

HUNGRY FOR A CHANGE:
VEGANISM AS THE 'NEW SEXY' IN
GERMAN SOCIETY



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Abstract

Purpose: This thesis aims at discussing a new image of veganism that has been developed in Germany during the last year and months and specifically, the roles of identity construction, community and culture connected to the prior. The basis for this thesis builds a case study conducted on a book called “Vegan for fit” written by Attila Hildmann, a well-known German cook. He invented the ‘vegan for fit challenge’ and with that builds the ‘vegan for fit community’, *‘the challengers’*.

Scope: Since a great amount of communication happens on social media channels, the scope of this thesis is limited to the involvement of certain social networks; these include Facebook and YouTube. The empirical research happened from March to May 2013.

Method: Methodically speaking, the researcher investigates within the interpretivist paradigm, conducting a qualitative content analysis of the social networking sites. Since the method is a qualitative content analysis, participants are not considered as such but still, approximately 12000 members of the vegan for fit community between circa 15 to 55 years have been part of the observations and analysis. The content posted on the social media channels is rather narrative and similar to diary entries, thus video diaries on YouTube are being analyzed as well.

Results: The community is being identified as a virtual community that shares important core commonalities and motivates members to perform extraordinarily and rather obedient. Moreover, negativity is not tolerated nor is it promoted when uttered but rather scotched. The results of the investigation show a strong bond between the community members and a significant role of identity construction within this issue. Hildmann is the brand of the community and serves as a role model, arousing the will to achieve a certain body image through the diet. Thus, body image is a significant factor within the analysis. However, the role of culture within the community could not be identified precisely, which leads to the assumption that it does not matter in this specific context. Lastly, the findings point to the fact that Hildmann works with stereotypes and different forms of sexism in order to market himself.

Conclusion: The findings of the thesis suggest that Hildmann works with common marketing strategies in order to sell his concept. However, a new image of veganism is being formed through making it a lifestyle, a challenge which is worthy to achieve since it can have a vast impact on the body and the connected image. Additionally, since Hildmann is a role model he is authentic and trustworthy and thus, creates a personal bond that attracts the community members. The community spirit and the connection and core commonalities of the members form a strong basis for everyone who joins the community and thus, creates the image of veganism as a form of cultural movement.

Recommendations: However, in order to investigate entirely the role of culture, further research is required. Additionally, for further research it is reasonable to include sexism theory and theory on stereotypes within the theoretical framework. With these two components and thus a shift of focus, the role of culture could be explored in more detail. Moreover, a change in method is recommended as well, that is, qualitative in-depth interviews could deliver a more detailed and personal image of the members and their motivation and thoughts.

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1 Introduction – We are what we Consume

As the market for ecological food is rising, so is the awareness among consumers in western society (Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence and Mummary, 2002). Recent scandals in the food branch^{1 2}, particularly in meat production, might be one explanation, for a sudden spike in sales of whole food markets and vegetarian and vegan restaurants. The UK's biggest vegetarian fast food brand "Quorn" recognized spikes in sales after the horsemeat scandal³, additionally the German brand "VeggieDay" reported larger sales and finally the German VEBU (Vegetarierbund) announced that everyday another 2000 consumers in Germany decide to live a vegetarian lifestyle⁴. Overall, the number of consumers that avoid eating meat or fish is estimated to be around 7 million in Germany alone (Vebu, 2012). Worldwide we are counting approximately 1 billion vegetarians (ibid). Albeit, these numbers do not only include vegetarians but also vegans: vegans are consumers who refrain from consuming any animal products such as dairy, eggs or meat (Cherry, 2006). The discussions in the German media show that although there are a lot of controls in the EU they apparently still lack diligence and seriousness at some points. Considering the list of food scandals in Germany in recent years, there is not much room left for appetite. EHEC, Dioxin or BSE are keywords that remind us of disease and even deaths through food that was contaminated. However, these scandals apparently reveal new consumption habits in western society: In Germany the vegan market is spiking: A lot of vegan restaurants are being opened and vegan supermarkets are expanding. By now Germany is a strong market for vegan restaurants, cafés and other vegan businesses⁵. Jasper (1997) considers veganism to be a post-industrial movement which is supported by Cherry (2006) who found that there do exist social movements which see it as their task to spread veganism as a form of lifestyle. Melucci (1984) defines a social movement as "a form of collective action, (a) based on solidarity, (b) carrying on a conflict, [and] (c) breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs" (p.825). Cherry (2006), therefore, states that "vegans represent a new form of social movement that is not based on legislation or identity politics, but instead is based on everyday practices in one's lifestyle" (p. 156).

However, despite its close connection to animal rights and environmental impacts, veganism recently has been tied to a healthier lifestyle (Campbell and Campbell, 2011). In their research, the two scientists found that the consumption of meat and other animal products, such as dairy, is often found to be closely connected to diseases such as cancer or cardiac infarction. Chronic diseases such as hypothyroidism and multiple sclerosis are further named in the study. However, though we can observe a change in the market

¹ <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/service/putenfleisch-in-nrw-mit-medikament-belastet-schwein-in-muslim-produkt-a-889214.html>

² <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/tv/pferdefleischskandal-tv-talk-bei-plasberg-a-884166.html>

³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/mar/05/horsemeat-scandal-sales-vegetarian-alternatives>

⁴ <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/vegane-ernaehrung-vs-fleischkonsum-jetzt-haben-wir-den-salat-1.1601837>

⁵ <http://www.fr-online.de/wirtschaft/vegan-supermaerkte-vegan-ist-das-neue-bio,1472780,21493444.html>

for more ecological food, health has not been found to be the most significant (Michaelidou and Hassan, 2007). Instead, the ethical self-identity was found to be an important factor in the purchasing decision of an individual (Michaelidou and Hassan, 2007), i.e. the individual's identification with ethical issues, such as environment and animal welfare, influence the consumption habit. Hartman and Wright (1999) add, the threat of genetically modified food to be another concern for ethical moved buyers. Therefore, consumers can be divided into egoistic and altruistic consumer segments, caring for themselves (egoistic) or for their environment (altruistic) (Shaw and Shiu, 2002).

1.2 Consumerism – From Fringe to Fit

However, it is not long ago since consumers with an environmental awareness were called “hippies”, driving old VW busses and wearing the famous Birkenstocks (Ottman, 2011).

“Back in the 1960s, trying to lead an environmentally conscious lifestyle, and especially integrating green into one's shopping, was a very fringe phenomenon” (Ottman, 2011, p.1).

Generally speaking, we know that consumption is a social and cultural process through which we all express our identity and establish our place within society (Belz and Peattie, 2009). The history of green consumerism goes back in the 1980's after a series of critical incidents, for instance the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984 or the nuclear reactor accident at Chernobyl in 1986, made society aware that the planet is vulnerable and resources are not everlasting. This was the time when consumers began to take interest in environmental marketing (Belz and Peattie, 2009). Belz and Peattie (2009) deliver a sociological explanation for consumer behavior. This again includes the fact that we keep on identifying with the things we buy, i.e. being vegan and therefore consuming vegan food and beverages forms a big part of our identity (we care about animals, the environment, probably like nature etc.). Some consumers might even not be willing to give up consuming a certain product because for what it represents in their eyes, such as electronic articles, alcohol or even meat (ibid.). As Belk (1988) puts it “we are the sum of our possessions” (James, 1890, in Belk 1988, p.139). Elaborating on this, we need to consider that Belk (1988) suggests that what we consume is basically an extension for ourselves – constructing identity through the things we consume, i.e. not of only material nature but also groups, body parts or abstract ideas, such as moral of society (Belk 1988). Similarly, we sometimes speak of “consumer tribes” (Cova and Salle, 2008). This term advocates shared consumption within a group of people as a form of self-identity. Cova and Salle (2008) point out that shared consumption is a form of link-building in society between individuals, which alludes to the concept of consumer communities.

“Unlike conventional segmentation, where consumers are arbitrarily grouped by segment characteristic, tribes are identified as consumer-driven groups that hold meaning for construction an individuals' self-identity and creating new communities based on shared beliefs, passions and ideas.” (Mitchell and Imrie, 2010, p.52)

1.3 A Shift in Values and Norms

Additionally, a lot of social norms are bound to consumption, as for instance driving a great car or consuming only ecological food. Both products might represent wealth and also the fact of consuming many products in certain intervals or even overconsumption represent wealth and well-being and are therefore accepted as normal (ibid). Therefore, in order to consume on a more sustainable level, a shift in values and norms is needed within society (ibid.). This shift could be a shift in food consumption - and recent research in consumer behavior shows, that a shift is apparently happening: A study conducted in 2010, by scholars of consumer behavior, shows that consumers with pro-environmental behavior tend to have goals, which focus on personal transport, eco-products and three so called "aspects of the home" (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg, 2010, p.209) energy, water and waste (ibid.). In the respective study, the consumers stated examples for their pro-environmental behavior such as "more responsible water usage", "buy energy efficient products", "eat more food that is locally in season" and "adopt lower impact diet". Moreover, the factors, "Better energy management" and "Increase recycling" were mentioned (Solomon et al., 2010). Also Germany has experienced a shift in consumption: Grunert, Baadsgaard, Larsen and Madsen (1996) found that most of the German consumers already have a rather positive attitude towards ecological food products for instance, and 34% of the interviewees in that respective study claimed that they were willing to pay a larger amount of money for ecological produced food. Grunert et al. (1996) also found that German consumers tend to prefer healthy food over other products and that consumers are wary especially of additives in those products they choose. However, 11 % of the German population is marked as being "the careless food consumer" (Grunert et al., 1996), who is far less interested in health, the price-quality relation, and whether the product is ecological.

As already mentioned previously, also veganism experiences a growth in Germany; the book-market entails a growing range of vegetarian and vegan cookbooks and non-fiction books (for instance Grabolle (2012), Safran-Foehr (2010), Campbell and Campbell (2011), Moschinski (2011) and Hildmann (2012)). Most of the books provide the reader with loads of information about a vegan lifestyle and the impacts of our consumption. One specific book though, differs significantly from others, since it displays veganism as a form of fitness lifestyle ("Vegan for fit", Hildmann, 2012). Written by Hildmann (2012) the book includes recipes and a guide on how to become fitter, healthier and more energized through a vegan diet. Considering the German market, this is the only book so far that connects a vegan diet with a fitness lifestyle. Hildmann (2012) suggests a "challenge" that includes eating a vegan diet for 30 days and consuming solely organic, vegan food products. Furthermore, he promises weight loss within these 30 days, if one follows a fitness plan and the vegan diet (Hildmann, 2012). Thus, he also points out the advantages of a plant-based diet for the environment and animal welfare (ibid). Hildmann's marketing concept has experienced significant response in the German population: Already before the official publication date, Hildmann sold about 15.000 books. Searching for vegan books on Amazon.com we find his book to be on the top of the list, rated with 5

stars and reviewed by 275 people, in Germany only. Furthermore, Hildmann started a community page on the social network Facebook, for all those who try the 30 days challenge, calling themselves “challengers”. As of today (March 29th, 2013) Hildmann counts more than 3000 fans in his Facebook community. Veganism appears to get a completely new face in German social networks, called “Attila Hildmann”, with whom apparently many consumers are finally able to identify. Hildmann presents himself as a 30 year old fit, agile and sexy vegan, connecting a whole new image with veganism. But how does this image connect with the picture of the “hippie” that Ottman (2011) describes in her research? And are all the consumers that became vegan due to Hildmann’s (2012) challenge ethically convinced to consume in such a way? Can we already speak of consumer tribes or a brand community? And which role does the issue of self-identity play? This thesis aims at elaborating on the phenomenon of “Hildmann’s 30 Days Fitness Challenge” and its connection to consumer tribes, culture and self-identification through consumption. In its attempt to do so, the following research question has been developed:

“Vegan for fit”: How does Attila Hildmann form a new image of veganism and which roles do identity construction, community and culture play in this issue? - A case study

2 Background

2.1 The Challengers – a virtual Community Around Veganism

In 2012 Attila Hildmann published the first book in Germany that draws a connection between the concept of veganism and weight-loss. The concept of the book is called a “30-day challenge” which comprises a diet plan for 30 days that only includes vegan recipes. Hildmann (2012) promotes the vegan lifestyle as healthy, fit and on top of that sexy, encouraging his readers to combine their new eating habits with moderate to excessive fitness exercises. In 2012 Hildmann started the first challenge, inviting 100 challengers to do the challenge with him and share their experience with other challengers on Facebook. He even created a whole platform called “Challenge 4 life” in which everyone who has a valid e-mail address may register and start the challenge and ask questions or discuss topics around the challenge. His book includes recipes that are designed either for morning, lunch or dinner time, all vegan and free from processed foods and chemicals. Additionally, Hildmann gives tips on fitness and motivation. His personal success story, from being an unhealthy, corpulent young man to becoming a man with an “eight-pack” (Hildmann, 2012), plays an important role in the marketing concept of this book. Hildmann includes photographs of himself, showing his weight loss and his muscles building; he claims to be full of energy and much happier than ever before. Another personal reason for Hildmann in his decision to become vegan was the early death of his father when Hildmann was still a child. Hildmann (2012) utters that his father did not consume healthy food at all and therefore suffered from cardiac infarction. The first 100 challengers put up videos and entries in form of a diet diary onto the internet, accessible for everyone interested. The huge

success that has been tracked among the first challengers made the project growing vastly and created a brand new image of veganism in Germany. Hildmann shows up in several TV-shows, magazines, newspaper articles and broadcasting stations; also international such as for instance in the U.S., Great Britain and his home country Turkey. To date, his biggest success was a whole German village doing the 30 day vegan for fit challenge in 2013 and his book being sold 100.000 times in Germany (date 16.4.2013).

