

The Role of Visual Media in Image-based Social Networking Sites in regard to Self-expression and Social Communication

An empirical-qualitative investigation of image usage in
communication via Instagram

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The Role of Visual Media in Image-based Social Networking Sites in regard to Self-expression and Social Communication

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communication via Instagram

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Abstract

Online social communication currently undergoes several trends. There is a growing ubiquity of mobile devices, so that people are constantly on their mobile phones. They spend a high amount of time consuming online media and exchanging information which is not produced by editorials as it was in the past. Instead, the roles of content consumers and producers are now interchangeable and people create their own content and have the option to share it on several kinds of channels online. Particularly within current social media, the trend shows a shift from a text- to image-based communication, visible through the strong growth of the photo-sharing social networking site Instagram, which has now reached more than 1 billion monthly active users. As identified by prior research, images have a strong impact on people's well-being and self-perception. However, images' effects on social media primarily create negative feelings and self-doubt. Yet, people show several motivational factors to share photos online with others, mainly with the focus on self-expression and self-presentation.

This thesis focuses on exploring the social interaction on image-based social networking sites through qualitative interviews with Instagram users. As online communication platforms increasingly become visual-heavy, the question arises how people perceive images as a means of communication if a text is not always available or plays a secondary role. The interviews aim to find out how people use images to express themselves, what kind of visual content they look at, how they understand it, how their consumption impacts their perception of reality, and consequently, how they reply to such content. Drawing on the definitions of qualitative research as described by Mason and Witzel and the analytical methods by Braun & Clarke and Mayring, the results of the interviews will provide an in-depth analysis of individuals' use of images as a means of self-expression and self-presentation. Vilém Flusser's theory of images' social impact and the residing codes in them as well as Erving Goffman's ideas and concepts on self-presentation in everyday life are taken as the main theoretical base.

Findings provide information on motivational factors and personal intentions behind the use of image-based communication. In addition, it reveals learnings and emerging adoptions of communication standards and how people's perception is related to their well-being. Moreover, it uncovers issues of the maintenance of personal values and the need to achieve one's goal within an online social environment, particularly in terms of upholding an authentic self-presentation in mind. Moreover, it discusses the differences between text- and image-usage and touches the subjects of the role of mobile phones and photography's omnipresence in current social communication.

Kurzfassung

Die soziale Kommunikation der Online-Welt erfährt derzeit mehrere Trends. Die Allgegenwärtigkeit der Mobiltelefone führt zu einer zunehmenden Abhängigkeit der Nutzer und Nutzerinnen. Sie verbringen viel Zeit mit dem Konsum von Online-Medien und dem Austausch von Informationen. Online-Inhalte werden nicht mehr ausschließlich von Redaktionen verfasst. Die Rollen von Konsumenten und Produzenten sind austauschbar, jede Person ist in der Lage eigene Inhalte zu erstellen und diese dann über mehrere Online-Kanäle mit anderen zu teilen. In den sozialen Medien zeigt sich ein Trend hin zu einer überwiegend bildbasierten Kommunikation. Diese Entwicklung ist insbesondere am starken Wachstum von Instagram ablesbar: die auf Fotos basierte Social Media Plattform hat mittlerweile mehr als 1 Milliarde monatlich aktive Nutzer und Nutzerinnen.

In früheren Studien zeigte sich, dass Bilder einen starken Einfluss auf das Wohlbefinden und die Selbstwahrnehmung von Menschen haben. Die bildbasierte Kommunikation in sozialen Medien erzeugt jedoch in erster Linie negative Gefühle wie bspw. Selbstzweifel. Die Gründe für das Teilen von Fotos lassen sich dabei meist auf das Bedürfnis nach Selbstentfaltung und Selbstdarstellung zurückführen.

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit widmet sich der Erforschung von sozialer Interaktion auf bildbasierten Sozialen Netzwerken wie Instagram. Da Online-Kommunikationsplattformen zunehmend visueller werden, stellt sich die Frage, wie Menschen Bilder als Kommunikationsmittel wahrnehmen, vor allem wenn Texte nicht immer verfügbar sind oder eine untergeordnete Rolle spielen. Das Ziel der im Rahmen dieser Arbeit durchgeführten qualitativen Interviews war es herauszufinden, wie Menschen Bilder verwenden, um sich auszudrücken und welche Art von visuellen Inhalten sie auf der Plattform sehen und näher betrachten. Zudem wurde untersucht inwieweit sich der Konsum von Bildinhalten auf das eigene Nutzungsverhalten und die Produktion von bzw. die Einstellung zu eigenen Bildern auswirkt. Als Grundlage der Interview-Analyse wurden die von Mason und Witzel beschriebenen Definitionen der qualitativen Forschung und die Evaluationsmethoden von Braun & Clarke und Mayring verwendet. Aus der angewandten Methodik ergibt sich eine tiefgehende Betrachtung der Bildverwendung als Mittel der Selbstentfaltung und -darstellung. Als theoretischer Ausgangspunkt der Analyse dienten hierbei Vilém Flussers Theorie der Wirkung von Bildern im sozialen Kontext und deren Codifizierung, sowie die Ideen und Konzepte von Erving Goffman bzgl. der Selbstdarstellung im Alltag.

Die Erkenntnisse der durchgeführten Studie geben Informationen darüber, welche Motivationen und persönliche Intentionen Menschen dazu bewegen Bilder als Kommunikationsmittel einzusetzen. Ebenso kristallisieren sich Kommunikationsnormen heraus, die die Probanden während ihrer Nutzung in Instagram erlernt und für sich adaptiert haben. Weiters zeigt sich, inwiefern die persönliche Wahrnehmung von Bildern mit dem eigenen Wohlbefinden zusammenhängt. Insbesondere wird dabei die Problematik reflektiert, wie individuelle Ziele (bspw. die Aufrechterhaltung einer authentischen Selbstdarstellung) innerhalb eines sozialen Netzwerks mit den persönlichen Wertvorstellungen der Nutzer und Nutzerinnen vereinbart werden können und welche Lösungsstrategien sie dafür entwickeln. Schließlich werden die Unterschiede zwischen der Verwendung von Text und Bild als Dreh- und Angelpunkt der Kommunikation genauer differenziert und verdeutlicht.

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1. Introduction

In the last few years, there have been several trends in the aspect of technology and its relation to people's actions. Society experiences a growing ubiquity of mobile devices, an increase in dependency and higher usage time. People spend a great amount of their time on social media, in which they consume all kinds of content and constantly exchange information. Online content is not only produced by specific editorials, instead, everyone nowadays can create and share their own content with the world over several online channels, such as forums or blogs and particularly through social media. Furthermore, current social networking sites undergo a notable shift from text to images. Social media feeds become predominantly visual, as can be seen by the popular sites like Youtube, Pinterest, Snapchat, or Instagram. All of these trends are linked together and constantly influence each other's development.

In this chapter, the problem statement and the motivation behind the thesis are further elaborated in order to better understand the ideas behind the main topic. This includes the aforementioned changes in mobile use and social communication. Based on these ideas, the aim and relevance of the thesis' research are formulated and research questions are specified.

1.1. Problem statement and motivation

The growing dependency on mobile phones

With the quick rise of technology and the internet, and the growing ubiquity of technological integrations in everyday life within the last decade, it has strongly impacted our lives, not only at our workplaces but in all social environments. Especially smartphones have become a crucial part of everyone's life, due to a large number of mobile apps that simplify life and allow people to perform their daily tasks in a more effective way. This concurrently leads to a growing dependency on the mobile devices.

The smartphone has played an increasingly critical role in people's lives over the last few years: About 5.135 billion, that means two-thirds of the world's population own a mobile phone and this number is forecasted to steadily increase in the years to come. Recent reports on digital usage showed that in 2016 and 2017 Europeans spent between 4.5-6 hours per day in average on the internet (Germany nearly 5 hours/day), whereby more than 1.5 hours of internet usage are accessed through their mobiles. Furthermore, the average number of hours daily spent on social media were between 1-2 hours in Europe and over 2 hours in the United States (Statista, 2015; We Are Social UK, 2017; We Are Social UK, 2018).

Besides media consumption and task-oriented activities, people use their mobile phones mainly for social communication. This includes staying in contact with their circle of friends as well as monitoring other people's social lives (Lai and Katz, 2012, p.45).

Mobile phones facilitate the availability of communication and information anytime and anywhere, thus, passing general barriers of time and space people experienced in the past. This alters the way we communicate and our connection with friends: The asynchronous exchange of information through instant messaging is not only perceived as faster and easier as to phone calls but also as more efficient. The resulting immediate feedback, in turn, encourages a deeper feeling of constant connectedness with friends (Pettegrew and Day, 2015, p.133). In addition, social media use on mobiles is also steadily increasing. Mobile social media users grew by 30% (i.e. a growth of 580 million) between January 2016 and January 2017 (We Are Social UK, 2017) and the number of active mobile social media users in 2018 has reached almost 3 billion (We Are Social UK, 2018). In 2016 the average US citizen spent 60% of their time on social media on their smartphone (Statista, 12/2016), 82% of Twitter users accessed the platform on mobiles (Gebauer, 2016) and Instagram has been a mobile-driven social networking site from the beginning.

The shift from a text- to image-based communication in social media

It currently becomes more and more visible that communication channels experience a shift from text-based to image-based content. For instance, in the early years of Twitter, tweets were based on text only, allowing 140 characters per tweet. Photos or images could only be added as a link, which then also counted as part of the character limit. In order to increase user engagement, Twitter introduced the possibility of visual content in late 2013, in the form of image previews (Geerlings, 2014). However, at that time, images rather served as an engaging, supplementary instrument of the post. Presently, current social media networks, such as Instagram and Snapchat, show that image-based communication becomes more relevant. These social networking sites are distinct for the dominance of images compared to text. On Instagram, texts are mainly accompanying images as captions. Although people can communicate with text within Instagram through comments and instant messaging, the main focus still lies on visual content. This fact has recently been further enhanced by short videos, known as InstaStories, which can be viewed only within 24 hours after they have been uploaded, and by live videos (viewers watch the video in real time). Instagram stated that one year after the introduction of Instastories, users spent 0.5 hours more time on Instagram than before (Instagram, 2017a). Since July 2017, users can also reply with photos and videos, reinforcing the importance of images within the platform (Instagram, 2017c,d).

The role of content consumer and content creator become interchangeable

Moreover, the aspect of interactivity and participatory internet engagement of social media changed the traditional allocation of roles between information creators (senders) and information consumers (receivers). These roles are not predictable anymore but instead became interchangeable: consumers can send out information themselves, respond to traditional information companies or create content for followers on their social networking sites, which in turn can be senders again (Zanger, 2014, p.4). A good example in this context is the role of the so-called *social media influencers*. An *influencer* can be defined as "a person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by promoting or recommending the items on social media" (Oxford Dictionaries|English, 2018). Thus, a social media influencer "is a user on social media who has established credibility in a specific industry. A social media influencer has access to a large audience and can persuade others by virtue of their authenticity and reach." (Pixlee, 2018) In other words, social media influencers are non-traditional content creators that share their lifestyle, personal information, and experiences with everyday products, which mostly have an impressive number of followers on their social media channels, and present themselves through visual content. As these influencers have a great follower base, their content, as well as their way of communication, consequently have an immense impact on their follower base.

Several studies indicate that social media has had a great impact on users: people compare themselves to others, envy other people's lives, or become insecure about their body-image — all of that heavily influencing their self-perception and in turn the way they deal with their self-presentation (Stapleton et al., 2017; Moon et al., 2016; Jackson and Luchner, 2017; Sponcil and Gitimu, 2013). Moreover, photos, in comparison to text, have more room for interpretation and can communicate emotions (Serafinelli, 2017, p.96), making it harder for consumers to differentiate between reality and intended and targeted placement within images. Thus, the choice of a communication channel and the content shown within (e.g. likes, texts, images, videos) certainly affect how people perceive and understand each other. Consumers see and learn from one another, hence, certain norms and manners on image-based communication style are developed, adapted and modified. And with every newly introduced feature, new modes of use emerge. These newly adopted communication styles might offer new ways of self-expression, but at the same time also entail the risk of misleading or misinterpreted communication. Thus, it is of great importance to understand how and where our current communication will move towards in order to ensure a more conscious and elucidated way of novel communication technology use. A common understanding of the effects of images can enhance a confident handling of visual content, avoiding a distorted reality through misinterpreted information, perceived through visual communication.

1.2. Aim and relevance

So far, research has focused on user practices in social networking sites (SNS), on the influence of mobile communication on social life, on motivational factors of photo-taking and sharing, and on the effects of social media on the self-perception. Yet, there has not been any scientific research conducted on the increasing relevance of images in visual-based SNS, when used as everyday communication tools, and how this can impact the perception of the environment and the socialisation of individuals and further development of society. Research in this field can serve us with more indications on developments of future communication services and furthermore, help raise awareness of possible misunderstandings in communication and instead increase a conscious way of information exchange.

In view of the above-stated developments in technology and their impact on society, and the rise of visual-based social media, the following research question will be leading this thesis:

What roles do images and visual-based content play within social networking sites (particularly within Instagram) in the context of self-expression, self-presentation and social communication?

As the above-mentioned empirical studies as well as Vilém Flusser (see Chapter 3) posit, there is a distinct shift from text to visual content within our communication, i.e. a shift from primarily discursive symbolism to presentational symbolism (Langer, 1992). With this change in communication, questions arise how the discursive and emotional shares vary within digital communication, how people deal with image-based communication as a new means of interaction and what actually fascinates them to communicate by visuals, and in turn, how self-presentation alters within social media. Thus, the above-stated research question is quite relevant in order to comprehend this set of facts. Therefore, a necessary first step is to understand how the communication behaviour on visual communication platforms takes place at the moment and how it could look like in the near future. It is of great importance to comprehend the perception and handling of images by viewers of the last few years, in order to make statements on future developments. Therefore, the thesis outcome will give answers to the research question and sub-questions, as well as further details and explanations on the intentions and motivations behind the use of visual-based social media platforms.

Thus, we will first look at how people communicate within image-based networking channels, taking Instagram as a case study. The focus will be on the following sub-questions:

- *How and with which intentions and expectations do they select the content they want to see and share?*

- *How do people perceive, understand and interpret visual content?*
- *What roles do intuitiveness and emotions play during the process of image interpretation?*

Answering these questions will give us insights into people's inner thoughts and on factors that play a distinct role in visual-based communication. In addition, we will gain more information on how people perceive and understand images and their creators' intentions, including intuitive thoughts, and transmitted emotions, and eventually how visual interaction shapes their social lives.

Moreover, we want to know in which way (content-wise) do people reply to image-based communication. Essential sub-questions on this issue are:

- *What do they "learn" from visual-based communication use and how do they reply?*
- *Do they pick up any particular norms and imitate them to express themselves?*
- *What kind of communication standards are developed and adopted by the people?*

Additionally, endeavours should be undertaken to get more insights on the changing role of images in social communication in general. What qualities do images have and how does each of these traits affect the communication (focussing on the extended interpretation scope of images)? Furthermore, we want to look at the differences between text-based and image-based communication, especially if there are any meaningful differences in the transmitted message. This will clarify how well visual content can express the intentional information of the sender, and in which way this, in turn, affects the understanding of real life. Moreover, the insights collected through the qualitative interviews and the final analysis of the results can spark a discourse and open a debate on the subject of changes and developments in our communication habits, manners, norms, intentions, and effects. This, in turn, can encourage and ensure a more conscious and self-reflected way of information exchange with modern means of communications.

1.3. Structure of the work

The thesis is structured in five chapters: this introduction, theory, methodology, the analysis of empirical findings, and a discussion.

The chapter "Theory" provides a general overview of the theoretical basis of the research field. In particular, close attention is set on relevant literature around the nature of images, social communication and the impact on society, and the role of mobile phones in this

context. Additionally, the photo-sharing social networking site Instagram will be introduced to give readers a general mindset of its development and its current features.

Within the chapter about the methodology, the research methods applied in this study are further explained, namely the nature of qualitative interviews according to Mason (2002), the methodological framework of problem-centered interviews by Witzel (1985), as well as the methods used for data analysis: a combination of Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and Mayring's (2010) qualitative content analysis. Furthermore, the interview guideline and conduction are illustrated in detail.

The chapter about the analysis of the empirical findings includes an in-depth description and examination of each interview. The idea behind this is to get to know each interviewee and their background in order to have a more holistic view of their actions and motivations. The chapter finishes off with a summary of the empirical findings and highlights several aspects that emerged from the interviews and which proved to be quite relevant for the analysis.

The final chapter "Discussion" brings together the empirical findings and analysis and sets them in comparison with the literature and concepts found in chapter 2. Lastly, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are given in an outlook.

2. Theory

This chapter serves to give an overview of previous research on the topics around the use of mobile phones and visual-based social media. Scientific works on the motivations for sharing personal information online will be given, as well as the impact and consequences of social media on people's lives and well-being. Moreover, the chapter continues with basic concepts on the nature of images, image interpretation and the effects of images in digital media on its viewers. In the end, the history and impact of the image-based social media platform Instagram will be introduced, used as the case study for this thesis, which helps to understand the interview findings and evaluation.

2.1. State of the Art

In this section, current research papers will be introduced that deal with relevant aspects of social media. In particular, close attention will be paid on the current development and impact of social media, the motivations and intentions of its users to share their lives online, as well as the role of mobile phones in this context. These research findings provide a general context on which this thesis is based on.

Smartphones and online image-sharing

In recent statistics, a shift from desktop to mobile phone usage is clearly visible. Especially for use cases, such as internet browsing, online shopping or communicating, people tend to use their mobiles more than their desktop computers or laptops (Statcounter, 2016; Sterling, 2015; Perez, 2014). This is probably due to reasons, such as that the mobile phones became faster, smaller, lighter and several technological features are now already integrated and available within one single device. These developments make it more appealing, convenient and easy for mobile phone users to satisfy their needs.

Advantages of this mobility are that people can maintain their social relationships through the sharing of visual content at all times: they can take photos anywhere and anytime instantly and can edit and share them immediately on their social media accounts. In fact, a visual post can present more information at a time compared to a paragraph of text (Serafinelli, 2017, p.96), which implies that browsing on mobile phones through a visual feed can be easier than browsing through posts filled with text. In addition, Goh et al.'s (2009) study already demonstrated that images are the most popular medium to share on

mobile. With each year, smartphones' photo cameras improve and data packages for mobiles become cheaper, facilitating users to upload images on-the-go.

Furthermore, there is an increase in well-designed photo editing apps (such as *VSCO*, *Enlight*, or the built-in photo-applications on smartphones), making it easier for non-professionals to create beautiful and aesthetic pictures. These conditions elicit an increase in popularity of image-based social media applications, such as *Instagram*. This platform is additionally mobility driven; it is now available with a restricted set of tools in a web version (e.g. no instant messaging feature), however, it was developed to be primarily used on mobile phones (Instagram, 2013a). By combining the factors of an increasingly image-focused social communication, the heavy usage and availability of mobile phones, it is not surprising that Instagram, with its focus on visual content and mobile-only nature, has become one of the most popular social media platforms at the moment (Statista, 2018b).

Motivations and intentions behind social media use and sharing

Nowadays, it has become commonplace for every person to communicate with their social circles within social media channels. Every user's actions in these networks are based on personal reasons, motivations and intentions. As mentioned above, mobile devices promote a constant connectivity with friends and family, making it possible for immediate feedback from anywhere (Pettegrew and Day, 2015). Goh et al. (2009), who examined the motivations behind media sharing on mobiles, found out that 52.80% of their study participants have the intention to maintain their social relationships, e.g. with pictures of common interest to strengthen their bond, or with pictures of recent events to update the loved ones about their life. In fact, this was primarily communicated through photos (97.78%) instead of video or audio. Another study's findings also show that taking pictures are mostly meant for social reasons, i.e. to share them with others. Pictures are for the public to conceive and to tell one's own experience of this captured moment. Only in a few cases, photos are not shared but are taken for individual reasons, e.g. for reminiscing while browsing through past photographs (Lux et al., 2010). Lee et al. (2015a) specifically analysed motivational factors on Instagram use. Their results offer five primary social and psychological motives (which are sorted by frequency of mentions in the following): social interaction (e.g. to stay in touch and communicate with others or to receive life updates), archiving (e.g. creating a personal image-diary), self-expression (e.g. to share one's own life and to be noticed), escapism (e.g. to forget about reality and troubles and to avoid loneliness) and peeking (e.g. to browse through other people's lives) (Lee et al., 2015a). Another study uncovered motivations of surveillance (knowledge about others), documentation, coolness, and creativity (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016).

Lee et al. (2015b) applied the uses and gratifications theory to examine the motivations behind photo sharing on Instagram and their findings significantly resulted in self-presentation and status-seeking. Especially, users with a greater number of followers care for their status. Users who follow a high number of accounts additionally seek community support (Lee et al., 2015b, pp. 137-139). Other researchers confirm the strong motivational effects of self-presentation and self-expression in sharing images (Van House et al., 2004; Van House and Davis, 2005; Van House, 2007; Lee et al., 2015a). Moreover, images are a well-used tool for users to control these. As Van House (2007) states: "People seek to present themselves in such a way as to ensure that others see them as they wish to be seen. Photos (self-portraits, images of one's friends, family, possessions, activities, and so forth) are a form of self-representation, as are images that demonstrate the photographer's aesthetic sense, humour, or skill." (Van House, 2007, p.2718) Self-expression, on the other hand, is often marked by an artistic way of presenting images, emphasising the beauty within these photos (different to Lee et al.'s (2015a) definition). (Van House et al., 2004) Thus, one has to differentiate the two aspects: "self-presentation is about influencing others' views of oneself (which may include deception), while self-expression is about giving expression to our 'authentic' self" (Van House et al., 2004, p.7).

A popular way of presenting oneself is through selfies — pictures mainly showing people's faces in close-up, most often taken by the person shown himself/herself. These are different from portraits, which are rather taken by another person. The popularity of selfies has many reasons: as studies showed, Instagram posts of selfies attract more likes and comments compared to other motives (Souza et al., 2015) and they grab more attention than other content (Bakhshi et al., 2014). People, who seek a great number of followers on social media or want their followers to notice their posts thus upload much more selfies.

Another intention to use social media is the possibility for people to prove something. A recent study examined the user behaviour of parents on Instagram, analysing the content that they shared about their family. Parents used Instagram "as a means to evidence good parenting" (Le Moignan et al., 2017, p.4935), aiming to present a happy family and showcase their cute children. Their online family profile is built upon images that are prior selected in a careful manner, whereby omitting any situations that could be associated with a less perfect family life. Due to that, photo "albums typically represent a romanticised, sanitised and relentlessly upbeat view of family life, where the sun always shines and children are impeccably well-behaved" (Le Moignan et al., 2017, p.4936). Moreover, the researcher's analysis provides evidence that this message is especially effective if such pictures capture mundane things. Different to traditional family portraits, where special occasions and planned-out setups are captured, Instagram family photos now highlight the most ordinary moments, e.g. eating ice cream, going for a bicycle ride in the neighbourhood, or preparing the family meals. This sort of photo-diary can particularly be enhanced through

image-driven social media platforms like Instagram and particularly through the constant availability of the mobile phone, its integrated camera, and the ease of online media sharing (Le Moignan et al., 2017, pp. 4936-4940).

The above-stated motivations emerge both from intrinsic as well as from external influences. However, motivations such as self-presentation and being up-to-date are possibly triggered by the effects and pressure that people have by social comparison when consuming other people's photographs. This will be further analysed in the following section.

Social media and social comparison

The impacts of social media have been a research topic in the past decade, in particular, Facebook has been extensively researched because its heavy use was suspected to create negative feelings and to decrease people's well-being.

Chou and Edge's (2012) findings show that heavy users of Facebook tend to perceive other people's lives as better and happier and feel as if life is unfair. Reasons are that they base their judgement on examples they constantly see (availability heuristic). Facebook users usually tend to share their happiest and most exciting life events, as their goal is to present a desirable life. Thus, their Facebook friends barely know of bad moments in their life. By solely perceiving the positive side of other people's lives, users get the feeling that it is only them who experience bad moments in life. In addition to this phenomenon, people oftentimes associate positive content with the person's personality instead of the situational factors (correspondence bias). They rarely take into consideration the context and the occasions their friends are experiencing at that moment and automatically link the happiness with the person's nature. This especially occurs with strangers, as no background information is provided and followers can only judge by the pictures provided on Facebook.

Krasnova (2013) examined how envy is associated with the constant consumption of Facebook content. She found that frustration was one of the emotional outcomes users experience after Facebook use and that the reason for envy comes from social comparison and lack of attention. In particular, "travel and leisure" was the most mentioned area to trigger envy. In her study, Krasnova highlights the threat of the "self-promotion — envy-spiral", which implies that "users reacting with even more self-promotional content to the self-promotion of others" (Krasnova, 2013, p.12) which can harm users who excessively spend time on social media networks such as Facebook.

Instagram has several characteristics that are similar to Facebook as it also allows the photo-sharing, commenting and liking posts, and following others. Thus, the findings on social media effects on self-perception can be applied to Instagram as well. For example, Lup et al. (2015) explored the link between Instagram use and depressive symptoms and results

showed that the higher the number of strangers followed, the higher the negative social comparison and thus the higher the depressive symptoms.

However, some research found out that there are beneficial effects of social media use as well, namely in the context of self-affirmation. Toma (2010) tested whether social networking sites such as Facebook could have beneficial effects for its users. Results of her research show that by looking at one's own Facebook profile (instead of a stranger's), people actually start to recognise the good sides of their lives and feel more positive about themselves. They particularly begin to recognise important aspects of themselves, such as their values and goals. This, in turn, decreases defensiveness towards criticism and strengthens open-mindedness (Toma, 2010).

Overall, the research findings show that the consequences of social media use mostly cause negative emotions and lower peoples' well-being. Particularly images trigger social comparison, especially photographs of travel and leisure time. As Instagram shows several similar aspects of Facebook but also has an image-driven nature, it is important to take a deeper look into the effects of image-based content.

The impact of image-based social media

As explained above, social comparison very commonly emerges through social media use. However, images tend to enhance it even stronger: Bessenoff (2006) analysed the effects of thin-ideal images on the self-discrepancy of women. Results showed that women who are insecure about their body and who have a high level of self-discrepancy tend to compare themselves more often with other women. This especially has stronger negative effects when women are exposed to images of a thin-ideal than of neutral body types. Similar results were found in Deane's study (2017) where Irish women admitted to be much more insecure and dissatisfied with their own body when they heavily consume Instagram posts, where "only the best of the best" (Deane, 2017, p.10) pictures are shared. Consequently, the women hesitate to post anything of themselves if they feel their body is not "good enough" (Deane, 2017, p. 9) compared to the ideal one that Instagram communicates.

As Chou and Edge's (2012) study show, people especially develop negative feelings about distress if they perceive a high number of photos of others. They recall the attribution theory, specifically the correspondence error in this context, which states that people often tend to explain another person's behaviour with their personal character (dispositional attribution) instead of looking at the situation the person is in at that moment and associate the actions with the context (situational attribution). The attribution theory is especially noticeable when people look at a stranger's photos (Chou and Edge, 2012).

With this knowledge applied to image-driven social media like Instagram, it can be assumed to cause an even higher level of social-comparison and false attribution. On Instagram, posts

are known to be especially beautiful and users are solely bombarded with images of the happy moments of their friends' life. Due to the nonreciprocal and high amount of public accounts, it is even possible to follow and have access to millions of other people's accounts they do not personally know. Daily browsing through such an image-filled feed can thus trigger negative emotions.

