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TRENDS ON INSTAGRAM IN THE DIGITAL ERA

A Quantitative and Qualitative Study

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PRÆSENTATION AF FORFATTEREN



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This scientific article is dedicated to

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Abstract

I takt med den digitale udvikling peger flere og flere undersøgelser på, at det kan gøre en skelsættende forskel for virksomheders brand-image, hvorvidt de følger med i, hvad der rører sig på de sociale medier – bl.a. hvilke trends, der er de mest dominerende.

En bevågenhed om, hvad der på nuværende tidspunkt er ”in” gør det muligt for virksomheder at nå ud til sine kunder og forbrugere, hvilket potentielt positionerer dem hensigtsmæssigt i forhold til andre virksomheder og omverdenen. Det er især blevet sværere at fange opmærksomheden blandt *generation y*, da deres opvækst i internettets epoke har medført en naturlig færden på særligt de sociale medier, hvorfor de i dag anses som værende blandt verdens mest kritiske forbrugere.

Af den årsag er det nærmest blevet en nødvendighed for organisationer – store såvel som små – at følge trit i udviklingen af de sociale medier og den digitale tidsalder i det hele taget.

Følgende artikel søger derfor at opdage de mest fremherskende trends blandt en række brands inden for modeindustrien på det sociale medie Instagram med henblik på at undersøge, hvordan de opdagede trends kan påvirke de beskæftigede brands’ organisatoriske etos.

Instagram har i stigende grad vist sig at være et af de mest signifikante sociale medier for moderne markedskommunikation og branding, da kanalen besidder talrige fordelagtige værktøjer, heriblandt muligheden for at benytte sig af funktionen *stories*, altså muligheden for at knytte øjebliksbilleder og videoer til sin profil i 24 timer, og muligheden for at lægge enhver slags billeder ud i al almindelighed.

Undersøgelsen, som ligger til grund for denne artikel, er foretaget således, at de pågældende brands’ handlinger/aktiviteter på Instagram er blevet observeret i 14 dage med henblik på at identificere de mest iøjefaldende mønstre, som kunne tænkes at udgøre en trend.

Feltet inden for branding- og kommunikationssfæren for sociale medier er grundet sin hastige udvikling et relativt nyt emne, hvilket betyder, at der fra et akademisk synspunkt ikke er blevet udviklet tilstrækkeligt teori omkring dette undersøgelsesområde. Derfor er det essentielt at fastslå, at observationsperioden blot har været med til at skabe et indtryk af nogle af de mest fremtrædende trends, som har dannet rammerne for det teoretiske afsnit i artiklen.

Til første del af analysen benyttes en kvantitativ tilgang, hvor hyppigheden for hvert enkelt tema for hver *post* og *story* statistisk er blevet beregnet og anført til at skulle udgøre en trend. Anden del af analysen tager udgangspunkt i en mere kvalitativ tilgang, hvor det med udgangspunkt i den teoretiske ramme i artiklen og via en subjektiv fortolkning bliver undersøgt, hvordan de opdagede trends kan påvirke de udvalgte brands’ organisatoriske etos.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media is one of – if not *the* – most ground-breaking development in digital media over the last two decades. With over 2.5 billion active users worldwide, social media has clearly revolutionized the way in which people communicate, and it is anticipated that the number of users will increase to 3 billion on a global level by the year 2021 (Statista, 2019).

The reason why nearly a third of the current world population is present on social media is the reality that social media provide endless opportunities for people; whether it is to connect with each other with a minimum amount of effort, thereby modernizing everyday interactions and making it less difficult to stay connected, or to share photos, opinions and follow influential individuals – social media undoubtedly encompasses countless traits (Rufaid, 2015). Thus, social media and digitalization is a growing field, but besides enabling people to stay in contact and to act socially in general, social media can be characterized as a game-changer with a significant impact on businesses as well. This is validated by the large and increasing number of businesses who strategically operate on different kinds of social media platforms for different marketing-related purposes (Smith, 2019).

Although there are several types of social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and LinkedIn, Instagram is perceived as one of the most significant social media platforms for modern marketing because of its potential (Hughes, 2017).

The platform was originally created as a photo and video sharing application, which contains numerous beneficial tools for publishing content since photos and videos can encourage engagement, generate sales, and add an overall value to the brand. The most efficient tool for businesses, however, is perhaps the opportunity to utilize *hashtags* and apply “stories”.

With that being said, the real “magic”, however, presumably occurs if brands or businesses utilize these tools in combination with the prevailing trends within the digital sphere.

By being observant regarding the predominant trends on social media – specifically on Instagram – the brand can recognize, reach, and communicate with its target audience (Innexus, 2019).

Combining the current trends with the production of content and simultaneously utilizing the tools Instagram offers may convert prospects and followers into customers, and therefore prove highly efficient for today’s brands and businesses on Instagram, while bringing along a positive impact on a given brand’s overall brand equity. On this basis, from an academic and personal perspective, it is regarded relevant and interesting to examine how a number ‘front runners’, that is, globally recognized brands within the fashion industry, use Instagram for branding purposes based on the current trends and how these trends therefore can affect their organizational ethos.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is to initially discover the prevalent trends (and tools) on Instagram used by eight globally recognized brands within the fashion industry, namely ASOS, Nike, H&M, Chanel, Adidas, Under Armour, Louis Vuitton and Levi Strauss & Co.

As mentioned in the introduction, the social networking platform, Instagram, offers several tools which businesses can utilize to hit their target audience and generate sales by inciting their followers and customers to purchase their products or services.

Harnessing the available tools and publishing content, which is based on an awareness of the trends on Instagram, may be a fruitful combination. Thus, by quantitatively discovering the prevailing trends and tools first, the article subsequently seeks to qualitatively examine and highlight – with the help of different theoretical perspectives and based on a subjective interpretation – *how* the discovered trends on Instagram can affect the brands' organizational ethos.

In addressing and answering this two-parted research question, the first part of the research question will, despite quantitatively measuring the data, also be handled by subjectively interpreting the study.

Epistemology & Ontology

The ontological perspective regarding this article is the study of trends, while the epistemological perspective concerns producing knowledge through a hermeneutical and social constructivist approach by subjectively interpreting the study using an inductive method.

In other words, the ontological perspective deals with how the article grasps the (socially constructed) reality, while the epistemological perspective deals with how the reality is studied (hermeneutically). The ontological position within hermeneutics is that phenomena ought to be understood contextually, which is the case with this article, since trends are ephemeral, unpredictable and appear in different contexts.

The epistemological position within hermeneutics deals with the understanding of knowledge and can be achieved deductively and inductively, the purpose being to ideographically understand through subjective interpretations (Egholm, 2014: 235). As for social constructivism, the essence of the ontological position is that phenomena are being studied in terms of how they procedurally come into existence, which is a matter that will be dealt with in the analysis.

The epistemological stance within social constructivism resembles the hermeneutical: by inductively understanding knowledge and how phenomena are ascribed meaning, the purpose once again is to ideographically understand through subjective interpretations (ibid.).

The demarcation between the nomothetic and idiographic scientific ideal is that while nomothetic means to establish general laws by using natural sciences, the term idiographic refers to the study of e.g. events in its own specific context (ibid.: 226). There is a fine line between this demarcation within the article: it might be that events or phenomena – in this case trends – are being studied in its own specific context, however, by studying trends on Instagram, some laws in terms of a potential importance of trends may likewise be established, although the article circulates around human and not natural science. From a sociological perspective, it can be argued that the article focuses on a *micro* level context, since only one industry (the fashion industry) and only a handful of brands (the eight fashion brands) have been selected to shed light on *macro* level phenomena, that is, to potentially ascertain that the discovered trends may in fact contain a significance for other industries and brands as well (Fuglsang et al, 2013: 539).

Hermeneutics

Instead of seeking to explain as in positivism, hermeneutics seek to interpret and claims that understanding and interpretation is prior to explanation, and that the social phenomena, which are being studied, are carriers of meaning and therefore must be interpreted (ibid.: 289).

In this context, social phenomena refer to the discovered trends on Instagram, which are yet to be subjectively interpreted and understood in order to answer the second part of the research question, namely how the trends can affect the brands' organizational ethos.

A central element within traditional and philosophical hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle, which suggests that parts can only be understood if the whole is implicated, yet this understanding can only be gained by understanding the parts (ibid.: 292). In the article, the parts are the distinctive trends, while the whole is the possible effect of trends and its outcome on brands.

Social constructivism

As the name implies, social constructivism considers the reality to be a social construction (Klausen, 2011: 168). In other words, the reality we seek to acknowledge is never a 'real' reality, but instead an interpreted reality.

A central element within social constructivism is the emphasis that societal phenomena are not eternal and unchangeable, they are, however, a product of historical and social processes (Fuglsang et al, 2013: 403).

The interesting aspect of social constructivism is therefore to identify how a phenomenon is created and works within the concrete context, and instead of understanding what meaning the phenomena have, it is crucial to grasp how phenomena are given importance (Egholm, 2014: 148).

The most diverse phenomena today are perceived as socially structured and are therefore subject to a social constructivist analysis (Fuglsang et al, 2013: 404). Accordingly, the trends constitute social phenomena and are thus socially constructed.

Within social constructivism, the specific studies are often inductive, given that it is attempted to let the concrete context define relationships rather than to examine already established hypotheses about relationships (ibid.).

What is common to both social constructivism and hermeneutics is thus the perception that the realization of the reality is always an interpretation, and the methods applied within both scientific theoretical approaches typically consist of qualitative interviews or participant observations, although in this context participants refer to the brands' behavior on Instagram focusing on trends (Fuglsang et al, 2013: 431).

Observations

Given the level of difficulty to conduct interviews with key figures within the desired number of companies, it was necessary to apply an alternative data collection method in which I was forced to be fully independent from potential respondents. The article is therefore built on observations in the form of online monitoring.

Even though Herring (2004) claims that “much research on online behavior is anecdotal and speculative, rather than empirically grounded” (Herring, 2004: 338), the study is nonetheless based on observations, figures, and data in the form of textual and especially visual representations, thereby making the data empirical and thus the research scientific.

That said, because of the complexity of the data, the size of the data and specifically *how* the data have been collected, different research designs have been identified and *mixed methods* have therefore been applied (Bjørner, 2015: 20).

Being a qualitative method, the data in this article was firstly collected through observations. However, a quantitative approach has likewise been applied. This will be clarified in the following sections, where I will specifically elaborate *how* the data was collected and *how* it was processed.