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Social Networks

“Social networkers of the world have become lifecasters who are happy to share the previously private and deeply personal detritus of their lives.” (Patterson, 2012, p. 527)

Granovetter (1985) pioneered the social theory within a marketing context; social theory implies that human behavior is rooted in networks of interpersonal relationships. The core issue in contemporary social theory is according to Elliot (2009) the nature of society. Generally speaking, social theories are frameworks that serve to analyze modern society and its development under changing circumstances with regards to culture, ethnicity, gender, social structure and modernity (Harrington 2005). Thus, considering social media networks from Granovetter’s social theory marketing context, Doyle (2007) found that also in online networks one can find these interpersonal relationships, where they are being discussed. Additionally following this marketing context, Kerpen (2011) points out, that social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Blogs are *“engagement media or listening networks”* (p. 14). That is, Kerpen (2011) sees social media merely as a tool to engage with customers and to build relationships. Additionally, he calls for authenticity, honesty and transparency from the side of the person who wants to promote a product to be successful in social media (ibid.). A crucial note within a successful social media strategy is, for instance, ‘listening’ (ibid) since a customer who feels understood is bonding to a certain brand or product, which is naturally every marketer’s goal.

“By listening and responding, greater sentiments come from customers, whose loyalty grows. They in turn become better advocates for your products. It’s as simple as this: Customer talks, company listens and acknowledges; customer is happier, as is anyone else watching since the conversation is public” (ibid., p.22-23)

Though Kerpen (2011) is discussing his findings from a business perspective, his work is highly applicable to this study as well, since the nature of engagement remains the same between Hildmann and his fans. Kerpen (2011) therefore suggests five key components in order to be successful on a social media platform, i.e. (1) listen, (2) network and build a community, (3) respond to negative and positive comments, (4) be authentic, (5) be honest and transparent and (5) deliver constant excitement. As mentioned previously, being truly engaged is the key to success, or as Kerpen (2011) puts it: *“You have to authentically believe that being active in growing your social network will lead to deeper, stronger relationships with your customers”* (p.64).

Kerpen (2011) also points out that this will lead to a community of loyalty and trust around the brand, since the customers are feeling heard and comfortable around the brand. Additionally, the author points out that if once a person becomes a fan through liking a Facebook page, all of this person's friends can see that which is helping again to get new fans (ibid).

Besides these rather practical tools for engaging in social media, De Valck, van Bruggen and Wierenga (2009) postulate, that social networks highly influence the member's behavior and describe social platforms also as virtual communities of consumption in which knowledge, that is given from consumer to consumer influences the community's member's behavior. Boyd and Ellison (2007) draw an information technology perspective, which postulates that social networks

"allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p.211)

Supporting this, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) point out that on social media platforms people come together to share and discuss ideas, contacts and build relations, both business and casual. This is similar to Cheung and Lee (2010) who add that users share stories in form of writing or in form of pictures and videos, just like the community members of the challenge do.

Dumenco (2009) on the other hand criticizes social community platforms since social network users share political interests, consumption patterns (through liking and listing hobbies, favorite music, books, TV shows) and with that provide access for the social networking marketers who use this for generating new advertisement. This again, is what Kerpen (2011) promotes when he advises on how to follow marketing strategies on social network sites. Concluding from this first consideration, there are two sides: On the one hand social media are a tool to connect and share, on the other hand they are a marketing tool for economic processes.

3.2 Virtual Communities and Brand Communities

Considering the social media networks as a tool to connect, discuss and share I must discuss virtual communities and brand communities. Most users on social media platforms also post brands to their personal profiles, such as for instance Levis, Nike or Adidas, in order to show their loyalty and affection to the brand. Around these brands, it is very often the case, that communities are being built; these communities are also called brand communities. According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) brand communities are a certain form of consumer communities, which link the brand to the community. In these communities consumers share interests for the brand and exchange information about the brand's products or simply share their affection towards the brand (Woisetschläger, Hartleb, and Blut, 2008). In this specific thesis this brand would be the book and its connected challenge and the author, Hildmann. Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2008) found that brand communities differ from other communities in so far as they have

a commercial core and that the discussions within the community revolve around connected issues and the affection towards the brand. Considering this from the other angle, the marketing focused angle, Ganley and Lampe (2009) point out, that these brand communities are vital for the development in marketing and economics due to the fact that companies can engage with their customers and have a closer relationship with them. Furthermore, Patterson (2012) describes that the consumer shifts through these communities from a rather isolated consumer to a consumer with all available means to influence the market, i.e. communicating with the businesses and other consumers, sharing ideas and discussing questions.

However, Kozinets (1999) points out that not all members of a virtual community are necessarily consumers; most virtual communities though are at least constructed around consumption and the connected marketing interests. Additionally, considering Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) definition of a brand community *“a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand”* (p. 412), one can assume that this includes virtual communities, such as the community around vegan for fit, which could be both, a brand community and a virtual community, since there is for once the book that is in the center of the community but also the pure exchange of information around the topic discussed in the book. Rheingold (1993) refers to the concept of virtual communities to

„social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p.5).

Thus, I consider the challenger community a virtual brand community, since these characteristics are given. Additionally, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) also refer to so called *“core community commonalities”* within communities (p.413) which are called consciousness of kind, shared rituals and tradition and moral responsibility (ibid). They define consciousness of kind as *“a way of thinking about things that is more than shared attitudes or perceived similarity”* (p.413), rituals and traditions as *“the community's shared history, culture and consciousness”* (p.413) and finally moral responsibility as *“a felt sense of duty towards the community as a whole and its individual members”* (p.413). The first marker describes the affection towards the product or brand that connects the members of the community and makes them feel comfortable within it. The second indicator which includes traditions and rituals may for example be a celebration of the brand's history or the exchange of stories that are related to the brand (ibid.) Comparing this to Casaló, Flavia and Guinaliú (2008) who state that *“members often share a common set of values and behaviors; for example a specific form of language or signs which are used within the community”* (p.21), this theory finds acknowledgment. Lastly, moral responsibility can arise, for instance, when a new member is being integrated in the community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Finally, the scholars Chan and Li (2010) introduce the idea of a virtual community that is based on reciprocity or reciprocal behaviors. This includes for instance, the sharing of resources and the active engagement of members within the community, which is similar to Gouldner (1960) who suggests that the concept of

reciprocity helps to develop these communities. Gouldner (1960) explains that reciprocity has been existent in humanity since decades and he found four reasons for people engaging in reciprocal behavior:

“(a) in the long run the mutual exchange of goods and services will balance out; or (b) if people do not aid those who helped them certain penalties will be imposed upon them; or (c) those whom they have helped can be expected to help them; or (d) some or all of these”(p.170). Therefore, the roots of reciprocity between human beings go back several decades and as Gouldner (1960) points out displays a *“moral norm of reciprocity”* (p.170) which describes certain responsibilities and activities as refunds for prior received benefits.

3.3. Social Identity in Communities

In order to understand the virtual community and the members fully, I find it only reasonable to investigate the issue of social identity in connection with the community, since the individuals are what forms the community in the end.

Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) found that members of an organization identify with the communities and are (1) likely to accept the organization's goals as their personal goals, (2) attend to subordinate goals and (3) be loyal and obedient. Moreover, according to Dutton et al. (1994) the identification with an organization always relates to the member's willingness to perform extraordinary and highly motivated. Considering the vegan for fit community I hypothesize the above mentioned criteria for a virtual and brand community to be fulfilled since the challengers represent themselves as a community with common goals and achievements.

As Kim, Lee and Kang (2012) point out *“in virtual worlds users want to be connected with other users who can provide them with understanding and emotional support”* (p.1664). In real life this group identity occurs when people define themselves as belonging to a certain collection of people who share same or similar interests (Turner 1985). These can be locations, gender, political values, hobbies or other categories, which are being defined within the group (Spears, Postmes and Lea 2000). Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) comprises that social identity has three components, self-awareness of membership (cognitive), feelings of belongingness to the group (affective), and self-appraised value/importance to the group (evaluative) (Christian, Bagozzi, Abrams and Rosenthal, 2011). As Tajfel (1982) adds, social identity is *“the part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”* (p.255).

Moreover, Gudykunst and Kim (1997) state that the social identities of an individual are based on demographic categories, the roles one plays (daughter, teacher), membership in organizations (formal and informal), association or vocation or membership in stigmatized groups (e.g. homeless person, person with AIDS). Smith and Bond (1983) found that social identities, such as gender and ethnicity are rather important in most situations whereas other social identities only come to light or are seen as important, when they are

distinctive in the specific setting. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) differentiate between two main identities that play an important role within the communication with strangers in communities: cultural identity and ethnic identity. The cultural identity refers to the degree to which we identify with our own culture, for instance Danish, and the ethnic identity incorporates how we react towards strangers and the assumptions we have towards the stranger's ethnicity.

Hogg and Abrams (1988) conclude that social identity construction in groups derives first and foremost from the functionality of the group, i.e. the fact that group members and what the group is consisting of, fulfills an individual's needs and belongings. Considering Bagozzi et al. (2012) it was found that brand communities let their members adopt different and multiple social identities: with the brand community, the brand, the company, and with the social network.

3.4 The Intercultural Community Approach

In order to gain a more substantial insight into the community, I would like to investigate the community with regards to an intercultural approach, since several members with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds meet in one community which probably requires an intercultural approach to fully understand the former.

Therefore, considering the concept of communities from an intercultural perspective one can often find the term 'polarized communication' (Arnett, 1986; Gudykunst and Kim 1997). Polarized communication happens when groups or individuals only strive to fulfill their own interests but ignore those of others. Gudykunst and Kim (1997) explain that this is what one calls 'moral exclusion' and that it is often found to be a stereotype towards diversity in groups. *"Diversity is necessary for community to exist. For community to develop, group differences must be dealt with in a constructive fashion"* (p.371). This means that a community does not as indicated earlier only grow due to reciprocity and commonalities but also through diversity between the members in the group.