In addition to the negative effect on the mind, the consumption of images can also have an influence on the physical. Turner and Lefevre's (2017) study demonstrated that a high use of Instagram significantly correlates with a greater tendency of eating disorders: orthorexia nervosa, which is the obsession with healthy eating. As Instagram is a popular platform for several communities with health-related focus (e.g. fitness, nutritionists, wellness), a constant consumption of such content will have an influence on followers' eating behaviour. As orthorexia nervosa is often linked with anorexia nervosa, there is a risk that Instagram can enhance unhealthy diets.

Images vs text

So far, online social communication has been mainly text-based, e.g. emails, Twitter and Facebook in their beginnings, yet, the sharing of images has become quite popular. Since the introduction of the photo-sharing social networking site Instagram in 2010, its daily active user number has now reached over 500 million (Instagram, 2018a). A possible explanation for the popularity of image-sharing could be that text-based communication is very precise and creators of social media posts are asked to be quite specific in choosing their words that best fit their intentions. In contrary, images allow to express a much wider range of information, are vaguer than text, and thus, leave room for interpretation. As Serafinelli (2017) phrases it: "Words can explain motivations and visions while images can communicate what words are not able to describe, such as emotions." (Serafinelli, 2017, p. 96) Online journalists claim that the popularity of images is based on three other characteristics: images are global (they are understood by people of different kinds of countries and cultures), images are distributable (the bandwidth to transmit pictures is very small), and images are digestible (they can be consumed at one glance compared to text or video) (Rubel, 2012).

Furthermore, the shift in communication from text- to image-based content shows changes in social life: people experience a deeper social connection by sharing visual content; furthermore, socialising on image-driven SNS offline communities can be extended by the online community, thus, virtual togetherness (facilitated through the visual feed on mobile devices) can be further developed (Serafinelli, 2017, p.93). For members of Instagram-communities, visuality is perceived as "social currency" (Serafinelli, 2017, p.99) and not merely a platform to share photos. Moreover, it has been shown that image-based

communication can increase happiness and satisfaction of life and decrease loneliness whereby text-based SNS are neutral (Pittman and Reich, 2016). However, participants in Serafinelli's (2017) study admit that their relationship with other Instagram users will stay rather "superficial" (Serafinelli, 2017, pp.99-102) because as long as they talk online, their conversations are merely based on common interests.

Hence, images as a means of social communication should not be compared with text and especially not with face-to-face conversations. Consequently, it is necessary to share and consume visual-content more consciously. "In the age of the Internet, visual messages travel through different spaces. Photos are made in one place and displayed in another. They are very easy to capture and send, and their value and significance often change over time and across platforms. Because of this, photos' meanings are constrained by several socio-cultural contexts in which they are located, and these vary by places and periods. It follows that contexts of experience (the mediation of the platform) are decisive in shaping the value of images." (Serafinelli, 2017, p. 95)

2.2. Theory of images and self-presentation

The nature of images

Vilém Flusser sees images as meaningful surfaces. They are shortened illustrations of the outside world. He calls this ability of images "Imagination", the abstracted information of space and time and the projection back into reality. In other words, to reflect reality through two-dimensional symbols and to interpret these symbols (Flusser, 1991, p.8). In his opinion, images are mediators between the world and the people. As the world is inaccessible to the people, images are necessary to make it imaginable. However, as soon as images try to illustrate the world to the people, they stand in between them both. Instead of maps, they turn into screens. Consequently, they don't represent the world, but instead, adjust it. People start to "live" in the world that images have created and stop trying to decode them but project them to the 'outside world' directly. Therefore, Flusser introduces the term "Idolatry", the inversion of images, in regard to the current technical images. People forget to be the creators of their images that they needed to orientate themselves in the world. They lose the ability to decode them and will start to live within the nature of the image itself (Flusser, 1991, pp.8-10).

Vilém Flusser whose work involved media and communication theory sees a constant fight between text and images. He claims that images in communication are actually codes, that have to be decoded by viewers to be fully understood. This is similar to Langer's (1992)

concept of presentational symbols in comparison to discursive symbols. Images can be seen as presentational symbols, elements that have to be interpreted as a whole dependent on the context, whereas text or verbal communication as discursive symbols are elements with fixed meanings (Langer, 1992). Furthermore, images can reflect two intentions: the images itself and the image that the observer sees. Thus, images are not unambiguous (not denotative) complexes of symbols like numbers, but rather of connotative nature. Hence, they offer room for interpretation. (Flusser, 1991, p.8) In this context of image interpretation, Müller-Doohm refers to Waldenfels' term "Doppelgestalt im Bild" (Müller-Doohm, 1997, p. 85): An image not only shows itself as a picture as is but it additionally reflects further information which might not be immediately apparent. Müller-Dohm states that in order to identify truthfulness within images people's understanding has to be based on a shared living environment and a common worldview (Müller-Doohm, 1997).

In order to make images decodable by many, the codes must be based on known ones within a society. However, every view is subjective so that every newly created image adds new symbols to its code. Thus, each image differentiates from previous ones and changes and extends the codes within a society. Turning subjective point of views into symbols known within a society is called "publishing" by Flusser. This is possible with traditional images (e.g. traditional paintings) but not with the new technical images because the latter requires another level of consciousness (Flusser, 1990, pp. 14-16). This will be further described in the following.

Technobilder and the creator's loss of control

Vilém Flusser especially dealt with the role of images in the age of media, mainly traditional photography and television, but began to also look at personal computers and the internet.

Flusser states that within human communication, particularly mass communication, images are ever-present and he sees this "flood of images" ("Bilderflut") (Flusser, 1999, p.71) from a negative point of view: the production of technological images is not accessible and understood by the people, images are received by its observers primarily in the same way, and although they are only reflections of realities and therefore artificial, they give the impression to accurately reflect reality. In order to overcome this danger, Flusser suggests to either return to images of the past or to create new ones.

The first suggestion, however, is not possible in his view. Flusser feels that due to modern technology, people are not able to create images with their own imagination anymore. To illustrate his point of view, he makes use of the example of cave paintings of early humans in Lascaux, France, in 15.000 b.c. and biblical paintings of Florentine artists in the Renaissance. Cave paintings are symbols subjectively conceived from the Lascaux human and transferred to the cave walls. These symbols can be decoded by anyone who is familiar with the code. The biblical painting in the Renaissance requires an additional condition for

its decoding, namely the historical background of the biblical scene. Flusser claims that the creation of such images is not possible anymore because the control of the operator has been transferred to the apparatus, the modern technological cameras (Flusser, 1999, pp.71-73). The photo camera as an apparatus is a technical device which simplifies reality and projects them onto a photograph. The way a photograph is created is not well understood by the operator as everything happens hidden in a “Black Box”. Photographs are concretions of objective abstractions, in other words, objective information of the real world is transferred into codes. Due to that, there is a high risk of misinterpretation on the receiver side (Flusser, 1999, pp.75-76).

In this context, Flusser introduces the term "Technobilder" (Flusser, 1998, p.177) which refer to photographs but also includes other novel images created by modern technology, e.g., television shows and movies, magazines, and even street signs or food packaging. Compared to traditional images, such as paintings, novels, or theatre plays, these new images require a new kind of interpretation and decoding, which Flusser refers to as "Technoimagination" (Flusser, 1998, p.177). It's the requirement for decoding and understanding of those new images. Similar to traditional images, Flusser claims such Technobilder to be codes, systems of symbols, which have been defined based on distinct concepts and ideas. In order to understand the internal message of such images, they have to be decoded to become visible. Thus, people need to be conscious of such codes first, in order to be able to interpret them. However, these hidden codes are oftentimes unknown for receivers but also even for its creator. This is due to the still existing limitations of the photographer. Flusser exemplifies this: Different to a painter, who controls the creation of his painting, it is the camera, (the apparatus) that creates the technical image; the photographer (the operator) is only using it. Flusser sees limitations for the photographer both regarding the creation process as well as in the decision making of photographs. Although a photographer thinks his photograph was taken due to reasons of aesthetics, it is not. When the photographer looks through his camera lens, the image he sees is only one of several reflections of possible scenes that can be captured with the camera. Each photograph, in fact, is a reflection of a code. By pressing the shutter button, the photographer in the end simply decides which of the suggested reflections of the apparatus communicates his idea (Flusser, 1998, pp.177-189). Thus, an accurate decoding and understanding of such "Technobilder" in visual content within our current social media channels become more challenging if senders and receivers are not familiar of the "hidden" messages and symbols they create and consume. Flusser states “If we were aware of what we do when we take pictures, we would perceive, experience and value the world in a different way.” (Flusser, 1998, p. 189)

With this, Flusser states that photographers are always limited in the creation process due to their cameras. However, his point of view is based on the technological status of the past. With the rise of several post-productive applications for image manipulation, such as

Photoshop or *Adobe Illustrator*, cheap and accessible mobile applications, such as *VSCO*, or *Afterlight*, or the highly improved built-in photo-editing tools on mobile phones, the photographer is able to gain back part of the control in the creation process.

In addition, his fear that everyone receives and perceives images in the same way without having any control or independence can be solved with new communication tools. He states, that as soon as the one-sided broadcast of images is replaced by a two-sided communication, everyone is not only a receiver but also a sender and able to participate and give feedback to the visual content he consumes. Moreover, an open dialogue can emerge through this mutual exchange of information which takes a more critical look on the realness of visuals broadcasted through mass media. This is currently realised through the telematic information society ("telematische Informationsgesellschaft") (Flusser, 1999, p.74). Especially nowadays with social media and other networking sites, where consumers can create content as well, as well as the constant access to the internet and with the mobile phone, opinions and ideas can be exchanged and discussed.

Furthermore, he defines images as bodiless messages, created with a distinct intention and transferred to a receiver. With the introduction of photo cameras back then and the personal computers and smartphones nowadays, images have become more and more transportable, are endlessly replicable and as their senders and recipients are more mobile than ever, everyone can receive these images anytime. With the continuous sending and receiving of these images, their meaning is built from the collaboration of several participants (Flusser, 1999, pp.83-88).

Goffman: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

In Goffman's theories on "the presentation of self in everyday life" (Goffman, 1990), he compares everyday situations with theatrical settings: people are actors and actresses on (front-)stage, trying to persuade their audience to be a specific character they wish to be. The audience in everyday life can alter, depending on daily life's surrounding, e.g., work colleagues, managers, schoolmates, close friends, strangers, sports mates, etc. Goffman explains that for each of these audiences, people try to give a performance that pictures an ideal version of themselves. "Backstage" however, the actual effort happens to maintain the front stage's character (Goffman, 1990).

Goffman's theory has been applied to our social media use by Hogan (2010). Our social media profiles represent our front-stage characters and our follower-base is our audience. Hogan points out, that keeping up our front stage appearance becomes a challenge as soon as the different audiences, and thus our different self-presentations, begin to merge. People can be friends on Facebook with their managers, friends, and schoolmates. Therefore, uploading content (which is how the social media appearance is maintained) becomes difficult if all

possible followers need to be taken into consideration. Hogan highlights the theory of lowest common denominator: "One might not post for one's boss on Twitter, but if one's boss is following (or is likely to follow), then one will certainly post in light of the fact that the boss may read it. One might not be posting for one's parents (or children or students) on Facebook, but again, one is posting in light of the fact that these individuals may have access; these individuals define the lowest common denominator of what is normatively acceptable. [...] An individual assesses whether his identity can be effectively represented by the lowest common denominator of the people who view his content in his absence." (Hogan, 2010, p.383)

For this thesis, it would be particularly interesting to find out, what groups of people the interviewees' follower bases consist of, whether the interviewees are aware of their audience when they upload images and if the visual content in this context affects their social media behaviour compared to text-based content.

2.3. Instagram

“We’ve focused on building a simple app that has inspired creativity while capturing everyday moments through the lens of your mobile phone. In fact, our focus on building out a mobile-only experience is a unique path that we’ve chosen for many reasons, the most important of which is that Instagram, at its core, is about seeing and taking photos on-the-go.” (Instagram, 2013a)

This chapter introduces the image-driven social media network, Instagram, and gives information about the beginnings of the platform, the initial idea, the fast growth in users, postings and general popularity and explains its most important features. Understanding Instagram's background and vision helps to comprehend the explanations and results from the interviewees.

Story

Instagram was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and launched on October 6, 2010, with 25,000 sign ups on the first day. This number increased to over 12 million after just one year. On April 9, 2012, Facebook officially acquired Instagram. Already then, Instagram was known as a social platform for visual content. Photographs were taken by the

mobile phone only and instantly shared on the platform. Each picture had the standard size of a square and each post only contained the picture, likes and comment section. Moreover, the founders wanted to revive the trend of retro photos, hence, they introduced several filters that added a retro-look to any picture. It wasn't possible to upload anything over the web (until February 2013) because the app was focused on mobile-only. The reason for this late accessibility on the web was that Instagram's pictures were meant to be posted instantly after the experience "Instagram is about producing photos on the go, in the real world, in real-time". (Instagram, 2013a) In fact, Instagram started out based on another app idea, called 'Burbn'. The founders Systrom and Krieger originally developed an app where users were able to check-in to restaurants and other locations, tag friends and share pictures. However, they found out that it was not the check-in feature that their users used, but they simply liked to share pictures (Garber, 2014). Thus, they dismissed their original idea and focused on a simple photo-sharing app, renaming it to Instagram because as Krieger said: "We renamed because we felt it better captured what you were doing — an instant telegram of sorts" (Sengupta et al., 2012). Since the beginning, the number of app users continuously grew over the years: from 300 million in 2015, 600 million in 2016, 800 million in 2017, to even 1 billion on June 20, 2018.

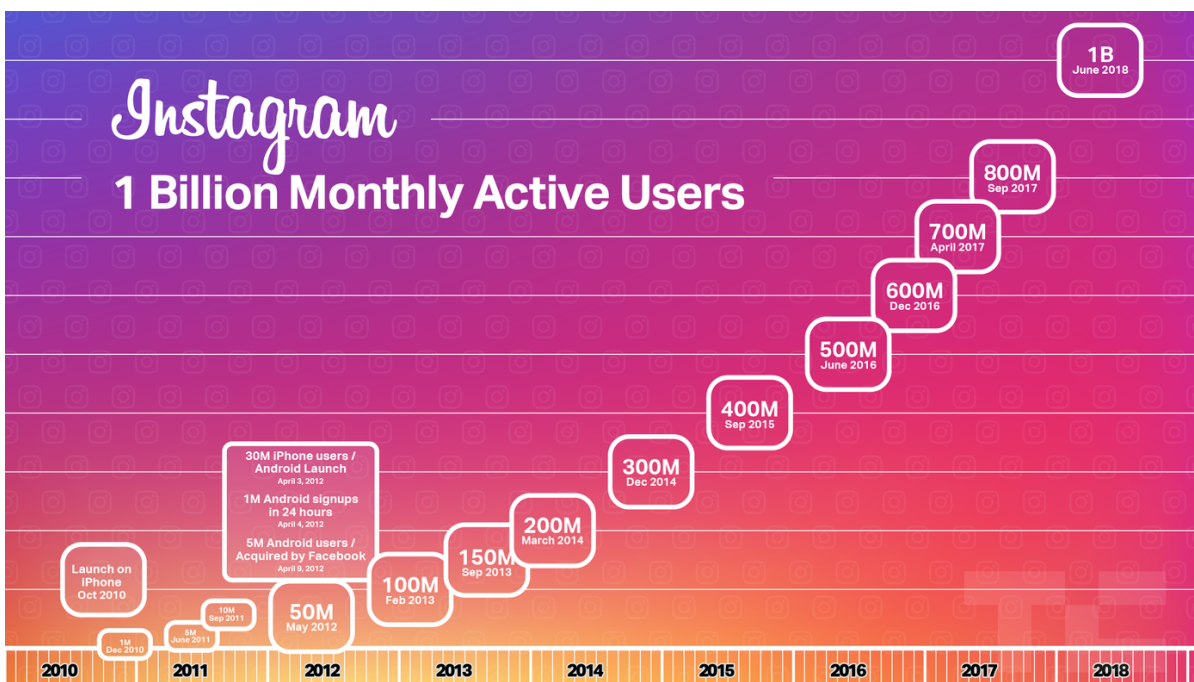


Figure 2.1: Overview of Instagram's monthly active users since 2010 (Constine, 2018)

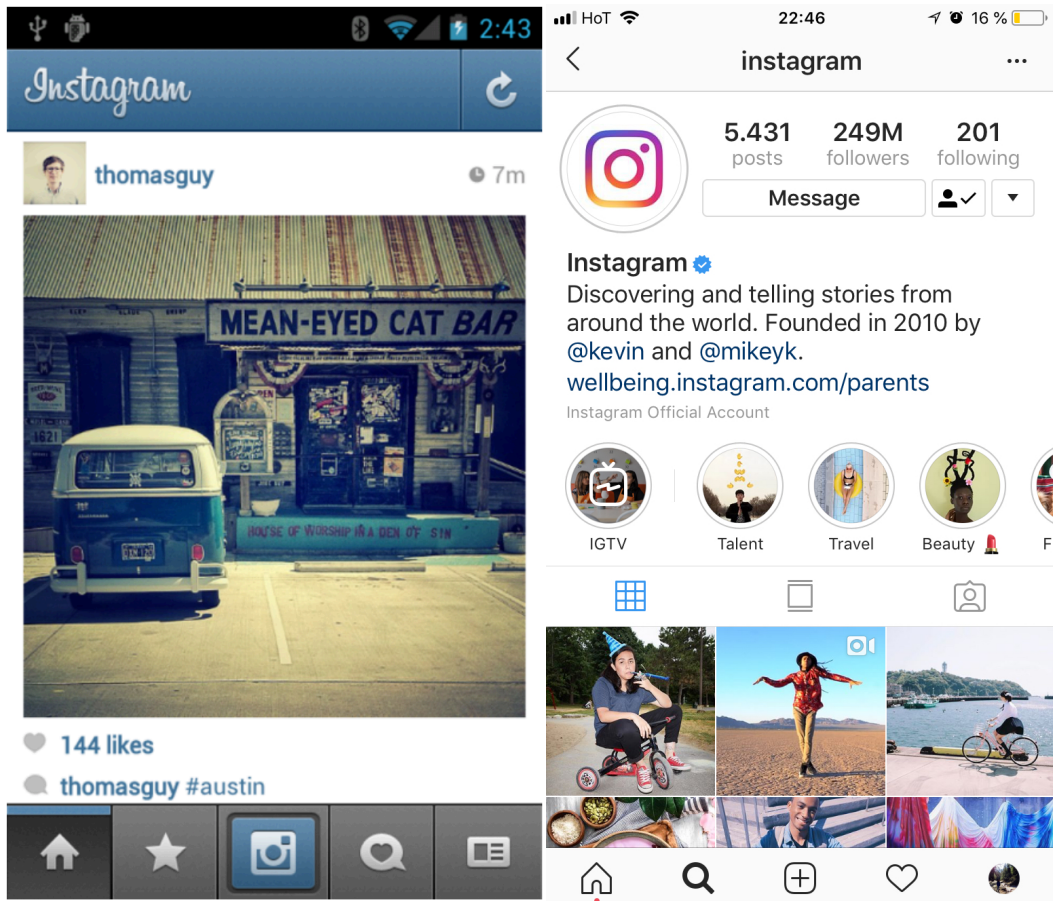


Figure 2.2 (left): Instagram on Android in 2012 (Instagram, 2012),
Figure 2.3 (right): Instagram on iOS in 2018 (Retrieved by the author 2018)

Until now, Instagram has added several features that allowed their users to upload even more visual content. These will be further explained in the following chapter.

Features

With over 1 billion monthly and 500 million daily active users, Instagram represents the most popular and impactful online platform to share photos and videos. Different to Facebook, each uploaded content contains a picture or video. Although people can comment or give a “like” on each other’s posts, the focus mainly lies on the visual. Already at the start of the platform, filters were integrated into the app, allowing users to edit their photos, oftentimes giving them a retro look with colours enhanced. This feature probably became the most known characteristic of Instagram. Another significant difference to Facebook was the one-sided following — users are able to follow any account they want without the requirement that the other person follows back. Vice versa, they can be followed by anyone on Instagram, receive likes and comments by others without having to follow them back. (If

an account is set to public, anyone can follow without the account's owner's permission. However, a private account requires the confirmation of the owner, if someone request to follow. Still, a reciprocal following is not mandatory.) As long as a following is accepted, people were able to have an insight into any person's life without knowing them personally. Hence, the range of social contacts and information about other people's lives are much wider than on Facebook. Another very crucial feature of Instagram is the use of hashtags. Each posting can be added with the maximum amount of 30 hashtags. By tagging photos, they can be found through the global search much easier, which is most desirable if people aim for a lot of reach as well as likes. Especially with the introduction of following hashtags, tagging pictures became even more valuable for those who wanted to be found by others. For the last two years, Instagram Stories has been integrated and became one of the most popular features. Currently, there are over 400 million stories posted on a daily basis. It allows users to post pictures worth sharing but which they do not want to keep on their profile. Those posts will only be available to viewers within 24 hours and disappear afterwards. However, in late 2017, Stories Highlights got introduced, which contain Instagram Stories that users wish to keep on their profile. Around the same time, Instagram also added the archive where users are able to move pictures they do not wish on their profile anymore, but which they still want to keep for themselves. These two features indicate that Instagram users really want their profile to represent them in their current state and have control of what is permanently shown (post) and what is ephemeral (story). Thus, highlights of Instagram Stories make it possible to express themselves in several visual aspects, but at the same time, are "hidden" at first glance as they need to be tapped to look at. Since 2018, other people's posts (from public accounts) and stories (if one is tagged in it) can be integrated into one's own stories.

Recently in June 2018, Instagram TV has been launched, where users can watch longer lasting videos for up to 1 hour. As Instagram explains, they want to started a "new chapter of mobile video". (Instagram, 2018b)

The development of Instagram shows an increase in visual content creation and consumption and each new feature indicate the growing concentration on images. However, due to the critics, Instagram receives from the media regarding uncontrolled time consumption, it also tries to add features that allow users to better control their user behaviour. These are for example the "You're all caught up" notification in the feed for cases when users scroll over a posting, that has already been looked at, or the soon announced tools to manage the time users spend on Instagram (Instagram, 2018c).

For understanding the interviews about Instagram use, it is important to know the general features of the platform and several terms related to it, beforehand. Therefore, the following list of terms and definitions should serve as a guide.

Instagram features:

- Instagram post/posting: in the German dictionary, duden.de, a “posting” is a written message or contribution on an online source, e.g. a website, internet forum etc. However, a post or posting on Instagram refers to a visual entry on the platform, as it mainly works with images.
- Instagram timeline feed: the “message board” of Instagram. It is a list of all newly added visual posts from the accounts one follows.
- personal feed: the personal image board, which represents one’s own account.
- photo filters: overlay on photos which modify the image’s appearance in e.g. brightness, colour, contrast, etc.
- Instagram Direct: the instant messenger for visual conversations on Instagram, where photos and videos can be shared with specific people. (Instagram, 2013)
- boomerang: “Boomerang takes a burst of photos and stitches them together into a high-quality mini video that plays forwards and backwards” (Instagram, 2015)
- Instagram Stories (InstaStory): an Instagram feature, ephemeral videos and photos that disappear after 24 hours. The videos and photos durations are less than 15 seconds. Viewers can give likes and reply. (Instagram, 2016a)
- stickers: visual labels that can be added on top of photos, e.g. animals, smileys, but also the location or day and time; there are special geostickers depending on your location (Instagram, 2016b)
- live stories: sharing a video real-time with all followers, can be saved for 24 hours (Instagram, 2017e)
- face filters: visual accessory on selfies, done with augmented reality, e.g. flowers in the hair, face smoothened, dog ears and tongue with mouth open (Instagram, 2017b)

Instagram related terms:

- selfie: „an image of oneself taken by oneself using a digital camera especially for posting on social networks“ (Merriam Webster, 2018)
- flatlay: "A flatlay is basically when you’re shooting items from directly above. Usually, those items will be arranged or styled on a flat surface.“ (Fat Mum Slim, 2016)

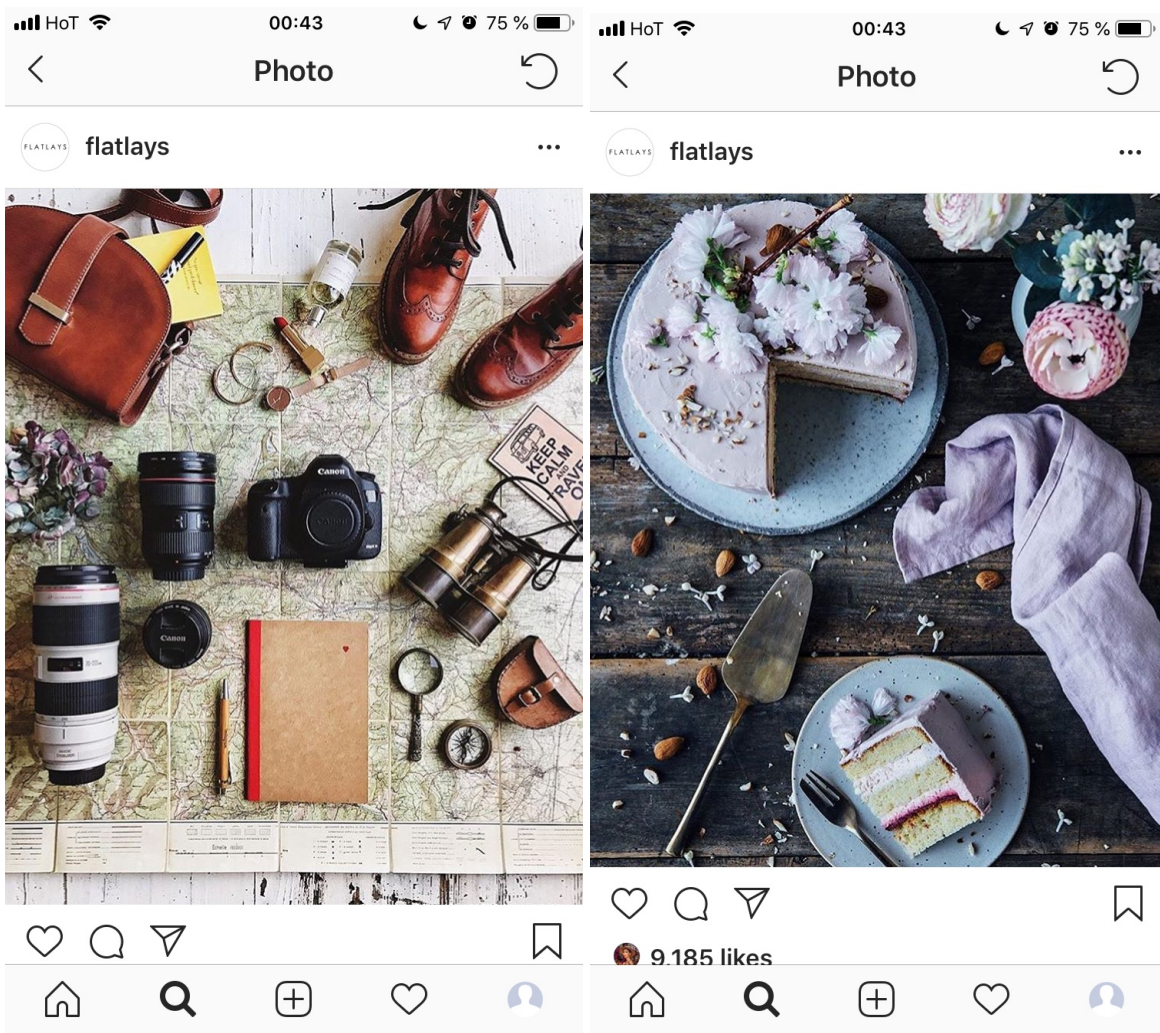


Figure 2.4: Examples of flatly (@flatlays) on Instagram (Retrieved by the author 2018)

Current research on Instagram

So far, research on Facebook use and its impact on people’s well-being and self-perception has been conducted intensely. However, not much has been explored around Instagram use and its users. Nevertheless, there are a few studies that started to examine its users' behaviour.