When the data is collected through observations, it provides an insight into matters such as processes or behaviors and surpasses the acumen conveyed verbally, consequently comprising the potential to cover complex aspects such as social patterns (ibid.: 63). In this case, social patterns are the trends identified among the eight globally recognized fashion brands on Instagram.

Secondly, *document data* has been applied as a data collecting method.

In short, document data is not always textual, as the name might imply; the data can be visual in the form of photos captured from social media channels such as Instagram and Flickr (ibid.: 94).

This is exactly the case with the data collected for this article, since photos captured through observations were the primary source to originally discover prevalent trends whose potential effects subsequently will be analyzed.

The advantage with document data is that it provides the researcher with readily accessible information and observations, which perhaps could not have been gathered through interviews.

The disadvantage with document studies, however, is that the documents – being the visual material captured on Instagram – were not intended for explorative purposes, meaning that the material might not be as precise or detailed (ibid.: 95). It is therefore relevant to question the reliability and validity of the material.

Moreover, when doing (online) observations, there are several features to have in mind.

These are whether the environment is natural or artificial, whether observations are by participants or non-participants, whether observations are human or mechanical and whether observations are direct or indirect. The environment in which the observations for this article were collected is artificial, since the environment – being the online monitoring of eight fashion brands on Instagram – is created by the researcher himself and provides a greater control in collecting data (ibid.: 64). In addition, the article deals with non-participant, mechanical, and direct observations.

Non-participant since there is no participation in the activities observed, and non-participant observations can take place on the internet, including digital and/or social media such as Instagram, as in this case.

The advantage of this type of observations is that there is no possibility for the researcher to bias the data by intervening. The disadvantage, however, is that the observations rely greatly on the researcher's interpretation of what is in process (ibid.).

Nevertheless, this merely highlights the scientific theoretical position of this article, which as mentioned above has its roots in a social constructivist and hermeneutical point of departure.

Although not involving ethnographic fieldwork, however, a noteworthy aspect within this approach is *virtual ethnography*. It is also referred to as *netnography* or online ethnography, and as the naming indicates, the environment in which the data is collected is computer-mediated, often within internet usage (Bjørner, 2015: 43). Bjørner (2015) exemplifies this with an approach where Facebook hypothetically could be used as a virtual field to study brand communities.

This article has monitored eight fashion brands on Instagram to discover trends and analyze how they can affect the brands' organizational ethos. As a result, it can be reasoned that virtual ethnography therefore is the environment in which the study took place, the observations and document data were the empirical methodological approaches to collect the data for the article, while the overall scientific method applied is inductive.

In using inductive methods, the researcher searches for patterns based on observations, with the purpose of developing a generalized conclusion, although this is not unambiguously the case with this article (Klausen, 2011: 116).

But even though the article focuses on trends within exactly eight brands in specifically the fashion industry on one exact social media, the knowledge that will ultimately be achieved can nevertheless theoretically apply to all brands within all industries and on other social media platforms, as the data collected hypothetically *can* shape a theory.

In other words, by systematically observing and studying phenomena, patterns may occur which lastly enable the researcher to generate a comprehensive abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomena – in this case the trends and their possible effects on organizational ethos (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006: 5).

The process of gathering data

Before the process was initiated, a new Instagram account was created to be able to exclusively focus on monitoring the eight selected fashion brands.

The collection of data began on Saturday, March 17th, 2018 at 8am and it is noteworthy to state that content posted before this juncture has not been considered, due to factors such as the brands already having a massive amount of content on their respective Instagram accounts, which would be impossible to analyze based on the maximum number of pages allowed for this article and due to a longer period necessary to observe and examine the data.

In addition, it was assessed that it would be interesting to observe, discover and examine trends identified at that exact time, since trends can be argued to be ephemeral and can change with the blink of an eye, especially within the digital era.

In observing the eight fashion brands, a mobile device and a computer was used. The observations were specifically made three times a day on a mobile device; at approximately 8am, 4pm and 12am, due to different time zones when American brands such as Levi's, Nike and Under Armour post, versus when European brands such as ASOS, Louis Vuitton and Chanel publish content.

When observing, I would screenshot every time the brands had posted new content, whether being images, videos, or Instagram stories. The technical term for this is called *real-time data processing* (Walker, 2013).

The screenshots were taken on a mobile phone and not on a computer, due to the simple reason that emojis are primarily invented to be used on a mobile phone, which is why not every emoji can be viewed on a computer screen, as the characters are inconsistent. In an attempt to capture all details, a mobile phone was therefore assessed to be the most ideal instrument to gather as rich data as possible. In addition, it was necessary to take multiple screenshots (more than two) if a post was published as a slideshow consisting of multiple images and/or videos. Essentially, an Instagram slideshow allows the user to combine up to 10 images and/or videos into one post. All images/videos can then be viewed by swiping left.

When transferring the data (the screenshots) and inserting them in a document, all the above mentioned details would meticulously be written down; what type of post it was (an image, video, or slideshow), what the post focused on, whether it was product-oriented, motivational, community-driven or something else, what was written in the caption, the use of emojis in the caption, how many "likes" and comments the post (at the time of the screenshot) had received, how many views the post (if it was a video) had received at the time of the screenshot, if hashtags were included, if the brand had an official brand hashtag, if the post included tags such as *influencers*, *brand ambassadors* or *arbitrary individuals* in general, if tools had been used when publishing the post, and finally, if possible trends could be identified.

When identifying possible trends, it is essential to stress that all trends have been identified based on own interpretations and fundamental knowledge of what a possible trend on Instagram might look like, which therefore once again reflects the scientific theoretical positions of this article and thus makes it difficult to generalize.

This supports the assertion that the observations and data collection made for this article are of non-participants, which greatly relies on the researcher's interpretation of what is in process (Bjørner, 2015: 64). Additionally, this once again likewise underpins the scientific theoretical standpoint of this article being based on social constructivist and hermeneutical beliefs.

Regarding the amount of "likes" of a given post, it is central to underline that it is an inevitability that the number of "likes" of a given post almost constantly increases, since the studied brands have millions of followers.

Thus, the "likes" which are captured at the given time of a given post is an illustration of how many "likes" a given post (published by a globally recognized fashion brand) can receive.

The same applies to the number of followers which inextricably varies.

Having said that, when screenshotting an Instagram story, the procedure slightly differs.

Since an Instagram story is not static, meaning that the story – whether it is an image or a video – disappears after a couple of seconds and completely after 24 hours, a screenshot of each brand story was taken at an arbitrary moment during the length of a given story.

The documentation of this type of data therefore solely serves as an impression of what kind of story it is.

After the screenshots were taken, the procedure was more or less similar to the screenshots of posts (images and/or videos). The type of story would be defined along with describing the content of the story in detail, and what the story focused on. If the story included functions such as the commerce-friendly option to "swipe-up" on the story to e.g., gain information regarding a product, this would likewise be written down.

If filters, GIFs/stickers and emojis were included and if other Instagram-users (such as celebrities or "ordinary" users) have been "tagged", and finally, if a possible trend could be determined.

Once again, all these measurements serve to provide as rich information about the data as possible, in order to systematically and methodologically analyze it. The data collection took place over two weeks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Because of the rapid development of social media, this field of study is relatively new within the area of marketing and communications, which means that there is still little theory from an academic viewpoint.

As a result, the theories used and applied in the analysis, is primarily a reflection of which trends are prevalent and were interpreted during the period of observing the eight fashion brands and their respective publishing of content on Instagram.

That is why the overall theoretical framework concerns organizational communication and different disciplines within the branding sphere. Without having to provide an all-embracing and detailed description of the theoretical structure used in this article, theories regarding organizational communication primarily involve the communications triangle focusing on the external perspective, that is, the *desirable image* and *ethos*.

The second overriding theme within the theoretical framework, branding, concerns the demarcation between corporate versus product branding.

Other theoretical notions implicate Heidi Hansen's (2016) suggestions regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) addressing it as more of a societal responsibility rather than social, thus being an organization's external obligation since organizations increasingly involve in several societal issues (Hansen, 2016: 122). In addition, Schwartz and Carroll's three-domain model for CSR has likewise been applied (see the model below).

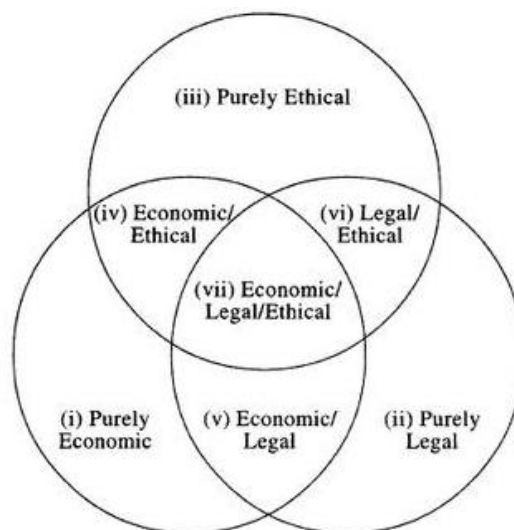


Figure 1 – The Three-Domain Model of Corporate Social Responsibility

Moreover, celebrity branding and storytelling – two ethos-marked types of branding – have also been used to illustrate how the discovered trends (which will be clarified in the next section) are connected to Hansen's (2016) theoretical beliefs.

Celebrity branding is a branding discipline where organizations strategically make use of celebrities in their marketing communication to “boost” the sale of their products (ibid.: 209).

Besides creating attention about a product or service, the celebrities can furthermore transfer their ethos to the brand which they cooperate with. The idea is to create a conception in the user's head where the user believes that if the celebrity can vouch for the product, it must be a good product. In this way, the celebrity thus becomes a “guarantee” for quality.

When it comes to storytelling, Hansen (2016) argues that it is a conscious positioning strategy where the organization decides how it wishes to present itself to the outside world (ibid.: 136).

The organization can choose to work with storytelling from a strategic, *outer* level, which is the organization's deliberate, external communication, from a strategic, *inner* level, where the organization deals with storytelling from an internal, employer-oriented perspective or by including both the inner and outer aspect, which is referred to as storytelling on an *operational* level.

Within online spaces, Hansen (2016) argues that the recipient practically controls the course of the battle, since online storytelling is created in an interplay between the sender and the recipient, hence enlarging the opportunity for interactivity.

With that being said, the sender (in this context the organization) can still choose to apply *episodic* storytelling, where the organization produces a complete story, which is then made available on different social media. Thus, episodic storytelling encompasses some of the same characteristics as traditional commercials since the organization is in control of the design of the communications product. However, even though this type of storytelling functions as completed and closed stories, interactivity may still occur when the recipient for instance shares or comments the story.

