LAPPEENRANTA-LAHTI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY LUT

School of Business and Management

Master's Programme in International Marketing Management (MIMM)

Brian Simiyu

VISUAL BRAND COMMUNICATION AND USER ENGAGEMENT ON INSTAGRAM

1st Supervisor: Professor Olli Kuivalainen, LUT

2nd Supervisor: D.Sc. Igor Laine, LUT

ABSTRACT

Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology

School of Business and Management

Master's Programme in International Marketing Management (MIMM)

Brian Simiyu

VISUAL BRAND COMMUNICATION AND USER ENGAGEMENT ON INSTAGRAM.

Master's thesis

2020

88 pages, 4 figures, 1 table and 1 appendix

Examiners: Professor Professor Olli Kuivalainen, D.Sc. Igor Laine

Keywords: Engagement, Brand communication, Social media, Instagram, Visual communication.

The aim of this study is to find out what kind of visual brand communication evokes higher engagement of Instagram users and why? This is because, an upsurge of new information and communication technologies has influenced the way people live, more and more consumers are moving towards social media requiring brands to adjust the way they communicate by following consumers to social media. Instagram, an image sharing platform happens to be one of the social media platforms that has seen major success and many brands are using it to communicate and interact with their targeted audiences. For brands to succeed in keeping their customers engaged, they need to stand out from other content in the platform, making it necessary for brands to understand the kind of visual preference their target audience need.

The theory of the thesis was based on existing academic literature of visual communication and of social media with a focus on Instagram while the empirical part of the study was conducted by utilizing qualitative research method. Ten in depth interviews were conducted with users between the age of 21 and 32 in Helsinki, Finland. The results of the study suggested that users preferred to engage with visual brand communication that evoke a connotative association which leads to the development of an emotional reaction in them. Additionally, this kind of content motivated lurkers (passive users) to visibly engage with the brand content.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions.

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The world we live in today has experienced an upsurge of new information and communication technologies has influenced the way people live. It has also resulted to change in market trends and dynamics, requiring company to adjust the way they communicate to their customers to stay competitive (Porter 2001) and has made access to information much easier for people. Currently, there are several sources of information that people are being bombarded with, these include, newspapers, magazines, billboards, televisions and online media. Brands are constantly trying to grab the attention of consumers using targeted ads as a way of communicating their brand messages (Solis 2011). With more and more companies doing this, the amount of noise that consumers are exposed to is enormous making it difficult for companies to get recognized. For a consumer to pay attention to brand content, the content must stand out from all the noise that they are exposed to.

Continuous development in technology has led to introduction to radical changes in ways which brands use to communicate and interact with their stakeholders, social media being the flag bearer. There are several social media platforms available and many more emerging every day, each of them having their own strengths and weaknesses. This means the choice of platform used to convey brand messages maters depending on the goal the message is set to achieve. One of the social media platforms that has been commonly used among brands to convey their messages is Instagram. The platform has established itself as an image sharing service for its users with little focus on texts. Instagram currently has more than 1 billion monthly active users (Maryam 2019) and 500 million daily active users and the number is constantly increasing (Statista 2019). Many brands have created accounts on Instagram due to the huge numbers mentioned above making it an ideal place for companies to communicate their brand messages to its audience.

Originally, Instagram was just a simple image sharing platform for users, however, it has now evolved into a platform offering its users several services like direct messages, online shopping,

advertising just to mention a few but still maintaining core concept as an image sharing platform. The platform has tapped into the world of visual communication, where images are used to tell user stories about their day to day activities. Even though an old concept, visual communication is being utilized by Instagram to enable people share and communicate with each other using images.

Images usually tells more than what texts does, hence the reason why companies are constantly using images to convey their brand massages to consumers. Tools like Instagram have made it even easier for companies to use images to communicate to an even larger audience. The use of images by in brand messages gives the message a background and frame and evokes emotions much easier on viewers (Fahmy, Bock & Wanta 2014; Jamieson, 2007) it is also easier for the viewer to understand the message than the use of text (Alice 2016).

Companies utilize Instagram to tell a larger brand story which is done with the help of other activities executed outside the platform itself. Most brands post pictures of their products on other medias but on Instagram they post personal images such as production behind the scenes, memes, gifs, their products being used in an everyday environment. These kinds of images not only tell a wider brand story but also fit seamlessly with other content from other Instagram users.

Due to the numerous amounts of content that users are exposed to on Instagram, it has become difficult for companies to capture the attention of users and keep them engaged (Sprout Social 2020). Therefore, it has become very crucial for companies to understand the kind of content that their target audience is looking for and is interested in. This way, they can capture the attention of the users and potentially convey their intended message to them. The visual nature of Instagram means that most of the time, the brand message is encoded in the images used. Therefore, it is not only necessary to understand what kind of images and visual compositions capture users' attention but also understand how the visual composition affects how message(s) encoded in the images are interpreted by the users. Therefore, this study is aimed at revealing the kind of visual brand communication that evokes higher engagement of Instagram users and why?

1.2   Research aim and research questions

Instagram as a platform has come a long way from just being a photo sharing services between friends and family to a platform utilized by companies for communication and marketing purposes. The visual nature of Instagram has attracted a huge number of users making it a very ideal channel for companies to share their brand messages. Some companies have experienced a high success from utilizing the platform but most of the companies have not figured out how to navigate, utilize and integrate the platform into their business. As more and more consumers move towards Instagram it has become more crucial than ever for companies to learn how to communicate in the platform.

As more and more companies start using Instagram to communicate their brand messages to their target audience, it has become more crucial than ever to understand what kind of content that users prefer to engage with in the platform. Many companies have Instagram profiles but are struggling to build up their engagement and attracting Instagram users' attention to their content due to several factors.

Instagram users are exposed to so much content at time that it becomes very difficult for companies to get their attention due to the noise the users are exposed to. Due to the visual nature of Instagram, the images used in the posts are the first things that users are exposed to and the visual composition of the images majorly affects whether the users will interact with the content or not. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what kind of visuals users prefer to engage with when viewing brand content on Instagram. Hence this research aims at answering the following research question

1) What kind of visual brand communication evokes higher engagement of Instagram users and why?

The aim for this study to find out the kind of visual brand communication that evokes higher engagement of Instagram users and why. To solve the research questions in-depth individual interviews will be done to collect the data needed for the research. At the end of the research, it should become very clear on the kind of content that users are looking for and interested in. With this knowledge companies can know which kind of visual brand communication they should use to capture the attention of their target audience on Instagram users and potentially convey their intended message to them.

1.3   Literature review

With technology continuously evolving every time, it has made it easier for people to access information both willingly (browsing on the phones or computers) and unwillingly (ads on billboards, social media etc.). It has also made it easier for brand to target consumers through ads that are displayed in several channels. All this has created huge noise and in turn made it harder for brands to grab peoples' attention to their messages. Social media is among those channels that most brands use to communicate and interact with their intended audiences. There are several platforms which brands can choose from like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram and many more.

Instagram has become a very important tool for brands around the world to communicate and engage with their customers. With 1 billion monthly active users (Maryam 2019) and 500 million daily active users (Statista 2019), the platform has made it very easy for brands to get their message to their intended audiences. It has a much higher engagement rate per follower than Facebook which is a platform established long before Instagram (Ryan 2014). Even though the Instagram has been in existence for a while now and most of brands have an account, many businesses are struggling to grab users' attention on the platform and boosting their engagement.

For brands to be able to boost their engagement levels, they need to understand the kind of content that captures users' attention and in turn drives up the engagement levels (Walter & Gioglio 2014). Several researchers have been looking into the topic of consumer engagement in

general and in social media in particular (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Illic 2011; Hollebeek, Glynn& Brodie2014; Rebecca 2016; Elaine & Marie 2018; Solis 2011). In 2014 Winqvist did a research on the visual content of 3 airlines to determine the reasons that cause a post to be popular on Instagram. Based on the conceptual model which was used to explain the number of likes and the number of comments, originally developed by de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2002), he proposes a revised model specifically adapted to Instagram. However, the research only focuses on user actions that can be measured (likes and comments) in the 3 airlines' Instagram accounts but does not provide an explanation as to why the users engaged with the airlines´ content the way they did.

Maria (2015) conducted a research on visual brand communication on Instagram. Even though the topic combined both visual communication and Instagram there are a lot of changes that have occurred on Instagram that calls for another study on this topic. For instance, in 2015 brands could not see the number of lurkers while now they can. Another difference is the functionality of the platform itself, since 2015 Instagram has undergone many changes like introduction of Instagram stories, shopping ability on the platform (Instagram, 2020), these changes might have changed the user behavior and therefore making it necessary to conduct this study.

Based on the results of the literature review (chapter 2 and 3), it seems that most of the research done by earlier researchers on social media has been mostly on strategy and has been very general. For instance, Kohli, Suri & Kapoor (2015); Walter & Giolgio (2018) mostly discussed about brand communication in social media in general. While Fahmy et al. (2016); Jamieson (2010); Smith, Moriarty, Kenney & Barbatsis (2005) researched the general visual communication in social media. From the mentions above and results of the literature review, it can be concluded that these two research streams; visual communication and brand communication, and social have been studied as topics on their own but there has not been a research that studies their combined effect on consumer engagement.

Due to the above mentioned fact, constant change and evolution of social media, and other communication channels, it is important to study visual brand communication on Instagram to

understand what kind of visual communication users prefer to engage with and the reasons behind.

1.4   Theoretical framework

The theoretical research of this study combines two main concepts, visual communication, and social media with a concentration on Instagram. These concepts are discussed in their own and later media combined and the relationship between them outlined thus creating the theoretical base of this research.

The visual communication discussion helps to gain a deeper understanding of how images work and how it affects viewers both connotatively and denotatively (Jamieson 2007). This is done by exploring image composition and image interpretation which occurs when one views an image. Additionally, the discussion covers image aesthetics and visual literacy which covers the ability of users to interpret and decode messages embedded in images.

On the other hand, the subject of social media explores Instagram and discusses brand communication on the platform itself. Furthermore, it covers engagement with lurking included as a form of user engagement. Due to the visual nature of Instagram's content, visual communication is a very crucial factor in determining a brand´s success on the platform, therefore by these two topics are lastly combined to form the theoretical framework is proposed below (Figure 1).
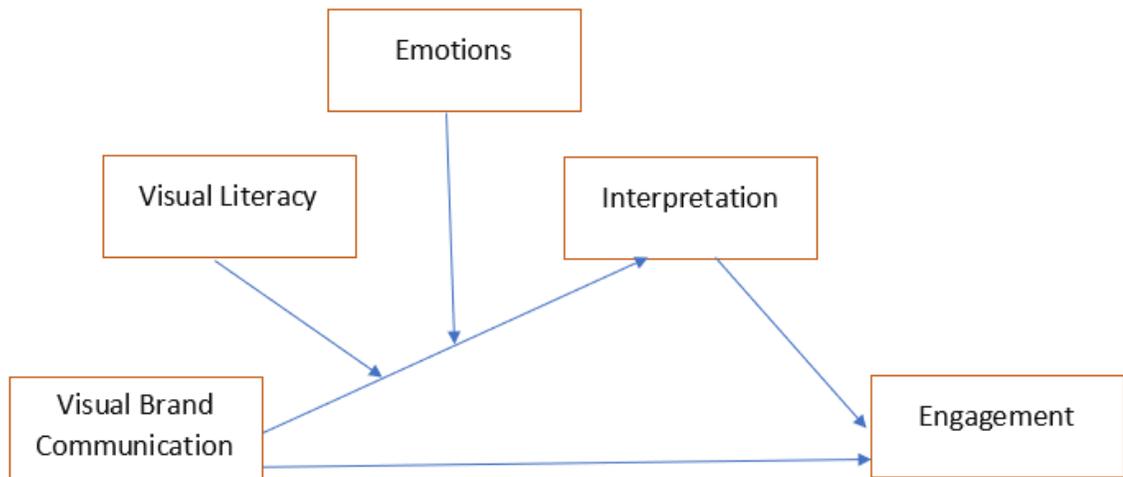
Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the thesis

1.5   Definitions/key concepts

This section presents key concepts used in the research, this is for the purpose of clarifying to the reader what they stand for since some of them are largely unestablished and can be interpreted in different ways.

Visual Brand communication - the transmission of information and ideas using symbols and imagery by a company (Kenneth, Sandra, Keith & Gretchen Barbatsis 2004) to affect how customers view them and their offerings. Additionally, also helps them differentiate themselves from competitors (Cambridge Dictionary Online 2020).

Engagement – in this context of the current study, engagement is referred to social media users interacting with brand content on social media, and is measured through the number of likes, comments, shares, and followers (Simply measured 2019). In this study lurking is also deemed as a form of engagement despite lack of measurability (Chen & Chang 2013).

Interpretation – a person's own understanding of something (Vocabulary.com 2020).

Visual literacy - The ability of users to read, interpret, evaluate, and make of the information embedded in the image (John 2017).

Emotions - in the context of the current research emotion is a subjective state of feeling as result of viewing an image.

Social media - "Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the and the exchange of User Generated Content" (Haenlein & Kaplan 2010 p.61). Companies use social media as a marketing tool to facilitate a two-way communication between them and their customers (Ahlqvist, Bäck, Halonen & Heinonen 2008)

Users - in the context of the current study users will refer to social media users or Instagram users depending on the context in the research.

1.6   Delimitations

This research is set to explore the kind of visual brand communication users desire to engage with on Instagram and understanding the reasons behind why users prefer them. The research will focus on the images used to deliver brand messages instead of the visual aspects of the text used in the caption description (fonts, emojis etc.). Although, Instagram has provided a way which the visual appearance of captions description can be altered to attract users' attention, this aspect will not be covered in the research.

Engagement is a very wide topic which can be studied in different context of different disciplines of academia. However, in this research the focus is engagement on social media specifically on Instagram. To narrow it further, the forms of user engagement considered in this study include following, liking, commenting, sharing and lurking. The linkage of engagement

to other user follow-through activities like purchase intentions, brand loyalty development is also not covered in this research.

Lastly, due to limited budget and time required to finish the research, the respondents chosen for the empirical part of collecting findings for the research are all from Helsinki only. Therefore, this means the results in this research generalization might be limited and may not be applicable to all Instagram users in other geographical locations.

1.7   Research methodology & data collection plan

The study consists of two major parts: theoretical and empirical part. The theoretical section of this study entails a comprehensive literature review that mainly includes academic articles. Since the current study is aimed at understanding the kind of visual brand communication that users prefer to engage with and why, a qualitative approach was selected for the empirical part of the study. Qualitative research is used to describe, understand, and interpret different phenomena or situation (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004), which is the case in this research.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data from the respondents. This was to give freedom to respondents to formulate their own opinions the way they subjectively perceive the topic and for the researcher to learn first-hand from Instagram users about the research matter (Silverman 2011). However, an interview guide was used to steer the interview along and to ensure that no critical matters were left unattended (Patton 2002).

The respondents were chosen through purposeful sampling method. This was to ensure the respondents chosen would provide a great deal of information from which the researcher could learn from (Patton 2002). The sample group was homogenous (with similar characteristics) (Kitzinger 1995; Patton 2002) which was urban Instagram users in Helsinki, Finland between the ages of 21 to 35.

1.8   Structure of the study

The research is divided into 6 main chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which presents the research subject and covers the problem and the aim of the study. Furthermore, it provides a short description of the theory, a summary of the key concepts to be covered and the delimitations that the research will be under.

