basis. My findings were documented with screenshots and brief notes (Silverman & Patterson, 2014) after each observation session.

For my online observations, I used a newly created Instagram profile (@socialshoppingresearch) to follow the public profiles of social media influencers

and my informants' profiles. Most of the informants had private accounts. Therefore, I asked for permission to follow them before choosing them as informants. In line with Fettermann's (1998) assertion that maintaining a professional distance during fieldwork is essential, my research profile did not contain any personal information, nor was it connected to any of my private social media profiles. Instead, it was clearly recognizable as a researcher's profile. The account was deleted in August 2022 when this study came to an end, to ensure anonymity of the study participants.

The initial structured observations started in August 2019 and ended in March 2020. During this time, observations were carried out on a regular basis, on weekdays and usually in the early evening, as well as sporadically during weekends. I found it useful to develop my own routine during these regular time slots in order to capture as much material as possible. Bearing in mind that each Instagram story is only available for 24 hours, and since the vast amount of content can be overwhelming at times, I found that conducting observations in the evenings at about the same time every day lowered the chance of missing temporary, but potentially important sightings. Thus, my observations were frequent, but brief. After this intensive period of field work, additional online observations were carried out until the writing process was finished. As further discussed in the section on analytical considerations, the data collection and analysis were not strictly separated. During the writing process, I also conducted "quick trips back to the field", a common practice in the ethnographic research tradition (e.g., see Atkinson & Hammersley, 2019; Beollstorff et al., 2012). When I returned to the virtual field site, I was able to collect additional material that illustrated the points made or reflected the overall narrative (Beollstorff et al., 2012).

Sampling criteria for influencers

Similar to my methods for finding interviewees, the selection of social media influencers for the present study was based on a purposive sampling (Silverman, 2010). Since the number of potential candidates seemed almost infinite, I based the final selection on a certain set of criteria. First of all, I looked for active users with a follower base above 50,000 who posted at least one new image every week and used Instagram stories to allow their followers to participate in their daily lives. In addition, and to further reduce the number of potential candidates, I only chose influencers who had participated in multiple in-brand collaborations to promote products and/or services, and engaged in displaying products (paid or unpaid) on a regular basis. Finally, candidates needed to be involved in at least one additional activity associated with social media shopping (e.g., owning a brand, store or product line). As mentioned before, the selection of influencers I came across and evaluated as potential study participants was to some extent influenced by my previous online behavior as a social media shopping practitioner. In this context I once more draw attention to the Instagram algorithm that determines what users do

and do not encounter. A different researcher might have found an entirely different sample. In order to overcome this subjectivity inherited in the choice of influencers, I gradually extended the sample by adding influencers who became the topic of discussion during my interviews. While I was familiar with some of the names my informants mentioned, others were new to me. Based on the same four criteria, I chose 11 additional social media professionals to be observed, which resulted in a total of 23 professional influencers. Notably, since these users were added to the study at a later stage, these profiles were observed only for about three months (see Table 2 in the appendix for an overview of professional social media influencers).

Analytical considerations

As Whitehead (2005) notes, conducting an ethnography "is a cyclic iterative process, wherein the ethnographer moves back and forth between observations, interviewing, and interpretation" (p. 34). Accordingly, my analysis was not a distinct phase of the research process, but rather an ongoing process that spanned throughout the data collection, formal analysis and ethnographic writing.

The analytical process was fundamentally inspired by Beollstorff et al.'s (2012) view on analyzing material for virtual ethnographies, and by the work of Kathy Charmaz and colleagues (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Bryant, 2016). Beollstorff and his co-authors (2012) propose a three-step process for analyzing empirical ethnographic material: systematizing, thematization, and forming narratives and arguments. In the first step, systematization, I read the textual material in its entirety (interview transcripts, interview notes and field notes) in order to familiarize myself with the material. During this stage, I also inserted the pictures I had taken during my interviews into the transcript documents. After this initial merging of the materials, I decided to print out the interview transcripts to add notes and annotations.

With the printed material to hand, I began to form initial codes. In doing so, I carefully went through the material multiple times, and read the interviews line by line. As Charmaz (2006) suggests, this form of coding enables a critical, and at least to some extent "neutral" view on the material, as it encourages questioning the data, which in turn allows the researcher to better identify and understand actions and associated processes. This coding technique was complemented by "incident-to-incident coding" (Charmaz, 2006). Here, I focused on the activities shoppers engaged in. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) refer to this as "an emphasis on action" with the intention to gain access to the material. To this end, I specifically searched the transcripts for words and phrases that described shopping-related actions, their characteristic trajectories, and their typical consequences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). I focused on means and methods by which

shoppers shaped their social lives, and I paid attention to the ways in which they achieved and constructed social order to identify routines and patterns.

The screenshots from the digital observations were also sorted and arranged according to which activity they related to. I also attempted to paste images onto PowerPoint slides to create virtual mind maps, but found that shuffling, sorting and regrouping pictures using different folders was the better technique to organize the material according to emerging concepts and patterns. I analyzed the visual material by paying attention to the organization of the (social media) environment, the materials found there, and the ways in which shoppers interacted with them and with each other (see also Whitehead, 2005). In addition, I looked at the language used by practitioners, as well as "other forms of expressive culture" (Whitehead, 2005, p. 38); for example, the use of hashtags, (shopping) tags, links and emojis. As recommended by Beollstorff et al. (2012), I tried to be as open as possible to new things: I wrote down particularly salient, unexpected or unusual quotes, discoveries or analytical thoughts on Post-it notes and pinned them above my work desk. The goal of this was to address and question them at a later stage.

The second phase of the analysis was characterized by thematization, and by "moving beyond the notation of single incidents" (Beollstorff et al., 2012, p. 166). I further developed my categories by connecting the codes, and by developing an understanding of the relationship between them. Following the grounded theory tradition that advocates the "constant comparison method", where the researcher continuously compares the different materials gathered with the emerging codes, and the different codes with each other, in order to develop theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Bryant, 2016), I mapped out similarities and differences in my material. For example, during this phase, I realized that a distinction between everyday shoppers and professional shoppers is essential in order to make sense of the variations found in my material.

This process was in turn accompanied by a rereading, recoding and reorganization of the research material. I shifted categories around (e.g., "shopper feedback"), built sub-categories (e.g., "affirmative comments", "critical comments", "follower questions") and looked into further literature to sharpen my ideas. I compared and evaluated different approaches and concepts in order to understand how my categories and findings inform and relate to each other (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Notably, all different ethnographic materials were used throughout the process of analyzing and writing. It quickly became apparent that the insights gained from my observations initially served to identify which activities constitute social media shopping and how practitioners carry out these activities. Much of my observational material (captured as screenshots) shows actual activities, as well as the materials involved. The screenshots and notes from the story observations are also particularly worth mentioning at this point. Professional shoppers in particular often shared

insights into how they create their content and how exactly their day-to-day lives as professional creators play out. For example, I was able to observe in detail which materials are used and *how* they are used. The material from the consumer observations also illustrated activities and materials, so I was able to compare the different actors regarding their doings and sayings, the ways in which they speak and write, for example. The interview data supported the observations (as they also covered activities) and also helped to better understand the subjects' motivations, emotions and meanings. Emotions could also be observed in some parts of the data (e.g., emojis can depict emotions), however, the interviews were an important departure point for questioning certain findings, which could then be confirmed or refuted. I used the field notes and pictures taken during the interviews primarily to understand how users interact with technology (hardware and software). Further, it must be emphasized that since the interviews were conducted with shoppers who can be categorized as either ordinary shoppers or semi-professional influencers, the part of the analysis that considers how influencers can take advantage of their role within the social media shopping ecosystem is largely based on the observations of professional influencer accounts.

Once the analysis reached a stage where I could no longer discover any new patterns, the third and final step of the analysis began. This phase was driven by the goal of transforming themes into narratives and arguments and making larger theoretical statements (Beollstorff et al., 2012). This phase was also not a linear process; in fact, the opposite was true. As I wrote the ethnographic accounts, I developed abstractions and constantly sharpened my key arguments. Indeed, shaping the argumentative core was an ongoing, iterative process which also involved some additional fieldwork in the form of quick returns to the research field. This helped me to stay "close to the data" and the informants' own categories and understandings, while allowing for theory building based on the "raw material" by connecting "individual meanings and actions with larger social structures" (Charmaz & Bryant, 2016, p. 838).
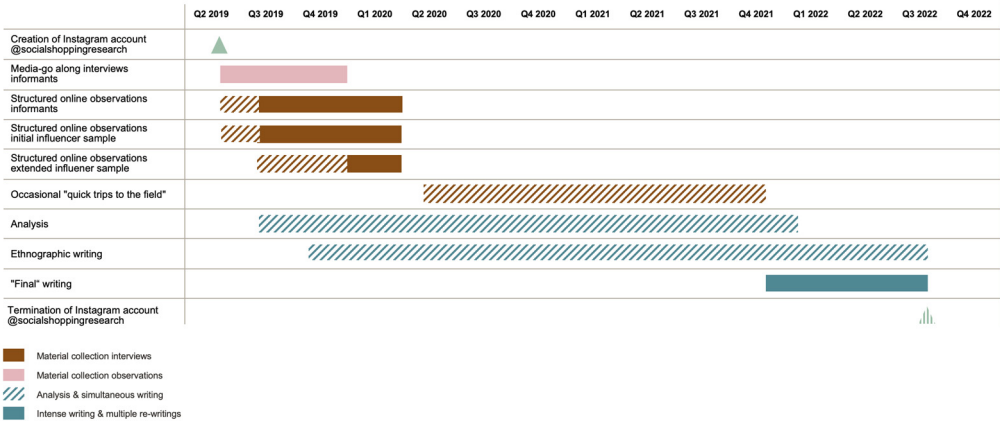
Figure 2. Timeline of the data collection and the dissertation process.

Limitations

Like any research, the present study has distinct limitations. The first concerns the chosen methodology and, in particular, the chosen research field. This study is based on an explanatory case study. My material was collected from a single social media platform. The single case offered the potential to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of social media shopping in a real-world context. However, it must be emphasized that the way social media shopping is performed on Instagram is certainly different compared to other social media platforms such as Facebook or TikTok, where the sociomaterial structures (particularly the technical design features and the user interfaces) differ compared to Instagram. Accordingly, the same study on a different social media platform might not yield exactly the same results when it comes to the descriptions of the shopping mode itself, as presented in the analysis.

Another possible point of criticism is the sample at hand. My informants' areas of interest mainly revolve around fashion, beauty, lifestyle and fitness. This most likely has an impact on the results of the study. While I did not plan for this focus from the beginning, it became apparent that these sectors are very present and, more importantly, very visible on Instagram, and were also considered as common areas for social media shopping by my study participants. A different focus, or the inclusion of shoppers or influencers who serve other niches (e.g., gaming, food, parenthood, etc.) would have enriched the study.

The selection of study participants should also be considered. The consideration of class, gender and ethnicity could have yielded more nuanced and richer results. In

addition, the age of the study participants could also affect the results. Industry research has shown that teenagers and very young adults in particular spend a considerable amount of time on social platforms, and that social media plays a significant role in everyday life for this shopper group, which has grown up with social media and the corresponding technologies (e.g. globalwebindex, 2017, 2019, 2020). It would have been interesting to include this very young group of social media shoppers as well, and, if possible, make comparisons with regard to the performance of the shopping mode under study among different age groups.

At this point, I would also like to address the apparent gender imbalance among the participants in my study. The fact that I only interviewed and observed women must also be seen as a limitation that carries certain implications. Of course, other genders are also represented among influencers and everyday shoppers. I assume, for example, that a mixed sample would have led to the inclusion of other areas of consumption, such as gaming, food and nutrition and probably an even stronger focus on sports, in addition to beauty, fashion and fitness which are currently strongly represented. This could have had implications for the results of this study. For example, there could have been variations in the aesthetic scripts and shared understandings (especially regarding self-image) that I emphasize in the analysis. There might also have been different or additional meanings involved. Moreover, according to industry research, there tend to be different gender distributions on different social media platforms (The Nielsen Company, 2022). While more female creators are active on Instagram and TikTok, male influencers are more likely to be found on YouTube, a platform that receives little attention in my study. Male influencers could thus also have expanded the discussion on how sociomaterial affordances shape practical enactments.

Another limitation concerns the type of practitioners considered in my study. My work focuses heavily on everyday shoppers who occasionally act as (amateur) social media influencers. I also considered those who are already successfully established as professional influencers, and whose shopping practice is a significant part of their job. What could have been more strongly represented in my study are the users who fall in between (the so-called nano-influencers): those who are already earning money through social media shopping, but who are not yet able to make a living from it. This limitation is based on the fact that at the beginning of the study, I suspected from my reading that influencers would play a role in my work, but I could not estimate to what extent this would be the case.

Ethical considerations and data processing

Issues regarding data protection and usage, as well as ethical considerations, were taken seriously within this project. Particularly in research concerned with the digital – where field sites are often public or semi-public spaces, and where it is not always immediately apparent that digital information involves individual persons or sensitive information – taking good care of informant data, and preventing any kind of informational risk or harm, are important considerations when balancing the rights of people with the benefits of scientific research (Boelstroff et al., 2012; Markham & Buchanam, 2012). To place these considerations and the principles of "The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity" in the context of my research project, I draw on Boelstorff et al.'s (2012) ethical guidelines for ethnographers who conduct research online. Further, I made sure that the data handling und processing was compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[15].

Ethics and sensitive data

As Boellstorff et al. (2012) point out, ethnographers are obligated to be transparent towards informants and tell them much as possible about the nature and purpose of the study they are participating in. Providing information about the research aim and the method applied and making one's presence clear as a researcher is crucial for trust building and for fostering good relations with the research participants (ibid.), and for complying with the principles for participating in social research. Following these principles, I clarified the fundamental nature of my study to participants during the recruitment process, identified myself as a researcher, and provided a link to my profile on the Lund University research portal to all interested parties. Participation in the study was voluntary and not subject to any conditions.

I began each of the interviews with a summary of my research project and my intentions for using the data. All participants were asked for their consent to record each interview and to document parts of these interviews with pictures, and to use the data for this research project. In addition, all informants agreed to have my researcher Instagram profile follow their (mostly private) Instagram accounts in order to collect further data after the interviews. In doing so, I stressed that anonymity would be maintained. The Instagram profile I used to follow my informants was declared as a researcher profile. In the profile bio, I explained that it was part of a PhD project on social media and shopping and that I was affiliated

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[15] https://gdpr-info.eu/

  https://gdpr.eu/

with Lund University. Finally, I explained that revoking consent or opting out of the study was possible at any time.

The profile I used to study my informants' social media practices online was kept private to avoid any third party getting access to the list of accounts I followed, as this contained all the profiles of my research participants. In addition, I did not allow my respondents to follow back, to avoid them finding out any information about the other study participants. To secure the account, a two-factor authentication was used. Finally, at the end of the study, in August 2022, the research account was deleted.

When conducting research on or with social media – and especially Instagram, a platform where people share their daily and private life with other people or even the public – one cannot fully avoid *encountering* sensitive content and sensitive data at some time during the fieldwork. However, such data was not collected. With regard to article 9 of the GDPR, "Processing of special categories of personal data", for the present work, in good conscience, no data were used that fall under the categories described in this article. Further, care has been taken not to use any potentially critical or harmful statements from the interviews and observations that could cast a person in a negative light.

Use of personal data

The processing of the collected data has been carried out in accordance with the GDPR. More specifically, "the principles relating to processing of personal data" have been taken into account in order to structure this section and to enhance transparency. The use of data for the purpose of scientific research has legal grounds and therefore legitimacy. In accordance with the aforementioned principles of the GDPR, the collected data have not been processed in a way that is incompatible with the purpose of conducting this study.

The principle of data minimization was particularly relevant for the analysis sections within this work. Only the data that were absolutely necessary were used. This means that within the analysis, screenshots were only used where they served the purpose of visualizing findings and supporting arguments. Screenshots or quotes that did not serve this purpose were not published. The faces of persons (study participants) were generally made unrecognizable using censor bars. However, in order to be able to illustrate activities and objects in use, which I considered as important for illustrating practical enactments and for building my arguments, I refrained from making the subject's whole body (bodily activities, materials) and the setting they were operating in (materials) entirely unrecognizable. All these techniques were used so that individuals could not be identified. Other persons who were visible in images, for example in the background or on a brand profile, were rendered anonymous by image processing (blurring). In addition, all pictures used

were slightly blurred – the figures in this study therefore purposely have a slight blurriness.

The study contains brand names. In most cases, brand names were not covered, since it can be assumed, especially in the case of large companies that are very active in influencer marketing and thus employ a large number of brand ambassadors and promoters in several countries, that the data I used do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about individual persons. One exception is smaller brands (less than 100,000 followers), where the identification of individuals through information about a collaboration might allow conclusions to be drawn.

Despites this exception, direct identifiers such as clear names, account names, and specific locations, hashtags, accounts that liked or commented, or other features that could be indicative of participant identity were also obscured by censor bars. As is common in research practice, pseudonymization also included the replacement of particular characteristics with characteristics of comparable information and meaning, but which do not allow any inference about the subjects (see Appendix 1 and 2). This also included altering names and using pseudonyms. To be precise, in order to distinguish between informants and influencers, I used different naming techniques. Informants were given female names, while influencers were named by a letter in alphabetical order "@influencer[A];[B];[…]". Given this degree of anonymity, I found it appropriate to use exact-quoted interview material in the analysis, but did not use direct quotes from written chats or online conversations, as written discourse could potentially be retraced online. Since the interviewees were not native English speakers, slight linguistic adjustments were made where necessary. Care was taken not to distort the content, but merely to improve readability. Data that were not in English were translated verbatim. Again, where necessary for understanding the content, slight changes were made to the wording to reflect a more natural English language.

For documentation purposes, this project was registered in "PULU", an internal program for the documentation of the processing of personal data at Lund University.

Chapter 5 – The performance of social media shopping

This chapter presents social media shopping as a particular form of shopping that is configured by the sociomaterial fabric of social media platforms. In doing so, it will be shown that both the virtual and the physical, the human and the non-human interact with, reinforce and constrain each other, and ultimately constitute this mode of shopping. Further, social media shopping is presented as a distinct variation of shopping that differs in many ways from previously researched shopping modes. Engaging in social media shopping requires practitioners to use and link together a particular set of meanings, materials and competences, which will be laid out in detail. In this regard, this chapter also describes the different activities that constitute social media shopping. To this end, three themes that emerged from the empirical material are presented, all of which highlight the entanglement of the social and the material as social media is introduced to shopping practice. Consistent with previous accounts of shopping, this chapter shows how shopping involves both human and non-human elements (e.g., see Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2019; Samsioe & Fuentes, 2021), both cultural and economic aspects (e.g., see Aslan, 2021; Elms et al, 2016), both emotions and rationality (e.g. see Ozen & Kodaz Engizek, 2014), and is also closely linked to the production and reproduction of identities (e.g. see Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Miller et al., 1998).

As my empirical material shows certain variations in terms of how social media shopping can be performed, I distinguish between two groups of shoppers: namely, everyday shoppers and professional shoppers, or influencers[16]. This distinction runs throughout the analysis and is intended to highlight the different actors and their variations regarding their social media shopping practice. However, as will be shown later on, these groups are by no means stable entities. The analysis demonstrates that social media shopping is a mode of shopping that blurs established boundaries between shoppers and sellers, between the human and non-human, and between the virtual and the tangible.

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[16] The terms "professional social media shopper", "social media influencer" and "influencer" are used interchangeably.

Consuming shopping content

Social media shopping entails the consumption of shopping content. As such, it involves a distinct form of digital window shopping that is enabled, shaped and constrained by both physical and virtual sociomaterial entities. In line with previous shopping research, shoppers use social media for browsing and for discovering new or trending products (e.g., Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2016), as well as for cultivating their "desire for an attractive life and its trappings" (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 27). All of this happens in an environment that bears immediate commercial potential and accessibility (Hund & McGuigan, 2019). Instagram's sociomaterial assemblage resembles an interactive storefront where various shopping opportunities, and especially those commodities that match aspired-to lifestyles, are presented in an aesthetically appealing, but also very convenient manner. Social media shoppers, and especially influencers, who are part of the sociomaterial assemblage themselves, make a decisive contribution to this. By offering other users the potential for interpersonal relationships, they foster identification and contribute to making social media shopping a meaningful and gratifying mode of shopping.

Discovering trends: Browsing and getting inspiration

The shoppers interviewed for this study reported that they enjoy using social media to "just get some inspiration and to get a feeling of what would be nice together, and find new stuff all the time" (interview with Jessica), because "on Instagram, you see the trends; they pop up first on Instagram and then you see it everywhere" (interview with Linda). What these two women describe refers to the act of browsing, which has been depicted in previous literature as "the examination of a retailer's merchandise without a current intent to buy" (Bloch, Ridgway, & Sherrell, 1989, p. 13). Browsing has been acknowledged in much of the recent shopping-as-practice literature (e.g. Bäckström, 2011, 2013; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019) and discussions of this activity have broadened the more traditional goal-oriented conceptualizations of shopping (Bloch et al., 1989). The act of exploring current offers is closely related to what Bäckström (2011) refers to as "scouting the marketplace", and much previous shopping research has framed similar activities centering on discovering novelties as experiential consumption (e.g. Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Lehtonen & Mäenpää, 1997). In line with these studies, social media shoppers expressed that browsing on social media is a pleasurable activity in its own right, where the acquisition of products is not always the final or intended achievement.

Nevertheless, being able to buy products via, or inspired by, social media content is important for many consumers, especially once they have their eye on a particular object. As demonstrated in the following excerpt, browsing on social media is often the starting point for shoppers' customer journeys, which can stretch over time and

involve multiple on- and offline touch points. Since Instagram does not offer in-app features that enable transactions (including payments) on the platform itself, the act of purchasing always happens on external sites, or, as shown in the following excerpt, in physical stores. In fact, browsing on social media often leads to the consultation of external sources for further information, multiple on- and offline store visits, as well as actual purchases. Tessa, a 24-year-old store manager, describes her browsing activities on social media as follows:

> Tessa: "Like almost every day I see something, and I think, *"Oh, maybe this will fit into my wardrobe, too"*, or *"I have something similar, maybe this would be nice to add."* Yes, it's normal!"

> Interviewer: "Do you have an example for me? Something recent?"

> Tessa: "At the moment, it's… Mhm… Most of the time it's bags, designer bags! Lots of Aigner and Louis Vuitton, these kinds of bags I see. After that, maybe I'll walk down the Maximilian Street [one of the most prestigious high streets in Germany] and think, *"Oh, okay. I saw it online."*"

> Interviewer: "Do you sometimes end up buying something, or do you have a story for me about when you found something on Instagram and you actually bought it?"

> Tessa: "Yes! I bought this bag a few weeks ago.

> [Tessa shows the bag she is carrying with her.]

> I saw it online first and I really, really liked it. I went shopping and thought about it a little bit more, and after that, I went and bought it. It took me from seeing it to buying it, maybe two weeks… I had this picture in my head!"

> Interviewer: "What picture? Was it an advertisement, was it an influencer…?

> Tessa: "It was an influencer. It was @influencerF. She's a Munich blogger."

> Interviewer: "Can you maybe show me which picture it was?"

> Tessa: "Just give me a second."

> [She picks up her phone and scrolls through some images she has saved on her Instagram.]

> "This [bag] is from Aigner… This picture was for a trip…. This was from Aigner itself and the other from…. I don't know… But I had to go it get it [laughs]."
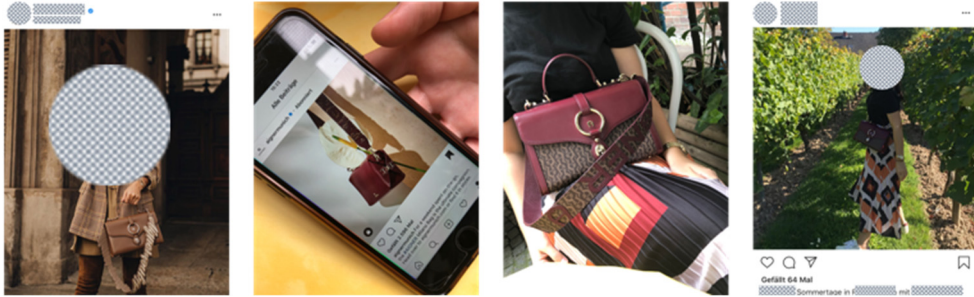
Figure 3. From an Instagram discovery to a feature on a user's profile: The Aigner bag story.
1) Screenshot from @influencerF's profile that initially inspired Tessa.
2) Tessa shows similar products on @aignermunich's Instagram page. The picture was taken during our interview.
3) Tessa shows her bag during the interview.
4) Screenshot from Tessa's Instagram profile that displays the bag. The screenshot says: "Summer days in [place] with [name]."