The other type of storytelling within online spaces is *inviting* storytelling, and here the organization invites the recipient to be a part of the story and lets the receiver contribute to creating and developing the story, thus having no control over the development of the story (ibid.: 392). Within inviting storytelling, the story is not closed and completed as in the first mentioned type.

Inviting storytelling may therefore make use of user-generated content, making the level of credibility for this type of story higher, as the users have no commercial interest in creating the content they contribute with (ibid.: 393).

Finally, since the article circulates around the social media landscape, more specifically Instagram, theories regarding the term hashtag naturally ought to be a part of this article.

There are several researchers who have contributed within the research of hashtags, including Zappavigna (2015), Page (2012), Scott (2015) and Hougaard (2016), however, this section is exclusively based on Thomas Hestbæk Andersen's work from 2018. The incentive for exclusively focusing on Andersen's (2018) work is chiefly because his article, "Hashtaggets funktioner" (The functions of the Hashtag, my translation) in *Det Ny Merino*, is the most updated research regarding hashtags.

Being aware of the fact that Andersen (2018) addresses four functions of the hashtag, including the experiential, logical, interpersonal, and textual meaning of the hashtag, this article focuses on the implication of the hashtag as a whole, as the use of hashtags from a holistic aspect constitute a significant part of the data collected for this article.

Nonetheless, in all its simplicity, a hashtag is a lingual construction of the hashtag character (#) in combination with a word, abbreviation, phrase, or sentence. If the hashtag character is followed by more than one linguistic element, it is constructed without any gaps, partly due to general principles for the design of metadata, but also to distinguish the construction from the rest of the text (Hestbæk, 2018: 2).

To exemplify this, a hashtag may be constructed in the following way: #Masterthesis, #trendsoninstagram, #fashionindustry, #brandingandorganizationalcommunication.

From a whole perspective, Andersen's (2018) scientific article is therefore deemed to assist when analyzing the data from a hashtag-oriented perspective, since the data for this article is constituted by visual material where many different hashtags are captured and can potentially have an influence on the discovered trends and ultimately the research question.

ANALYSIS/RESULTS

In the following section, I will specifically illuminate which trends have been interpreted as being trends from the data conducted for this article and why.

The first section of the analysis therefore seeks to answer the first part of the research question, namely which trends are the most prevalent among several brands within the fashion industry on Instagram, which will be done by subjectively interpreting and quantitatively analyzing the data, and by statistically calculating the frequency of each trend among all 176 posts and 173 stories.

The second part of the analysis seeks to qualitatively portray how the discovered trends – with a starting point in the theoretical framework – can affect the eight brands’ organizational ethos.

A subjective interpretation will in continuation hereof also be applied, reflecting both scientific theoretical positions of the article: the hermeneutic and social constructivist.

Thus, it can be argued that to understand the whole (the possible organizational ethos), the parts (the trends) must be understood first.

Interpreting the data statistically

It has been highlighted that the duration of the collection of data lasted for two weeks (14 days), which resulted in 554 screenshots in total, from which 349 will be analyzed; 176 posts (images, videos, and slideshows) and 173 stories.

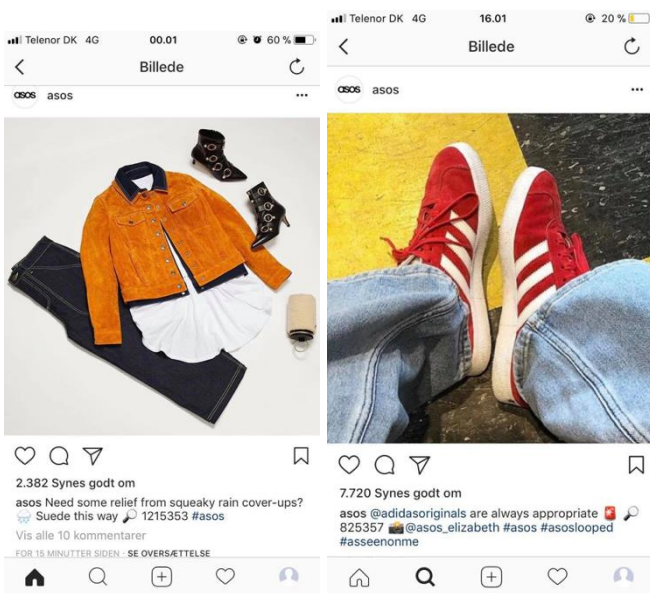
The discovered trends within posts

Thematic trend: Product branding

First, it is essential to state that the majority of the posts to a large extent encompassed product-oriented content. This can be seen in the *Brand Matrix* (Figure 2), where the category “Focuses on” explicitly explains what the post focuses on.

Post no.	Date	Observation time	Brand	Type of post	Focuses on	Caption	Hashtag(s) (yes/no)	If yes, which hashtag(s)?	Tags	Theme/Possible trend (when identifiable)
1	1 March 17	4PM	ASOS	Image	Saint Patrick's Day, the global celebration of Irish culture, hence the green colors	Lookin' mean in green (emojis: shamrock, camera with flash) @asos_barbara (emoji: magnifying glass tilted right) 1202344 #asseeonme #asos	Yes	#asseeonme #asos	asos_barbara (brand ambassador)	Cultural celebration
2	2 March 17	4PM	ASOS	Image	Saint Patrick's Day, the global celebration of Irish culture, hence the green dress and green glasses	Seeing the world through green-tinted glasses (emojis: sun, camera with flash)	Yes	#asos #asseeonme	asos_lotte (brand ambassador)	Cultural celebration
3	3 March 18	12AM	ASOS	Image	Saint Patrick's Day, the global celebration of Irish culture, hence the green colors in the background	How's the view? (emojis: eyes, camera with flash) @asos_rudy (emoji: magnifying glass tilted right) 1091798 #asos #asosman #asseeonme	Yes	#asos #asosman #asseeonme	asos_ruddy (brand ambassador)	Cultural celebration
4	4 March 18	4PM	ASOS	Image	Creating a "funny" scenery due to weather forecast (no relation to the brand, could easily be posted by anybody)	Stockpiling after you see the snow forecast (emojis: snowflake, lollipop, camera with flash) @asos_jana #asos #asseeonme	Yes	#asos #asseeonme	asos_jana (brand ambassador)	Unidentifiable
5	5 March 19	12AM	ASOS	Image	Brand products (product-oriented post)	Need some relief from squeaky rain cover-ups? (emoji: cloud with rain) Suede this way (emoji: magnifying glass tilted right) 1215353 #asos	Yes	#asos		Product branding

Figure 2 – Brand Matrix



Screenshot 1

Screenshot 2

In fact, out of all 176 posts consisting of images, videos and slideshows (slideshows referring to a combination of multiple images and/or videos, as previously mentioned), Asos have published 45 posts – 36 of them which were related to either the brand's (Asos) or other brands' (for instance Nike or The North Face,) products, which means that only nine of Asos' posts were non-product-oriented. However, it is important to mention that during the 14 days of observing the eight fashion brands on Instagram, Nike – as the only brand – did *not* publish any posts.

Although being somewhat paradoxical, since – out of all eight fashion brands – Nike has the most followers (77.5 million as of this moment), from a researcher's perspective it is, however, quite a shame that the brand has not published any posts at all in the observation period, as the interesting is not what have not been observed, but what could have been. However, on the other hand it can be argued that Nike has achieved brand icon status; a status where brands are so strong that they can be considered exemplary symbols.

This status is – among other criteria – obtained through acting as a cultural activist, creating an original expressive culture as an artist and developing an authentic populist voice, which is why it may not be as necessary to publish content excessively (Heding et al, 2016: 238-239).

Nevertheless, the only content Nike posted during the observation period were stories, which will be touched upon when the analysis seeks to discover trends within the 173 captured stories.

For all 176 posts published by the brands (except Nike) on Instagram in the period of observation, 112 posts in total were product oriented. To be more accurate, this corresponds to 63.6 percent.

Thus, with a frequency of 63.6 percent among the 176 posts, the first trend discovered is product branding.

Thematic trend: *Celebrity branding*

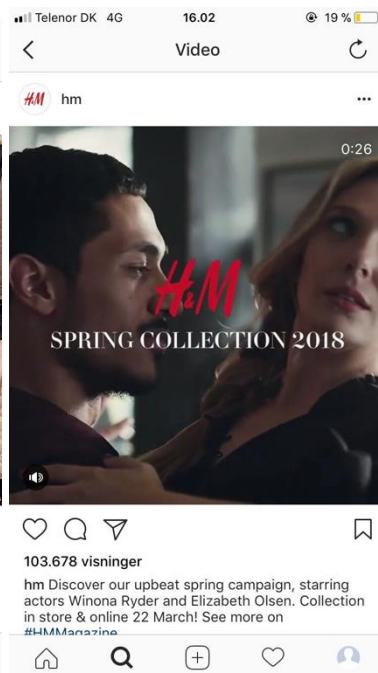
In continuation of the first discovered theme, which subsequently have been interpreted to be a trend, the second discovered theme within the data of the eight brands in the Brand Matrix are posts which are *celebrity engaging*.

When posts are celebrity engaging, it merely signifies that (some of) the brands have chosen to employ celebrities in their branding activities and therefore post content where, for instance, a product is worn by celebrities such as Kendall Jenner as in the case with Adidas, thereby endorsing the product.

Another example is when actresses such as Winona Ryder and Elizabeth Olsen have been utilized to promote H&M's spring fashion campaign, and afterwards reveal their experience regarding the collaboration with the brand (Screenshot 3-5).



Screenshot 3



Screenshot 4

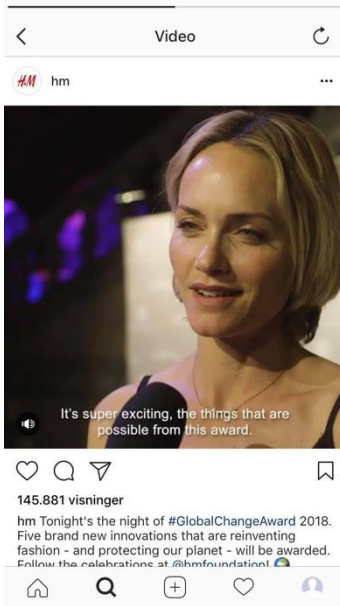


Screenshot 5

As touched upon in the theoretical framework, there are many options for how brands can use celebrities for their branding and marketing strategies, and today celebrities can practically be seen everywhere – especially on social media where they either diplomatically or indiscreetly endorse a brand or brand product.

Among the observed brands, five of them applied celebrity branding in their posts, including H&M, Chanel, Adidas, Under Armour and Louis Vuitton (Screenshot 3-14).