In chapter 2 the thesis deeply covers the concepts and theories that are applicable to the study. The first section of the chapter mainly mains focuses on the theories and concepts of visual communication while second section covers the subject of social media with an emphasis on Instagram.

Chapter 3 introduces the methodology and data collection plan used in the research. It also covers and argues the validity of how data was collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study with the help of respondent's quotes to help in the illustration process. Chapter 5 uses findings from the empirical part to reflect theories and concepts that were covered in the previous chapters. Lastly chapter 6 addresses the theoretical implication, managerial implications and the limitations and proposal for future research. Below, is a figure illustrating a simple summary of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 1
- **INTRODUCTION**
  - Research goal and research question
  - Literature review and research gap
  - Theoretical framework
  - Definitions and deliminations

Chapter 2
- **VISUAL BRAND COMUNICATION ON INSTAGRAM**
  - Visual communication
  - Social media
  - Visual comuncation on Instagram and user engagement

Chapter 3
- **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**
  - Research context
  - Data collection Methods
  - Data analysis methods
  - Reliability and validity

Chapter 4
- **FINDINGS**
  - Visual brand communication
  - Engagement

Chapter 5
- **DISCUSSION**
  - Visual brand communication
  - Engagement

Chapter 6
- **CONCLUSION**
  - Theoretical contributions
  - Manegeral Implications
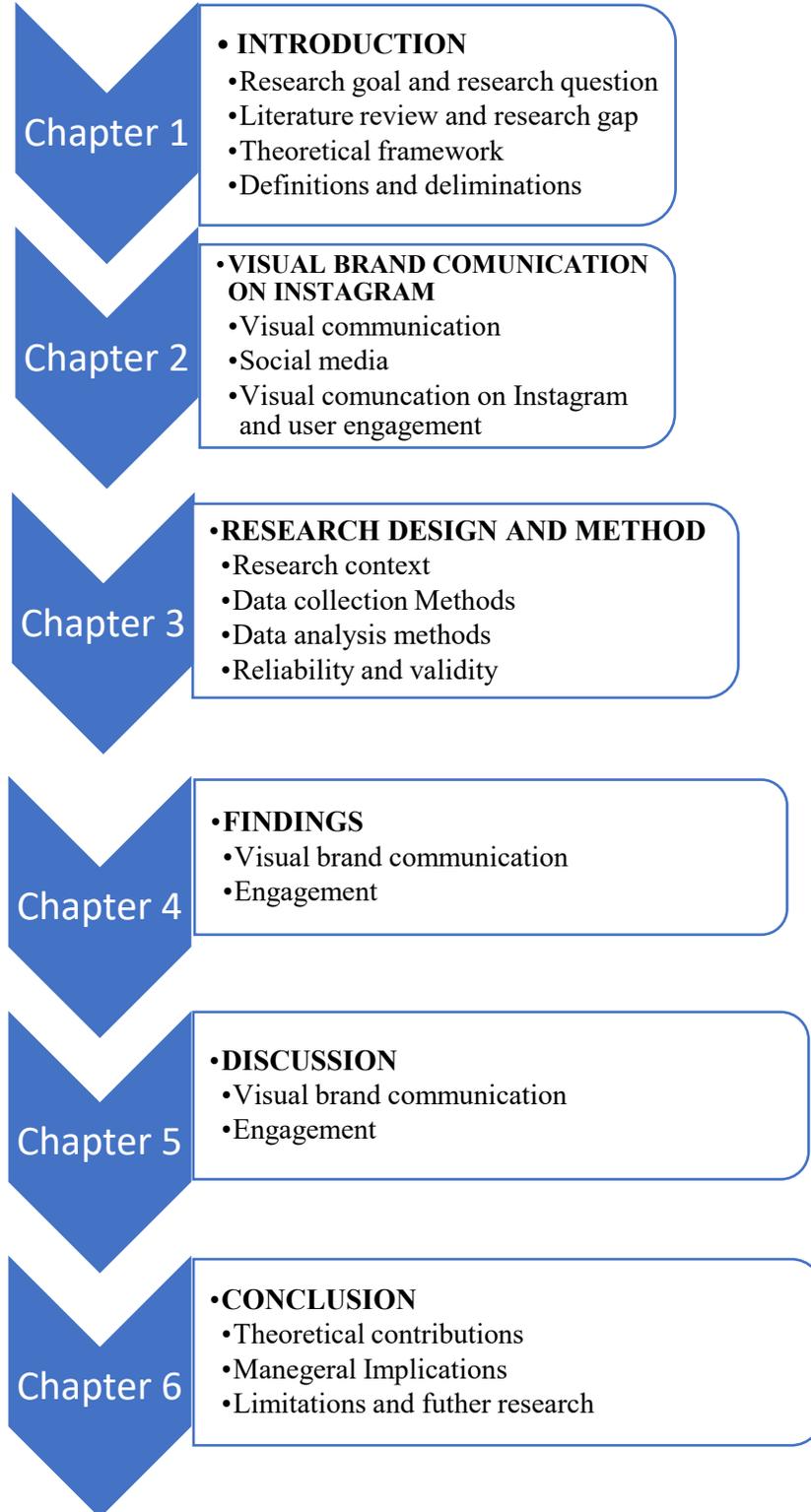 - Limitations and futher research

Figure 2. Structure of the thesis

2 VISUAL BRAND COMUNICATION ON INSTAGRAM

This chapter covers the theoretical aspects of the research by reviewing existing academic literature of visual communication and of social media with a focus on Instagram. First, visual communication will be covered in the sub-chapter 2.1 followed by social media in 2.2. Since these are wide subjects, both topics will be broken down and discussed in smaller segments. Lastly, in sub-chapter 2.3 the different elements discussed in visual communication and social media will be combined and the relationship between each other outlined to allow integration into a theoretical framework.

2.1 Visual Communication

Instagram is a visual tool with a huge number of photos and videos uploaded to the platform every day. Due to this nature of the platform it is essential to gain a deeper understanding on visual communication, specifically how images work and how they affect the viewer. To breakdown the topic of visual communication even further, the topic will be approached through discussing interpretation of images in sub-chapters 2.1.1 and image composition in 2.1.2. This is done to develop a deeper knowledge on the constructs that add up to an image.

Additionally, the topic of aesthetics (judgement of sentiment and taste) which has a huge effect on Instagram users and is always linked to an image (Jamieson 2007) is discussed in chapter 2.1.3 Lastly, visual literacy which entails a concept of how people can become more proficient at deciphering images and messages embedded in them (Fahym et al. 2014) is discussed in chapter 2.1.4

2.1.1 Interpretation of images

When one is viewing an image, information and message(s) both intentionally and unintentionally created by the image creator are conveyed through (John 2017) a process of reading an image (Choon-Lee 2019). This usually causes an affective (emotional) or cognitive (logical) or even both reactions in a person after viewing an image (Sojka & Giese 2006). These

reactions can be different in people since people read images differently due to several factors like culture, social background, personal experience and even attitude (Jamieson 2007 & Smith et al. 2005).

Scientifically, the human brain has the left and the right hemispheres and both have unique methods of processing information (Leo &Terrence 2006). The left hemisphere is more logical, analytical and verbal while the right side is more visual and affective (Dragan, Goran, Jelena & Pavlović 2013). When presented with information both parts of the brain are usually utilized to process it however one hemisphere will be more dominant than the other depending on the kind of information presented (Jamieson 2007; Smith et al. 2005). This is known as brain lateralization and the degree of it is not the same in person.

Additionally, the left side of the brain is considered best for rational thinking and logical skills (Corballis 2014) making it a perfect tool for processing information in sequence and in one step at a time (Jamieson 2007). On the other hand, the right side of the brain is for creative activities and emotional connection (Corballis 2014) which makes it able to take information more holistic and instantaneously (Jamieson 2007). This means that when companies use images to communicate brand messages, consumers can process the information faster as compared to using texts (Jamieson 2007).

People have different cognitive processes on how they gain knowledge and comprehend things (Smith et al. 2005). This affects how individuals can process and remember information they are exposed to and according to research, most individuals are able to do that visually or verbally depending on their cognitive process (Kenda 2019). This means that using visuals to communicate with customers is not always effective but is dependent on the customers' inclinations (Revlin 2013). Therefore, companies should be careful when creating their brand messages and find the most effective way to communicate with its customers (either visually or verbally or a mix of both) due to the existence of customers' inclination around different communication modes (Fahmy, Bock & Wanta 2014).

When viewers are constantly exposed to brand visuals their attitude and perceptions towards the brand may be influenced. This may in turn lead viewers to convert the visual information they are exposed to into beliefs about the brand and what it stands for (Mitchel & Olson 1981). Although companies can influence the belief and brand perception of the consumers, this influence can also be negative if a company is not careful which visuals they use. For a brand to positively influence the consumers' beliefs and perceptions, the consumers must be capable of interpreting the images used to communicate and draw the intended conclusions from them.

When a viewer looks at an image, a perception is created through association to ideas and concepts which the viewer has personally experienced (Smith et al. 2005). This means when people are exposed to the same image, they will interpret it differently due to the difference in personal experiences (Jamieson 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to analyze consumer reactions and engagement after their exposure to company branded images to enable companies find what works best for target group. This analysis enables companies to know different consumer preferences and attitudes which will help the company communicate brand messages with images that consumers understand correctly.

There are not universally decided upon regulations and guidelines on how creators can create, or viewers should interpret images. Most of the times viewers are usually able to decipher messages encoded in images due to natural interpretations and those arising from cultural and natural background that the viewers have been exposed to during their lifetime (Walter & Gioglio 2014). When people are trying to interpret images, denotation and connotation play a role on they are going to understand and pick out the meanings in the images (Fahmy et al. 2014). For instance, on Instagram, Nike posts an image of a sweaty great athlete during a training session wearing Nike gear with the caption "Hard work pays". The denoted aspect of the image would be the gear and the sport the athlete is paying while the connoted aspect would be where the image takes the viewer. This may include the aspect of hard work before success or even the pain which one goes through in life before they succeed. Due to existence of connotation companies cannot be certain how their images will be received by the viewers and what feelings and thought it will evoke in them (Jamieson 2007).

From the discussions above it can clearly be seen that the topic of image perception is quite complicated and not well defined. However, for brand communication, it is very crucial to understand how it works, the effect of visuals on viewers and how culture and individual experiences affect how they interpret an image. Additionally, it can be concluded that no image can be universally interpreted the same way by people who see it, however, culture and society help people to decode the correct intended meaning of the image but with different reaction due to difference in individual experiences.

2.1.2 Image composition

When an image is created, the artist usually tries to infuse the image with different subjects and visual elements inside it to create something that will be understood and arouse emotions and interests of the viewer (Todd 2017). These subjects and visual elements are usually what make up the composition of the image and play a very important role how the viewers will interpret the image created (Smith et al. 2005). Image composition usually helps identify, emphasize, complement, isolate, or highlight the subject that the image creator wanted the viewer to see when they come across an image (Todd 2017).

One of the components of image composition is framing, which detects what is included and what is excluded in an image. It helps to the image creator to focus the viewers' attention towards a certain subject in the image created by manipulating the viewpoint of an image. This in turn affects how the viewer interprets and understands the image (Smith et al. 2005). Apart from framing created by the image creator, there are also social and cultural frames that viewers adopt through their lives which affect the way they see, understand and interpret an image (Jamieson 2007)

Social and cultural upbringing also influences what a viewer focuses on when exposed to an image. Since most humans can only look one way at a time (Herbert 2008), when viewing an image, viewers tend to focus on the main area of the image while the background becomes less important (Jamieson 2007). The main area that a viewer chooses to focus on is partly influenced by the interests, novel concepts and social and cultural frames mentioned above. This means

that when the image composition is clean and clutter-free, viewers can easily focus their attention on the main subject of the image instead of multiple things in it.

Even though the above paragraph shows that creating a clean image helps the viewer to focus easily, using images with irrelevant subject and background noise makes it more natural and easily relatable to viewers since it mimics real life (Smith et al. 2005). This makes the image more relatable and familiar with the viewers thus resulting to them paying more attention to it causing a greater effect on their long-term memory (Rossister 1982). This means when creating images carrying brand messages, companies need to find a balance between the two situations create an image with the maximum effect on the viewers.

The medium which the image is displayed also influences the composition of an image (Fahmy et al. 2014; Jamieson, 2007). This is because each medium has its strengths, and weaknesses and viewers usually have opinions about these mediums therefore a viewer might interpret the same image displayed in different mediums differently (Smith et al. 2014). For example, an image posted on Twitter and Instagram attract different responses since they evoke different emotions (Michelle 2018). Choosing the right medium which will communicate the intended message best is crucial for companies.

The above paragraphs have described image composition and how it influences viewers when exposed to an image. Below is a simplified theoretical framework to summarize and visualize the concepts discussed in the paragraphs above.
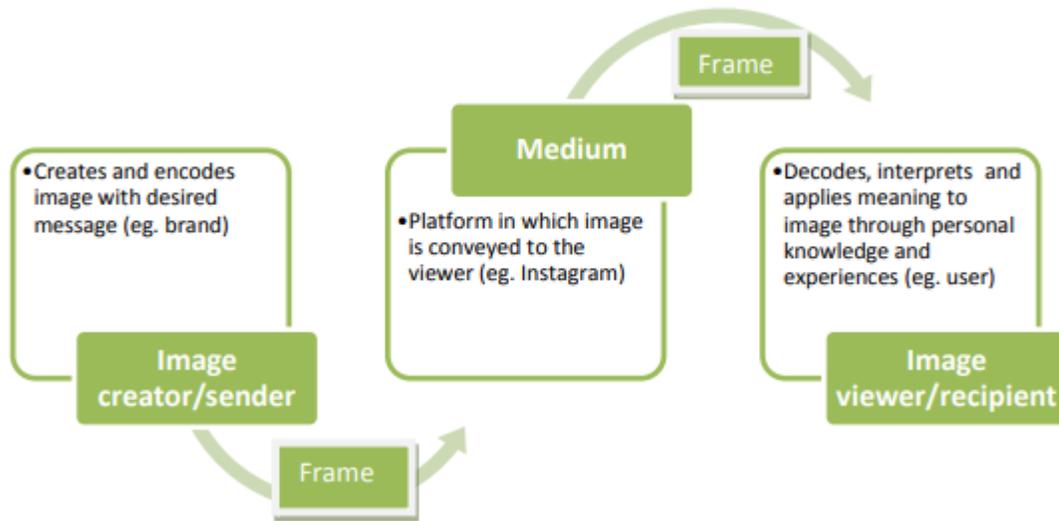
Figure 3. Simplified summary of the important elements of visual communication (Fahmy et al 2014; Jamieson2007 & Smith et al. 2005)

2.1.3   Aesthetics

Aesthetics in this research refers to the principles of the nature and appreciation of beauty in an image. Judging beauty and other aesthetic qualities of an image is however dependent on the viewer making it a very highly subjective subject. This makes it hard to measure the aesthetic value of an image (Datta, Joshi, Li & Wang 2009). Even though there is no universally agreed standard for measuring aesthetics of an image, some images are believed to be more aesthetically pleasing than the others (Arnheim 1974). This means many viewers find the images appealing to their eyes than others.