As illustrated in this case, Tessa saw an image of a bag on her Instagram feed that not only stuck in her head, it also inspired her to trace the origin of the product and "follow" it from an influencer's profile to the brand's Instagram page and to their web shop, and later to their flagship store, where she eventually bought it (see also Figure 3). As exemplified here, the performance of this shopping technique requires the mobilization of a specific set of competences, including knowledge about social media influencers and their promotional activities, brand profiles, and how to use social media mechanisms to collect additional product-specific shopping information. While the discovery itself was unplanned, Tessa's example illustrates how shopping on social media can be performed in a thorough and methodical manner. As exemplified by this story, and similar to other modes of shopping that involve extensive modes of looking (e.g. Gregson et al., 2002), careful searching, evaluation and selection (e.g., Bäckström, 2013; Fuentes, 2014; Fuentes et al., 2019), or price comparisons (e.g., Fuentes & Svingstedt; Gregson et al., 2002), social media shopping can be performed in a systematic manner, frequently grounded in making well-informed purchases. What is also made clear at this point is that the social media shopping experience and the accompanying practical enactments include various virtual and non-virtual elements and moments. Accordingly, this type of shopping is neither purely nor primarily virtual, as is often assumed in the s-commerce literature. These activities take place both on- and offline, which indicates that this type of shopping is inherently hybrid in nature.

Never *not* shopping: Discovering and finding without searching

From Tessa's interview excerpt and from many other examples from my fieldwork, we can see that shoppers rarely actively search for particular items on social media. Instead, they *discover* them. Previous research has highlighted that shopping can entail finding appealing products that one has not specifically been looking for (e.g. Bäckström, 2011; Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Gregson et al., 2002; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019) – a phenomenon also known in the shopping literature as "idea shopping" (e.g., Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2016).

On social media, however, this activity plays out differently. The notion of discovering products is closely related to how Instagram is organized. Instagram's sociomaterial assemblage makes products *appear* in users' news feeds or in their story updates, and shopping opportunities often seamlessly blend in with non-shopping related content. In addition, due to various tagging mechanisms used by social media influencers and everyday shoppers (as will be illustrated in the course of this chapter), additional information about the items on display is frequently *presented* to them. When talking about shoppable posts, Kim, a 28-year-old woman who describes herself as an environmentally conscious shopper, explains how she spontaneously and unintentionally discovers products and related product information:

> Kim: "I guess one of the examples is @skagendenmark, I think they use it [shoppable posts]. I've used it many times before.
>
> [Kim searches for the brand's account and opens an Instagram page]
>
> Oh, that's a crappy watch… Anyway, they have a lot of cool bags sometimes… Okay, wrong channel, I guess…
>
> [She finds the right account and clicks on a picture that features a shoppable post]
>
> Anyway, I like the idea of looking at a product and then I instantly know if it's like 300 or 50 [Euros]. […] I think I have clicked on it and I've also popped into the online shop, but I haven't bought it right away. But I'm always checking the brands. If somebody tags the brands then I check the brand's site [Instagram page], and then I go to the online shop. That's something I do at like @skagendenmark for the bags… or… what else do I check? Like @twothirds_bcn which is an environmentally friendly online shop, or an eco-online shop." […]
>
> Interviewer: "And why do you check these tags?"
>
> Kim: "Well, sometimes I just see an ad, and then I'm, *"Oh well, there's a sale going on!".* So, I go to the website with the link in the description and then I'm scrolling through it. That happens a lot [laughs]."

In this passage, we can see that sociomaterial assemblages that constitute social media shopping and related enactments on the platform enable shopping opportunities to "pop up", as users interact *with* and *within* these assemblages – e.g., the technical in-app features and functionalities, the content and the actors involved. Thus, on social media, shopping can occur even when one is not intending or anticipating it. Shopping is ubiquitous on the platform, and "discovery" can *happen* at any time, which clearly differentiates this type of shopping from others.

Indeed, social media shopping often starts in situations where shopping is not the primary reason for a user engaging with the platform. During my interviews, shoppers reported that while using social media for their functional needs, such as messaging, entertainment or updating statuses (see also Kaur, Dhir, Rajala, & Dwivedi, 2018), shopping opportunities simply arise on a regular basis. Shopping thus takes place in various situations throughout the day, such as during waiting times – a finding that corresponds with Fuentes and Svingstedt's (2017) work on mobile shopping – or while taking a break from other activities, which reflects the recreational aspects of shopping (e.g. Bäckström, 2013; Prus & Dawson, 1991). Shopping is therefore often an unplanned side event that is mixed in with other (social media-related) activities.

At the same time, social media is contributing to shopping becoming increasingly seen as common and incidental. Social media often "triggers" shoppers to leave the platform and visit online stores to "just have a very quick look" (interview with June), which results in numerous unplanned online shopping trips, sometimes ending on the check-out page of an external web shop. But more frequently, these shopping trips are terminated only shortly after they began. Similar to Kim's example, I witnessed many of my informants switching back and forth between Instagram and different shopping websites connected to the content being discussed, which further underlines the elements of sophistication and routine that characterize social media shopping practitioners:

> It was a bit hard to follow when Amy talked about skincare products and her favorite brands. Not that I didn't understand *what* she was saying, but it seemed like she assumed *I knew all these brands* and accounts she was showing me? (I did not.) As she spoke, Amy typed several things into the search box and opened maybe 3-4 pages in quick succession. She didn't mention any names. She kept talking: "So, they got…", "Here, see…". No pictures taken. (Field notes taken shortly after the interview with Amy)

> It is not possible to trace in the transcript what exactly she was showing. She did mention (account) names, but in the recording, it was not intelligible. But the transcript "confirms" she might have assumed I was familiar with the content she talked about (e.g., "you know", "…right?"). (Subsequent addition to the field notes from the interview with Amy)

Notably, most informants claim that these spontaneous browsing sessions are often very brief, but frequent. This finding resembles a phenomenon called "snack-time mobile" which refers to the tendency to consume information on mobile devices in frequent, but rather short bursts (Hund & McGuigan, 2019). In line with this, and in accordance with Fuentes and Svingstedt's (2017) work on mobile shopping, I found that browsing on social media can be a pleasurable, but time-consuming and highly engaging activity in which shoppers may "lose themselves" (ibid., p. 140). The ever-growing stream of novel shopping content shared by everyday shoppers, social media influencers and many other actors, and the occurrence of multiple, often unplanned browsing sessions during the course of the day, result in a tendency to spend a lot of time on social media and to "do it [shopping] all the time" (interview with Hanna).

While the "always-on" and "always-available" (Marwick, 2015, p. 140) nature of social media clearly comes with some benefits, shopping on social media – similar to other modes of shopping – can entail stress, anxiety and frustration, and may also lead to overconsumption (e.g. see Bäckström, 2011, 2013; Fuentes et al., 2017; Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). On social media, these aspects are even amplified, as shopping is an integrated part of the social media experience and cannot be separated from entertainment, networking or other social media-related activities. Like Tessa, who reported finding "attractive products" daily, the majority of other shoppers I spoke with expressed concern that social media often leads to unplanned purchases because "the temptation is always there" (interview with Gina), and "if you see products on Instagram, it really makes you want to have those products" (interview with Cara). As seen in the following interview excerpt, the sociomaterial fabric of platforms like Instagram creates and reinforces these conditions:

> Hanna: "It lowers the boundaries to get something because they show you *everything*: they show the price, they show you which size they're wearing, and they even give you access to the store. It makes it sooo easy to get something. It makes it so fast! Which is not always good [laughs]. Because you buy so much more, which you probably don't need."

Drawing on Hanna's statement, what makes this kind of shopping easy, convenient and enticing can once again be related to the condition and organization of the platforms. In particular, Instagram's algorithm is known for constantly analyzing shoppers' browsing behaviors and preferences, and for presenting them with new content and advertisements based on content they have previously engaged with. Thus, and in line with Orlikowski (2007), the resulting sociomaterial assemblage that constitutes this mode of shopping is both emergent and contingent, and subject to constant change. Users are *constantly* fed new shopping opportunities, and the stream of novel (shopping) content never ends. It seems that users are never *not* shopping when engaging with the platform. This aspect clearly distinguishes the

form of shopping examined here from other shopping modes. As we have seen throughout this chapter, this form of shopping has certain similarities with, for instance, mobile and online shopping in terms of the activities, meanings, materialities and competences that previous literature has already highlighted. What must be emphasized at this point, however, is that social media brings shopping even closer to the consumer. Shopping has become an integrated part of social media, and thus shopping also becomes tied up even more closely with everyday life. The boundaries between entertainment, leisure and shopping are not only becoming increasingly blurred; these categories can hardly be kept apart.
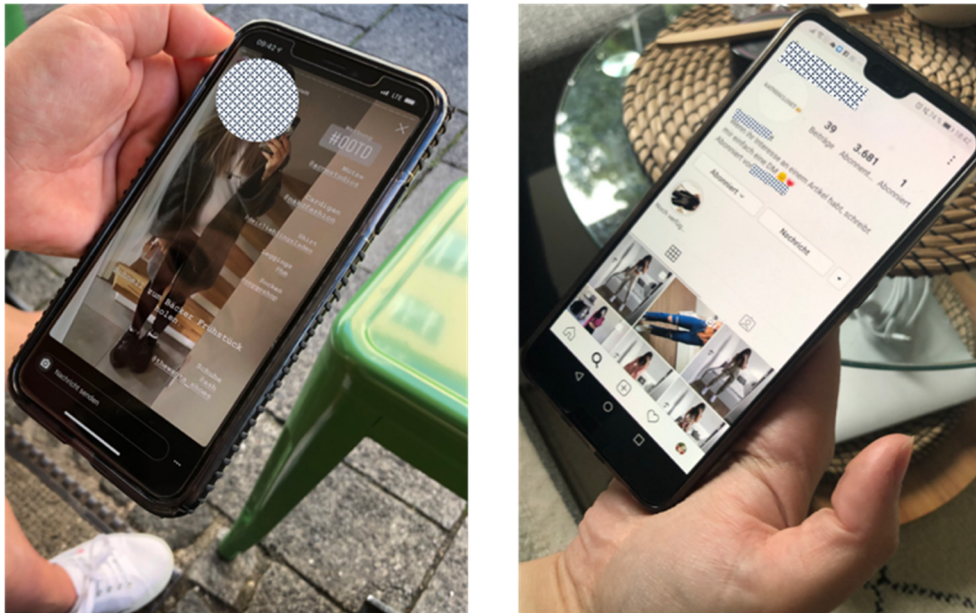
Figure 4. Product discovery on social media.
1) Hanna shows how she discovers shopping opportunities on Instagram stories.
The screenshots says: "Quickly to the bakery to get breakfast. Advertisement. #OOTD. Hat @brandname. Cardigan @brandname. Shirt @brandname. Leggings @brandname. Socks @brandname. Shoes @brandname @retailstorename."
2) Emma browses an influencer's "virtual closet" for pre-used clothes.
The screenshot says: "If you are interested in an article, just write me a DM."

Sale shopping: Searching for and shopping with discount codes

Another sub-theme that emerged from my empirical material centers on discount shopping. Within the shopping literature, several authors have devoted attention to particular goal-oriented modes of shopping that involve the acquisition of products that have been lowered in price (e.g. Kelsey et al., 2019; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). These studies have illustrated that searching for, tracking down and acquiring objects at a favorable price is often experienced as particularly satisfying. In this context, the metaphor of shopping as "bargain hunting" is repeatedly used in the academic discussion (e.g. Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Bäckström, 2011; Cox, Cox, & Anderson, 2005). Many of these studies investigate environments such as flea markets (Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Gregson et al., 2002), large grocery stores (Kelsey et al., 2019) or pop-up sales (Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019), where bargains are not always explicitly presented to a shopper, but require shopping practitioners to invest time and effort, and sometimes to develop distinct strategies and tactics, to actually find desired items (e.g., Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). When engaging in such modes of shopping, the acquisition of products often makes consumers feel proud, smart and competent. As Evans (2011) points out, such "thrifty shopping" is characterized by "the thrill and skill of 'the bargain'" (p. 551).

On social media, however, money-saving opportunities in the form of discount codes or special promotions are frequently offered at the same time as items are presented. During my observations, I noted that announcing promotions and sharing discount codes are common activities for social media influencers. Whether they are sharing an unboxing or a shopping haul, influencers who collaborate with brands almost always provide discount codes to their followers, as their commission often depends on how often that code has been used by others (Schaffer, 2021). Thus, and given the frequency of promotions offering various price reductions on social media, the "thrill" of acquiring items at a lower price is less significant for shoppers in this context compared to other shopping modes, where sales and price reductions are the exception. On social media, and in particular on Instagram, users *expect* discounts and promotional codes, and strategically tracking down these codes is part of many practitioners' shopping routine:

> Lou: "For example, with @nakdfashion or @idealofsweden I would never order without a code because I know next week, they'll have a code again with an influencer. I would just be like, *"No, I don't want to pay more for it when I can get it like 10% to 15% off next week."* I'm always waiting for that. My favorite brand, ASOS – I own lots of stuff from ASOS – they never have codes.[17] That's not that great but I order without it. With @nakdfashion or other brands, I'm always waiting

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[17] This statement is in fact incorrect. Lou mistakenly claims that ASOS does not offer influencer discount codes; in fact, ASOS regularly promotes discount codes on their social media and on their website.

for it [a discount code]. Especially around Black Friday, I'm really waiting for the codes and seeing who has one and then I order lots of stuff, way too much! [Laughs]

Interviewer: "How do you get the codes? You said you wait for them, or do you search for them?"

Lou: "Normally, I wait for them because I know when I'm just checking the stories, I will see the codes when there's a new one. Sometimes, when there's a piece I've seen online and I'm like, *"I really want to have that now,"* then I'll go to the stories of the influencers I know who collaborate with that brand and then I'll have a look at their stories! Once, I just went to @nakdfashion and tried out like "INFLUENCERNAME20" and I was lucky that she had a code at the time. Sometimes, I'm just like, *"Okay, they probably have one but I'm just trying that out."*

What becomes evident from this passage is that shopping with a discount on social media is experienced as enjoyable, similar to other modes of shopping that involve "bargain hunting" (Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Gregson et al., 2002; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). However, as reflected in Lou's assertion that she would never pay full price for certain brands, saving money is also *taken for granted*, and therefore, nothing special. Yet, specific shopping skills seem all the more important. Lou's statement highlights the range of tactics shoppers use to find money-saving opportunities on social media, for example by visiting influencer profiles, observing story updates, or checking other shoppers' story highlights. Her idea to make up and try out a code, composed of an influencer's name and a number representing the percentage of the expected saving, not only suggests a certain creativity, it also exemplifies her level of engagement and dedication, which is in no way inferior to the bargain-hunting skills acknowledged in previous shopping literature (e.g., see Kelsey et al., 2019; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019).

Other shoppers recounted similar stories. For example, some shoppers also search for influencer codes on external sites and via Google, as "most of the bloggers do post these codes on their blogs, too" (interview with Tessa). In addition, social media shoppers indicated that they not only search for codes when they are already considering a purchase, but also take screenshots to save the code for a later date if they come across an offer that may be relevant to a future purchase. This finding once more illustrates that social media shopping is not bound to a specific time. Technology makes it possible to stretch shopping out over time and store practically relevant information (in this case a discount code) as a virtual artifact (screenshot) in the shoppers' personal collection (in their camera roll, or as a bookmark directly in the app).
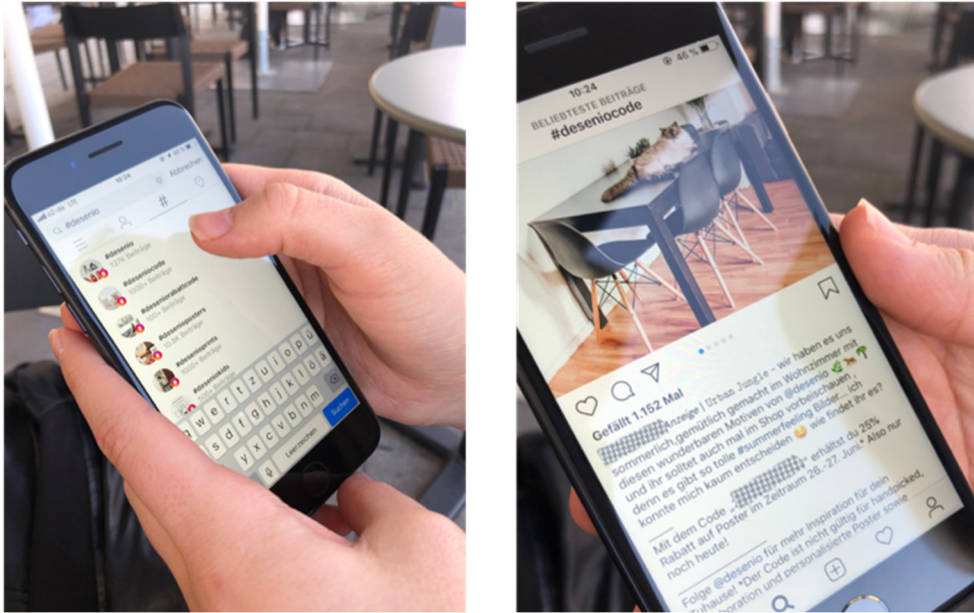
Figure 5. Hunting for discounts.
Mia demonstrates how she searches for discount codes on Instagram during our interview.
The screenshot on the right says: "Advertisement I Urban jungle – We have made it summery cozy with these wonderful posters from @desenio [emojis] and you should also visit the store because there are so many great #summerfeeling images [emoji] I could hardly decide. What do you think? With the code [name] you get 25% discount on posters in the period [date]. Only valid today! Follow @desenio for more inspiration for your home [...]."

Taken together, the previous sections have demonstrated how shoppers consume content in the context of shopping on social media. With the help of three sub-themes ("Discovering trends: Browsing and getting inspiration", "Never not shopping: Discovering and finding without searching" and "Sale shopping: Searching for and shopping with discount codes"), its practical enactment was depicted, and certain parallels were drawn with already established forms of shopping. What is special here, however, is that the consumption of shopping content is enabled, shaped and constrained by the interplay of physical and virtual sociomaterial entities – everyday shoppers, social media influencers, platform affordances and many other elements. In particular, it has been emphasized that the sociomaterial fabric is constantly changing, and the platform's organization ensures that users can potentially encounter shopping content at any time they interact with social media platforms, even though they might not be actively looking for shopping opportunities. This form of discovery shopping is a unique characteristic of social media shopping. While it can be utilitarian, helpful and convenient, we have also seen that it can involve an element of persuasion, as shopping opportunities are practically infinite on social media. Social media shopping provides immediate commercial potential, anytime and anywhere.

Producing shopping content

The performance of social media shopping is not only about consuming content produced by others. Shoppers are also actively involved in the production of shopping-related content for social media platforms and therefore contribute to their existence and preservation. Besides millions of selfies, vacation photos, meaningful moments, and snapshots from everyday life, shoppers use social media to share what they have bought, where they bought it and whom they bought it from. In contrast to posting reviews aimed at supporting other shoppers with information – an activity that has been widely discussed in the s-commerce literature (e.g. Do-Hyung et al., 2007; Hajli, 2013; Turban et al., 2016) – the public display of shopping on social media also reflects aims related to self-expression and status (as also discussed in Duan & Dholakia, 2017; Harnish & Bridges, 2016). The following sections show how practitioners use the sociomaterial affordances of social media to apply various content creation techniques and thus realize and make visible such social meaning s through their shopping practice.

Presentation modes and tactics: Staging, photographing and filtering

Displaying one's possessions on social media is a common activity that characterizes this mode of shopping. On Instagram, the (public) display of achievements and acquisitions is not only considered as legitimate but is also explicitly *desired* by social media shoppers. Specifically, there are two types of product display that currently dominate on social media: First, selfies, portraits or videos of the shopper that show items in use (see Figure 6), and second, carefully styled flat lays and arrangements where items are positioned on a (flat) surface and typically photographed from above (see Figure 7).

While the former technique is frequently used for clothes, make-up products and accessories and anything that can be worn or used while being photographed or filmed, flat lays are utilized for any kind of product – from food, calendars and books to interior decoration and beauty tools, the product categories featured on social media content seem endless. Typical of these modes of product presentation is an aesthetically appealing image composition: Products are usually prominently positioned in the middle of an image, surrounded by other items, often with matching colors, decoration and carefully selected backdrops. While similar "innovative, creative and often complex processes of taking, editing, sharing and viewing" have previously been acknowledged as a set of activities related to digital photography (Shove & Pantzar, 2007, p. 157), social media transports them to, and connects them with, the domain of shopping.

Figure 6. Displaying sponsored items in use.

1) @influencerO wearing and promoting jewlery from @brandname. The screenshot says: "[emoji] YAY, finally I can tell you about my dream project: I've been dreaming of designing my own jewelry for so long, the way I envision it... and together with [@brandname] I was finally able to make it happen [emojis]. Every piece of jewelry I have designed reflects me […]."

2) @influencerS shows how she uses skincare products from @brandname. The screenshot says: "Sundays are made for skincare [emojis] advertisement. I hope you end your Sunday beautifully my dear [emoji]. I'm starting the day today with an extensive skincare routine. @brandname - my favorite skincare!"

3) @influencerR demonstrates how to create hairstyles with the @dyson_de airwrap. The screenshot says: "DYSON AIRWRAP GIVEAWAY [emoji] advertisement."

4) @influencerW advertises protein products from @brandname. The screenshot says: "Accessories like these are my favorite for taking photos [emojis]. The [product name] from @brandname is now also available in coconut flavor [emoji]. With 8% coconut flakes and no added sugar and 20g protein per 100g. I am already addicted [emoji] you guys have to try it [emojis] you can order them at @shopname [emoji]."

Indeed, when it comes to staging photos for social media, the use of both physical and virtual materials in particular, and their entangled meanings, deserve closer attention. In the case at hand, shoppers report and demonstrate considerable know-how regarding technology, including digital devices. In fact, the smartphone was confirmed as the most important device for accessing social media. Additionally, many shoppers reported using selfie tripods, ring lights, and sometimes even professional cameras and studio equipment (a finding that resembles van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020) along with other photography accessories to enhance the quality of their images and videos, a finding that echoes Abidin's (2017) work on micro-influencer practices. Thus, the materials that constitute social media shopping go beyond the in-built features of the digital devices that enable social media in the first place (e.g., software, integrated smartphone or tablet cameras) and those offered by the platform itself (e.g., Instagram's in-built photo, video and story filters and effects). In fact, and related to shoppers' aim to create appealing, high-quality content, before products are staged and presented on social media, images and videos often go through further processing. Natural, "straight-out-of-camera" pictures are rather the exception on social media, and extensive modes of editing are considered an essential aspect of preparing visuals for publication. This is closely related to shoppers' desire to "increase the attractiveness of their purchases", something that previous literature has already touched on (Duan & Dholakia, 2017,

p. 406). From this perspective, in order to be able to participate in the creative aspects of this shopping mode, practitioners need to develop competences in terms of handling electronic equipment, as well as in digital photography and image processing. As described by Emma, a 25-year-old law student and semi-professional social media influencer, as part of what she calls her "long journey with picture editing", both photography and editing skills are usually self-taught and continuously developed:

> Emma: "At first, it was like I used every filter on Instagram. But that made the quality really bad, and it's always the same. And the filters, I think after many years, are not so good! Then I was like the picture I showed you: Everything is lit up, and there are birds everywhere, and that really freaky editing [Emma shows the picture she is talking about on her Instagram feed]. Then I went to normal colors, but also really clean and fitting together. I'm really happy where I am now with my editing. […] I did one yesterday, where I do something like this, putting planes or something in the sky [Emma shows an image in her Instagram feed that shows her and a friend forming their hands into a heart shape with an airplane placed in the center during post-production]."

> […]

> Interviewer: "How did you get those skills? I think you said you developed them, was it through trying out, or tutorials or…?"

> Emma: […] "I started looking up YouTube tutorials, starting with Photoshop and free programs like GIMP or something like that. Then I moved to my phone and I started with, let me think, what was the first program? I have to think… I got Lightroom a year ago, last summer. What was my first? I think my first, yes, my first app was VSCO. I don't use it that often anymore, just for a few things. Then I got Lightroom, and then I got all the other apps. […] Yes, and Facetune. Everyone has Facetune, but Facetune doesn't make a good feed, so something like that [Emma shows an image edited with the relevant app]. Facetune is for your skin, something like that. After Lightroom, like a half year ago, I started with PicsArt. PicsArt is for really creative pictures. That's how I put the plane, for example, in my pictures, or the birds or something like that. You can lay photos over another photo and stuff. You can do a lot. Picnik, for example, I can show you. I use Picnik for the sky, but it makes the quality also not so great. It's like, it puts another sky in."

> [Emma opens the app under discussion and demonstrates how she changes the sky in a picture.]