Trends on Instagram in the Digital Era



Screenshot 6

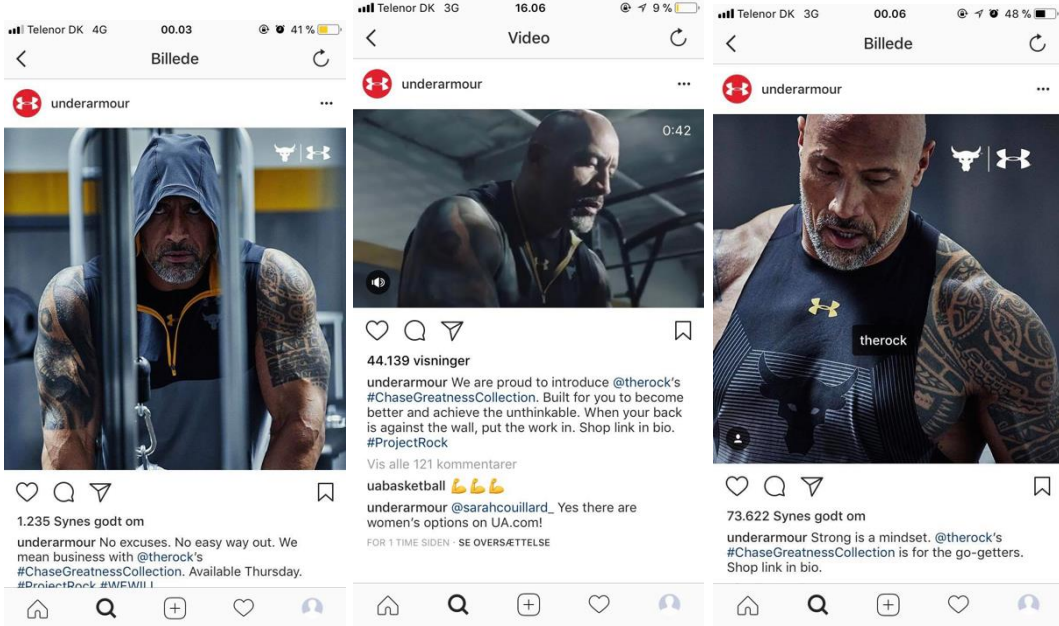


Screenshot 7



Screenshot 8

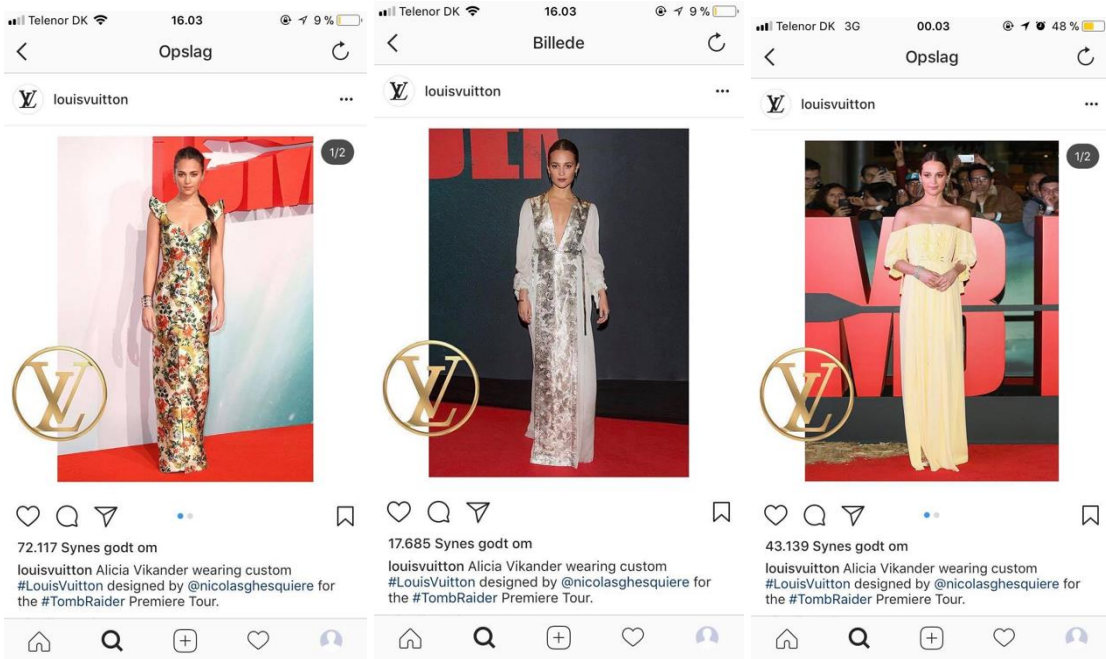
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Screenshot 9

Screenshot 10

Screenshot 11



Screenshot 12

Screenshot 13

Screenshot 14

With the examples above, a total number of 20 celebrity-including posts are prevalent. In calculating the exact percentage as with product branding, 20 posts out of the 176 posts in total are equivalent to 11.3 percent.

Thus, with a frequency of 11.3 percent, using celebrities in some way or the other as ambassadors for the brand, *celebrity branding* is the second most prevalent trend within the eight fashion brands.

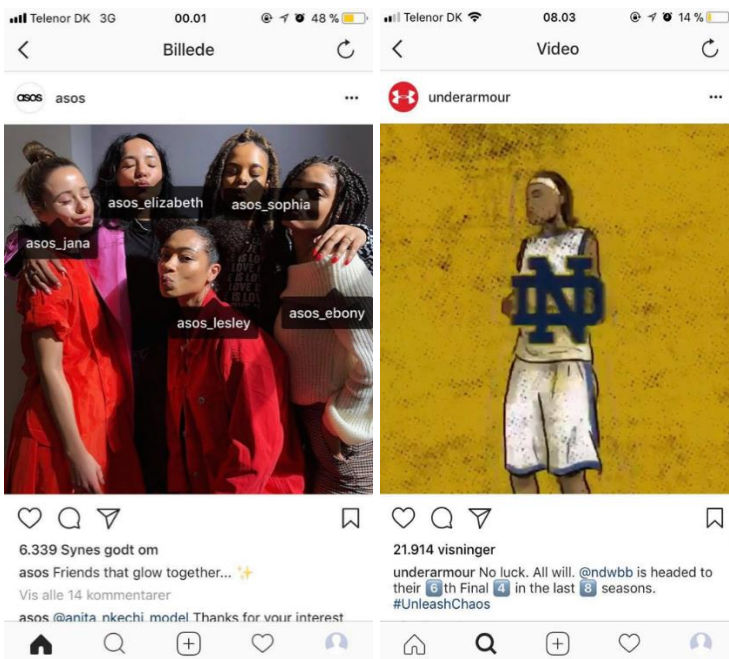
While this may not seem like a high percentage out of all 176 posts, more than a half of the eight fashion brands (five) still used celebrities to endorse their brand or brand product, thereby making it a prevailing trend.

Thematic trend: Community-driven content

Moving further, the third most prevalent theme within the 176 posts have been discovered to be posts which contain *community-driven* content, based on the number of times this “theme” has been written under the “Theme/Possible trend” category in the Brand Matrix (Figure 2). Before stating the percentage and the exact number of times community-driven content has been interpreted to be present within the 176 posts as with the two trends above, it is essential to state that the term community-driven is self-created, and posts with this type of content differ from product-related and celebrity-engaging posts, as they embrace multiple factors.

First, it is essential to state the definition of a community. Oxford dictionaries define a community as *a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common* (Lexico, 2020).

Thus, when a post for instance focuses on a brand’s brand ambassadors, it has been interpreted to be community-driven. When a post focuses on the endeavors of a professional women’s basketball-team, again, it has been interpreted to be community-driven.



Screenshot 15

Screenshot 16

Out of the observed brands, three have published posts that comprise community-driven content in one way or the other, including Asos, Under Armour and Levi Strauss (Screenshot 15-19).



Screenshot 17



Screenshot 18

Trends on Instagram in the Digital Era



Screenshot 19

Having elaborated how many times and *how* community-driven posts appear within the three above-mentioned brands, posts encompassing this theme transpires 17 times in total out of all 176 posts, which corresponds to 9.6 percent.

Consequently, the third identified theme (community-driven content) has been interpreted to be a trend, since it emerges within the posts of various brands, as seen with examples above.

Thematic trend: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The fourth and last identifiable theme, which thus has been interpreted to be one of the most prevalent trends within the 176 posts are posts which encompass traces of CSR, which as mentioned in the theoretical section revolve around societal issues.

According to studies, the general population has increasingly become aware of social and environmental issues, which therefore places greater demands of corporate humanitarianism on companies (European CEO, 2015). Issues such as the increasement of plastic found in the oceans and water waste have encouraged various companies within the fashion industry to become more aware of the materials used in the production of their products, thereby using more sustainable products such as recycled rubber.

Among the eight observed brands, this is particularly seen within some of the posts published by H&M, Adidas, Louis Vuitton and Levi's (Screenshot 20-25).



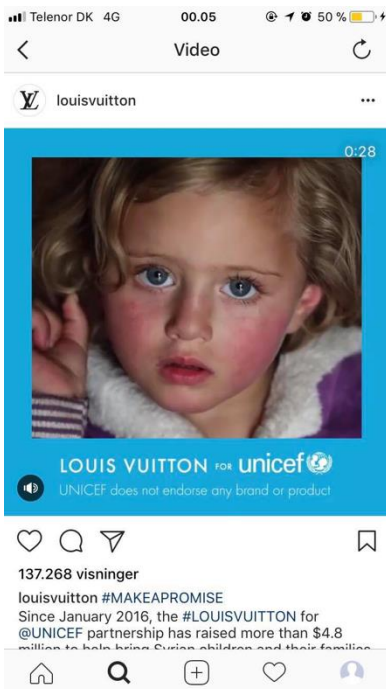
Screenshot 20



Screenshot 21



Screenshot 22



Screenshot 23



Screenshot 24



Screenshot 25

Trends on Instagram in the Digital Era

Appearing 11 times in total among posts of the four abovementioned brands, CSR as a trend constitutes 6.2 percent of all 176 posts.

The four trends identified and interpreted above (*product branding*, *celebrity branding*, *community-driven content* and *CSR*) constitute the four most prevalent themes, since they appear multiple times within the 176 posts and across various brands, thus being interpreted to be trending among a number of brands within the fashion industry on Instagram. That said, other themes such as *cultural celebration* and *how-to* posts can be identified as well, however, since they only appeared a few times and not across multiple brands as the four most prevalent trends, they have not been deemed to be trending and thus not considered in this analysis.

