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**The Different Shades of Source Credibility:
An Influencing Chain of Fitspiration Imagery on Instagram
Towards a Healthier Lifestyle**

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Abstract

Physical inactivity is an important risk factor contributing to suffering from a broad range of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes. A fruitful way to encourage people, especially the young, to exercise is the use of social media. An emerging trend, particularly among young women, is following fitspiration content on Instagram. A considerable amount of literature has shed light on the dark side of fitspiration, specifically highlighting the negative effects of fitspiration imagery, particularly on females. Recent literature, however, has also underlined its positive effects. Moreover, the *Source Credibility Theory* has been widely applied in the area of social media influencers (SMI). However, research bridging the gap between source credibility and the effectiveness of fitspiration imagery in terms of nudging people towards a healthier lifestyle is scarce. Therefore, to test a proposed influencing chain from source credibility towards a healthier lifestyle, an online survey was conducted in February 2025 with n=186 students from a mid-sized university in Europe using LimeSurvey, by recruiting participants via the crowdsourcing platform Clickworker. The results from SEM, calculated using IBM SPSS AMOS Version 28, emphasize the necessity to differentiate between the three dimensions of Source Credibility, as they have a strong but nuanced impact on *Intention to Exercise* and *Fitspiration Engagement*, at least partially mediated by *Well-being*. Limitations and implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: fitspiration, fitspo, Instagram, well-being, engagement

Suitable Tracks (in our view): Consumer Behaviour and Marketing Research, Special Track Well-Being, Digital Marketing