When judging the aesthetic aspects of an image, it is required that the viewer judges the image for what it is and not what it stands for (Jamieson 2007). Different cultures have different meaning and judgement on what is considered beautiful and different individual have different subconscious preferences on what they consider beautiful (Bao, Fang, Lin, Pöppel, Quan, Wang & Yang 2016). This causes a difference in judgment from one person to another when judging what image is aesthetically pleasing and what is not.

When one looks at an image, a mental form and perception is immediately created in their mind at a subconscious level due to how they feel the aesthetics of the image (Jamieson 2007). This then evokes emotions which are regarded as aesthetic experience (Datta et al. 2009). As stated above, the process of deciphering the image aesthetics is very subjective, meaning when companies use visuals to communicate with their customers on Instagram, the preference will vary among customers. Although some of the images will be aesthetically pleasing to many customers due to the generalizable cultural and societal structures in the interpretation of aesthetics (Arnheim 1974).

The medium in which the creator uses to create and display the image also affects the aesthetics of an image (Jamieson 2007). For instance, on Instagram, some images need to be cropped before they are posted this affects the aesthetics of the image. Additionally, different platforms have different kind of filters that can be used to alter the image thus influencing the aesthetics of the image. However, even though the mediums create some barriers to enhance image aesthetics, image creators' creativity can help enhance the image and make it stand out from the rest of the images available in the medium used to display it. This will improve the chances that the image will engage more viewers, capture their attention and subsequently their interests (Walter & Gioglio 2014).

2.1.4   Visual literacy

When a creator creates a photo or video, usually they want to communicate certain information to people who will view the image. The ability of users to read, interpret, evaluate and make of the information embedded in the image is known as visual literacy (John 2017). Visual literacy is centered on the notion that pictures and videos can be "read", and that message can be passed through a process of reading (Fahmy et al. 2014). This skill or ability equips viewers to comprehend and evaluate the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components in an image (Association of College and Research Libraries 2011).

Since visual literacy is an ability and or a skill, there are ways in which people gain or learn it, however, in the field of academia it has not been entirely agreed upon how users learn to be

visual literate (Fahmy et al. 2014). However, researchers agree that images are more influential than texts (John 2017). When a person sees an image an idea, concept or subject is triggered (Jamieson 2007) resulting to development of emotional responses and prompting imagination prior to logical reasoning (Fahmy et al. 2014). The ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning of the codes in an image, as complemented by the creator, makes for a more visually literate image viewer. (Fahmy et al. 2014; Smith et al. 2005).

Currently, people are constantly bombarded and exposed to images and information constantly from different sources like social media, TV and billboard screens on the street (Choon-Lee 2019). Being able to understand the nature of these images, interpret the message they are conveying, how they influence and how can be enjoyed is essential to all people exposed to the contemporary media ecosystem (John 2017). Due to the huge effect of images on consumers as compared to text, companies are constantly using images on both their traditional and online advertisements. Even though there is a general agreement among researchers that images have effects on consumers, little is known regarding visual communication in an interactive environment (Fahmy et al. 2014).

From the above paragraph it can be concluded that there are still many aspects in the field of visuals which are still unexplored. Due to the rise in the use of social media among people and in companies with the aim of marketing their products, it is important to understand how visuals influence consumers' behavior. That is why this research sets to look at the kind of visual brand content that consumers desire to engage with on Instagram and hopefully bring some insights on these issues from a consumer point of view.

2.2 Social media

Social media is an ever-evolving field due to the constant technological advancements made by the social media companies towards improving the user experience (Aral & Zhao 2019). To get familiar with the current situation of social media, the background of the topic will be covered in the introduction of this chapter. Thereafter, a detailed presentation of what Instagram has to offer will be done in chapter 2.2.2 Brand communication on Instagram, its challenges and opportunities will be covered in chapter 2.2.3 Lastly, Engagement both in social media (in general) and on Instagram (detailed) will be covered in chapter 2.2.4.

In this research context social media is viewed from the definition given by Haenlein and Kaplan (2010, p. 61) that is "*Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the and the exchange of User Generated Content (UGC).*" This means both companies and customers in social media are viewed as users and are both able to consume and create content equally. Brands and normal users go through the same processes regardless to get their content viewed and shared among other users.

The amount people and of time that people have been spending on social media has been constantly on the rise as shown in the graphs in appendix 1 and 2 respectively. This makes social media a very effective and efficient tool for brand to use to create, communicate, deliver value, and exchange offerings to its stakeholders (Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi, Nerur & 2018). Due to technological advancements, opportunities created by social media and easy accessibility to internet by consumers more companies are utilizing social media, it's channels, and software (Solomon & Tuten 2017). However, since there are many companies and other users creating content every second, it has become very difficult for brands to capture the attention of users on social media due to competition from other content available in these platforms (Kang & Kim 2017).

Customers are constantly scrolling up and down looking for relevant content to satisfy their need, for brands to get users to pay attention to their content, they need to understand what their

target audience in the social media platforms are looking for (Alalwan 2018). In this research the focus is on the visual aspect of the images used to communicate the brand messages to users. Visuals are the first things that most users look at in most social media platforms even before reading the text therefore they are a very important part of grabbing users first attention to the content (Choon-Lee 2019).

Royle and Liang (2014) and Gruzd, Jacobson, Mai & Dubois (2018) found social media is widely used in the private sector for communication purposes to facilitate selling and promotion of products and services while the public sector it is used as a tool for information sharing and driving engagement with the users. Usually both private and public organizations utilize relationship marketing strategies to construct long-standing relationships that are reciprocally beneficial for both parties involved (Kang & Kim 2017). There are several social media platforms available but depending on what the organization is aiming to achieve; certain social media platforms are chosen (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). This is because different social media platforms have different feature that makes them unique and better at achieving certain goals (Kang & Kim 2017).

Different customers have different attitudes towards social media marketing thus having different effectiveness on different customers. However, interactivity (Jiang, Chan, Tan & Chua 2010) perceived relevance (Jung 2017), perceived usefulness (Chang, Hung, Cheng & Wu 2015) and organizational reputation (Boateng & Okoe 2015) have an impact on customers' attitude. Therefore, if a customer regards social media advertising to bring value to them, their likelihood to buy targeted products of these advertisements increases (Alalwan 2018).

With more people constantly using social media, more data is created thus creating a huge mass of data which some of it is publicly available. Organizations are utilizing this data to do opinion mining (Gundecha & Liu 2012), create targeted advertisements (personalization) (Sterne 2010) and customer relationship development (Soler-Labajos & Jimenez-Zarco 2016). Organizations collect and analyzes both structure and unstructured data to develop knowledge, patterns and insights which will be used develop guided actions and decisions that can help them reach their business goals and increase their competitive advantage (Gundecha & Liu 2012).

According to Cochrane (2018), personalization and individualization of solutions to customers delivers five to eight times more ROI and can grow sales to more than 10%. Due to this, marketers are constantly utilizing customers' social media data to develop personalized service and experience (Sterne 2010) both in their business operations and their social media content. Apart from utilizing social media data, these platforms provide a tool through which organizations can have a two- way communication with their customers which facilitates the development of strong customer relations (Soler-Labajos & Jimenez-Zarco 2016).

2.2.1 Instagram

Instagram is a free photo and video-sharing social networking service developed by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger (Instagram 2019) but is currently owned by Facebook, Inc. and has about one billion active monthly users, this makes it more popular that Twitter and LinkedIn (HubSpot 2018). The social network lets users to upload photos and videos to the platform, which can be edited with several filters to create different effects and organized with tags and location information attached (Instagram 2019). The platform has a high engagement rate due to its visual nature, emphasis on user experience and constantly adding new features making it a valuable tool in social media marketing (HubSpot 2018). Due to this characteristic 98% of the fashion brands have an Instagram page and brands posted averagely 20 images monthly (Statista 2020).

Instagram currently has over 1 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2019) with over 95 million photos uploaded every day (Omnicore 2019). With the constant upload of new photos and videos and existence of old ones, there is an average of 4.2 billion likes per day on the platform (Omnicore 2019). These numbers are constantly growing each year this is due to the constant improvements made to the platform and accessibility to internet services among users.

Brands can share photos and videos by posting them, before posting them they can crop and filter their images on the platform. Posted images appear in their users' feed who follow the brand also they can appear in the search feed depending on the relevancy of the post and the kind of user. Sharers can tag other members in an image, tag the location where the image was

taken and include has tags and mentions (marked with "#" and "@" respectively) in the text description under the photo. Below is a screenshot take from Fenty Beauty Instagram account in January 2020 to show the characteristics described above.
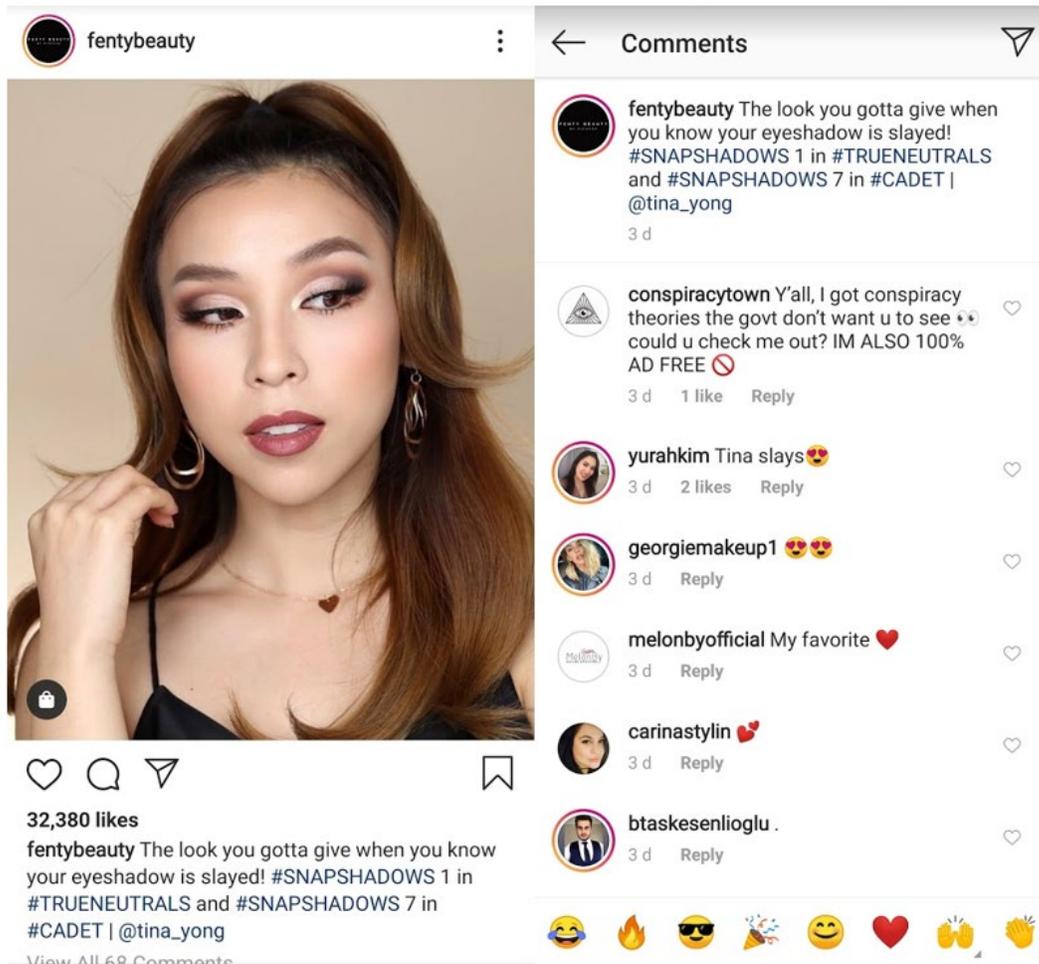
Figure 4. Screenshots from Fenty Beauty Instagram feed (@fentybeauty)

In this platform, companies have an opportunity to set up their pages and share their content with customers online who are users of these platforms (Koch & Benlian 2015). Most firms utilize these pages to promote their products and services such as when launching new products and announcing sales promotions to customers, carrying out surveys to get feedback customers,

provide information for example new opening hours or new locations and post fun messages (Dekay 2012). Additionally, the platform has increased their e-commerce and conversion capabilities thus making it easier for companies to show their return on investment (ROI) (HubSpot 2018).

There are many opportunities which Instagram provides for companies and they are constantly adding new features (Hootsuite 2019). With these constantly new features companies need to research and explore how they can use them to optimize their desired results effectively and efficiently. Some of these features include Instagram stories, IGTV, boosted photo and video ads, story highlights etc. (Instagram 2019). These features enable brands to showcase their personal side and bring users behind their scenes enabling them to communicate their brand values and show their humorous side (Choon-Lee 2019). This allows brands to tell a wider story giving room for personalization which makes them more relatable and approachable in the users' eyes (Walter & Gioglio 2014).

Apart from company created pages, customers can create their own Instagram pages and content regarding a company or a brand (Knolle & Papathanassis 2016). They can also form a community within which customers meet online to view, discuss and share content relating to a company/brand (Ko & Megehee 2015). These discussions might be negative or positive since some of the customer generated pages are created by fanatics while the others are created by critics who are against the company/brand thus the discussions depend on the orientation of the community members (Dong & Wu 2015).

Companies need to monitor these communities closely since these communities usually are a source of information for many customers before they make a purchase decision. According to research many people tend to trust opinions and content from these communities more than company generated content (Knolle & Papathanassis 2014). In these pages, customers also tend to express their feeling freely and these would be good places for companies to collect insights which will help them towards developing the brand which lead to improved customer satisfaction (Boo, Duan & Levy 2017).

2.2.2 Brand communication on Instagram

Instagram is a revolutionary tool which has changed the way companies communicate with their customers. This tool is very different from other traditional tools which companies used or uses to communicate its brand to customers. Its direct, multi-way and continuous communication features between brands and customers make it very different from traditional forms of brand communication. Hence, brands need to adapt accordingly since the traditional ways and forms of brand communication may not be applicable to Instagram. Apart from that, companies also need adapt to the constant changes and upgrade of features and functions on the platform itself to ensure effective brand communication.

To enable clear brand communication, companies need to establish a clear strategy and the core brand values to ensure that the customers understand what the company brand stands for. The strategy and the brand values should be as consistent as possible to avoid confusing the customers (Solis 2011). The strategy and the core values will allow the company to make the brand personality visible to the customers and show them what the organization stands for. This is done through the help of clearly curated goals and brand messages whose intention is well defined.

Just like any other social media platforms companies have very limited ultimate control over the messages they pass to their consumers through Instagram (Kohli et al. 2015; Peter, Chen, Kalplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels 2013; Solis 2011). This means that brands have little control on how their brand message will be interpreted or shared across Instagram and other social media platform by their followers. Mostly, followers share brand content if the perceived brand message and their own values, interests and motives are aligned. Others also share the content to other users if the content provokes their values, interests and motives or evokes some emotions in them. It is possible for a brand message to be interpreted differently among different users (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010), causing an effect on how a message is shared by the followers or across the platform. Therefore, companies should identify key customers so that they can curate content which align with their values, interests and motives to increase the chances of the message being spread further through sharing (Stephen 2015).

31

Instagram has very many features that companies can utilize, and more are constantly being added every time. With these several features, companies need to identify which features to adapt and which should be disregarded for what brand message. For instance, depending on the brand a photo or a short video could be appropriate for introducing a new product, but would not be appropriate for showing company behind the scenes, instead Instagram TV (IGTV) would be. Apart from finding right feature to use, the message also must fit the medium. Instagram is more of a visual tool; it would not be a good idea to have lots of text on posts since it is not suitable for Instagram. Fitting the content according to the medium increases the chances of interactivity among users since the message gets noticed by followers depending on the content of the message (Peters et al. 2013).