Araújo et al. (2014) examined the user practices in Instagram. They found that users prefer the afternoon until the late night to post on Instagram, also weekends (Sat/Sun) showed the highest numbers of posts. Furthermore, 76% of the analysed pictures show some kind of editing, however, it is possible that the rest of the unfiltered postings are edited externally before uploading. Also, the most popular posts were tagged with hashtags that correlate with recent life events. Although the use of hashtags is meant to be easily found in the search, its number does not help to generate more likes. On the contrary, a high number of followers

attract more likes, which in turn, also triggers more comments — known as the rich get richer phenomenon (Araújo et al., 2014, pp. 20-23).

Hu et al. (2014) conducted an analysis of Instagram data and their results suggested 8 major topics that users primarily post: friends, food, gadgets, captioned photos, pets, activities, selfies, and fashion, whereby the majority of posts covered the topics selfies and friends.

In regard to the usage of Instagram, researchers found both behavioural and normative beliefs for Instagram use: Behavioural beliefs found were personal gratification, features' usefulness, socialising role, product information and entertainment, whereby normative beliefs were the siblings, relatives, close friends and peers, friends in general, Facebook friends, and application reviewers (Ting et al. 2015). Jang et al. (2015) take a closer look at the differences of Instagram teens (age 13-19) and adult users (25-39). Their study suggests that teens receive more likes and comments and have a higher number of hashtags in their postings. As hashtags are used to be easily found by other Instagram users, it indicates that teens seek attention more than adults. In addition, teenagers oftentimes use filters and remove unwanted postings, implying that they care much about their online appearance. When it comes to the content that is uploaded, adults offered a wider variety of topics, such as different locations, moods and emotions, or art and design. In contrast, teens primarily upload pictures of themselves (selfies). The researchers assume that it is due to financial reasons as adults can afford to get around and access more diverse places where they can experience more things. At last, the study found teens to be more expressive with words, providing a longer text in their bio than adults (Jang et al., 2015, pp. 4040-4041).

Impact

In addition to the above listed academic studies and research papers, this section gives insights from recent online media, where journalists also discuss the impact and effects Instagram has on people's life. In their opinion, it is obvious that Instagram as a photo-sharing social media platform has negative effects on the well-being of its users, due to its nature of perfectly staged content.

Mariella (2014) claims that the constant consumption of carefully chosen pictures of people in their happy moments will make consumers insecure about their own life. Although many users are aware that pictures on Instagram are beautified with filters and editing tools, they do not see the manipulative nature of such images, similar to common visual advertisements. Mariella assumes that it is because the creators of Instagram pictures usually are friends, acquaintances or other ordinary people, and people therefore have the feeling that it should technically be reachable for them, too. Mariella worries "through this process, we're breeding a culture of people who are not only fascinated with looking, but are also permanently aware that they are being looked at." Consequently, this social comparison

might pressure people to keep up with their Instagram contacts. Sunstrum (2014) criticises the resulting reaction of seeking the ideal self: “We have a general persona we construct and put out to the cyber universe based on the person we want to be, and more important, based on the person we want to be seen as”. This is often realised through unrealistic self-presentation and an endless circle of outfitting each other. Kay Green (2013) warns users to be aware of this manipulative nature of Instagram and other any visual-based social media platform. A high amount of likes, comment and followers serve as reinforcer for esteem, and users seeking such attention try to satisfy their needs through social media use. Kay Green therefore asks users to question whether one is actually presenting the real self or a “hyper-idealistic version of ourselves” in order to avoid deluding oneself. She additionally gives three advices: to stop comparing oneself with others, to keep authenticity and to align the real self with the ideal self.

In addition, online journalists see a change in the motivations of photo-sharing and the way people live their lives when the capturing daily moments is constantly available through the ubiquity of their mobile phones. Reinke (2017) tells about his personal experience where his son heavily insisted jumping off the waterfall. When Reinke agreed but states the condition of not taking a picture of said jump, his son immediately lost interest and cried out “Well then, what’s the point?!”. This example shows that situations and activities in life nowadays are not enjoyed by itself but only if the experience can be shared later on with other people. “Shareable moments become little stage-plays” and young people only put their attention to “shareable spectacles — certain unique Instagram-worthy experiences with friends”. Especially the vacationing has changed a lot since Instagram became more popular. A New York Times online article by Kathrine Rosman (2017) deals with the increasing popularity of Palm Springs. This desert area in California is currently highly requested due to external influences such as TV Series (*Mad Men*) or music festivals (*Coachella*) that take place in that area, and moreover, young people’s seeking of instagram-worthy locations during their vacations. She mentions a quote from Jaime Derringer, founder of the popular design blog *Design Milk*, who explains in an interview “This is the Instagram generation and it wants an experience associated with an area. And in Palm Springs, that means the desert, the sun, the palm trees, and the midcentury modern house. You want to stay at places that are Instagram-worthy because you are living your life as content.”

As shown above, the amount of online articles that deal with Instagram’s influence on people’s behaviour is steadily increasing. People seem to become more aware of its new manipulative power and the different aspects it has an impact on. This implies that this new form of social photo-sharing platform should not be taken as irrelevant or equated with previous social media networks such as Facebook or Twitter. In fact, more scientific research should be dedicated to this platform in order to fully understand the changes in people’s social media behaviour.

3. Methodology and Approach

In this chapter, the research methods applied in this study are further explained, namely the nature of qualitative interviews according to Mason (2002), the methodological framework of problem-centred interviews by Witzel (1985), as well as the methods used for data analysis: a combination of Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and Mayring's (2010) qualitative content analysis. Furthermore, the interview guideline and conduction are illustrated in detail.

3.1. Qualitative interviews

So far, a lot of research has been done regarding social media networks and the role of photography, however only little research has dealt with image-driven social networking sites and the resulting changes in online communication, as well as the role that images play in this context. In order to answer the stated research questions in Chapter 1, it is necessary to understand the behaviours and motivations in-depth. To achieve this, it is important that interview participants recall real-life situations by which they can base their statements on. Only then, their thoughts and explanations come close to the real-life situations and the study's results are sufficient to properly cover the research questions. Moreover, since the research topic deals with the perception and interpretation of images, which primarily happen in an intuitive and unconscious manner so that it is the researcher's task to ask questions that can promote respondents' reflection on their behaviour. This can only be done through qualitative research, particularly through qualitative interviews.

Mason (2002) states several reasons for which the application of qualitative interviews in scientific studies are to be considered, and which are well-suited for this thesis' problem field.

- ontological interest: qualitative interviewing allows the exploration of “people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions [that] are meaningful properties of the social reality”. (Mason, 2002, p.63) As stated, the aim of the thesis is to understand the role of images in visual communications These stated insights can serve as a base to answer the thesis’ research questions.
- epistemological interest: in qualitative interviews, it is possible to interact with the interviewees in a natural way, ”to ask them questions, to listen to them, to gain access to their accounts and articulations, or to analyse their use of language and construction of discourse” (Mason, 2002, p.63)). Through this personal discourse, the researcher can dive

much deeper into aspects depending on the answers of the respondent. However, as Mason mentions, the researcher must keep in mind how that the collected information is not fact but only reproductions of personal interpretations.

- The situational and contextual character of qualitative interviews promotes the participants to reveal information that is closest to real situations. It aims to “ascertain people’s reasonings or judgements in certain areas by focusing on events and situations which have taken place in their lives, rather than simply asking them their views about x, y, or z. Or it could involve providing the means for them to ‘free associate’ so that you can get a sense of how issues and concerns are connected in their perceptions” (Mason, 2002, p. 64)
- Mason additionally suggests using qualitative interviews if the goal of it is to gain knowledge about social contexts and actions which require “an understanding of depth and complexity”. (Mason, 2002, p. 64) The respondents’ explanations and arguments for this thesis research are primarily important because they give information about the individual context they are in, which help to interpret the statements in a more holistic way.
- “because the data you want may not feasibly be available in any other form” (Mason, 2002, p. 65). As stated above, automated actions and intuitive decisions that a person performs can hardly be brought to the surface with quantitative methods as it simply does not suffice to give answers to the intentions behind an action. Additionally, it needs a researcher to guide a conversation and ask questions that enhance a reflective process during their explanations.

In addition to the above-stated reasons of the application of qualitative interviews, it was decided to particularly follow the methodological framework of problem-centred interviews, as it may enhance a closer look into the respondents' situation and thus offer deeper insights into their motivations and intentions of their actions.

The problem-centred interview

The problem-centred interview according to Witzel (1985) is a methodological framework for qualitative research in social sciences. It not only includes methods for data collection (e.g. qualitative interviews, biographical methods, or focus groups) but also evaluation procedures. The problem-centred interview is based on the idea of the grounded theory approach. This research methodology does not aim to verify pre-formulated theories through empirical methods but to generate them within the process of data collection and in-depth data analysis.

The problem-centred interview is characterised by three factors: problem centring, object orientation and process orientation.

Problem Centering: Witzel claims that in order to systematically examine the actual ideas and thoughts of a research participant, it is crucial to set the focus on the situated problems the interviewees are in, which is in fact also the object of research. The researcher's tasks include two main aspects: on the one hand, it is necessary to gain enough knowledge about and to be sensitised to the problem field before the actual interviews actually take place. This prior knowledge allows the researcher to have a forward-looking perspective and to empathise with the interviewee during the conversation. On the other hand, the researcher is required to allow openness towards the empirical findings. This two-sided meaning of the problem-centring aims to elastically apply the researcher's prior knowledge on a socially relevant issue. In addition, a level of conversation must be obtained where the interview participants are able to express themselves and bring forth their perspective of the problem even if the interview's questions might have an implicit suggestive nature (Witzel, 2000, pp.231-232).

Object orientation indicates the flexible adaptability of the methodological approach. Witzel emphasises that it is highly important to allow different research methods and to be open about variations and combinations depending on the examined object. For example, explorative group discussions may be conducted, complementing the actual interview, to explore an unfamiliar problem field through open discussions with a relatively passive role of the interviewer (Witzel, 2000, pp.232-233).

Process orientation refers to a dynamic and gradual analysis of the issue, by which the findings emerge from an iterative and alternating process of induction and deduction, whereby it is constantly based on the collected data. With each iteration, more insights into each aspect of the research field and the relation between them are brought forth. In particular to the interviews, the aim is to create a relationship of trust between the researcher and the interview participant. This not only promotes the self-reflection process of the respondent but also allows them to explain complex matters of the problem or to correct themselves if needed. The researcher's task here is to collect information and to ask context-related questions to clarify any misunderstandings or variations of statements. By this, the researcher is immediately placed into a process of understanding, where interpretations can already develop which serves as a base for the actual analysis afterwards (Witzel, 2000, pp. 233-234).

Use Case Instagram

The choice of Instagram as the case study is due to its image-heavy content and increasing user base in the last years. Its feed's content is primarily visual, taking up the majority of the visible space, a text is only used for image captions or comments. By this, photo editing and instant sharing are strongly encouraged. As only little scientific research has dealt with

visual-based social networking sites, it would be interesting to see if there are any significant sharing behaviours in creating and sharing photos online. Thus, the image-driven nature of Instagram and its popularity serve well to answer our research questions.

3.2. Lead questions and the interview guideline

One main goal of this thesis is the deeper understanding of people's mindsets during their interaction with visual content in social networking sites, in particular, what thoughts arise when users consume visual content and what their responses to image-based communication are. These insights help us understand the ways of and the reasons for the ever increasing use of images, photos and videos as communication tools within social communication. Thus an open interview guideline was chosen to achieve the aforementioned goals.

Pre-study

Before the actual interviews were conducted, a small pre-study on general Instagram use should serve as a preparation. Every person, including the author of this thesis, has an individual way of using Instagram. As there is not much research on Instagram use with the most recent app version, where features such as InstaStories, live videos, and many more improvements have been integrated, it was necessary to gain insights into users' current behaviour on the platform. Therefore, five personal contacts of the author were taken into consideration. To have a comparable group of people, the participants of the pre-study matched the requirements of the final interviewees (which will be further described in the following chapter). With a first draft of the interview questions, which was a smaller set of questions than within the final interview guideline, the author conducted short test-interviews. By that, she was able to find out what features are the most commonly used ones and what participants find most interesting in the platform. It turned out that InstaStories took up a majority of the usage time and that they were partially even more important to the participants than the posted images. Another interesting finding was that people sometimes prepare images of past events and used those for periods when they do not have anything to share. Overall, by this pre-study, the author was able to get a first impression of current Instagram usage, which helped in modifying the final guideline to cover all of the relevant topics, including the InstaStories.

The final interview guideline

Hence, the main focus aspects of the qualitative interviews were as follows:

- the relation of the participants to photography, mobile phone use and online communication
- their perception and usage of Instagram
- the role of visual communication in their daily life

In fact, these areas are not distinct but are indeed closely intertwined and influence each other in several ways. In addition, they are not the final categories of the data analysis but rather a summary of the areas that have to be covered in order to answer the research questions.

The relation of the participants to photography, mobile phones and online communication

Social communication that happens online, particularly on the mobile, have changed the way people live. As mentioned in the introduction, the mobile phone's ubiquity allows people to be in touch with their social groups at all times and have become a natural part of everyone's life. The fast development of both hardware and software, it is now easier than ever to take qualitative pictures and store them on the phones, if they are not immediately shared over several online channels on-the-go. For the interviews, it is therefore very interesting to see, how much space the mobile phone takes up in participants' life and closely connected with that, how strong their relation with online communication and photography is. In which parts of life and in which way is the smartphone integrated, how do they handle their social media use and how important has photography through smartphones and social media become?

The main questions for this area include:

- In which situations *and moments do you use your smartphone? When is it not in use?*
- For which purposes are you using your smartphone?
- Which social media platforms are you regularly using? Are there different purposes?
- What are other online communication channels that you use? Are there particular groups of people dedicated to each of these channels?
- How regularly do you take pictures in your daily life and what are you taking pictures of?
- *Do you take pictures with the smartphone or with an external professional camera? Why?*

The perception and use of Instagram

This section covers the main part of the interview as it focuses on several aspects of the participants' actions during their Instagram use. The questions ask the participants to explain their general user behaviour on the platform, however, with each answer (and justification) participants also reveal several intentions and motivations for their online actions. Additionally, the questions do not only deal with the participant's role as a consumer but also with their role as a content creator. By examining how participants deal with the social platform in both roles, it can be better understood in which way visual communication actually takes place and how the experiences a user gain through consuming content can have an influence on their content creation process and vice versa.

The main areas and dedicated questions include:

General Instagram use

- What are you mostly doing when you use the app? What do you look at?
- What do you pay attention to, when you scroll through your feed?

Other people's profiles

- How would you describe the pictures you see?
- What content do you see in other people's pictures, stories, and videos?
- What differences do you see between images in a post and images in an InstaStory?
- When does another person's profile grab your attention and interests you? What is important to you in another person's profile?
- Can you show me a profile you really like and tell me how you feel when looking at it?
- What information do you gain from other people's profile pictures?

The personal account

- Are your followers/followees mainly personal friends or strangers?
- What topics of your life do your pictures show?
- How do you decide which pictures you upload? What factors play a role?
- How do you edit your pictures and what is important to you during this process?
- In which way has your profile changed since you have started with Instagram?
- How would you describe your profile, what is its main focus and in which way is that visible to viewers?

- What similarities or differences do you see in your profile compared to the ones you follow?
- How much attention do you pay to captions? Do you often read them and how important are they for you?
- What kinds of captions or hashtags do you post?

Interaction with others

- When do you comment or like other people's post? Do you receive comments or likes?
- When do you make use of the messenger feature within Instagram?

The role of visual communication in their daily life

The last part of the interview should give insights into the importance of visual communication in the participants' lives. Interviewees need to explain what benefits they gain through visual communication, why Instagram as a photo-sharing platform is appealing to them, what advantages and disadvantages they see in communicating this way. The answers can clarify the differences people see between text-based and image-based networking sites and what factors are most important to them in current communication.

The main questions for this area include:

- What role does Instagram play in your life? What benefits do you get from its use?
- Why do you choose Instagram for sharing your photos? What is most appealing about it compared to the other social sites you use?
- What strengths or weaknesses do you see in Instagram?
- What advantages or disadvantages do you see in visual communication?

3.3. Data Collection

This chapter describes the practical implementation of the interviews. This includes details about the sampling of the interview participants, the introduction of the interviewees as well as the process of the interviews.

The interview participants

In order to gain a profound insight into the research topic, the number of qualitative interviews must be set in a way to ensure objectivity as well as to achieve a realistic reflection of the present situation of visual social communication. According to Mason (2002), in qualitative research, the quantity of interviews does not necessarily ensure better and useful results, but instead, the quality and depth that are brought forth from the interviews are much more important. Hence, for this thesis it seemed reasonable to conduct a number of 12 interviews.

Furthermore, regarding the sampling of interviewees, it was crucial that they reflect the current Instagram user base. Statistics show, that around 61% of Instagram users worldwide are between the age of 18-34 years old, with 50.4% female and 49.6% male users. (Statista, 2018a) Therefore, the pool of interviewees was oriented on these numbers the age limitation was set to according to the two stated age groups, with 3 female and 3 male participants in each of them.

Interviewees must own an Instagram account and have a general knowledge of its use and functions, hence, participants were required to have a minimum of experience with Instagram. The researcher defined by their number of uploaded images and amount of followings. The number of images does not necessarily mean to be the number of postings, but as Instagram allows up to 10 images in one single posting, the overall amount of posted images count. The reason for this parameter is that with each posting, the user undergoes a process of several decisions, which include the motivation to post, the image selection, the editing and the addition of captions and hashtags, and hence, the user shows experience in the use of Instagram's content creation. For this study's interview, a minimum number of 10 images was set to be sufficient. In regard to the second parameter, namely the number of followers and followees, it is assumed to reflect a social circle in which the participant consumes content as well as shares his/her own. The author hence set a minimum number of 50 followees and 50 followers, which participants must own, to ensure they have gained a good amount of knowledge about other people's profiles and posting behaviour, and additionally, have a reasonable number of followers that are in their minds when they posted images.

Participants were found through the author's friends' circles of acquaintances, which includes university colleagues, work colleagues or family members. As a small incentive, the author offered three 10€ Amazon gift cards, which would be drawn in a raffle between all participants. After confirming the interviewees' consent to participate in the study, they were contacted by the researcher either via WhatsApp or email, depending on what contact the interviewee provided. In this first contact, participants were generally informed about the researcher's background and briefly introduced to the thesis' topic. However, in order to

prevent any bias, they were only told to give feedback on their experience with Instagram, and nothing was mentioned about the actual focus of the thesis, namely the role of images in visual communication and the differences to text-based. Additionally, interviewees were informed and asked for their consent to be audio recorded in the interviews, which was agreed on by all participants. The interviews were then scheduled over a period of 6 weeks (during April-May 2018).

The interviews

The majority of interviews were held in the library room at the Institute for Multidisciplinary Design and User Research of the Technical University of Vienna. This setting ensured a quiet and focused atmosphere and enough space to engage in the topic without any distractions. In addition, snacks and water were supplied by the researcher. However, two interviews were conducted outside the university due to the difficult schedule of the interviewees, thus, one interview was carried out at the participant's workplace, a Yoga studio, and another interview was held at a cafe in Vienna close to the participant's home. These locations still fulfilled the conditions of a quiet and focused interview atmosphere. It was important that all interviews were held face-to-face because participants were asked to show examples of their Instagram account on their profile during the interviews, which is hard to realise on video calls or else.

Each interview started off with a brief introduction to the topic and the explanation of the rules and nature of a qualitative interview. It was specifically pointed out that the research topic is still quite explorative, hence, no statement is wrong, all opinions are highly valued, and interviewees are merely asked to share their experience and opinion with Instagram. Afterwards, demographic information, as well as general numbers of their Instagram profile, were collected. (see Table 1)

With one participant from Germany, three from South-Tirol, and eight interviewees from Austria, all interviewees were held in German. The interviews lasted for about 1.5 hours on average; with the shortest one lasting for 1 hour and the longest one for 2 hours and 15 minutes. It was important to leave room for questions and open discussion with the interview partners afterwards. The interview guideline served as an overview of the relevant topics, however, the order of them was based on the participant's available time, their answers and interests. Generally, the questions were adapted to the interview's flow. Thus, some topics were discussed more thoroughly with some participants and less with others.

Additionally, specific Instagram use cases should be pointed out. This was realised by a live demonstration of the Instagram usage during the interview. Interviewees were specifically asked about their thoughts and impressions of the images within their feed or of profile images of people they follow. The idea behind the procedure is to cover real use cases and

catch the natural behaviour of users related to real situations. Without this live app performance, it might be difficult for interviewees to think certain examples during the interview, which in turn could result in artificially formed answers. Moreover, with the help of the live Instagram feed, they can refer to specific images while reflecting on past situations. With this, it is possible to gain not only the general experiences users have but furthermore, their intentional and detailed thoughts in actual cases.

The interviews were audio recorded with the integrated “Voice Memo” app on iOS devices on several devices (laptop, smartphone, tablet), to ensure a sufficient audio quality for later transcription. After the interviews, post-scripts were done in those cases, where striking details about the interview and the participant was relevant to keep in mind.

Transcriptions were done through dictating applications (a combination of Google Docs, dictation.io and otranscribe.com). The author listened to the audio recording and dictated the interviewee’s statements into one of the stated tools, which automatically transcribed simultaneously. To ensure a correct reproduction of the interviews, several re-examination rounds were performed, where any errors were removed or missing phrases were added, and any noticeable change in the voice, relevant parts of dialect use, or emotional highlights were noted down.

Demographics					Instagram information				
Name	Sex	Age	Industry/field	Educational attainment	since	#followers	#followees	#posts	private
Alex	f	21	Nursing, student	Matura	mid 2012	421	924	67	no
Flo	m	28	Biology, tax consulting	Bachelor of Science	2016	1313	824	92	no
Ellie	f	25	self-employed, Yoga teacher, German teacher	Bachelor of Science	2012	911	427	515	no
Leo	m	24	Medicine, student	Matura (AHS)	2012	274	289	12	yes
Julia	f	23	Teacher, PhD student (French)	Magister Lehramt	end 2015	209	201	174	no
Michael	m	27	Software developer	Master of Science	end 2012	~8400	81	486	no
Lena	f	25	Culture and social anthropology, journalism, student	Bachelor of Arts	2015	240	1006	65	yes
Paul	m	25	Software developer	Bachelor of Science	2015	4279	715	331	no
Mary	f	25	Teacher (Spanish, French)	currently finishing Bachelor	2014	246	276	103	yes
Simon	m	22	Multimedia, musician	Matura (HTL)	mid 2014	159	303	69	no
Nele	f	21	Tourism, student	Matura	2014	2669	376	376	no
Tim	m	21	Medicine, student	Matura	mid 2017	358	571	6+	no

Table 3.1: Interviewees' demographics and general Instagram information
(names have been changed)

3.4. Data Analysis

For the analysis of the collected data, Braun & Clarke's (2006) approach of thematic analysis has been applied. Moreover, Mayring's (2010) approach of qualitative content analysis was used to complement the proposed analysis method of Braun & Clarke. Due to the explorative nature of the thesis' topic and the little research about it in recent scientific studies, predefined themes and categories must be avoided and findings should emerge alone by the analysis of information and statements from the interviewees. This is achievable with thematic analysis as the method aims to reveal the "experiences, meanings and the reality of participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.81) which is the core information to answer the thesis research papers — "Thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.81).

Similarly, Mayring suggests three steps of analysis (summarisation, explication, and structuring) with the aim to reflect social reality in a truthful way based on the collected data. (Mayring, 2010) By summarising, the researcher is able to reduce the collected data material, whereby relevant or meaningful content does not get lost during the process of data abstraction. Explication then helps by adding any necessary information to clarify the context in which a statement was formed, in order to avoid any misinterpretations. Lastly, the process of structuring uses pre-defined categories to filter out relevant aspects of the data. For this thesis, summarisation was done to clarify the collected statements, however, the researcher was particularly careful not to paraphrase and compromise the data too much because there would be the risk of losing important and meaningful details. Specific phrases of the interviewees were highlighted to keep the intonations and specific wording for a proper analysis. As the interview was held by the researcher herself, the context was quite clear, thus no additional material was needed to interpret specific text passages. Furthermore, with the exploratory nature of the research topic, pre-defined categories of the structuring phase would work against the initial aim of the research to be open to new insights (Mayring, 2010).

Mayring's summarisation approach corresponds with the first phases of the thematic analysis, which will be described in the following. The researchers Braun & Clarke define six essential steps in the thematic analysis to achieve a thorough analysis and interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.86-93):

Step 1: Familiarising with the data

This includes the transcription, reading and re-reading of the data, as well as taking the first notes on initial ideas. In this phase of analysis, the researcher's task is to fully understand the data. This already starts with the data collection itself, if the researcher was personally involved in the process. For this thesis, qualitative interviews were held by the researcher herself, thus, there was already prior knowledge of the data before the transcription phase began. With the transcription of the audio recordings, Braun & Clarke (2006) see an essential and highly important step for a better understanding of the data and point out that this step is perceived as tedious and thus undertaken by external resources. However, they claim that it is a crucial "interpretative act where meanings are created" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). The researcher not only spends more time and energy into each phrase that is noted down but also starts to develop first thoughts into the analysis. As mentioned before, the transcripts for this thesis were done with the additional step of dictation. Due to that, the researcher not only carefully listened to the audio recording but additionally vocalised the statements interview participants made. With the repetition of intonations and pace of phrases, a better understanding of the interviewee's thoughts can be enforced, so that the researcher is able to reproduce the verbal data more accurately and "in a way which is 'true' to its original nature" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.88). Punctuations, pauses and any relevant conversational or emotional feature were then added to the transcripts in several rounds of re-listening and re-reading of the final transcripts.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

After having familiarised with the data, the next step is to generate the first possible codes. These include any interesting words or phrases that appear relevant either to answer the research questions or were noteworthy due to its originality or high occurrence. For this thesis, the researcher already began to take notes during the phase of transcription as well as to highlight and comment statements, that seemed usable for possible themes. Braun & Clarke (2006) mention that the style of coding depends on whether it is data-driven or theory-driven. As the topic of visual communication in new social networking sites is a relatively undiscovered field of research, the aim of the researcher was to pay great attention to the interviewee's thoughts in order to understand their motivations in full-depth. However, due to the research questions that emerged from prior familiarisation with the research areas of social communication and image perception, naturally, the analysis of data was also affected by the questions in mind. Hence, the coding process was both data-driven and theory-driven, whereby the former approach was set as the primary focus, and the theories and hypothesis simply served as a reminder for the research questions. Furthermore, the coding was applied to the entire set of data and not only on particular parts that seemed relevant. The coding itself was done manually by a combination of paper post-its and digital

highlighting and annotating on the computer. The result of this step of the analysis is the organisation of data and arrangement of groups of statements.