Just like Emma, who uses an array of different apps and editing programs (materials), most of the other study participants also use specific software to process their images. Trying out different editing techniques and expanding the photography skill set are common doings for preparing (shopping) content for social media. Previous shopping research has highlighted that the establishment of new shopping

competences can be driven by various reasons, such as economic restrictions and necessity (e.g. Elms et al., 2016; Gregson et al., 2002), ideological reasonings (e.g. Fuentes, 2014; Fuentes et al., 2019), or in order to make shopping more enjoyable (e.g. Bäckström, 2013; Elms et al., 2016; Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019). For social media shopping practitioners, the establishment and mastery of distinct competences, and especially those related to photo and video production skills, becomes meaningful in its own right. While a basic level of know-how around social media and camera use enables participation, extending and continuously refining their expertise through repeated performance allows shoppers to build upon the aesthetic rules and underlying scripts of social media shopping (meanings), and likewise contribute to shaping the collective understandings of this shopping mode.

Indeed, shoppers ascribe particular meaning to aesthetics, and the understanding of what is considered as "aesthetic shopping content" is configured by shoppers' engagement with the platform and its affordances. Despite variations in individual tastes and personal preferences, there is generally an alignment among practitioners in terms of the understanding of what constitutes appealing content creation for social media shopping. Shopping content often follows a distinct style or motto which hints at the constitutive effects within the intertwined network of sociality and materiality. As illustrated in Emma's narrative, the look and feel of one's personal social media content (materials) is important to many users, and the act of creating a profile style that matches the established collective expectations (meanings) frames how shoppers engage in this mode of shopping. Indeed, the desire (or even need) to align with this underlying system of expectations in the sociomaterial system motivates shoppers to invest time and effort in "styling their profiles" when turning their personal timelines into virtual (shopping) diaries.

Interestingly, the more effort shoppers put into staging their shopping (or more generally their content), the more likely it is that they will publish this content on their Instagram profiles. Unlike the Instagram story format, which is temporary in nature, the content published on users' profiles is permanently visible to visitors. Shoppers agree that the feed "must be more aesthetic and more appealing than the story format" (interview with Kim), since, unlike in-feed pictures, in "stories, it doesn't matter if the picture is not perfect" (interview with Hanna). On the one hand, this distinction between two different publishing techniques demonstrates the commonly accepted differences in meaning in relation to material elements within the sociomaterial assemblage. Therefore, and as will be discussed in more detail in chapter six, it reflects Shove and Pantzar's (2007) view on the constitution of social practices: it illustrates that social media shopping has been and continues "to be made by its relation to cumulative and collective expectations" (ibid., p. 157).

In addition, it must also be emphasized that most information on the Internet is publicly archived and thus all content is theoretically traceable (Duan & Dholakia, 2017). Therefore, social media shoppers carefully curate their content on social media, as their shopping, manifested and materialized as pictures and videos within

the sociomaterial assemblage, becomes part of their personal, yet public history (see also Duan & Dholakia, 2017). Social media shopping thus shapes the self-image and external image of these users and directs corresponding online and offline activities.
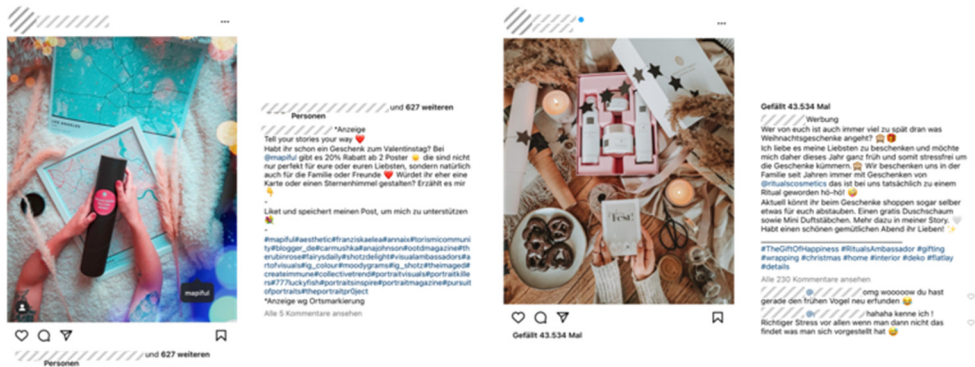

Figure 7. #ad – Displaying sponsored items as styled flatlays.
1) Emma promotes @mapiful products. The screenshot says: "*Advertisement. Tell your story your way [emoji] Do you already have a gift for Valentine's Day? At @mapiful there is a 20% discount for 2 posters [emoji] which are not only perfect for you or your loved ones [emoji] but also for family or friends [emoji] Would you rather create a card or a starry sky? Tell me [emoji] – Like an save my post to support me [emoji]."
2) @influencerA promotes @ritualcosmetics. The screenshot says: "Who of you is also always way too late as far as Christmas gifts are concerned? [emojis] I love to give gifts to my loved ones and would like to take care of this year's gifts early and therefore stress-free. [emoji] We have been giving each other presents from @ritualscosmetics for years and it has become a ritual for us hö-hö! [emoji] Currently you can even get something for yourself while shopping for gifts. A free shower foam and mini fragrance sticks. More about this in my story. [emoji] Have a nice cozy evening dears! [emoji]."

Dis/connecting on social media: Tagging brands and people

As illustrated in Figure 7, in addition to using content-related hashtags to describe and draw attention to their content, users frequently tag the brand of the item shown in the image or video. For shoppers who collaborate with brands, tagging other profiles is often part of the agreement, as brands usually expect visual links and "provide the official hashtags you have to use" (interview with Fiona). In contrast, my material also shows that this form of "connecting" with a brand does not necessarily involve incentives and brand collaborations. Quite the opposite is the case: everyday shoppers in particular use tagging mechanisms as a way to show their affection for a brand. My material illustrates that referring to or displaying brands on social media is related to self-image and status, a finding that is coherent with Abidin (2016a), who refers to this phenomenon as a manifestation of users' desire to "hypervisibilise one's social status" (p. 89). Or, as summarized by Lou, a 23-year-old student and semi-professional content creator who enjoys posting about fashion, lifestyle and traveling on Instagram, it's also about reputation and a matter of "doing it for the 'gram":

Lou: "I think it's something about prestige. For example, Victoria's Secret is expensive, it's chic and we don't have it in Germany. Every girl is like, *"Oh my God, it's Victoria's Secret. I don't get that in Germany".* It's kind of cool to go there and appreciate buying something there."

[Lou shows me a snapshot of herself in a dressing room that she posted to her Instagram story. The picture is accompanied by a location tag that shows she is in a Victoria's Secret store.]

Although both my observations and interviews show that tagging brands and retailers is common among social media shopping practitioners, some users have mixed feelings about visibly staging products to satisfy social needs such as prestige and status (Duan & Dholakia, 2017). As illustrated in the following, some shoppers are critical of this phenomenon.

Cara: "I feel a little bit awkward doing it, because I don't… I don't know… It's weird. On one hand, Instagram is a place where you can show off a little bit and show, like, maybe how good you look or what you're doing, and that you're proud of what you're wearing or where you're traveling to. But then, yeah, tagging a brand… Mhm… I feel like if I'm wearing some expensive glasses… it feels a bit like… let's say, it's a kind of bragging!"

Interviewer: "Bragging?"

Cara: "Yeah. And, sometimes, I actually make fun of friends when I see that they're tagging everything. And I think, *"Okay, now I can calculate how much your outfit is worth".*"

What Cara, a shopper who is more interested in consuming content on social media than producing her own, is criticizing here are the self-branding strategies used by everyday shoppers, often expressed through the public display of (high-priced) goods, and their attention-seeking online activities, which have previously attracted scholarly attention. In fact, the idea of "Instafame", previously conceptualized as users' desire to attain fame and attention on social media through status-seeking self-presentation techniques and aspirational content creation (Marwick, 2015), was also a recurrent feature in my empirical material.

Previous shopping studies have discussed the phenomenon of displaying shopping activities and its relation to status, and has conceptualized displaying or showing off purchases and possessions as "conspicuous consumption" (e.g. Duan & Dholakia, 2017; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014; R. Lin, 2018). What differentiates sharing online content about one's purchases from conspicuous consumption in an offline context is the potentially infinitely large audience. To use Marwicks' (2015) words, "Instagram provides users with a fairly open-ended social media tool, suggesting that individuals could choose to represent themselves using a range of techniques"

(p. 138) to reach a much larger audience. In fact, Instagram's sociomaterial affordances, including the tagging, sharing, re-posting and hashtag functions, allow shoppers to attract and broadcast to mass audiences (Marwick, 2015). Previous research has found that broadcasting (as opposed to communicating to a small audience) supports shoppers' tendency to focus on themselves, encouraging a greater concern with self-expression and status (e.g., Duan & Dholakia, 2017).

Figure 8. #noad – Displaying individual purchases for status purposes: Items in use presented by everyday shoppers.
1) Screenshot from Maya's profile.
2) Screenshot from Linda's profile.

In line with this, my findings show that everyday shoppers who engage in displaying purchases on social media can be perceived as narcissistic and self-centered by those who do not participate in social media shopping and its related activities, and that the display of shopping sprees on social media can arouse feelings of envy in those who consume this content. In contrast, this behavior seems to be more accepted when performed by professional social media influencers.

What distinguishes these practitioners from everyday shoppers is their devotion to the shopping mode under investigation. However, it would be inaccurate to say that these practitioners came to the practice from the outside. Rather, some shoppers evolve into social media shopping professionals and are able to make "influencing" into their profession by steadily expanding and mastering their skill set and

knowledge (competences), which ultimately changes the underlying meanings of shopping for these actors' everyday lives. As illustrated in the following passages, when social media influencers, or those who aspire to become professionals and who therefore "model themselves after influencers" (Sarah Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 66), engage in extended or "advanced" modes of displaying shopping (altered activities), a different composition of meanings, materials and competences emerges.

Advanced and creative content creation: Creating #OOTDs, shopping hauls and unboxings

A typical way of engaging in the promotional side of social media shopping is the presentation of entire outfits, also known as "Outfits of the Day", or "OOTDs" for short. This acronym is used to refer to a genre of self-presentation posts in which shoppers share images or videos modeling their own clothes (Abidin, 2016a; Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013). The presentation of outfits can be either broadcasted as photo and video content on users' feeds, sometimes resembling fashion diary archives (see also Abidin, 2016a), or, when performed on a daily basis, shared on Instagram stories. Shoppers usually create their OOTD posts in front of a mirror, while filming themselves talking about the clothes and accessories they are wearing. Users will often discuss the composition of the outfit, which size they are wearing, how well the items fit and where to purchase them. If certain parts of the outfit have not been purchased recently, or are no longer available, a recommendation may be made on where to find similar pieces or sometimes even dupes[18] (competences). Furthermore, and as previously noted, it is typical for professional social media shoppers to provide their followers with a discount code. Once again, it is common practice to state labels and brands through hashtags, profile tags or direct links to the individual pieces in the form of "swipe-up links" or "tap links"[19], to make shopping more convenient and easier for others.

"Unboxings" and "shopping haul" videos in which purchases are methodically shared with others are also typical social media shopping activities. Both unboxings and shopping hauls are formats that are often associated with YouTube (e.g. García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021; Harnish & Bridges, 2016; Jeffries, 2011), but they have also found their way onto other social media platforms, including

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[18] On social media, dupes refer to lookalikes or products that resemble designer items but come without the label, and therefore also without a designer price tag. Dupes are not the same as counterfeits.

[19] Swipe-up links were unique to Instagram stories and formerly allowed users with a follower base above 10,000 or with verified profiles to connect their story content with an external website, and to lead prospective shoppers, for example, directly to a product page in web shop (Pasarow, 2018). This type of link was discontinued in August 2020 and replaced with "tap links" which any profile can use for the same purpose, regardless of the number of followers.

Instagram. These videos are also dedicated to product evaluation, and typically the presenter will recall shopping experiences, display purchases and give their personal opinions (Harnish & Bridges, 2016). Shopping haul videos often result from offline shopping trips and therefore often center on unpacking a shopper's shopping bags. Thus, this variation of product presentation is a very typical example of how shopping that begins offline is extended to the digital.

Unboxings, on the other hand, are recorded when a shopper receives "a package and [they] just open it up and tell people what's in it" (interview with Fiona). This format typically shows a shopper opening a package from an online retailer in front of the camera, and will often include combining or styling the unboxed items and presenting them in extensive "try-on sessions". Accordingly, unboxings represent an extension of a digital shopping experience using social media.

Figure 9. A shopping haul for @aboutyoude.
Screenshots from @influencerA's Instagram story. The screenshot (on the left) says: "This is a small mini haul from @aboutyou."

While my empirical material shows that these advanced modes of product presentation overlap in many ways with the doings and sayings that characterize the display of shopping habits of social media amateurs, the ascribed meanings differ in two important ways. First, social media influencers use their shopping to present product evaluations and share their (expert) opinion with others. Their content often serves as shopping guidance, as it involves teaching, helping and informing (García Rapp, 2016), which resembles the principles of eWOM as discussed in many s-

commerce studies (e.g. Herrando et al., 2017; Hung & Li, 2007; Stephen & Toubia, 2010). Accordingly, social media professionals often regard their follower base as their community. In the context of social media shopping, this apparent proximity between social media professionals and everyday users is further demonstrated by the fact that some influencers give their audiences specific names when talking to them (e.g., @influencerD calls her followers by a nickname related to her profile name; @influencerP calls hers by a nickname related to her real name). This finding corresponds to Arrigada and Bishop's (2021) work on "influencer imaginaries". Arguing that viewing, recommending and rating products on social media reduces information asymmetries, they show how these users often present themselves to their followers as "friends" who share their knowledge about brands and products under the "guise of friendship" (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021, p. 8).

Second, social media professionals (and aspiring professionals) use shopping content to strategically attract attention to themselves. This, however, goes beyond signaling possessions and providing information. These shoppers employ their know-how of Instagram's sociomaterial assemblages and the influencer ecology to extend their overall reach and, as a result, increase their commercial value (for similar findings see Abidin, 2016a; the discussion on reach and commercial value will be continued in chapter six). In addition, shopping is also used to publicly underpin one's affiliation to a certain lifestyle, and to create, sustain and alter social media trends (Abidin, 2014). In doing so, "they are exchanging their acquired cultural capital for financial gain" (Abidin, 2014, p. 124; the discussion on social media actors' agency will also be continued in chapter six), which is clearly different from the rationale everyday shoppers apply when showcasing their possessions on social media for pure status reasons. Recommendations that result from brand collaborations, or those used to promote one's own products (e.g., an influencer's own brand, or to sell pre-used clothing on Instagram), are usually accompanied by a clear commercial focus which frames how social media shopping is performed by these users. Professional shoppers naturally have an interest in portraying their clients' products in a favorable light in order to secure further collaborations and their reputation with advertisers and influencer agencies (see also Hund & McGuigan, 2019). Shoppers who engage in paid advertising or product recommendations thus intend to strategically influence others in their purchasing decisions.

As a result of publicly sharing and evaluating purchases in a repeated, routinized manner, social media professionals' private lives often "become a tool for selling products and services" (Abidin, 2014, p. 119; a detailed discussion on the implications of using the private as a resource follows in chapter six). Against this backdrop, previous research has shown that social media professionals often face the challenge of finding a balance between their commercial content and their personal posts, in order to retain their status as "ordinary", relatable shoppers who share the same experiences as average users (Abidin, 2014; Kozinets, de Valck,

Wojnicki, & Wilner., 2010). Thus, posting about shopping sprees on social media in a professional manner includes both displays of conspicuous consumption that signal wealth, status and lifestyle affiliation, and a form of creative eWOM that essentially serves to connect with and grow their audience (for a similar finding see Duan & Dholakia, 2017).

The previous sections have shown that social media shopping is closely linked to creative practices such as photography, videography and extensive modes of editing. In order to participate in this mode of shopping, many users acquire a special set of skills that they continuously refine and develop. This entanglement with creative activities clearly sets this type of shopping apart from other established modes of shopping. Furthermore, we have seen that "how" shoppers create content is strongly influenced by the sociomaterial assemblage, which provides a script, including distinct activities and a common understanding of practical doings and sayings (including neologisms and abbreviations) that are linked to status and self-presentation, as well as a shared understanding of aesthetics and style. It was emphasized that shoppers contribute to the preservation of the sociomaterial assemblage by adapting to and publicly reproducing these images.

Influencing and being influenced

Not only do shoppers consume and produce shopping content on social media, they also influence and are influenced while performing these activities. As we will see in the following sections, shopping on social media involves a specific form of sociality. The idea that shopping and sociality are interlinked is by no means new (e.g., see Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Bäckström, 2011; Bloch et al. 1989; Gregson & Crewe 1998). More specifically, previous research has pointed towards the value of social experience, and has comprehensively shown that shopping can encompass various forms of socially meaningful activities such as meeting and mingling, bonding and interacting, and generally socializing with others (e.g., Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Aslan, 2021; Bäckström, 2011; Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Jason & Holbrook, 1995). In contrast to this understanding of sociality in the context of shopping, in the specific case at hand, it is less about social encounters or meaningful relationships. Consistent with the work of Hund and McGuigan (2019), the type of sociality that unfolds on social media platforms is a "commodified" or "commercialized" sociality. As this section will show, this sociality is closely related to status and attention, and shaped by a collectively shared understanding of lifestyle and desirability. This understanding, which materializes and therefore becomes visible in shoppers' performances and in their shopping content, has a significant influence on how this type of shopping takes shape.

Shopping another life(style)

All shoppers I talked to claimed that they follow brands and retailers that match their personal interests, but it is mainly the influencers who are seen as a source of shopping guidance on social media. First, this can be attributed to the various, often creative and entertaining ways that influencers display (sponsored) products. Moreover, by following influencers that reflect their individual style, tastes or preferences, shoppers are able to co-constitute their social media shopping experience and transform their newsfeeds into customized and personally curated virtual "lifestyle magazines" (interview with Sarah). The following passage illustrates how everyday shoppers relate to influencers as commercial mediators:

> Lou: "She's [@influencerO] probably my favorite, although her style, sometimes, it's a bit tacky, but I really love her, especially because of her personality. She's quite outgoing, quite loud, really. […] I think she's really an authentic person. I like her outfits. Most of them I couldn't wear because I'm really short but sometimes, she has really nice stuff that I really like. Her pictures are so nice to look at.

> [Lou switches to the search function and starts typing in a new name.]

> Oh, and somebody I really like to copy styles from, where I'm like, *"Okay, I could wear that, too"* is probably @[influencer who was not part of the study]. […] She has a really sophisticated style. […] I really like the kind of clothes that she wears. It's more covered up than the others and lots of stuff from @nakdfashion. This is stuff where I would say I could see myself in that, too. This really "sassy" style, but more natural, not too much. She does a lot of hauls, for example, in her story and then I'm going, *"Okay, where is it from?"*"

This quote illustrates how shoppers relate to and identify with social media professionals. Lou not only sees the two women, whom she does not know personally, as a fashion inspiration; the notion of "love" and her ability to see herself in the clothes modeled by the other person hints at a sense of identification. In fact, identification with others, and especially with actors who embody a certain (desirable) lifestyle, has been around as long as celebrity endorsements have been used in the advertising industry to promote shopping. In this context, Hund and McGuigan (2019) point to Marshall (2014) who notes that celebrities have the ability to mediate "between the world of goods and the world of individuals using those goods" (p. 245). On social media, however, it is not only celebrities but increasingly also social media influencers and ordinary consumers who take on this mediating role. Due to what Turner (2004) describes as the "demotic turn", social media platforms have made fame achievable for "ordinary" people. As also shown within this research project, shopping practice, too, has become a means of gaining social media fame. Indeed, social media has enabled the emergence of micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2015) who partake in various performative techniques, often aimed at reflecting authenticity and credibility, to visibly negotiate and "produce

identities, reputations, and lifestyles in commodity form online" (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 22). Thus, their active participation in various social media shopping activities as illustrated earlier in this chapter, while also providing insights into their personal day-to-day lives, allows social media influencers to create "a detachable, saleable image or narrative, which effectively circulates cultural meanings" in promotional and competitive ways (Hearn, 2008, p. 198).

Professional shoppers by no means simply provide shopping recommendations without getting a reaction from other users or engaging in dialogues with them. Rather, I found – particularly while observing influencer profiles – that shoppers reach out to social media influencers, mostly in the form of private messages or comments. Besides posting expressions of admiration, shoppers frequently ask for further information about items they *happen to discover* on other shoppers' profiles:

> In what she calls "a reaction to her follower's inquiry" to know more about the interior design of her apartment, @influencerD shares a story in which she films and talks about her personal home décor. During this "room tour", she walks through the different rooms of her apartment and displays a variety of products. She explains where to buy the sideboard and sofa in her living room; she talks about the brand of a large floor lamp and explains where she got it. She even shows smaller details like the different pastel-coloured vases on a golden shelf, the framed posters on the wall, and the vacuum cleaner she uses. While a blog entry on influencerD.de (she refers to this blog on her Instagram) about the vacuum cleaner suggests that some of the products were sponsored, not every single item she shows to her followers is from a brand collaboration. Instead, she emphasizes that individual followers asked her about many different products that were (unintentionally) visible while she was filming content for her channel at her home. (Field note, August 2019)

> In March 2020, @influencerD asks her followers to stop messaging her asking about the interior decoration of a place she visited. She seems a bit amused by her followers' curiosity and which details her followers pay attention to and asks them to understand that she can't – and doesn't want to – respond to these shopping-related questions. (Field note, March 2020)

My material, including these two field notes, suggests that influencers in particular often receive many such requests that go beyond what they are already showing and promoting. The idea that users demand to know *everything about all products* that are associated with the social media professional demonstrates their role as commercial mediators (see also Hund & McGuigan, 2019), as they often embody representatives of lifestyles that are considered desirable by "Instagrammers" (meanings).
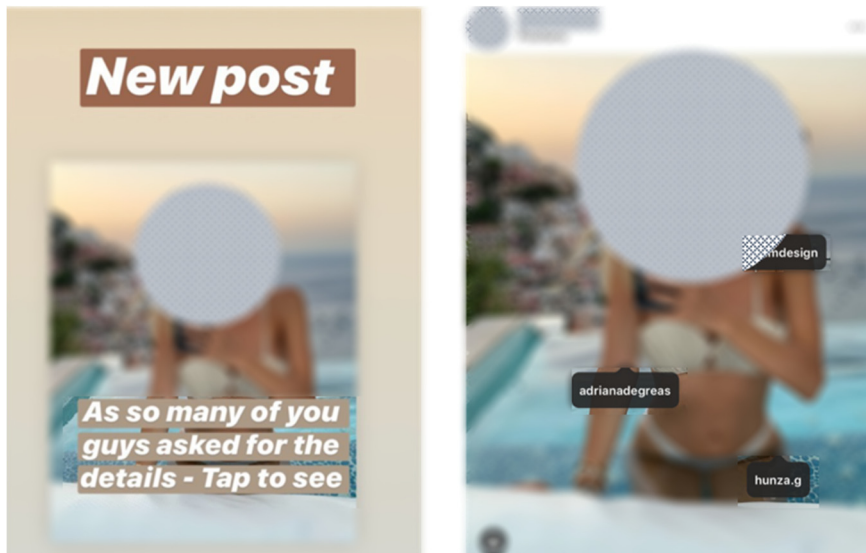
Figure 10. Followers asking for product information.
@influencerH shares the details of her outfit after being prompted to do so by her followers.

In addition, the fact that users participate in shaping others' (shopping) content also shows that the performance of social media shopping is not solely determined by content creators. As further exemplified in the following quote, all actors involved collectively shape how shopping on social media is performed. Alice, who has more than 10,000 people following her daily life on Instagram, describes her experience with users who actively ask for shopping advice, and how this affects her shopping:

> Alice: "[…] There are a lot of these private messages that come in saying that they've seen your content, and they really like it. Your followers might say, *"Why don't you do a post on make-up? It might help me"*. That's when you tend to think you can deviate and do a lot of make-up. So now I do a lot of stories where I show the skin routine that I do on a daily basis and things like that. And I also talk about the experience. For example, *"This is non-sponsored, it's just a toy that I bought for her"* [Alice points to her daughter sitting next to her]. It's a kitchen toy and I keep talking about the importance of… mhm… or how necessary it is to have a toy like this, which you might like… So, things like that, which are all completely my own content!"

> […]

> Interviewer: "Also, it seems you get a lot of comments!"

> Alice: "Of course."

> Interviewer: "Is it important for you to get this feedback?"

Alice: "Yes. Of course. I'll just show you the kind of comments that I have."

[She opens a picture she recently shared on her profile]

Alice: "Yes… This post had a lot of comments, about nearly 70 or 80 comments, which is good for me because it's also that I'm writing about something that the audience wants to hear. […]"

Listening to one's audience and sharing what Alice calls "something that the audience wants to hear" is frequently a strategic decision for social media shoppers as it fosters a sense of accessible communication and what Abidin (2015) refers to as "perceived interconnectedness". At the same time, it also highlights the participatory aspects of shopping and the often short-lived, non-recurring collective experiences that characterize the sociality of this mode of shopping.