Different people follow different brands on Instagram for different purposes. The purpose and motivation for following a certain brand on Instagram usually influences how a follower will be receptive on the brand message (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang 2012). Users who follow a brand because they genuinely like the brand tend to be more receptive on messages from the brand. On the other hand, users who are following a brand with the hopes of receiving a free prize or winning a gift tend to be less receptive and the value of their engagement to the brand are questionable (Hanna et al. 2011; Lee, 2015).

Peters et al. (2013) stated that it is better and more valuable for a brand to have a smaller number of followers who are truly engaged with the brand. This makes the brand message be heard and repeated with a bigger effect as compared to brand with a larger number of followers made of 'leftovers' likes from previous brand campaigns, for instance where people are encouraged to like, follow or comment on a brand related content for a chance to win a prize (Hanna et al. 2011; Lee, 2015).

Stephen Lee (2015) also elaborated this point by stating, if a person follows a brand for personal gain motives and is not necessarily genuinely interested in the brand, what it offers and any other level, this makes this kind of follower either unaffected or minimally affected on the brand's communication efforts on Instagram. This can cause companies to easily misinterpret their Instagram effect if only likes, comments and followers are the only things considered when

measuring the Instagram effect. This means companies need to measure the engagement level and its content to get the real social media effect (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang 2012).

During their study about brand post popularity on fan pages, de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang (2012) found some of the few factors that influence users to like or comment on a post. One of the factors was the vividness of the post, this correlate to how the posts triggers different senses among users for instance the use of bright colors or addition of a video in a post. Additionally, information, entertainment, and relevancy of the message to the brand were also a huge factor that affected the number of likes and comments in a post.

Lastly, de Vries et al. (2012), Peters et al. (2013) and Lee (2015) all conclude that if a user regularly comments on company's posts, it shows they are more engaged with the brand than another user who just simply likes the brand's posts. Additionally, they found out that users seem to encourage each other to engage with a brand; brand posts with positive comments from users attract other users thus attracting more likes and comments to the post. Customer engagement is on a continuum, thus the range of engagement among users is also affected by several factors including previous encounters and personal needs and interests (Brodie et al. 2011)

2.2.3 Engagement

Different researchers have defined the term engagement differently, and there has not been an agreed definition among researchers on the term. Jeffrey Graham, the executive director of the New York times described the situation very well by saying "*Engagement is like love – everyone agrees it's a good thing, but everyone has a different definition of what it is*." However, in this research context, engagement is referred to Instagram users liking, sharing, following, commenting and lurking brand content in the platform.

Thanks to the incredible technological developments, companies can gather a massive amount of data about the behavior of their customers on Instagram. This also means that brands can track and measure the previously mentioned actions on Instagram considered as engagement.

Most of the brand usually use these metrics in measuring their return on investments (ROI) and the success of their Instagram activities. However, most of these companies do not take a moment to comprehend why certain posts on the platform are driving engagement than the others.

The ability to gather data on customers on Instagram, gives companies a massive advantage to analyze their customer behavior. This means they can be able to know which content their customers prefer to engage with the most. This then gives them an opportunity to adjust and optimize their content according to the analytics and data they have, making them more relevant to the customers' minds and a better chance to build relationships with them due to the increase in value they will deliver to them. Staying relevant to customers usually leads to an increase in word of mouth, brand advocacy and positive attitude towards the brand.

Customers engaging with a brand's content on Instagram does not necessarily mean a good thing always. Social media has given customers freedom to express their feelings freely about brands also given them access to read and share what other people say about brands. For instance, if a brand makes a mistake and shares provocative content the customers can put negative comments and share the content to others. This can damage the reputation and the brand image very easily, even though in this situation the customers would be engaging with the brand content by sharing and commenting, it will cause a negative impact to the brand in the long run.

Instagram has grown to become a very big factor to consumers not only as a source of entertainment but also as a determinant factor when making purchase decisions. Customers go to Instagram to search for more information about a brand and a product they want to purchase by looking at the engagement. For instance, if a customer wants to buy Nike Air Max shoes, they might go to Nike´s Instagram page with the Nike Air Max shoes post and read on the comments on what other users are saying about the shoes. The comments of what the users are saying about the brand and the shoes will affect the customer´s buying decision. This shows that engagement on Instagram can also affect purchase decisions.

Customers can interact with brand content at different levels and different forms of engagement have different value levels (de Vries et al. 2012). For instance, if a user comments on a post on Instagram, it is more valuable than a user who only like the post since relevant comments give more insights on the customer (Goncalves, de Fatima & Mateus 2014). Sharing is seen as the most valuable kind of engagement since it increases the reach which the message receives (Peters et al. 2013). However, all these kinds of engagements do not matter if the brand message or image used does not create a lasting and continues effect on the user (Hanna et al. 2011; Solis 2011).

Another form of engagement in called lurking, this means that the customer interacts with the brand's content, but they do not like, share, comment or follow the brand. There are different reasons why users might choose to be lurkers for instance, shyness to participate publicly online, value anonymity, no time to participate. Most lurkers usually engage with content for information gathering (Chen & Chang 2013), curiosity (Scheider et al. 2012) and entertainment purposes (Heinonen 2009) and may in the long run evolve to like, comment, follow or share content once they feel they have gathered enough knowledge and can contribute to an ongoing discussion (Chen & Chang 2013). This means lurkers form quite a significant audience and need to be considered when measuring the success of Instagram activities by a brand.

It can be very hard and complex for companies to determine the accurate level of engagement their content has on Instagram. Even though the above metrics indicate engagement level, they do not always indicate the real level. For instance, the number of followers following a brand does not mean that all the followers are engaged with the brand´s content. Therefore brands should not only rely on the above metrics to show engagement levels but also include and consider other aspects for example looking at the change in brand mentions that a brand receives per follower as well as interaction among a group of followers (Peters et al. 2013)

2.3   Visual Communication on Instagram and User Engagement.

This section combines and looks at the relationship of all the different elements discussed in visual communication and social media to allow integration into a theoretical framework shown in Figure 1. Images usually tells more than what texts does, hence the reason why companies are constantly using images to convey their brand massages to consumers (Alice 2016). Due to the popularity and visual nature of Instagram, most brands utilize this platform as the go to place when they want to convey brand message(s) to its audience (Maryam 2019). With Instagram, they can use both videos and picture to convey their message.

For visual brand communication to occur, brands curate image(s) in which the desired message is usually encoded in. These images are infused with different subjects and visual elements inside it to create something that will be understood (Smith et al. 2005). and hopefully arouse emotions and interests of the viewer (Todd 2017). Thereafter, the image is posted on Instagram for the target audience to see and hopefully engage with it.

When a user gets to see the brand image on Instagram, they immediately try to read, interpret, evaluate, and make of the information embedded in the brand image (Fahmy et al. 2014). However, since visual literacy is an ability and or a skill, different people read, interpret, and evaluate images differently (Association of College and Research Libraries 2011). The different subjects and visual elements infused in the image result to development of emotions in the viewer which are regarded as aesthetic experience (Datta et al. 2009). Aesthetic experience is also different in different people due to cultures and subconscious preferences on what is considered beautiful among people (Bao et al. 2016). These two aspects, visual literacy and emotions will affect how a user will decode and interpret the message embedded in the image.

After the user has decoded and interpreted the image, that is when visual communication has occurred. Depending on how the image has affected the user, it will determine whether the user will engage with the image or not.

3   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In this chapter of the study the chosen research methodology and how it was carried out will be discussed in detail. The first sub chapter will go through the kind of research design chosen to answer the research question created. In chapter 3.2, data collection methods for the study will be discussed, and the reasons behind the selected methods will also be explained.

After the collection of data, the data must be analyzed to make sense of the data and gain useful information for the study. Matters on how the data collected was analyzed and the steps taken to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the results will be discussed in chapter 3.3.

3.1   Research context / case description

When conducting a study, the forms of empirical parts are commonly either quantitative or qualitative. In quantitative research the problem is quantified using numerical data or usable statistics derived from data. In this form of research opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and other defined variables in the research are quantified with the aim of supporting or disprove a hypothesis about a specific phenomenon. This is all achieved through use of quantifiable data which helps to expose patterns like behavior, motivation, emotion, and cognition in the research. The data collection methods involved in this form of research give room to collect data from a wider population.

On the other hand, qualitative research, is used to discover and gain a deeper understanding of some real-life phenomenon like the of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations for certain actions (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004, 152). It is also utilized to provide insights to a problem which can be turned into possible hypotheses for prospective quantitative research. Unlike quantitative research which is expressed mainly in numeric, graphs and tables, qualitative research is mainly expressed in words. The data collection methods in this research form vary from structured to semi-structured, however the respondent population is usually smaller and usually selected to satisfy a given quota.

The aim of this research as described in the research question chapter is to find out the kind of visual brand communication prefer to engage with on Instagram and the reasons behind. This shows that this research aims to gain a deeper understanding of this situation therefore, qualitative research method was chosen since it was suitable for the empirical part of the study as described in the above chapter.

3.2   Data collection methods

There are several data collection methods available in qualitative research some of which are structured and some semi-structured in nature. Some of the most common methods include interviews, focus groups and participation/observations. In this research, semi-structured in-depth interviews will be used.

In depth discussion of the semi-structured in-depth interview as a data collection method will be done in chapter 3.2.1. The sample and sampling methods of the respondents will be discussed in chapter 3.2.2 and lastly, the interview process and interview guide will be presented in chapter 3.2.3.

3.2.1   Individual Semi-structured in-depth interviews

The aim of the study was to understand the kind of visual brand communication users prefer to engage with on Instagram and why. This involves feelings, thoughts, intentions and opinions which are impossible to observe. To be able to understand the motivations behind their behavior and opinions of the respondents it is necessary to choose method that allows them to freely explain their behavior and point of view concerning the topic in an open way which is why individual semi-structured in-depth interview was seen as the most appropriate method.

Individual semi-structured in-depth interview method lets informants to express themselves in a freely manner, in their own terms and subjectively on how they perceived a certain topic. This gives the respondents room to create their own opinions about the phenomena.   During the interviews, the questions are not asked in any specific order but instead in a way that develops

the conversation. However, an interview guide will be utilized to ensure that no crucial issues are left uncovered. This means that all the interviews will be different, to ensure that the topic list is covered in a way that best suits each situation.

There were also other useful methods that were considered to study the research topic, for instance observations.

3.2.2 Interviewees selection

To gather the data required for the research, there was need for respondents, who would act as data sources. To find and select the respondents for this research, purposeful sampling was applied. This method is vastly used in qualitative research for identifying and selecting information-rich respondents associated to the research topic (Patton 2001). The respondents chosen are usually conversant about or have experience with the research topic (Patton 2002). This is to ensure that the respondents chosen will provide a vast amount of important information to for a quality research of the phenomenon (Cresswell & Plano Clark 2011).

There are several purposeful sampling designs, however in this research context a combination of three were utilized. One of the designs used was homogenous sampling, this design entails researching a group of respondents with similar attributes in a more in depth and comprehensive manner (Patton 2002). In this research, the homogenous sample will be Instagram users in Helsinki between the ages of 21-35. According to Statista (2020) the biggest Instagram users by age group is 18-35. The reason 18-20-year-old were left out is because the researcher wanted to study a group with some sought of regular income and can make major purchase decisions themselves.

To find the relevant respondents, criterion sampling was also utilized. This purposeful sampling design involves choosing respondents that meet some predetermined criterion of importance for the research (Patton 2002). In this research the predetermined criterion is that the respondent needs to have an active Instagram account and should be following a minimum of one brand.

Lastly, snowball sampling is the last design used in this combination of the purposeful sampling design. This technique involves using existing respondents to identify other information rich respondents with similar characteristics through their referral (Patton 2002). This method usually saves time and resources needed to find relevant respondents fit for the research (Green & Aarons 2011).

After a vigorous process, in the end the final number of respondents chosen for the research was 10. The researcher ensured that all the respondents fit the sampling criteria described in the above paragraphs. An overview of the respondents chosen, and the interview duration is displayed in the table below.

Table 1. Overview of respondents

Respondent	Age	Occupation	City	Interview duration
R1	21	Retail	Helsinki	1:05:35
R2	23	Nightlife	Helsinki	50:23
R3	23	Marketing	Helsinki	45;39
R4	24	Nightlife	Helsinki	39:42
R5	25	Marketing	Helsinki	53:56
R6	26	Retail	Helsinki	1:10:19
R7	27	Finance	Helsinki	53:23

R8	29	Marketing	Helsinki	48:39
R9	30	Human Resource	Helsinki	36:28
R10	35	Public Relation	Helsinki	47:22

3.2.3 Interview process and guide

The interviews were conducted in March 2020 either in respondents' offices or in cafes. All the respondents were living and working fulltime in Helsinki and their ages ranged from 20 to 32 years. The length of the interviews varied very much and was very dependent on the interviewee's personality. Some of the respondents answered very succinctly and assertively whereas others were more conversational and contemplating giving the interviews different lengths. The interview style also varied from one interview to another, some of the interviews were more conversational and others were following the interview guide order closely.

The interviewer ensured all the topics in the interview guide were covered during each interview. During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked by the interviewer when he did not fully comprehend a response, when response was vague or ambiguous or when he wanted to get a more specific or in-depth information (Patton 2002). The respondents were also allowed to have Instagram open during the interviews; this was to allow them to direct their thought process towards the platform. It also made it easier for them to express their thoughts with words and gestures and in some moments assisted them to come up with new points as they scrolled up and down their news feed.

The interviews were all conducted entirely in English, even though none of the respondents were native English speakers, they all had a very good spoken English and could express their opinions very well in the language. To ensure that the respondents expressed their own opinions with no influence from the interviewer, the interviewer's role was kept as neutral and objective as possible (Paul 2008). However, the interviewer used some affirmative gestures and

acknowledgement words to show them that their feelings, knowledge, and experiences are important thereby encouraging the respondents to continue expressing themselves further (Patton 2002).

All the interviews done were recorded on the interviewer's phone and later transcribed to ensure that all the critical information was not forgotten or overlooked (Sullivan 2010). Recording the interviews also helped the interviewer to concentrate more on the interviews (CSR- Center for Strategy Research Boston 2006). The interviewer also made written notes when necessary during the interviews to capture any ideas that popped in his mind during the conversations (Patton 2002).

Interview guide

To ensure that no relevant topics were left uncovered during the interviews, an interview guide was used (Patton 2002). Additionally, the guide helped to ensure the interview stayed on course and steered it back when the conversation went off-course (Kitzinger 1995). The interview guide entailed important questions and topics to ensure all the interviews covered the same topics and none left unexplored.

The subject question in this research is to find out *why* users prefer certain visual brand content to engage with on Instagram, therefore the manner in which the questions are asked is crucial to get the respondents to explain as many factors as possible during the conversation (Patton 2002). To achieve this, the researcher tried to avoid using *why*-questions but instead used descriptive questions to avoid receiving short and superficial response from the respondents. Additionally, the motive behind certain behaviors, actions or opinions is usually due to different complex factors therefore several questions must be asked for the respondents to reveal as many factors as possible (Patton 2002), making descriptive questions the best choice. The more the respondents got more comfortable, investigative questions such as *why*-questions were added.