Step 3-5: Generating themes (searching, reviewing, defining and naming themes)

In the part of this particular phase of analysis, the researcher begins to discover similarities in the codes, to combine them, and to see links between different codes. By that, the first set of potential themes and sub-themes is formed and set in relation. By reviewing them, some of the initially generated themes may lose their relevance, due to insufficient data, they may collapse and are merged into one, they may get separated into two new distinct themes, or completely new themes have to be developed. During this refinement, the researcher has to examine the themes in terms at the level of the coded data extracts (Do the codes still fit the dedicated theme? Do the themes form a coherent pattern?), as well as on the level of the entire data set (Do the themes actually reflect the entire set of data?). The final step is then to assign names to these themes which can properly express their meaning and the underlying sub-themes and codes.

For this study, during the phase of theme searching, the researcher made use of mind-maps and repetitive arrangements of theme-piles noted down on papers. For the researcher, it was particularly helpful to get a first understanding of the interrelations between each theme. It became clear that all themes are somewhat tightly linked together due to the nature of social communication and its impact on people's perception and responds. However, by breaking down these interlinked areas and recombining them during the phase of refinement, the final themes were generated, which will be explained in-depth in the following chapter.

Step 6: Producing the report

In this final step of the thematic analysis, the emerged themes and interrelations must be summarised. As this is the end result that readers see, it is important that the report can accurately reflect the intentions and ideas from which the data stems. Most importantly, it has to provide "a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 93) of the data, and moreover should not merely retell the statements interviewees provided but must set them into relation to the research questions to be answered.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, each of the 12 interviews is examined by itself. This serves to gain a deeper understanding of the interviewees' personal viewpoint. Moreover, with the knowledge about each persons' background and initial intentions, it is easier to understand their actions and motivations on Instagram. Afterwards, the generated themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews results will be examined in more detail.

4.1. Empirical findings

The qualitative interviews covered the general user behaviour of the 12 interviewees, mainly focusing on their daily usage, their habits and their experiences.

Topics that interviewees talked about were their mobile phone usage, their social media usage, the role of photography within their life and most of all, their Instagram usage and experiences with this platform.

During the analysis of the interviews, several topics and issues have emerged:

- the role and use of visual content in the process of its consumption, perception and creation
- the role of the information transmitter within Instagram and in general, more precisely, the role of visual transmitters such as postings and stories, and the role of written transmitters such as captions, comments, likes, and messages
- issues, resulting from the increasing consumption of visual content
- values, factors and characteristics within Instagram, which users highly seek and value, namely authenticity and realness, identification, relevance and intentions, uniqueness
- the benefits in consuming Instagram's content (expectations) and the resulting benefits in producing Instagram content (motivation, intentions)
- the changes in behaviour and the way of living
- the changing role of relationships, namely the role of followers and followees, communities as well as the role of family and friends

These topics will be further explained within the following chapters, where each interview will be looked at and described in more detail.

Interview 1: Nele

Nele is 21 years old and currently in her Bachelors. She studies Tourism at a private university in Vienna. Besides her studies, she occasionally works as a dog sitter. She has been abroad several times, as she went to San Francisco for one year and has several international friends, e.g. in Australia, which she regularly visits.

The interview

During the interview, Nele has been quite talkative but yet, also seemed a bit cautious and shy in a few moments. Especially at the beginning of the interview, she acted a bit nervous but became more comfortable as the interview continued. Throughout the interview, she rather calm and rarely raised her voice. Her answers were fairly short and it required more questioning on the interviewer's side for her to provide more detailed information. Nevertheless, the information she shared showed several interesting aspects. While observing her of using Instagram, it was noticeable that she was very fast in overlooking posts within the timeline. She also gave likes to several posts while she quickly scrolled through the feed. Until the end of the interview, it seemed as if her motivation shrunk, as her explanations became shorter and slower.

Her content

Nele started Instagram in 2014 and has reached over 2,500 followers over the time. She follows nearly 400 Instagram accounts and has already posted 376 Instagram posts on her account. Before she started using Instagram, she was a bit hesitant towards the platform, but her friend who started a food-blog at that time reached several followers over Instagram, which sparked Nele's interest towards Instagram. She then went abroad to San Francisco for one year and that was the initial reason for her to post more regularly, in order to always keep her friends and family at home up-to-date.

Nele's pictures on Instagram generally cover topics such as lifestyle, travel, and her life in Vienna. In her opinion, one can clearly see her interests in photography, travel, dogs and plants within her profile. She mostly posts when she travels to other countries. Her images have been taken e.g. in Australia, USA, France, or Czech. Several posts show her while hiking in Austria or visiting cities like Salzburg. She also uploads images about her life in Vienna: her followers see images of her plants, of Viennese neighbourhoods and coffee places, as well as a couple of shots of her and her friends. Although she has a couple of selfies on her profile, she states to hardly posts them because, in her opinion, it appears that people only post selfies if they do not have anything else to show. Asking her why she has posted a selfie of her sunburnt face, she claims to find it funny and thus worth sharing. Other selfies of hers are only posted because followers and friends have asked her to show more pictures of her face. Overall, out of 385 posts, she has ~46 selfies (12.0%), 13 in a group and

31 by herself. Therefore, there is a discrepancy in her arguments. Her posting behaviour has also changed since she began using Instagram. She claims to be more selective now and prevents to post boring things; one of them she names are coffee pictures. Yet, her profile shows that she still posts pictures of „coffee flat lays“ throughout her profile. However, she noticed those while she was scrolling down her feed during the interview and admitted that she would not have noticed that before. Generally, she now uploads more stories than postings.

For her, her profile is a personal visual blog, where she updates her followers about her life. As her profile is set to public, everyone on Instagram can technically follow and see her content. At the time of the interview, she had 2,669 followers. Nele is aware of the number of strangers following her life and she admits she behaves differently because of that. It was noticeable that Nele's decisions highly depend on her followers' opinion, as she claims to only post things that might be interesting for her followers. For example, although she stated that she does not like to post selfies of herself, she did so because others have asked her to post more pictures of her face. Still, she does not want to be restricted by her followers too much, as she wants to keep her authenticity and prevents to appear as fake. Her solution to deal with this problem is blocking those, for whom she needs to consider too many things before posting (e.g. it is too embarrassing or ugly).

Followees and consumed content

The accounts she follows are partially friends and partially lifestyle or fashion bloggers. By the bloggers' Instagram accounts, she learns about their circle of friends (which are oftentimes bloggers as well), their boyfriends, their work-life or studies, their taste of music and how the interior in their homes look like. The bloggers' InstaStories mainly show how they travel and which food they eat while on vacation. Although many of these facts interest Nele, she dislikes people who show off. In this context, she points out bloggers who post what their rich boyfriends have bought them.

Nele's friends, compared to the professional bloggers, are much more active in uploading InstaStories instead of postings. The content her friends primarily document in those stories is their travels and the food they eat there, or everyday activities, e.g. when they drive somewhere in the car with friends.

In regard to the written captions, Nele states that she is very lazy to read any long text. The captions are only necessary to get to know a person better and especially to get an impression about new accounts. She would miss the captions if there were not any, but she actually does not really pay attention to them, unless it's a friends' post. However, overall, she does not read any written information, not even within stories, as she is too lazy to and it would ask her for more effort - she would need to put the story on hold by pressing on the

smartphone's display. To save time, she also does not write much in her own captions and mostly uses only an emoji and a couple of hashtags.

Her perception of visual content

Nele claims that postings are much more aesthetic than stories, as they oftentimes show pretty things, compared to stories which mainly cover everyday activities that do not always look fancy and are less formal. She mentions the situations where she didn't have any interesting and pretty pictures of recent activities to post, and she instead looks up old pictures that match the necessary aesthetic requirements. Nele has the feeling that due to Instagram's stories' ephemerality, people are less pressured to post beautiful things. This could be a reason why she nowadays posts stories more regularly than postings. In her opinion, postings stay on the profile and therefore have to be pretty for the long run:

"A post stays and a post has to be beautiful and meant for eternity. (laughs) It's actually not that strict but depends on one's own style. But stories disappear, that is why there is not much pressure to make it look beautiful."

Nevertheless, Nele states that it is important to her that a professional's images are visually pleasing, in order for her to follow.

In accordance to this manner, Nele noticed that all pictures, especially from bloggers, are usually edited with filters and she is aware that not everything in real life looks like that, but in order to keep a consistent profile, it is necessary to do that. She herself also edits all her pictures on her smartphone with photo-editing apps, such as VSCO or Afterlight, before she posts them on Instagram. It is important to her that her profile looks good, and thus, more interesting for her followers. During the interview, she explained the filters she normally uses and she already has specific ones to edit her photos, which indicates that she has already developed her own style of posts.

Her values

During the interview, it became more clear that she highly values accounts that are authentic and which she can relate to. She follows profiles where the content seems real and the things people show are reachable for her. One profile that she particularly likes is from a Viennese blogger who lives in the same district as her and who has similar interests as her. The identification with the person is very important to her. Nele herself also aims to show herself on Instagram as real and authentic as possible. She "definitely does not want to be fake" and wants to show how she really is. As a negative example, she recounts her best friend's, who regularly posts selfies with a pout or shares several stories of her work-out in a gym. Nele does not understand why her friend is acting differently on Instagram than in real life. She claims that her friend's pictures make her seem very narcissistic, which is a character trait

which Nele does not know of. When advising her friend to stop posting things like that, her friend gets mad at her.

Regarding her own profile, it was noticeable that Nele pays attention to the uniqueness of her pictures. This is indicated by several things. She says she only posts things in her life if she considers it as interesting or novel. For example, she does not post pictures of her staying at home and studying because not much is happening. A posting must show something „not everybody has“ and the content should not be repetitive. This also applies to content she consumes: *"I feel it is especially boring if everyone does it."* She compares her profile's images to photographs she would hang on the wall. Those pictures present a precious moment, which she wants to retain and remember in the future. She has even already deleted some pictures from the very beginning which are embarrassing to her now and don't align with her current posting behaviour.

Another important factor for her is the outcome of an edited photo. She selects her photos by the result after editing them. This indicates that she values aesthetics over content. She even used to make sure that her profile as a whole shows a consistent style; her postings needed to visually fit together next to each other on the overview of her profile.

Instagram as a social media platform

The purpose of Instagram and the benefits she gains through it have changed over the time. At first, the platform was mainly there for her to update and to keep in contact with her friends and family. She even created an account for her mother, so they can exchange life events on a new channel. Now, Nele gains feedback, acknowledgement and compliments from her followers and can express her creativity through photography at the same time. Additionally, she likes the fact that her pictures are shared with many people, and thus, have a purpose now, instead of merely saved on the computer where no one else can see them. Furthermore, Instagram became a source of inspiration for her, where she can be inspired by bloggers on where to eat out and on which other locations to go to in Vienna. Additionally, she also receives a lot of tips and inspiration on fashion and addresses on where to shop for the clothes she sees on Instagram. Nevertheless, she feels as if Instagram is less personal than e.g. Snapchat because the follower base is much bigger due to her public account.

Interview 2: Lena

Lena is a 25-years old Master student who originally comes from Germany. She currently majors in Cultural and Social Anthropology as well as in Journalism at the University of Vienna. She has a job at a retail store and is very interested in political topics. Currently, she is in a relationship with a photographer.

Lena uses Instagram since 2015 and follows over 1,000 accounts, which she mainly collected at the beginning and where she assumes that many accounts are already “dead accounts”. She has created 65 postings and around 240 accounts follow her. Her account has been set to private from the beginning as she only wants people to see her pictures, who she personally knows. However, she probably has 3-4 followers which she does not personally know. She assumes they have been added in the very beginning when “one wanted to have followers” at that time.

Instagram in the daily life

Lena is a very confident person, who was very open and talkative right from the start. Similar to Nele, Instagram was an unfamiliar platform for Lena, so that she was not sure whether she should create an account or not. But as she got her first smartphone 2 years ago, she gave it a try. Lena’s Instagram account is a way for her to represent her life. She regularly takes a quiet moment at home alone or with friends, to reminisce on the moments shown on her Instagram profile:

"looking at old pictures on a Sunday afternoon, e.g. with friends, going through old memories together - it is fun to talk about old times".

Instagram is also a source of inspiration for her, where she looks up places beforehand, either as an inspiration for vacation or and also for short trips outdoors, e.g. for hiking trails. She oftentimes goes online on Instagram right after she waked up, and starts to look at the timeline feed before she continues with the Instastories. She mentions that scrolling through Instagram’s feed is a very pleasant way to ease into the day without any great effort. It seems as if she wants to get exposed to a constant stream of visual information, which does not require any effort from her side.

Consumed content

At least for her own profile, the caption under a posting is quite relevant, thus, she always writes one. Nevertheless, she admits to being too lazy to actually read many captions:

"reading what text is below the caption every time - I do not fancy that, that's just too much effort for me, as lazy as it sounds but it's true."

As she follows over 1,000 accounts, Lena consumes a great number of visual content. Things that are typically displayed on her timeline are pictures of travels, nature, food and coffee, lifestyle and fashion, and a couple of accounts aim at professional photography and social subjects such as feminism. She points out that the majority of the images she sees are staged though. Captions, Lena remembers, are oftentimes wisdom slogans and common hashtags, showing that there are typical captions and hashtags used on Instagram.

When she was asked to show an account she regularly looks at and pays attention to, she immediately recalled a content creator from Berlin, who is part of a joint group of journalists

and responsible for the travel section. She really idolises the creator's photographing style and here, she especially pays attention to the captions. As Lena states "*she [the content creator] is very straightforward and she has an incredibly beautiful way of forming her captions which fascinates me. [...] and she comes up with the perfect hashtags*". Lena wants to make her own captions similar to that, where the picture and the caption go along with each other, e.g. enhancing an image by adding some humour through the text. Lena sympathises with her, not only because of the pretty images and texts but especially by the way she conveys her character. She calls her "*a girl I can well imagine to be friends with [...] she has that touch of a girl next door you can really laugh with. That's a quite charming fact of a profile if someone can bring forth that vibe in an authentic way.*" The authenticity within the profile is imparted by the minimal use of filters, which Lena also applies for her own; she tries to keep her postings as realistic as possible, only stressing those things in a picture that need to be more noticeable. Besides the use of filters, honest updates about one's own mood show realness, e.g. if the creator takes a break and is offline for a couple of weeks although her job takes place online. But this is exactly what makes her different to others, according to Lena because within this "perfect" world on Instagram a small hint of "imperfections" is more real and authentic. By that and by the style of captions, Lena can relate to her very well, which makes her even more fascinating. As a counterexample, Lena presented an account of an acquaintance, who works for a newspaper and is a travel journalist, too. The contrast to the first creator is the way the travel journalist illustrates the travel content: she posts a lot of pictures of herself, whereby showing a lot of bare skin in bathing suits and poses. Lena thinks it is very conceited and assumes that amount of bare skin is solely there because she seeks attention from men. In addition, some of her travel content show food, cars and her boyfriend, which indicate a rather egocentric approach.

Her content and values

Regarding her own profile, Lena states to upload a video, e.g. when she visits a concert, her favourite songs come up where she sings along. Furthermore, she posts images of activities such as skiing, museum visits, activities with friends, travels, or when she encounters a celebrity. Generally, she mainly uses InstaStories nowadays and rarely posts a photo on her profile. Reasons for her to post are the relevance and the uniqueness of a picture. For Lena, a picture is relevant if it is a moment to be remembered and which wouldn't be overlooked by followers. To her, an indication of recognition would be e.g. a "like" from her followers. There have been cases, where her post received two likes, which was too little for her and thus, an indicator that followers do not value this memory as much as she expected which made her delete the unpopular photographs. Uniqueness, on the other hand, means that the picture captures something that stands out from the crowd. It has to be "1 moment in 1000", something worth talking about and which is relevant for the future, too. The same applies for captions, as she dislikes general text such as wisdom quotes or common hashtags - "the

uniqueness is simply missing”. Lena claims not to post images of food, coffee or anything staged, neither does she like to post things about her relationships as they are too private. One of her motivations for posting all those memories is to show other people what she is experiencing and where she has been travelling to. She hereby hints at Bourdieu's idea of social capital and cultural capital and says she wants people to see her as someone who is able to travel to different places and as adventurous. The pictures are simply a tool to proof all these facts.

"Of course you want to show what you have and what you do [...] it was just such a beautiful view and of course you want to share it, like 'Hey, look!' [...] I was there and I want to prove that I was there [...] who I am and what I do and how I want to present myself".

Therefore, she tries to plan out some of her shots, e.g. when she was at a retreat with her friend, they tried out several photos of them in a pool surrounded by nature. She mentions that the focus of the picture is on the view of nature, and she herself should appear as if it is a coincidence. Having her in the picture gives her followers the information that she was actually there, but this information must appear unobtrusive. By that, she achieves her goal of showing everyone where she has already been to, but at the same time, it is not too imposing to her followers. Usually, her postings capture happy moments in her life, whereby she pays attention to look good on all of her pictures.

Her perception of visual content

Although Lena looks at the timeline before she goes through the stories, she is increasingly interested in the InstaStories due to the content's currentness compared to postings that can showcase past events. She feels that although stories are not showing anything worth for permanent use, it captures moments that are important to share at that actual moment.

When it comes to the role of captions, Lena claims that image-heavy platforms such as Instagram make it easier for the users to consume information, compared to Facebook where there is a lot of written information. She says that scrolling through images is easier for her to look over or to instantly filter out important things for her; it can be done as a quick break. In addition, she points out that creating text is harder than uploading an image: *"To put something into words may be a little harder for many"*.

Her benefits

The benefits Lena gains through her use of Instagram are for inspiration. She not only learns about other people's lifestyle, but she also uses it for travel incentives, looking up locations she could go to, e.g. hiking trails. In addition, by consuming other Instagram accounts and noticing the effects on herself, she weighs what she likes or dislikes, and on what base she will develop her profile. E.g. she states to take the creator's use of words within captions as an inspiration as well as the thought through combination of image and text. By producing

content on her profile, Lena not only keeps in touch with her friends and family in Germany, but she can also express herself through her experiences in visuals. Also, she receives recognition and confirmation:

"I believe that if I perceive something as aesthetically pleasing, others will perceive it the same way. That should usually be validated with a 'Like' or a 'heart'".

Interaction

When it comes to interaction on Instagram, Lena does not really take much effort. She does not give many likes for other postings, nor does she comment much. The Instagram messenger is merely used with her roommates if they reference funny memes. Otherwise, she communicates with friends over WhatsApp or other Instant Messengers.

Her perception of usage and visual content

An interesting aspect Lena mentions is the more automated use of Instagram, where one checks on it regularly just because out of habit:

"it is sad but true, it sometimes is already an automatic movement, e.g. you have just been on Instagram and it is a typical Sunday afternoon and you are contemplating and once again, you open the app!"

She also feels as if the communication with visual content becomes more general. People don't explicitly tell or write each other anymore, instead, they send pictures of their activities. By doing so, people automatically start presenting themselves to a broader audience of friends and followers, which in turn makes the content more general, and rather omit information by that than to write it down.

"I think nowadays, it is enough to send pictures without any additional text."

Overall, Lena is a private user who mainly uses Instagram to consume visual content and is especially interested in lifestyle and travel inspiration and only posts something now and then. For her, the authenticity of an account is one of the main reasons for her to follow because it is very important to her to identify with that person. Otherwise, it is merely for her entertainment. Her attention is usually on the images and visual content and less on captions or other written text. Although captions are important to her, she barely reads any. Interaction on Instagram is less relevant to her, she barely gives likes or comments and usually does not communicate on the messenger. Instead, personal communication is all shifted to instant messengers.

Interview 3: Leo

Leo is 24 years old and currently studies Medicine at the Medical University of Vienna. He graduated from high school 3 years ago and has always lived in Vienna. Thus, the people he's friends with for over 10 years all live close by and he sees them regularly, especially when he visits his soccer practice. He visits his parents every weekend and spends Sunday brunch with them. The rest of the weekend he usually is with his girlfriend, who lives very close to the border to Vienna in Niederösterreich and who works at the airport. They are together for ~1.5 years. In his spare time, he enjoys nature, plays football, goes hiking and biking and during the winter season, he enjoys skiing.

Leo is a friendly young man, who was very open and talkative throughout the interview. He has also been surprisingly open regarding his private life and about his relationship with his girlfriend, which opened up many interesting topics. During the interview, it was additionally noticeable that he cares much about his friends and in keeping their relationships stable.

Relation to his mobile phone

For Leo, his smartphone is a very essential part of his life. He uses it for almost anything and uses many apps to manage his studies, to track his expenses and smoking habits, for entertainment reasons like music or gaming, and also for social communication and photographing. His smartphone is always within reach, laying around close to him, even when he watches a movie or reads a book, which theoretically wouldn't require his phone. In daily situations, he uses it on the public transport, at work and at the university, but also at home in the bathroom or even in the restroom. His laptop, on the other hand, is only used when he has to work on long-term activities, such as studying for his medical studies or for emailing.

One particular activity that shifted from his smartphone to his laptop is Facebook. In the course of the interview, it becomes apparent that Leo has an ambivalent standpoint towards the platform. He used to have it installed on his smartphone but as he always looks at it right before bedtime and "wasted" much time on it, he deleted the app and now only checks on it 5 minutes per day on his laptop. Instagram has thus replaced Facebook in terms of consuming updates on the everyday life of one's friends through images. He argues that nowadays Facebook's only useful features for him are the updates on his university classes, the news on sports, and for receiving new job offers. Updates on his friends' lives have become quite rare, thus, he only communicates with them via WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, through WhatsApp Call or by meeting them in person.

Content perceived

When he logs into Instagram, he usually looks at the feed first until the InstaStories appear in

between other images in the feed. This is when he starts to go through all the stories. He mainly follows friends or people he personally knows. Only a few commercial sites are in his followee list as he claims that content of people he does not know well usually does not interest him. Thus, he pays more attention to his friends' posts. The majority of his followers are also friends and family, but he occasionally receives requests from girls he does not know because "*it's girls where I don't see any harm to anyone*". To the question why he thinks only female users send him friend requests and no male users, he states to see no reason a strange boy would request to follow, however, he also does not give a reason a girl would have to do so.

The few commercial accounts he follows focus on nature, travel, sports and photography. Consequently, he sees a lot of images illustrating such topics. His friends comparably seldom post and if they do, it's rarely a post but an InstaStory, showcasing their pets, their university day, the weather or their ride on the public transportation. In particular, food is a popular motive he often sees. Generally, Leo has the perception that his female friends post much more frequent than his male friends and that girls oftentimes post pictures of themselves.

One of Leo's friends shares a lot of travel photography taken with a drone. In the captions, his friend describes his personal opinion on drone equipment, by which Leo learns that drone companies pay his friend for posting these pictures. Nevertheless, he really enjoys these images and favours them over professional photography accounts. By regularly seeing his friend's feed, Leo sometimes has the feeling that his friend is constantly travelling around the world:

"I assume he must be on vacation and wonder 'Why on earth are you on vacation again?' You've just been to so many other places!"

As his friend also studies medicine which implies that he must study a lot like Leo as well, he shouldn't have too much time to travel. He assumes that due to the high frequency of his friend's posts, he must probably own a pool of prepared pictures of past travels and simply uploads one by one. Hence, the content can be quite misleading. Nevertheless, he admires his friends' editing skills because the final image turns out even more beautiful than in reality.

Leo states that he generally noticed that there is a difference between the photos on Facebook a few years ago and the ones on Instagram nowadays. He claims that images selected for Instagram are much more curated compared to Facebook where people used to upload 20 pictures of their vacation at once.

His content

Leo started Instagram in 2012 and currently has 274 followers and personally follows 289 other accounts. During these 6 years, he uploaded 12 Instagram posts.

Leo states that his posts in the beginning only showed him and his friends but overall, he was rather consuming than uploading photos. Particularly, between 2013-2016, he didn't post anything at all until he got together with his girlfriend in 2016, which is when he started to upload again.

The most recent picture of him and his closest male friends shows them at dinner on his birthday. The picture captures the nice atmosphere he felt very well and everyone looks happy. He explains it was one very precious day and moment as he values time with his guy friends a lot and wanted to share that memory on Instagram. Although he has a few vacation pictures of him and his friends, he does not have the urge to post them on Instagram, instead, they only exchange them internally on WhatsApp.

Generally, he says that pictures are allowed to go on his profile "as long as they are pretty". This was especially obvious when he recalls a time when he edited a picture of a sunrise for half an hour, although he claims to not care much about editing.

Instagram particularly plays an important role in his relationship with his girlfriend. He has posted more regularly since he has got together with his girlfriend and he started to post pictures of the two together as soon as they got together in early 2017. On his profile, one can see images of them biking, skiing, or visiting cities or nature sites.

During the interview, he describes how his girlfriend posted photos of them on her Instagram profile and made clear to him that she would appreciate if he would do so as well. Because he wants to show that he cares for her, he tries to upload more pictures of them although himself does not feel the need to do it. He also noticed that the same happened with his male friends, too.

When asking him, why he posted a specific picture of him and his girlfriend on a skiing trip, he believes that his girlfriend has been pressuring him ("im Genack gesessen") by accusing him "*You haven't uploaded anything of us for quite a while. Do you even still like me?*" It appears that for her, Instagram is a tool to express their affection for each other and the number of images of the two relates to the level of affection for each other. It feels as if she highly depends on the opinion other people have on their relationship. The fact that he for sure has to like every of her postings, again shows the relevance of Instagram within their relationship. Furthermore, he mentions that he sometimes looks into her profile, to make sure that he did not miss any pictures. As for stories, he always watches them resulting in them showing up most prominently in his stories. By that, he's sure he won't miss anything. Social media wouldn't be as important if it weren't to make his girlfriend happy. This is especially apparent when Leo mentions using Snapchat merely with his girlfriend because "*she is sometimes nervous and [with Snapchat] I can prove that I tell the truth about my daily activities*". Moreover, Leo recalls a discussion he had with his girlfriend about the importance of posting Instagram pictures of them: His girlfriend used to regularly post

pictures of them on her profile but slowly reduced that when she noticed that he wasn't doing the same. Thereupon, she complained that she always showcases their relationship on Instagram and he never does. He justified himself, stating that he generally rarely post on Instagram and the ones he has are photographs of them anyway. He does not see the same importance of Instagram as she does, however, as she expressed her appreciation of him posting something of them at least once in a while and he doesn't enjoy such discussions, he agreed on posting images of them if they have some in the future.

Leo interprets a "like" as a nice gesture. As for his girlfriend's postings, the meaning of a "like" differs because in her case it is "unexceptional" to like her photos and he does it "without batting an eyelid". It is important to mention here, that Leo recalls the stories about his girlfriend in a very humorous way and he laughs at the circumstances himself. Nevertheless, these findings are still relevant and true.

Perception of the visual and textual content

Leo noticed that InstaStories' content generally contain rather everyday things and that these videos are mainly taken with the smartphone camera. He feels that for stories the inhibition threshold is much lower than with postings; people don't hesitate or overthink a posting because they are ephemeral and simply disappear after 24 hours. For him, stories are much livelier and have the role of an entertainment source as it almost feels like watching a movie to him. In contrast, he noticed that postings are required to be pretty which constraints their explorative nature.