Or as Buber (1958, 1965) postulates, a community is not a group of only like-minded persons but also individuals with other opinions over the same concern. Moreover, in order to develop community one must enter a dialogue between the different individuals and respect that *"it also requires a commitment to values higher than our own"* (Gudykunst and Kim, 1997). However, Buber (1965) argues that one should though not completely avoid a conflict of interests, by giving in in other's opinion but rather accept other's opinions as a possible solution. In order to communicate interculturally, i.e. often with strangers, it is only natural to face ethical issues (ibid.). Here, Barlund (1980) found that when two or more strangers communicate, there are two characteristics of communication strategy that can be found: (1) making ethical judgments using one's own cultural standard as a basement, or (2) using the knowledge one has, the *'frame of reference'* (Gudykunst and Kim, 1997, p.378), of the stranger's culture. According to Barlund (1980) both characteristics are not satisfying since they are deficient and egocentric. Therefore, Barlund (1980) suggests a metaethic

that is applicable to both cultures. However, Gudykunst and Kim (1997) argue, that there is no metaethic upon one could agree to guide conversations in intercultural settings but rather are there cultural universals that can be used as a guide. Concluding, Gudykunst and Kim (1997) derive seven principles which help building community: (1) be committed, (2) be mindful, (3) be unconditionally accepting, (4) be understanding, (5) be concerned for both ourselves and others, (6) be ethical, (7) be peaceful. Since these terms are rather self-explanatory I will only briefly explain them. The first principle incorporates the commitment to engage in dialogue, the commitment towards the group and the social identity one gains through it and finally the commitment to cooperate with other members. The second principle advocates that one has to think about his or her actions and what they might do to others. The third principle means that one must accept the other individual just as they are and not try to change them. Moreover, the principle 'be understanding', means

"we must recognize how culture, ethnicity, and other forms of diversity affect the way we think and behave" (ibid., p.383).

Moving on to the fifth principle 'be concerned for both ourselves and others', it means that communities are inclusive and that they are not groups of like-minded people, just as Buber put it in his research (1958, 1965). Therefore one must actively listen to others and engage in a dialogue whenever possible and thus, avoid polarized communication. The sixth principle alludes to ethics and morality, which means that behavior within a group must be morally and ethically right in order for the group to function. Finally, the principle 'be peaceful' indicates that one does not make use of violence or engage in such behavior, even when experiencing such behavior toward oneself.

Drawing from the intercultural perspective I have represented some 'guidelines for behavior within groups of strangers' which are only natural to adopt in virtual communities and which need to be taken into account when analyzing the data since I am going to enter a community that has probably some cultural diversity in it.

3.5. Identity Construction and Role Models

Closely connected with culture and social identity, is the construction of the identity through role models and community. Therefore I am going to have a closer look at identity construction and connected issues such as body image and consumption.

Thus, Saren (2007) points out that an individual's identity is closely connected to his or her body, which influences the way they consume food or how they do diets, sports or fitness. This is particularly relevant for this thesis, since Hildmann's book is indeed a diet book and he represents a role model for a fit and healthy body. But is it the diet and fitness that creates so many fans and puts veganism to a whole new level? Identity construction has various shades and one of them is what Belk (1988) calls *"the extended-self"*. The three main parts of Belk's work (1988) can be summarized as follows: (1) self-perception is always related to

possessions, i.e. we are what we have. Belk calls it the extended-identity, which is presented through the feelings a person has towards consumption, for instance, buying a new car in order to gain prestige and feeling less confident when driving an old car or when losing the car. Additionally, these extended identities are crucial, when possessions are linked to significant events in life, such as birth, death or matrimony, situations when the self is transformed. (2) Self-perception is also related to functional things, objects that enable people to do things they could not do without the certain possession. For instance a bike to ride or sewing machine to sew clothes; however, there is also the possibility to go beyond the function of things, that is, wearing a badge or a uniform in order to extend one's identity and to represent a certain identity that an individual wants to have. (3) Finally, Belk (1988) refers to Sartre's (1943) proposition of three primary ways that represent to us the part of our self. Firstly, money is one way of extending the self, since people can control consumption and purchasing decisions with money. If one makes the decision to purchase something the person has control over the situation and can individually decide whether to add an object to oneself or not. Secondly, one can extend the self through creating an object, thereby it is not important whether it is a physical object or just an idea; the main part is that the creator creates an identity through it. Finally, the third part of constructing an extend self is simply through the power of knowledge, that is for instance, an academic grade or level one can achieve.

However, not only through consumption can people form identity and a self-image. Waterman (1982) for instance believes that in adolescence people often start questioning identity issues and personal growth, that is, also the body image. As Cash (2002) points out, body image can guide an individual's emotional and response patterns when it comes to viewing and evaluating the self. Additionally, Huang, Norman, Zabinski, Caifas and Patrick (2007) found a link between body-images and the self-esteem, since in their study it showed that students who lost weight got more confident compared to those who gained weight. As Dittmar, Llyod, Dugan, Halliwell, Jacobs and Cramer (2000) put it:

"Body image has a major influence on adolescents' self-esteem and both female and male adolescents place more importance on their appearance than adults and report higher levels of dissatisfaction"(p.888).

Furthermore, Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger and Wright (2001) suggest that mass media are the reason for this sort of self-imagery. Mass media show day by day potential role models, who appear to be what every person is trying to achieve, that is beauty, strength and glamour. According to Anderson et al. (2001) in adolescence people shown in the mass media become an important factor of influence towards attitudes, behavior and values.

"An adolescent who believes that people in the media represent ideals of appearance, behavior, or lifestyle may not only identify with these media figures but also compare him- or herself to them. Two partly conflicting processes may result: efforts to be more like a media role model and increased awareness of the

discrepancy between self and model. Social comparison processes could lead to dissatisfaction with oneself (ibid., p.108).

Since the body represents parts of the identity, bodies are seen as crucial cultural codes in society (ibid.). As Leipämaa-Leskinen (2011) points out, the body in society is rather a project that a consumer is responsible for and that a consumer can influence and has an important role in every-day life.

4 Methodology

4.1. Paradigm and Research Approach

Since I want to generate new knowledge, the thesis must be based on a social research paradigm, a “basic set of beliefs” (Guba, 1990, p.17). Also, the research paradigm must be directly connected to the research question, since it influences the whole researching progress (Saunders et al., 2009). In this thesis I wish to understand the relationship between the themes ‘identity construction’, ‘culture’ and ‘community’ and the main theme ‘veganism’. I seek to understand how Hildmann creates a new image of veganism and if the above named themes are playing a role in this image construction. Clearly, considering the situation of a whole community based around one book or author, I must accept that social interaction is the key process in this research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The thoughts, experiences and utterings of the individuals in this community is what I want to analyze, i.e. the communication that is being constructed by individuals from different backgrounds with distinct concepts of their environment and reality. I hereby have to bear in mind that I cannot find an ultimate truth but rather a profound impression of the whole process around this community and the different roles the themes might or might even not have in this issue. Drawing from this I adopt the research philosophy that Saunders et al. (2009) call interpretivism (p.115). Saunders et al. (2009) argue that interpretivism implements the necessity of understanding the differences between “humans in our role as social actors” (p.116). Thus, since I want to analyze social interactions, it only appears reasonable to adopt this philosophy. Additionally, it reflects my personal view on the world, i.e. there is more to humanity than laws and rules; rather can the world with all its social interaction be called “complex” (ibid., p.116). In the analysis I seek to gain a deeper understanding of the community around Hildmann and the individual motives for the members, the social actors, in it. In order to understand and analyze their motivational actions I need to enter their world and thus, collect data in this process (ibid.). Also Bryman (2008) defines interpretivism as the epistemological stance that requires researchers to subjectively comprehend the meaning of social action; calling it the “chief ingredient” (p.15). Epistemology describes the knowledge that I as the researcher approve to be acceptable (Saunders et al., 2009) – i.e. as it might be clear by now, knowledge being generated through subjective meanings and social phenomena (ibid.). Thus, considering the context in which I wish to analyze the data an interpretivist stance is only appropriate.

Ontologically speaking, I believe that reality is being socially constructed by individuals and therefore, there are individual ways to look at it (Saunders et al., 2009). There is no such thing as objectivism or a state of stagnation, rather can we call reality multiple and changing (ibid). Therefore, I need to keep in mind that all data that is being collected throughout the research process, firstly passes its way through my perception, i.e. there is no ultimate reality nor is it excluded from being bias. Since I analyze the community's efforts and actions and the individual motives, subjectivism must be applied; Saunders et al. (2009) suggest that subjectivism includes "understanding the meanings that individuals attach to social phenomena" (p.111). Considering the community at a first glance, I find without needing to research at all that there are several actions in it: Video-Diaries, also called Vlogs (a mixture of Weblog and Video in which an individual narrates its personal experiences in frequent intervals), Blog entries, Facebook posts and additionally articles, pictures and interviews are being produced for the matter of sharing and discussion. A community has been formed around a social phenomenon called the "30-day challenge by Attila Hildmann". In order to understand these motives and actions performed in the community, I adopt what follows from the interpretivist philosophy, i.e. "social constructionism" (Saunders et al., 2009, p.111). Social constructionism, as it is being described by Saunders et al. (2009), is adopted, when the researcher needs to empathically enter the subjective reality of the individuals being researched, which are in my thesis members of the community. Referring back to Bryman (2008) I find that

"Reality has a meaning for human beings and therefore human action is meaningful – that is, it has a meaning for them and they act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and to the acts of others." (p.16)

Following this strain of thought, I have to keep in mind that not only does my reality differ from the community's reality but also do the individual's realities within the community differ from each other – that might come out as crucial in the analysis section of this thesis.

Social constructionism as it is defined by Saunders et al. (2008) can also be found in Bryman's (2009) studies under the term "constructionism" (p.19). Albeit, Bryman (2009) emphasizes not only the individuals within a given context, but also the context in which the social action takes place, which in this thesis is the challenger community. Strauss et al. (1973 in Bryman 2009) found that there do not exist strict organizations or institutions but rather a "negotiated order" (p.19), i.e. an organization re-forms and forms itself throughout time over and over again, there is no such state as stagnation. Similarly, Becker (1982 in Bryman 2009) describes culture as being shaped by its participants and "that no set of cultural understanding provides a perfectly applicable solution to any problem people have in the course of their day, and they therefore must remake those solutions, adapt their understanding to the new situation in the light of what is different about it." (p.20). Obviously, this position is applicable to the community I wish to analyze since it

goes hand in hand with the belief that each individual has an active role “in the social construction of social reality” (Bryman, 2009, p.20).

Considering the research approach needed for this study I must constitute whether to use an inductive or deductive approach. Since Saunders et al. (2008) classify an inductive approach as useful for “gaining an understanding of meanings humans attach to events” (p.127) and as “a close understanding of the research context” (p.127) it is rather obvious that an inductive approach seems most appropriate for this thesis. Contrary, the deductive approach relies on scientific principles and the movement from theory to data. Mostly in deductive approaches one uses a highly structured approach and a quantitative data collection; often this approach can be found within the research philosophy positivism. However, often both approaches are interdependent and none can be specifically excluded. Albeit an inductive approach is chosen in this thesis, going from data analysis to building a theory of it in order to answer the research question. In this thesis I want to find out if there is a relationship between veganism, identity construction, culture and community – thus an inductive approach, which helps us to understand the context in which a possible relationship is happening, is being applied.

4.2. Research Design and Methods

Now that I have outlined the epistemological and ontological stances, as well as the research approach that leads through this thesis, I will concentrate on the research design. Saunders et al. (2009) explicate that the research design or research strategy is often tied to whether one uses an inductive or deductive approach. But also, that no research strategy is inferior or superior to another and hence, I must only focus on finding the strategy that helps to answer my research question. Above all, no strategy should be thought of as being mutually exclusive (ibid.) (similarly to what I pointed out in the last section about inductive and deductive approaches). Considering the research topic I notice that I investigate a temporary and sudden phenomenon, namely veganism as a trend in German society⁶. I also hypothesize that Attila Hildmann is part of this phenomenon since with his book ‘Vegan for fit’, he inspires consumers to re-think their food consumption and consider veganism as a healthy diet. Additionally, bearing in mind the community one can imagine that this phenomenon will pass at some point. Following this strain of thought, Robson (2002) recommends a case study, defining it as “a strategy for doing research which involves empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (p.178). Further, Morris and Wood (1991) consider a case study as useful for gaining a rich understanding of the research context and the developments within. Interestingly, the data collection within this research strategy is not bound to a specific one but rather can we freely choose how to collect data, also from various sources (Saunders et al., 2009). Furthermore, Yin (2003) points out that a case study leaves room for free interpretations of the context, without strict boundaries. That is, I do not have to stick to certain patterns or

⁶ <http://www.presseportal.de/pm/71147/2401974/vegan-liegt-weltweit-im-trend>

formula but I can be led by my interpretations of the contexts I find within the data analysis. This is, however, completely opposite to a survey strategy or other strategies with a rather “controlled context” (Saunders et al., 2009), such as they are also being used for quantitative methods. In a nutshell: Due to the fact that this study is based on a qualitative content analysis, which enables me with a lot of room to gain a deeper understanding of the actions and motives in the area of interest, I adopt a case study as my preferred research design. In terms of a time frame I position this study in a longitudinal research (Bryman, 2008) though I do not collect the data in a certain period of time but rather do I intend to go back in time, since the data I find useful for this thesis, is already collected in large amounts on the internet. This gives me the chance to go back in time and analyze past events and discussions but also observe the processes that have been made within the community. Also, as Saunders et al. (2009) suggest, “the main strength of longitudinal research is the capacity that it has to study change and development” (p.155) which is important for this thesis, since we study a brand community that has been established during the last year. As already stated, I am using a qualitative method in this thesis, i.e. a content based analysis of the data collected on Facebook, YouTube and blogs. In the respective analysis I will also consider variables such as the cultural background of the community members and the author himself, as well as possible publications of this book and articles about him and the community in other countries. This will enable me to draw possible connections between different cultural backgrounds and their role within identity construction and community. A qualitative method and the analysis of the individual actions and the different motives of the individual community members will enable me to gain a deeper understanding of the above mentioned connections and therefore draw cautious lines on a cultural account.