During the beginning of the interviews, simple descriptive questions were asked to the respondents to make them comfortable and slowly ease them into the topic while they reflect on

how they use Instagram. Later, common questions like such as how long they have used Instagram, and why they use the platform were asked. This was to provide little background information about the respondents (Patton 2002). The guide then dives deeper to explore the kind of brands the respondents follow and the reason behind combined with opinion and value questions to provide a platform for the respondents elaborate the kind of visual brand communication they prefer and the reason behind. The pool of question was intended to explore the kind of image composition or aesthetical aspects the interviewees search for in visual brand communication.

Lastly, opinion, values and feeling questions regarding engagement with brand content on the platform were introduced. The objective of these questions was to assess the behavior and how each respondent engages with brands and why particular behavior is common. Lurking was also covered in the guide; respondents were asked if images with no visible engagement have any effect on them and in which way. The result of the interviews will be presented and discussed in the next chapter and the interview guides can be seen in the Appendices.

3.3　Data analysis methods

During the interviews, the researcher used his phone to record all the conversations, and after all the interviews were done, transcription of the responses was done. The researcher then thoroughly read through all the transcripts and singled out similar things that surfaced from the text while color-coding them (Patton 2002).　Each color represented a category and was transferred in different file for further analysis.

During the process, some of the texts were found to fit in several categories while others were discarded since they were found unrelated to the research or were too revealing of the respondent's identity (Patton 2002). After all the color-coding was done and the categories were built, the categories were then thoroughly studied and compared. Some categories were then combined into larger abstracts due to their similarities (Spiggle 1994). The process was repeated

several times until the final themes were constructed. The themes presented in the next chapter, come from vigorous re-reading of the transcripts and re-arranging of categories.

3.3.1   Quality of the research

The researcher did not utilize any statistical procedure nor other means of quantification to arrive to his research findings. Instead the data analysis is interpretive meaning different people can interpret it differently, hence making it difficult for people to come to a common conclusion. As a result, ensuring quality and trustworthiness in the research becomes very challenging (Pratab 2018). However, in this case, the researcher took some measures described below to ensure that the research has value and integrity and that it demonstrates rigor and relevance.

First, the researcher has a provided a detailed description of the settings and the context in which research is conducted. Therefore, it gives a reader abundant information to make their own judgement on the applicability of the results to other settings. Additionally, all the data, methods and decisions have been properly documented in the research to ensure the possibility of the study being repeated in similar settings and the context (Lincoln& Guba 1985).

Due to the time limitation in the research, it was not possible to conduct a triangulation across methods (Wallendorf &Belk 1989). Instead, the researcher recorded and transcribed all the interviews conducted and clearly explained interview guide the creation process and all the analysis to ensures complete transparency in the research. Additionally, the respondents were chosen using snowball method to ensure that only information-reach respondents who were familiar with the research topic were selected. These respondents had huge amount of critical information to ensure high quality and credible research that relates well to the phenomenon studied. Additionally, raw data in the form of extracts from the interviews along with their interpretation is provided so that readers can evaluate the logic and plausibility of associated theorizing.

Since the research is seeking to gather greater understanding on vastly undiscovered phenomenon with a qualitative research approach, the degree to which the results may be

generalized is rather limited. This research does not provide a definitive answer on the kind of visual brand communication users prefer to engage with on Instagram and invites further research to examine the proposed framework quantitatively as well as investigate possible additional factors which may play a role in the focal relationship.

4 FINDINGS

In this segment the results of the study will be covered with the main elements being visual brand communication and engagement presented in chapter 4.1 and 4.2, respectively. Each element will have different associated themes discussed under it. The illustration of the findings will be done with the help of direct quotes from the respondents' interviews done during the study. Each theme and its relevance will be discussed in relation to the direct quotes.

4.1 Visual brand communication

During the interviews, the topic of visual brand communication was approached and discussed from several different angles and there was a variation of responses depending on the topic. From the responses given, there was not one visual brand communication characteristic that was favoured by all the respondents, but instead some aspects appeared to be favoured by most of the respondents while others divided the group. Below are some of the brand communication aspects that were preferred most of the respondents.

4.1.1 Colorful images

Colourful images seemed to be more preferred by the respondents as compared to muted tones. The brightness of the images and their ability to stand out from the rest of the images made them interesting and easily captured the viewers' attention.

> "Like when I am scrolling through my newsfeed, most of the time I spend more time on colourful images. There is something about colours that that makes me brighten up a little more, which I guess is the reason why those kinds of images seem attractive to me. (R_3)"

> "The colours used in an image is the first things I notice, sometimes I like seeing colourful images but also, I like images with bright colours even if it has one or two colours in it. (R_6)"

> ".... If an image is well executed and the colours are popping, I usually take more time looking at the image to just admire and appreciate its beauty. (R_5)"

4.1.2 Framing

All the respondents preferred well thought out images which were clear and well presented in all sorts of manner. For the viewers, the image composition was the first thing that attracted them to the image and not the message it represented. Additionally, users preferred that they could relate to with some users preferring naturally composed images this meant that there should be images of the product during use.

> "…. if you look at this photo it is just a random photo of just a basketball and the background is just white, there is nothing interesting about this photo. But of look at this one, there is a kid holding the basketball with this I feel there is something like a story and I can relate to this image too since for instance what I see is a kid with a dream to play professional basketball, the sane kind of dream I had when I was a kid. (R$_5$)"

> "I feel like some companies don't know what they are doing on Instagram, since some just post photos and videos of their products and I am like there is no creativity in that and those are very boring pictures to look at. Like, even if you want to promote your new product put it in a context that I can relate to and find it interesting. For example, of it is a running shoe, a photo of a girl running in the woods with the shoes on would be an interesting way of showing it off …... (R$_4$)"

> "….. I mean Jesus, would it kill people to put some creativity in what they post. I just do not want to go to my feed and just see companies trying to sell me their product. I know Instagram is a good platform for marketing, but it is also for people to entertain themselves. So if companies are going to try sell or market their products there, make the images look good, I don't want to see photos of products on white background on my feed all the time, put some thinking and make an interesting image. (R$_9$)"

However, some of the respondent even though they appreciated well composed images, they preferred the product to be the main focus of the image and be clearly presented.

> "….If I am interested in buying a shoe, and I go to look it through on Instagram how it looks, I would like to see the shoe and not the model since I want to know what I am buying and if the shoe in worth it so that is why I want the shoe to be the main thing and show all the details. (R$_6$)"

"Well it depends, for other things I don't care that much, but if it is a product like a dress or sunglasses, then I would like to see them clearly so that I can decide to buy them or not. So that means the image should capture as much detail of the product as it can. (R$_9$)"

Since Instagram allows users to post a maximum of 10 images in one post (carousel) (Instagram 2020), it gives brands an opportunity to post both naturally composed and product focused images in one post. This allows the brand to fulfil the different preference among the users.

4.1.3   Aesthetics

This was a difficult element for the respondents to discuss or give example of, there were variations among respondents when they tried to describe images they found alethically pleasing. This is also the same case as described by Jamieson (2007) in his visual communication discussion. Respondents found aesthetics to be something that is rather instantly felt and very hard to describe.

"It just comes in a flash of a second when I look at a video or picture on Instagram you know, I usually don't have to think like what it is that I like in the picture. It is really hard to explain myself now. Like when I look at a picture, immediately, in my mind I will decide whether the picture is nice or not, I am not an artist, so I do not analyse all the small details in an Instagram picture. [laughs]. (R$_1$)"

"I am usually scrolling on Instagram quite a lot, and it takes me a split second to look at a picture or video and be like 'oh now that's a cool one' and it is some kind of a gut feeling that just kicks in immediately when is see the post. (R$_6$)"

Even though there were variation in what respondents considered aesthetically pleasing, there were some of instances that the respondents more or less agreed upon. For instance, all the respondents preferred images which evoked some kind of good feelings, emotions or ideas in them. Inspiration, tips and ideas were some of elements that most of the respondents found appealing in an Instagram image.

"…. as an example, I follow so many sports brands but Nike is my favourite because if you look at their Instagram, they have really inspiring videos that motivate me to work out since their images show me that I can also live a healthy and sporty lifestyle no matter the barriers. So those kinds of messages make the images more interesting to look at…. (R_3)"

"I like a lot of brands which post a lot of DIY [Do it yourself] videos and pictures since they are very simple and give me ideas on how to tackle somethings by myself. Also, they give me a sense that life can be simple and not as complicated as we think it is. (R_1)"

"Like, most of my fashion sense, I usually get it from Instagram and also most of the places I have been travelling for holiday for the past 2 years I have got them from Instagram …. (R_5)"

From the response given by most of the respondents, it seemed they logged into Instagram to seek good feeling by viewing images in the platform and possibly find some kind of escape via the images they see.

4.1.4 Instagram as a communication tool

Since the respondents were already following brands on Instagram, it showed that there is a certain level of acceptance of brand presence on the platform. Furthermore, the respondents seemed to like the brand communication on Instagram since it offers a more personal channel and getting to know the brand on a higher personal level. This has been cultivated further especially with the introduction and advancement of video features in the platform.

"There is a lot that companies can do on Instagram like give the customers a view of what happens behind the scenes, live streaming a Q&A session etc. all these things I feel like the bring me closer to a brand since I feel more involved and associated with the brand which I feel is nice. (R_5)"

"There other medias which are trying to copy Instagram, but I feel like they are not there yet. Even Facebook which owns Instagram is not there yet. There is something special on Instagram that I feel like I am in a journey with the brands I am following. Like they post lots of things

about the brand that as the brand is growing, I get to follow every step of their growth through their posts, Instagram stories and Instagram tv... (R₃)"

"I think what Instagram has beat other platforms in terms of brand communication is the intimacy and a sense of connection they bring between the brand and the customer. Most of the brands that I follow, I feel like I know their story since I am constantly involved in their growth. Like for instance the Instagram stories and Instagram TV allows the brands to show us their offices, their employees and even sometimes their production so by the end of the day as a customer I feel like I know the company even from the inside. (R₇)"

From the above comments made by some of the respondents, it is evident that users appreciated the personal touch that the platform offers which is not available in other media. This personal touch allows brands personally connect with the customers and display their personality to them, which was an important aspect to majority of the respondents.

4.1.5 Post frequency

This was a very interesting factor among the respondents since they did not have a certain number of posts they preferred at a certain time, however the post frequency affected how they viewed brand communication on Instagram. From their comments it seemed like if a brand posts too often or to frequently it reduced their interest in the brand.

"I don't want to have my newsfeed be filled with posts from one brand, that would be very boring. But also, some brands take weeks before they post something, then that is also boring and bad… (R₂)"

"Um… well I do not have a particular number of posts that one brand should post a day. But if it is too much then it makes my newsfeed monotonous and if it is rarely then what was the point of following them [laughs]. In both cases I usually end up unfollowing the brands, it sounds ridiculous that I do not have a certain number, but brands have to kind of find the mid-ground. (R₁)"

4.1.6 Variation

Another factor that was quite close to post frequency was the variation of the posts. Users preferred that brands to post varying posts to avoid monotony and keep the news feed more interesting to follow. Users wanted companies to dare to explore new and different approaches to their posts on the platform.

> "I don't want to see the same kind of images all the time, brands got to take their Instagram game higher so that I am always curious and anxiously waiting for a new post from them. Like keeping me on my toes, you know what I mean? Like if you go to some brands Instagram, let us say go pro, it has huge variety of stuff that every time they post something I am always like oooh that is really cool or like oooh that is really new. I think some of the brands ought to copy this kind of strategy. (R7)"

> "…. I think it is all about trial and error, that is the game of life and some companies are afraid of exploring and trying out new things. Like of you look at their Instagram it is just same stuff and they do not go out of their way to try other things, that is just boring. It them means I always know what to expect from their posts every time…. (R5)"

4.2 Engagement

In this segment all the forms of engagement discussed in the theoretical section will be covered in line with the respondents' direct quotes from the interviews done during the study. During the interviews, there were some themes that emerged, and they will be discussed at the end of this segment.

4.2.1 Liking

Liking was the most common form of measurable engagement behaviour among the respondents. There was variation in what persuaded the respondents to like a picture, some of the respondents had quite low requirements for an image to fulfil for them to like it while some needed the image to be special for them to like it

"Most of the times I usually like a lot of pictures since most of the time the people or companies I follow are the ones who interest me, so I don't find it a big deal to like their posts. For example, when I am bored, sometimes I usually end up liking everything that pops up on my feed. It's like a habit for me. (R2)"

"It is not a very big deal for me to like images on Instagram, if I find something pleasing no matter if it is brand related or from my friends, I usually end up liking it. You know if I like something then I double tap on it ('liking') I do not really need to think about it so much. (R4)"

"Normally I am very selective with what I like on Instagram. Like you know some brands just post for the sake of posting without thinking of something special whatsoever. But you know some brands usually take time think of meaningful posts, for example the video about women showing emotions on Nike's page was very good and something special. Something like that I can guarantee I am going to 'like' it because you can see there was some thinking in it and also it is emotionally touching you know. (R3)"

There were some respondents who felt liking a brand image was irrelevant due to the numerous likes that brands receive causing their like to get lost in the masses. Additionally, one respondent added they do not get any value for liking a brand image.

"I don't find it relevant to like brand pictures. Cause for example brands like Nike or Starbucks for one post they might get like millions of likes so probably they will not notice if I liked their post or not making my one like kind of worthless. This is also the same with comments too, I find them worthless. (R8)"

"I follow brands mostly because I want to be entertained, and just seeing the images is enough entertainment for me so that is why I never like anything brand related cause it does not add any value for me in anyway. (R7)"

Concerns over anonymity was also another factor that made respondents reluctant to like brand images.

"Sometimes I feel like people try to snoop around you know, sometimes I do it too [laughs], like try to see what this person has liked and stuff. So, to avoid that being done to me too, I kind of

try to be very careful on what kind of images I like on Instagram. I don't what people judging me and stuff. (R_9)"

"Even though I like brand images on Instagram, I don't like the fact that other users especially people who follow me can see what I have liked, you know people are very petty and judgemental these days. But I hope Instagram will change this since I know they are testing hiding likes, maybe then I won't have to worry about what images I like since people cannot see the kind of images I have liked or affiliated with. Not that I have something to hide [laughs]! (R_{10})"

The brands' post frequency was also a factor to one respondent on whether or not they would like brand image.

"Like you it depends sometimes I like and sometimes I don't like. But something I hate is when companies post so many images in a row, then I find like almost my whole timeline is filled with post from one company. This sort of thing annoys me a lot and most of the time I end up getting bored even if the images a great then after that I don't like their posts or even if I like them I can only like one or two posts. If they continue doing that several times, then usually I just end up unfollowing them …... (R_1)"

4.2.2   Commenting

This was the least practiced form of engagement among the respondents. This showed that respondents were not ready to communicate with brand verbally in the comment section.

"No. No I have never ever commented on any brand images. It just feels weird to me to comment on social media platforms in general. (R_4)"

"I can't remember the last time I commented on a brand post on Instagram, the best I ever do is just like their posts and that is enough for me. (R_6)"

"I don't find a reason why I should comment on brand images? If I am happy with what they posted, a like is good enough. And if I am annoyed or angered by what they have posted I usually

just keep quite and do nothing or find a better way to deal with it but definitely not commenting on the post. (R$_7$)"

Few respondents said they have commented or would comment in the future just to tag their friend(s) an interesting brand image. Tagging a friend allows users to share brand images from one user to the other. In this sense it can be argued that the comment is not for communication purpose with the brand but instead with the friend. Hence, the communication value of the comment to the brand is low however, the increase in the reach of the message is a positive thing for the brand.