He especially likes the feature of posting several images as a gallery in one single post because he believes it is less imposing compared to several images showcasing the same event:

"I am annoyed when someone visits a city and I see three different pictures of the same location in different angles every 10 minutes".

Regarding the captions, Leo noticed some people separate the text and the hashtags with several lines of one single dot, which he finds quite weird. Due to that, the hashtags are usually hidden and users only see it in one glance when they press on "more". Leo learned that the more hashtags are applied on a post, the easier it is to find this picture in Instagram's search feature and the higher the chance to gain followers. He claims that "in using such a high amount of hashtags, you reveal that you want to become 'bigger' [on Instagram] [...] especially with hashtags such as "like for like" or "photo of the day".

Summarising the above, it can be said, that Leo uses Instagram for two main reasons: 1) to keep up-to-date about his friends' daily life as all of the visual content has been shifted from Facebook to Instagram, and 2) to satisfy his girlfriend's need of showing affection over social media. He himself does not actually see the need to post regularly and rather

consumes what his friends are posting or to get inspiration from nature and photography channels.

Interview 4: Tim

Tim is 21 years old and studies Medicine at the Medical University of Vienna together with Leo since 2015. He has started using Instagram in 2017. Although he has only uploaded 6 posts so far (whereby one post is a gallery of 8 pictures), he has already reached 358* followers and follows 571* accounts.

The interview

Throughout the interview, Tim was very interested and talkative, loved to joke and laughed a lot. He wasn't shy about sharing facts about his private life and was very honest regarding specific topics, which will be further explained in the following paragraphs. His profile is set to public and it was noticeable that he was generally very open towards social media. He is very interested in politics and the current news which is reflected in his social media behaviour.

Meaning of Facebook

Tim was one of the only ones of the 12 interviewees who use Facebook not only for the group chats and news but also favours the feed's relation to his friends as well. He benefits from Facebook through its news articles as well as from the group chats for the most part but feels as if he would also still gain a lot of information and updates from his friends. Thus, for him, there wasn't any particular shift from Facebook to Instagram in terms of information, but he clearly sees a shift of the image-uploads, which are now mainly done on Instagram. He found out that his friends post much more pictures on Instagram, on the one hand, and on the other hand, those pictures differ from those in Facebook, too.

Motivations in using Instagram

Tim actually started Instagram because his friend suggested him to create an account in order to see different pictures of friends, so to say the second pool of pictures which are not available than on Facebook. Lots of male friends tried to motivate him by luring him with the statement that girls would show much more skin on Instagram. Tim claims that this was definitely not the main motivational factor for him to join Instagram as he finds it questionable to only use the platform in order to follow girls. The key factor was the importance to have full access to his friends' social lives, which is not fulfilled by Facebook anymore. Other benefits he gains from Instagram is the information and inspiration regarding clinical traineeships or opportunities of studying abroad, as friends oftentimes

share photos of such experiences on Instagram. In addition, the platform acts as a source of entertainment, fun and inspiration.

His profile

He uses Instagram as a secondary social media platform because Facebook is still the channel for him to share personal information. As he has linked both platforms, all Instagram pictures are automatically also uploaded on Facebook. His personal feed cover events of his social life: his trip to Amsterdam, camping trips, his extracurricular activities as a firefighter and blood donor, his humour as well as events he attended. When describing his pictures, he admits that he pays attention to his appearance and only shows the positive sites of himself and his life, especially things that in general can't be criticised by the public:

"It [my profile] does not show anything to be disliked in any kind of way. Blood donation is hopefully welcomed, and hopefully, no one is against me in a firefighter uniform [...] I usually choose pictures of myself which I believe are "save" to show in the long run and which are no juvenile sin."

"I also always try to present myself well. Blood donation is a good idea and I like to do and everyone should know that. [...] I intentionally try to showcase the positive sides of my life."

His posting behaviour is partially influenced and inspired by postings of others. He recounts a past moment where he evaluated over three weeks on posting an InstaStory of him and his classmates wearing white coats in front of a building and celebrating the passing of an exam. From his observations on what other people post on Instagram, he has learned what content is "appropriate to upload on the web" and popular and what not. He found that it is best to share things that make you look good, which "does not provide too many details of yourself but which are also not perceived in a negative way

However, he noticed that it is still somewhat a way to show off what he has and does but he adds that this behaviour can be seen on other male Instagrammers as well: *"Boys try to have 2-3 good looking pictures where they look as manly as possible, like a photograph of them flexing their bicep right after their workout [...] men are like 'Bam, look at what I have achieved'"*. Girls, in turn, usually post a lot of selfies or pictures with their girlfriends and he feels as if they want to be perceived as funny, clumsy and cute.

Nevertheless, he does not want to appear as conceited or arrogant in any way, which is why he ponders about each posting over weeks before he actually uploads it, especially because he also has troubles in finding the appropriate words for the captions as he wants them to be funny and witty.

Content consumption and perception

When Tim logs into Instagram, he usually goes through the timeline's feed first, scrolls through all the images and afterwards continues with the InstaStories. Tim's timeline is filled

with posts where friends usually take photos of their exam preparation (e.g. books, notes), of what they eat, of their fitness workouts (e.g. fitness studio), of their skiing trips in winter, and generally of their travels. When he was asked to specify, what he sees in his friends' Instastories instead, he recalls short videos of them partying or drinking, or snaps of a "good-morning-selfie" in bed. He also noticed that there are a lot of new filters which are very popular, such as the "zoom" or the "dog ears". Generally, to him all posts seem to be taken with smartphones; only a few pictures appear as if they were edited on the computer and uploaded afterwards.

Tim also follows several Austrian politicians and is especially interested in the background information on their job: to which events they go to, what kind of books or articles they read, or how a meeting looks like behind the scenes. As he is generally interested in political events, he especially values the personal and private insights that politicians share on Instagram.

The difference in stories and postings

Tim noticed a difference between stories and postings. Stories are snapshots of a person's life that should not be permanently visible on the profile because people don't want to be stigmatised or confronted by them in the future. He finds that stories are oftentimes very boring because they don't show anything new or exciting about the person. Postings, in turn, act as a means of a diary, Tim says, that can be viewed more permanently, and he assumes that people are aware of them being judged by the images within their profile's feed.

Likes

When it comes to giving a "like", he is usually not very strict about it. He gives a lot "likes" on his friends' postings, e.g. if he finds it very humorous, if he wants to show a sign of support (a friend shares her personal drawings, a friend is doing sports), or if mutual friends are captured. While he was looking through his "liked" posts, he noticed to specifically "like" friends' pictures if he hasn't seen them in a long time. It appears as if his "likes" not only mean "I've recognised it" or "I find it good" as he claims, but it is also a way for him to reconnect with friends with whom he has less contact in daily life. Lastly, he is sometimes cautious of liking posts that could potentially refer to sexual (e.g. a picture of a female friend that shows a lot of bare skin) or political issues.

Captions

Regarding captions, it is quite relevant to see who has posted it before he reads the caption and if the picture attracts his attention in any kind of way. He points out, that he is especially drawn to read captions if the post is a meme. He usually sees at first glance if it fits his humour, thus, he is curious about what the creator additionally has to say about it. It seems as if the relationship between a post and its creator provides further information about the person. Another case that usually catches Tim' attention is the person who posted it. He

recounts a friend whom he describes as someone with a great sense of humour and Tim enjoys the way his friend builds upon a joke without going too far (in o-tone for better understanding):

“[der] hat einen total guten Schmah und der bringt's einfach zam, dass er zu ollen Sachn irgendwie noch an Stufn draufsetzt! Aber net, aber net den Pulver verschießt.”

Tim's penchant for humorous postings becomes very noticeable here and he prefers it when friends act as they do in real life, if they are authentic and not afraid to show their funny sides.

He is ambivalent towards the necessity of captions though: on the one hand, he claims they are "the icing on the cake", an extension of the picture to represent oneself on another level, e.g. to add a joke on a meme; on the other hand, he usually "does not even remember what was said in a caption", pointing out that captions don't have a visible impact on him. Additionally, the effort in formulating an appropriate text is much higher than the relevance of a caption, thus, he would not miss them if they weren't there.

Image vs text - The relation between the post and its producer

For Tim, it is very essential to see the connection between a posting and its creator. He values that Facebook clearly communicates why a post is displayed on the feed and each post is connected to one of his Facebook friends in some kind of way so that he can better orientate himself. He likes to see his friends' viewpoints on a post, which he rarely sees on Instagram. Instead, Instagram is much more visual-centric to him and he misses more detailed information on a post and a discourse between the users.

Nevertheless, he sees an advantage of the visual-centric platform: Tim feels that images are more subtle than text, allowing people to share experiences of their daily life without being judged as arrogant or conceited.

"If you write 'I was just in a firefighter practice - period' or 'Have just been to Amsterdam - period', then it looks like you don't have anything to showcase [...] but if you show a picture of yours, everyone will think 'Hey, that looks great and cool, that's impressive' compared to 'Hey, I'm in Amsterdam' - 'Do you want to show off or why are you saying that?'"

It seems as if images and text convey a message in different tones, while text appears very direct and brisk, images allow the viewer to form the message themselves, using their own words. Tim mentions another interesting viewpoint, saying that the impact of a picture is much stronger than text:

"If you simply write 'Hey, I'm in Amsterdam', it is great and all, maybe someone might even like it, but truthfully no one will be actually interested and after two seconds, everything is already forgotten. [...] Photographs are better to be kept in mind compared to text and that's just easier to remember. Also, you can capture much more information at once [in a picture]. "

He claims that people remember the content of a picture much more than a written statement. He himself remembers the content of a picture much better than a written post on social media, which has proven to be quite beneficial in his social life, e.g. when his parents remembered his trip to Amsterdam by the post he uploaded on Instagram and asked him about it when they met again after a long time.

Overall, he thinks that *"one can better represent oneself and much more information can be extracted from a visual post" compared to "characters and a few bits"*. For Tim, this perception already works with boomerangs, as for him, those recurring movements within one photo can already advance an image, giving it much more information and with that, make it more interesting.

Tim uses Instagram as a private person who is curious about other people's lives, who want to get inspired, as well as informed through Instagram. During the interview, it became apparent that he carefully considers what he wants to share on Instagram. Although he wants to represent himself in a good light as he also fears to be misinterpreted by the images. Hence, he needs a lot of time to decide on his postings, weighing up all advantages and disadvantages. However, he clearly sees the great advantages of images in conveying information much more discreet compared to written postings. In addition, he mentions its power to fit a lot more information at once. He also values their high ability to draw the attention and that they are easy to remember. Nevertheless, Tim still seeks for more concrete interaction between the users, hence, he favours Facebook over Instagram.

Interview 5: Julia

Julia has a master's degree in teaching (French) and this year, at the age of 23, she started her PhD position. Due to her studies, she has travelled a lot and has spent a year abroad in France. She will soon fly to California for one semester where she already looks forward to.

Julia is a very friendly and open person, who enjoys time with her friends. She is very into photography, takes lots of pictures of everyday life and stated to have bought a new smartphone that has a high qualitative integrated camera, in order to capture better pictures. She owns another external camera but only uses it for longer vacations because it is just too heavy to carry around. Her favourite photo motives are impressions of nature or cities she

travels to, as well as the architecture of the buildings she comes across. For Julia, photography is a way for her to hold on her memories and her personal Instagram feed acts as a photo album illustrating moments she regularly reflects on.

During the interview, it was noticeable that Julia laughed a lot after her explanations which give the impression that she is unsure about her sayings. In addition, she didn't share too many details on her own. After the interview, she stated that she was sometimes not sure whether she could answer some questions as she has never actually given a thought about it, which made the questions somewhat overwhelming for her.

Her content

Julia has started Instagram in 2015 when she went to France for her year abroad and her friends suggested to use Instagram for sharing her experiences with them. At first, she was unsure what to post and how to post. Within the first 6 months, she only uploaded 12 pictures of her time abroad in France. Over the course of the time, she became more confident about her postings. She now shares a lot of pictures of her travels. If she's not doing anything exciting, which she claims is usually during wintertime when she stays at home, she does not post anything. A very apparent characteristic of her pictures is the uniqueness they want to convey, e.g. daily highlights and special memories or locations, events or objects people don't see in their everyday life. When she has the feeling that there are too many pictures on her profile which do not adhere to her personal expectations of her Instagram profile, she sometimes tidies her profile by deleting the ones she does not like anymore.

However, Julia is very careful about privacy on Instagram. She, e.g. always makes sure that the people on her photographs agree with posting it online. Also, she never shares information about her work, her age, or her relationship with her boyfriend. Her privacy is also connected to the people who have access to it. Julia does not want her ex-boyfriend to know everything about her, especially not about her relationship with her current boyfriend. She feels uncomfortable knowing that her ex-boyfriend follows her current love life and also does not want anyone to limit her Instagram feed. Hence, she blocked her ex-boyfriend so that he can't see her pictures anymore.

The process of photo-taking

When Julia found a location or object she wants to take a photo of, she usually takes several pictures of one location and carefully selects the best composition afterwards in a quiet moment. She recalls a day, where she and her friend headed to an avenue with lots of cherry blossom trees which she has discovered on one of the accounts she follows on Instagram, namely "1000thingsinVienna", a business account of a travel site that shares locations, tips and highlights of Vienna. Julia excitedly retells the story when she saw a picture of a beautiful cherry blossom street and she was instantly motivated to go there:

"Yes, right by the Schlachthausgasse where the exit of the metro is. It's another example of things I've stumbled upon on the Instagram account of '1000things to do in Vienna'. They posted this and I just thought 'Oh, I want to go there, too!' (laughs)"

When she arrived at the location with her friend, they started to discuss how they should take the pictures. Although Julia likes to try out several angles and positions, she is also embarrassed to take too many because she has observed several cases of people getting carried away with posing and shooting pictures of themselves. Julia especially points out a funny situation she experienced during her photo shoot at the cherry blossom tree avenue: when they arrived at the street, a mother was already posing in front of the cherry blossom trees, giving specific commands to her young daughter on how she wanted the pictures to turn out. According to Julia, the young girl was already on the floor, kneeling with an SLR camera in her hands, trying to get the perfect angle her mother requested. Julia remarks that the woman even chose to wear a pink dress especially for that day, to colour-match with the trees. After a while, when Julia and her friend did their private photoshoot, the woman came up to them, asking whether they could get out of her picture frame for a short time so that she can take one more picture with the whole street. Instead of taking only one more photo as she stated at first, she continued for a while. That situation was very funny to Julia and she was a bit ashamed for the woman because she tried very hard to get a good picture and in her opinion, the equipment, clothing and amount of poses were simply too much for an ordinary photo shooting. Due to these experiences, Julia prevents to come across as conceited or egocentric by taking too many pictures. This is also a reason why she wanted to go shoot with a friend, as she feels less uncomfortable with taking pictures of herself.

Content consumption

Julia usually looks at the timeline feed first and scrolls through until she sees a familiar picture. Of over 200 followee-accounts, she mainly follows friends or people she personally knows. She claims that her friends generally post a little number of pictures on Instagram, which is why she does not have to fear to miss anything if she does not log into Instagram every day. The only few commercial accounts she follows are inspirational profiles regarding travel or Vienna.

Julia's timeline feed usually shows pictures or InstaStories of food, outfits, nature, friends, and what they do as activities in the evening. Julia states that even if her friends post stories more frequent than postings, the stories usually are rarely interesting compared to the postings, as her friends mostly post stories of the food they eat, videos of their pets or the view out of their window. The stories are short videos or boomerangs which she oftentimes would describe as a waste of time. She feels that stories are only there " *because people want to post something*". Posts are meant for a longer period of time, they are much more meaningful and curated, thus, they usually are more beautiful than stories. Posts, on the other hand, act much more as an inspiration for locations to travel to or restaurants. As an

example, Julia mentions that she currently takes inspiration for her trip to California in the upcoming autumn, simply to get in the mood beforehand. She noticed that most photographs look like professionally done commercials to her, which she finds very nice because "*no one wants to see ugly things*". However, she is aware that Instagram triggers desires and creates jealousy in the people. It happened to her several times that she looks at Instagram pictures of "all the perfect people" and thought: "Oh, I'd like to go there, too!" or "I want that, too!". Nonetheless, she is aware that people carefully curate their Instagram pictures and "*only show what they want others to know about them*". Additionally, Julia states that she feels as if Instagram's content is quite "meaningless" because "*it's less about the person but rather about the things the person is surrounded by.*"

She continues that many Instagram pictures would never be uploaded to Facebook because the objects shown on Instagram are oftentimes too irrelevant for a Facebook profile picture. She herself thinks about a Facebook profile picture much longer than about an Instagram post. This could be linked to the fact that she only has personal friends on Facebook, but a public account on Instagram. To her, Facebook generally has a different philosophy behind the usage because "*you do not want to stand out or be too different by posting every week when others only post twice a year*".

Captions

Interaction is a rare thing Julia pursues on Instagram. She does not write much in her captions or hashtags and mostly only uses single words or emojis. She generally does not care much about captions because the most essential information she gains from a posting is within the picture and its location (which is mostly tagged or written in the hashtags). Julia claims that the images are self-explanatory for the most part. If that's not the case, she takes a look at the caption if they are not longer than one line. As soon as it is required to click "more" she mostly ignores the caption completely. She likes the fact that Instagram is a visual-based platform, where the content "pleases the eyes" with all the colourful and beautiful pictures, "*like an online-blog but only with images which makes it easier to consume*". In addition, Julia only uses the Instagram messenger if she wants to refer to a specific story. Otherwise, she uses other communication channels to talk with friends.

However, Julia does give "likes". She mostly likes posts of her friends, even though the quality of the picture might not be the best but it simply is a kind of norm within Instagram to like your best friends' posts, no matter what. A "like" is a gesture, that Julia uses to show that she cares for her friends and does not necessarily regard the quality of the picture because Instagram pictures are "usually beautiful anyways". She herself enjoys receiving likes on her own posts and she also wants to give back to her friends.

Generally, Julia uses Instagram to update her friends with personal photos as it is currently the common platform for this purpose as Facebook has lost this role. She enjoys taking pictures and editing them, as photography and photos have become a part of her everyday

life, which she can share with her friends or enjoy for herself. She is very aware that Instagram only shows the good and beautiful things and that one can easily get a false impression of other people's lives through the permanent consumption of pretty images. At the end of the interview, she also added that she could imagine it to be especially difficult for teenagers to properly deal with the apparently pretty life of others and to not compare and define themselves by the likes they receive on Instagram. She advises that one should sometimes just enjoy a beautiful day instead to spend it on Instagram.

Interview 6: Mary

Mary has currently finished her master's degree in teaching at the University of Vienna. She is 25 years old and she is a passionate dancer who practices Ballet, Hip-Hop and Jazz. This interview has been conducted at a coffee place in Vienna and a bit shorter than the other interviews. It lasted for about 1 hour as Mary was very busy with finalising her Master thesis and was moving to Graz at the same time. Despite her tight schedule, she was eager to participate in the interview but apologised for the short time she can offer. She had to do a few interviews for her master thesis as well and knows how difficult it is to find participants, hence, she wanted to support this thesis. Her motivation reflects within her answers as well. She was very open and honest, shared several personal experiences during the interview and appeared very confident.

Consumed content

Mary first started Instagram in 2014. She was mainly motivated by her year abroad in France when she needed a platform to share her experiences with her friends and family at home in Austria. According to her, Facebook wasn't the platform for that anymore, which is why she started using Instagram. In addition, one of her friends recommended Instagram to her because she would see a greater amount of pictures as on Facebook.

Over the years, she has mainly collected personal friends in her follower-base (246 accounts) as well as followee-base (276 accounts), and she herself has uploaded 103 posts. There are only a few other accounts she follows, which mainly include dancers from whom she gets inspired. On the one hand, she admires their dance routines and sometimes learns specific techniques for her own performances. On the other hand, she also learns a lot about the dancer's private life, e.g. through pictures of their photo shootings or they share insights through their InstaStories about workshops they attend.

She enjoys both the posts as well as the InstaStories: the videos that are posted in the feed are longer and she can get a sneak peek of a dance performance; the stories, on the contrary, allow her to get to know the private life of the person.

As her friends' frequency of uploads is much lower compared to the dancers', her feed is filled with dance videos and 'boomerangs'. Nevertheless, there are a few common things she notices her friends generally share, which are pictures and stories of their travels or of their spare time at home (e.g. swimming, hiking, BBQ, food, dancing, parties). Mary stresses several times that especially vacation or travel pictures are the most common subject people want others to see and she claims they have the intention to make everyone else jealous:

"when someone is on vacation, of course, all of the vacation photos are shown in order to make the others jealous (laughing)"

Her usage

When it comes to her Instagram usage, Mary claims to also post more frequent if she is travelling, living abroad or if she is attending an exciting dance workshop. When she started using it, she wanted to show that she travels a lot and that she can show the cities she has visited:

"At the beginning, as I was in France, I simply wanted to show that I have travelled around a lot and have visited several cities. This was the main purpose of my Instagram account."

Nowadays, she tries to capture daily events and the variety of things she does. She mentions that a highly diverse content is important because she has seen others constantly posting the same things, which she finds quite boring. She recalls a time where her own profile only consisted of boomerangs or baking results and wanted to change that immediately. For her, a profile must display variety because *"If everything is the same, it's boring and when it's boring, it's senseless to post and rather post nothing."*

Similar to Julia and other interviewees, she does not want to show her boyfriend or mention their relationship on Instagram, due to privacy reasons. She has experienced from an acquaintance's profile that sharing one's private life can go too far and she herself wants to prevent that. She recounts how she knows every detail about the acquaintance's life: the girl shares several pictures of her baby or InstaStories about her life as a single mom and how she struggles to get the child's father to pay for maintenance. Mary understands how this information and the way the girl deals with it can be a motivation for other women who experience similar things. However, she feels that there is a certain degree of privacy and passing this line is unnecessary:

"She was heavily pregnant with a huge baby bump and was naked, sitting in the bathtub. I think this kind of things is just not meant for the Instagram community to see. [...] That much insight into a private life is just excessive."

Mary also dislikes selfies. For her, it means *"to stand by myself, having the smartphone in my hands and taking a photo of myself"*. With this kind of description, she points out the absurdity she sees within such a process. She thinks selfies are very egocentric if only the photographer is visible. This is why she does not post selfies anymore, only if she takes one together with her friends. Instead, her profile highlights her time abroad in France, her baking skills, or her dance performances. While she goes through her profile, she mentions that several things would now rather go into an InstaStory because they don't seem as important to keep them permanent. Generally, she has the impression her friends currently post far more InstaStories and she feels that stories are less perfect than postings. She says that in order to upload a post, it "has to be much cooler than a story" because all posts stay on your profile and it is permanently visible, which she thinks urges people to think about their postings much more. She adds that there's a noticeable difference in the profession where those who use Instagram on a more advanced level will post more posts compared to "mortal people like her" who usually only post stories. To her, stories can contain any kind of nonsense or shenanigans because of their ephemerality.

The role of images

Mary really enjoys Instagram as she thinks that images are more expressive than words, allowing her to have the feeling of being up-to-date about the daily events in Vienna even if she's not there. A picture of Vienna alone would be enough for her to get a grasp of home. Also, if she has never been to a place or country, she really likes to see photos of it because she can better imagine what actually happens compared to text only. The imagination is triggered through pictures and becomes much more concrete. According to her, images can deepen a relationship because one feels much more connected and closer to a person.

"Text would be sufficient but you still might not have a good idea of it. When a friend says 'I'm on a safari.' or 'I am on the road and see a lot of lions', you can kind of imagine this but as soon as you see pictures of it, it's a huge difference."

"Pictures *"make you feel as if you're actually there"*. Furthermore, she has the impression that posting a picture on Instagram is less imposing as sending several pictures directly through an instant messenger:

"You're not forcing anyone to see it but they will probably come across it but it does not feel too pressured".

Nevertheless, she has seen Instagram accounts where she claims that people use it to show off with a modified capture of their life. Such braggers only share the good and pretty things on their profile, trying to make others jealous and feeling better by that. Oftentimes, Mary noticed that this feeling is even intensified through heavily edited pictures. Thus, she warns one should be careful in believing everything one sees on Instagram.

Captions

Although the images on Instagram are most important to her, she also thinks that captions are necessary. She notices that many people don't write anything meaningful in their captions, oftentimes only a short saying or phrase, e.g. "enjoying nature". However, without captions, she feels as if something is missing. She herself always writes a caption, "*even if no one is reading it but because it has become a standard to do so*".

Interaction

Mary changes between the languages (French, English) depending on the group of followers she wants to address. She doesn't really maintain other interaction on Instagram. She merely likes a couple of dance videos to support her idols and only gives a "like" to her friends' posts if she actually likes what she sees. The comments she receives are very short sentences, usually a compliment. She herself does not comment at all. And since she usually communicates on other channels, she only uses Instagram Direct to refer or reply to a story.

Generally, Instagram has become a big part of her life. Not only did it happen to her several times that she unconsciously logs into the app to check if there are any new updates from her friends and other followees. Moreover, she says that she does not get any news of friends who don't own an Instagram account or don't post regularly. She recounts a friend who is living abroad and who has only sent one picture over WhatsApp and she has no clue what is going on in her life. When she was asked whether she has considered a longer chat or phone call, she claims that it is ok but that it doesn't happen much and that she could imagine it wouldn't get as much information about her friends than with Instagram postings.

"I noticed that my friends who don't own an Instagram account always complain that they are not able to see any updates and ask for photos. They feel excluded."

Interview 7: Alex

Alex is a 21-year-old student, currently studying and working in the nursery. Besides her studies, she also practices several other hobbies, e.g. singing in a choir, pole-dancing or martial arts. Her mother moved to Australia with a new partner about 2 years ago, whereas she stayed in Vienna together with her father and younger brother. Alex just moved out of her father's house one year ago and now shares a flat with 2 other students.

Throughout the interview, Alex was very honest and open when it came to her social media use and how it affects her everyday life. She talked a lot about her private life, hobbies and experiences of other people's social media behaviour. It became very noticeable how much she worries about privacy on social media platforms, which will be further explained in the next sections. Alex started Instagram around 2012/2013. At the time of the interview, Alex had 421 followers and followed 924 accounts, and has already posted 67 postings.

Her content

During the interview, when Alex was asked for when she started with Instagram, she stated it to be 2015. However, when she later mentioned having deleted a couple of pictures from the beginnings, she noticed that she must have started between 2012 and 2013. The reason why and what pictures she deleted was due to privacy reasons. Alex has heard of privacy issues that go along with social media and now tries to be more attentive to that. Thus, she deleted every post which could be harmful to her in the future in any kind of way. Additionally, she deleted all Instagram pictures with her younger brother and those of her high school graduation. She claims she does not want to share her "big moments" anymore and won't post anything about her graduation from nursery school either. She thinks nobody would actually care about her graduation. Many others have done so and most of the times the only reactions to such pictures were short comments, saying "congratulations". In comparison, she feels to raise more interest in her followers when she posts about her pole-dance photoshoot, about her travels to other cities or of events with friends, e.g. parades or concerts. It seems as if each posting must have a meaning, representing unique experiences of hers. Her boyfriend plays a major part in her life, which is reflected in her profile as well. She oftentimes posts pictures of them and they even have an own hashtag for themselves, namely #alpakoala, which is a combination of "alpaca", referring to her boyfriend's similar hair, and "koala", referring to her. Alex says it is nice to be able to look at all of their pictures at once, simply by clicking on the dedicated hashtag. The two have done several trips together which are all documented on her Instagram profile. One interesting detail Alex shared during the interview, was her boyfriend's attitude towards Instagram and social media. He has deleted his Facebook and Instagram profile, as he claims he does not need it anymore because he simply wants to live and does not want to hold on or waste any more of

his life on his smartphone. However, Alex recalls times where he asks her to sit down on the couch with him and both of them start to “stalk” on people on her profile instead:

"He says 'Come on, let's stalk someone!' [...] Yes, he uses [Instagram] through my profile [...] it's actually quite terrible, you know, like those couples who sit on the couch and say: 'Come on, get your phone, I want to stalk that one girl!'. It's really terrible. (laughs)"

This shows, that even though he claims to be independent without social media, he still craves to be up-to-date on people’s social media postings.