4.3. Data Collection

In this thesis I rely on a literature review as well as on primary data. The literature review consists of peer reviewed literature found on different academic databases which deliver carefully researched knowledge that provides me with a fond knowledge on social identity, communities and identity construction as well as connected cultural issues. The literature review serves as a source to support the research done in this field of study and enables me to draw connections, conclusions and thoroughly analyze the primary data. Other than that, I use different articles from legitimate periodicals and professional journals as well as secondary data such as statistics from different specific organizations and institutions. As Bryman (2008) points out, the use of secondary data collections has the advantage of being of an extremely high quality. In order to be sure that my collected secondary data is of high quality, I only use peer reviewed sources as well as I make sure that the sources are trustworthy and official. Bryman (2008) points out that also high quality data means that for instance the sampling procedures have been intense and most of the time are rather representative, in contrast to a small thesis like this one. Additionally, the studies used as a secondary data source are often developed by highly experienced researchers who have been spending years on one study, being able to also

collect data cross-border (ibid). But is it legitimate to use the World Wide Web as a reliable source of data? According to Bryman (2008), "Websites and webpages are potential sources of data in their own right and can be regarded as potential fodder for both quantitative and qualitative content analysis" (ibid., p.629). On top of that, considering the vast development of the World Wide Web it appears only reasonable to make scientific use of the forth (ibid). Considering the field of study in this thesis the World Wide Web is crucial, since the phenomenon that is being investigated would not even exist without the communication medium social network and thus, there would be no research question I could answer. This case study is specifically possible due to the existence of the World Wide Web. Of course there are some limitations to the data collection within the web; these will, however, be discussed in the section "limitations".

4.4. Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, a qualitative content analysis is being employed in this thesis, i.e. analyzing the content on Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms such as wordpress. In its effort to do so, a qualitative content analysis tries to find patterns and possible codes within a given context (Bryman, 2008). Altheide (1996) also calls this ethnographic content analysis, which precisely describes that I do not try to put the data into certain schemes like I would do with a quantitative method, but rather do I seek to gain an understanding of the meaning in the context through categorizing the data. During this process the researcher constantly detects new themes and revises old ones:

"Categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge during the study, including an orientation to constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meaning and nuances" (p.531).

This strategy is similar to grounded theory described by Saunders et al. (2009). In grounded theory a theory is established through categorizing data and going back and forth between the variables, detecting possible relationships and patterns (ibid.). There are, however, other characteristics within grounded theory which though do not matter within this thesis's method. It is also to mention that the content I am analyzing also contains pictures and video material; Bryman (2008) points out that pictures and videos (moving pictures) can be regarded as valid data on their own.

4.5 Research Criteria

Since this research lies within the humanistic approaches, interpretive, the research criteria must also be regarded as such. Saunders et al. (2009) refer to validity and reliability in this context, meaning validity to be concerned with whether the results of a study display reality or only are an appearance. Reliability refers according to Saunders et al. (2009) to *"the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings"* (p.156). Guba and Lincoln (1985) call this trustworthiness and established *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability* as humanistic criteria. Considering

the credibility of this thesis I already pointed out within the paradigm that I do believe that reality is socially constructed, hence the data I am analyzing has already passed through the lenses of my eyes. In order to avoid such bias, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest asking the individuals, whether I interpreted their opinions and utterings in the right way. This goes, however, far beyond the scope of this paper and can therefore be accepted as a possible limitation of this thesis. The term transferability means whether it is possible to transfer the actual study and its method and theory to another similar situation (ibid.). Lincoln and Guba (1985) additionally suggest that one describes the research situation in such details that one could call it a “database”; Geertz (1973) calls this a “thick description” (p. 387). The third criteria dependability is again led by an idea by Lincoln and Guba (1985): The so called auditing-approach entails that researchers should make recordings of their research steps which can be easily accessed by other researchers afterwards. However, due to the limited scope of this student thesis I do not consider this approach as relevant in this case. Now, considering confirmability the term describes the nature of objectivity within research, which is, conversely, not completely possible within social research (Bryman, 2008). Especially in this research this does indeed play an important role since I as the researcher am living a vegan lifestyle myself. Therefore, I refer to Bryman (2008) who suggests for the researcher to “act in good faith [...] it should be apparent that he or she has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it” (p.379). Still, considering the interpretivist paradigm the data is being collected and analyzed through the eyes of the researcher, constructing reality for herself; thus this will be discussed in the next section.

4.6. Limitations, Feasibility and Ethical Considerations

Naturally, I am facing some limitations in my thesis. Since I am working with data from the web I need to consider that it is rapidly changing, therefore, Bryman (2008) suggests being cautious when using it as a data source. Additionally, within a social constructivist paradigm, it is not possible to generalize the findings nor is there the wish to do so. This is, however, due to the assumption and belief leading the paradigm, that every individual has her or his own truth and that there simply does not exist an absolute truth (Bryman, 2008). Considering the ethical issues in this specific context, it must be questioned whether one is allowed to actually use the content on the social media platform, or whether one has to keep the users anonymity. However, the users post their discussions on platforms for the public to read, which leads to a conclusion that one does not necessarily wants to keep them anonymous. The users agree when uploading content or writing in forums, that the content is public and thus, I refrain from keeping them anonymous since I want to keep the thesis as authentic as possible. Naturally, I will process the data carefully and fair.

5 Analysis

In the following section I am going to analyze the findings of the data collection of this thesis. The data collected was found within a time frame from when the book was published in September 2012 until April 25th 2013 and entails data from mass media, the World Wide Web, as well as social networks, i.e. Facebook and YouTube.

First of all, I will consider the social networks that I observed; these were Attila Hildmann's Facebook Profile but also the YouTube Channels from Hildmann and his fans. It is noticeable that Hildmann uses his personal Facebook profile and not a fan-side, though this also exists. However, I decided to use his personal side, which required me, the researcher, to add him as a friend, in order to get deeper into the community and into the position of an observer and to apply a qualitative content analysis.

5.1 Vegan for Fit – Forming a Virtual Community

Starting out with the community that is based around the diet book I found that there exist nine Facebook groups in which members discuss their "challenge". The groups are all "closed groups" which means in order to get into one of the groups one must request a membership by clicking on "join group". The criteria to get a membership differ from group to group: Some groups are dedicated to specific regions or countries, for instance Switzerland or Austria, or to Berlin and Cologne. There are also some groups that are dedicated to specific circumstances some challengers face, for instance, a group that maintains challengers who are suffering from diseases around the thyroid. It is fact that persons suffering from such diseases gain weight more easily (Rieger, 2007), which is why the vegan for fit diet book is interesting for them. In the thyroid group, the members discuss which groceries that are needed for recipes in the book, could harm the thyroid or on the other hand support its function. Additionally, some group members share their personal success stories with vegan for fit, and its impact on their disease. Other members comment on the stories, encourage each other, motivate each other and give advice around veganism and the disease. The members utter relief to have found such a group and tell that it emboldens them on their way through the disease. This is exactly what characterizes a brand community, which is in this case a virtual brand community, since the members share information about the book and also how the diet recommended by the book, effects their personal lives (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) (*see section 3.1*). Additionally, this is also similar to what Casaló et al. (2008) suggest, since they found that members often share a common set of values, which in this case appears to be the disease and the way to deal with. I, thus one can speak of a second indicator for a community around the book. However, there is of course a much bigger community to be found on Hildmann's personal profile which will be elaborated on in detail at a later point in this analysis.

5.2. The Brand within the Community – Attila Hildmann

Since Attila Hildmann counts approximately 5000 friends (as of today, May 2nd 2013) one can find a variety of user discussions and behavioral patterns (such as shares, likes and link-sharing) within the profile.

First of all, I would like to consider Attila Hildmann's presence on the profile. When clicking on the profile the first thing that catches one's attention is the profile picture that shows him without a shirt or any other clothes to cover his upper body parts. Instead he is wearing army trousers and shows off his muscles.

Considering this array one might assume that he likes to represent himself as masculine and strong (army trousers), drawing a line between his concept of veganism and his image as a strong young man. Similarly, I found another picture, which is even more direct.

On the picture it says "vegan maskulin" (eng. vegan masculine) which directly utters what one can already assume from the first picture: Hildmann links veganism to masculinity, a strategy that is assumedly rather successful among his fans and readers. Hildmann is being portrayed during his strength training, his facial expression implying strength and willpower, basically displaying Hildmann's motto that one can achieve anything if there is only enough willpower. However, Hildmann's strategy becomes even more direct on a second picture (see figure 1).

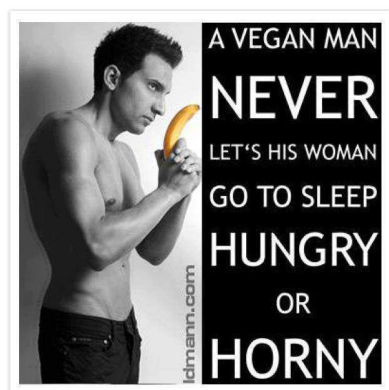


Figure 1

"A vegan man never lets his woman go to sleep hungry or horny" is the message on the picture (Hildmann, 2012). At a first glance the picture seems harmless, however, considering that Hildmann holds a banana in his hands shifts the meaning of the picture into a sexual one. First of all, the banana could display veganism, a healthy diet with a lot of fruits and vegetables. At a second glance the banana alludes to the male sex, being "horny" and prepared. A third possibility would be the metaphor for a man holding a "gun", again connecting to masculinity. Representing himself in such ways delivers certain characteristics that are assumedly worth striving for, from a stereotypical male perspective in western society. Here we find what one might consider as a "role model", which according to Sørensen (2007) influences factors such as dieting or fitness. But is this a form of an extended self? Considering Belk's (1988) definition of the extended-self one must argue that this form of body modification can be seen as an extension of the self: The third form of Belk's (1988) extended self refers to control and creation of objects. Though a body is not a material possession, one is always (if not burdened with a disease) in control of the body's appearance. A human being can do certain sports and train his muscles in order to modify the way his body looks; additionally, this can be supported by certain diets. In western culture a fit and strong body within the male gender is

worthwhile, a thin body is considered as beautiful for the female (Anderson et al. 2001). As mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper (*see section 3.5*), Cash (2002) finds the body image to be crucially connected with the self-esteem, therefore, a person with a body that is considered to be fitting the norm is more likely to be satisfied than a person with an aptness to be obese, thus one must argue that Hildmann changed his body from not fitting the norm to fitting the norm through the diet. Comparing this to Cash's argument Hildmann should be rather satisfied with his body, which is probably the reason for him to feel the need to share his success. But why is it even 'normal' to feel like one must fit the norm? Anderson et al. (2001) suggest that one reason for this behavioral pattern is the mass media, thus I must conclude that Hildmann plays a role in these mass media as well, supporting this specific body image. But is this the only reason for Hildmann's success? In order to elaborate on this I must take his social media engagement into consideration. Following Hildmann's Facebook activities through the period of this thesis I found that he is marketing himself in several ways. One way for instance is his appearance on the profile pictures. A second way is his positing about his popularity of the books and spikes in sales; he often takes pictures in book stores and other stores in order to show the expansion of his book and its popularity.