"I don't comment on brand images to address them directly. I only comment when maybe I see cool brand image that I think my friend would like, then I mention them at the comment as a way of sharing the image with them. (R$_4$)"

"The only times I have commented on company images is when I have been tagged a brand image by my friend on the comment section. For example, my friend tagged me a really nice Nike shoe photo that we had a conversation about couple of days ago then we had couple of chats on the comment section. Oh…. And I have also tagged you (the researcher) a photo like last month [laughs]! (R$_5$)"

Just as reported in liking, respondents brought the issue of their comments getting lost in the masses. This was a discouraging factor for them since they felt their comments would be irrelevant since they will not be read or responded to by the brand.

"I mean what is the point of commenting if there is like millions of comments on a post. Even if I have a genuine issue I am expressing, the chances that the company will see and reply to the comment is very minimal, so I better use my effort in doing something else or use other channels to express my issue. (R$_1$)"

"I usually feel no need to comment if there is a lot of comments already, but sometimes I do this silly thing where if I open a post of some famous brands and it has like between 3 to 7 comments, I then find myself commenting on the post since I feel like those first comments are usually read since the person who posted it will most like be interested with the performance of the post in

the beginning. And you know what…. I have once got a response from one big company on my comment. It felt kind of nice. (R$_5$)"

4.2.3 Sharing

All the respondents seemed to have at one time shared a brand image with other users. The most common way was mentioning a friend's name in the comment section. However, this was if it was for one or two friends. If there were more than that then users preferred to use the share button to share directly with them or also to share in their 'my story'.

> "Well when I see a good brand image on Instagram that I want to share with my friends I usually just use the share button, since most of my friends are on Instagram so that way is much easier and more convenient for me. But if it is just one or two friends then I just mention them in the comment section. (F$_3$)"

> "If there is something hilarious or something I am passionate about posted by a brand I sometimes end up sharing it with my friends with my friends by pressing share or just reposting it in my story, therefore I can share my views with most of my friends easily since I know most of them look through my story on Instagram. Like I only mention people on comment section usually when it is only one person I want to share with. (R$_6$)"

Two of the respondents were mentioned that they are usually hesitant to tag their friends due to the anonymity issues. This is because, just as likes, other users can see who you tagged in the comment section raising the anonymity issue not only tot the user but also the friend who was tagged.

> "Well I do tag my close friends in the comment section since I know them well and I know they do not mind me tagging them in certain images, however there are those images that I want to share with my friends but I would not like other people to see [laughs] so those I rather take a screenshot and send it to them via WhatsApp. That way we can keep out things to ourselves. (R$_2$)"

"I generally don't like being tagged on the comment section especially with the friends that I have, they have a very dark sense of humour, so I would not want them to tag me in things that I do not want people out of my circle to see I was tagged on….. (R₄)"

Another way that users used to share brand images with others is by taking screenshots. This form of sharing is not measurable although respondents used it to share images with users on other platforms other than Instagram. It was easy for users to screenshot photos but with videos, it was only iPhone users who used it since the phone has the ability to do screen recording.

"[…..] I usually take screenshots or do a screen recording of images or videos when I want to send them to mostly my mom or my grandma or people who are not on Instagram. Also, when I have WhatsApp groups so sometimes, I might share with my friend in the WhatsApp group some brand images since the group might not exist on Instagram. Sometimes I don't share them on WhatsApp or anything but just keep them in my phone to show my friends when ai meet them. (R₁)"

"[….] However, if they are not on Instagram then I can take a screenshot of them image. But that way, I am not able to share videos since I have an android phone which does not do screen recording. (F₃)"

Some respondents reported to have participated in brand competitions on Instagram which forced them to share company images to win prizes from the brand.

"When I was young, like two years ago [laughs] I used to repost, like, and share a lot of company images just because it was part of something I had to do to win some present from some companies. But I don't do it anymore but some of my friends still do it. (R₈)"

"I have done couple to reposting of brand posts on my story to win some small tokens, and actually have been lucky twice now. [laughs]! (R₉)"

4.2.4 Following

All the respondents followed at least one brand since it was one of the prerequisites for one to become a respondent. Entertainment seemed to be a huge factor for most of the respondents to follow a brand and majority of them discovered new brands to follow on the search feed.

> "Like most of the times it happens when I see brand pictures on my search feed that I like, I usually go to their Instagram page and look through their feed and if the other contents seem interesting too, I usually end up following them. (R9)"

> "For me to follow a brand I usually look for entertainment. They do not have to be incredibly unique, as long as they entertain then I will follow them. (R3)"

> "…. yea like mostly when I am idle, I go through the search feed looking for entertaining videos and pictures. Here, I usually find nice things that brands have posted and when I look at their personal feed and it makes sense. Then I usually follow them. (R4)"

The frequency at which brands posted was also found to be a determinant factor for some of the respondents to keep on following the brand.

> "…. like if a brand only posts once in two weeks, what is the need of continuing to follow that brand. (R4)"

> "Once in a while I usually go through the people I am following and if I have not seen your posts for a while, and we are not close friends or it's a brand page then I end up unfollowing. (R6)"

> "…. I mean, the main reason I followed a brand page is for entertainment, and if it takes long for you to post then I do not feel entertained anymore so why should I keep following your page? (R10)"

Three respondents said they do follow brands which they do not buy or will never buy products from but instead enjoys the brands' Instagram content that they keep on following them despite the fact.

"…[laughs] I do follow expensive brands like Dolce & Gabbana and Versace, but I will probably never buy anything from these brands since they are ridiculously expensive. It's just that their clothes give me inspiration and ideas on the kind of clothes I want to buy and also, they have very cool pictures and beautiful models too [laughs]! (R_9)".

"Well, there are some brands with remarkably interesting material on Instagram like the GoPro Instagram page. Even though I do not have a GoPro or even thought of buying one, follow their Instagram page because they have amazing videos…... (R_5)"

"Yea, I do follow Lamborghini but as you know I don't drive one [laughs] but they have very nice photos of their cars in their Instagram that is why I follow them. (R_4)"

4.2.5 Lurking

This was the most common form of engagement among the respondents. Respondents not only lurked on their own Instagram feed, but they seemed to mostly lurk in their search feed. The search feed allowed users to find and lurk in a variety of brand content, keeping them entertained.

"For the most part, that is I what I usually do on Instagram especially on the search feed. I don't follow a lot of people or brands on Instagram so usually my newsfeed is usually very short, so what I do after that is go to the search newsfeed and pass time there scrolling through videos and pictures. (R_4)"

"I spend a lot of time in a day on Instagram and most of the time I am not looking for something specific or doing anything but just sitting down with my phone just scrolling through Instagram. Like also I have noticed Instagram has kind of understood me and now when I go on the search area scrolling though videos I usually see cooking related pictures and videos I can watch them for hours and not necessarily like or follow any of them. (R_6)"

"I mean, I don't necessarily need to follow, like or comment on Instagram, I can just look through and see what people are posting without doing any of that and still get entertained. (R_{10})"

The brand images seemed to have an effect on users even if they did not visibly engage with the images. Some of the respondents mentioned to source inspiration and ideas from brand images even if they are not visibly engaging with these images. This shows the importance of lurking on Instagram and the god effect it has despite it being no visible to brands.

"I mean, most of the time I go to Instagram I just lurk, it might be actually the reason I am on Instagram. And from I get some many ideas kike cooking and DIY [Do It Yourself] ideas. (R7)"

"… of course, they have an effect. I mean take for example most of my clothing ideas I usually get from Instagram and if you look now [shows her Instagram] I do not follow any clothing brand, so that means these ideas I usually get from my lurking. (R1)"

4.2.6   Timing and mood

Timing and mood were found to affect some of the respondents whether they would visibly engage with brand content or exhibit the lurking behaviour. In these kinds of situations, the user might be interested in the brand's post but instead the timing and mood affected their scrolling process on Instagram.

"...When I am busy and I open Instagram most of the time I do not have the time or the luxury to like, comment on do anything else apart from scrolling through my news feed. Maybe if the picture or the video was striking enough, I might revisit it later and maybe I might do something. (R1)"

"….actually yea, I tend to like or follow lots of brands when I am in a good mood also when I am having some wine and relaxing going through Instagram then I become more loose and I might end up following some accounts. (R8)"

4.2.7   Personal engagement

Personal engagements appeared to be incredibly crucial factor among the respondents in regard to whether or not they would visibly engage with a brand´s Instagram image. Personal engaging content seemed to attract a visible engagement behaviour among the respondents, this included

brand content that in some way directly relates to the respondent or somehow mirrors the respondent's values.

> "For instance I told you before that I liked that Nikes Instagram post about showing emotions, that is because the video felt like it personally spoke to me as a woman and I could relate to and that is how women a viewed as. So, liking the video was very easy to me since it touched me, and I agreed with the message they were trying to convey to the society. (R₇)"

> "Mm... I mean it is human, it is the same with people when you share something in common with someone then sometimes you tend to favour them. I think it is also the same with Instagram, if a post has something in common with me then the probability that I will like that image is very high just because it feels like we share something in common with the brand and also I can relate to the post. (R₈)"

When the respondents felt a close relation with a brand the act of liking their content seemed like a way of showing their support to the brand.

> "If you look at my Instagram, I follow and have liked many of the Heidi's bier bar in Helsinki, that is because I go there a lot also, I have friends working there. So, liking these photos is a way of showing my support to my friends and because I go there frequently the brand feels more personal to me. (R₁₀)"

> "…. I don't have to think about it much, buy as humans everybody is biased to something that is personal to them. Let's say one brand posts a photo with something related to my country on the image and then another brand post a photo with nothing related to my country, then I am really sure the chances of me liking the first picture is higher than that of the second one. So that shows that I am kind of biased but it's because the first brand has posted something I can relate to and the fact that my country is involved then I want to show my loyalty too. (R₅)"

Many respondents wanted brands to post content that was personalized or had some personal touch or ties for them to visibly engage. This showed that personal engagement was a very important factor that affected the user´s willingness to visibly engage with brand content. This

means that if brand want to see more users visibly engage with their content, they ought to study their audience so that they can curate content that personally engages them.

5   DISCUSSION

This chapter links the findings of the study to the previous theoretical literature covered in the second chapter of the research. Visual brand communication will be covered first in chapter 5.1, under it, aesthetic experience, colourful images, framing and brand communication will be discussed in depth. Lastly in chapter 5.2 Engagement will be covered, in this chapter, different forms of engagement will be discussed in addition to personal engagement.

5.1   Visual brand communication

From the findings above, it can be said that generally users find visual brand communication on Instagram a very enjoyable experience, with many users engaging with different brands for different reasons. Many users seemed to appreciate and had embraced the personal form of communication by brands via Instagram, and the brand images used to communicate brand messages seemed to be effective on users when they were properly executed. However, due to high subjective nature of images and their interpretation (Jamieson 2007), there was not one kind of visual that was collectively preferred instead, users had variance in image preferences. There were however some commonalities which appeared among the users which will be discussed below.

5.1.1   Aesthetic experience

As discussed in the theory, aesthetics is a huge factor in determining a person's visual preference. It acts as an instant stimulant in the subconscious levels in human beings resulting to development of emotions once a person looks at an image. These emotions are then compared to ones constructed patterns which are moulded from personal experiences and background (Jamieson 2007). This then makes aesthetics highly subjective and something that is instantly felt when a person looks at an image. From the findings, it was found that it was very important for all the respondents to feel like they are drawing something out from a brand image. This is because images cause development of emotion on a viewer (Rossister 1982)

Some of the things that respondents wanted to draw from brand images they viewed on Instagram was a sense of inspiration and good feeling. Due to the connotative nature of these concepts (Fahmy 2004), they seemed to spark a higher sense of engagement in users increasing their willingness to visibly engage with brand content. From the findings, respondents seemed to draw a sense inspiration mostly from naturally framed images as compared to product focused images. Additionally, some respondents mentioned, tips and ideas as some of the things they want to get out of a brand image, however, these can be argued to belong in the inspiration category.

Instagram offers a chance for most people to divert their brain from the unpleasant or boring aspects of life. This is achieved through viewing images which in turn spark imagination on users giving them a sense of escapism (Jones 2018). This escapism factor was also raised by some of the respondents who wanted to some kind of a mental transfer through imagination by viewing brand images. This adds underscores the point made by Fahmy et al. (2004), that images possess connotative power that can result to development of strong reaction in viewers.

5.1.2 Colourful images

Colourful images seemed to attract users' attention and users found them more pleasant to look at while scrolling on Instagram. However, despite some images being colourful, some of the users still did not take any further action after viewing them. This statement is in concurrent with Windqvist's (2014), which he noted that viewers were more attracted to colourful images which captured their attention more as compared to muted tones, but this does not guarantee the viewer will take any visible engagement action. Since the images grabs the user's attention, it can be argued that the user could notice other aspects of the image like the framing which could lead to a user taking further action.

5.1.3 Framing

Framing was another image aspect that was considered to be particularly important when it comes to visual brand communication on Instagram. It was important to the respondents that brand images were well thought and conveyed the message in the best way possible. Brands are in constant competition for users' attention with other content on Instagram, hence a poorly constructed image will suffer in the presence of other well thought images in the user's newsfeed.

Users Among the respondents, there were difference in what was considered good framing depending on the reason why a respondent is following a brand. Framing is not limited to the image only, but also users possess their own frames that are curved by personal experience, social and cultural background making framing factor subjective (Jamieson 2007).This was also the case on this study as some users preferred images with product put into use while others preferred product focused image. Users who preferred images that were framed into use were following a brand for inspiration and good feeling purpose. While users who preferred product focused framed images were usually interested in the brands product offerings and wanted to get as much detail of the product from the image, aesthetics were not very important to them.

When curating brand images to post on Instagram, brands must be careful to use good framing for the images. Whether the image is just product focused or naturally framed, it there must be thoughtful execution involved in the curation so as to ensure the envisioned message is well communicated to the viewer. With the introduction of Instagram carousel companies are able to include a maximum of 10 images in one post (Instagram 2020). This gives brands an opportunity to post both product focussed image and images framed into use in one post, helping them to satisfy both user preference without affecting the posting frequency which is factor that influences user engagement (discussed in the later chapter).

5.1.4 Brand communication

Brand communication on Instagram seemed to have been appreciated and embraced by the respondents. The nature of Instagram allowed brands to personally communicate with users better than other communication channels. This personal communication allowed respondents to get much closer to the brand and it gave them a sense of closeness to the brand and knowing it on a more personal level. The transparency and openness exhibited by the brands on Instagram also seemed to be a contributing factor to respondents feeling a personal connection with the brand. When users feel this closeness to a brand, they become more perceptive to the brand's communication activities (Walter & Gioglio 2014).

Different users followed different brands for different reasons, and this affected the content kind preference in users. Users who were following a brand for product update reasons, did not need the brand images to evoke much emotions but instead be functional enough so that the user can have as much details as possible about the product. On the other hand, users who followed a brand for ideas and inspirational reasons, they required the images used to be captivating, interesting and evoke emotions. Furthermore, in agreement with Jamieson (2007) these users were also far more interested in the story telling and connotative aspect of the brand communication on Instagram.