Notably, my material offers no indication that the relationship between everyday shoppers and social media professionals is a parasocial one. Social influencers are seldom perceived as *real* or *personal* acquaintances. Evidently, shoppers express enjoyment in partaking in other shoppers' lives by virtually accompanying them on a day-to-day basis, and following, listening to, interacting with and also learning from their (shopping) experiences. All of these interactions are meaningful for practitioners and are mainly seen as a form of entertainment. Interestingly, and contrary to my observations, when asked, many shoppers claim that they do not shop what is promoted by others in order to *be like them*. My work supports the idea that the relationship between influencers and their audiences is rather based on affective bonds (see also Marwick, 2015), created through the desired lifestyle and the meanings attached to the commodities that users admire. Following on from this, and picking up the idea that social media influencers represent and embody certain lifestyles, it becomes clear that social interactions between everyday users and social influencers are related to the idea of recreating tastes and styles (thus, collectively shared understandings), rather than supporting social bonding. Thus, and in contrast to studies that have emphasized the social benefits as the focal point of certain forms of shopping, sometimes overshadowing acts of purchasing (e.g., Aslan, 2021; Bäckström, 2011), shopping on social media foregrounds the shared desire for ideas and a collective system of meanings, rather than the time spent with others or interacting with them (contrary to, e.g., Lehtonen & Mäenpää, 1997; Prus, 1993). Thus, virtual social encounters between different shoppers are often ephemeral and short lived and can be very object focused.

Social media influencers therefore offer what Hund and McGuigan (2019) call "the potential for interpersonal relationships", and unlike anonymous models, they "invite followers into a more sustained and intimate world of desire" (p. 27). In doing so, they use their shopping to steer or influence other shoppers' commercial desires and also their purchasing decisions, which reflects the core idea of influencer

marketing (for a detailed account on the principles of influencer marketing see Hayes & Brown, 2008).

At this point, however, it is worth noting once again the distinct characteristics of the sociomaterial fabric that constitutes this mode of shopping. Recurring messages and advertisements do affect consumers. Actors involved in social media shopping are influenced by, and likewise influence, others. These recurring messages and ideas, in the form of (promotional) content created and materialized by all involved actors, as well as through various actants (such as the algorithm that plays out certain content in the same or a similar form over and over again), not only create endless desires, but also make shopping a constant part of daily reality:

> Kim: "You may identify with the people you're seeing on Instagram or the styles you are seeing on Instagram. And if you are constantly seeing stuff, it's becoming part of your reality, or life somehow! I mean, it doesn't matter if it's just an image you're seeing. But you're seeing it. And if you're constantly, or over and over again seeing the same things, it will affect you in a way."

In the context of repetitive, similar advertising messages, the theme of authenticity and credibility of professional buyers was a recurring theme in my interviews. Indeed, shoppers critically reflect on the commercial and also partly self-serving intentions of this user group. My empirical material shows that shoppers have a comprehensive knowledge of how brand collaborations work (competences). They are able to identify sponsored content and demonstrate awareness of this, as exemplified in the following quote:

> Fiona: "You do believe these people! But I also think that people are aware of the big influencers that are showing another different product every day. […] But I know it's not a recommendation, is it?"

Indeed, many respondents claim that they sometimes question the reliability of product recommendations, especially when they notice that the same products, or the same brand or retailer, is being promoted by several other shoppers in more or less similar ways. This finding is coherent with García Rapp's (2016) study on YouTube beauty gurus, who claims that there is a fine line between being considered as "fake" and a "sellout", or as a "real" and "honest" user whose opinion can be trusted.

Asking for feedback and attention

My empirical material highlights that consulting one's personal network for immediate feedback to inform upcoming purchase decisions is a common doing for social media shopping practitioners. In fact, asking for a second opinion on social media is usually performed spontaneously, either during offline shopping situations

or after unpacking the latest online order. Social media shoppers frequently photograph their reflection in a mirror when modelling clothes or take snapshots of items they are considering buying, and then share them on their Instagram story. Some also add a question box or Instagram's poll feature to this content, encouraging viewers to express their opinions by voting for different options. This way of asking for shopping advice reflects what Spaid and Flint (2014) refer to as shoppers' desire to "be right" when assessed by others, or to "fit in" with their social group (p. 80). As shown in the excerpt below, social media shoppers use the platform to consult others in order to feel empowered and to become more confident about their prospective shopping decisions:

> Ida: "I used to post outfits I was trying on and then send them via Instagram message to my friends to ask, them *"What do you think? Is it cool?".* I think I also posted a photo. It was in Hamburg, there was a shop which was promoting their newest collection or something like that with a hashtag and it was like *"Hashtag us on Instagram".* And then I was in the fitting room and I hashtagged them in my story."

> Interviewer: "And how did your friends react to that?"

> Ida: "With the *"Should I buy the thing"* they were just a bit too… well, it wasn't fast enough! So, I was already out of the shop and I had to come back afterwards."

> Interviewer: "And then did you end up buying it?"

> Ida: "Actually, yes, I did."

> Interviewer: "Because of the feedback or would you have taken it anyway?"

> Ida: "No, I would have taken it anyway, I think. But it was like, when I have fancy outfits, it's better that I have some friends where I know they like it. Because my boyfriend, normally the fancy things I really like, he doesn't like them and, yeah… But I know some friends of mine, they do. It's always better to check with them."

> Interviewer: "And why did you use Instagram for the shopping advice and not any other app, or maybe call them?"

> Ida: "Uhm, yeah, that's a good question actually because I made a small video and… actually, with videos I thought of Instagram stories. It was more like I didn't think about it before. I just went to Instagram."

Evident in this passage are the meanings Ida prescribes to sharing her shopping experiences in this particular situation. For her, it is important to get advice on the appearance and appropriateness of the clothes from other shoppers she considers to be just as knowledgeable, or more knowledgeable in fashion than she is (for a similar argument see also Prus, 1993). For routinized social media users like her,

social media platforms are additional channels for support in shopping contexts that enable real-time assessments. Indeed, the form of social interaction that becomes evident in this example resembles the notion of social support and social confirmation that has previously been identified as an important aspect of this form of shopping (e.g., Hajli, 2015; Hajli & Sims, 2015; Li, 2017).

Once again, there seems to be a difference between social media professionals and everyday shoppers. My empirical material shows that asking the "shop or drop" question is considered more acceptable from everyday shoppers who are seeking genuine feedback during shopping situations from people they also know outside of social media or with whom they have a personal relationship. Users seem more critical of shoppers who publicly ask for others' feedback, as illustrated in the following quote:

> Fiona: "I think this is kind of a way to make sure that in the end it is going to make everyone around you say *"Oh, yeah, you look great."* I think it's an insecurity thing. People, you know, who are not sure about themselves. Because this is how they try to gain it back by saying, *"Hey, do I look good in that dress?"* and people like say, *"Sure, you do!"* [laughs]."

As shown here, the line between asking for authentic feedback and chasing attention and status seems narrow, which can once more be related to some users' desire for "Instafame", where attention is treated as currency and a measure of success (Marwick, 2015). Indeed, social media shopping can thus favor or even reinforce the desire for confirmation and social recognition, materialized in social status signals, social media metrics or other forms of user feedback.
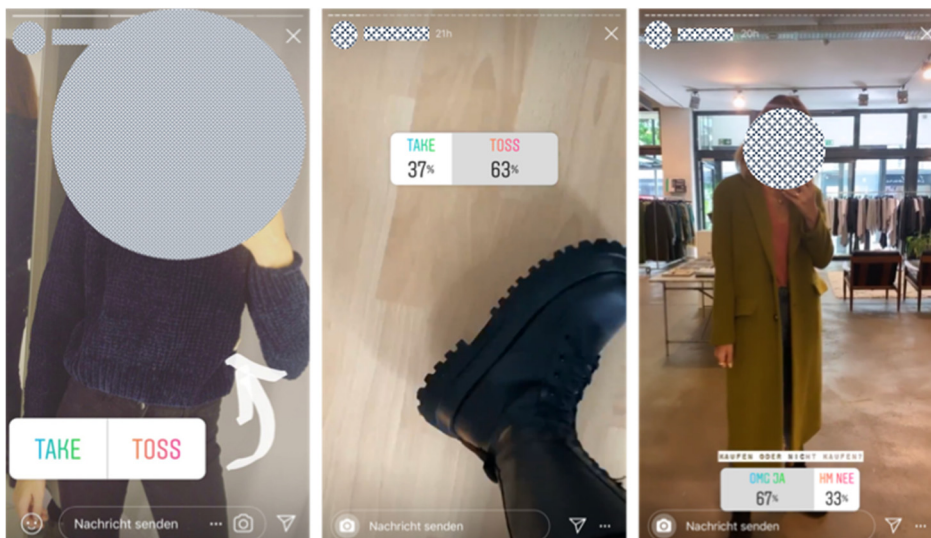

Figure 11. Shop or drop? Screenshot from June's, @influencerP's and @influencerD's Instagram stories.

Summary: A new mode of shopping takes shape

In this chapter, social media shopping has been presented as a particular form of shopping that relies on and combines a distinct set of meanings, materials and competences. In particular, we have seen that shopping in or via social media involves multiple meanings and is closely related to identity construction and related social needs. Moreover, various physical and virtual materials are involved, including human and non-human, which together make up the material dimension. Materiality not only shapes what users do, and how they do it, it also frames what they regard as meaningful and relevant in their daily lives.

Furthermore, shoppers draw on and constantly develop specific know-how and skills to become competent shopping practitioners, in order to align with collective expectations embedded in the sociomaterial assemblage. Recalling that meanings and materials are intertwined, it has been shown that materials, both virtual and physical, acquire particular meaning or are given altered meaning through shopping performance. In this context, there is not only one way to perform social media shopping, and there can be differences between various actors. At the same time, analytical categories (e.g., professional shopper/eveyday shopper, shopper/seller, influencer/influenced) are fluid and subject to change.

Social media shopping involves various activities that relate to *content consumption*. Some of these activities have previously been acknowledged in the literature as closely tied to shopping practice, such as browsing, discovering and buying. In the context of social media, these activities can be broken down further into watching, liking, clicking, swiping and commenting, for example. Contrary to other (offline) modes of shopping, these activities are more visible and traceable and therefore contribute to shaping other users' shopping practice. While the meanings attached to these more "traditional" shopping activities overlap in many ways with those associated with what has been described in the existing shopping literature, being a social media practitioner requires the mobilization of comprehensive knowledge of technology in use, including social media mechanisms, in-built features of social media platforms (e.g., shoppable posts, different types of links, functionality of hashtags) and the wider social structures in which social media shopping is embedded (e.g., knowledge of the legal requirements for labeling commercial content). Thus, this technology-driven mode of shopping is in many ways more complex than other forms of shopping as its sociomaterial affordances drive and reinforce collective ideals, images, trends and ideas in a more encompassing and far-reaching way.

In addition, this chapter has illustrated that social media shopping comprises a variety of activities that relate to *content creation*. Practitioners were found to be proficient in the entire content creation process: from developing an idea to capturing footage to deliberate curation, photo editing, and the final preparation for

publication, underscoring that this specific variant of shopping is related to, and overlaps with, creative practices such as photography and film making. Social media shopping thus encompasses creative enactments and visual representations of shoppers' everyday lives, materialized and made meaningful through the performance of shopping.

Lastly, and in contrast with more traditional forms of shopping, social media shopping has been shown to be associated with a form of sociality that is less about forming long-lasting bonds with others, and more about *influencing and being influenced*. In the context of shopping, relationships between actors are primarily characterized by commercial desires, a longing for aspired-to lifestyles, and collectively shared meanings. Indeed, in this analysis, shopping on or interlinked with social media has been shown to be shaped by a set of collective expectations, beliefs and perceptions. Social media shopping conveys a certain imaginary of what is desirable and how someone should be. Shopping is a means to achieve certain social goals, or "sociomaterially" constructed ideals. This implies that these meanings are relevant to the user beyond the actual practice of shopping. As will be shown more clearly in the following chapter, drawing on the idea that social media has become an important and integral part of many users' lives, through technology, shopping moves closer to the consumer, blurs together with other everyday actions and puts them in new contexts.

However, it is important to emphasize again that the sociomaterial assemblage which determines how this form of shopping takes shape is not configured by either practitioners (humans) or the technical functionalities and features of the platforms (non-humans) alone. Instead, social media shopping is constructed in the interplay between all actors involved, including everyday shoppers, brands, retailers and commercial mediators, as well as all actants involved, e.g., the platform and its virtual elements, physical materials and their affordances. In this sense, shopping is enabled, shaped and constantly (re-) configured by the physical, virtual and symbolic properties of the sociomaterial assemblage as a whole. The following chapter builds on this line of argumentation and addresses the social media shopper themselves. In doing so, I examine how this particular actor is created in and through shopping practice and how they gradually take shape.

Chapter 6 – The social media shopper: A hybrid actor emerges

The previous chapter illustrated how social media shopping is performed. This chapter sets out to discuss how the performance of social media shopping creates an actor who gains both identity and agency in the process of becoming.

To begin with, we will look at how the social media shopper, as a specific type of actor, is constructed within and through practice. As will be shown in more detail later on, creating, maintaining and adjusting the social media shopper, embodied and publicly displayed in images, discourse and users' social media profiles, is a process that requires effort, persistence and continuity. This chapter highlights how the sociomaterial affordances of social media make the idea of becoming part of the currently hyped "influencer culture", and getting a glimpse of fame and stardom, attainable for everyday shoppers. Social media, it seems, "tacitly promises fame" (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017, p. 194) and offers an opportunity to turn amateur shopping practice into a paid profession. Driven by practitioners' desire for social recognition, attention and increased agency, the creation of a social media shopper – a hybrid in terms of being both human and non-human, both virtual and non-virtual – becomes a means to reach this end. At the same time, the making of a social media shopper also entails certain challenges and comes with a set of consequences for those engaged in the practice, which will also be addressed here.

This chapter thus further elaborates on the complex process by which a range of acting sociomaterial entities – including the shopper(s), brands, audiences, the platforms' functionalities, algorithms, likes, shares, comments, as well as a system of collectively shared understandings such as shared aesthetics and tastes – work together to constitute the shopping mode under study and also the shopping practitioner. In this process, the acquisition of agency occurs as these acting entities interact with each other. Agency thus emerges through the continuous (re)arrangement of the elements involved. Accordingly, the agency that emerges in the process of "constructing" a social media actor is relatively unstable, as the sociomaterial fabric is subject to constant change. Based on this understanding, it is shown that humans alone are not capable of building and maintaining agency in the social media shopping ecosystem. On the contrary, while the human component has the ability to impact the process through certain (strategic) choices and performances, the constitution of the actor is to be understood as a complex interplay

of human and non-human acting entities that are not only entangled, but also co-constitute each other.

"Everyone" can be an influencer: Creating the social media shopper

On social media, everyday shoppers can become professional influencers, secure their own brand collaborations and eventually turn their shopping into a profession[20]. The options for shoppers to become commercial mediators seem endless, and the fact that even the now well-known "big players" in the "social media influencer game" once started out small, makes the idea of social media fame seem achievable. My material shows that those shoppers who aim at becoming commercial influencers gradually professionalize their shopping practice. In doing so, these shoppers strategically make use of the features and affordances Instagram offers, and also work towards impacting the relationships and connections that exist within the sociomaterial fabric with the goal of strengthening their own position. The following parts of the analysis show that the social media shopper is willing to invest creativity, time and money in order to achieve this very goal.

Getting started: Extending the set of shopping activities

Social media shoppers aiming to professionalize their shopping work to expand their shopping activities. They start to commercialize their content and begin to focus on promoting brands and products, and therefore move from displaying their possessions to actually advertising sponsored products on social media.

On social media platforms like Instagram, everyday users are frequently offered discounts or free products in exchange for such promotional activities on their personal social media accounts. Small and less well-known brands in particular use social media to recruit everyday shoppers to become small-scale brand ambassadors. The first contact between a shopper and a brand usually happens on the social media platform itself. On Instagram, brands often reach out to shoppers by sending (impersonalized) direct messages with their offers, or comment on shoppers' in-feed content to encourage them to participate in brand collaborations. While it is common in professional influencer marketing practice to carefully select the brand ambassador, considering whether they are a good fit for the brand (Vicuña, 2020), when deciding on short-term collaborations with everyday shoppers, neither the shopper's previous content nor the style of their profile nor their number of

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[20] Not everyone can become an influencer. An exaggerated formulation was deliberately used here to reflect the message that is implicitly or explicitly spread by social media platforms.

followers is taken into account, which lowers the barrier of recruitment for new practitioners. As Alampi (2020) points out, companies benefit from recruiting ordinary shoppers, or micro-influencers, to their marketing campaigns, as these users often reflect the core demographics, psychographics and/or values of their following, which means that "these influencers *are* the target audience" (p. 204). Similarly, Fiona, a 30-year-old marketing and communications consultant, recalls one of her experiences from an unpaid collaboration with a sportswear company as follows:

> Fiona: "[…] They were searching for people, usually micro-influencers. And I like their brand, I just think it's something I can relate to because everybody needs sportswear. Especially me, when I'm at the gym like four times a week or something, so I need that. And they [a company representative] had a look at my profile and they said *"Okay, we can do the collaboration with you."* The thing is they are actually doing it in a different kind of way, they have this huge micro-influencer community and you can upload pictures on a Google Drive for them and they use it for their account. So actually, they're using the people to generate content and it's a very cheap way for them, when they are just giving them 50% off. But for me, it's a win-win. I get my clothes cheaper."

Similar to Fiona's experience, the majority of my interviewees had either applied to micro-influencer programs or had been asked to promote products on their personal accounts, and some of them occasionally accepted these offers and acted as brand ambassadors in a more or less professional manner. Whether it's a free bikini in return for some fashionable Instagram shots (interview with Lou), a "typical Instagram watch" in exchange for a few story posts (interview with Gina), or a matching outfit for mom and daughter (interview with Alice), social media offers everyday shoppers numerous possibilities to become temporary marketers and engage in what Fiona calls a "win-win collaboration".

Showing initiative: Investing time and money

Nevertheless, and as illustrated in Fiona's interview, as well as in Figure 12, my material shows that shoppers often have to be willing to make initial monetary and non-monetary investments. The account @bisouswear advertises an influencer program and invites shoppers to "become a #BisouBabe ambassador! DM us" (profile bio @bisouswear) and offers discounts and "access to a blog on influencer tips" in return for promotional activities. @schmuckladen.de is a bit more specific. The company promises a free bracelet; in return, shoppers are asked to publish stories about previously bought products (paid for by themselves), tag the brand's profile and promote their discount code before receiving the gift. Whereas this brand asks shoppers to invest money, time and creativity, a "brand manager" for another company is very open about a "one-time payment" in return for two free items of choice and a list of other "cool opportunities" (see Figure 12). These and many similar examples from my fieldwork illustrate that everyday shoppers usually have

to pay for the items they display online – whether it is part of the retail price, or, as illustrated, trading reach for a free item – in order to start brand collaborations in the first place.

Figure 12. Brand collaboration calls.
1) Sponsored stories by @bisouswear.
2) Sponsored stories by @schmuckladen.de. The screenshot says: "We're giving you a FREE BRACELET. What do you have to do? 1. Upload 3 different stories before Sunday (spread over the days) and tag @schmuckladen.de. 2. Take screenshots of all 3 stories. 3. Write us a bundled email to: kooperation@schmuckladen.de with name, address and the screenshots! You can use this discount code for your story: -25% discount code: ENDOFSUMMER* (*applies to Jewlia brand products only)."
3) A collaboration request from @zq_media_agency on Lou's profile.
4) An impersonalized message send to the research account @socialshoppingresearch by @sndfl.ynah (most likely a scam message).

Unsurprisingly, new social media profiles are unlikely to attract high-end brands, as their market value is usually connected to the size of the account (Khamis et al., 2017), as well as to performance metrics that capture and evaluate the audience's engagement (Napoli, 2011; Vicuña, 2020). These virtual entities that are part of the sociomaterial arrangement play a crucial role in configuring both practice and practitioners. Everyday shoppers commonly start by promoting low-priced fashion items such as jewelry, accessories and clothing, as well as consumer goods. Professional influencers, on other hand, are able to monetize their follower base and therefore attract large advertising clients from all kinds of sectors. However, as exemplified in Figure 13, an examination of the profiles of currently successful social influencers illustrates that many of these users typically started by displaying their acquisitions and sharing advice without receiving payment, before they professionalized their shopping practice to gradually become commercial social media actors – a finding that resembles McQuarrie et al.'s (2013) work on the development of fashion bloggers.

In addition, many users, both professional influencers and everyday shoppers, continue to invest in expensive camera equipment, upgrade their smartphones (materials) and spend time educating themselves to become "better" social media shopping practitioners (competences) (for a similar argument see McQuarrie et al., 2013). Thus, the composition of materials, meanings and competences gradually changes, as users become more professional. In order to be part of influencer culture, attract more followers, and increase their reach to eventually enhance their attractiveness for (paid) brand collaborations, investments in the form of money and (working) time are often necessary.
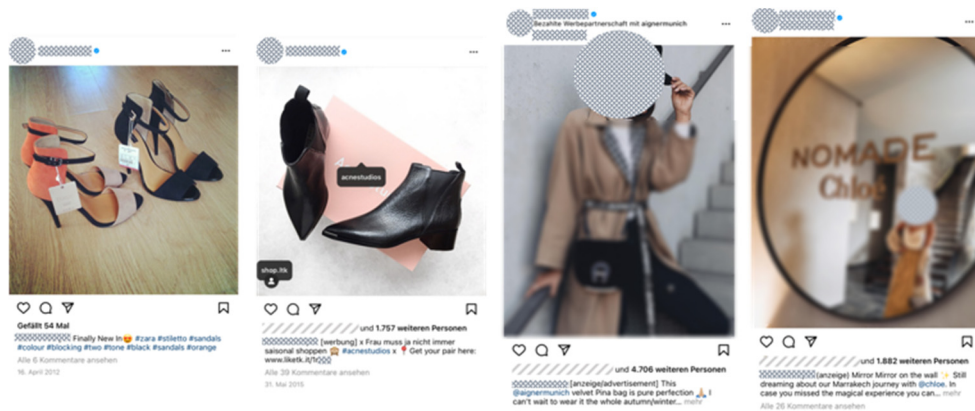
Figure 13. Content from @influencerF over time.
Displayed purchases in 2012; displayed purchases including a brand tag, and made shoppable with a "like to know it" link (affiliate link) in 2015; a paid advertising partnership with @aignermunich in 2017; a paid advertising partnership with @chloe in 2019.

Working to shop or shopping as work?

Given these examples, one might raise the question of who *really* benefits from non-professional social media shoppers' productive activities. Just as Fiona explains in the excerpt above, everyday shoppers are aware that the benefit that companies receive is often higher compared to their own benefit.

In conjunction with this, Fuchs and Sevignani (2013) point out that the business model of contemporary online platforms and social media sites is based on exploiting users' unpaid labour. The authors portray social media users as "creative, social, and active prosumers who engage in a culture of sharing, doing, connecting and making", and support the notion that all of their online engagements can be considered as work activities that can be turned into monetary profit (ibid, p. 288). In a similar vein, Briziarelli (2014) refers to social media users' productive activities as "content valorized for the benefit of others" (p. 629), while Fuchs and Sevignani (2013) criticize the fact that users are sold as a "commodity" to advertisers.

Following these arguments, social media shopping also comprises a form of work, as users' doings and sayings and their practical enactments correspond to a commodity that is indeed sold to external stakeholders, and thus leads to revenue. Following this line of reasoning, my results show that consumer work is an embedded and collectively accepted element of this particular shopping mode.

Although the distribution of profits from everyday shoppers' productive activity seems unbalanced, it is not completely one-sided. It is not only advertisers and platform operators that benefit from social media shoppers' work; shoppers *do* receive something in return, even if it is not always a monetary settlement. In fact, there seems to be a tension between the idea that consumers are exploited (e.g. Briziarelli, 2014; Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013), and shopper's own perception of their productive social media activities. All of my interviewees describe this form of shopping as especially entertaining and rewarding, and as a form of play (for more on playing and its relation to working and the concept of "playbour" see Lund, 2014). As shown in the following quote, performing (promotional) activities as part of social media shopping is meaningful in its own right:

> Sarah: "I think it's a hobby! Other people read magazines and print media, and I like to scroll through this kind of social media."

In addition, on Instagram, it is not only the platform operators who profit from selling data and advertising spaces. While brands actively use the platform and its affordances to recruit everyday shoppers to work for them, many shoppers specifically look for work opportunities and approach brands to ask for collaborations. Collaborating with brands requires strategic planning, personal initiative and proactivity, which once again exemplifies the skill set practitioners have to acquire. For example, shoppers need to evaluate which brands and products might fit with their preferences or their previous content, research contact persons, sometimes negotiate conditions, and finally satisfy their business partners' requirements in order to pave the way for future collaborations. The working social media shopper is therefore not a completely unconscious subject who unknowingly works "for free". In fact, such a take on shoppers would not align with the practice perspective on actors, as outlined in chapter three. Following Briziarelli's (2014) line of thought, social media shoppers do not correspond to the Marxist perspective that claims exploited subjects "simply don't know". Also, Slavoy Žižek's reformulation "they do know but they still do it", does not fit well enough to understand the practitioner under study, as social media shoppers do not see themselves as exploited individuals, simply accepting or ignoring this condition. Rather, these shoppers have agency, and their productive activity offers the potential for expanding that agency. Thus, what drives these users is the expectation and belief that they will benefit from their work and investments, both in the short term

and, more importantly, in the long term, by creating an influential actor that meets certain social and economic needs.