Textual trend: Hashtags

In addition to the four prevalent thematic trends above, another element which – in this case all brands have in common – is the use of hashtags.

In the posts of Asos, hashtags appeared 20 times in total, among some of them were the brand name in a hashtag (#asos) and the brand's self-constructed hashtag #asseenonme (as seen on me), which the brand uses whenever they publish product-related posts. The purpose with this is possibly to let followers and users know how the product is seen on an actual person (Screenshot 26).

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Screenshot 26



Screenshot 27



Screenshot 28

Trends on Instagram in the Digital Era

As a result, hashtags appeared 146 times out of all 176 posts, which corresponds to 82.9 percent. Although not being a theme such as the four mentioned above, using hashtags can likewise be stated to certainly be a trend – in fact the most predominant based on the percentage mentioned above and because all seven fashion brands apply hashtags.

Functional trends: Product-tagging

A final observation within posts which is worth mentioning is the fact that several brands seem to be using *tools*.

The first observable tool is *product tagging*, which is a tool where a brand can “tag” their products (in this case clothes), and by clicking on the post, the prices of every piece of clothing appear, and by clicking on the desired product, the user gets redirected to a sub-page within Instagram, where, by clicking the “shop now” button, the user can shop directly from the brand’s webpage.

This tool is used by brands such as H&M, where it is applied in seven of their posts, and by Levi’s, which has tagged the products in two of their posts (Screenshot 29-30).



Screenshot 29



Screenshot 30

Functional trend: Slideshows

The second identified tool is the use of slideshows, which as earlier mentioned is a combination of multiple images and/or videos in one single post, thus letting the brand showcase several products. That said, it is important to mention that the two tools, product-tagging and slideshows, can be used as a combination.



Screenshot 31

The use of product-tagging and slideshows as a tool for product branding can likewise be affirmed to be trending.

Having stated this, the bar chart below specifically illustrates which trends are at stake for each brand within posts:

Trends on Instagram in the Digital Era

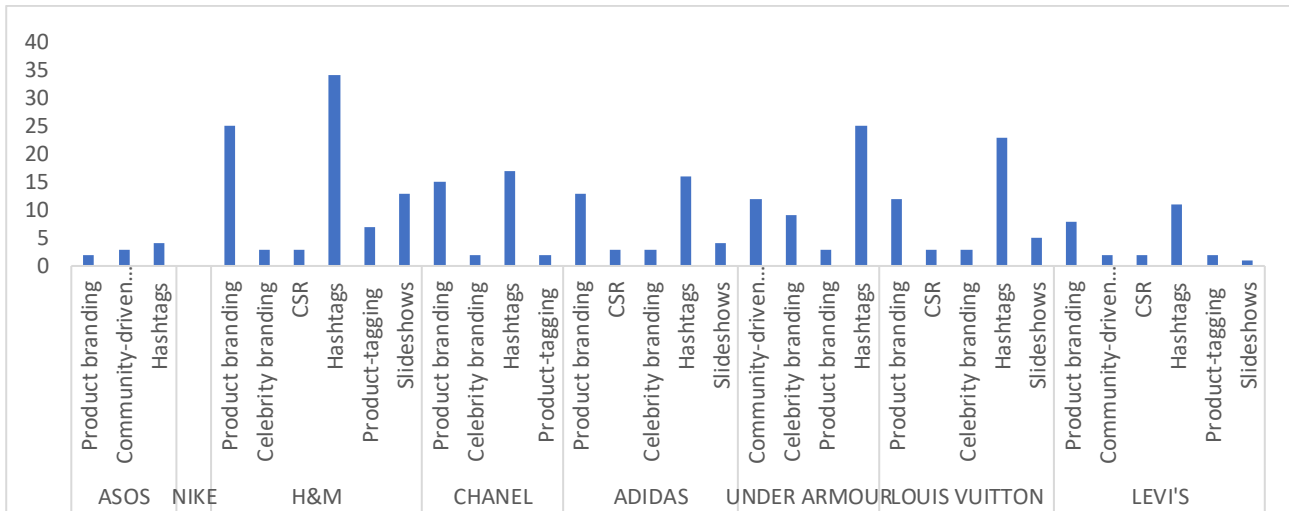


Figure 3 – Bar chart of trends at stake for each brand within posts

The discovered trends within stories

Functional trend: Stories

Before considering identifiable trends within stories, it is important to mention that using stories per se is a trend. This is validated by the fact that out of all eight brands, seven of them have published stories during the 14 days of observations, with Chanel being the only brand which did not.

It has been mentioned before that the total number of stories is 173. Out of all 173 stories, 23 were published by Asos, 53 by Nike, 31 by H&M, 21 by Adidas, 19 by Under Armour, 16 by Louis Vuitton and 10 by Levi's.

As a result, publishing stories can likewise be stated to be a trending tool like product-tagging and slideshows, although stories are used to a much larger extent.

Thematic trend: User-generated content

In moving further with the concept of stories, there are, in fact, some themes which seem to be highly prevalent within the stories of the observed brands.

Although being conspicuous only within the stories of two brands (Nike & Under Armour), *user-generated content* appears to be the most prevalent theme within stories, since here, the brands have allowed the recipient to contribute in creating the content.

It has earlier been mentioned that Nike – as the only brand – did not publish any posts during the 14 days of online observations.

This, however, does not apply to stories, as out of all 173 in total, Nike has posted 53 – 52 of them focusing on content created by users, with only their first story being a “presentation” to the then present Nike “Air Max” day. Here, the users were urged to post an image of their Nike Air Max shoes and use the hashtag #AIRMAX for a chance to get featured on Nike’s Instagram-page.

In Under Armour’s case, the brand posted 19 stories, nine of them focusing on content created by users where viewers were challenged to do a “cool” thing while catching a ball.

As a result, 61 user-generated stories were published which corresponds to 35.2 percent of the 173 stories in total.

Thematic trend: “Behind the scenes”

The second most prevalent theme within stories is something I refer to as “behind the scenes”, where brands transparently provide the viewers with an impression of what goes on behind closed curtains, both through images and videos. Three out of eight brands have published stories where “behind the scenes” was the prevailing theme, and there were 28 stories in total where “behind the scenes” was the most prevalent theme, which makes this trend constitute 16.1 percent of all 173 stories.

User-generated content and “behind the scenes” constitute two new thematic trends, which have been analyzed to be among the most prevalent based on their frequency and percentage.

However, it appears that there is a similarity between trends within posts and within stories, as trends such as product-branding, celebrity branding, community-driven content and corporate social responsibility likewise emerged within the stories.

Thematic trend: Product branding

Being published eight times by Asos and 16 times by H&M, product-branding was identified 24 times in total, hence making it the third most prevalent trend within stories.

Thematic trend: Corporate Social Responsibility

Appearing 15 times in total (11 times within stories from Adidas and four times within stories from Asos), stories with traces of CSR is the fourth most prevalent trend within stories and the second trend which appears in both posts and stories.

Thematic trends: Community-driven content & Celebrity branding

Constituting 13 stories in total, more specifically 10 from Under Armour and three from Asos, and another 13 from H&M and Adidas (eight from H&M and 5 from Adidas), stories with community-driven content and celebrity branding share a fifth place in regard to the most prevalent trends within stories.

With a view to community-driven content in the case of Asos, stories were published with videos and images of their brand ambassadors, thereby focusing on their own brand community, whereas Under Armour have highlighted a number of famous American baseball players and incited viewers/followers to screenshot their favorite player when watching their story, thus making the theme of the story stand out as being driven by fans of the baseball community.

Celebrity branding on the other hand appeared when H&M published stories where the thoughts of actresses Winona Ryder and Elizabeth Olsen regarding their collaboration with the brand's spring fashion campaign primarily were emphasized.

For Adidas, celebrity branding was obvious when the brand used celebrity and model Kendall Jenner to promote the brand's new shoes.

Just like within posts, other themes such as "how-to" content and storytelling can be determined as well, however, these themes only appeared a few times and not across various brands, which once again is why these themes were not regarded to be trending and thus not relevant to examine.

Functional trend: "Swipe-up"

Finally, as within posts, stories likewise enable brands and businesses to utilize tools.

In this case, only one tool appeared multiple times, which is the possibility for users to "swipe-up" within the story being watched, allowing users to shop directly from a brand's story. This tool, which arguably is more of a function, was used twice by Asos, once by Nike, 29 times by H&M, three times by Adidas and twice by Under Armour (Screenshot 32).



Screenshot 32

Being used by five different brands 37 times in total out of all 173 stories, and with a percentage of 21.3, this tool/function has been stated to be a trend.

The bar chart below specifically illustrates which trends are at stake for each brand within stories:

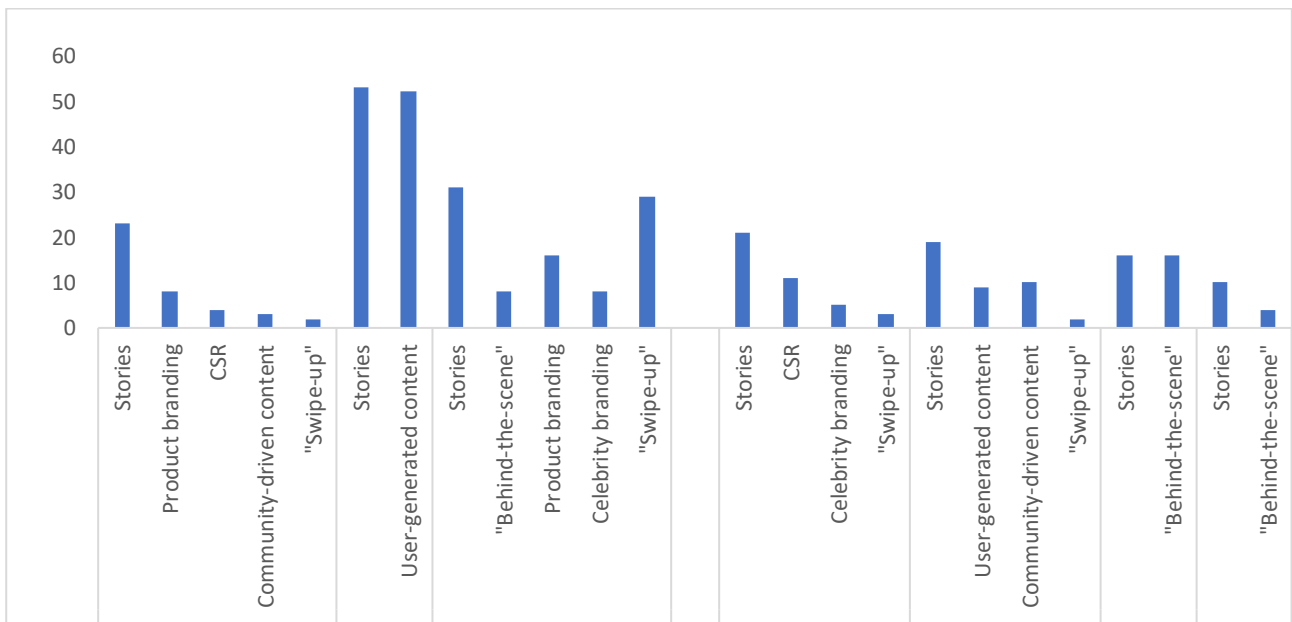


Figure 4 – Bar chart of trends at stake for each brand within stories

Partial Conclusion

Before qualitatively studying how the discovered trends – both within posts and stories – can affect the eight fashion brands' organizational ethos, this section seeks to summarize in order to have a clear understanding of the discoveries mentioned above.