Generally, Alex does not post with any specific intention but as long as it somehow "fits to Instagram", she would post it. While looking through her profile pictures during the interview, she questioned one picture of her standing at the beach in her bikini with her back towards the camera because she worries if it is appropriate for Instagram or not. Although Alex likes to take pictures and also owns an external camera. She mostly uses it for outdoor pictures if the weather is good. However, she claims to avoid taking too many pictures nowadays, when she is on vacation or hiking. The reason is that *"all the memories are already saved 'up there' [her memories] and it's much better to just enjoy the moment."*

Her mobile use

Alex uses her smartphone during several short breaks and situations: on her way to school, when she's bored during school class after she wakes up and right before bedtime. She admits that it is probably not very healthy to do that. She generally uses it during the day because, in the evenings, she usually spends time with friends and thus does not need social media then. She explains her frequent usage because it is a great tool against boredom, brings much entertainment and allows her to “stalk” people, which is also very entertaining for her. One of the most important purposes of her smartphone is for communication with friends, with whom she messages on WhatsApp mostly. The only person she actually video calls is her mother, who lives in Australia. Besides Instagram, Alex only uses Facebook, whereby she merely keeps in contact with family members in the Philippines as this is the only common social media platform they have. Otherwise, Alex only looks for events or on the marketplace on Facebook. She noticed a distinct shift from Facebook to Instagram, stating that everyone who has been active on Facebook now posts on Instagram instead:

"Facebook seems a bit 'dusty', if you will say so. It's like a shelf that hasn't been used [...] and Instagram is like a new one. [...] there are definitely more people who post on Instagram than on Facebook in regard to the pictures. [...] there is really no one I know who still posts there."

Content consumption

When Alex logs into Instagram, she usually starts going through the InstaStories. She explains that it's so easy, "*you simply click and swipe through*", *requiring the smallest effort. "It's entertaining, almost like reality tv but it's not even actors!"* This hints at a laziness that people enjoy when being entertained. Content she sees on them are e.g. waiting rooms at a doctor's, food, vacation, or parties. Nevertheless, she also notes that she finds some of the content within people's stories quite questionable: of their coffee in the morning, of their daily commute to school, of their school supplies or laptop during school class, like a "live stream". Alex feels as if stories are only snapshots of a moment, compared to postings that stay on your profile and which people associate you with.

Alex consumes the timeline's feed as well, however, she enjoys them less and less, as the integrated commercials strongly annoy her. Unlike the stories, Alex usually sees videos of pole-dancers in her timeline. There are fewer pictures of pole-dancers as it is important to see the movements within the choreographies. Her friends oftentimes post their lifestyle, families or partners. Overall, she feels that her feed is too overcrowded, hence, it is necessary to remove a couple of accounts in order to be able to see her friend's posts between the professional accounts.

Interaction

When it comes to interactions within Instagram, Alex is a rather passive user. She does not give many "likes" also because of privacy reasons and she also does not comment much. She does not expect any "likes" or comments on her posts but admits to feeling joy if she does receive any. She also pays attention to the people "liking" her pictures. She tells about her choir teacher who barely speaks to her in class but who is oftentimes the first one to "like" her posts, which she finds kind of weird. Another way of interaction is through polls - questions within stories that address the followers. Alex has tried to set up polls in her InstaStories but as they didn't get much attention, she won't use them again.

Captions

For Alex, the captions below an image don't play a major role and the usage is sufficient without them. However, she finds that a caption helps to better understand the intention of the image's creator, as she has often been confused by images that do not have a caption, making her question what message of the image's owner actually is. This is why she always puts captions and hashtags under her postings. Some captions perplex Alex. She recounts someone writing "keeping up with me", which refers to the name of an American reality show of celebrities. For Alex, this indicates that the person wants others to also watch her, similar to the reality show, which she finds quite questionable. She is shocked how much of

their privacy people ignore and what they actually share, e.g. photos of babies and children. Even a picture of one's vacation indicates to the viewer that one is not at home and that the apartment is probably empty. Sharing this is dangerous because it's useful information for potential robbers. Besides privacy issues, Alex notices a strong urge of parents to show off with a perfect life: they post day trips with their children, trying to prove how easy and happy they are as a family:

"[...] to show that their children are so beautiful and great. But it's not always beautiful and great (laughs) but they only show their happiest moments and the bad ones are omitted."

This is why she has deleted all pictures with her brother. During the interview, Alex discovered a video of her brother on her profile and she deleted it immediately. Also, a lot of her friends from the Philippines put a lot of effort into each photograph by taking several pictures in different kinds of poses, similar to a professional photoshoot:

"It's not like 'Come on, I quickly take a picture of yours', but instead, they stand there and do 'one pose left, one pose right, one more twist, please'. [...] they put much effort into looking good on Instagram."

She feels that everyone on Instagram tries to present the most perfect version of oneself, however, in reality, it's different:

"On Instagram, I'm not sure if these photos are specifically edited or not. Sometimes I think 'Ah, this looks too perfect to be true'. I think on Instagram it's also important for people to represent themselves in a good way. Some are perfectionists and even their pictures on their profile harmonise together, you know, that square [added by the author: several pictures next to each other become a bigger picture]. [...] I mean there are a lot of nice pictures, you know, but I do not know how much the people are faking, you know, how real that still is. On Facebook, back then, I've posted every stuff and it didn't matter. Now on Instagram, I have the feeling that it does matter more. Because if it not perfect as you want it, you have to delete it right away. [...] Nicely arranged meals, things like 'foodporn' - that's just not how life is."

For Alex, Instagram is generally used as for entertainment against boredom as well as to be up-to-date about her friends and to be in touch with people such as pole-dancers in her sports venue or her piercer in Vienna. She also gains a lot of inspiration regarding pole-dancing by looking into other dancers' videos and pictures. She worries about her privacy and started to go against it by deleting some of her old pictures and avoids posting private content in the future. She questions many other profiles and she and her boyfriend sometimes sit together to look at those profiles as a means of entertainment. Alex feels as if Instagram is the new platform in comparison to Facebook, however, the pictures that are uploaded are much more

curated and more perfected than on Facebook, making Instagram a more artsy and creative platform. Real interaction and communication are rather unimportant on Instagram, as it is only shortened and all communication happens on other platforms or Instant messengers.

Interview 8: Michael

Michael is an Android developer, working full-time at a software company, 27 years old and a passionate photographer in his spare time. He did not study in the field of photography but merely learned all the necessary tools by himself. His photographic career is not based on a project basis, instead, he posts his landscape and travel photographs online on platforms, such as 'behance', where potential buyers can have a look at his portfolio. He owns several pieces of equipment for professional photography and if he takes pictures, it is only done with his external camera and not with his smartphone as it is used for snapshots only.

Smartphone usage

As an app developer, his smartphone is a crucial device and he uses it throughout the day, at work as well as for personal use. Even during the interview, he received a phone call from his boss, which shows his constant availability through his mobile phone. Due to the heavy use and related dependence on his smartphone which he experienced in the past he now tries to decrease his use as much as he can by turning off the internet access on his phone at work, with phone calls being the only feature left. Talking about his current usage, he says to usually check on his phone at any free time: right after getting up, during lunch break, while commuting between home and workplace and of course after work at home. He further complains there are still several situations where he has the urge to check on social media or any incoming messages even though he is technically busy doing other things, e.g. while watching TV. He blames the available mobile data as it allows him to look up things at any time he wants, regardless of the actual importance or urgency.

Experience with Instagram and distorted reality

Different from the other interviewees, Michael manages two Instagram accounts, a private as well as a professional one. He started Instagram in 2012 which implies that he is an experienced user after 6 years. He started out with a private account where he posted private pictures of events or snapshots of everyday life. His friends are not very active in posting on Instagram, and when they are, they generally post Instastories rather than postings. Michael also does not post on his private account anymore and mainly uses his second account which he created in 2016 for more professional photographic purposes. He claims that it was quite late. In the beginning, he did not like how the app required the users to crop their

photographs into squares. In addition, the quality of his photographs did not come out well on the platform. With the new possibilities of Instagram and the improved smartphone camera and display quality, he then started to join the trend of Instagram.

At the time of the interview, Michael has already posted 486 pictures on his professional account and already gathered more than 8400 followers on Instagram, whereby he only follows 81 other accounts. He points out that he actually used to follow 150 accounts and has cleaned out half of them because the high amount of images he sees in his timeline every day were just too much for him. There are two reasons, Michael recalls, which he currently finds quite annoying: an overfilled feed forces him to spend more time on the platform and in addition, it is difficult to manage the overload of beautiful yet similar looking pictures. He explains that Instagram has become a platform where each picture shows something beautiful or positive, which he thinks could lead to a misconceived view towards one's own life as well as to a misinterpretation of one's own life circumstances. He recounts when he is stressed from work and scrolls through all the pretty Instagram content from several hundred accounts, seeing all the images of travels and leisure of others, which can lead to a distorted reality and impression of other people's life. He adds that especially users who earn money through Instagram can mislead viewers as they pretend to have a sorrow-free life. This is not clear for viewers right away which results in a misperception of other people's life:

"Often, the whole thing is not quite transparent and honest in the way it is presented. It requires a lot of skills from these people to bring in money and the way they do that certainly affects many many people and, at least I feel this way, mostly in a rather negative way."

He knows that his own profile might distort his real life, as well, thus, he tries to be as transparent as he can:

"[I've posted] 5 times a week, not from January to December, but at least 3-4-5 months, and it conveys a wrong picture of me. It would seem as if I'm constantly on the move, constantly enjoying sunshine somewhere, and how free I am, not having to work, doing what I want (laughs), This is somehow completely distorted and only a little part of my life. But I mean, my profile says I'm a full-time developer, so it's not like I'm lying about it."

His perception and learnings of Instagram

As he primarily uses his professional account where the major content comes from travel and nature photographers, Michael mostly consumes beautifully shot and edited pictures of landscapes. He usually scrolls through his timeline feed and takes a quick look at the InstaStories, whereby he only pays attention if he notices a storyline. Otherwise, it is not

very interesting for him. The stories either act as a “behind-the-scene”-channel or as a preview of the most frequent post that a photographer just uploaded.

Everything looks the same

After all the years of experience with Instagram, Michael feels as if everything on the platform looks the same and that it is quite difficult to differentiate an account from another. He misses the authenticity and uniqueness within Instagram:

"What I do not like is that everyone, or almost everyone, does the same thing. If you do not stick to the latest trend, then you're gone and this is what most people try to avoid. Everything somehow becomes very monotonous and takes away the life and the colour. [...] The authenticity or individual ideas get lost. It's this brown mass and everyone swims in there."

Michael points out that this phenomenon is especially noticeable on Instagram compared to other platforms such as *behance* or *500px*. Photographers on Instagram learn what is considered as popular from what they see and their content becomes similar to what others do.

Everybody does the same, due to dependency

Michael sees great dependency photographers and creators of Instagram have on the followers. Specific styles and pictures have been developed by popular photographers over time which has shaped the viewers' taste. Thus, it has become quite difficult to develop an own style, which is on the one hand, different to what the mainstream does and which, on the other hand, will be accepted and popular by the followers. Content, which is different to what the mainstream is used to, does not get the same positive resonance even if the object shown is technically the same. Thus, a lot of people stay safe and adapt their style to what is generally popular, in order to be successful.

"It's harder on Instagram because the style adapts to the masses. [...] Mountains are always trending, thus, a picture of a mountain is always popular. But if I take a more detailed photo, I don't know, like a crevice or anything abstract like an icicle in some rock, which basically is still a mountain or a part of the mountain, but that would not work out as well."

Moreover, Michael knows from the photographers' community, that people not only post similar shots but even the editing styles are very similar or even identical. People adjust their content depending on what is currently a trend on Instagram which results in a homogenous pool of pretty pictures, use of filters and editing tools. In addition, Michael recounts trending travel locations or countries, which have become very popular merely through Instagram:

"Everyone goes to the same place. [...] As an example, like 2-3 years ago, a big influencer with 100,000 followers travels to the Farröhr Islands this place is booming. The same happened with Iceland and our home in the Dolomites last year. It's just a guess but I would claim that at least a larger share of it was caused by social media, if not even Instagram alone. That's how trends are created."

Michael's experience as a photographer on Instagram shows that Instagram's content becomes more and more homogenous and this indicates how users of Instagram develop a similar taste aesthetic-wise, e.g. how a picture is shot and how it is edited, but also, what locations are targeted to be part of the popular accounts.

Values uniqueness and authenticity

This is why he highly values accounts where users still express their individuality. For him, a post is considered as "pretty" when it has some form of uniqueness, referring both to the visual and textual content, to the location as well as to the editing style. He does not pay attention to images he has already "seen a 1000 times", and he claims that only a few people actually stand out. In particular, this was his main criteria when he was downsizing his followees. He now only follows "accounts which are not mainstream". During the interview, Michael mentions a photographer he follows and whose work he admires. Not only the pictures but also the captions are unique and stand out from all the other photographers he has seen.

"You can see he thinks about the way his picture should look like, how he takes the picture. He's not just running from Spot A to Spot B to produce as many pictures as possible which is how 'generation Instagram' normally acts. Instead, you notice he makes an effort, the picture makes sense, aesthetically speaking. [...] And he also writes [his captions] well and fittingly. Perhaps sometimes it's some quote but not those 08/15 quotes, but whole paragraphs of a quote which, in turn, stands out from all the Instagram stuff."

Hence, Michael himself tries to differentiate himself from others, too and wants to stay true to himself and his style. As he is aware of the dependence on Instagram photographers have, he would, now more than ever, post something he personally finds "worthy" even if it does not meet the mainstream's taste. He additionally wants to convey a story or message within his own photographs by trying to select curated and meaningful content, things that "tell a story" as well as to keep his own style of editing. As an additional way of staying unique, Michael does not share all of his locations and keeps some of them his secret.

Time

Throughout the interview, it was noticeable that time was a very important factor for Michael as he mentioned several cases where he tries to reduce any waste of time. First of all, he minimises his overall time on social media and does not use platforms, such as Snapchat or Twitter anymore. In addition, he reduced his time in consuming content on Instagram by deleting a great number of followees, and consequently, the number of pictures on his timeline feed decreased. He also does not spend much time with InstaStories, instead, he rather swipes through them quickly to only get a grasp of everything: *"What I do is to click through them and at first glance I can already recognise what is shown, whether I want to see it or if I should continue."*

Furthermore, he also limits his time within the uploading process: his main goal is to share his photographs with his followers, whereby the captions and hashtags don't play an important role. Thus, he nowadays only shares the location of an image and uses emojis as the caption, as writing a caption and selecting hashtags take up too much time which, in turn, means wasting more time and effort he does not want to spend on Instagram:

"I did not have the financial reason to do that, I do not have the time anyway, so I usually just limit myself to posting pictures. If I have any thoughts on this picture in mind, I write it down but usually, I don't. [...] I used to make effort to use hashtags or to write 1-2 sentences. Now, I limit it to the rough location and add a smile maybe. [...] Yes, due to time reasons and because I do not always have the motivation to write anything about it. Because if I do, I would try to make effort and this, in turn, costs 5-10 minutes if you post something, which I don't do anymore. But if you do, it is a lot of work."

Moreover, he only interacts on Instagram as much as needed: he rarely gives a "like" (only for very good friends or if he actually likes a picture), he barely comments and only uses the chat within Instagram to reply to some of the questions he receives through the InstaStories (which are mostly questions about the location of the post).

Text vs image

With this, Michael opens the debate about the differences between textual and visual content. He claims he barely reads captions and would assume they are generally not very important: *"Whether I'm reading this, or not, that does not really matter"*. Michael finds that information can be already well compressed within a picture or can enhance a written information. If a friend would ask him what he's doing, he would describe it with text, however, a picture always complements his message because "it offers more information". Long discussions are usually also based on written communication. Nevertheless, he feels

that something visual is always added to any text nowadays. When it comes to his own captions, it is oftentimes hard for him to come up with relevant and reasonable text for the captions below his postings:

"Other people might struggle less to write 1-2 sentences. I, on the other hand, would need 2 to 5 minutes to come up with something meaningful."

Additionally, it is only important to him to share the visual content, namely his photographs and text is therefore unnecessary. Thus, he does not spend much time for captions anymore. Nevertheless, he still sees the necessity of captions to enhance the intentions of a picture, clarifying the idea behind it:

"You can look at an image without text but of course the text can suggest a new perspective to look at the image or to better understand the context of it to round off generally."

Furthermore, he thinks that scrolling through a feed where images and texts are mixed, the text wouldn't be noticed because visuals grab much more of the attention of the people, and thus, social media platforms will sooner or later all focus more on visual communication. Nevertheless, he is quite sceptical towards Instagram and calls it meaningless and a major waste of time.

Instagram has become the new social media platform after Facebook and, according to Michael, people nowadays prefer the new way of communicating over images because experiences can be shared in a very fast and simple way. Visuals become even more easily shareable as the mobile phones nowadays contain all the necessary apps needed, from qualitative cameras, editing tools as well as cheaper and bigger mobile data plans:

"It is simply the benefit of the present time to exchange and communicate in this [visually] way. [...] you can transmit more information within less time than to write it down [...]. A video or a picture is taken and uploaded instantly, and you can share your current experience with others in a much faster and intense way. [...] With a smartphone, you have a camera, internet access, apps, all in one device. Thus, if I feel like sharing any visual content out of the blue, I open [...] Instagram, and within 2 seconds my chat partner has already received the picture. The whole process is simplified and accelerated, it just makes sense to share many things visually."

Out of the 12 interviewees, Michael is both a private as well as professional Instagram user and separates both roles by maintaining two accounts. He has gained a lot of experience on Instagram and social media in general over the years and throughout the interview, it was noticeable that he has already thought through his social media user behaviour. Thus, he was aware of the negative aspects that come with such platforms. For him, Instagram's purpose, on the one hand, is to stay in contact with his friends, whereby his private account acts as an

additional channel besides Facebook. On the other hand, from the professional side, Michael uses the platform for inspiration, to get to know new photographers, locations, techniques and trends, as well as to keep in contact with other photographers. As he already works full-time at a software company, he does not rely on any income from his photographs. Hence, he is not dependent on any likes or follower numbers on Instagram to gain money, but in turn, is able to shape his work the way he wants it. However, he is aware of the influence that other Instagram users have on his work and tries to keep his independence as good as he can.

Interview 9: Paul

Paul is 25 years old and, similar to Michael, he works as an app developer at a software company and also spends his spare time with photography and editing. However, Paul started Instagram a lot later than Michael and posts his pictures with a slightly different intention. His first Instagram post was in 2015, where he began to share personal pictures of travels, outdoor activities, concerts, friends, and a few landscapes. He states that he has always been interested in photography since his father also enjoys to photograph, hence, Paul probably got in touch with this hobby in early ages. With the introduction of the iPhone 3GS, Paul started to take a lot more pictures but the quality was very poor. In 2012, he got his first professional camera, and from then on, he practised photography on a more regular basis. In 2016, he travelled to South America where he spends one whole year, and this is where his passion for photography got enhanced. Since then, he merely posts pictures of his journey in South America on his Instagram account, currently still hasn't posted all pictures of his trip. His smartphone camera is now only used for daily snapshots if it's really worth capturing and his other camera is not in reach.

Motivations in use

At the time of the interview, Paul has already uploaded 331 posts, follows 715 accounts and has gained 4279 followers. Although he is happy with his job as a software developer, he would not mind having a professional career as a photographer. He has already worked as a photographer at weddings and other events but does not have any actual education in the field. His main interests are nature, travel and landscape photography, which he offers online as 'doc-photography' for sale. Paul mentions several things he does within Instagram in order to increase the chances of a career as a professional photographer:

"I mean, now I have a nine to five job but somehow it is not what I want in the long run [...] and eventually people or companies will contact me and that is the ulterior motive, why you do this shit. (He grins and speaks louder) There are phases when I really like to

do it, but as I said, during dinner I just think 'Can I please just post this shit really quick!'. Yes, that makes less fun."

He tries to generate traffic on his account through interaction with others, e.g. giving "likes" (even if he does not actually like it), commenting on other photographers' posts, and exchanging opinions on his stories or within the chat. It's an "unexciting task" to do, however, "good things come back to you" because if one is passively posting content, nothing will happen." He values the resources to other photographers' work and the possibility to interact and exchange experiences and opinions on Instagram. As he tries to become a more professional photographer, he spends much time on Instagram although he oftentimes does not enjoy it:

"When I drive home from work and (gets louder and more hectic) sometimes I try to post this shit while having dinner although I'm actually not interested at all, and instead, I would much rather eat. [...] It is really stupid but you know what I mean".

Furthermore, he generally likes the idea to connect with people he does not know in his daily life, to see how they live and what they do different to one's own life. Especially the integrated messenger in Instagram can be utilised to connect with strangers. A "like" is very easy to give and easy to fake as well ("a like-to-follow"), thus, Paul does rely on them. He generally wants to connect with people and especially appreciates the relationships he has with followers:

"Oftentimes it is also the commonality. I was just in South America where they originally come from, so there is the connection. Others follow me due to photographic manners. So there is a mutual interest between me and my followers.

Time

Similar to Michael, Paul also tries to save as much time with Instagram as he can. Currently, the process of posting an Instagram post is oftentimes squeezed in between his daily activities. He recounts times where he commutes home with the metro, trying to upload a new picture. As Paul found out through his Instagram analytics, the evening is the most popular time for his followers to be online. Hence, it is important to him to post during this period of time. Otherwise, his post might be pushed away by other images in his followers' feed and they would not see it anymore. However, he always struggles in finding the perfect caption to go with it which usually takes him 30 minutes. Hence, he now plans to automatically schedule his posts with the help of external apps. Right now, he plans out his Instagram feed beforehand to save time: he developed a personal workflow where he prepares a grid of pictures in the app Lightroom, which looks similar to an Instagram grid. He arranges selected and edited photos within this grid the way he would like his Instagram

account to look like. The idea behind this process is, on the one hand, to save time by preselecting and editing the images all at once, and on the other hand, at times when he wants to post something, he already knows which one is next in the sequence. Furthermore, Paul mentions that many successful Instagram accounts of photographers have a general mood, a harmonising colour palette, or the posts visually fit together in the overview of the account. With the prepared grid, he is able to have an impression of different arrangements before he actually posts it on Instagram.

Another way how he reduces his time on Instagram is by regularly reviewing and unfollowing accounts. He used to have 1200 followees but has only 700 left at the time of the interview, whereby he admits that 700 followees are still too much. He claims that it just gets too confusing with too many accounts and images on Instagram and that he does not look out for more account because he is saturated with what he already has.

Similarity within Instagram

Another aspect, which Paul pointed out to have experienced is the popularity of “Instagram spots”, as he calls them, where commonly known Instagram motives can be found. As an example, he points out a specific lake with a lake house, located in the South of Italy. Paul is not only annoyed about the fact that every landscape photographer on Instagram has travelled to and posted a picture of this place. Moreover, each one of those pictures receives a high number of “likes” every time. As everyone has posted a picture of that lake, Paul does not see the uniqueness of it anymore, calling it “08/15” and does not understand how it is possible that these pictures still get so much approval by the followers. For him, each of his posts needs to have a purpose or message. He claims to not simply post pictures of his South America trip, instead, he tries to select those pictures that have a particular story or meaning behind it. He sees his images as relevant content, showing how the countries and people really are by not only photographing the pretty sides. With his pictures, he aims to show the reality of a place, and additionally, he wants to convey his impression of those locations to his followers:

"I try to convey the places realistically and not just simply show the beautiful side of this place but different ones [...] [I do it] because it fits the story of the photo and reflects the impression I really want to convey. Actually, my photographs must represent what the places were like. (...) I just wanted to convey the impression I got during that trip and how I see them with my eyes."

Moreover, he uses the captions as an additional tool to communicate, whereby he avoids to send out any sentimental quotes. This indicates that Paul tries to communicate with his account. He likes to trigger conversations not only through his actions, e.g. interaction through likes, comments, replies on the messenger.

Difference between stories and postings

Besides using InstaStories for polls and messages, Paul also uses them to share his private life. Different to Michael, who separates his private life from his professional life as a photographer by maintaining two Instagram accounts, Paul handles it within one account. His postings cover all pictures from his South America trip, showing his photographic skills, whereas his InstaStories mainly show short videos and snapshots of his current personal life. His stories show, e.g. his move to a new apartment, his weekend trips to the rural areas of Austria, or him skateboarding in his spare time, generally "insights into current events". This is due to the way he sees and differentiates the features of Instagram: Stories are more personal and real to him, they are much more intimate as they aren't polished. Postings, on the other hand, are very polished nowadays: *"I think by now the tendency is to avoid random posts as it may have been. Eventually, everyone started to upload the 'hottest shit', in a very polished format."* Posts reflect all relevant things, and stories are much more experimental. Hence, according to Paul, the profile grid act as a portfolio, that you show to people and from which they will decide whether they are going to follow you or not. He points out that not only the images themselves are important but also the impression people get when looking at the overview of the profile, specifically the grid of picture: *"this is actually your portfolio and that is the one thing people look at [...] which is why you should really try to keep a nice grid."* In addition, the combination of stories and postings can help to convey authenticity. Paul states, that events within the posts can be somewhat confirmed through InstaStories because stories usually show raw videos of the current reality compared to images which can easily be edited and modified in their looks. He recalls a photographer he personally likes and whose authenticity he trusts:

"Through the stories I really know that he actually performs these tasks and that he does not simply drive from one Instagram hotspot to the next one. [...] you always see it in the stories, it fits with his posts, it's consistent."

Captions

Captions can help to clarify and express a message. Paul sees captions as additional information, that a creator of an image uses to clearly convey intentions and opinions on the photograph. He claims, *"Captions are [...] usually more than the actual picture because it's just a nice picture anyway [...] and real information is usually not apparent from pictures."* and adds:

"I think it's important because it simply is further information. [...] there is more about the photo beyond just a real background if you want to know what I can imagine. If there are people from the city right now, I might be interested in what he thinks about the city or what he thought of the photo. I find it more or less necessary additional information."

(...) I would save a lot of time if I did not do it, but I think that's just kind of pleasant or whatever I think it just makes it and it's good if you do it. "Captions are "If the captions are not so sentimental, it's usually more than the actual picture because it's just a nice picture again. (...) real information is usually not apparent from pictures.

Benefits in use

For Paul, Instagram gives him a lot of inspiration. He learns from looking at other people's accounts, how pictures are shot and edited and how they are arranged. From that, he has copied a lot and applied it on his own profile. As he aims for a professional career as a photographer, he tries to achieve a regular posting rate, which he thinks others expect from him. Additionally, his captions are in English and in Spanish, so that more people understand and follow his account.