Keep going: Crafting and maintaining the social media shopper

My material suggests that an influential social media actor endowed with a certain level of agency cannot be created "overnight". Rather, it takes perseverance and continuous work to gradually develop and materialize this specific actor. As will be explained below, in the process of making the actor, especially in the beginning, shoppers' identity needs are in the foreground.

Indeed, shoppers' identity needs are met through the creation of this actor and make *all the work worthwhile*. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's political economic analysis of power, Fuchs (2014) points to affective relations to better understand users' engagement in online work. From his perspective, social, cultural and symbolic capital are considered necessities, but also scarce goods. In order to acquire social relationships (social capital), qualifications, education, knowledge (cultural capital) and reputation (symbolic capital), users are willing to invest time and labor to satisfy these very social needs. Regarding the latter, Anderson et al. (2016) draw attention to identity, as such a social need. As these authors point out, the exchange of cultural and affective content adds value to users' identities and to their social relationships – an argument which is also reflected in my material.

Of course, the idea that social media and identity formation (e.g. Brünker, Deitelhoff, & Mirbabaie, 2019), as well as consumption and identity (e.g. Arnould & Thompson, 2005), or, more specifically, shopping and identity (e.g. Gregson & Crewe, 1998; Miller et al., 1998) are interlinked, is not a new one. In the particular case at hand, however, practitioners use a range of objects, in the form of both physical acquisitions (e.g., purchased items that are displayed) and virtual possessions (e.g., the number of likes or followers) to create an actor that is disembodied and reembodied in the form of photos, videos and digital (shopping) content (materials) to conform to their identity needs. Unlike in other forms of (offline) shopping, the virtual (long-term) *outcome*, which is captured and temporarily stabilized in the sociomaterial fabric, is vital for these users.

Turning to my interviewees, we have Dana, the sports enthusiast who shares her workout routines and advertises her favorite fitness program on her account. Nora, the interior decoration lover whose posts show almost every corner of her apartment, including information about the brands she likes to buy from. Linda, the yoga instructor who aims to motivate other users by frequently sharing inspirational quotes and what she calls "little reminders" for mindfulness and social responsibility, and sometimes also displays her yoga equipment and preferred sports supplements on her profile, to name just a few examples (see Figure 14).

Of course, there are variations in the type of identity markers and the amount of consumption exposed, but as the following quote shows, many shoppers target their content around a very specific theme, and use their doings and sayings, and also associations (tags) with brands, to manifest their sense of identity and belonging while attracting the attention of other users:

> Linda: "Mm, mine, it's a yoga profile. [laughs] But I also share activities in my free time and many quotes concerning mindfulness, awareness, yoga, meditation, traveling…"

> Interviewer: "Is your Instagram and your Instagram profile important to you?"

> Linda: "Yeah, because, I want to spread a positive message and yeah, I would like to enhance the numbers [followers] of my profile because… not only to show my interest, but because I want to spread the message of affirmations and the yoga message. The philosophy and positivity, and self-love!"

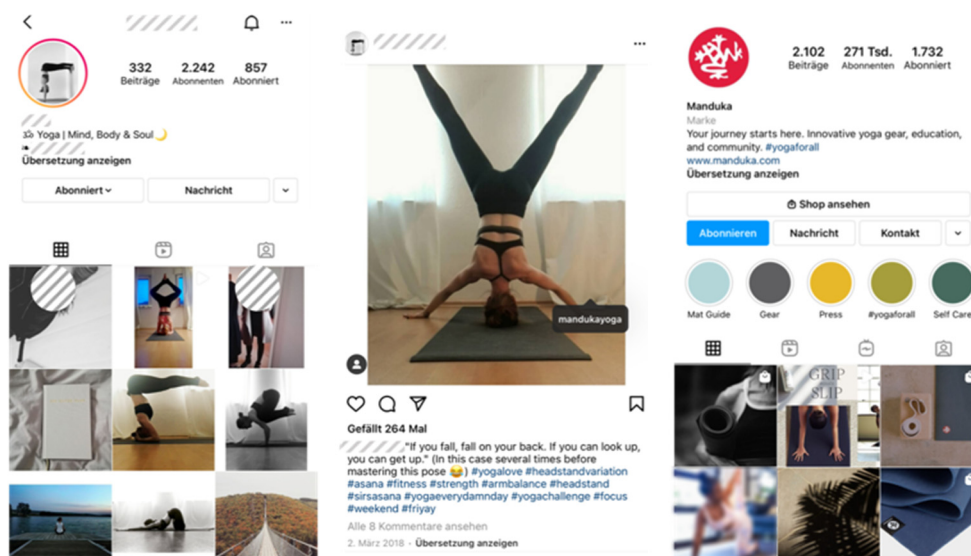**Figure 14.** Identity materialized in a user profile.
Impressions from Linda's Instagram profile, including an example where she tags the brand @madukayoga.

Social media profiles are thus not only an example of the entanglement of people and technology; they must also be understood as culturally significant and meaningful sociomaterial assemblages that show (publicly) who someone is or wants to be.

However, identities are not determined and constituted by the individual shopper alone, but by the totality of the acting entities that make up the sociomaterial fabric. Indeed, my research suggests that the performance of shopping gives way to meeting collective expectations in a way that is more visible and public compared to other modes of shopping. Specifically, in the process of creating a social media actor through regular and repeated shopping performance, identity also gradually takes shape as the actor is jointly co-constituted. As explained in more detail below, other users/shoppers, as well as non-human actants, are actively involved in this process.

Staying focused: Adjusting and re-focusing the social media shopper

The creation of the social media shopper largely depends on the feedback and evaluation of others. Social media shoppers regard it as important to control, or at least influence, the process of constructing the actor, and also other shoppers' evaluation of their enactments. For them, being "noticeable and positively prominent" among viewers is key to strengthening their image (Abidin, 2016a, p. 90). Thus, as Anderson et al. (2016) have also shown, users often carefully curate their content to get immediate, real-time feedback and evaluation.

Anderson and colleagues (2016) distinguish between two types of feedback that are particularly relevant for understanding how the actor under study is made. On the one hand, there is feedback in the form of cultural content that "acknowledges that workers produce consumer tastes, social norms and aesthetic values" (ibid., p. 390). On the other hand, there is affective feedback that includes the expression of feelings and emotions (ibid.). In the context of social media shopping, such feedback is materialized in text, emojis, reactions, likes, shares, as well as in reach and visibility. My material suggests that both types of feedback (materials) significantly shape social media shopping practice and the creation of the actor.

If social recognition and affirmation contribute to the constitution of the actor under study, it seems logical that practitioners aim at producing content that is valued and recognized by others. As will be illustrated in following sections, alignment with and the reproduction of collectively shared aesthetics and tastes, and concomitant work to improve social media metrics, play a crucial role in this.

Aesthetics, taste and collective preferences

My study shows that collective tastes and aesthetics, constituted in what Lou in our interview called "content everyone likes", frame how social media shoppers engage in this mode of shopping. Indeed, and drawing on Arsel and Bean (2013), tastes "orchestrate the visual and material order" and offer "shared meaning and values that allow individuals to produce and reproduce material representations of a given

arrangement of objects, doings, and meanings with a high degree of fidelity" (p. 902).

On social media, taste, and the associated meanings and knowledge, can (at least to some degree) be observed, as it materializes in the representation of social media profiles and users' content collections. Of course, once again my material shows variations with regard to *how* shoppers curate their profiles (e.g., Ida likes to post alternating colorful and black and white images; Kim's "channel styling" is characterized by a photo of her shoes in each of the picture rows), but as shown in Figure 15, and in the interview excerpt below, social media shoppers often create profiles that "have some kind of similarity [in terms of design consistency] in it" (interview with Hanna) to match certain aesthetic scripts and standards. Becca, a technical writer in her mid-twenties who uses her social media to display her photography work and scenes from her everyday life, explains this phenomenon as follows:

> Becca: "It looks better. Because when I look at other profiles, I also want to see that it fits together. You want it nice. It's important for me and it's also important for others who look at your profile. Yes, that's why."
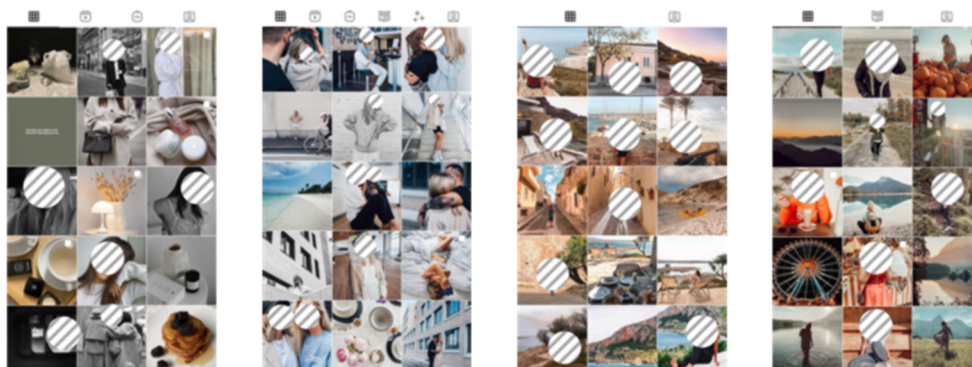
Figure 15. Capturing collective tastes.
Screenshots from the photo galleries of @influencerU, @influencerG, Becca and Hanna.

These and many other examples from my fieldwork demonstrate that social media shopping practitioners share a collective understanding of how content should look, and illustrate how taste is expressed and materialized in the performance of social media shopping. Referring back to Figure 15, although all four users use different color schemes, the color-grading within each profile is similar. In addition, there are similarities regarding not only *how* (activities/doings) shoppers capture, edit and arrange their content, but also *what* (objects/materials) virtual artefacts they add to their profiles, and therefore ascribe meaning to. The moments and situations they capture, the objects they present on camera, the locations they visit – all of this

seems to align and correspond to a distinct collective understanding of social media aesthetics. Despite subtle distinctions and individual interpretations, these examples illustrate that both professional and non-professional social media actors align with a certain understanding of taste and aesthetics that shapes preferences for objects, related actions, and associated meanings (see also Arsel & Bean, 2012).

In order to further elaborate on how collective preferences shape shopping and the creation of the actor under study, it is interesting to look at how different actors promote the same products on social media. The e-commerce brand @idealofsweden, which markets fashionable accessories for mobile devices, is one of the many "influencer brands" that I came across multiple times during my fieldwork. @idealofsweden is known for its partnerships with well-known influencers across Europe, as well as for special collections created in collaboration with various social media personalities. In addition, the company promotes its own micro-influencer program in which everyday shoppers can participate, as did three of the shoppers I interviewed. While I have to assume that the social media partnerships of professional social media actors are based on lucrative advertising deals, the example of influencer brands like @idealofsweden illustrates how tastes, as socially constructed entities, contribute in shaping social media actors and their shopping practice. Similar to the everyday users who apply the same photography techniques or presentation styles as professional social media actors to develop their shopping practice (see chapter five), these practitioners align their content with collective tastes and preferences. They adapt to and draw from the underlying prescribed preferences, rules and expectations inherited in this mode of shopping and continue to refine their skillset. To borrow from Arsel and Bean (2013), "individuals choose similar objects to which they perform similar doings in order to achieve similar meanings" (p. 907). In the context of social media shopping, this observation of the two authors also applies. As illustrated in Figure 16, tastes and aesthetic understandings, manifested as cultural knowledge in the sociomaterial setting, determine both *what* shoppers prefer (e.g., what they purchase, display or promote) and *how* they make use of virtual and non-virtual artifacts to create, adjust and manifest the shopping practitioner. In this sense, such cultural knowledge functions as guidance, or even a set of rules, that configures actors and their performances. Tastes, as part of the sociomaterial arrangement, must then be seen as acting entities.
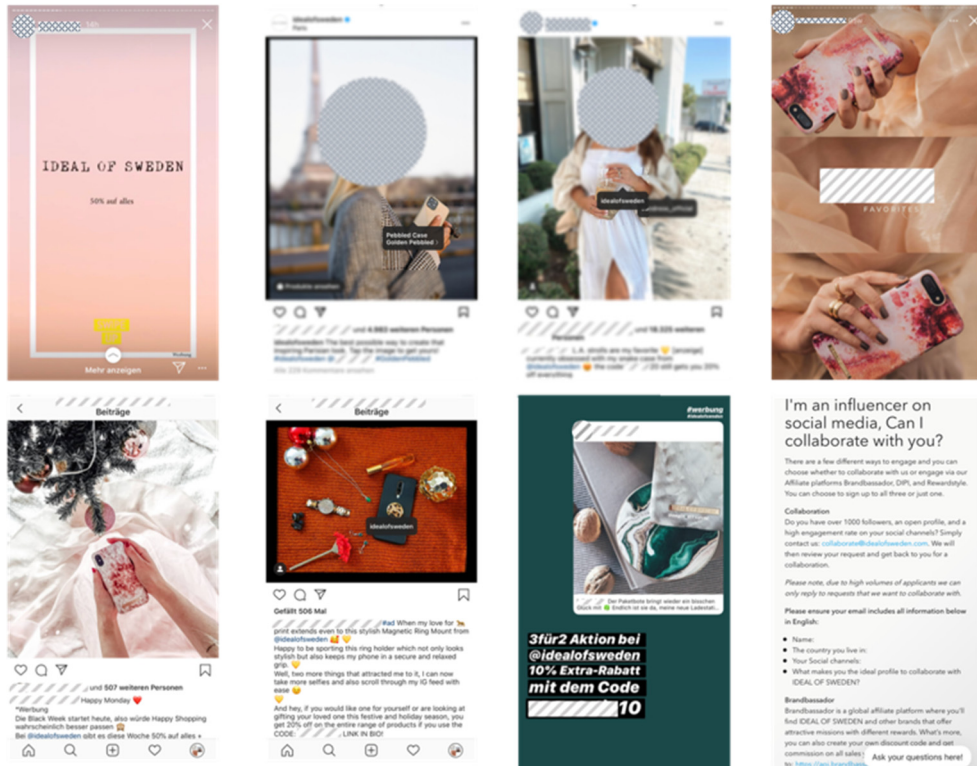
Figure 16. Different shoppers, similar presentation styles and techniques.
Top row: Professional social media shoppers advertise @idealofsweden products. Bottom row: Everyday shoppers advertise products from the same brand.

Following on from this discussion, it remains to be emphasized that there is not just one single taste that steers how social media actors and their performances take shape, nor are tastes themselves completely stable. Rather, I see tastes as temporarily materialized meanings and knowledge, which are subject to change, as they are made and re-made through the performance of social media shopping.

Shoppers' ability to adapt to emerging collective tastes/trends and to change their focus shows that what shoppers consider meaningful can change over time (for a similar point see Fuentes et al., 2019; Hand & Shove, 2004; Quitzau & Røpke, 2009). For example, Dana, the sports fan we met earlier, expressed no intention to engage in any form of "influencing activity" during our interview. Yet, a few months later she started to focus on sharing her workout outfits and displaying her sports equipment. Likewise, Jessica, another woman I spoke to, opened a new account to promote her first book and to present herself as an author and literature blogger. Interestingly, for her second profile, she developed a style that is expressed in a recurring color grading for her images and carefully selected cover pictures for her story highlights (see Figure 17). In addition, the choice of words is different

compared to her original profile. Jessica's posts show that she is deliberately addressing an audience here (as opposed to her friends), presenting and reviewing her latest book purchases, asking questions and seeking feedback. Jessica's example not only shows how shoppers develop their skill sets and competences (for a similar argument see McQuarrie et al., 2013), it also illustrates that individuals can maintain multiple (online) identities at the same time, each being guided by different means and by a different aesthetic script. Again, while it is not a new idea that shopping builds identity, what is unique here is the finding that different materialized representations of online identities can be used to serve or align with other sociomaterial entities (here, friends and acquaintances vs. audiences) and to negotiate one's position in the sociomaterial assemblage.
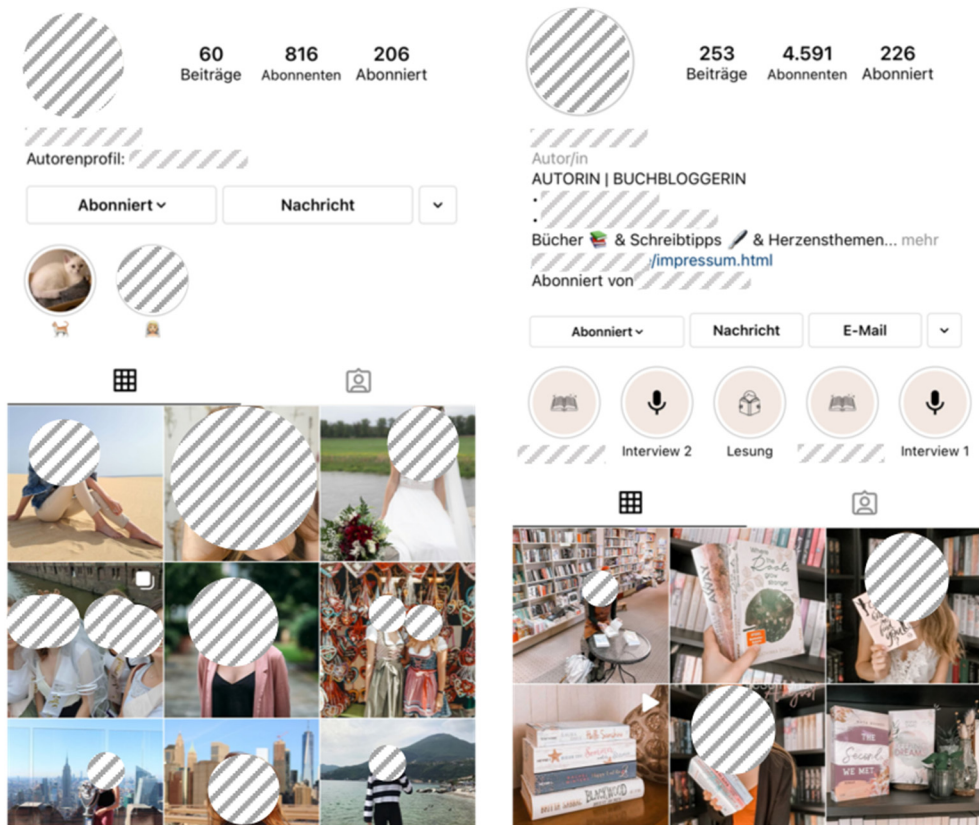

Figure 17. Capturing different shopping enactments.
Jessica's first profile which she uses for sharing mostly personal moments, compared to the profile in which she positions herself as an author and blogger.

Linking to this discussion, the following section takes a closer look at the relationship between the (re)production of cultural knowledge in the form of tastes and recurring social media aesthetics and attention, and the resulting commercial value of one's social media persona, will be explored in more detail below. The success (measurable in social media metrics) of those who adapt to and incorporate cultural expectations and knowledge into their shopping practice suggests that adaptation or imitation is likely more "effective" in creating a "successful" actor than completely disengaging from these socially constructed ideas (and ideals). Thus, particularly those who want to take their social media activities to a new level – in other words, those who aspire to a career as a commercial shopper – are constantly adapting and realigning their online presence and performance to meet their own goals and the expectations of others, while tracking and improving their social media metrics. In order to better understand the actor and their practical enactments, we must further elaborate on their engagement and interaction with the sociomaterial assemblage.

Confirmation and validation through social media metrics

On social media, attention can be easily measured by the number of views, likes, comments, followers etc. The shopping practitioners I interviewed all demonstrated a profound understanding of how to monitor and constantly improve the overall activity on their profiles (competences). They confirmed that social media metrics are important indicators to estimate the commercial, but also social value of the actor, and the growing number of likes and followers seems to be the currency shoppers are rewarded with. Indeed, during my interviews it became clear that social media shoppers experience feelings of happiness and satisfaction when they watch their Instagram notifications for new likes, comments and followers popping up on their screens. Likewise, if an image or video does not get as much recognition as expected, and turns out not to be "Insta-worthy" based on its projected amount of likes (see also Abidin, 2014), my interviewees expressed feelings of "not being good enough" (interview with Mia), or "the urge to delete the picture" (interview with Selena).

What we can see from these examples is that materiality, and especially non-human entities, configures both the actor and their performances. Social validation is, among other things, mediated by a "like button" which is attributed a particular meaning through performance (in this example, through the pressing of the virtual button by a human on a physical smartphone). This meaning is then materialized in a number (e.g., number of likes on a post) that can be evaluated and interpreted by other actors.

This evaluation and assessment performed by other actors and actants (both human and non-human) is particularly relevant because social media metrics are potentially accessible to every Internet user. Indeed, the nature of the sociomaterial fabric gives rise to lateral peer-to-peer monitoring. On the one hand, this motivates shoppers to

be constantly active, and to improve and work on their online presence. On the other hand, it is quite close to what Trottier and Lyon (2012) call "social surveillance". Consistent with Anderson et al.'s (2016) findings, social media shoppers often feel obligated to constantly maintain, evolve and adjust their social media shopping performance. For example, during our interview, Emma recalled how she used to post pictures showing her as a gothic model, before she decided to delete all of her content to take a completely new direction – in terms of the content she published, but also stylistically. Claiming that she "wanted to share something that I know people would like to see", she turned what she calls her "main profile" into something "more mainstream". "Like what *everyone* shows, but with a tattooed girl" (interview with Emma).

Similar to Emma, who shapes her social media presence to match certain societal expectations, particularly those users who demonstrate an interest in professionalizing their social media shopping claim that they actively work on improving the performance of their posts in terms of "maximizing likeability" (Abidin, 2016a, p. 91). While balancing authenticity, uniqueness and their reputation with various social groups (Abidin, 2016a), these social media shoppers seem to "work even harder to create the content everyone likes" (interview with Lou). This notion aligns with Abidin's (2014a) view of commercial bloggers who use social media less to create lasting memories, but "more about catering to an audience" (p. 123).

Developing and consolidating the actor's position

As these and other examples from my field work illustrate, the means and ends that motivate social media shoppers to participate in the sociomaterial order, and to develop and strengthen their position within it, are by no means fixed. Changes in one of the elements that constitute the practice have implications for the performance of this shopping mode, and this furthermore explains why shoppers continue to adjust their online presence. This finding is consistent with Shove et al. (2007), who explain that the reproduction of social practices is dynamic in nature. As these authors demonstrate, new patterns and routines are made when "positive experiences *[here the positive feedback of others in the form of increasing social media metrics]* give rise to processes of repetition and reproduction through which the new entity *[here the change in how social media shopping is performed]* becomes part of an individual's life" (Shove et al., 2007, p. 164).

In addition, means and ends can be situational and are subject to change, depending on an individual's mental state (as discussed in Schatzki, 1996;1997). This becomes especially visible when examining commercial social media influencers' profiles who – without exception – all share mundane, ordinary aspects of their daily lives, including the highs and lows of the everyday, and sometimes, but not always, combine these (seemingly) spontaneous moments with carefully staged shopping content (see Figure 18). In the following sections, I elaborate on the changed

capacity for action and the resulting opportunities and challenges that the creation of a social media actor entails.

Figure 18. Snippets from everyday life.
1) @influencerT talks about watching a movie. The screenshot says: "Completely underestimated how cold it was today so I've ended up on my sofa with a hot water bottle in my pjs watching twilight and can I just say I completely forgot how funny the scenes are when Edward and Bella first see each other."
2) @influencerW shares a moment when she ate some cake.
3) @influencerR waits for a delayed flight. The screenshot says: "I am dyyyyyiiiinnngggg!!!! [emoji] Nearly 24h on the road hahahh."
4) @influencerP celebrates at a house party with friends.

From everyday shopper to taste-makers: Activating the social media shopper

As shoppers gradually build up a follower base, and continue to create the social media actor, their social media shopping changes. At this point, it must be emphasized that the transition from an everyday shopper to a social media personality who has a certain influence through their reach is by no means a linear, plannable or controllable process. Rather, the process of making a social media actor is a sometimes lengthy and complex endeavor, but one that comes with certain changes in status and position. The following sections focus on the impact on the everyday lives of actors who professionalize their social media shopping. In this context, I continue to show that the process of "activating" or "agencing" the social media actor is conditioned by, and also conditions, the sociomaterial assemblage in which it unfolds. Following on from the previous discussion of identity, the next section shows that agency also changes in the process of constructing the actor under study.