Within posts, product branding, celebrity branding, community-driven content and CSR were the most prevalent themes, whereas user-generated content and “behind the scenes” were the themes most prevalent within stories. Consequently, these six themes may be characterized as *thematic* trends, as seen in the headlines.

Then, based on the frequency and with a remarkable percentage of 82.9 percent, the use of hashtags was stated to be trending as well. Because they appear in the caption of a post and are formed by words, abbreviations, phrases or sentences, hashtags may be argued to represent a more *textual* trend. Lastly, a number of tools, which were used multiple times and across various brands, were analyzed as well. Within posts, these tools were the opportunity for brands to “tag” their products (also referred to as product-tagging) appearing in a post and the use of slideshows, where brands can lay out multiple images and/or videos, for instance to promote their new clothing campaign, as seen with the illustrations above.

Within stories, the tool, which, in fact, was argued to be a function, was the option for users to “swipe-up” when viewing a story and shop directly from Instagram.

The “swipe-up” function can thus be comprehended to be a trend within a trend, since stories (as a tool) is a trend in itself, as earlier mentioned. Nevertheless, product-tagging, publishing slideshows, publishing stories and implementing the “swipe-up” function within stories constitute *functional* trends. The diagram below provides a complete overview of all trends within both posts and stories in correct order.

Thematic trends		Textual trend	Functional trends	
Within posts	Within stories	Within posts only	Stories (as a trend)	
Product branding	User-generated content	Hashtags	Within posts	Within stories
Celebrity branding	"Behind the scenes"		Product-tagging	"Swipe-up"
Community-driven content	Product branding		Slideshows	
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)			
	Community-driven content & Celebrity branding			

Figure 5 – Overview of all trends within posts and stories in chronological order

Examining the possible effects of the discovered trends on organizational ethos

This section seeks to answer the second part of the research questions, which is how the discovered trends on Instagram can affect the different brands' organizational ethos.

In the first part of the analysis, the data have quantitatively and statistically been analyzed, which resulted in a number of prevalent thematic trends within posts and stories (product branding, celebrity branding, community-driven content, CSR, "behind the scenes" and user-generated content), a textual trend (the use of hashtags) and lastly, several tools which diligently are used by multiple brands (product-tagging, slideshows, stories and the "swipe-up" function within stories), constituting the functional trends (Figure 5).

In the following, the thematic and textual trends will qualitatively and separately be analyzed to highlight how they representatively for the eight brands can affect their organizational ethos in general, and not specifically for each brand, as all eight brands exist within the same industry and circulate around the use of the same trends.

Then, within functional trends, stories will be the only tool to be examined, since the remaining tools (product-tagging, slideshows and the "swipe-up" function) resemble each other to a great extent and serve the same purpose, which is why it has been considered redundant to investigate these three tools. This will specifically be discussed later in this article.

The possible effects of product branding on organizational ethos

As touched upon in the theoretical framework, product branding naturally focuses on branding the product or service of a given brand. Hansen (2016) argues that there is a rising focus on corporate branding, the main reason being that it has become challenging for brands to penetrate the media-noise, which is why a strong corporate brand therefore is a method to communicate louder.

Given the fact that seven of the eight fashion brands have published a diverse number of product-related posts, resulting in 112 out all 176 (63.3 percent), product branding greatly surpasses the rising focus on corporate branding, which Hansen (2016) speaks in favor of.

Almost all the observed brands – with Under Armour being an exception – are either relatively or extremely focused on publishing product-related posts. In order for brands to stand out from their respective competitors, Hansen (2016) argues that they have to be observant regarding the demands of the public, which among other factors include aspects such as the need for brands to act as responsible citizens. On the other hand, since all eight brands are globally recognized and thus well-established companies, it is somewhat more “acceptable” for them to put greater emphasis on branding their products to this extent than it would be for smaller companies, since they possess more brand equity (Hansen, 2016: 447).

In addition, Instagram is increasingly becoming a platform to market products and generate sales, which once again speaks in favor of product branding (Medium, 2016).

In light of the communications triangle and with an eye to product branding as a trend, the organizational ethos of the selected fashion brands can be affected both positively and negatively.

Positively since customers may associate the brands as globally strong, recognized, and with millions of loyal customers, which may incite a desire for new products. This is also validated by the magnitude of their followers on Instagram.

Negatively since organizations nowadays are perceived as citizens of the world and are therefore expected to contribute to the society in other ways than the purely economic (Hansen, 2016: 122).

By repetitively letting users be exposed to products or services, the brands may neglect their core values, which may create a feeling of sales-obsessed brands in constant need of generating sales.

The possible effects of celebrity branding on organizational ethos

In the theoretical framework, it has been stated that celebrity branding is an ethos-marked type of branding discipline where organizations strategically attempt to create an idea in the head of the user that if the celebrity can vouch for the product, it must be a good product, which potentially can lead to escalating the sale.

The strategy is, in fact, not a new phenomenon at all. Since the beginning of advertising, celebrities have been paid to vouch for various brands (Stylecaster, 2010).

This was also seen in the first part of the analysis, where 20 of the 176 posts in total focused on branding through the use of celebrities across five different brands.

In the same way, celebrities were used when promotion of products occurred in the stories of H&M and Adidas, thereby making celebrity branding a prevalent trend, not only because the discipline is used across several brands, but since it is applied in both posts and stories.

Celebrity branding can therefore be considered an ideal strategy and can assist in penetrating the media noise and cut through the clutter of the many businesses – specifically the globally recognized which are on Instagram (Sciencedirect, 2015).

With the use of celebrity branding, the posts can be argued to stand out as more trustworthy, as the celebrities transfer their professional ethos to the posts (and stories) and the brand itself, thus increasing the brands' authenticity and affecting the organizational ethos in a convincing and positive way. However, in addition to increasing the brands' trustworthiness, the celebrity must "fit" the brand.

Under Armour for instance have arguably applied celebrity branding in a "proper" manner. Despite being famous for his roles within several blockbusters, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is also known as a former wrestler and devoted bodybuilder, which automatically makes him fit the brand, transferring the value and ethos to the brand and thus the celebrity branding is perceived legitimate, since many fans around the world plausibly aspire to him immensely.

There are, however, some risks included when applying celebrity branding as a strategy. First, the actions of the celebrities beyond the spotlight can affect their ethos if the media witnesses an unfortunate action.

Based on this hypothetical situation, celebrity branding can thus be difficult to manage, since it is impossible to predict possible changes in the celebrity's ethos, as well as whether these changes will be positive or negative.

Another risk is that the celebrity can create too much “noise” in relation to the brand message, which may result in the celebrity stealing all the attention, hence the consumers will only notice the “star”, disregarding the brand which the celebrity endorses.

One may therefore argue that the organizational ethos is not a constant quantity, as it appears right now for the examined brands. In other words, it is under constant change, since there is a chance that the values of the celebrities may change in the future (Hansen, 2016: 221-122).

The possible effects of community-driven content on organizational ethos

With 17 community-driven posts in total in the first part of the analysis, which was spread across the posts of three different brands, a community was identified to either be a brand’s own community (such as brand ambassadors), as in the case with Asos, a community connected by united forces, as within the post of Levi’s, or, connected by sports, as in the case with some of Under Armour’s posts. In essence, the communities can therefore be characterized to either be *internal* or *external*.

According to Hansen, the term *community* is an essential tool in creating customer loyalty (Hansen, 2016: 404).

The internal community, which in this case is constituted by brand ambassadors as seen within the posts from Asos, affects the brand’s organizational ethos in a way where the organization at first appears altruistic. However, as mentioned in the first part of the analysis where the trend was identified and interpreted, Asos uses brand ambassadors in nearly half of all the brand’s posts, where the posts primarily focus on either their own products or products of other brands whom Asos are a retailer for, which is why these posts were not interpreted to be community-driven.

Out of all Asos’ posts where brand ambassadors appeared, only three focused on their internal community.

Thus, behind the brand’s desirable image to appear humane, there is (perhaps) a “hidden” agenda, as the purpose – just like with product branding – is ultimately to generate sales, since their brand ambassadors are predominantly used to promote products.

By using real individuals, the brand’s ethos can thus be decoded as a way for the brand to demonstrate how the product(s) are worn in practice, or perhaps by intentionally removing the direct focus on the products by using real persons to humanize themselves, thereby increasing the chance of generating sales.

With an eye to the external community, which, as mentioned, is prevailing within the posts of Under Armour and Levi's, the organizational ethos may be decoded rather differently.

By publishing posts which focus on uniting communities, these brands appear as altruistic as Asos, as they signal that there are more to it than the bottom-line figures, therefore obtaining a greater degree of sincerity.

Although the communities seen on the posts of Under Armour and Levi's are not internal, as seen with Asos, they nonetheless still act as responsible citizens, since the brands take the external stakeholders into account and do not focus entirely on generating sales, as seen with some of the above-mentioned illustrations (Screenshot 16-19).

By focusing on what connects communities, the brands act as responsible corporate citizens branding the entire organization, which according to Hansen (2016) is desirable, since a corporate brand exists in an interplay with the outside world and not as an absolute, which is these brands thereby acquire a positive ethos.

The possible effects of CSR on organizational ethos

It has previously been stated that publishing CSR-related posts and stories is a trending topic as well. In addition, there was a distinct difference in how CRS emerged among the brands who have published CSR-oriented content.

H&M for instance published posts and stories which focused on embracing their environmental responsibility.

Similarly, Adidas and Levi's published posts where both brands focused on letting the outside world know that the brands have either produced a sustainable product or has the intention of avoiding water waste by using less water in their production methods, once again embracing a more environmental responsibility.