From the study findings, it was found that respondents were also very keen on content variation and post frequency of a brand. In terms of content variation, users preferred it when brands vary their content and keep their news feed more interesting and avoid monotony. Since users have different preferences when it comes to brand communication on Instagram, having varying posts can enable the company to cater the needs of most user preference. The introduction of Instagram carousel has made it even easier for brands post varying content on one post (Instagram 2020), therefore serving different user preferences in a single post.

Users were also aware of the post frequency of different brands they follow, and it affected their interest in a brand's Instagram activity. Different media platforms have different norms around post frequency before drop-off in engagement level (Peters et al. 2013). According to the

findings, when brands post too much content at a time on Instagram, they risk their message being flooded by the utter quantity of content and users viewing them as spammy, on the other hand, with infrequent posts they run a risk of being forgotten and deemed irrelevant by its users. Brands should study the feedback from users to determine the best post frequency and to always think of quality over quantity (Peters et al. 2013).

5.2   User Engagement

User engagement analysis by brands is a very crucial activity, since it allows brands to get to know the kind of visual brand content that its audience prefers and therefore optimize future content accordingly (Lee 2015; Walter & Gioglo). From the research, it was found that different users engaged with different brands' content on Instagram in different ways. However, there were some behavioral patterns that were widely common among the respondents. Below is a presentation of each engagement kind in relation to the findings.

5.2.1   Liking

de Vries et al. (2012) and Lee (2015) in their discussion on different levels of engagement on social media, concluded that liking was the least valuable as compared to other forms due to the low effort required by the user to execute and users did not have to think much about it. This was also the same case in this study as liking emerged to be the most common method for respondents to show their shared interest and support or acknowledge brand images due to the ease of executing the action. The user does not need to put much effort to like an image, they can just press the like icon or simply double tap on the image to like it.

Even though liking was the most common measurable forms of engagement among the respondents, some of the respondents were still hesitant to 'like' brand images on Instagram. One of the reasons was to maintain their anonymity on the platform, the fact that other users could see what brand content they have liked or commented made them hesitant to take any visible engagement action. The other reason liking a brand image felt irrelevant due to the

numerous likes that brands receive causing ones like to get lost in the masses. Additionally, one respondent added they do not get any value for liking a brand image. This indicates liking still holds some certain significance to some respondents and have to do definitive thinking before liking a brand's content on Instagram. This is in contradiction to the statement in the paragraph above.

In relation to the point above, about respondents being concerned about anonymity when they liked or commented on brand images, Instagram is currently testing hiding 'likes' on its platform in certain parts of the world, and if the testing is successful then they will apply this feature to all the users worldwide (Kaya 2019). It would be very interesting to see how this update will affect the 'liking' behaviour among the users who have anonymity issues or concerns that their likes will get lost into the masses.

5.2.2 Commenting

Living comments on brand images was found to be very rare form of engagement among the respondents. Commenting meant direct communication with the brand which most users felt weird to do and mostly brand images usually have many comments and the likelihood of a user getting response from the brand are usually very minimal. Due to the large number of comments that most brand messages receive, users felt that their comments might never get read or get a reply resulting to a waste of their effort. Some users even expressed disappointment when they did not get a response from brands after leaving a comment aimed to address the brand in the comment section.

Most of the users however said they sometimes commented on brand image(s) not to directly communicate with the brand, but to tag the brand image(s) to their friends by adding their names in the comment section. This form of commenting action is overlapping with sharing as it combines elements of both engagement forms. Since this action is however extending the reach of the brand message and the comment is not aimed towards the brand, it can be argued that this action falls more under the sharing category.

Some brands use competition posts to encourage users to comment, like or share their brand messages. Users have a chance of winning a prize after taking action(s) described by the brand on the post, below this paragraph is an example of such a post by Cosabella an Italian clothing company. This method is not the best or most profitable way to encourage engagement since the users only take the action required just to win the prize and not for the true sense of engagement that they feel towards the brand or image used (Peters et al. 2013). Some respondents found these kinds of campaigns to be very irritating and don't inspire more interest in them towards the brand.

Figure 4. Screenshots from Fenty Beauty Instagram feed (@fentybeauty)

5.2.3 Sharing

On Instagram, there are several ways that users use to share brand images to their friends, some of the methods are measurable whiles some are not. Respondents said they usually shared brand images that they found entertaining and thought other users would enjoy too. One of the

measurable methods of sharing is with the use of the sharing button located under images on Instagram. This button allows users to share brand images on their story, to other friends or even to their Instagram friends group. Sharing brand images on ones Instagram Story increases the reach of the message since most of the people following the user will see the image, however as Petters et al. (2013) says, the important factor is the quality and not the quantity of engagement therefore the effect of the message might not be as large as compared to if the user share the image with just 2 friends since it make it more personal.

Another sharing method that was partly covered in the commenting chapter is users mentioning their friends in the comment section to share brand content with other friends on Instagram. This method was preferred when a user is sharing content with 1 or 2 friends, as it was viewed as more personal. Way of sharing by the respondents. However, just as liking, some users were still hesitant to use this method due to the anonymity issues for them or their friend whom they will mention in the comment section. This is because other users are able to see who has shared which image and with whom.

Lastly, since at the moment sharing Instagram images on other social media platforms is not possible from the application itself, some users opt to take screen shots of pictures or screen recording of videos that they want to share with others using other platforms like WhatsApp. This form of sharing was very common among the respondents and is currently impossible for brands to track or measure making it harder to determine the exact number of times brand message has been shared.

Even though when a user shares brand images to others they are not directly communicating to the brand, however, this engagement form further the reach of the message (Peter et al. 2013) and can be very valuable to the brand due to the word of mouth effect created by sharing (Raluca 2014).

5.2.4 Following

Even though following a brand was one of the conditions that people had to fulfil to be respondents in this research, it was found that this form of engagement was a common action among the respondents. The motivation towards following a brand varied among respondents, however most of the respondents had certain conditions to be met for them to keep on following the brand. Some of the conditions included the kind of content and the post frequency. Respondent expressed the need for a variety of content on brands Instagram feed to break the monotony of the content. In terms of post frequency there was not a definite amount of post per day or per week that every user preferred. Too many posts and too few posts were the descriptive words that the respondents used to describe reasons to why they would unfollow a brand due to post frequency.

Amusingly, some of the respondents said that they also follow brands on Instagram whose products or service they do not or will not buy. The main reason for following these brands is that their content was so interesting and inspiring that they follow them despite not purchasing from them. This shows the connotative power of images and the aesthetic experience that users are usually looking for (Jamieson 2007) despite them not buying the brand's product offering. This raises an interesting question as to what kind of value these kind of users bring to the brand. Despite these users not buying the brands product or services, they might share the images used to friends and family who might be potentially buy the brand's offerings. Additionally, these images might result to positive image about the brand in the user's which might be valuable in the long run.

In summary, the aesthetics of the images used to convey brand messages on Instagram play a very important role in determining whether a user will follow and keep following a brand. Additionally, due to the connotative response in humans, inspiration and good feeling evoked as a result of viewing an image on Instagram might result to a user following a brand even if they are not or will not buy the brand´s products or services.

5.2.5 Lurking

This was found to be the most common form of engagement behaviour among the respondents. Even though they did not visibly engage with content on Instagram respondents said the content still had some effect on them. This study suggests in agreement with Cheng and Chang (2013), Crawford (2009) and Heinonen (2011) that users who have the lurking behaviour on Instagram does not mean that they are not affected by the images, but instead may actually be drawing some information, tips, inspiration or ideas from brand content on the platform. This means that just because a user is lurking and there is no trace of a visible footprint, it does not mean that they are ignoring brand messages embedded in the images.

One of the major factors that was found to be related to lurking was the **timing and mood** of the user. Many users stated that, usually when they are going through their newsfeed when tired or occupied, mostly their user behaviour never advances past lurking. However, a handful of respondents revealed that they sometimes later after lurking go back to their feed to view images they found interesting at the time. This shows that even though the user did not visibly engage with the content, the image(s) caught the user's attention for them to revisit them. The effort put by the user to revisit the content already shows an effect of the image in the user.

In conclusion it can be stated that despite the covert nature of lurking, it is an effective form of engagement with lasting effects on users. This means the effect of the images used to convey brand messages on Instagram cannot be measured through measurable or visible user engagement forms. Additionally, timing and mood of the users are seen to affect the user engagement behaviour even further.

5.2.6 Personal engagement

According to the study results, they show that personal engagement on brands' images on Instagram will most likely trigger a visible engagement behaviour from users. Respondents pointed out that they wanted to feel inspired and touched when viewing brand images used to communicate brand massages on Instagram. This shows the significance of the general aesthetic

experience and connotative powers related to an image (Rossister 1982). The more personal engaging an image is, the more the chances of a user visibly engaging with the image.

When users have a personal connection with the images used to convey the brand message, for instance one´s favourite artist on a brand post, it triggers a personal level of connection and emotion which was found to encourage users to visibly engage with a post even with users who are predominantly observers on Instagram. This study agrees with Brodie et. al. (2011) that when a brand´s post content entails a message that a user can relate to their personal experience, culture and background, then the chances of them visibly engaging with the brand´s image become higher.

Sometimes, even though an image may be personally engaging with some users, it may not trigger a visible engagement behaviour with some of the users. This is due to some of the users being more of observers than an action-takers on the platform. However, the effect of the image on this user should not be overlooked or deemed less important since it might have the same or an even bigger emotional effect on the observer than the action-taker.

To respond to the research question, the research implies that Instagram users prefer to engage with visual brand communication that personally engages them. This is because it activates the connotative process that triggers an emotional response hence giving a sense of inspiration and good feeling to the users. Additionally, this kind of personally engaging communication has a higher chance of triggering a user to visibly engage with the content just to demonstrate support or even share the content with friends.

Personal experience, social and cultural frames affect how users interpret and establish the message in an image (Jamieson 2007), this results to variation in what users consider personally engaging images on Instagram. However, these same social and cultural frames which cause a variation in image interpretation may also on the other hand result similar interpretation among individuals with related backgrounds (Walter & Gioglio 2014). This in-turn provides brand an opportunity to create personally engaging content by studying the similarity in cultural and

societal norms of their target users and creating images that trigger the connotative process in this audience(s).

The empirical study shows that images evoke emotions after the user has interpreted the message encoded in the image. This is against the proposed theoretical in which emotions came after the user has viewed an image and before interpreting it as shown in figure 5 below. These emotions lead to development of brand attachment in the user, which as a result was seen to increase the chances of engagement in users and also seemed to motivate lurkers to visibly engage with the brand content. Additionally, as shown in the revised theoretical framework the sense of attachment or relation to the image made the users feel closer to the brand and hence increased the chances of them engaging with the brand's content.

Colourful images were also seen to attract users' attention and users found them more pleasant to look at. The ability of colourful images to stand out from the rest of the images made them interesting and easily captured the viewers' attention which lead to interpretation of the image as shown in figure 5. From the conclusions drawn for the empirical study, a revised theoretical framework is proposed in the figure below.
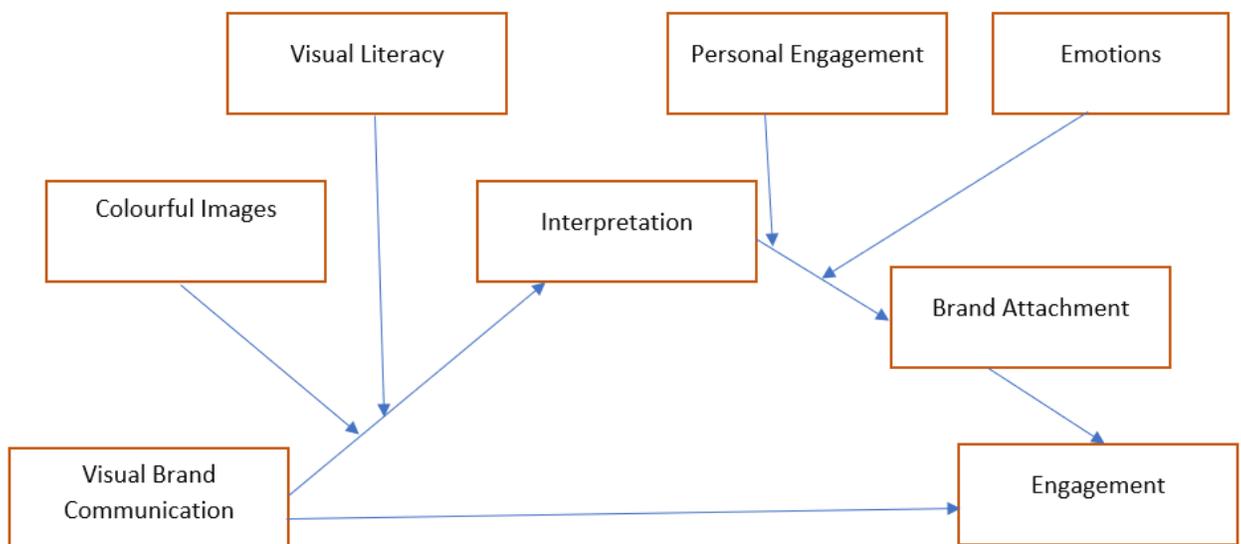

Figure 5. Revised theoretical framework.

6   CONCLUSION

This final chapter entails the theoretical contributions and managerial implications of the study which will be covered in chapter 6.1 and 6.2, respectively. In chapter 6.3 the limitations of the study be discussed for the quality purposes and to determine the generalization of the results. Additionally, suggestions for future research direction will be done to address the topics that were not covered in this research due to some of the limitations and delimitations in the study

The aim of this research was to investigate what kind of visual brand communication evokes higher engagement of Instagram users and why? To answer the question, the topic was first approached by looking into previous academic literature from two theoretical angles: visual brand communication and social media with special emphasis on Instagram. Thereafter, an empirical study was conducted, and data was collected by conducting 10 individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data was then analysed through text colour coding where several categories were built creating themes.

Before progressing deeper into the theoretical contributions and the managerial implications, a brief summary of the response to the research question according to the data analysis will be covered. The results of the research show that users like visual brand communication that evoke a connotative association which leads to the development of an emotional reaction in them. This emotional reaction leads to the user developing an attachment or relation to the brand image thus increasing the chances of engagement. This sense of attachment or relation to the image make the them feel closer to the brand.

6.1   Theoretical contributions

According to the findings of the research, emotional evoking images were preferred by users when it comes to visual brand communication on Instagram and to some degree even influenced the willingness of whether or not a user will visibly engage with a brand's content. Additionally, in agreement with Jamieson (2007) and Rossiter (1982), users were more emotionally affected

by images with high quality aesthetics and connotative features than denotative product focused images. The preference of visual brand content that sparked a good feeling and inspiration was also emphasized by respondents. This research adds to the visual communication field in a social media context where for brands to be successful in engaging its users, they need to standout (Peters et al. 2013) and use visual content that is very creatively curated and well thought visual communication process.

The research also uncovered that brand attachment in users as a mediating factor between interpretation and engagement. When users interpret an image, feel personally engaged and develop emotions, it was discovered that they develop a connection between themselves and the brand which is considered an emotional attachment. This attachment was seen to increase the willingness in users to engage with the brand's content on the platform.