In these pictures he also presents that store owners order exactly the food that is needed in the concept of his diet, as for instance green tea. Additionally, he also posts pictures where he found the certain products to be sold out in the store, which in his opinion indicates the diet's success. Compared to what Kerpen (2011) points out (*see section 3.1*) about media engagement Hildmann fulfills these criteria, since he engages on a constant basis with his fans. The five key components suggested by Kerpen (2011) (*see section 3.1*) are definitely met, thus one can argue that Hildmann truly engages with his fans. Through his authenticity through pictures and emotions that he shares, he delivers constant excitement. Additionally, through caring about his challengers he is networking a lot and at the same time building a community. The key to building a loyal community, according to Kerpen (2011), is to make the consumers feel heard and comfortable; this is exactly what Hildmann creates through his concept of the young man who transferred his obese body into a fitness model and then wants to share his 'secret' with the whole world and make everybody feel like he does.

However, Hildmann also uses a different strategy, since he shares other self-marketing links, for instance, numbers that indicate the selling of his book on amazon.com or other bookstores. He repeatedly promotes his book through Facebook posts and shares of different stores that sell his book. Additionally, Hildmann frequently finds press releases and articles about himself in the World Wide Web which he posts and shares on his Facebook page as well, presenting himself rather proud and with a big self-esteem (for instance see figure 7). Whenever he shares these he comments on them or cites from the article. Other than that, Hildmann has recently been shown in several TV shows on German TV, in which he is being interviewed about veganism, his vitality and the challengers; Hildmann promotes these TV appearances again on

Facebook and his personal web page. Drawing from these marketing efforts I would like to define the book Attila Hildmann as a brand around which a community has been growing in recent years.

5.3 The Virtual Brand Community – Connect, Discuss and Share

In this section I would like to analyze the findings that include the community around the brand. As stated earlier I define Attila Hildmann as brand which has two reasons: First of all the marketing efforts of Hildmann are highly egocentric, that is, he promotes himself through links, shares and comments on his person and the book he wrote. The second reason for this definition is the development of a community around his person, a brand community. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) describe brand communities as a certain form of consumer communities based around a brand. This specific brand is being discussed, shared or simply finds a lot of affinity among users (*see section 3.2*).

As pointed out in the theoretical section of this paper, this brand community is also a virtual community, which is according to Chan and Li (2010) based on reciprocity or reciprocal behaviors (*see section 3.2*). But do I find reciprocity in the virtual brand community around Attila Hildmann? First of all, reciprocity includes the sharing of information, resources and also activism of members of a community (*ibid.*). Considering the challengers this reciprocal behavior is found a lot in specific groups (as for instance the thyroid group introduced above) but also on Hildmann's Facebook profile. Since the core of the diet is based around food products and fitness, the resources shared in the community are based around these two factors as well. The community members post pictures or pose question on the profile, finally some community members utter their success and share related stories. There is a lot of reciprocal behavior to be found within the community as for instance community members share their fitness routine or their feelings during the time of the challenge. Very often, community members start a YouTube channel in which they record and upload videos of themselves, sharing experiences, thoughts and ask questions. These videos are called vlogs (video-blog) since they are rather narrative and not music videos. However, as indicated earlier (*see section 3.2*) Gouldner (1960) refers to a moral behavior that he sees in reciprocity. Compared to his findings one could argue that the first reason, mutual exchange can be found within this challenge but not the fear of having something bad being imposed on oneself. Rather must one argue that the reciprocal behavior found within this challenge is more about sharing and discussing ideas in order to have advantages for the individual, that is, probably a more egocentric stance than what Gouldner (1960) and Chan and Li (2010) suggest.

However, in order to understand this egocentric driven community I would like to analyze one video. In this video a young girl (nickname: JessVeganLifestyle) has reached day five of the fitness and dieting challenge and shares her first experiences. First of all she talks about how she has already lost some weight:

"I know it is only day five and I shouldn't have lost any weight yet. However, my stomach felt so flat so I was curious whether I already lost some weight [...] and I did lose already 2 kilograms and I am really, really happy about that [...] though I am not really overweight." (Appendix A, lines 1-5)

Only from this very first part of the video one can assume that identity construction might be an important factor within this girl's challenge, since she refers to her body weight and explains her delight about her weight-loss, even emphasizing this through saying "really, really happy". While uttering this she smiles a lot and appears to be truly happy. After that she goes on explaining this weight-loss with the new diet and its possible advantages. Additionally, she goes back in her narration to having lost 2 kilograms (kg) and how she normally tends to balance between two different weights because sometimes she would just stop eating at all. Finally she encourages challengers to try the diet and utters as a final statement that she really needed to let the others know about her weight loss and she could not wait any longer to tell them. Here, similarly to Hildmann's personal identity construction, this points to what Belk (1988) calls the extended-self, again, meaning that the girl appears to "add" to her personality through being able to control herself, i.e. her weight and thus, her appearance. Since Huang et al. (2007) found that weight and self-esteem are closely connected (*see section 3.5*), I find this being strongly reflected within this girl's behavior when she utters how extremely happy she is about having lost 2 kg already. Therefore, this video powerfully implies what is being established in the theoretical section, that is, the girl has achieved a higher self-esteem through dieting and following Hildmann's recommendations (*see section 3.5*). Additionally, based on Waterman's (1982) assumption on adolescent self-questioning, one must argue that this girl truly *is* questioning herself and defines herself about her outer appearance (*see section 3.5*). This again alludes to the influence of mass media as pointed out earlier and the connected wish to fit into the norm. Though Hildmann might not be the first indicator for the girl to feel uncomfortable, he definitely signalizes a way out of this discomfort through his diet and thus leads to an affirmation for the girl that fitting into the norm is required in society.

At a later point in the video, she refers back to the community, through encouraging others to try the diet and above all, through uttering her need to share her success immediately with them. This is a strong indicator for how important this community around the book and Hildmann's person is, since the girl appears to feel as a part of the community, being able to share success and feelings and also having the need to share it with them. For one part, this could indicate what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) call moral responsibility (*see section 3.2*), one of the three markers of the "core community commonalities (p.413), meaning that the girl feels that she should share her success with the community since she is part of the challengers and therefore, sort of agreed to being part of a whole group. Secondly, I find this to be highly reciprocal behavior, meaning that the girl wants to share her experience in order to give something back to the community, but also to Hildmann as the inventor of the diet. She wants the other challengers to see that everyone can succeed in the diet and thus, should not stop believing in themselves but rather do the challenge and feel the difference, just like she does. However, paying closer attention to the comments underneath the video one can find that she was already eating a vegan diet before the challenge; this could indicate that she might only not have been eating very healthy before and thus changed from eating

processed vegan food to self-made vegan food, leaving out sugar and other additives. Considering the comments under the video one can find a lot encouragement by other challengers and congratulations on what she already achieved. Some challengers find her vlog very motivating and ask several questions about her eating habits and her liquid intake during the challenge. She engages with a lot of enthusiasm and explains every detail, even adding, she will tell them about *everything* she is eating during the challenge. This behavior is similar to what was pointed out in section 3. 3, that is to perform extra ordinary and highly motivated (Dutton et al. 1994) when being a member of a group.

One can find similar videos from various challenger members. Some show their fitness routine and others share their experience by telling about their success through a video diary, just like JessVeganLifestyle does. It appears that this specific sharing of information through the video channels is a core connection between the members; in the search query on YouTube the results for “vegan for fit” reach approximately 49.000 (as of today May 10th, 2013). Partly, the videos appear to be rather creative and colorful than professional; however, this only supports the image of a personal diary and probably creates a feeling of community and closeness among the challengers, due to the personal note. However, as indicated earlier, the challengers do not only communicate through videos, though this is a huge aspect apparently, but also through comments and likes in respective groups that I started to discuss in the early beginning of this analysis.

Still, there is not only a group that discusses within the field of thyroid disease but also a general challenger group. The most important and popular group is called “Vegans for fit” and in its description it says that this is a “bootcamp group” for those who want to consequently join the challenge; the number of people in this group to date is approximately 12.000 members (as of today May 14th 2013). This is even more than Hildmann’s fans on Facebook. In order to understand the community even better, I am going to analyze this group in the following by means of the theoretical framework (*see sections 3.-3.5*).

First of all, in order to become a community member, one needs to make sure that one is serious about the challenge, others who only want to observe (or study the group like I do) are welcome as well, but only in the background. Additionally, there are a few rules for the group and the topics that are allowed to be discussed; thus, topics that do not belong to the challenge will be deleted immediately. The principles of the challengers are posted at the very top of the group and are the following (for original in German language see Appendix B):

1. Be loyal towards the other challengers
2. Show team spirit and be around for the weaker challengers
3. Be honest towards yourself and others
4. Be respectful with each other, avoid arguments
5. No pictures or videos in which animals are being slaughtered
6. Motivate each other

7. Staying superior for 30 days towards all the know-it-all people in this world
8. Never give up
9. Taking pledge for animal aliments and industrial processed food
10. Challengers network
11. Take before-and after pictures! Once you see the difference you will be extra motivated. We are looking forward to see the pictures. (*see Appendix B for original transcript*)

These principles or rules are an important marker for a rather professional community, since they clearly state what is allowed and expected in this group. The spirit of the group appears to be that of a sportsmanship, with a common will to reach goals. This is similar to what Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) found, that is, the members are more likely to identify with the goals of an organization and are loyal and obedient (*see section 3.3*). In this case I found that the members indeed never post anything that has not to do with the topic and if they do so, they are posting in a rather abject manner, apologizing frequently within the same posts. For instance, *"I am really sorry if this does not belong into this group"*. These rules, however, help the community members to identify and keep on being motivated, since they have the wish to belong to this group (Dutton et al., 1994). Also Kim et al. (2012) found that there is a need for other users to connect and feel accepted, in order to be provided with emotional support (*see section 3.3*). Additionally, also the social identity theory principles are met in the group, the three components self-awareness (cognitive), belongingness (affective) and self-appraised value (evaluative) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, *see section 3.3*). First of all, self-awareness is brought up in this group through the list of rules that form the very beginning of the group. Here, the first steps into the cognitive direction are made since the members feel belongingness through following the group rules but also through the content of the rules. That is for instance, the rule to motivate each other, be honest towards others, show team spirit and be around for the weaker challengers, network and be loyal towards other challengers. Considering these rules it is clear that they form a picture of a very close group, being supportive but not accepting people to be individualists in the group. What is being reflected is rather a team-minded group within the virtual community, like one could find in a sports team. But also the affective stage is being met through the same rules I mentioned above. Since the rules demand the challengers to be around and look after one another, sometimes weaker challengers, the rules include *all* members in the group and create a strong feeling of community spirit. Finally, the self-appraised value is being heightened through the whole challenge. The challengers start the challenge with different goals to achieve within the 30 days and the group is open for sharing of success and experiences. Thus, the self-appraised value can grow since the challengers reflect on their achievements a lot and on top of that are being encouraged to go on and achieve more goals. Also, the before and after pictures are useful in order to raise the self-appraised value: The challengers have the chance to see the change of their bodies through the diet and the fitness routines but also to share it with the other

challengers, which in return heightens the self-appraised value of a challenger in their eyes as well (*see section 3.3. for further information on this theoretical aspect*). These findings go hand in hand with what I found when considering the whole content of the group; one can find several questions regarding the diet and around fitness again. Therefore one must argue that the challengers all build on what is pointed out in section 3.5 of this paper and what has been indicated earlier in the analysis, that is a higher self-esteem is closely connected with the body image and thus one must consider Hildmann as a role model for this “*norm-fitting*” body that every single challenger wishes to achieve (*please see sections 5.2 and 5.3 for comparison*). Most of all, people use the page to share their success and find encouragement in each other, that is, the most significant factor to be found. Reciprocal behavior indicates here a mutual benefit on each side on a voluntary basis though (*see section 3.2*).