Based on *The Three-Domain Model of Corporate Social Responsibility* (Figure 1), this corresponds to an ethical responsibility, as the brands involve in societal issues by being aware of the materials used in the production of their products. On the other hand, it can likewise be considered an economic responsibility since the brands produce necessary products.

Moving further, Louis Vuitton focus on a purely ethical aspect based on the model, which is validated by their charitable actions in regard to support Syrian children and their families (Screenshot 23-25). However, as Hansen (2016) argues, charitable donations may also comprise an economic aspect, as the motive may be to uphold legitimacy and create brand-preference.

In using Hansen's (2011) communication triangle, Louis Vuitton may have a desirable image to be perceived as a responsible corporate citizen and a caring brand.

Although their actions are generous to a great extent, the outside world may "see through" the brand and understand the true nature of their action, which potentially is to create brand preference, thereby weakening the brand's organizational ethos instead of reinforcing it.

Based on the above, all four brands act ethically and economically based on Schwartz and Carroll's three-domain model for CSR, but the difference is that H&M, Adidas and Levi's have a more environmental approach to CSR.

A study conducted by The Carbon Trust in fact shows that "consumers are more aware of a brand's strategy and 56 % of people implicated in the study are more loyal to brands that can show evidence of environmental actions" (Econsultancy, 2011).

In addition, it was stated that brands adopting a strategy based on sustainability enter a long-term commitment with the environment. Thus, this environmental and ethical (based on the model) CSR strategy provides these three brands with strong and convincing organizational ethos.

However, just like with celebrity branding, there are risks involved when communicating CSR.

Studies show that organizations who communicate mostly about their societal responsibilities are those who attract most critical attention.

Accordingly, there seems to be a conception that if organizations have a strong need to point their virtuous actions out, there is a probability that they have something to hide or wish to distract the recipients from other aspects of the organization (Hansen, 2016: 127). Thus, the paradox is that an increased CSR-communication elevates the suspicion that the organization is hiding something.

As H&M, Adidas, Levi's and Louis Vuitton have only posted a small number of CSR-related posts, the brands' actions are not suspicious, however, if the period of observation was longer, it could potentially have revealed something else, or perhaps increased skepticism.

Nevertheless, based on their actions, the organizational ethos of the four brands is deemed either relatively or appropriately positive.

The possible effects of user-generated content on organizational ethos

Being prevalent only within stories, user-generated content was certainly among the most prevalent trends as well, as it appeared 61 times in total out of all 173 stories.

The practice is a powerful marketing tool within the business world, as it can not only increase sales but include other advantages such as building customer trust, strengthening brand/customer relationships, expand social reach and enhance authenticity and credibility (Curata Blog, 2020).

Hansen (2016) states that the internet has created a new infrastructure. Online branding and online communication belong to the interaction paradigm characterized by two-way communication where the communicated parties take turns at being senders and recipients (Hansen, 2016: 377).

With user-generated content, this is greatly evident, as users are no longer impressed by pushy sales tactics; they crave connection and interaction with other humans, which is why they have gone from being passive consumers to active choosers and creators (TINT, 2016).

Users simply wish to feel a part of a community, and with user-generated content users can build a relationship with like-minded people, as with the 53 stories of Nike, where the users were urged to post an image of their Nike Air Max shoes and use the hashtag #AIRMAX for a chance to get featured on the Nike Instagram-page.

In using another example, Under Armour challenged viewers to do a “cool” thing while catching a ball, which again can be a prosperous way to fortify customer relationships.

Thus, consumers are considerably less passive and studies show that when consumers are exposed to a mixture of professional marketing content and user-generated content, brand engagement increases with 28 percent, which indisputably indicates the importance of user-generated content and why the content published by brands needs to be trending in this fast-paced and constantly changing online landscape (TINT, 2016).

In the theoretical framework, it has been explained that within branding on digital media, there are two types of storytelling: episodic and inviting.

User-generated content clearly falls under the second category, as both Nike and Under Armour invites the receiver to take part and create a “story”, which makes the level of credibility higher, as the user(s) has no commercial interest in creating the content they contribute with, thereby signifying an authentic organizational ethos for both brands.

The possible effects of “behind the scenes” content on organizational ethos

The last of the thematic trends, which likewise was discovered within stories, are content which tends to take the users “behind the scenes” to give them an insight into internal matters, which – as seen in the first part of the analysis – appeared in several ways.

Common for the three brands who have published “behind the scenes” content, which in theoretical terms are referred to as “backstage”, is that although they present different aspects of their internal matters, Hansen (2016) argues that organizations may stage themselves by deliberately making a stage visible for the public, expressing the “ideal me”.

Thus, what is shown backstage through stories is part of the intentional external communication and the organization’s way of communicating their desirable image (Hansen, 2016: 52).

With that being said, publishing stories which take the users “behind the scenes” still show a personality of the brand. In fact, a study shows that a total of (...) “94 percent of consumers surveyed that they were more likely to be loyal to a brand that offers transparency” (...) (Entrepreneur EUROPE, 2017).

For that reason, when H&M provides their followers with a sneak peek of their new spring campaign (Screenshot 4-5), they may strengthen their customer relationship.

Similarly, Levi’s took their followers and customers backstage by showing a part of the process of the manufacturing of their world-renowned jeans, which again may provide a positive impact on the brand’s overall brand equity.

By publishing stories which focus on giving an exclusive “behind the scenes” interview of the brand’s new artistic director, Virgil Abloh, Louis Vuitton likewise acquires a positive ethos by personalizing their brand.

We live in the age of information where people can access the desired knowledge easily (History of technology, 2014). It is therefore not completely farfetched that consumers and customers expect organizations to act as transparently as possible. Modern users simply wish to experience the genuine and unadulterated.

By taking the users backstage to give them an exclusive look into processes, which are normally not accessible may provide an additional dimension in their overall experience of the brand, reinforcing the organizational ethos of the three brands.

However, even though the users can get an insight into parts of the production process, as seen in the stories of Levi’s, the insight is nonetheless staged.

Thus, instead of obtaining a real understanding of the organizational backstage, Hansen (2016) argues that organizations only reveal aspects of the organizational backstage, thereby providing users with a staged insight, but the overall experience with the organization is still authenticated (Hansen, 2016: 326).

The possible effects of the use of hashtags on organizational ethos

“When used properly, hashtags are a *great* way for individuals and brands to make their social posts more visible and increase engagement. They can give people useful context and cues for recall, aggregate posts and images together, and update a group of like-minded individuals on certain topics in real time” (Kolowish in Andersen, 2018: 2: my italics).

As scrutinized in the first part of the analysis, hashtags were used in 82.9 percent of all posts, making it the indisputably most widespread trend.

That said, although there is a similarity in the use of hashtags within the posts of the brands, it can be pinpointed how the brands apply the hashtags differently as well (Screenshot 33-41).