Nevertheless, Paul is aware of the jealousy Instagram can create in people. He explains that it is no secret anymore that social media and Instagram can have a negative impact on people's mental health, especially for teenagers. Everybody posts "the hottest shit" which partially not even true. He states he sometimes also feels jealous when someone else is surfing in the ocean and he is in the office. "also bei Instagram ist es ja eh kein Geheimnis das ist ja ein sehr negativen Effekt auf die Psyche glaube ich vor allem von Jugendlichen hat,, was ich voll nachvollziehen kann weil jeder postet den geilsten scheiß, der teilweise nicht mal wahr es. und natürlich ich schaue mir auch durch und meine der ist gerade beim surfen, und ich würde auch gern anstatt im Büro zu sitzen. es kann halt teilweise auch passieren sein." Therefore, he believes in the benefits Instagram offers and advices to use Instagram as an inspirational source instead of a place to compare oneself with others: „je nachdem wie man es nutzt man darf sich nicht zu stark beeinflussen lassen und man sollte sich das Positive einfach rausnehmen und das ganze als Inspiration sehen.“

Interview 10: Flo

Flo is a 28 years old biologist, who currently works at several jobs, e.g. as a tax consultant or pizza delivery guy. He is also a musician and plays in 3 different bands and he frequently started to pursue photography as well.

Flo is a very outgoing person. At the time of the interview, he was living in South Tirol and was only visiting Vienna for a few days, as he was applying for a university in Vienna. Even though he had a busy day with his examination interview at the university, he still agreed on the interview. Hence, he also brought his portfolio which he uses to apply for university.

Flo has started Instagram quite recent in 2016. He started out with only personal photos of his cycling tours in the mountains of North Italy, of his relationship at that time, or of cities he visited. Since the winter of 2017, he began to take more professional photographs of nature and landscapes as well as developed his passion for editing. He claims that he had much more spare time since he and his girlfriend broke up so that he started to spend more of his time on photography. Since then, he regularly uploaded pictures on Instagram, 92 at the time of the interview, and has gathered more than 1,300 followers, while he follows a little bit over 800 accounts. He claims that he is only a hobby photographer but mentions during the interview that he aims to reach a much greater community with his Instagram account and he wouldn't mind being more successful with it.

Photography

For Flo, photography acts as a passion or hobby in the first place but by his stories, it appears to be much more like an experience that he shares with his closest friends and family members. He recounts the times when he and his good friend went together on a photo-trip in the mountains. They simply drove by car during nighttime to one of the mountains nearby their hometown and jointly planned which locations and spots they want to take pictures from. It is a very exciting and enjoyable activity for him and it became his newest passion, which was very noticeable as he got very excited telling about his experiences on his photo-trips. Not only the outcomes of such photo-trips raise his moods and motivate him, but besides the actual act of photographing, it is the whole experience which he enjoys.

“I take the camera with me when I go to the mountains but the coolest thing is to decide where to go, if we're leaving at night or at noon, to really plan out everything, this is when the coolest pictures are taken.”

This even got him to do trips together with his mother. He sometimes has specific motives of landscapes in mind, which he tries to recreate in real life afterwards. For example, he wanted to have a night shot of a curved street in the woods, where he exposed for a longer period while cars were driving through. In order to get the shot he wanted, he discussed it with his mother and they both drove up and down the streets in the mountains until he finally got the right spot, that he had in mind. Moreover, his mother drove the car up and down the hill for several times, while he was taking the picture. These situations clearly show, how much of an impact photography has on his life already and how his passion even take over his private activities.

When it comes to the tools he uses for his photographs, he prefers to use his DSRL instead of his smartphone. However, due to the weight of his camera and its equipment, he is sometimes unsure what to bring on trips to the mountains, hence, he oftentimes only uses very minimal and only the most important equipment. His smartphone camera is merely

used for InstaStories or for snapshots to share on WhatsApp, but not for actually taking pictures.

His content

Flo's current focus is on producing rather than on consuming. Instagram is merely a platform for him to post his pictures which is currently his only goal. Thus, he is not interested in exploring a lot more accounts to follow. If he wants to get new inspiration from other accounts, he scrolls through the *explore* feature within Instagram. As he has gotten more and more followers over time, he stopped posting private things and "*only posts pretty pictures from now on*". It seems that he differentiates the aesthetic of private pictures and his landscape and nature pictures whereby the later is considered as more beautiful. He additionally mentions that he nowadays would not post pictures of his girlfriend or private activities anymore, instead, only pictures of "high standards" are accepted to get on his profile. However, he wouldn't delete old postings because they are still part of his life and journey and this should be reflected on his Instagram account. If his follower count will increase even more in the future, he will consider creating a new account which is dedicated for his private pictures only. Mixing private and professional pictures not only complicates the maintenance of his Instagram account, it would also decrease his popularity and *likes* count. The reason for that, Flo claims, is that people expect a certain type of photographs within a profile and only follow if they continuously get the content they expect. He tried to post portraits of friends but the feedback which he bases on the count of likes wasn't as high as with his usual photos of sceneries and nature. Nevertheless, he claims he won't focus on others too much and still wants to try out new things no matter how his followers will react but as long as he likes it, he will post them.

However, one can still see the dependency on his followers, which he experiences: he always tries to post at times, where his followers are most busy on Instagram. The reason is that due to the high amount of accounts people usually follow on Instagram, each newly uploaded posting only has a short amount of time where it's visible on a follower's timeline before other postings push old ones down the feed, making it less visible. In addition, he regularly checks his follower count: "*On a daily basis, I usually look at 10-20 new followers' profiles but the day after.*" He states that followers are potentially bots and this number should not be fully trusted. However, he is affected by the follower number of other accounts and is impressed when an apparently popular account starts to follow him. He considers it as a compliment if such a popular account follows him, thus, he feels to follow back:

„Oh cool, he has 80,000 followers and only follows 300 accounts? And now he wants to follow me, too? Then I of course follow him back!”

This implies that he relies very much on the numbers shown on Instagram, both on the followers and followees count, but probably on the *likes* count, too.

Captions

Flo especially reads his friends' captions. He himself always wants to have a caption below his posts because it works as a title for the image.

“Leaving the caption empty is nothing I would do. I at least want to give the picture a title [...] if I don't know any keywords or quotes, I'd rather use a statement as a title instead of a description of the visible situation.”

However, he oftentimes has troubles in finding a caption that fits. He tried to use motivational quotations for his mountain pictures, which he has seen a lot lifestyle Instagrammers done before. It seems as if there are specific popular types of captions users are used to and which have become a standard on Instagram. As for interaction and communication on Instagram, he claims that commercial sites usually work with bots, so that he never knows when a comment or like is actually real.

Time

Similar to other interviewees, Flo also experiences a loss of time on Instagram. He plans on reviewing his current accounts and to unfollow unnecessary ones, in order to reduce the content he consumes. It seems as if he is saturated by all the many nature and landscape pictures he sees on his timeline feed but new and different things, such as urban photography, now stand out for him.

Stories vs postings

Flo regularly takes a look at the analytics of his Instagram account. He found out that it is mostly friends and not strangers who watch his InstaStories. In addition, he claims that stories are the channel, where he can see the most recent activities of his friends. All of the personal updates that friends share are done through InstaStories.

“Most of the updates are nowadays available on the stories [...] if it's non-professionals [...] the everyday things are heavier in the stories than in normal posts.”

This is why his stories now mostly show events or things that happen in his private life instead of content regarding his landscape photographs. For him, stories are temporary and you can show your humour a lot better. In addition, pictures on stories can be posted more spontaneous compared to postings in the personal feed.

“For private things I mainly use stories. [...] I don’t want everyday things on my Instagram profile overview anymore. [...] I like that stories are of temporary nature, they disappear after one day. Also you can be much humorous or edit it in a humorous way.

In turn, he avoids to post everyday things in his postings because as Flo says, *“postings are there to stay”*. Flo complains that in the past, when InstaStories haven’t existed yet, he posted many private pictures as posts. However, he would now rather upload such topics in stories *“who would want to see that”*. The reason behind his is because he worries about future followers who should not see pictures of his private activities or relationships.

Instagram for photographers

Generally, Flo thinks that Instagram is a platform that encourages its users to generate pretty pictures with the help of the range of integrated filters and editing tools. As it is developed for mobile in the first place, the quality of a professional photographer does not come out as good as it would normally be on a big screen. Thus, Flo feels that Instagram’s purpose is much more for self-presentation instead of representing qualitative photographs. This perception also stems from the fact that pictures in portrait-mode in comparison to squared or landscape mode, usually the mode of professional photographs, fill out the whole screen. Hence, the impression a viewer gets from a portrait-picture is much more intense and impressive. Otherwise, the picture’s details are just too small and the caption and comments take up more space than the image itself. Hence, in order for photographers on Instagram to stand out within someone’s timeline, they either upload in portrait-mode and have to cut out parts of the image or they need to make a compromise and find a new way to show their art in a more vivid way. [Note by the author: For example, some photographers post a gallery of pictures as a posting where the whole image is presented in 2 or more pictures, and the viewer can swipe through them. In that way, the original picture size is visible although it is cut in several pieces.]

Overall, Flo really likes to use Instagram, as it is a platform that motivates him to go out and take “cool pictures” to share them, instead of “hiding them on his computer”. He can pursue his dream of a professional photographer and reach other people a lot better through the platform but he can also stay in touch and up-to-date about his friends and people in the photographers' community as well. Flo feels as if visual content becomes more and more relevant and appealing because you can express yourself and compress information much better within an image as in a written sentence: *“You can express a lot more in an image than in a sentence”*. However, there is a difference in the meaning and effect of pictures depending on the person’s follower base. Flo tells about his friend, who does mountain climbing, skiing, mountain runner, and who has a much deeper relationship and strong

interaction with his follower base. Flo recalls a picture of a mountain view that his friend posted, which was not as aesthetic as a landscape photographer's shoot. However, the picture received much more likes than some of Flo's pictures. Flo explains that in the case of his friend, the picture does not have any photographic value but content-related value. Thus, it is a big difference how users view a picture and what message it conveys. Flo adds that his friend's post shows him standing at the summit and below him are the clouds covering the rest of the world. This message is quite impressive for Flo and he admits that this triggers his motivation to do the same. Nevertheless, he has the feeling that on Instagram the focus lies on "seeing and being seen" and that as the majority of Instagram pictures are edited, everyone needs to find out another way to stand out between all the beautiful pictures.

"On Instagram, it's about 'seeing and being seen' and most importantly, that you attract the attention of others."

As an example, he mentions Michael's work. He especially likes that Michael does not over-edit his pictures like many others do. Instead, the more natural looking modifications make it stand out between all the other photographers a lot. The lighter edits also convey the feeling that Michael decides independently from followers and has a strong self-confidence in doing so, as all photographers are usually dependent on the viewers' opinion as this is most likely linked with a photographer's popularity.

Overall, Flo is a hobby photographer who enjoys photography and wants it to be a bigger part in his life. He strongly cares about his followers opinion, checking his Instagram analytics on a daily basis. However, he also wants to try out new things on this account even if this isn't exactly his followers' taste. He also points out the importance to attract other users' attention on Instagram and he generally feels that images are a tool to both get people's attention and to express oneself.

Interview 11: Ellie

Ellie is a Yoga teacher and also teaches German as a freelancer. She is 25 years old and has a Bachelor in Psychology. She is one of the more experienced Instagram-users of all the interviewees, starting at 2012 already. So far, she has 911 followers, follows 427 accounts herself and posted 515 times.

The interview was held at a Yoga Studio, where Ellie works. It was hence much more cosy and casual compared to the other interviews which were held at the University's library meeting room at the institute. It turned out to be very fitting, as Ellie was in her familiar surrounding and felt very comfortable to talk.

Her usage

Ellie started with Instagram as she got tired of Facebook's content because she preferred a feed of only images over a mixed and crowded timeline that Facebook has. Instagram offered a lot more images than Facebook in general and in addition, she enjoyed getting inspiration from strangers or from topics she usually does not get in contact with. Nowadays, the number of people and images have increased so much that she feels somewhat overwhelmed and stressed by the content. Due to that, she has done an "unfollow-action" as she calls it, where she cut the number of accounts she follows in half, from around 1000 to 427. For about 2 hours, she went through her list of Instagram accounts that she followed at that time, looked at each profile one by one and unfollowed those that "*did not add any further value to her life*" or who did not interest her anymore. A lot of the accounts that got removed were Cross-fitters and Yogis, who showed off their perfect bodies in very complex or difficult postures.

"[I deleted those] where I felt bad whenever they post something and when I notice no further value for me. Especially in the world of yoga you have the perfect yoga models, who always post themselves in great poses with their great bodies. This annoyed me, so I decided I do not need this as it does not give me anything."

It not only lowered her self-confidence but she also realised that many of those users were not very authentic in their self-presentation. Furthermore, she can save a lot of time by seeing fewer images on her feed, which she mentioned as one of the negative factors of Instagram. She calls it mindless scrolling, which she now tries to avoid. She even introduced rules that she and her boyfriend need to follow at home, e.g. no phone after waking up and no phones are allowed in bed. She hates those moments where she and her boyfriend lay in bed and both are scrolling through their own phones: "there is nothing more that I hate than sitting in bed next to each other and scrolling through one's own phone."

Authenticity

Authenticity is a very crucial factor for Ellie; referring to others as well as to herself. She used to follow many sports-enthusiasts, especially Yoga practitioners which use Instagram as a marketing platform very heavily. Ellie states that as a follower of such yoga accounts, you are confronted with beautiful pictures of a perfect lifestyle all the time. In terms of yoga, this includes a perfect shaped body, high skills and difficult postures, such as handstands or other balancing postures. Besides the appearance, those Yogis furthermore mostly show the end result of their practices and seldom mention the progress on how they got there. As an example, she chooses a profile in her feed of a yoga girl who works for a yoga brand *Alo Yoga* as a brand ambassador, which means she wears the clothing on all of her pictures on Instagram. Ellie points out that she used to look at the girl's short yoga videos as an

inspiration. However, over time, Ellie noticed that she disagrees with the girl's message that everybody is able to do the yoga postures she's showing. In addition, the girl showed more and more skin in her videos and pictures, which also was not very authentic in those settings:

“You generally always see her butt. For example, she often does handstands with her back to the video where she wears a loose t-shirt but no bra. Her sweater then slips over her head and you just see her bare back from behind. That's alright but it's sort of a "sex sells" thing. So that indicates for me something like 'I'll do it now because I know there are people watching.'”

Ellie is afraid that other followers might believe this message and thus, will get pressured to reach those postures but will get disappointed if they can't and have the impression it's their own fault. This is why Ellie wants to change that with her own Instagram profile, too.

“That's one of those profiles where I have the feeling you're supposed to do something you do not need to do. This puts pressure on me and that's why the value is not there for me [...] For me, it's also the biggest criterion when I post to be absolutely authentic.”

Ellie also mentions that she tries to understand how her followers perceive her account and oftentimes asks herself: „How does this post affect viewers?“. She wants to show her followers that it is hard work in order to reach a certain difficulty in Yoga, that the practices at home aren't always in a clean room but instead can happen in the bathroom next to the laundry, or that one does not need a perfect body to do Yoga. She has learned over the time that especially the flaws that people share on their Instagram account are authentic and real, and is also much more relatable for the followers. She wants her followers to think “Look, that girl has cellulitis, too, but can still do this [posture] so I can do that, too”. In the past, she felt bad about herself when she only saw the apparent positive things in people's lives and perfect looks they have. Ellie emphasises that it must be more accepted by the online community that people show flaws because, for her, it's the most valuable thing you can share nowadays, while everybody else tries to be perfect. Moreover, Ellie tries to put relevant things on her profile, e.g. videos on how to get to a Yoga pose, showing the progress and failures for others to learn from. She also shares thoughts and ideas on other interests of hers, e.g. zero Waste or body positivity. Being real and authentic not only refers to physical appearance and presentation but also mentally. Ellie exemplifies this with another account which she follows, where the girl conveys her thoughts and feelings through well-formulated paragraphs of text in the captions or through stories. This is where the interesting things are hidden. Ellie states that she has learned a lot and got inspired by such accounts and tries to write similar to how she perceives the ones she follows.

Stories vs postings

Ellie uses her account both privately as well as for promoting her yoga classes and follows friends as well as accounts of professional yoga teachers or other sports. She noticed that her friends mostly post about their vacations. Some people even regularly post travel pictures months after they were gone, which makes it seem for her as if they are on vacation all the time. This annoys Ellie a lot because she gets very irritated and does not like a distorted perception of someone's life. Other typical motives that her friends post are coffee or memes. Stories, on the other hand, mostly only show her friends' everyday life, e.g. public transportation, food, or the weather. Ellie states, that users who don't post consciously for a specific goal, the content is obviously quite random. Yoga accounts, on the other hand, are always very beautifully shot and edited.

Ellie also noticed a difference between stories and postings. Her friends usually upload stories currently. Ellie explains it by her feeling, that stories are much more effortless, spontaneous, less perfect, which means they can be done everywhere without the idea of perfection in mind because it's gone after 24 hours anyway. Postings, on the other hand, are done much more consciously, people tend to put more effort into quality, aesthetics and locations. They can be fully edited and thus, viewers don't see the process of their making but only the end result. As Ellie sees it, the image overview is the first thing people see on one's profile and which they get the first impression from. Hence, it is much more important how each posting looks compared to an InstaStory.

Interaction and discourse

One of Ellie's benefits in using Instagram is the inspiration and knowledge she gains through the other accounts. Another purpose of hers in using Instagram is the possibility to promote herself and her yoga classes. Ellie considers on moving to Canada with her boyfriend and already prepares her social accounts in a way that helps her find a job later on. Thus, one of her goals in using Instagram is to gain a wider reach and more followers. Also, she wants to raise the number of international contacts by engaging with international yoga colleagues, increasing the interaction which can be useful in the future. Especially, the yoga community exchanges thoughts and ideas over Instagram instead of e.g. Twitter. This is why a regular discourse on Instagram with other users is so important to her. Interaction on Instagram through comments or likes do not happen much. She tries to start conversations with other users through comments but the feedback is not very strong. She is also easy in giving a like but especially if she knows the user personally or if she likes the post strongly. The Instagram Direct instant messenger is not regularly used either. The content is usually merely based on and refer to InstaStories and people oftentimes don't talk much on the messenger.

Development of profile

In the beginning, Ellie posted private pictures, especially during her time abroad in Canada. Since she got back, she got more into yoga and nowadays, she seldom posts anything private besides vacation but posts much more yoga-related content. All of her yoga-pictures are planned beforehand though. Ellie nowadays does not want to take random pictures anymore. She noticed that in the past, she was always taking pictures instead of enjoying the moment. She claims that she sees photos as something from the past that does not need to be kept physically or digitally. This is why she wants to reduce her camera use and now only takes pictures consciously. Furthermore, she only takes pictures with her external camera and not with her smartphone. Her mobile camera is merely used to take snapshots or for practical use, e.g. to take pictures of documents. Usually, Ellie thinks about the kind of pictures she will need in the near future to post on Instagram and takes all of her pictures on a specific day. As all those pictures are taken on a professional camera, she does not need to edit them afterwards.

Captions and Interaction

Regarding the captions, Ellie has developed an interesting process. She uses online note-taking services, such as *Notability*, which she has installed on her mobile phone. Whenever she sees or thinks of an inspirational idea or a nice message she wants to send out to her followers, she notes it down in Notability. She then combines the text with a photo of hers afterwards.

“So I always have two Notability notes open on mobile and if I feel like I have an inspiring idea, I write it down and then I put it together with an image and text and hashtags and stuff.”

However, Ellie admits that picture and text do not always need to fit together logically, instead she chooses a nice looking picture and the focus in her posting process is actually the text. Sometimes, she finds a fitting combination but this is rather coincidentally. Ellie takes much care of her caption’s appearance as with her pictures. Not only the text must be relevant and authentic, hashtags must always be added (she admits not for any specific reason but just because out of habit), and she even adds several dots as a spacing between the caption and the hashtags. When it comes to reading other people’s captions, Ellie says to only pays attention to captions under images (not under videos) and only reads them, in case she does not understand the picture right away.

Ellie is a very conscious person and thinks through her actions on Instagram a lot. She feels to be a role model for others. This means to mention realistic things, e.g. the struggles in the process of practicing yoga, what a natural body is, which are more realistic and identifiable

to others. She herself has experienced many Instagram accounts that hide those informations from the followers and thus, give a wrong impression of apparent ordinary lives and looks. As it affected her negatively, she now avoids looking at such accounts and instead, tries to do it better for her followers.

Interview 12: Simon

The last interviewee is with Simon. He is a musician and regularly works with multimedia tools in his spare time, creating videos or working on his band's songs. He is 22 years old, works part-time and studies at the university as well.

During the interview, his interest in Apple products, social media and marketing became very noticeable. He used to work as an Online Marketing assistant where he got in touch with social media marketing for the first time. He learned about the potential in promoting oneself over Youtube or Instagram and now dreams of making a living from that. The interview with him was the longest one, lasting over 2 hours as he was very talkative and shared his experiences and stories very detailed.

His motivation in using Instagram and other social media networks is based on several things: first, he wants to promote his music and band, second he wants to learn how others use the online channels to grow their fan base, and to get musical inspiration and lastly, to be in touch with his friends.

His accounts and distinct usage

In order to cover all his needs in Instagram, he maintains 3 accounts at the moment. The first one was created in 2015 and is his private account, where he shares music and band-related content as well as private things in his life. In his second account, which he started about a year ago in 2017, he collects and shares all of the photographs that are 'artsier' and which do not fit into the theme of his first music-based account. Two days before the interview, he has started a third account with the topic "cars". He has seen his friend opening an account simply for his car where he shares all related topics, e.g. car equipment, modelling, etc., which apparently attracts a great number of people.

"A friend of mine owns a car and now somehow reached 1500 followers although he hardly has any posts, only 15 posts and has a lot of followers, which is really cool because I thought 'I can actually do that, why not?'"

Simon sees great potential in his newest Instagram profile and expects a fast growth in followers, of which he could make some money from. In preparation for future cases, Simon

even saved a username for a fourth Instagram account, which he has not have specific plans for so far, but he's certain to find one and wanted to save this username just in case. Simon generally plans on having a channel in the future, which is solely used for his personal life and where he can actually be the "normal guy", as the current situations do not allow him to do so.

Above all of, he currently uses his personal and music-related account. His goal is to promote him and his band on Instagram and he already tried to post every three days to trigger more traffic and to gain more users. Due to limited time, he was not able to keep this posting frequency. Hence, he has set all four accounts to business accounts in order for him to see the analytics which helps him to understand his followers' behaviour. However, he barely interacts with other people: he only comments on friends' postings to compliment them on something and the Instagram messenger's only use is to reference an InstaStory, where questions and short answers are exchanged instead of actual conversations. The only type of interaction is to "like" postings, which he usually give for content he considered as interesting, aesthetic, or if he wants to give a sign of support towards his friends.

Separation of interests and privacy

As an answer to the question why he created several accounts, Simon explains that each of these accounts covers a specific topic and present his different interests or personalities, hence, there are different types of followers on each of these channels. He does not want to bother any of his followers with content that does not fit to their expectations which is why he solves it by separating the themes on several accounts. Most importantly, his friends mostly follow his first account, which shows his life as a musician and private person and he wants to keep a certain impression of him. Besides band-related news, Simon only shares his travels, e.g. his visits at his uncle's in Paris. Neither does he post private pictures of his family or relationships, nor of his home or work. Thus, his friends see rather "safe" things, as he phrases it, things "which won't bother anyone".

The reasons behind this became more evident during the interview: several things indicate that he feels uncomfortable knowing that other people can see and judge his life:

First, Simon feels that it is much easier to get to know people when they have no knowledge and consequently are unbiased towards him. Another side of his life, which Simon does not want to be publicly shared, are his private achievements which refer to his possessions as well as to his career. He assumes that some of his friends or acquaintances who follow him on Instagram will get jealous or get the feeling that he is bragging or that he wants to show-off. For instance, on his car-related channel, he likes to share information and to give tips on how to maintain his car only with people who are genuinely interested in this type of information. For him, the community is very important. He wants to be integrated into the

community and not being judged for what he does. In addition, he wants to express himself on Instagram without being restricted by his followers. If he would post something about his car or about his job on his private/music-related account, Simon fears that his friends perhaps misinterpret his intentions and thus, will misjudge him.

“The last thing I want to achieve through social media usage and the posts is somehow that people think I would brag or something. [...] I’m scared that people interpret it like that. [...] There are many envious people and I just do not need that. [...] It’s about the car and I just share the hobby and it does not matter if I drive a Ferrari or not, it just does not matter. If I would post that on my private account, many people would think, “okay, he’s just talking about the car now, he’s probably thinking that he’s cool.” That’s not true, I only want to just share my passion”.

Hence, he sometimes blocks specific followers from his InstaStories, e.g. followers who could tell his grandparents about his relationship or people who should not know that he currently is not in the city but in Paris. If he would be able to block people from seeing his postings, he would do so, too. For example, he does not like all his past schoolmates but some follow him. He had to choose to set his account to public in order to gain more followers, which in turn means that everyone is able to follow him.

Secondly, another reason why Simon only posts safe things and hides e.g. information about his relationship status is that he does not like other people to follow the up and downs of his relationship. He has seen people showing their affection towards their partners online. Simon recalls his ex-girlfriend who used to post several pictures of her and her new boyfriend and who expressed her love for him in the captions very strongly. This online behaviour is something Simon cannot stand and which annoys him a lot because as soon as the relationship is over, people delete those photographs and everything that happened are not available on their account anymore. When it happened with his ex-girlfriend, it was quite amusing for Simon and he finds it embarrassed. It seems as if he does not want it to happen to himself, which is why he prevents it by not posting anything about his relationship beforehand. Hence, he and his girlfriend have decided to not post anything about them on their social media accounts.

Uniqueness

Pictures on Simon’s main Instagram profile need to have something unique. He claims that people want to know about “things they don’t have or do”. Content which deals with the day-to-day life of people is too ordinary (“08/15”) and Simon does not want to bore his followers. As a result, he tries to post about things he considers to be more special, rare, exciting, or difficult to reach. Especially when it comes to musicians, Simon assumes that his interested followers are eager to know more about the things that happen behind the scenes

of a gig. This is why he posts e.g. a picture of David Hasselhoff's microphone, concerts he attended, equipment his bands use, the inside of a music studio which his band was allowed to use for two days as it was the prize of a music contest.

Difference stories/postings

Before 2016, Simon used his account for more private things and less for his career as a musician. He mentions that some of his past postings would go into an InstaStory nowadays. Simon usually takes more time to upload a post compared to a story. With posts, he feels as if he has to take future followers in consideration much more because one never knows who will see it, e.g. a work colleague or business partners does not need to see his performances on stage. Stories are comparably easier to create, as they only last for 24 hours and thus can be less perfect and less exciting. In addition, stories' short life cycle allows people to reveal parts of their personality without keeping this information forever on their account:

“Because I think a post is a post. I’ll think about it more intensively what I do and that’s usually ok to be seen. Stories can be anything [...] because it’s just easier because if you want to share a little bit of yourself, you do not need to post right away.”

Simon takes one of his music clips, which he finds not quite exciting to be uploaded as a post, but it was still interesting enough to be shared in a story. This distinction between stories and postings indicate that there are different purposes and levels of importance between the two channels.