Stepping up self-branding and commercial value

By further leveraging self-branding strategies in terms of developing a public image for both commercial gain and cultural capital (Khamis et al., 2017), some social media shoppers evolve from everyday shoppers into cultural intermediaries – actors who mediate between commerce and culture (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2012). These users construct an actor that aligns with collective expectations and the underlying scripts of social media shopping, with the aim of increasing the attention they receive and "[building] a strong fan base, sizeable enough to interest advertisers" (Khamis et al., 2017, p. 194). As shown in the following interview excerpt, agency and social status needs mutually reinforce each other. Alice, 34, a "mom-blogger" and communications specialist on parental leave, confidentially explains how she uses her impact to negotiate with brands:

> Alice: "My main idea was to start slow and slowly move into this space where I act as an influencer. Currently, since I'm reaching almost a 10,000-follower base worldwide, it is necessary for me also to help the brands to make them aware of me, as well as inspire them to connect to the follower base that I have. Basically, these collaborations that I'm talking about is when a brand approaches you, based on your content […].
>
> The brands [also] come to me, and they ask me what I look out for when I'm buying. Let's say, for example, a dress from them or what is the kind of criteria that I have. When they approach me, I tell them what I like, and they show me what they have in their store. […] Then with my help, they can put that across to the audience that they are targeting. […]
>
> It doesn't happen from day one, but it happens when you have a reach […]. I think when I reached a follower base of 2,500 is when I started having these brands approach me.
>
> It's a two-way process. It's not necessarily the brands only come to you, but it could be also you that you can also choose to work with any brand that you want. Probably that will also help you build your credibility. That's how the collaborations work."

As shown in this statement, some shoppers are able to develop and professionalize their shopping skills, profit from their previous investments, and eventually turn their shopping into a paid profession. Alice's choice of words is interesting here; her approach is portrayed as highly strategic and attests to a strong sense of self-awareness. Alice wants to "inspire". Here, the means and ends not only consist of her motivation to inspire her followers with, for example, her aesthetic judgment in fashion, or her everyday parenting experiences; she also wants to inspire brands to "connect to her follower base" for advertising purposes. Judging from this narrative, Alice is able to negotiate her working conditions herself. Unlike those shoppers who only occasionally engage in brand collaborations, some of the more experienced

social media shoppers, such as Alice, can set their own criteria instead of just accepting offers. This freedom to choose clearly increases her confidence, which makes her an example of what Banet-Weiser and Sturken (2010) call a creative amateur, "encouraged to be 'empowered' by the flexibility and openness of new technological formats and expanded markets" (p. 272).

According to Abidin (2017), being a micro-influencer is "not merely a hobby or a supplementary income but an established career with its own ecology and economy" (p. 1). However, monetary compensation, and what Alice refers to as the freedom to "choose to work with any brand that you want", depend on the level of impact an actor has, and impact on social media is interlinked with the audience size (Khamis et al., 2017). In fact, my findings reflect McQuarrie et al.'s (2013) argument that social media actors build audiences and reach to attract the attention of companies in order to receive benefits including gifts or momentary compensation for advertising placements.

Establishing agency

Indeed, the economic value of a social media shopping actor is determined by how often audiences press the "like", "comment" and "follow" buttons. This "power" of social recognition has been acknowledged in previous research. For example, Goldhaber (1997) introduced the concept of the attention economy in the 1990s – long before social media as we know it today existed – to explain that information overload related to digital media makes human concentration a limited resource. In turn, attention can be regarded as cumulative wealth which users, including social media shoppers, strive for. Goldhaber concludes that people with the ability to attract and sustain the attention of others are "in a preferred position to get anything this new economy offers" (Goldhaber, 1997, n.p.).

Consequently, in a sociomaterial fabric that is in large part based on the exchange of attention, shoppers' agency also increases the more attention they attract. This can be best explained by having a closer look at the non-human elements of social media platforms and their role in configuring practice and practitioners. Interestingly, it is often the already large accounts that offer the highest potential for visibility and growth. This phenomenon is related to the platforms' algorithms which determine who actually sees the content users publish, and who doesn't.

Even though Instagram in particular maintains, one might say, a certain sense of mystery around their algorithm, it is no secret that Instagram evaluates and scores every user's content. For example, it prefers those accounts that upload new content on a regular basis and make use of all the functionalities and formats the platform offers (or those they most want users to adopt), and it classifies content with high engagement rates as more relevant, compared to content with little or no user interaction (Geyser, 2021). On social media, users with a high follower base receive

a high level of attention in the form of likes, comments, reactions, shares and so forth, as their content is more likely to be seen and further shared by others. In this way, non-followers are made aware of the user's content and profile, which in turn can lead to further growth.

Moreover, ordinary shoppers who "crack the Instagram algorithm" (Geyser, 2021, n.p.), or at least "understand" its capacities and mode of action to some extent, also have potential access to a mass audience. Thus, shoppers' agency is to a large extent shaped and determined by the digital platform, its affordances and the algorithm that governs it. Indeed, the non-human actants of the sociomaterial fabric have a great influence on how shopping is performed and how the actor under study takes shape. This illustrates once again that agency is distributed across all elements involved in social media shopping, be they digital or physical, human or non-human (for a similar argument on distributed agency see Fuentes et al., 2019; Hagberg, 2016). As shown below, social media shopping performance changes with altered agency.

Making trends and changing shopping practice

As Goldhaber (1997) explains, money flows along with attention. While my material confirms this statement, it also suggests that changes in agency that accompany the process of the construction of the actor, follow attention and vice versa. On social media, shopping practitioners who receive attention "have the ability to construct value, by framing how others engage with goods, affecting and effecting others' orientations towards those goods as legitimate – with 'goods' understood to include material products as well as services, ideas and behaviors" (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 552). In line with this argument, some shoppers evolve into tastemakers and opinion leaders themselves. They gradually move from recreating established tastes to becoming a "declaration of taste" (McQuarrie et al., 2013, p. 143). Their patterns of action, materialized in their content, in their profile and in their engagement on the social media platform, become a source of inspiration and guidance that may be reproduced by others. In line with McQuarrie et al. (2013), what these social media actors offer is "an exemplar of taste" (p. 147) that functions as a meaningful linkage between doings, materials and understandings, and ultimately guides how others practice shopping.

My empirical material shows that social media shoppers continue to draw upon established doings, sayings, competences and understandings when engaging in this mode of shopping. However, the more professional a shopper becomes, the more this composition changes. For example, once a social media shopper has reached a certain position, they shift from communicating with and reacting to individuals, to talking to their audience as a whole (for a similar finding see McQuarrie et al., 2013). Instead of replying to specific comments and questions, they provide public "Q&A sessions". Instead of asking for shopping advice, they pose questions to spark

user interaction, and frequently act as consultants themselves by making claims and clear statements about their shopping and individual tastes:

> "Combining a classy plaid blazer and skirt combination with black boots is so cool!"[21] (@influencerU).

They run Instagram competitions and provide giveaways (often in collaboration with a sponsorship) for their followers and to further grow their reach:

> "We are 700,000! […] I'm giving away 7 fat surprise packages to you to go with the 700k! You can get an insight into the packages in my story! How to participate – Comment & like my last 3 posts – Be my subscriber. I will contact the winners via DM on Sunday evening at 8:00pm. Good luck to you all! I'm rooting for you guys, you are the best!!!"[22] (@influencerA).

Depending on their focus, these changes in shopping practice follow rising reach and impact, as everyday shoppers gradually become part of the higher-level systems and institutions that govern standardized patterns of social behavior. Thus, they become part of the fashion, beauty or fitness industry, to name the fields that most of my study participants are associated with. This affiliation not only satisfies the identity needs of these users, it also gives them access to such things as exclusive invitation-only events, expensive vacations, free products and sponsorships, as well as influential and sometimes very prominent contacts (for similar findings see McQuarrie et al., 2013 and their study on fashion bloggers).

The fact that most professional social media shoppers make use of this newly acquired agency and start their own businesses beyond their social media presence, illustrates that rising agency and economic value are closely interlinked. At the same time, agency gives them more freedom to act against the conventions, scripts and collective understandings that shape this form of shopping, and allows them, for example, to show more individuality (e.g., @influencerU publishes a picture showing her without make-up with the image caption "pores, spots, wrinkles: some real skin on Instagram" and a terrified emoji), or to display somewhat unconventional things (e.g., @influencerL posts an image with the caption "Saint Laurent & kebab shop", wearing high fashion while eating at a fast food kiosk).

As shown here, the continuous performance of this particular mode of shopping leads to the creation of an actor that affords both identity and agency, and causes changes in shoppers' relation to social media shopping and the meanings attached. As Shove and Pantzar (2007) acknowledge, repeated performance binds practitioners more closely to the practice in question, and what it means to be a

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[21] Translated verbatim from German.

[22] Translated verbatim from German.

practitioner "evolves over the course of any one practitioner's career" (p. 165). At some point, these users stop being ordinary shoppers as their position gradually shifts towards that of a marketer, rather than a consumer (for a similar point see McQuarrie et al., 2013). The accumulation of positive experiences and the feedback of others (e.g., in the form of a growing audience, affirmative comments, increasing metrics, etc.) affects how these social media actors perform this mode of shopping, which ultimately leads to changes in the arrangement of meanings, materials and competences. Social media shopping becomes a profession.

At the same time, this argument further suggests that different actors can perform the same practice in different ways. Social media shopping and the actors who perform it are thus not ready-made, pre-existing entities; they come in many different configurations. In line with Shove and Pantzar's (2007) work, these configurations are subject to change depending on the "continual re-positioning of practitioners with respect to the entity or practice they sustain and reproduce" (p. 165).
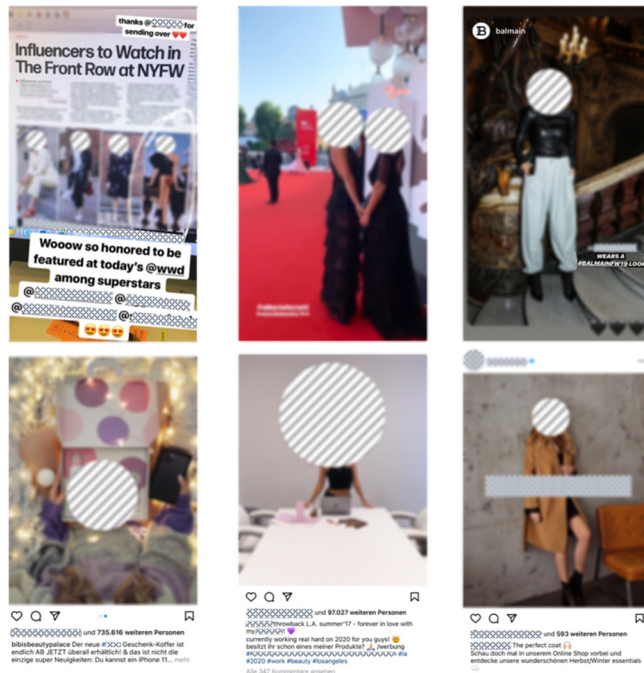
Figure 19. Shoppers' "new" agency.
1) Top row: Social media shoppers become part of the fashion system: @influencerL featured in "Women's Wear Daily"; @influencerC on the red carpet of the Venice Film Festival 2019; @influencerH at the Balmain SS20 show during Paris Fashion Week 2019.
2) Bottom row: From shopper to seller: @influencerB presents new body care products from her own beauty brand and promotes a competition for her followers; @influencerR announces her 2020 beauty collection from her own beauty brand; an "autumn/winter essential" post from @influencerI's fashion brand.

Challenges and consequences of being a social media shopper

Having seen how actors are made and gradually take shape through the performance of social media shopping, this chapter addresses the challenges and accompanying consequences of a publicly shared life as a (professional) social media shopping practitioner. While social media offers a template for constructing particular actors, at times it can be difficult to adhere to this template and live up to the sometimes "unrealistic" requirements and high standards social media imposes. The sociomaterial fabric and its entities, but above all the constantly changing algorithm, can lead to several issues that shoppers must face in their daily lives and sometimes even put them under pressure. Thus, practitioners often find themselves in a state of conflict: they have to meet the demands and expectations of their audience and comply with particular social media scripts, yet at the same time they aim at conveying a sense of authenticity and individuality. In addition, they often find themselves having to balance their (public) online lives and their (private) offline lives. As discussed below, stress, anxiety and pressure can be unpleasant consequences of being a social media shopper.

From leisure and pleasure to demanding work

Keeping social media updated and serving the audience

Following McQuarrie et al. (2003), my study confirms that once shoppers acquire a certain status and privileges, they are keen to hold on to it. Previously, I have demonstrated how Instagram's algorithm, the platform's functionalities, as well as other entities configure how social media shopping and the actor take shape. Following the logic of the distributed agency approach, changes in one of these elements consequently affect practitioners' ability to perform the practice (see also Fuentes et al., 2019; Hagberg, 2016). In the case at hand, a loss of audience has significant effects on how social media shopping can be performed. A loss of audience equals a loss of agency and also affects shoppers' sense of identity. As a result, shoppers demonstrate a profound understanding of the importance of reach, and for many, the potential loss of their audience is not only frustrating, it also represents a threat to their position (for a similar point see McQuarrie et al., 2013).

> Lou: "I know the algorithm at the moment is really fucking everybody up. For example, I have 3,400 followers at the moment and before I went to London, my average like number was about 300. Then I went to London and it went back to 100. I was like, *"Why?! Thank you, Instagram for that."* I'm hoping that it's going to get better because this was kind of frustrating. […] I put a lot of effort into the pictures […] and everyone's like, *"All the pictures are so nice."* And I was like, *"Yes, but nobody sees them."*

In order to keep up with the pace of social media by "keeping the engagement rolling" (interview with Fiona), just like Lou who feels disappointed when her effort is not paying off, other social media shoppers I interviewed also reported a certain pressure to perform social media shopping on a regular basis. In addition, some shoppers also expressed the need to develop distinct strategies to both hold on to their reach and grow their following. "Trying out what works best" (interview with Emma), or finding the right moment "when the audience rate peaks and the posts peak" to share content in order to "get maximum likes and maximum reach" (both statements from the interview with Amy), were expressed as challenging, but necessary endeavors.

The experienced actors in particular noted that the frequency of posts matters in order to stay relevant for followers and also to be *seen* at all. To elaborate on this point, the commitment to constantly consuming and sharing social media content and trading (work) time for social recognition and attention can be related to what Mick and Fournier (1998) refer to as the paradox between valuing the liberties that technology offers and turning away from its "addictive (enslaving) capacities" (p. 133), which is also evident in the following quote from 34-year-old doctoral student Amy:

> Amy: "And then I delete Facebook, I delete Instagram, because I use it so much. Like it's, mhm… I am addicted to them! And, especially now that I'm working on [a specific project], I'm very, very stressed. What I do is that when I'm so stressed, instead of doing something else, I would go and scroll through Instagram. And then that sucks you in and then you spend some time there. So, it's just better, that I decided "no more Instagram during the day". I just delete it. I delete it and then I try to work and like in the evening, after the kids go to sleep, I download Instagram again."

The compulsion to engage regularly with social media (shopping) as mentioned here and in similar narratives from my interviews is conditioned by the interplay of collective expectations and technological mechanisms. It points once again to the capacity to act of both the technological and the human elements within the sociomaterial fabric. It sometimes favors, but likewise can work against social media shoppers when participation becomes compulsory. In fact, continuity and regularity are considered important to maintain followers and to be considered relevant by the algorithm (Geyser, 2021) – a statement most of my interviewees confirmed. Social media shopping is therefore not a practice where practitioners can simply drop out and pick it up again at some point later – at least, not without consequences for their agency and position within the sociomaterial fabric. Thus, and if we remember that social media shopping can be a professional career path for some, being a carrier of this mode of shopping can be challenging, demanding and time-consuming. In fact, the line between social media shopping as a recreational activity and social media shopping as a demanding profession is narrow.

Similar to what my interviewees state above, the desire to consciously limit social media screen time and to take social media breaks was expressed by several interviewees. I also witnessed professional shoppers announcing a "story pause for a day" or "broadcasting break" as a strategy to cope with the tensions described above (for more on restriction as a form of anti-consumption see Anderson, Hamilton, & Tonner, 2014).

Blurring the private and the commercial

At the same time, the fear of "over sharing" and its potential consequences was a recurring topic of discussion during my interviews. While professional social media actors usually add to their feeds every, or every other day, and typically use the Instagram story feature multiple times per day, everyday shoppers or aspiring social media influencers are often anxious that their shopping content might be perceived negatively, especially by friends and acquaintances (for a similar point see Abidin, 2016a). Hanna, a 33-year-old account manager, explains why she often declines brand collaborations:

> Hanna: "One, two stories, that's okay, but I'm not going to do it for 10 [story posts]. I don't want to annoy people […] Because *everyone's* doing it."

Hanna's last sentence refers to non-professional influencers, who – according to my material – sometimes have a rather negative reputation. Amateurish promotional messages can be perceived as "annoying" by other everyday shoppers, especially when these users are on the threshold between representing a private person (fun and leisure) and building a professional influencer status (commercial). In fact, my study shows that particularly shoppers who are not yet as established as professional social media actors, and who are still building their reputation and agency, face the challenge of constantly negotiating between satisfying their (online) audience and their personal (on- and offline) relationships. As discussed in the quote below, it can be challenging for shoppers to meet various expectations:

> Lou: "Sometimes, I'm embarrassed about how important it is for me, but yes. It's always been a hobby and I like pretty pictures of myself. I like the positive feedback that I get for it. It's really fun. I deleted it [Instagram] last year in December after a breakup that had to do with Instagram actually, because my boyfriend who was nine years older than I was… well, he was quite uncomfortable with all this girly Instagram stuff. He thought that it's too girly. Not natural enough. He had a problem with that. So, I just deleted it for two or three weeks because I also had exams to do. I was already freaking out. I needed a short break. It felt good not to have this pressure all the time to upload pictures, to look your best on social media. […]"

> Interviewer: "I think at the start, you said that it's sometimes even a bit embarrassing for you, how much you care. Why embarrassing?"

Lou: "For example, I have some friends who are like me […]. We take pictures, of course, before we drink or eat. But I also have friends, especially my male friends who are like, *"Why do you always have to take pictures of your food or your drinks?"* Or when I ask them like, *"Can you take a picture of me here?"* They are like, *"Again? Really?"* That makes me feel uncomfortable sometimes because some people, they don't understand it."

Interviewer: "Mhm, yes, I understand…"

Lou: "It's some kind of Instagram thing. You are into the game or you're not."

What Lou here frames as "this pressure all the time to upload pictures, to look your best on social media" is an example that relates to serving the audience in terms of producing taste-conforming social media content. Moreover, the way she phrases her doings – "We take pictures, *of course*" – shows how the practice of creating content for social media at all times has been internalized. For others, in this instance for outsiders to the practice (Lou's boyfriend who didn't like her social media presence, and her male friends), there is often limited understanding and acceptance of shoppers' engagement and dedication, which can lead to conflict with others, but also to internal conflicts of interest. In this particular example, Lou seems to accept this situation by casually framing it as "some kind of Instagram thing" that these shoppers merely have to live with. But as shown in the following, not all practitioners take it so easy, especially when they have to serve external business partners as well:

Fiona: "I'm trying to make it [sponsored content] as natural as possible but sometimes you're getting things… I mean, there are also these brands that send you stuff, and you "can't" take a picture of it. So, I'm like *"Okay, what? Okay, how am I supposed to do a good picture with a scale?"* It's problematic if you're not really behind it. I could of course use a scale, but you're like, *"Okay, what am I going to do with it, picture-wise?"*

[Fiona pauses for a few seconds]

"It depends. For me, it's important that it's something that I can relate to, if I take a picture [for Instagram], it's kind of my life…"

Interviewer: Were you asked to sell the scale or integrate it into a picture?

Fatma: It was from [name of a micro-influencer agency]. They sent it out, and then you had to take the pictures and say what you liked about it, what you didn't like, if you would recommend it.... things like that, so that's what I did then."

This quote from Fiona, who is not committed to the product she is supposed to promote but feels obligated to share content about it, is one of several examples in

my material where social media actors perceive it as challenging to negotiate between (economic) opportunities, commercial pressure and their relationships with others and themselves.

In addition, social media shopping (or usage, in more general terms) affects user's everyday lives outside the realm of social media platforms in significant ways. The narratives above illustrate how social media (shopping) practice affects other, mundane everyday practices such as eating or spending time with friends. It *merges* with other practices of daily life. Indeed, social media shopping, like any other mode of shopping, does not exist in isolation but has to be understood as part of a nexus of related practices (following Warde, 2005). As shown in the following field note based on one of @influencerP's Instagram stories, the private becomes a resource that inevitably becomes entangled with actors' social media shopping:

[The story shows @influencerP sitting in her grandmother's home. Her camera is positioned in a way that only she can be seen, not her grandmother. However, viewers can hear the woman talking in the background as she walks around the kitchen.]

Grandma: "If you hadn't come now, I would have laid down, but never mind."

@influencerP: "Shall I go?"

Grandma: "Nooo, I'm glad you're here @influencerP! But, if I had known, I would have cleaned up a bit first."

[Cut]

@influencerP: "I brought my nail polish with me, because I wanted to do my nails. Maybe you want to do your nails, too!?"

[@influencerP shows a make-up pouch. Both women laugh.]

Grandma: "Nah, I don't want to have them colored anymore."

@influencerP: "But I have such beautiful colors!"[23]

[@influencerP opens a box with four nail polishes from @brandname. She begins to show her grandma several colors and as she goes along, the two try out the nail polishes while @influencerP starts talking about the products. She explains that the nail polish has no harmful ingredients. Furthermore, she tells her grandma that she can put together her own nail polish set online by choosing the colors she likes. They continue to talk to each other, and the viewer sees how @influencerP is casually eating a piece of cake at the same time. It seems like an ordinary conversation

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[23] Translated verbatim from German.

between a grandmother and her granddaughter. The story is marked as an advertisement and the brand's Instagram account is tagged.]

From this transcript of a sponsored story post, we can see how the private and the commercial blur together. Product features and related commercial activities are frequently combined with non-commercial, even very ordinary and mundane performances. Although it remains unclear whether the grandmother knew that she was part of an advertisement in this specific example, many social media shoppers share content involving more or less private situations and also bring in other people around them to blend shopping and non-shopping content in a very seamless way.

Although the shoppers I interviewed did not consider this as problematic, it seemed clear to me that using the private as a resource involves challenges, especially in the form of public criticism. For instance, some social media shoppers come under criticism when they show their children online and are publicly accused of using their children for advertising (e.g., @influencerB) and of being negative role models (e.g., @influencerB, @influencerO), or are exposed by (anonymous) users when they (according to their critics) reveal "too many" private details about themselves and their family members (e.g., @influencerM). These and similar examples make it clear once again that social media shoppers are certainly under the critical eye of the public, and that their position in the fluid and ever-changing sociomaterial assemblage can switch at any time.

Balancing authenticity, creativity and collective expectations

Drawing on the previous section, the professionalization of the social media shopping actor leads to more standardized and therefore less creative content, and as van Driel and Dumitrica (2020) state, such users "are forced to consciously invest in balancing the strategic approach to their Instagram account with their position as authentic (at the very least in the eyes of their followers)" (p. 79).

During my interviews, social media shoppers discussed the concept of authenticity in connection to their role as an everyday shopper and commercial mediator. (Perceived) authenticity was confirmed as an important factor when considering whether or not to buy a product promoted by another individual on social media. Likewise, being authentic when engaging in the promotional side of this mode of shopping is considered key to build shoppers' online reputation and keep their audiences (e.g. Gannon & Prothero, 2016; McQuarrie et al., 2013). Interestingly, Fiona, a 33-year-old marketing and communications consultant, who recalled several occasions where she had participated in the promotional side of social media shopping herself, is highly critical of professional influencers. For her, everyday shoppers or semi-professional social media actors like her are more "real" or "credible" than professionals. As shown in the following excerpt, she and other shoppers I spoke with often identify themselves as ordinary consumers who

recommend brands and products somewhat incidentally, expressing a very deliberate distinction between themselves and professionals:

> Fiona: "I think when the person that's recommending the stuff is actually standing behind it and really starts telling you, *"Okay, this is good, because of this and that. But also, it's bad because it doesn't have that, or whatever,"* then I think, you do believe these people! But I also think that people are aware of the big influencers that are showing another different product every day. […] I know it's not a recommendation then, is it? I think this is… I think people are aware of this thing nowadays."

> Interviewer: "Maybe not everybody does, but you seem to know, and you seem to recognize…"

> Fiona: "I think that's because I always have to write it down when it's an ad, as well. If I get the things as a present, or if I post for @swedish_fall, I always have to mark it as an ad. But people know, *"Okay, there is an ad written below"*. I mean they see if it's a product that I only post once, *"Yes, this is definitely an ad."*

> But if it's something I'm using – and of course @swedish_fall is just leggings for sports – but I like how they look, I like their style and, in the end, I do buy them. Yes, for a lot less money, but I do buy them in the end. So, I think this is something that people do understand. *"It's okay, she is really using the stuff that she's getting. She's not just posting one picture of it and that's it."*

> Interviewer: "So, you're showing it in use actually, while you're at the gym?"