Generally, the group members are rather emotional and tend to be very personal about themselves in the group, similar to what Kim et al. (2012) point out (*see section 3.3*). The scholars found that emotional support is what the members are searching for in virtual communities, thus this explains why the members also tend to react in an emotional manner and share several personal thoughts. On the other hand, the emotional support is sort of being required through the rules that have been posed upon the members; therefore one must be careful whether this emotional support is provided by choice or if the members feel that it is their obligation to provide it. Moreover, as indicated in section 3.2 the social identity is derived from the functionality of the group. The functionality of a group is closely connected with advantages and support that members gain from the group (Hogg and Abrams, 1988) and that is reciprocity (*see section 3.2 and 3.4 for comparison*).

In order to demonstrate this emotional and success focusses behavior of the members I am going to analyze rather briefly three weight-update posts.

One woman says that it is day 21 of her challenge and that she is happy about having lost 3.8 kg. The comments encourage and praise her. Again, this clearly alludes to the body-image since it makes her happy that she lost 3.8 kg and assumedly more satisfied with her body (*for more information on body image see section 3.5*).

Additionally, in a second post a woman shares her success with others and gets appreciation from other challengers. Her post says that it is day 17 of her challenge and that this is the point where she achieved the lowest weight in the whole challenge since day 1. She also adds the achievement of her husband to the post. Furthermore, she reports that she only drove 50 km by car in the last week whereas she rode her bike to work and get groceries on a daily basis (40 km). She ends her post in saying that the other challengers should cheer up and not lose heart. The reactions on her post are all similarly encouraging and motivating to not stop the challenge. Even more detailed is the post by another challenger, describing every inch that got less on different parts of her body.

She calls this post a progress report which sounds rather formal and then adds what she lost, that is for instance 1,7% less body fat, 2 cm less on her thighs and so on. The comments are again encouraging and also some challengers add that they still 'have a lot to do' since they for instance lost 'only' 5 kg.

The posts about these weight losses are frequently found within the group. It is noteworthy though, that these exact measurements are only being presented by female challengers. Male challengers instead do not explicitly utter how and when they lost weight but rather post before and after pictures of their upper body parts; the main goal of the male challengers is, to form their muscles into a six-pack. The weight posts are mostly accompanied by emotional utterings about positive feelings (happiness) but also negative feelings appear. For instance, one woman complains about her laziness and asks for tips on how to get motivation for sports and fitness. Also, some challengers complain that they feel tired and at the same time are too comfortable to change this but only share negative feelings in the group. It appears as if they are looking for excuses within the reciprocal behavior of others in order to justify their laziness.

Finally, drawing from this community and communication aspect, the challengers have one thing in common: They share what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) call the core commonalities of a virtual community, since they have some shared rituals, for instance the regular work-out but also the food, and most importantly they value the responsibility they have towards others (*see section 3.2 for more information on core commonalities*). This factor is made sure through the rules but also is it observable when analyzing the content that whatever is being posted, the challengers want to please other challengers and never attract attention through negativity or worse through quitting the challenge. The only negativity is to be found in the posts that display some laziness and a lack of discipline. The reactions towards these negative posts are rather interesting: other members do not tolerate negative posts but tend to react rather aggressive and utter intolerance for those members who do not find the challenge as successful and satisfying. This may be due to what was pointed out to be the indicators for a growing community (*see sections 3.2 and 3.3 for comparison*). The indicators such as commonalities, sharing emotions and supporting through this behavior, reciprocal behavior and identification with the community through achieving goals and expressing motivation are not given if a negative comment is being uttered. Thus, if these criteria are not being fulfilled one must argue that the community growth is being endangered and thus this explains the reaction of the other members (which could be both conscious and unconscious). However, possible discussions of these results are pointed out in the discussion section at a later point in this paper (*see section 6 for discussion*).

5.4 Culture and Social Identity in the 'Bootcamp'

In this section I will analyze the data with regards to certain cultural factors and the connected social identity, but also investigate whether there exists an intercultural community approach within the community at all. I am aware though that I covered social identity in the above sections partly, when analyzing the importance of weight loss and the connected self-esteem suggested by Huang et al. (2007) and

Hildmann's profile and the connected image that he wants to display (*see section 3.5 for more information on body image*).

However, social identity is not only linked to self-esteem but also to other paradigms such as ethnicity, gender and culture. As Gudykunst and Kim (1997) point out, cultural and ethnic identities are the most important ones in the intercultural communication approach (*see section 3.4*). Considering the vegan for fit challengers it must be mentioned that Hildmann himself has a Turkish-German nationality, living in Germany. His social identity is therefore possibly connected with a Turkish background and connected values, norms and beliefs, for instance if he is Islamic he would not consume pork, Buddhists avoid beef and so on (Pensel 1998) (of course, Hildmann does not consume any meat at all). Therefore one must argue that a certain intercultural background is given from the beginning and may lead to polarized communication (*see section 3.4 for more information on polarized communication*).

Given that the vegan for fit community, that is the main group "Vegans for fit" on Facebook has approximately 12000 community members, there are probably various cultures and ethnicities combined. However, one cannot detect any cultural differences within the content analysis that grasps attention. Objectively appears the situation to be that these aspects do not play an important role within the community, that is, heritage appears not to be a constant here. Rather do the rules that go along with the community imply, that every challenger is equal and differences are not a topic to discuss and do not matter. This might, however, have to do with what has been discussed in the previous section (negativity is not tolerated, *see section 5.3 for comparison*).

The only constants that appear to matter in the challenger's context and with that within the community are weight, level of fitness and level of food consumption. But never within the whole time frame that I investigated, have cultural issues been discussed (at least not in the open Facebook community for everyone to observe or in the vlogs and blogs I considered). It could be though that the members understand that ethnicity and cultural heritage are not important in this matter that all community members have the same goals and want to achieve the same lifestyle and thus, these discussions are being avoided. Though not due to a possible conflict of interest as Buber (1965) would argue, but rather due to the fact that the seven principles by Gudykunst and Kim (1997) are being applied, which are (1) be committed, (2) be mindful, (3) be unconditionally accepting, (4) be understanding, (5) be concerned for both ourselves and others, (6) be ethical, (7) be peaceful (*see section 3.4*). Granted, these seven principles are also obliged through the rules that have been established for the group but also do the seven principles sort of reflect the rules in only different words (*for explanation of the seven principles see section 3.4*). Therefore, an intercultural communication approach has been taken, probably unknowingly, in order to create a calm and ordered atmosphere within the community. First of all, in the context of the challenger's community the principle 'be committed' applies through the willingness of everyone to be determined in the challenge and to commit to

not eating meat and only consume vegan food. Secondly, 'be mindful, understand and be concerned for both ourselves and others' alludes to the rule to look around for others, help other challengers and be honest to others and oneself as well. The principle 'be unconditionally accepting' is not being displayed in the sense that Gudykunst and Kim (1997) prefer it, that is, that a person must accept other persons unconditionally as they are. However, one could assume that this is given in the first place since this is a value that everyone should follow. Also, concluding from the rules 'be loyal towards yourself and others' and 'be respectful with each other, avoid arguments' one can assume that this principle is unknowingly met as well. Finally, the principles 'be ethical' and 'be peaceful' are included within the same above mentioned rules as well, displaying an overall peaceful und respectful atmosphere that is being requested.

Drawing from these findings, one could assume that the seven principles do not only find their fulfillment in explicit intercultural communities but also in communities, where strangers are communicating with each other. That is exactly what Gudykunst and Kim (1997) call the intercultural universals, working within every given communication context between strangers (*see section 3.4*). Thus, cultural diversity is not explicitly found in this group. However, considering the number of members, one could assume to have found a community where different cultural backgrounds are given. Still, apparently in this context they do not come to light, since all members of this community are voluntary members who took the decision to enter the group but never were forced to do so. The social identities in this community are formed by the rules that the community lives by, since they are all challengers with the same goals and wishes. Additionally, the challengers form their identity through the new body images they try to achieve and assumedly through the team-spirit of the community. Some community members support their membership through tattoos that display a "V" for vegan for fit, which is apparently another form of identity forming, and additionally a form of the extended-self by Belk (1988) (*see section 3.5 for more information on the extended-self*). Another marker of the challengers is the 'v' they form with their fingers (*see figure 2 and figure 3*)



Figure 2



Figure 3

Finally, there is one intercultural aspect that is obvious. As previously mentioned Hildmann is of Turkish-German nationality, thus he is being supported by Turkish media as well (see figure 4)⁷.



Figure 4

⁷ <http://www.hurriyet.de/haberler/magazin/1387935/vegan-beslenerek kilo-verdi>

Additionally, he recently started to let his book translated into different languages around the globe, aiming for the international success. However, this intercultural aspect does at this point of the thesis not influence the community in Germany but will lead to further research pointed out in a later section of this thesis, the conclusion (*see section 7*).

6 Conclusion

At this point of the thesis I must look back at all the findings and the starting point, the introduction. So *how* does Attila Hildmann form a new image of veganism? First of all I found that he uses the new media as a marketing tool, engaging successfully with his community and thus being authentic for “generation y” that is capable of the new media. Moreover it is clear that he works within the mass media stream, supporting the stereotype of a young, male who is strong and fit to be considered successful and worthy to strive for. Since identity construction plays an important role within a whole life and within adolescence his concept finds a lot of followers, who strive to form their body image into the norm. Hildmann works with a marketing tool that has been successful over years: a key to become thinner and thus more beautiful and acceptable. Seeing it like this, one could harshly argue that he is just another marketer who tries to sell a diet to people who are not happy and satisfied with their bodies. However, he does support something else as well: Clearly he spreads veganism as a lifestyle, just as pointed out by Cherry (2006) (*see section 1*), but with this lifestyle he and those who follow this lifestyle protect animals from being agonized and held in captivity. Considering the current western market meat consumption must be reduced due to the climate, world hunger and poverty, water and resource consumption are closely connected with this issue (Safran-Foehr, 2010). From this point of view it does not matter why a person chooses to become vegan but rather the fact what impact this has on the environment and humanity (*see section 1*).

During the analysis I also realized what impact a community can have on individuals, that is, people who might not even have been interested in veganism before start to think about their consumption habits and reach people all over the country with this idea. Hildmann even had two whole villages that did the challenge and succeeded. The spirit within this challenge that delights the individuals appears to be outstanding, carrying whole villages and groups of people; it almost appears like an enthusiastic phenomenon with a community that grows daily. One could claim that the spirit of the community, the solidarity, is the reason for the individuals to forget about cultural issues such as ethnicity and gender; this is however, only an assumption which must be considered carefully.

Winding up the conclusion, I wish to argue that the question of the roles of identity construction, community and culture are an important issue within this scope of research and should be elaborated on in further investigations. To say the least, these are key components for researching this issue, which should be extended by two other key components, that is gender and sexism. Finally, Hildmann plans on publishing a

second book in October 2013, called “vegan forever young” which will have its focus on staying young and beautiful with the help of a 60-day challenge. The promise of this book is just another great opportunity to draw comparisons but also to investigate the oldest dream within humanity, that is, the fountain of youth and thus its impact on modern society. At a first thought this book appears to be utopian and escapist and thus, not a goal humanity should strive for in times of much more significant issues such as climate change and nuclear phase-out. Because what is a fountain of youth worth it if you have no planet to enjoy it on?

7 Reflections and Implications for Further Research

The following section shall give an overall reflection on the thesis as well as implications for further research. First of all the research was initialized by subjective impressions that I had deriving from online articles but also from recognizable changes in my environment, that is the openings of vegan grocery stores, vegan restaurants and other localities. Though the findings did in a way present what I expected I gained a much deeper insight into the community that I have been analyzing and the way it works. The important roles that identity construction and social identity have in such communities were rather unexpected in the beginning of this thesis. The fact that the brand the community is built around is Attila Hildmann was not expected either.