Screenshot 33



Screenshot 34

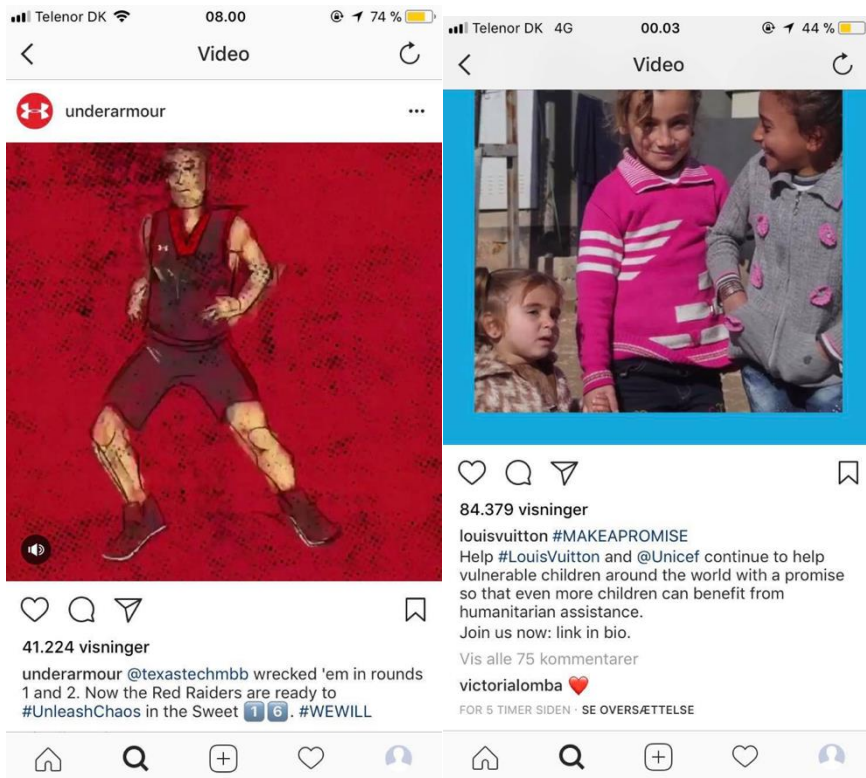


Screenshot 35



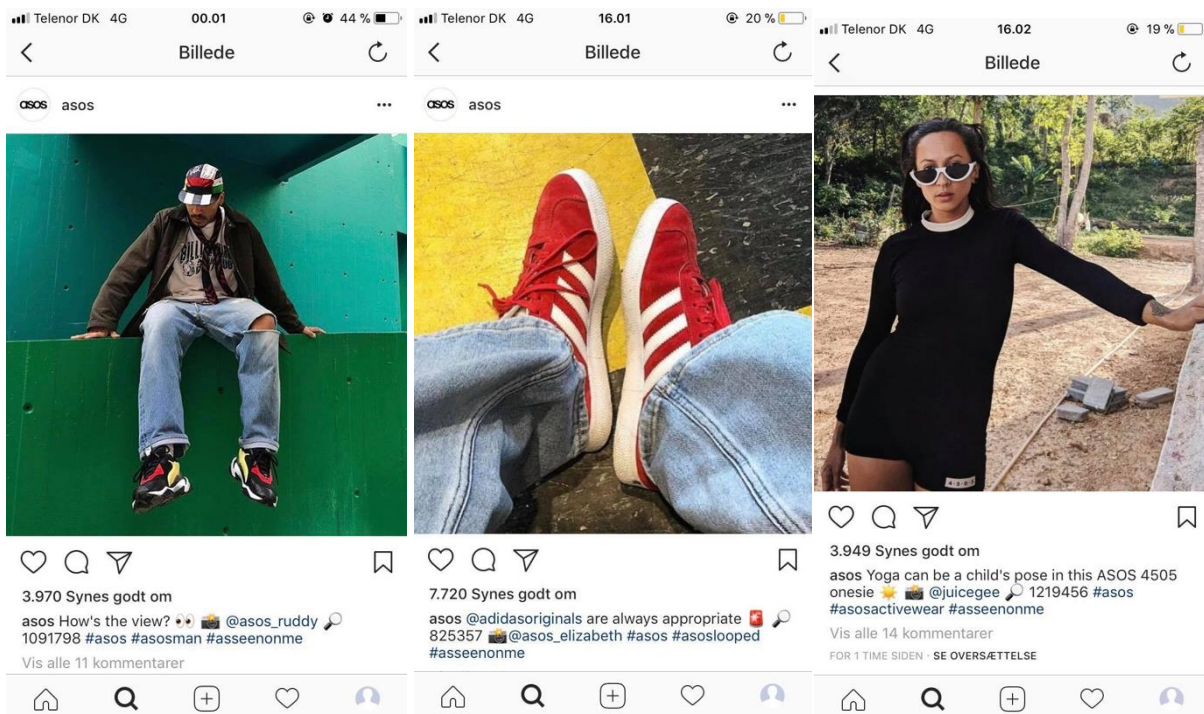
Screenshot 36

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Screenshot 37

Screenshot 38



Screenshot 39

Screenshot 40

Screenshot 41

As illustrated in the examples above, hashtags can be argued to clearly constitute an essential communicative trend on Instagram. Without hashtags, Andersen (2018) states that posts appear uninspiring and unclear, making it difficult for the recipient to decode the purpose and meaning of the post (ibid.: 11).

The possible effects of using stories on organizational ethos

Since seven of the eight fashion brands have published stories during the 14 days of observations, and because nearly the same number of stories were captured (173) as posts (176), using stories (as a tool) was unquestionably stated to be trending as well.

Although there may not exist theories regarding the publication of stories on Instagram yet, making use of this tool can be linked to the term *storytelling*. In the theoretical framework, storytelling has been defined as being a conscious positioning strategy where organizations decide how they wish to present themselves to the outside world (Hansen, 2016: 136). Comparably, when the brands have published stories on Instagram, external storytelling was applied, since the brands have purposely chosen to present a specific type of content within their stories.

In addition, it has been stated that brands can work with storytelling from different levels.

Given the fact that a story only exists for 24 hours on Instagram, publishing stories would correspond to storytelling on an outer operational level, since this type of storytelling is a short-term strategy where organizations apply “small” stories in its daily external communication (ibid.: 139).

Thus, when stories, which for instance encompassed community-driven or “behind the scenes” content when published, the stories have been a part of the brands’ external short-term strategy in order to lure recipients to feel like they are a part of the story, since storytelling as earlier mentioned have a manipulative nature (ibid.: 133-134).

With that being said, how stories can affect the organizational ethos depends on what is being communicated through them.

Stories with user-generated content may for instance result in a higher level of trustworthiness than stories with product branding, since despite the feeling of becoming a part of the story, users have no commercial interest in creating the content they contribute with, thereby providing a favorable organizational ethos.

Stories which circulate around CSR may likewise be ideal in ascribing a positive ethos in the minds of the consumers, as CSR-activities as a rule are associated with anticipation and positivity (ibid.: 102).

DISCUSSION

As previously stated, the data of this article consisted of screenshots made through online observations and written material of those screenshots located in the Brand Matrix (Figure 2). It is therefore noteworthy to firstly discuss how the data has affected the results and the study in general.

Given that the scientific theoretical positions in this article comprise a hermeneutical and social constructivist approach, an accurate answer is impossible to provide, since the study is based on subjective interpretations and statements, thereby reflecting the scientific theoretical positions. The question here may be how the validity of these statements based on these two scientific theoretical directions are evaluated. In this connection, it is essential to mention that common for hermeneutics and social constructivism is that both approaches are founded in the coherence theory of truth. In short terms, the theory attaches importance to connection rather than agreement; a statement is considered true if it is connected to a system of statements in a non-contradictory way, which makes the connection to other statements a central factor within this theory (Egholm, 2014: 65).

With an eye to the research question, although the trending elements have separately been interpreted, quantitatively measured, and hence stated to be a trend, it has been illustrated that not only can a post cover two trending themes at times; trends such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), celebrity branding and user-generated content are interconnected. The fact is that despite being trends, they are corporate strategies with more or less the same purpose, which is to communicate a desirable image in order for the brands to acquire a positive organizational ethos and eventually increase the company revenue.

This therefore depicts a picture of how the statements – the statements being the trends – are connected to a system of statements, the system here being the Brand Matrix, thereby increasing the overall validity of the statements.

Thus, it can be stated that the data – with a view to the first part of the research question – have affected the results in a way where they were based on a subjective interpretation of the most prevalent trends.

This also applies to the second part of the research question, where I – among other things – have put myself in the shoes of a hypothetical customer and analyzed how the discovered trends can affect the organizational ethos of the brands the article deals with based on my own interpretation as a hypothetical customer.

Including various interpretations from *actual* customers or general users of Instagram – both in regard to identifying the most prevalent trends and decoding the possible effect the trends have on the brands' organizational ethos – would naturally have dedicated the article a greater level of reliability, since the identification of trends and how they theoretically can affect the organizational ethos would not exclusively have been based on my own subjective construal, and would perhaps have provided different results.

However, this could potentially have resulted in replacing one or both scientific theoretical approaches and perhaps include a phenomenological approach, as the purpose with this scientific theoretical position is to understand through intersubjective interpretations, that is, to include other competent researchers to approximately reach the same results (ibid.: 30).

But, since the research and the collection of data was made completely independent from external respondents and interviewees throughout the whole article, this potentiality was left out.

Another aspect which has been affected is the circumstance that my initial interpretation of the data (before going into depth with it in the analysis) have had an impact on the choice of theory. In other words, before having measured the frequency, percentage and having stated the identified theme/element to be trending, a theoretical framework has been constructed, which later resulted in an adjustment of it, since some trends were measured to not be trending after all, which led to excluding some theoretical aspects. In a way, it can be argued that the process of choosing and describing the theory has been the same as with the research question, namely an *iterative* process.

The fact is that as previously mentioned, there is still little theory regarding social media branding and communication, which is why it was necessary to initially obtain a depiction of the most prevalent trends, to be able to shape a theoretical framework.

A last remark which is significant to mention in this discussion is the fact that a minor element has not been addressed in the second part of the analysis.

In the first part of the analysis, it has been stated that the trends have been divided into three overall categories: *thematic*, *textual*, and *functional* trends (Figure 5).

With the trends within the first two categories being systematically scrutinized in the second part of the analysis, the only element left out from this part of the analysis was similarly to examine how the three remaining tools – the use of slideshows, product-tagging and the “swipe-up” function within stories, which belong under the category of functional trends – can affect the brands' organizational ethos.

Although the use of these tools was measured to be trending, the reason why they were left out is due to the assessment that the tools do not have a direct impact on the organizational ethos. The use of these tools is merely a business initiative with the purpose of generating sales, rather than to increase the feeling of credibility, as seen with various of the abovementioned trends.

CONCLUSION

As a starting point, the purpose with this article has been to discover the most prevalent trends on Instagram by observing how a number of brands within the fashion industry act on this social media platform.

Observing the eight brands for a period of 14 days led to the discovery of multiple trending topics, which subsequently were categorized as being thematic, textual and functional trends (Figure 5).

Within posts, the thematic trends concerned the promotion and branding of products – which to put it simply was labeled product branding. Other thematic trends concerned celebrity branding, community-driven content and communicating CSR.

Although these four thematic trends likewise transpired in stories, the two most prevalent thematic trends within stories were user-generated content and stories where brands transparently would provide the viewers with an impression of internal matters, also referred to as “behind the scenes”.

Out of all these six thematic trends, product branding was the most predominant, as it appeared 112 times out of all 176 posts, constituting 63.6 percent.

Based on its frequency, product branding appeared to unarguably be the leading trend at first, however, as I continued to review the data, the use of hashtags, which formed the textual trend, proved to not only be among the most prevalent trends, but in fact to be the indisputably largest. This is based on the fact that all brands (except for Nike, due to not publishing any posts during the observation period) have applied hashtags within their posts. As a result, hashtags appeared 146 times out of all 176 posts, corresponding to 82.9 percent.

As stated, the examination of data also led to the discovery of the usage of a set of tools, which likewise were stated to be trending and consequently referred to as functional trends.

Here, tools such as product-tagging, slideshows and the “swipe-up” function within stories were used multiple times across various brands, however, the use of stories (as a tool) emerged as the main functional trend, as all brands except for Chanel published stories.

The discovery of these trends has been done by using a quantitative method, which firstly concerned plotting the data of all posts and stories in an excel-sheet (the Brand Matrix, Figure 2) to attain a complete overview. This data concerned aspects such as the caption of the post, what it focuses on, if hashtags have been used et cetera, which subsequently would enable me to identify a theme/possible trend by quantitatively measuring the frequency of each possible trend.

In essence, the first part of the analysis therefore reflects the first scientific theoretical position of this article, that is the hermeneutical, as the data (the written material located in the Brand Matrix) have subjectively been interpreted in order to understand the different parts (the different trends), as it was impossible to understand them instantaneously, whereas the whole can be said to be the possible outcome on the brands' organizational ethos.

Having stated the most prevalent trends, the subsequent purpose with the article was to examine how the discovered trends can affect the brands' organizational ethos.

The course of action for this part has been done by taking a starting point in the theoretical framework, the aim being to firstly grasp how the brands deliberately communicate their desirable image by, for instance, communicating different CSR-related activities and by using particular types of celebrity branding. Secondly, to once again subjectively interpret the brands' organizational ethos by putting myself in the shoes of a customer and state how I, as a hypothetical customer and user, interpret and experience the organizations.

This part of the analysis reflected social constructivism to a greater extent; the second scientific theoretical position of the article, as the reality – in this case *my* reality, is a social construction and thus an interpreted reality, since the question of how the trends can affect the organizational ethos can be interpreted in many ways, both positively and less positively, as earlier stated.

However, the hermeneutical approach once again came into sight, as I, as an interpreter, am an active co-player in the creation of meaning, where there is no correct or incorrect interpretation. To put it in another way, it is an endless process.

Instagram can thus be argued to be a rhetorical arena, where messages – through an understanding of the dominant trends – are communicated by brands; both within the fashion and other industries, and constantly interpreted and decoded by the outside world, with no definitive understanding of the brands' organizational ethos.

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