> Fiona: "Yeah, I think it's also with these fitness influencers who have an ad for a different sports brand every day. Of course, it does make sense if you have a lot of brands you work for, you don't just wear one. But if you're wearing it and there's not an ad [here she means marking a post as an advertisement or sponsorship] below then you can say *"Okay, she's wearing Nike."* Then the next day when she's wearing Adidas and there's an ad below it, then you're like, *"Okay, that's not making sense!",* you know. So… It's how you show people how… how can I say it?... How authentic you are!

In accordance with this, and as exemplified in Figure 20, almost all shoppers I interviewed declared that the content they are exposed to on a daily basis is "always the same" (interview with Mia), which can sometimes even make social media shopping "kind of boring because the big [influencers], they're always ordering the same clothes. […] It's all the same" (interview with Lou). Thus, in order to monetize their shopping practice on social media, creativity, leisure, enjoyment and self-expression are increasingly relegated to secondary. As van Driel and Dumitrica (2020) note, these rewards eventually become externalized and overshadowed by other goals such as revenue generation.

At the same time, these skeptical voices support Arriagada and Bishop's (2021) notion that authenticity is often "heavily policed by audiences" (p. 5). As a consequence, shoppers refrain from believing that social media reflects reality; instead, they are aware that "[…] nothing on Instagram is real. My feed isn't real either" (interview with Hanna). Yet, it seems, these users still want to hold on to the "idea of authenticity", and a "perception of authenticity", despite the growing standardization of their content.

Figure 20. Standardized content on Instagram – Posing with pumpkins.
A location becomes an "Insta-spot" for both professional and amateur social media users.
1) @influencerO poses with pumpkins. The screenshot says: "Pumpkin spice and everything nice [emojis]".
2) @influencerA poses with pumpkins. The screenshot says: "Can't get enough of this season [emojis] After all the stuff [name of a person] and I are doing right now, I motivated myself to do some sports again […]."
3), 4) Other users pose with pumpkins.

In fact, authenticity in the context of social media is a recurring theme in the academic discourse. Such research suggests that authenticity is related to the presentation of content "in an unstaged way, taken in a real-life context and shot casually" (Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1866). The concept of authenticity of self-portraits in particular has been associated with self-deprecating, unfiltered and unedited formats (Gannon & Prothero, 2016), and Arnould and Price (2000) claim that authentic commercial opinions also incorporate the possible negative aspects of sponsored goods or services. Thus, and taken together, this research stresses the importance of "realness", "spontaneity" or "unadorned reality" to convey authenticity on social media. What then remains is the question of how social media shoppers can achieve an authentic image while simultaneously following tastes and aesthetics which often includes acts of processing, editing and recreating images, and often even limits creativity and individuality. Indeed, for aspiring social media professionals there seems to be a tension between conveying perceived realness and modeling after other users by mimicking similar messages and visuals (as also discussed in van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

In addition, some shoppers touched upon the stress and anxiety caused by unreal social media imaginaries and expressed the need to "always look your best on social media" (interview with Lou) as challenging. Thus, shoppers often find themselves in the difficult situation of trying to meet the demands and expectations of their audience, while at the same time displaying a sense of authenticity and individuality. My material shows, in line with van Driel and Dumitrica (2020), that navigating between the two requires continuous work.

However, for Emma, "being real" and "honest" and following the aesthetic scripts, doings and sayings and collectively shared understandings are not mutually exclusive:

> Emma: "[…] A lot of people are like, *"I'm traveling my whole life"*, and that's not true. They travel like three weeks of the year and they take so many pictures… Like me, I do the same, but I'm real... I'm honest. That's the word I was looking for. I'm honest with my followers. […]
>
> I also put captions under it [the content she publishes]. I tell them about my day and if I have a picture of me at the beach and I write, *"I have a test tomorrow",* then obviously, I'm not at the beach right now. My feed should be clean, but that's not reality and I think a lot of people know that. A lot of people post a picture and say, *"Look where I am, I'm in Hawaii!"* and that's not true.
>
> Interviewer: "You seem to be a bit critical about that…"
>
> Emma: "I like the picture editing thing. A lot of people say that it's fake because it's not the real thing. But for me, picture editing is not about being fake but about being creative. For me, it's like a form of art. I'm not doing the complete "photoshopping my body thing" if I obviously don't have the body in real life, but I do the creative editing. I understand that a lot of people [criticize body editing] because that's a big problem because I think it affects the self-esteem of young girls. That's the biggest problem I see there."

As shown in this example, shoppers are able to interpret the aesthetic scripts ("my feed should be clean, but without over-editing") according to their specific needs. Further, communicating openly to followers that content does not always resemble everyday life that is happening right now, is a way of balancing authenticity and expectations framed by other social media actors. In addition, what we can see here is a form of contrived authenticity which relates to Abidin's (2017) concept of "calibrated amateurism". As Abidin (2017) explains, "when orchestrated conscientiously, calibrated amateurism may give the impression of spontaneity and unfilteredness despite the contrary reality" (p. 7).

In particular, branded shopping content produced by professional influencers, to whom brand partnerships provide a key financial opportunity (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019), does not always reflect real life. Commercial content is often pre-produced,

which leads to the idea that commerciality and true authenticity might even be contradictory (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021), or at least difficult to unite.

For monetarily valuable partnerships, brands often seek social media personalities who embody a specific image or fit a certain lifestyle, or choose them based on their potential connections (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). At the same time, previous research indicates that such paid partnerships are often linked to specific requirements, as clients want to retain some control over the sponsored shopping content (e.g. see Martínez-López et al., 2020). While my material illustrates that short-term collaborations with amateurs and micro-influencers are rarely linked to contracts and specific requirements, when working with professional shoppers, brands and sponsors often specify how the advertised product should be staged (see Haenlein et al., 2020). Professional influencers often receive precise creative briefing documents with sometimes detailed specifications and requirements for producing brand-conforming content. Furthermore, it is common practice that brand employees approve the branded content before publication, ask for changes and sometimes even request for the content to be redone from the scratch. Thus, social media shoppers face particular challenges when trying to be perceived as authentic, transparent and honest in relation to their followers (e.g. see Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Luvaas, 2013; Marwick, 2013), while having to fulfil contractual obligations. Thus, even experienced shoppers must both reflect and remain true to their own understanding of the sponsored content they present, while meeting the demands of their business partners, which once more highlights their dependence on "external" sociomaterial entities.

Summary: A distinct type of actor takes shape

This part of the analysis has focused on the social media shopper and shed light on the process of making or creating this particular actor. In doing so, it has argued that the social media shopper is a hybrid actor – not only in terms of being human and non-human, virtual and physical, but also in that the process as such is enabled, accompanied and configured by a variety of hybrid actors and actants. In fact, it is by no means the shoppers (humans) alone that create this actor. The making of the social media actor must be seen as a collective process that gradually takes shape in shoppers' engagement with and within social media assemblages. In this particular sociomaterial structure, agency is divided among various elements. The virtual, the non-human elements (actants), and what practice theory scholars refer to as "materials" all contribute to configuring the social media shopper. These virtual entities are, however, not preexisting entities. They are neither made by nor solely controlled by platform operators. Instead, they are constructed in shopping performance and are constantly reproduced by all acting entities involved. They come into being and are made meaningful by actors and their practical enactments.

Social media metrics (e.g., number of likes, followers or views) are an example of this. In the context of shopping, these metrics matter for (creating) the actor and play a significant role in shaping their capacity to act. They determine the commercial value of a shopper, and simultaneously contribute to constructing their identity. These metrics are materialized and made meaningful by collective enactments of social media shopping and related practices.

On this last point, I have explained how both shoppers' identity needs and their desire for agency are met in this process. In doing so, I highlighted a connection between these two concepts. While social media shopping rather quickly satisfies identity needs – for example, when shoppers use their shopping content to connect to certain brands or lifestyles as a way of signaling status – agency gradually evolves. (Positive) feedback from other users, materialized in social media metrics, allows some users to break out of conventions, scripts and collective expectations posed by social media assemblages – at least in part. This in turn has an effect on the shopper's self-image and external image. To follow this path, shoppers need to invest, in themselves and their skills (e.g., in terms of scaling up their shopping activities, professionalizing their content creation) as well as in material properties (e.g., in professional equipment, editing software or products that they then display). Above all, my study shows that shoppers have to invest working hours to leverage their capacity to act within the sociomaterial assemblage. Work is intrinsically connecting to social media shopping. Thus, in order to monetize their shopping, actors must work to build an audience that is attractive to advertisers by aligning themselves with (perceived) successful standards, steadily work to retain that audience, and concurrently constantly monitor, adapt and refine their online presence (see also Hund & McGuigan, 2019; Scolere, Pruchniewska, & Brooke, 2018; van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

Indeed, professionalizing social media shopping practice requires adapting to and constantly negotiating one's position within the ever-changing sociomaterial fabric (e.g., alterations in trends, new technical functionalities, and above all the constantly changing algorithms). With regard to the latter, this chapter has shown that the process of making a social media shopper and becoming an influential actor is neither linear nor predictable. Rather, we need to understand this process as a complex interplay of different sociomaterial entities whose acting capacity can both foster and constrain the process of making the actor. In this context, it has been pointed out that the capacity for action of the individual entities of sociomaterial structures varies. It needs to be understood as fluid, and constantly changing. This potential for everyday to shoppers to use their shopping enactments to alter or change socially constructed scripts and understandings of others is new in itself. Other forms of shopping rarely offer such an opportunity and, most importantly, have rarely been associated with professional work.

Social media shopping thus offers the opportunity for self-expression, entertainment, inspiration, and much more. At the same time, it comes with certain

implications and (negative) consequences for practitioners' daily lives. For many, social media shopping is a leisure activity; for a few, social media opens up the possibility of a professional career. This study echoes previous discussions on the work of influencers which find that various investments and efforts can pay off later on (Scolere et al., 2018). However, and in line with van Driel and Dumitrica (2020), "such an invisible investment may not be affordable to everyone in the long run" (p. 79). Therefore, I refer to the beginning of this chapter and conclude: Anyone can influence others, but not everyone can be an influencer.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions, contributions and discussion

Against the backdrop of rising social media usage, the purpose of this study was to understand social media shopping, a relatively new and currently not extensively researched phenomenon. To do so, this dissertation adopted a practice theory approach to set out to explore social media shopping as a new way of performing shopping enabled through and shaped by social media platforms and their sociomaterial affordances. More specifically, I used a sociomaterial practice perspective as a particular way of looking at practices to understand the interplay between humans and technology in the context of shopping. The following sections outline the study's most important contributions to the social commerce literature and to the shopping-as-practice literature. The chapter includes a consideration of possible routes for future research and closes with a discussion of the implications of the intertwining of social media and everyday life.

Main findings, contributions and theoretical implications

As a point of departure, the objective of this dissertation was to examine and to understand the phenomenon of shopping on or via social media. Therefore, I embedded the present study in the context of the social commerce literature, a specific literature stream within the digitalization of shopping. In the course of an extensive literature review, I identified several shortcomings and along with that, potentials for new research, within this body of literature. To begin with, I found that many studies are characterized by similar research approaches. Specifically, I noted that a considerable number of studies are concerned with the design, construction and characteristics of s-commerce offerings, and with the optimization of social commerce platforms and corresponding constructs (e.g., Baghdadi, 2016; Gonçalves Curty & Zhang, 2013). At the same time, I noted that the existing literature places too little emphasis on understanding the consumer, their practical enactments and related consumption habits. The studies that do research consumer behavior relating to social media often focus on intentions and attitudes (e.g. Hajli, 2015; Kian et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2021). Meanwhile, many of them primarily

emphasize commercial activities, or more precisely purchasing, as the central or most important activity.

What has been missing, however, is an understanding of practices, and, along with that, of the meanings that play a role in this mode of shopping, the materials that are used and involved, and the competencies that are needed to perform this type of shopping. Studies from other fields, including practice theory papers, have shown that such a differentiated view of underlying meanings is essential to fully understand commercial activities (e.g. Burningham, Venn, Christie, Jackson, & Gatersleben, 2014; Elms et al., 2016; Fuentes et al., 2019; Gojard & Véron, 2018; Samsioe & Fuentes, 2021). Indeed, social commerce cannot be fully encapsulated and understood in all its facets if cultural aspects are left untouched.

In addition, many existing s-commerce studies fail to connect social media shopping to other aspects and practices of everyday life. This is an important omission. As we have learned from other shopping-as-practice studies (e.g. Burningham et al., 2014; Gram & Grønhøj, 2016; Molander, 2011), shopping does not merely happen in isolation. Everyday practices emerge, are contextualized, and are performed by skilled practitioners in a web of various other practices. This connection to other, yet important, aspects of ordinary everyday life has received rather scant attention by s-commerce researchers.

Further, while most of the s-commerce literature acknowledges that social media platforms, social commerce constructs, and websites with social commerce features differentiate this type of shopping from other forms of shopping, many of these studies are underpinned by a rather simplistic view of technology. In much of the current s-commerce literature, technology is seen primarily as an enabler of this form of shopping. The social aspects (e.g., digital exchange between consumers, advice and testimonials from other shoppers) enabled by technology are assumed to support purchasing. Thus, technology is more of a context, while its active and significant role in the shaping of social media shopping is not acknowledged. Studies in this field tend to overlook the interplay between people and technology and seem to place little emphasis on how social media and related technologies shape and configure practices.

My research project has sought to address these shortcomings and offers an alternative take with a view to advancing the research agenda on the topic. Specifically, the aim was to contribute to and expand the discussion of s-commerce by exploring how social media, as a disruptive technology and an integral and meaningful part of many people's daily routines, reconfigures the practice of shopping. In doing so, I have shown how social media shopping – as a specific mode of shopping – develops as a mode of practice, while also conceptualizing the social media shopper as a skilled, hybrid practitioner.

Following the work of Theodore Schatzki, Andreas Reckwitz, and other authors who have shaped practice theory research, I have used practice theory as an

analytical lens. In addition, I chose a sociomateriality approach to practices as a theoretical standpoint which views the social and the material as interwoven and mutually constituting one another (e.g., Gherardi, 2012, 2016; Orlikowski, 2007, 2010). This perspective allowed me to examine how humans and technology interact with each other, resulting in a rich and dense account of how social media shopping unfolds as practice. Taken together, this research perspective and the ethnographic approach I have employed have allowed me to consider and shed light on a variety of aspects to which current research on the phenomenon has paid little attention. More specifically, my study makes several contributions to advancing existing perspectives, to which I will now turn.

Contributions to the s-commerce literature

Social media shopping involves multiple activities besides purchasing

Current s-commerce research assumes that user behavior can be divided into two types of activities: Commercial and social. While commercial activities essentially correspond to purchases or acquisitions, sociality corresponds primarily to electronic word of mouth, expressed, for example, in ratings, recommendations, referrals and reviews (e.g., Hajli, 2014a, 2015; Mikalef, Giannakos, & Pateli, 2013; Trusov et al., 2009; Wang & Yu, 2017). My work confirms that buying is an important activity in social media shopping, and aligns with previous s-commerce research that has shown that shopping on or via social media involves a variety of other related activities such as browsing, discovering and looking for product information (e.g. Pöyry et al., 2013; Yadav, de Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013).

However, the present study also specifies and expands the range of activities associated with shopping on or via social media by highlighting an additional set of doings and sayings that have received little attention in this field to date. This study has shown that shoppers use social media to find, buy and display appealing products that convey certain cultural images shaped by the platform's sociomaterial affordances to reinforce and transfer the production of these images to the virtual self. Among other things, it involves following, tagging, connecting, linking, and strategic self-promotion and deliberate leveraging of the sociomaterial affordances of the social media platform. The latter point in particular, which receives almost no coverage in the current literature, is more complex and multifaced than assumed within that literature (e.g., as in Li & Ku, 2017).

In particular, many of the activities that constitute social media shopping are linked to modes of creative multimedia content creation. The content creation process, including activities such as photography, video creation, editing and publication, is an essential aspect of this mode of shopping that I have portrayed as effortful and time-consuming, requiring both a set of skills and a repertoire of different virtual

and analoge materials beyond the realm of a social commerce construct. My research has shown that these activities can be creative, fun and entertaining, without involving buying activities or being considered any less relevant to the performance of this shopping mode. On the contrary, this study has shown that social media shopping is a complex practice that closely blends entertainment, creative activities, buying, and even work. As such, it contributes to the existing, if not yet substantial, field of s-commerce research, which has already identified some of these and similar activities as important components of s-commerce that need to be recognized beyond the act of purchasing (e.g. Ko, 2018; Pöyry et al., 2013; Turban et al., 2016).

Social media shopping involves a distinct composition of meanings, materials and competences

Further, and in close connection to the first contribution, the present study emphasizes other important, yet overlooked elements of social media shopping: A set of *meanings*, including collective understandings, shared ideas and images; required *competencies*, skills and know-how; and lastly, a variety of *materials*.

In particular, the multi-layered nature of the underlying meanings involved in s-commerce has barely been considered in the literature. This study expands our knowledge of *why* users partake in social media shopping. This is relevant, because much previous research in the field assumes that shoppers participate in this form of shopping mainly to help others make better-informed purchases, and to make better decisions themselves (e.g., Amblee & Bui, 2011; Huang & Benyoucef, 2017; Hung & Li, 2007; Wang & Yu, 2017). This assumption is based on the idea that shopping content created by ordinary shoppers (not marketers) is considered particularly trustworthy and credible and can influence and/or support the purchase decisions of other users. While my study also shows that social support plays a role (e.g. as in Hajli, 2014b; Liang et al., 2011), it emphasizes at the same time that influence is not just about helping or supporting others. My work illuminates a range of other meanings and social desires that play an important role in this type of shopping, such as status, attention, identity and more.

While my study highlights goals related to prestige and social recognition, and the related desire to conform to social expectations and (aesthetic) perceptions, as strong motivators for participation and engagement in this form of shopping, these aspects have received little attention in the s-commerce literature to date. Thus, the present study goes beyond the assumption that shoppers are guided solely by rational and economic factors, as featured in much of the s-commerce literature, to also consider the cultural aspects that guide this form of shopping.

This study also contributes to the s-commerce literature by highlighting a set of competences that practitioners need in order to be successful shopping practitioners, and that shoppers are constantly developing and refining their skill set – something

which has not yet been discussed extensively. However, shoppers' ability to act is not only determined by their competences. Agency is only partially determined by the shoppers themselves, and as further explained below, their capacity to act is also tied to and shaped by the sociomaterial fabric.

Furthermore, social media shopping has been shown to involve a variety of different materials beyond the mobile device and social commerce constructs or platforms. The use of external software, programs or technical equipment highlighted in this study are rarely mentioned in the s-commerce literature. Closely connected to these aspects is the role of technology, which is more complex than assumed in the existing literature. S-commerce studies often imply that the provision of a technical infrastructure not only significantly shapes user behavior, but also determines it (e.g. Baghdadi, 2016; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Ismail et al., 2017). Technology is given a chiefly mediating, contextual role. This further implies that consumer behavior can (to some extent) be controlled, or at least steered. While my study confirms that technical features set a frame for what users can and cannot do, this does not mean that users have no agency at all. This is in line with previous studies in other areas of the retail and shopping literature that have shown that consumers' and marketers' interpretations of how to engage in a retail environment can vary widely, that shoppers can even work against the given retail script (e.g., Spitzkat & Fuentes, 2019), and that shoppers not only "use" technology, but can even configure it (e.g., Fuentes, 2019). More specifically, my study has shown that the performance of shopping is not controlled by marketers and s-commerce website designers alone. Instead, shopping on or via social media, as well as its practitioners, are shaped – not necessarily equally, but collectively – by a variety of hybrid entities beyond the technical design.

A distinct type of actor emerges from this complex practice

Third, social media shopping practice gives rise to a hybrid actor. My conceptualization of social media shopping challenges linear understandings of shopping that draw a clear line between consumers (those who buy) and sellers (those who sell). While the s-commerce literature tends to assign such clear roles to actors, and assumes that the role of shopper is restricted to information seekers and information providers (e.g., as in Aladwani, 2018; Do-Hyung et al., 2007; Dong-hee, 2013), my study has shown that these roles can be fluid and subject to change. Indeed, shoppers not only engage in both content consumption and content production, in line with previous literature from other fields (e.g., McQuarrie et al., 2013; van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020), everyday shoppers can professionalize their shopping and evolve into commercial mediators by strategically making use of the sociomaterial affordances the platforms offer. Indeed, my study has illustrated that shopping opportunities are not only created, curated and published by retailers and brands, or by professional marketers in general. On the contrary, everyday users can also become consumer-to-consumer ambassadors, occasional marketers and

shopping promoters, or even professional influencers and personal brands. Therefore, my study also clearly shows how diverse the practice of recommending or providing reviews, to borrow these words from the s-commerce literature, can be, and how these activities are practically carried out.

Further, it has been discussed that shoppers (both amateurs and professionals) can be consumers and producers at the same time (referred to sometimes as prosumers in previous literature, for an example see G. Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010): They are both promoters and followers of consumption. Indeed, these roles are not mutually exclusive; rather, actors simultaneously fulfil multiple roles and corresponding shopping activities. While the s-commerce literature generally acknowledges the productive capacity of shoppers, it rarely examines how these productive activities occur, what they look like, and what role they play in the process of shaping the actor. Thus, and by illustrating how actors are made and remade in practice, my study adds to the field of s-commerce studies by proposing a different take on agency that contrasts the more rational take on agents and agency that underlies much of the literature (e.g., Aladwani, 2018; Hajli, 2015; Hajli et al., 2017; Kim & Park, 2013; Ko, 2018; Shin, 2013).

Social media ties shopping more closely to everyday life

The fourth contribution is related to the understanding of the organization of the shopping mode under study. While the s-commerce literature often assumes that shoppers intentionally visit social commerce websites and consult user-generated content when seeking help or advice from others while shopping (e.g., as in Dong-hee, 2013; Hajli, 2015; Tajvidi et al., 2017), my study complements the research with an expanded understanding of how social media platforms "work" and how they enable, facilitate or constrain shopping enactments, and how they are co-constituted by the sociomaterial assemblage. My research illustrates that shoppers no longer have to visit a store or browse an online shop in order to find shopping opportunities. As a form of "discovery shopping", on social media, users are almost constantly presented and offered shopping opportunities, even if they are not seeking shopping-related content at that specific moment. Tailored shopping opportunities merge with entertainment, communication and social interaction (e.g., see also Abidin, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; McQuarrie et al., 2013; van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Shopping, it has been noted, is now as much a part of social media platforms as the social interactions and networking that originally formed the core of social media. Just as social media and related technologies and devices have become part of many shoppers' everyday lives as a meaningful daily companion, shopping has become part of these practitioners' daily routines as social media has been introduced to the practice. Thus, the introduction of social media to shopping practice has made shopping – and concomitantly, commodities and consumption – an integrated, taken-for-granted and omnipresent element of practitioners' everyday lives, which can come with both positive and negative consequences for the

practitioner. While it must be assumed that different platforms, and particularly social commerce constructs, vary in terms of their functionalities, this finding is relevant as it challenges the basic understanding of "how shopping works" that underlies many other (s-commerce) studies. Instead of "going" shopping, technology enables shopping opportunities to come directly to the shopper in a personalized way and without any time or space constraints.

Taken together, and with the clear goal of examining and understanding consumer shopping enactments on or via social media, my study extends the s-commerce literature by expanding and refining a set of activities that go beyond purchasing but are still an integral part of the practice at hand. Furthermore, it identifies a number of other elements that are also components of the practice under study but have rarely been addressed this far. Furthermore, the study also addresses the emergence and expression of the actor that is created in and through social media shopping. Thus, it is not "just" about consumer behavior, as is often the case in the s-commerce literature, but about how practice and practitioner mutually constitute each other, what conditions must exist for this to happen, and what role the sociomaterial properties of complex technologies such as social media play in this process.

Contributions to the shopping-as-practice literature

The conceptualization of social media shopping developed in this dissertation also extends the literature on shopping-as-practice. While it has already been acknowledged that materialities including technologies such as self-service machines (e.g., Bulmer et al., 2018; du Gay, 2004), smartphones (e.g., Fuentes et al., 2017; Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017), digital platforms and apps (e.g., Samsioe & Fuentes, 2017), or online stores (e.g., Elms et al., 2016) shape shopping and related consumption situations in particular ways, I advance this inquiry by showing how social media – as a broader, distributed and complex sociomaterial assemblage – shapes shopping. Social media must be understood as a more all-encompassing and hybrid form of technology that combines multiple technological components (e.g., mobile devices, cameras and video equipment, software, apps, etc.). The study of such a far-reaching technology and its impact on shopping thus represents a new contribution to understanding practical shopping enactments, and aligns with the practice theory literature that has already acknowledged that social media shapes everyday practices (e.g., Middha, 2018; Närvänen et al., 2013; Woermann, 2012). Thus, the study contributes to the existing practice theory literature in the context of consumption by introducing, and empirically illustrating, social media shopping as a new technology-driven mode of shopping.