Thus, one finding is rather significant in this context: As indicated earlier (*see section 5.2 and 5.3*) the mass media do play an important role in the way body images are being formed and made popular, even appear to be an important matter in a lifetime. The analysis shows that Hildmann who has been part of the society in which mass media provide the norm, has become part of these mass media. Instead of supporting different body types he even expands the picture of a ‘perfect’ male body. Though he pretends to have health as his foremost goal he adds to the mass media that spread exact this body type as the perfect and norm-fitting body. Thus one must argue when considering the findings that through his book and the challenge Hildmann adds to the general belief that only beautiful people can be successful and on top of that that being beautiful, strong and fit is the norm that everyone should strive for in society. Additionally, since the theory points out that body image and self-esteem are closely connected, I found that Hildmann supports this theory strongly and thereby creates and expands the image of the perfect body and the body as a lifetime project (*see section 3. for more information on body image*). But even more, Hildmann determines what a masculine body should look like (*see section 5.2*) and which characteristics are masculine. With these claims and arguments Hildmann goes into the direction of not tolerating a male body that does not look masculine or rather hazards a definition of what is masculine and spreads this as a form of a brand in society. This alludes to what one calls “sexism” which consequently does not leave room for any other body types being considered as beautiful and leaves now allowance for beauty that has nothing to do with the picture of mass media. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, sexism is defined as “behavior,

conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex" (2013). Thus, this is exactly what Hildmann does when he draws the line between masculinity and strong muscles (*see section 5.2*). In contrast to the general belief that sexism affects only women it clearly also affects men in daily life (Benatar, 2011), that is for instance the assumption that men need to be strong, fight in wars or should not cry in public. With the pictures of the vegan masculine strong man Hildmann clearly depicts a common stereotype in western society (*see section 5.2*).

Considering the method this research has been led by (*see section 4*), I must argue that for the scope of this paper it is quite reasonable to conduct a qualitative content analysis. However, one could have gained an even deeper insight into the community through conducting qualitative interviews, even narrative interviews. Interviews could have led to a more profound and honest picture of the challenger and could have revealed more personal information beyond the challenge and the motivation for the challengers. However, the reason for not choosing these methods was due to a limited time frame and the vast content that was found in the internet, as well as the quality of the content. That is, the challengers already describe their emotions and experiences online in very detail, partly in form of video diaries, which enabled me to conduct a solid content analysis (*see section 5*). Additionally, as the researcher I was also more interested in looking at the social media communication since the internet is a space that is rather new within research. Moreover, the theoretical section (*see section 3*) of this thesis was quite supportive for the findings, since they were found within the analysis and thus have been acknowledged. One aspect though has not been fulfilled or found acknowledgement within the analysis, that is, the intercultural community approach. In order to use this theory more effectively one should have conducted interviews and asked cultural specific questions and on top of that interview individuals with a different cultural background who are not necessarily German.

Thus, reviewing the theory and considering the findings one could argue that a theory within gender and culture would have been reasonable to establish. Though, a focus on sexism within society and mass media would have set the focal part, that is community and social identity, slightly different but not less scientific. Other than that, a sexism theory would set the focus rather up-to-date since sexism is being discussed a lot lately by the media and society in Germany.

Concluding from these two aspects one would have an insightful social field work instead of relying on written words and contents. The human being *behind* the words and the behavior would have been able to be understood in a more profound way, which is being indicated by an interpretive humanistic approach. However, the content analysis is still a very important research method that has created a base for further research within different focuses.

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Appendix A

Transcript Video 1

Transcript

- 1 Hallo ihr Lieben, ich möchte euch nur kurz ein kleins Update geben zu meinen Gewicht.
- 2 Eeeh ich weiß, normalerweise sollte man sich so schnell noch nicht wiegen und eh messen, aber ich
- 3 hab's jetzt dennoch getan weil ich das Gefühl hatte mein Bauch ist ein bisschen dünner geworden
- 4 und ich habe tatsächlich zwei Kilogramm abgenommen obwohl wir jetzt gerade erst an Tag 5 sind!
- 5 Und da bin ich wirklich sehr sehr glücklich darüber eeeh ich hab mich echt gewundert, dass das so
- 6 schnell geht, weil ich ja jetzt nicht so viel Übergewicht habe und normalerweise geht das dann ja
- 7 schleppender wenn ihr nicht so viel' Pfunde zu verlieren habt.
- 8 Und ja – meine Vermutungen sind einfach, dass es daran liegt, dass ich mehr trinke, weil ich sonst
- 9 sehr, sehr wenig trinke und mein Körper halt sich entwässert.
- 10 Und außerdem liegt es denke ich mal auch daran, dass ich frühstücke und abends die Kohlenhydrate
- 11 weglassen und eben diese ganzen Fertigprodukte und Zucker und sowas und ich bin einfach nur sehr
- 12 glücklich, dass das gut geklappt hat.
- 13 Und ich hoffe das ist für euch vielleicht auch ne kleine Motivation dass ihre eure Challenge jetzt
- 14 macht wenn ihr vielleicht das Buch zuhause liegen habt und aber noch nicht angefangen habt
- 15 und...ja...
- 16 Wie gesagt
- 17 ich hab jetzt zwei Kilo abgenommen in vier Tagen.
- 18 Ich hab ja immer gesagt ich schwanke zwischen 66 und 68 Kilogramm
- 19 Das liegt normalerweise daran, wenn ich so meine Phasen habe.
- 20 Also Phasen sind in dem Sinne dass ich denke ‚Oh mist ich muss jetzt sofort abnehmen‘ und dann

- 21 höre ich einfach auf zu essen und esse so gut wie gar nichts mehr und dann wiege ich irgendwann
- 22 halt nur noch 66
- 23 und das war bisher das niedrigste Gewicht was ich hatte aber dann auch nur Phasenweise
- 24 das ging dann immer wieder schnell hoch weil es ja nicht gesund war einfach nichts mehr zu essen.
- 25 Ehh und jetzt hab ich's halt geschafft ohne zu hungern oder so ich hab genug gegessen
- 26 Und ich fühl mich wirklich gut und ehm
- 27 Das find ich total motivierend und das...pusht mich jetzt noch ein bisschen weiter zu machen
- 28 Und auch mehr Sport zu machen und sowas
- 29 Also: Macht eure Challenge
- 30 Versucht es einfach
- 31 Es eehe geht bestimmt gut
- 32 Also bei mir hat's jetzt wirklich gut geklappt und ich wünsche euch ganz viel Erfolg.
- 33 Am Wochenende wirds dann ein anderes Video geben.
- 34 Ich konnte jetzt nicht mehr warten – ich musst es euch jetzt kurz sagen -und ehm ja...dann sehnen
- 35 Wir uns am Wochenende mit einem anderen Video
- 36 Tschüüüs.

Rough translation of some parts

(lines 2-6) I know it is only day five and I shouldn't have lost any weight yet. However, my stomach felt so flat so I was curious whether I already lost some weight [...] and I did lose already 2 kilograms and I am really, really happy about that [...] though I am not really overweight.

Appendix B

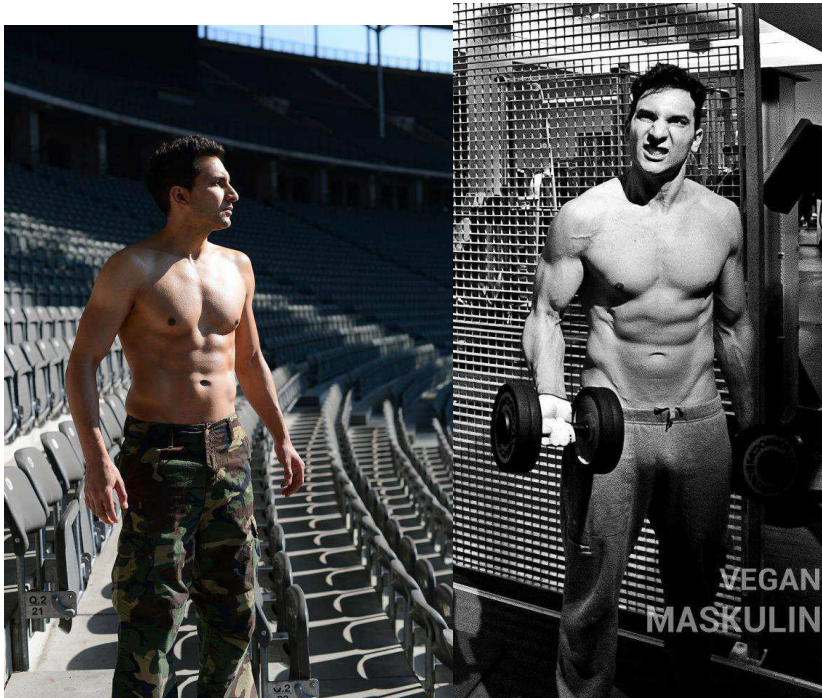
Principles of the challenger group original (German language)

- Loyal sein gegenüber anderen Challengern
- Teamgeist zeigen und für Schwächere da sein
- Ehrlich sein zu sich selbst und den anderen
- Respektvoll miteinander umgehen, Streit vermeiden
- Keine Bilder/Videos in denen Tiere abgeschlachtet werden
- Sich gegenseitig motivieren
- 30 Tage souverän bleiben gegen alle Besserwisser dieser Welt
- Niemals aufgeben
- Tierischen Nahrungsmitteln und industriellen Produkten entsagen
- Challenger vernetzen sich
- Vorher- und Nachher-Fotos machen! Wenn Ihr die ersten Unterschiede seht, wird es Euch zusätzlich motivieren. Wir freuen uns, wenn Ihr die Bilder mit uns teilt

Appendix C

Data Collection (images only)





vor 8 Minuten

99+ 20+ 1

und ... 20+

ter gefällt dein Link.

Antwort verfassen ...

Attila Hildmann

achte ich nicht drauf bro...hauptsache bio und vegan. keine synthetischen eiweißshakes, keine steroide/anabolika. hartes training ist der beste shake! pump it!

01:21

Wollte mal danke sagen für all die Inspiration. Hab insgesamt 23 Kilo abgenommen und du warst mir immer eine Hilfe dabei weiter zu machen, if you want something go get it! . Angefangen beim Schwabbelbauch bald ist das Sixpack definiert und im neuen Jahr kommt das Eightpack! Von wegen Eiweißmangel!

Ich glaube nicht nur das wir die Welt verändern können, sondern das wir es schon längst tun. Heute lecker vegan gekocht morgen und übermorgen gehts weiter. Kurz: Es ist als ob Tupac und Biggie ne fette Party feiern. Meine Familie freut sich über die leckeren Rezepte und irgendwie war dies das erste Weihnachten an dem wir uns nicht alle gestritten haben. Aber jetzt bin ich von der Grüntee-Granate und Matcha Horai so gepusht das ich keine Minute still liegen kann und lieber noch ne Runde Fight Club schaue und Liegestütze mache bis ich dann doch irgendwann müde bin. Du weißt wie das ist. 24 Stunden Tag, 18 Stunden richtig Power, 6 Stunden schlafen 😊

Wünsche dir und deiner Familie frohe vegane Weihnachten. Ich finde es ist das größte Geschenk wenn die Familie hinter einem steht.

Peace!

P.s. hoffe ich treffe dich mal wollte schon immer mal Armdrücken gegen dich machen. 😊

Antwort verfassen ...

Re: Faszination.

Ich möchte zum Thema Faszination auch etwas schreiben!

Ich finde bei jedem Wort, bei jeder Zeile die man liest, meint man Attila hinter einem zu spüren. Als würde er einem den Rücken stärken. Ich habe, nachdem ich die Texte gelesen habe, nicht einmal daran gezweifelt es nicht zu schaffen! Immer wieder lese ich diese Zeilen und merke wie mich die Motivation in Form von Gänsehaut überkommt. Leute, der Kopf ist euer Schachtfeld, Arsch hoch und jeder der zweifelt muss sich nur frei machen und sich ganz darauf einlassen... dem "Tropf man durch den Tag" wo wurde diese Challenge schon immer zu einem gehören.... Danke Attila.... das ist für MICH Faszination!

So, das musste jetzt mal gesagt werden....

Antwort verfassen ...