It is good when companies utilize visible user engagement to measure and analyse their social media efforts (Lee, 2015; Peters et al. 2012). However, in agreement with Cheng and Chang (2013) and Crawford (2009) though difficult to determine, the research recommends brands to take other invisible user engagement activities like lurking and taking screenshots in consideration during the overall evaluation. Lurking was very common among all the respondents and even though a respondent might have not visibly engaged with a brand's content they seemed to be somehow affected by the images used for brand communication.

The primary reason as to why users use Instagram is to connect with friends and family (Lin & Lu 2011) however, despite that, brand communication on Instagram seemed to have been appreciated and embraced by the users. The nature of Instagram allowed brands to personally communicate with users in a compact and clutter free method. This personal communication allowed respondents to get much closer to the brand and it gave them a sense of closeness to the brand and knowing it on a more personal level. However, using the feedback from their users, brand should develop a post frequency and variation criteria to prevent them from being forgotten and deemed irrelevant by its users and avoid being boring and monotonous.

6.2   Managerial implications

The research results indicate that Instagram is a worthwhile channel for brand communication when utilized appropriately. However, companies need to study their audience to be able to understand the kind of content they prefer and will keep them engaged (Lee 2015; Walter & Gioglio 2014). This will increase the chance of the brands curating visually pleasing images which personally engage their target audience and later evoke emotional response in them hence increasing both the effect and the reach of the message.

The study results imply that users prefer to engage with visual brand content that evokes a connotative association and thus inciting an emotional reaction in them. This emotional reaction leads to the user developing an attachment to the image thus increasing the chances of engagement. The research also supports the notion that brands should be attentive to the aesthetics of the image to drive the engagement levels higher (Jamieson 2007). Some of the aesthetic aspects that emerged to be of great importance to users thought use of colour and framing to curate images that were interesting for viewers to look at and at the same time conveyed the brand message in a compact and creative way.

For brands to know the kind of visual brand communication that evokes connotative association in its users, they need to do a thorough and extensive research on them. This will give them a good picture of what majority of their audience is looking for in brand content posted on Instagram. This extensive research be done at least once every year, since as stated in the introduction, the social media environment is constantly changing and with that the users' needs are also changing too.

Even after the through and extensive research is done, brands should also be constantly assessing and analysing the performance of their previous brand posts on their Instagram page and their engagement levels. With the analysis brands will be able to see what kind of images are doing well and which are not, enabling them to customize the future posts according the target audience (Peters et al 2013).

Many respondents also mentioned the importance of varying posts on brand's Instagram feed, hence brands should be daring and try varying approaches based on feedback and data from previous post to curate varying posts with the target audience in mind while maintaining a constant brand personality. Although, even if brands follow all the above-mentioned points, not all the content posted will drive higher engagement, however brands need to still be daring enough to try new thigs through trial and error and adjust future content base on the feedback from the users.

6.3   Limitations and further research

Every research conducted usually has its own limitation which provides room for further explorations. This thesis is no exception, to improve the quality of the thesis, the limitations, and possibilities for further explorations of the of the research have been addressed below. The first limitation of the research is that, all the respondents used in the research were all from Helsinki, Finland. This makes wider generalization of the research results limited since other people from different parts of the world or even Finland might have different visual content preferences and engagement behaviour on Instagram. In future it would be interesting to research users from different parts of the world and see if there have a different visual content preference and engagement behaviour as a result of different societal and cultural background.

Secondly, every respondent in the research had experience with Instagram for more than one year but the duration which they have used the platform differed. Additionally, the respondents age range was also from 19 to 32 which is very wide. There might be a difference in behaviours due to age or the duration which a respondent has use the platform. Therefore, it might be interesting to focus on a much smaller age ranges and see if there is any difference between different age ranges.

For data collection, the research utilized in-depth interviews, this creates a limitation for the research since there might be biases made during the interviews by the respondent or interpretation by the researcher. Additionally, here might be circumstances where the

respondent(s) was not honest or did not understand the question well at the time or the interpretation and analysis of responses affected by researcher's intuition which can be affected due to bias or misunderstanding pose limitations to the research.

Another limitation is that Instagram is constantly trying new features on its platform, this might user behaviour and the engagement preference. For instance, they have started testing hiding the number of likes with different users in several location of the world and this feature might become available among all the users worldwide (CNN Business 2019). These new features might affect the way users engage with brand communication on the platform. This opens the possibility for further research on how these new features affect users' engagement behaviours and preference.

REFERENCES

Ahlqvist, T., Bäck, A., Halonen, M. & Heinonen, S. 2008. Social Media Roadmaps: Exploring the futures triggered by social media. [online document] VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland. [Accessed 15 December 2020]. Available at https://www.vttresearch.com/sites/default/files/pdf/tiedotteet/2008/T2454.pdf

Alice, D. 2016. The Ultimate Guide to Using Images in Marketing. [online]. [Accesses 10 January 2020]. Available at https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/images

Aral, S. & Zhao, M. 2019. Social Media Sharing and Online News Consumption. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) - Sloan School of Management [online] [Accessed 6 February 2020] Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3328864

Arnheim, R. 1974. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. Berkley, USA: University of California Press.

Association of College and Research Libraries. 2011. Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. [Online] [Accessed January 2020]. Available at http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/visualliteracy

Bao, Y., Fang, Y., Lin, X., Pöppel, E., Quan, L., Wang, Y. & Yang, T. 2016. Aesthetic Preferences for Eastern and Western Traditional Visual Art: Identity Matters. Frontiers in Psychology. vol. 7(1596)

Bhimrao, M. 2008. Building brand identity in competitive markets: A conceptual model. Journal of Product & Brand Management. Vol.17, pp 4–12.

Brodie, R., Hollebeek, L., Juric, B. & Illic, A. 2011. Customer Engagement: Conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications for Research. Journal of Service Research, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 252-271.

Cambridge Dictionary. Brans communication. [online]. [Accessed 15 December 2020]. Available at https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/brand-communication

Chen, F. & Chang, H. 2013. Engaged lurking – The less visible form of participation in online small group learning. Research & Practice Technology Enhance learning, vol. 8, no. 1, pp 171-199.

Choon- Lee, C. 2019. Enhancing visual literacy of students through photo elicitation. Journal of Visual Literacy, vol. 38 pp. 120-129.

Choon-Lee, C. 2019. Enhancing visual literacy of students through photo elicitation. Journal of Visual Literacy. vol. 38(1-2), 120-129.

Corballis, M. C. 2014 Left Brain, Right Brain: Facts and Fantasies. PLOS Biology. Vol. 12(1).

Crawford, K. 2009. Following you: Disciplines of listening in social media. Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, vol. 23, no. 4, pp 525-535.

Cresswell, J.W, Plano, V.L. 2011. Designing and conducting mixed method research. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

CSR- Center for Strategy Research Boston. 2006. "This is a recording"… Three Benefits of Recording Interviews. [online] [Accessed 2 January 2020] Available at http://www.csr-bos.com/this-is-a-recordingthree-benefits-of-recordinginterviews/

Datta, R., Joshi, D., Li J. & Wang, J. 2009. Studying Aesthetics in Photographic Images Using a Computational Approach. The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802, USA [online] [Accessed 13 January 2020]. Available at http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.81.5178&rep=rep1&kind=pdf

De Vries, L., Gensler, S. & Leeflang, P.S.H. 2012. Popularity of Brand Posts on Instagram Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing. Journal of Interactive Marketing, vol. 26, pp. 83-91

Fahmy, S., Bock, M & Wanta, W. 2015. Visual communication theory and research. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Framework and Guidelines for Managing Social Media. Journal of Interactive Marketing. Vol 27, pp. 281-298.

Goncalves Pereira, H., de Fatima Salgueiro, M., Mateus, I. 2014. Say yes to Facebook and get your customers involved! Relationships in a world of social networks. Business Horizons, vol. 57, pp. 695-702.

Green, A.E. &Aarons, G.A. 2011. A comparison of policy and direct practice stakeholder perceptions of factors affecting evidence-based practice implementation using concept mapping. Implementation Science, vol. 7 pp 6-104.

Herbert, G. 2008. Human eye. Handbook of Optical Systems: Vol. 4, (12-46). Survey of Optical Instruments. [online] [Accessed 03 January 2020]. Available at https://application.wiley-vch.de/books/sample/3527403809_c01.pdf

Hirsjärvi, S. & Hurme, H. 2009.Tutkimushaastattelu. Teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Hirsjärvi, S. Remes, P. & Sajavaara, P. 2004. Tutki ja kirjoita. 10. Painos. Jyväskylä. Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy.

Hollebeek, L., Glynn, M. & Brodie, R. 2014. Consumer Brand Engagement in Social Media: Conceptualization, Scale Development and Validation. Journal of Interactive Marketing, vol. 28, pp. 149-165.

Instagram. 2020. How do I share a post with multiple photos or videos on Instagram? [online]. [Accesses 16 January 2020]. Available at https://help.instagram.com/269314186824048?helpref=search&sr=1&query=carousel&search_session_id=55c8f9962f52e928e709e3cedee7a7fa

Instagram. 2020. Posting and Adding Locations: How do I share a post with multiple photos or videos on Instagram. [online]. [Accessed 02 March 2020]. Available at https://help.instagram.com/488619974671134/?helpref=hc_fnav&bc[0]=Instagram%20Help&bc[1]=Using%20Instagram&bc[2]=Sharing%20Photos%20and%20Videos

Jamieson, H. 2007. Visual communication: More than meets the eye. Bristol: Intellect books.

Jelena, R., Dragan, M., Goran M. & Pavlović, A. 2013. Specialization of Cerebral Hemispheres in Humans. Engrami, vol. 35, pp. 63-70.

John, C. 2018

Jones, S. 2018. Mapping the extended frontiers of escapism: binge-watching and hyperdiegetic exploration. Journal of Marketing Management, vol. 34:5-6 pp. 497–508.

Kaplan, M. & Haenlein, M. 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. Business Horizons, vol. 53, pp.59–68.

Kenda, K. 2019. The Basics of Cognition and Mental Process. Very well mind. [online]. [Accessed 22 January 2020]. Available at https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-cognition-2794982

Kenneth, L., Sandra, M., Keith, K. & Gretchen B. 2004. Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge Communication Series.

Kitzinger, J. 1995 Qualitative Research: Introducing Focus Groups. BMJ, vol. 311, pp 299-302.

Kohli, C., Suri, R. & Kapoor, A. 2015. Will Social Media Kill Branding? Business Horizonz, vol. 58, pp. 34-44.

Leo, J. & Terence J. 2006. 23 Problems in Systems Neuroscience. Madison Avenue, New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Lin, K. & Lu, H. 2011. Why people use social networking sites: An empirical study integrating network externalities and motivation theory. Computers in Human Behavior, vol. 27, pp. 1152-1161.

Lincoln Y. & Guba E. 1985. Naturalistic enquiry. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.

Maria, H. 2015. Visual Brand Communication on Instagram: A study on consumer engagement. Department of Marketing. Hanken School of Economics. [Accessed 15 January 2020]. Available at: https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/156026/hellberg.pdf?sequence=4

Maryam, M. 2020. 10 Instagram Stats Every Marketer Should Know in 2020 [Infographic]. [online] [Accessed 15 January 2020]. Available https://www.oberlo.com/blog/instagram-stats-every-marketer-should-know

Michelle, C. Stop Posting the Same Message on Social Media (And Do This Instead). [blog post]. [Accessed 02 March 2020]. Available https://blog.hootsuite.com/cross-promote-social-media/

Omnicore. 2020. Instagram by the Numbers: Stats, Demographices & Fun Facts. [online] [Accessed 03 January 2020] Available at https://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/

Patton, M. 2012. Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Inc.

Patton, M.Q. 2002. Qualitative research and evaluation methods. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Porter, M. E. 2001. Strategy and the Internet. Harvard Business Review. [www document]. [Accessed 3 February 2020]. Available at https://hbr.org/2001/03/strategy-and-the-internet

Raluca, A. 2014. Word of mouth on Social media. SEA – Practical application of science, vol. 6, pp. 37-42

Ralucacra, Y. Instagram is now testing hiding likes worldwide. CNN Business. [online]. [Accessed 26 February 2020]. Available at https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/14/tech/instagram-hiding-likes-globally/index.html

Revlin, R. 2013. Cognition: Theory and Practice. New York, USA: Worth Publishers.

Rossister, J. 1982. Visual Imagery: applicatiions to advertising. Advances in consumer research, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 101-106

Ryan, H. 2018. As Facebook Shifts, Instagram Emerges As A New Home For Brands. [online]. [Accessed 20 January 2020]. Available https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanholmes/2018/02/01/as-facebook-shifts-instagram-emerges-as-a-new-home-for-brands/#7f38d3e17834

Simply Measured. 2015. Simply measured Q4 2014 Instagram Study. [online]. [Accessed 12 December 2019] Available at http://get.simplymeasured.com/2014-q4-instagram-study.html

Smith, K., Moriarty, S., Kenney, K. & Barbatsis. 2005. Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media. New York: Routledge.

Solis, B. 2011. Engage! The Complete Guide for Brands and Businesses to Build, Cultivate, and Measure in the New Web. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Sprout Social. 2020. Important Instagram Stats you need to know for 2020. [online]. [Accessed 09 January 2020]. Available at https://sproutsocial.com/insights/instagram-stats/

Statista. 2019. Number of social network users from 2010 to 2023. [online] [Accessed 22 December 2019] Available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/

Statista. 2020. Average number of daily Instagram posts of selected fashion brands worldwide in 2020. [online] [Accessed 22 December 2019] Available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/729726/number-posts-instagram-daily-fashion-brands-world/

Sullivan, T. 2010. The Evolution of Law Enforcement Attitudes to Recording Custodial Interviews. The Journal of Psychiatry & Law, vol. 38(1-2), pp. 137-75.

Todd, V. 2017. An Introduction to Photographic Composition. B&H Photo Video Pro Audio. [online] [Accessed 03 January 2020]. Available at: https://www.bhphotovideo.com/explora/photography/tips-and-solutions/11-thoughts-introduction-photographic-composition

Tuomi, J. & Sarajärvi, A. 2009. Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi. 5. Uudistettu painos. Helsinki: Tammi.

Vocabulary.com. 2020. Interpretation. [Accessed 22 June 2020]. Available at: https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/interpretation

Wallendorf, M. & Belk, R. 1989. Assessing Trustworthiness in Naturalistic Consumer Research. Interpretive Consumer Research, Association of Consumer Research.

Walter, E. & Giolgio, J. 2014. The power of Visual Story Telling: How to use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market YoUR Brand. USA: McGraw Hill Profesionall.

Winqvist, L. 2014. Factors Determining Brand Post Populatirty on Instagram (Master´s thesis). Helsinki: Department of Marketing, Hanken School of Economics. https://hanken.finna.fi/Record/hanna.192130

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Guide

When did you first start using Instagram?

What in Instagram appeals to you the most?

What are some of the things you pay attention to while scrolling down your newsfeed?

What brand(s) are you following?

Elaborate the reasons why you started following this/these brand(s)

Do you have a preference on the kind of brand post you want to see on Instagram? (products, in-use, behind the scenes…)

Do you have an example of a recent post you saw on Instagram that you for some reason recall very well and why?

How did you act? ^^

How do you usually interact with brand posts on Instagram? (Lurking, likes, comments, sharing, following…)

Is that (^^) dependent on the post and how?

What are your opinions about engaging with brands on Instagram?

Personally, what are the critical reasons why you engage with brand posts on Instagram?

Do you have any additional comments we finish the discussion?