Beyond the first point, but closely related to it, this research project expands our understanding of how materials and practitioners mutually constitute and jointly develop shopping. While there are studies that have addressed this issue (e.g. Fuentes et al., 2019; Fuentes & Sörum, 2019; Hagberg, 2016), the sociomaterial

fabric that constitutes social media platforms has some distinctive features that connect and entangle materials and practitioners in particular ways. It has been shown that the actions and practical enactments of shoppers contribute both to the shaping and ongoing development of the social media platform, and to its continuation. In particular, I have emphasized that collective understandings, ideals and scripts, etc. become materialized and distributed in the form of shopping content (discourses, images, videos, filters, etc.). The visibility and accessibility of this content leads to the manifestation and circulation of these understandings, thereby influencing the doings and sayings of potentially countless other actors – nearly independent of temporal and spatial aspects. Accordingly, this study contributes to a better understanding of how practices and actors interact with materials, how practices and practitioners emerge, and how they are constituted. Thus, it connects to research that addresses the mobility of practical actions across space and time (e.g., Middha, 2018).

While other research on shopping-as-practice suggests and conceptualizes shopping is connected to other everyday practices (e.g., Burningham et al., 2014; Gojard & Véron, 2018), these connections are rarely explored in greater detail. This study draws attention to these connections and provides a starting point for understanding them. Thus, on the one hand, it demonstrates the suitability of a shopping-as-practice approach for studying technology-enabled forms of shopping, but on the other, it also points to the need to take the technology and the role it plays in shopping more seriously within this approach. It stresses the need not only to see materials as mediating entities, but also to take into account their constituting and configurative capacities. It suggests giving attention to how technology and humans interact with each other, how these interactions play out, and what the potential consequences are. The sociomaterial assemblages involved in shopping not only enable, constrain and shape shopping; they do so in specific ways, based on specific sociomaterial scripts. Moreover, and as noted in the previous section, most technologies are not simple objects or devices but, like social media, are complex and hybrid combinations of software and hardware that are distributed across space and time. This needs to be taken into account, both conceptually and methodologically. Building on these considerations, the results of this study could be an interesting starting point for future research that should address and explore these very issues in more detail.

Social media shopping in everyday life: Some implications

Insights for (social media) marketers
Based on these considerations, the present study helps to better understand the commercial aspects of shopping on or closely interlinked with social media. It has been illustrated that the commercial and the cultural are closely intertwined; both

are integral parts of the practice at hand, and one does not exist without the other. Thus, the commercial alone cannot be fully understood without the social. My study shows why practitioners engage in this practice in the first place, what motivates them to stay with it, and why they constantly question, adjust and improve their practical performance (meanings). It has been shown that the means and ends to participate in this more of shopping can be diverse and multifaceted, and not just focused purely on buying. Such an understanding of the complexity of what motivates consumers – a broader view of their needs, aspirational goals and lifestyles, but also what constrains them and, if applicable, prevents them from participating in social media shopping – helps to better understand consumers for marketing purposes as well.

More precisely, an understanding of consumer meanings is relevant for marketers, who might adjust, for example, their own marketing campaigns to match certain aesthetics, tastes and preferences, and align their offerings and temporary campaigns accordingly, by recreating images that particular users feel drawn to. However, as my study also points out that social media shoppers are constantly confronted with shopping content and corresponding offers, which clearly comes with negative implications for them, companies should not only focus on sales and promotions, but continue to use social media for strategic brand building in the long term.

(Cultural) branding is also an important keyword here. Knowledge of consumer culture can help companies become even more customer-centric and also align their own cultural strategy with the needs of their target groups. In customer relationship management, too, increased knowledge about social media-savvy consumers, how and why they act in particular ways, can help companies to look more closely through the eyes of their customers and to consciously allow customer proximity. This is particularly relevant as this study has shown that shoppers do contribute to the configuration of social media platforms and take an active role in shaping and maintaining them. Marketers should understand that they can only partially manage and truly control platforms and social commerce constructs. Thus, knowledge about how consumers contribute to the existence of platforms can be beneficial for marketers, and can bring added value especially for s-commerce designers and web developers.

Following on from this, it was also shown that practice change and changes in practical enactments are strongly influenced by cultural factors. This understanding can also be used to deduce which platforms might be successful in the future. At the same time, the present study can provide indications of the extent to which platforms will (or should) change, but also what is needed to develop new (possibly even more sustainable or ethical) platforms.

Lastly, my study can contribute to a better understanding of commercial mediators and their behavior and perspectives in the area of (micro-)influencer marketing. As

explained elsewhere, micro-influencers in particular – or as I call them in my study, "everyday shoppers" – are quite interesting for marketing campaigns (e.g., Alampi, 2020; Khamis et al., 2017). My study shows that these users practice social media shopping somewhat differently than professional influencers. From this perspective, this research project can also be relevant for social media marketers who aim to recruit amateur brand ambassadors and commercial mediators. At the same time, however, as this study illustrates that the role of a social media actor does carry negative implications for practitioners, the findings should encourage brands to reconsider unpaid promotions in particular, or those that require shoppers to invest a disproportionate amount of work in exchange for free products.

Critical reflections on social media and its societal implications

The results of my study also allow us to understand more critically how social media shopping platforms shape consumers' lives, both positively and negatively. As explained at the beginning of the paper, the use of social media has become ubiquitous in modern society. Based on this development, the study has shown that the introduction of social media to the practice of shopping has led to a closer intertwining of everyday life, social media use and shopping. This type of shopping, supported and enabled by mobile devices, allows users to shop not only regularly, but technically anywhere and anytime. As a result, shopping (including buying) has become an integral part of many users' daily lives, and for some – i.e., social media influencers – it has become a profession. Thus, social media offers some people (even without special training)[24] to have a professional perspective turning their leisure activity into a legitimate career path.

At the same time, it is important not to underestimate how volatile and challenging this professional path can be. The supposed freedoms that some might associate with the influencer's position – to work from anywhere, to travel frequently, to choose brand collaborations and to "earn a lot of money for little work" – are probably something of an illusion. By also addressing the downsides of social media shopping as a profession, and showing that stress, anxiety, pressure and even harm are also part of the practice, this study helps to paint a more realistic picture of being an influencer, compared to its portrayal on social media.

In addition, the study also raises the question of the potential harms of the (sometimes compulsive) use of social media, and thus engagement in social media shopping, for practitioners and society in general. Important points for discussion include, for example, the increasingly rapid consumption especially of clothes and

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[24] In early 2022, Tampere University of Applied Sciences announced that it would be the first university in the world to offer a degree program that provides professional training for social media influencers and content producers. This degree program in influencer marketing is currently the only one to offer academic training for influencers and influencer marketers. https://www.tuni.fi/en/news/worlds-first-degree-awarding-influencer-marketing-studies-start-tampere-28-international

generally fashion items – something that also came up repeatedly in my study. Excessive consumption, overconsumption (e.g., Berg, 2018; Fook & McNeill, 2020) or hyper consumption (e.g., Ritzer, 2012) can be severe consequences of increased social media use that have been frequently discussed in the contemporary literature. For example, it has been argued that young adults in particular, who solidify their identities through the consumption of goods and lifestyles and share certain materialistic social values (as in the case of social media shopping), often tend to overconsume, buying more than they need at a sometimes rapid pace (Fook & McNeill, 2020).

Similarly, commercial pressures have been highlighted in previous studies (Berg, 2018), with contemporary consumer society encouraging individuals to define themselves by what and how they consume. Social media shopping seems to support these developments. In particular, the ever-changing sociomaterial fabric of social media platforms, including collective ideas about tastes and aesthetics that shoppers try to live up to, fosters increasingly rapid consumerism. The consequences of these developments for the environment in the form of dwindling raw materials and rising greenhouse gases and environmental pollution from accelerated production can only be mentioned in passing. The fact is, however, that social media platforms, and Instagram in particular, are setting a pace with which it is questionable whether shoppers will be able to keep up in the long run – at least not in a sustainable way.

Nevertheless, the present study has clearly shown that shoppers are not passive vessels whose consumption behaviors and practical enactments are controlled by technology, or purely dependent on these external factors alone. On the contrary, social media and practitioners are mutually dependent and contribute to the maintenance and continuation of the practice. Thus, it is important to emphasize here that social media not only entices users to buy more, but that users take an active role in this, and their behaviors, their doings and sayings, are shaped by multiple instances and factors beyond the technological component alone.

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Appendix

Table 1. Overview of interviewees

No.	Name	Age at the time of the interview	Professional background / field of expertise	Additional information
1	Alice	34	Communications & marketing	Alice shares content, including almost daily story updates and at least weekly feed posts of herself and her family. She is a very active user who engages with Instagram on a regular basis. She has several brand collaborations and sponsorships for fashion and beauty products, uses branded hashtags and tags, and provides personalized discount codes for her followers. Her content reflects the everyday life of a working mom and "weekend blogger" and she is keen on further growing her account, to increase her reach.
2	Amy	34	Research & education	Amy is a shopper who prefers to consume content, instead of posting her own. She has only a few pictures on her profile, which do not follow or reflect a distinct theme. However, she likes to shop through Instagram and enjoys being inspired by the content of others. Even though she does not share much herself, during our interview she claimed that she is a "silent" but very active Instagram user who tries to monitor and control her daily social media usage.
3	Becca	26	IT	Becca's profile resembles a styled travel diary. The content on her profile mostly shows herself at different travel destinations or the landscape around her. Not only does she post the locations, but often tags restaurants or hotels she visits. However, she does not engage in paid collaborations. Also, it is mainly travel destinations that she herself discovers on Instagram through other accounts. Through her job as a freelance photographer, she also comes into contact with fashion and beauty products, and when she finds or buys products via social media, they are mostly fashion or beauty items.
4	Cara	27	Communications & marketing	During our interview, Cara told me that she is particularly interested in fashion and yoga, and she also engages with these topics frequently on Instagram. During our interview, it became clear that she uses Instagram for shopping from time to time, but she is not a user who shares purchases or shopping content herself, or aims to become an influencer. On her profile, she shares professional modeling pictures and also personal snapshots of herself and her boyfriend.

No.	Name	Age at the time of the interview	Professional background / field of expertise	Additional information
5	Dana	29	Communications & marketing	Dana is a user who occasionally uses Instagram to search and shop for fashion and beauty products, and her profile mostly shows herself and her boyfriend during their travels. She uses location tags on almost every picture and in most stories, and her profile is a colorful mix of many different destinations. At the time of our interview, she had only one personal profile, but created a second profile later on, where she now shares fitness-related content. On this second profile, she advertises a sports program and also promotes fitness wear. However, her productive activity has no monetary component.
6	Emma	26	Student	Emma shares shopping-related content on a regular basis. She has a variety of brand collaborations, and offers discount codes and her own Lightroom presets for her followers. The look of her Instagram feed is especially important to her and she is one of the users who puts a lot of effort into "styling" her content. In order to increase her number of followers, she has previously organized Instagram raffles and tried out various techniques to increase the engagement on her profile. She also makes a lot of purchases via or inspired by Instagram, and makes a point of following trends.
7	Fiona	30	Communications & marketing	The content Fiona shares on her Instagram profile is a mix of everyday life snapshots, travel pictures and sponsored products. Even though she has less than 500 followers, she has almost 1,000 posts, and many of them show products she received for free in return for a social media post. The products she advertises cannot be assigned to a specific category, ranging from clothing and accessories to food and beverages. During our interview she explained that she is part of a variety of micro-influencer programs, and she enjoys both buying products via social media and promoting items herself.
8	Gina	27	Office management	Gina enjoys posting her outfits and stylings on her profile. When she does, she usually features all the brands she wears. However, none of her posts are sponsored or brand collaborations. For her, Instagram resembles a style diary. In addition to her own posting activities, she uses social media to get inspired by others, both friends and professional shoppers.
9	Hanna	33	Communications & marketing	Hanna calls herself an "Instagram victim" who uses the app multiple times a day, and also a lot to shop. During our interview she repeatedly said that she often feels tempted to buy the products she discovers, and that social media has had a great impact on her shopping habits. Her appearance on social media is especially important to her and she puts extra effort into styling her profile and making it look consistent. While she doesn't have any brand collaborations herself, she does promote her lifestyle as such, with which she hopes to inspire others.

No.	Name	Age at the time of the interview	Professional background / field of expertise	Additional information
10	Ida	27	Retail	Through her job in the fashion industry, Ida uses Instagram mainly to keep up to date with new trends and to discover new things. She follows a lot of brands, and from time to time she gets inspired and also buys products via or inspired by Instagram. She also occasionally promotes the brand she works for on her profile by using brand tags. In addition, besides showing snapshots form her daily life, she also shows her outfits and stylings on her profile, sometimes stating the brands the wears.
11	Jessica	21	Military	During our interview and also at the beginning of my field work, it seemed that Jessica mainly consumed shopping content rather than producing it herself. On her profile, she only shares personal pictures of herself, mostly on vacation. On a second account she created some time after our interview, and which appears very organized and visually consistent, she shows another side of herself: As a book blogger and author, she not only promotes her own writing, but also gives her followers tips and advice regarding other books and authors.
12	June	25	IT	June is an occasional Instagram shopper. Her profile doesn't follow any particular theme or style, and the content that can be found there shows her everyday life, hobbies and travels. She uses Instagram mainly to communicate with friends, but through social influencers she sometimes gets inspired to buy products.
13	Kim	28	Media	Kim doesn't post much content herself, and when she does, it's usually not shopping related. However, she does pay attention to the way her profile looks. As an environmentally conscious shopper, she uses Instagram to research sustainable clothing, for example, or to follow influencers who promote a sustainable lifestyle. She has often shopped via Instagram or inspired by the recommendations of other shoppers. On a second public profile, which she created during the course of my field work, she acts as a food blogger and shares her baking and recipes.
14	Linda	23	Student	Linda is a very active social media user and much of her activity revolves around shopping. On her profile, which has a yoga theme, she shares inspirational quotes, yoga poses and also fashion advice. She frequently refers to brands in her posts, although none of the content she shares is sponsored. In addition, she follows many "like-minded yoga people" that inspire her (shopping) habits.

No.	Name	Age at the time of the interview	Professional background / field of expertise	Additional information
15	Lou	23	Student	Lou is a shopper who puts a lot of thought into her profile, and she is concerned about her image and her followers. She wants to grow her account and enjoys creating content while inspiring others. Brand collaborations are currently not her main focus, but she has ambitions to turn her shopping into a profession and to create an influencer account. Instagram is her first choice when it comes to finding shopping inspiration for herself, and she follows many professional influencers who shape her shopping preferences and purchasing decisions.
16	Maya	30	HR	Maya is a social media shopper who frequently uses Instagram to seek shopping inspiration and information and enjoys following influencers for fashion advice. Even though she does not participate in brand collaborations, she frequently tags brands on her content. Besides showing her outfits and possessions, Maya shares images from her daily life and her travels.
17	Mia	22	Consulting (part-time) Student	Mia's profile does not contain many posts, and during my fieldwork, she rarely updated her account. Her images show herself with her boyfriend and/or friends. However, during our interview she recalled several situations when Instagram and especially influencers had shaped her own shopping and consumption habits. Thus, like other study participants, Mia prefers to consume shopping content, rather than acting as an influential actor herself.
18	Nora	29	Media	Even though Nora only occasionally publishes content on her profile, she cares about the "Instagram aesthetics" and prefers to use a consistent posting style for both her feed posts and her stories. Even though she does not regard herself as an influencer, her profile shows that she is interested in Scandinavian interior design. Most of the pictures she has published show the furniture and decor in her apartment. Nora frequently tags brands and uses branded hashtags.
19	Pia	28	Communications & marketing	Pia describes herself as a content consumer rather than a content creator. Her profile, where she rarely shares any stories and posts, reflects this: Besides a few personal posts, it mainly shows pictures from her travels. Still, she follows some influencers and brands and she uses the platform to discover trends and products. As a social media expert, she is somewhat critical of social media shopping. For example, she doesn't want to recommend products or associate herself with brands, but enjoys being inspired by others.

No.	Name	Age at the time of the interview	Professional background / field of expertise	Additional information
20	Sarah	25	Student	Sarah likes to "just post good moments she wants to remember", which includes both shopping and non-shopping related content. When she posts her outfits, she refrains from tagging brands, as she perceives such activities as "annoying". However, as a sports enthusiast, she follows many fitness influencers, who have an impact on her shopping.
21	Selena	28	Communications & marketing	Selena works with social media, so she is very familiar with Instagram's functionalities and features, including those related to business profiles. However, she uses her private Instagram account "just for the fun of it". Her profile is colorful and shows her mainly with friends, and from time to time she shares an outfit post or story. She rarely uses the shopping features and is somewhat critical of influencers (whom she does follow nonetheless) – she says she prefers entertainment over shopping content, but shopping has also become a part of her social media habits.
22	Tessa	24	Retail	Tessa shops a lot on or via social media. During our interview she showed me a collection of "saved items" that she considers buying. For her, social media has had great impact on her style and taste, and especially on her fashion shopping. She does not post much content and prefers stories over feed posts. However, she follows many influencers both for entertainment purposes and for fashion inspiration and advice.
23	Ulrika	25	HR	Ulrika uses her Instagram mainly for entertainment and for staying in touch with friends. Her profile is characterized by travel images and by her work as a yoga teacher. She sees herself more as a content consumer whose shopping is inspired by what she discovers on Instagram only every now and then. She is rather critical of social media shopping.
24	Victoria	27	Retail	Victoria is interested in high-end fashion and especially expensive shoes and bags. She follows many influencers who share these tastes. For her, social media shopping is mostly about finding inspiration and about status. During our interview she explained that she seldom posts shopping-related content on her profile. However, when she does, she never tags the brands she shows, as the (sometimes) visible logos in her pictures "usually speak for themselves".

Table 2. Overview of professional social media influencers

	Initial sample			
No.	Name	Followers (Dec. 2019)	Products they mainly shop/display	Additional shopping-related activity
1	@influencerA	> 840 K	@influencerA's Instagram account is mainly about fashion, inspiration, DIY tips and travel. The products she promotes fit into these categories and are complemented with beauty products.	She has a shop for Instagram story elements and Lightroom presets, and her own products from brand collaborations (e.g.,her own handbag collection). She also is a book author.
2	@influencerB	> 7 Mio	@influencerB started her career on YouTube where she became a very successful beauty blogger. On her Instagram, she gives insights into her daily life as a young mother, and promotes mainly beauty products and fashion items.	She has her own beauty line and is abrand ambassador for various retailers.
3	@influencerC	> 2 Mio	@influencerC's Instagram account focuses on fashion. She collaborates with a variety of different fashion brands, and also works with high-end labels.	She has her own products resulting from brand collaborations, e.g., with a global make-up brand.
4	@influencerD	> 810 K	@influencerD describes herself as a content creator and entrepreneur. The products featured on her channel include fashion and beauty items, home decor, food and family life.	She has her own shop for Lightroom presets and owns two fashion labels.
5	@influencerE	> 6 Mio	@influencerE refers to herself as a content creator and entrepreneur. Besides posting travel content, she uses her profile to display beauty and fashion products.	She founded her own beauty line and cosmetic company and owns a fashion brand.
6	@influencerF	> 330 K	@influencerF displays mainly fashion and beauty products on her account. On her profile she describes herself as a blogger, content creator and globetrotter.	She owns a fashion label.
7	@influencerG	>290 K	@influencerG is a mother of two small children, and she displays childrenswear and products for kids, interior, fashion, food and beauty products on her channel.	She started her own fashion brand and sells her own Lightroom presets on social media.
8	@influencerH	> 2 Mio	@influencerH is a fashion influencer who collaborates with many high-end labels.	She sells products branded in her name resulting from various brand collaborations.

9	@influencerI	> 1 Mio	@influencerI mainly promotes fashion and beauty products on her Instagram channel.	She owns a fashion label and has several fashion collections branded with her name resulting from brand collaborations.
10	@influencerJ	> 4 Mio	@influencerJ is a fitness influencer who shares mainly inspirational fitness content, and advertises fitness-related food and fashion.	She has several fashion and sportswear collections branded with her name resulting from brand collaborations.
11	@influencerK	> 3,5 Mio	@influencerK participated in a casting show before she started her Instagram career. She shares content related to her work and promotes fashion, beauty and fitness products.	She owns a beauty brand and has several fashion collections branded with her name resulting from brand collaborations.
12	@influencerL	> 1 Mio	@influencerL's profile is that of a fashion influencer. The items she displays are mostly from high-end luxury brands.	She owns a fashion label and has several fashion collections branded with her name resulting from brand collaborations.
	Extended sample: Social media influencers recommended by informants			
13	@influencerM	> 240 K	@influencerM describes herself on her profile as an always positive, passionate mom, wife and founder of a fashion label. Her promotional content is diverse, but has a strong food and fitness focus. Featured products include nutritional supplements, beauty products, sportswear and underwear.	She owns a fashion label and operates an online shop for supplements.
14	@influencerN	> 400 K	@influencerN is a fitness influencer whose content focuses on workouts and fitness routines. Products featured on her page are often related to the fitness lifestyle she embodies and often include sportswear and nutritional supplements.	She features several shopping links in her profile biography.
15	@influencerO	> 850 K	@influencerO started her career as a reality TV star. On Instagram she mainly shares content about travelling, beauty and fashion, and features products that fit in the two latter categories.	She sells her own Lightroom presets via social media.
16	@influencerP	> 60 K	@influencerP describes herself as a content creator and her account is a fashion, inspiration and lifestyle account. The products she displays are mostly fashion and beauty items, but she also occasionally advertises food.	She has several "Instagram story highlights" that center on shopping, including a highlight for [discount] "codes", "shop it" and "favorite products", for example.

17	@influencerQ	>150 K	@influencerQ's account focuses on fitness and nutrition and features many recipes and workouts. The products she displays fit into the category "healthy living", such as supplements, food, kitchen tools and sportswear.	She has several "Instagram story highlights" that center on shopping, including one for discount codes and several shopping links in her profile biography.
18	@influencerR	> 2 Mio	@influencerR mainly uses social media to display fashion and beauty purchases. She uses Instagram to show her followers how to use beauty products and features many make-up tutorials.	She has her own brand and sells Lightroom presets via social media. She sells products branded in her name resulting from various brand collaborations.
19	@influencerS	> 500 K	@influencerS's account focuses on a vegan lifestyle. The products she features include vegan food, fashion and beauty products, and also home interior goods.	She sells products branded in her name resulting from various brand collaborations.
20	@influencerT	> 55 K	@influencerT is a professional portrait and fashion photographer who displays her sustainable lifestyle on Instagram. The products she features are mostly fashion items.	She has several "Instagram story highlights" that center on shopping, including one for "shop my ootd", and shopping links in her profile biography she calls "shop my Instagram".
21	@influencerU	> 180 K	@influencerU's Instagram content focuses on fashion, travel and lifestyle. The products she displays match these categories. In addition, she displays food and drinks and shares advice regarding recipes.	She owns a lifestyle brand.
22	@influencerV	> 300 K	@influencerV's account focuses on fitness, lifestyle and travel. She features many workouts and fitness plans she sells via social media. The products she displays fit into the category "healthy living", and include supplements, food and sportswear.	She sells her own workout and fitness plans via social media, and has several "Instagram story highlights" that center on shopping, including a highlight for "discount codes", for example.
23	@influencerW	>150 K	@influencerW's account focuses on fashion, beauty and lifestyle. She features many outfits and occasionally shares her workout routines.	She has several "Instagram story highlights" that center on shopping, including one for "shop my interior" and shopping links in her profile including personalized discount codes.

Understanding Social Media Shopping

In the recent past, social media has gradually evolved from a platform for communication and personal exchange to a space where contemporary consumer desires are awakened, directed, and also fulfilled. Instagram, in particular, is one of the platforms that has made specific design decisions to combine the social and entertaining aspects of the native, virtual social media experience with shopping and consumption.

Based on these developments, and by using a sociomaterial practice approach, this dissertation examines how social media – as a sociomaterial assemblage – reconfigures shopping. Drawing on a digital ethnography centering on Instagram as the research field for collecting empirical material, it conceptualizes and vividly illustrates how social media shopping is emerging as a new form of shopping, what defines, enables, and constrains it. Moreover, this work conceptualizes the shopping practitioner – referred to as the "social media shopper" – as a hybrid actor that is shaped and constituted by both virtual and analog, both human and non-human entities, while also pointing to the consequences that this form of shopping has for its practitioners' everyday lives.

By showing how social media contributes to the blurring of previously established boundaries and roles, it demonstrates that social media is decisively contributing to shopping becoming an integral part of the mundane and ordinary life of a mostly young, very social media-savvy consumer group. This dissertation therefore offers new insights into the understanding of novel, technology-driven consumption habits, and sheds light on a special group of consumers who have firmly integrated social media into their everyday lives.

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