Vor zwanzig, dreißig Jahren gab es die ersten Kriegsdienstverweigerer. Die wurden mit so blöden Fragen genervt, wenn jetzt einer deine Frau vergewaltigt, erschießt du den dann? Heute als Veganer, wirst du gefragt, ob du im Extremfall auch Fleisch essen würdest. Heute gibt es keine Wehrpflicht mehr. Die Exoten von damals haben es geschafft, durch Hartnäckigkeit und Überzeugung. In zwanzig Jahren gehen wir zum MCAttilaKing und essen etwas veganes und heute haben wir viel bessere Möglichkeiten Informationen via facebook usw zu verbreiten zu multiplizieren. Wir brauchen keine Handzettel mehr zu verteilen. Einfach alle veganen Postings teilen. Dann erreichen wir viel mehr wie früher die Zivis. Wir können jeder die Welt ändern und den Tieren die gleichen Rechte zugestehen wie uns selbst. Da die Welt noch steht bzw. sich dreht, fangen wir damit an.

Gefällt mir nicht mehr · Kommentieren · Beitrag folgen · vor 11 Stunden

wieder fit für den Kampfsport zu werden. Seitdem trainiere ich am Eisen und seit kurzem lerne ich zusätzlich Gewichtheben. Es macht mir riesigen Spaß und ich musste mich bisher noch nicht extra zwingen oder motivieren, um zum Training zu gehen. Das Gefühl, etwas schweres gehoben zu haben finde ich ganz großartig. So primitiv es klingt, aber es macht mich glücklich. Ich nehme auch viel für alle anderen Lebensbereiche aus dem Training mit. Jetzt weiß ich, dass ich viel mehr schaffen kann, als ich es mir je zugetraut habe. Wenn ich beim Kniebeugen denke „Oh Gott, ist das schwer, das schaff ich nicht!“ und mich dann aber zusammenreiße, gehen plötzlich doch noch 3-5 Wiederholungen. Das ist auch beim Lernen so, oder wenn ich eine Rede halten muss und denke „Bin ich nervös, das wird nie was!“, dann denke ich an die Kniebeuge und dann geht alles ganz leicht und ich bin die Coolness in Person. Es ist eben eine Kopfsache, man ist so stark, wie man sich fühlt.

vor 2 Minuten

Lieber Attila,

Ich möchte mich an dieser Stelle bei dir bedanken... Ich lebe schon seit 2 Jahren vegan, warum ich überhaupt erst auf deine Seite kam... Trotzdem:

Ich leide seit Jahren unter einer Autoimmunkrankheit, die mich immer wieder schwächt. Ich liege dann Tage lang im Bett und kann mich vor Schwäche kaum bewegen. Eigentlich habe ich das immer einfach so hingenommen. So auch die letzten 2 Wochen.

Dann sah ich jeden Tag deine Videos, und auch Fotos. Ein Foto war dabei, von einem Mann mit nur einem Bein, der gekämpft hat und schwer trainiert hat. Darüber hattest du einen Satz "Was ist deine Ausrede?"

Dieser Satz war lange in meinem Kopf. Nun lag ich also die letzten 2 Wochen im Bett und hatte mich eigentlich meinem "Schicksal" ergeben.

Immer wieder kam mir dein Satz in den Kopf... und dann plötzlich war es soweit. Ich stand einfach auf und dachte "Mein Körper macht was ICH ihm sagt, es gibt keinen der es schaffen kann, nur du selbst". Ich war spazieren, einkaufen und habe meinen Tag genossen. Es war anstrengend, aber ICH HABE ES GESCHAFFT!

Ich bin über die Grenze meines Körpers und weiß jetzt, ich bin auf dem Weg zurück ins Leben. Denn ICH kann es schaffen. Für diese Erkenntnis DANKE ich dir von Herzen!

LG

 Vielleicht fang ich nach meinem Abi auch an :)
Seitdem ich jeden morgen die Bilder seh die du postest bekomme ich so gut wie nichts mehr runter, weil mich non stop der Gedanke quält der Hersteller könnte irgendwas mit Tierversuchen was zu tun haben...

vor etwa einer Stunde · Gefällt mir nicht mehr ·  1

 Heute mit meiner Stufe und Lehrern im Schauspielhaus gewesen.
Ein Lehrer: "Theresa, kennst du eigentlich diesen Attila irgendwas? Den Veganer?"
Eine Lehrerin: "Der der jetzt IMMER im Fernsehen ist?"
Ich: "Ja, Attila Hildmann. Den kenn ich zufällig schon..." :D
Der Lehrer: "Der ist total cool. Hab ihn beim Vorkoster gesehen. Ich dachte mir so, was ein netter, frischer Junge! Der sieht überhaupt nicht wie ein Veganer aus. Einfach sympathisch und jung!"
Hab ihm dann erstmal alles mögliche von Attilas Büchern, der Challenge etc. erzählt und die anderen Lehrer waren auch total begeistert. Fazit = auf dem Abiball wollen sie einen großen veganen Tisch mit Essen, auch mit Attilas veganer Bolognese.
Hahahah! :D Vegan rocks! ;D In diesem Sinne: Gute Nacht! :)

Gefällt mir · Kommentieren · Beitrag folgen · vor 5 Minuten

vor 4 Minuten · Gefällt mir ·  3

 das erinnert mich an zwei geschichten von einer Freundin die in der meyerschen arbeitet: Nach der wdr Sendung letzters mit Attila, rief ihr Vater an und meinte er wollte jetzt mehr vegetarisch essen und hätte da ein tolles rezept für sie (sie selbs list veganerin und bis jetzt fand er das total seltsam). und 1-2 Tage später fragt eine ältere frau sie auf der arbeit "ich will ein kochbuch mit tofurezepten! Hab die sendung mit björn freitag gesehen.." .. :D .. die welt verändert sich bereits!!!

vor 3 Minuten · Gefällt mir nicht mehr ·  4

Schreibe einen Kommentar ...

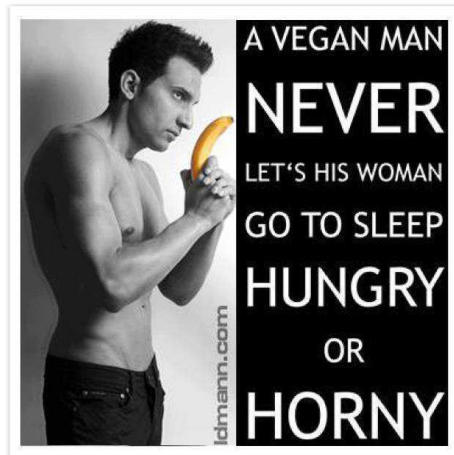
 Attila, mein Sohn (?) hat mir vorhin seine "Bauchmuskeln" gezeigt und dann dein Profilbild gesehen. Ich musste es ihm dann in Groß zeigen.
Habe ihm dann deine vorher/nachher Bilder gezeigt und ein blöchen was dazu erklärt. Er meinte dann "Haha ich will nix mehr vom Tier essen. Mag lieber noch mehr Muckis so wie der Attila da kriegen." :D

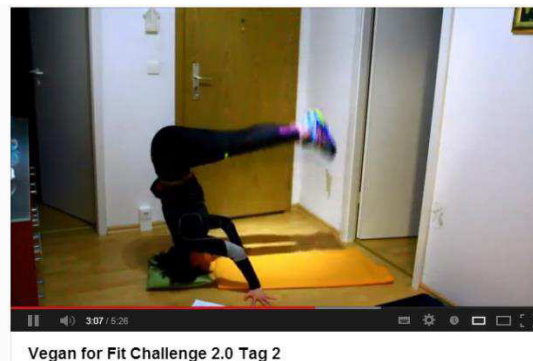
Zum Glück ist er auf einem guten Weg dahin. Er macht 2x die Woche Karate bei einem super Trainer und hat für sein Alter im Vergleich zu seinen Kumpels ordentlich Muskeln.

Gefällt mir nicht mehr · Kommentieren · Beitrag nicht mehr folgen · vor 23 Minuten

 Dir,  gefällt das.

Schreibe einen Kommentar ...





Vegan for Fit Challenge 2.0 Tag 2



Healthy Snack with Red Beet - Carpaccio recipe - cooking with Attila

The screenshot displays two YouTube channel pages side-by-side. The left page is for 'TheFreshVegan', featuring a video titled 'Healthy Snack with Red Beet - Carpaccio recipe - cooking with Attila'. Below the video, a list of other videos is shown, including 'Vegan For Fit Challenge - Tag 1', 'Vegan for Fit Challenge - Tag 2.4', 'Vegan for Fit Challenge - Tag 5.8', 'Vegan for Fit 2 - FMA Einkauf & Vorräte', '[Tips & Tricks] Vegane Hautpflege für starkes Bindegewebe', 'Vegan For Fit - 30 Tage Challenge (Vorher, Ziele, Update)', 'Vegan for Fit - Challenge - Tag 30 von 30 Tagen - Challenger Ben(jamin)', 'Vegan for Fit - Challenge Tag 7', 'Follow Me Around Tag 9+10 - Vegan for Fit Re-Challenge - Woche 2 (Folge 3/Teil', and 'Vegan for Fit Challenge Tag 12 von 30 - Stefanie Schmanky'. The right page is for 'RuhrpottVlog', showing a video titled 'Tag 0 - Bestandsaufnahme - Vegan for Fit - 30 Tage Challenge'. Below this, a list of videos from the challenge is displayed, including 'Tag 0,5 - Endlich geht's los! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', 'Tag 30 - Das Finale - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', 'Tag 1 - Aller Anfang ist LECKER! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', 'Tag 9 - die Sache mit dem Verzicht - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', 'Tag 28 - Spiralschneider "Spirelli" von Gefu - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', 'Tag 3 - Ein erstes Tief - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', 'Tag 4 - Überraschung! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', 'Tag 22 - Peta Vegan Probeabo - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge', and 'Tag 21 - Sportskanone?! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge'.

TheFreshVegan 14 Videos 7.964
 Abonnieren 1.341
 39 3

RuhrpottVlog 75 Videos 1.164
 Abonnieren 1.233
 18 0

Vegan For Fit Challenge - Tag 1
 von JessVeganLifestyle
 472 Aufrufe
 15:19

Vegan for Fit Challenge - Tag 2.4
 von JessVeganLifestyle
 106 Aufrufe
 10:04

Vegan for Fit Challenge - Tag 5.8
 von JessVeganLifestyle
 46 Aufrufe
 10:01

Vegan for Fit 2 - FMA Einkauf & Vorräte
 von JessVeganLifestyle
 276 Aufrufe
 10:50

[Tips & Tricks] Vegane Hautpflege für starkes Bindegewebe
 von JessVeganLifestyle
 94 Aufrufe
 7:26

Vegan For Fit - 30 Tage Challenge (Vorher, Ziele, Update)
 von 007morgenslern
 17.201 Aufrufe
 19:03

Vegan for Fit - Challenge - Tag 30 von 30 Tagen - Challenger Ben(jamin)
 von Benjamin Schimpf
 4.183 Aufrufe
 17:24

Vegan for Fit - Challenge Tag 7
 von Schmunzeltee
 898 Aufrufe
 37:34

Follow Me Around Tag 9+10 - Vegan for Fit Re-Challenge - Woche 2 (Folge 3/Teil
 von RuhrpottVlog
 231 Aufrufe
 3:24

Vegan for Fit Challenge Tag 12 von 30 - Stefanie Schmanky
 von Schmanky
 844 Aufrufe
 6:10

Tag 0,5 - Endlich geht's los! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 831 Aufrufe
 8:29

Tag 30 - Das Finale - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 7.990 Aufrufe
 17:07

Tag 1 - Aller Anfang ist LECKER! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 3.801 Aufrufe
 7:34

Tag 9 - die Sache mit dem Verzicht - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 1.186 Aufrufe
 4:16

Tag 28 - Spiralschneider "Spirelli" von Gefu - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 5.114 Aufrufe
 7:16

Tag 3 - Ein erstes Tief - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 2.216 Aufrufe
 4:42

Tag 4 - Überraschung! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 1.470 Aufrufe
 3:51

Tag 22 - Peta Vegan Probeabo - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 2.102 Aufrufe
 6:50

Tag 21 - Sportskanone?! - Vegan for fit - 30 Tage Challenge
 von RuhrpottVlog
 845 Aufrufe
 3:26