Difference image/text

Furthermore, Simon also sees a difference in the use of images compared to written postings. In his opinion, *“images say more than words and are able to tell stories”*. In addition, a lot of information can be easily compressed in a photo and visual content can be consumed very fast. Moreover, some types of information should not describe but must be somehow shown in order to be interesting, e.g. if Simon wants to share with his followers that he works on a new song and writes a post saying *“I have a sheet of music and am writing a new song”*, he assumes this would not interest anybody. Especially music-related things must be presented visually and auditive in order to get the attention and spark interest in others.

Simon uses Instagram as a news source as well and emphasises how much he enjoys to be up-to-date on current events without having to actually read articles:

“because works super fast and you do not need to read the news in addition because you can see at first glance what’s happening and I find this very cool.”

Additionally, Simon really prefers to only use images because it makes it easier for him to get an overview of what and when he has posted something.

Time

The use of visuals in online communication also has the benefit of saving time. Simon quickly grasps his friends' activities and news through their InstaStories, which is the most frequently used feature his friends use on Instagram as well as the most current things they do. He does not chat with them regularly so that it is an easy and quick way for him to be up-to-date. Moreover, Simon feels that a lot of his time goes into the consumption of social media in general, so that any additional task on the platform adds to the problem. Thus, reading long texts in the captions is something Simon does not really do.

“Social media already has a big impact on us and it costs a lot of time during the day, I do not want to spend more. [...] reading? maybe some small text like ‘Jamie’s Italian’ but nothing longer.”

He only reads caption or hashtags if he's unsure about the intention of a posting. Oftentimes, he does not even know what to write on his own postings. He usually never writes a whole paragraph or whole sentences, instead, he rather uses hashtags or a statement. In the end, he lets his followers decide for themselves what they should think of his posting.

I often ask myself what should I write there ... I think 'Look at the picture and just come up with something! [...] If I really want to say something conscious, I write it as a big hashtag [...] I never write fluent text.

Simon is a very interested and open minded person who really wants to test out the possibilities with Instagram. He has several accounts to be able to share his content to a dedicated follower base. Mixing all of these followers in one account only would cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations of his pictures which he wants to prevent. His aim is to create interesting and unique content for each of his channels and enjoys using images to do that. As he struggles in finding the perfect wording for text on Instagram, he really appreciates the new way of communication via images.

4.2. Summary and Analysis

From the in-depth interviews with the 12 interviewees, several common behavioural patterns have emerged which give indications about a similar course of experiences with Instagram as a social media platform. In this chapter, findings from the qualitative interviews will be brought together to determine and discuss similarities and differences that have emerged in the course of a thorough analysis.

The communication cycle

In order to understand the relationships between each of the addressed aspects within Instagram and how they are linked together, it is important to understand the general user flow and communication cycle within Instagram. Based on the interviews, a certain user circle can be derived from the respondents' answers and personal feeds, which is illustrated in figure 4.1. This should serve as a general overview and context in which the findings of the following sections are set in.

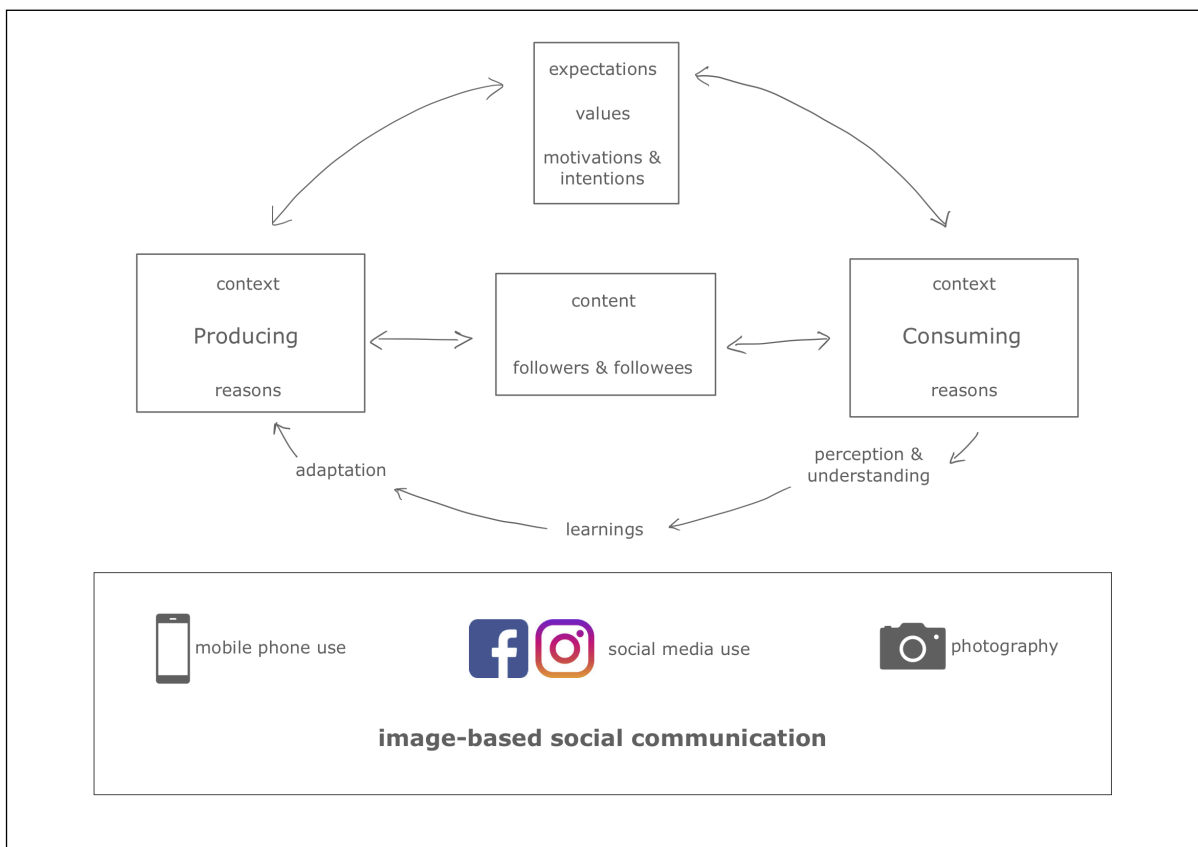


Figure 4.1: The communication cycle within the image-based social network Instagram, based on the empirical findings of the interviews

Among the 12 interviewees, there were quite some differences in regard to their motivations behind using Instagram. Some use Instagram merely for private reasons, others see a

potential to increase their prominence and to gain more reach with their content. However, all of them have developed a similar way of consuming and using Instagram.

Consuming. Most of the time, the interviewees started using Instagram with no particular intention, neither did they know what to expect, nor did they have a particular idea of how the platform works. Naturally, they begin as a content consumer and observe what the platform offers. As Instagram's focus lies on visual content, its users are exposed to a high amount of images which are shot in high quality and with a noticeable aesthetic level. Instagram's *explore* feature shows all kinds of photographs, categorised by themes (e.g. travel, beauty, interior, sports, movies etc.) or personalised suggestions, based on one's own interests. A lot of interviewees state that their friends were already using the platform before they did, hence, they started **following** personal friends and family first. The more accounts they follow (increase in the number of followees), the more pictures fill up their *timeline feed*. With the continuous growth of posts they see, the more they understand the nature of Instagram. **Expectations.** Slowly, expectations on new posts build up and ideas for the personal feed emerge. People see what kind of topics and motives their friends or other accounts address and in which way pictures are edited and captions are formulated. **Evaluating values.** Users then start evaluating the images, whether it fits their personal taste and principles or not. Thereby, specific values develop which have an impact on the way a person assesses future content as well as how they will select and present their own images. **Motivations/Intentions.** Every person who uploads content on Instagram does it for different reasons. It can be based on personal intentions, e.g. to receive inspiration or to be updated about friends' activities. Also, motivations for sharing an image can also be triggered by looking at other people's uploads. Considering what has been said in the interviews, people oftentimes perceive an image a certain way and evaluate, on the one hand, the image and the intentions behind it, and on the other hand, the response it gets from followers. **Learnings and Adaptation.** They then formulate plausible reasons and adapt their own behaviour depending on the kind of reactions they want to achieve. In this process, they learn how the platform works (norms and standards) and what has to be done to get a certain reaction. In other words, if they like the image they see, they can relate to it, and the feedback it receives is worth striving for, they will orient towards said image's style, theme, caption, etc. If they cannot relate to it and its response is something they do not want their own photos to cause, they will select pictures for their personal feed which they think will avoid such reactions. **Producing/Followers.** Over time, people start to develop an own feed, based on what they have seen on the platform so far. The process of observing, learning and adapting is an ongoing process, whereby motivations, expectations and intentions continuously change in time. Over time, every user gains followers themselves. From the interviewees' responses, they heavily care about their followers' opinion. Hence, their online

behaviour and decisions on which photographs they share on their feed highly depend on this relationship.

Consumers are producers and vice versa. Similar to other social media platforms, Instagram producers are always consumers, too. Both roles are confronted with visual content but obtain different kinds of **benefits** in order to satisfy their values, intentions and motivations. Thus, it is a constant cycle of observing visual content, evaluating and weighing up (responses, values, intentions and motivations), and adapting one's own feed, whereby the user constantly switches between the roles of a consumer and producer. **Consciousness** .However, it is not always sure how much of the image perception and selection happen consciously or unconsciously, as over time, the usage of such social media platforms becomes a routine where most behaviour patterns take place automatically. **Mobile use, photography, and changes in offline behaviour.** This cycle of visual communication on Instagram does not stay isolated on the platform but have an impact on external viewpoints and behavioural patterns, as well. The interviewees mentioned influences in the way they deal with photography and mobile usage in their personal life (some start to increase their technical equipment and spend more time to create content, others try to minimise their dedicated time on photographing and social media use on their mobiles).

Considering the research questions, the focus of this thesis lies on the role images and visual content play within social media platform (such as Instagram), with a particular regard to the personal interaction, communication and self-presentation that are intertwined with each other.

In the following sections, results from the qualitative interviews will be further elaborated, the role of images within the context of visual social media communication will be analysed and how people make use of them, in order to understand the interrelated communication factors.

4.2.1. The constant use of mobile phones

All of the interviewees have a high affinity with smartphones. They all stated to use their smartphone all day long, in every spare minute between (or sometimes even during) work and studies. Starting already in the early morning right after waking up, some interviewees mentioned it to be the easiest tool to ease into the day (see Lena, Ellie). During the day, their smartphone serves as a multifunctional device for several purposes: it supports them e.g. as a tool for navigation (public transport, maps), organisation (calendar, notes), social communication with friends, family and colleagues (Instant Messengers, video calls, emails), and for entertainment (music, videos, and social media). Even in the evenings they

oftentimes take their smartphones with them to bed which has already caused new bedtime rules for some (see Ellie's smartphone-free zone in bed). Regarding the place of use, a very common place is the public transport and the home, partially in unusual places, e.g. the restroom. The smartphones are always within reach, irrespectively of whether people actually need or use it at that particular moment. Interviewees stated to keep their smartphones locked away if their employers don't allow them to have it at work. Most interviewees work at jobs where their smartphone is an essential part of their workflow, e.g., as a yoga teacher or a software developer. Forgetting it at home has sometimes caused stress for some interviewees as they felt the need to be reachable at all times. (see Lena) Nevertheless, people mostly try to avoid using their smartphones when they focus on other activities like reading or eating or if they are surrounded by their friends and family, however, this only means they keep it hidden but carry it in their pockets and bags.

In comparison, the use of the personal computer becomes much more conscious. Interviewees state they only use their PCs when they actually need to do something for a longer period, e.g. working on homework, paperwork, watching series and movies, creating music, or professional editing of pictures.

The main difference between the smartphone and the personal computer is their relevance in regard to communication. Daily communication happens mainly on the mobile phones as they are carried with all the time. All 12 interviewees stated to use WhatsApp as the main app for communicating with their friends, families, as well as with their colleagues. One interviewee stated that due to the continuously cheaper prices for mobile phone data packages, it becomes much cheaper and easier to call and message each other via the mobile data as one does not need to buy additional packages for the EU anymore. Thus, written communication and phone calls happen on WhatsApp. Every interviewee also owns a Facebook account. Nevertheless, the majority of the interviewees have deleted Facebook on their phone or only go online for a little amount of time. Facebook is mainly used for finding events, for news or for Facebook groups. Creating Facebook posts, uploading pictures or following the newest updates on friends have all been shifted to Instagram now. Other social media platforms, such as Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, or Youtube are only passively used or the accounts are inactive.

4.2.2. Intentions, motivations & expectations

As stated above, new users on Instagram did not have a specific idea of what they can expect from the platform. Generally, the main initial motivation behind using Instagram was to follow one's friends on a new platform or to keep friends updated online, as most activities

shifted from Facebook to Instagram. Some interviewees heard they will see much more pictures of their friends, as uploading images to Facebook isn't a common or regular activity anymore. New motivations, intentions and expectations in using Instagram emerged, the more time they spend on the platform.

Generally, there are initial intentions and motivations that the majority of the interviewees stated:

- to keep in touch and stay current
- to get inspiration
- to be entertained or to avoid boredom
- to extend one's reach and increase popularity

Over time, the level of importance may differ as new ones are added and become more relevant.

to be in touch with friends, to see most current activities

As a consumer of Instagram's content, the initial motivation was to be updated about the most current news of their friends or families. Some of the interviewees went abroad during their first year of using Instagram and looked for a channel where they cannot only post pictures of their journey but can also see what happens at home. They also stated that many friends did not use Facebook anymore which used to be the most important information source about one's friends and acquaintances. In fact, when it comes to uploading pictures, the interviewees noticed that Facebook has become a secondary channel as people either upload new pictures to Instagram or send them directly via instant messengers. Tim, for example, was told by his friend that people not only post more pictures but also different ones than within Facebook, "*there are definitely photos which friends only post on Instagram [...] and InstaStories on Instagram are a lot different from those on Facebook where I only see one story and on Instagram I see a lot more.*" Instagram now seems to have become a more relevant source of information and the sharing tool for personal experiences.

to get inspiration

Another main reason for the interviewees to consume Instagram content on a regular basis is to get inspiration from other accounts. As everything is visual, consuming the content almost appears as looking at a photo album of one's friends. Some state that it reminds them of a digital portfolio of artists, musicians, sportsmen, photographers, etc. Mary gets her inspiration from dancers' videos and photos, Alex follows pole-dance teachers to see the newest routines, Ellie uses it as an informational source for Yoga to get new ideas for her

personal Yoga flows. The photographers, Michael, Paul and Flo, see the most trending locations and learn about the newest camera equipment and editing tools. Tim excitingly tells about how he learns about possible medical internships or countries to spend an exchange year at by simply following colleagues in his medical studies. Julia states that Instagram posts remind her of professional commercials and she even uses it to get inspiration for her future travels and vacations.

for entertainment and as an antidote to boredom

Another motivation which several interviewees stated was to be entertained in times they are bored. They usually use their mobile phones very regularly while commuting between places. In these short time periods they usually need some kind of distraction, and thus, social media or games are some of the most common solutions. However, many interviewees, e.g. Michael, Lena, or Alex also use it at home for longer periods of time. Alex and her boyfriend like to be entertained to see what their friends are publicly sharing and especially how they post it. However, all of them admitted that they feel as if it is a waste of time and they try to reduce it but they struggle to achieve that as it simply became a habit.

to extend one's reach and to increase popularity

As a content producer, there are additional motivational factors in using Instagram. It is well known that Instagram serves as a marketing tool very well as one can quickly increase one's popularity. Professional users usually want to expand their reach online, e.g. the photographers want to get more followers and likes in order to expand their popularity on the internet and to be noticed by potential magazines or buyers. Ellie wants to promote her Yoga classes and for the case of moving abroad to Canada, a popular Yoga profile will also help her in finding a job in a new city. Simon makes use of the platform to spread the word about his band and concerts and to gain more fans which are important steps in the course of becoming a successful musician. By seeing how his friend increased his follower count with a profile for his car, he expects Instagram to be his main tool in expanding his popularity in several channels as well.

4.2.3. Values

Based on the interviews' answers, people develop a certain opinion of the content they see. These viewpoints turn into values which serve as a basis for future opinion formation and decision-making. From the 12 interviews, the following values have been identified as highly relevant:

- authenticity, realness and identification
- uniqueness
- relevance and curated content.

These values come into consideration both in the process of consuming content as well as during the act of producing content.

authenticity, realness, identification

When the interviewees described their Instagram feed, they mentioned the term “authenticity” in several contexts.

First of all, they assess Instagram accounts by the appearance of the profile itself and the physical presentation of the person. If a picture uses too many filters it is very obvious for most viewers and it is perceived as "over-edited". That in turn, makes them question whether it actually projects the reality. The interviewees feel as if something is either hidden due to the modifications or exaggerated (e.g. the colours of the sky weren't as vigorous). Thus, if a profile looks as if the person tries too hard to present a perfect life, it looks unreal and people can't relate much to it. Additionally, Alex mentioned that she's seen profiles where even the whole grid of pictures harmonise visually, from the colours to the lighting, to the arrangement (e.g. the individual postings put together next to each other result in a bigger picture). If a profile as a whole seems too thought through, it indicates an inauthentic intention. Also, staged pictures of an apparently exciting everyday life irritates interviewees, too, if recalling the example of the Yoga girl who dressed up very provocative whereby revealing her naked back and doing headstands in bed while her boyfriend sits next to her, seemingly not noticing her acrobatics. Furthermore, the interviewees often mention that many things they see are simply not reachable for them, e.g. travels with a yacht, wearing the newest and most expensive fashion, or attending special events. This simply can't be a real life and they don't see the connection between themselves and the person. Instead, they accuse the person of showing-off and to communicate a misleading image of reality. As Nele states: *"it appears somehow unreal because it is simply not reachable for me."* Above all, the importance of seeing less perfect things was often mentioned, e.g. Ellie seeks accounts where other yogis show their progress and failures and Alex assumes those prearranged food settings give the impression that everyday meals have to look the same.

Furthermore, they look for real character traits of the people they follow. Especially the female interviewees very often mention they like to see more of the “weak” and imperfect sides of a person. These are aspects they consider authentic. Lena is particularly enthusiastic about a girl who communicates her weak moments through image and text and who takes a break even though her work and living depend on her online presence. She calls her a "girl next door" whom she can relate and imagine to be friends with. Nele admires a girl who

seems like an ordinary person just like her. They live in the same city, in the same neighbourhood, visit the same places in their spare time and she buys clothes Nele can afford. All of this is communicated by the images she uploads and thus, Nele can relate very easily. Tim points out to appreciate his friend's realness as he posted an image of himself in a nice outfit and smoking at a coffee house. This picture might seem quite weird or conceited for people who don't know him. However, Tim likes how his friend does not care about other people's opinions and presents himself the way he really is. Flo has a similar view: he refers to Michael and shows much respect for his self-confidence to edit and compose his pictures the way he likes, independent from what the general photography community normally favour and expect from him. As a counterexample, Nele recalls her best friend who uploads several selfies or gym pictures. According to Nele, this collection of images make her friend look very conceited and as if she would only focus on her appearance. However, this is not true and does not reflect her friend in real life and she wonders why her friend acts like that. Likewise, Alex experiences how parents constantly upload pictures of their kids and of happy moments in their family life. This can't be a true projection because it is commonly known that no one experiences happy moments only.

Overall, these examples imply, that profiles illustrating relatable character traits and activities and which convey an authentic life through ordinary lives were most appreciated by and popular among the interviewees.

Moreover, the interviewees not only expect authenticity in other people but towards themselves as well. Most of them use filters or edit their pictures. However, they claim they do not want to manipulate their pictures until they look unreal. Instead, they merely try to highlight those areas not captured well on the camera due to bad lighting or a poor camera quality. In fact, they e.g. adjust the colours in a way similar to how they originally perceived: *"It actually looked like that in real life and I'm just trying to illustrate that on the photo."* (Leo) In addition, they try to present their true character on Instagram as good as possible, *"I generally want to be myself everywhere, not fake"* (Nele) They claim to only post content that matches their life and character trait and only write or say things they can support and exemplify in their daily life. Interviewees who use Instagram in a more professional way see it as their responsibility to communicate to their followers that not everything shown is beautiful or perfect. Michael admits that the high number of beautiful and perfect pictures can be very intimidating, hence, it is imaginable to get a distorted view of reality. He himself has experienced negative feelings because of that:

"You are working and extremely stressed and you go on Instagram and see beautiful pictures of people who have been travelling, are relaxing and make themselves a great time. And since you follow 500 people who do exactly this you are constantly confronted with content which reflects a distorted truth or distorted image." (Michael)

This is the reason why Ellie sees herself as a model example for her followers. As a Yoga teacher, it is her responsibility to teach her students that she also experiences bad times and failures during her yoga practice. With this, she wants to convey that not everyone looks perfect and even yoga teachers struggle with particular yoga postures, different from the many unrealistic things on Instagram. By doing so, she hopes her followers find a person they can relate to and stop putting too much pressure on or having negative feelings about themselves. Paul similarly strives for more authenticity on Instagram. He uses his profile to introduce the countries he visited during his South America trip. Most photographers usually exclusively show beautiful landscape pictures. He wants to break this habit and uses his reach and influence to additionally stress the negative things about a country, such as poverty, which in the end reflect the reality much more in his opinion:

"I'm trying to reflect each place realistically and do not want to only show the pretty side. [...] others wouldn't particularly post this but I do not want to convey a wrong image." (Paul)

However, it seems that not only the content of a post communicates authenticity but the channel transferring the content plays an important role, too. Interviewees stated that especially the InstaStories act as an anchor of realness in a message: *"Images are mostly more beautiful than stories. Stories are rather everyday life, more authentic."* (Julia) Postings mostly show beautiful pictures that can be edited and manipulated before being uploaded. Stories, on the contrary, help convey the authenticity due to two reasons. First, they are mostly uploaded very frequently and close to when the activity happened. For example, if a person uploads stories about their vacation or a concert it usually happened recently or even at the same time. Secondly, videos are primarily used in stories which are rarely edited and hence, the potential is high that they show the truth. Due to that, videos in stories are perceived as more authentic. Additionally, if stories and postings match content- and time-wise people perceive it as evidence of truth. As Paul recounts stories he follows:

"[There] is not as much showing off as some might do, it is very adventurous and real, you can see that in the stories, everything fits together, everything is coherent. [...] Through the stories I really know that he actually performs these tasks and that he does not simply drive from one Instagram hotspot to the next one. Instead, he does things he likes and this takes him to untouched nature." (Paul)

uniqueness

Another very repeatedly stated factor that the interviewees paid attention to was the uniqueness within the posts. Again, this refers to both consumed content and produced content. Nele considered something as boring when everyone could technically do the same. She even goes further, stating that everything boring is in a way senseless, too: *"If everything*

is the same, it is boring, and if it is boring, it is senseless and you do not need to post it." Lena sees this similarly. For her, a posting is pretty and worth to share if it shows something unique, "*something you don't see for the thousands time*". Only then, she would notice these images. Moreover, the interviewees point out uniqueness is not only relevant in images but in a text, too. They dislike those who don't use commonly known quotes, e.g. "0815 quotes" (Michael, Paul) or "worldly wisdom" (Lena), as it bores them and wastes their time. Instead, they admire those who come up with their own personal captions that make them stand out.

When it comes to their own profiles, they also aim for uniqueness and avoid those images they have learned to be perceived as boring. Nele claims to avoid e.g. images of coffee mugs because it is a common motive posted on Instagram. This indicates that she seeks to be different from others by posting unique things. Paul tells about the typical behaviour on Instagram where people reproduce images which have gained high popularity. He refers to photographers who travel from one popular photo-location to the other, merely to shoot and post an image they have already seen several times on Instagram.

"[...] not just simply run from spot A to spot B in order to produce as many images as possible, as the 'Generation Instagram' usually does [...] authenticity and individuality get lost in this way. It's this 'braune Masse' and everyone is swimming in there." (Paul)

Nevertheless, those postings still get many likes which Paul really hates to see. Flo supports his viewpoint as he sees a lot of similarities between several Instagram accounts, too:

"it becomes a homogeneous mass as quite a lot is similar. In order that something stands out again, it really needs to have something unique." (Flo)

Michael's method to stay unique even involves his editing style on the one hand. He is aware that many people, including himself, tend to adapt an Instagram-like style after a long time of usage, thus, he especially tries to pay attention to that in his editing. On the other hand, he keeps his photo-spots secret for himself to prevent others to copy his content which automatically makes his postings less mainstream.

relevance and curated content

The last factor which the interviewees pointed out was the relevance and the curated selection of content they like to see and try to have on their own profile. Generally, relevance is closely interconnected with authenticity and uniqueness which will be more clear in this section. Every image should not merely be posted to fill up one's own feed should have a distinct message behind it. In addition, the viewers should clearly see its intention. Almost every interviewee stated they want to offer their followers an interesting feed whereby

“interesting” refers to a curated and relevant content which is defined slightly different between the interviewees. For Nele, Julia, and many others, “interesting” means “not boring” or “uncommon/unusual”. Unknown locations or non-repetitive content count as interesting, too. Ellie especially sees inspirational or informative content as “interesting”, content from which she can learn a lot from. She points out it’s often the caption which reveals the fascinating thing in a posting as images on Instagram are generally beautiful, and thus, there’s not much to gain from the appearance. Due to the same reason, Michael rather pays attention to the editing style. As soon as a post does not meet the above-stated requirements of the interviewees’, they see it as irrelevant. Tim, for example, mentions a girl who posts several pictures of her food on the regular basis. He does not understand the relevance of these images and does not see the impact these pictures have. To ridicule her behaviour, he gives the example of daily pictures of him brushing his teeth which would not make any sense to him either. In comparison, all of his posts had some kind of message and were addressed to certain people. Tim wants to convey something purposeful with his own images.

As a consequence, the interviewees stated that they try to strongly seek an interesting profile. A Simon says, *"the only thing I want is that the picture does not look like '08/15'. I don't just post because I want to post. Instead, I want others to notice that I invested time."* Paul and Michael also claim to carefully select their pictures. They either add a background story or an interesting fact. Only then, it is "worthy" to be shared on Instagram. Fabien himself values a meaningful combination of an informative caption and carefully selected but beautiful image. His own captions are not simply a repetition of some sentimental quote (which he oftentimes sees) but he tries to convey more background information about each situation or location he has posted. A personal and unique statement in the caption combined with a special image prove that he was actually there and has experienced it for himself.

Generally, the interviewees seek authenticity both in the content they see as well as in the content they create. However, in regard to their profile, they also want to convey a unique life and aim to share content they consider as relevant. In order to achieve these goals, they often struggle to present an authentic self while adapting their profile pictures to the platform’s standards. This will be further explained in the next chapter.

4.2.4. Perception, understanding, and learnings

When consuming visual content on social media platforms such as Instagram, the interviewees also gain an impression of how users of the platform behave and what common standards and norms exist.

Perception and understanding: “Everything must be beautiful and interesting”

During the interviews, the term “beautiful” was associated with Instagram very frequently. The interviewees have a similar perception of the platform's images and some claim no matter if a post originates from a professional account or from a private user, the majority of images always have a very aesthetic and artsy look. It is a common understanding between Instagram users that one only shows the good, positive and pretty sides of life. Mary even claims that "obviously, one does not want to see ugly things in IG". Realistic images are fine for her but it's not necessary to see them. Hence, this might be the reason why the interviewees see positive images most often. As Julia states, many posts look "just like advertisements" which makes it hard to differentiate them from actual ads. In this context, Alex mentions parents on Instagram who showcase their children, trying to prove to the world how happy they actually are. Above all, it is strongly noticeable that “travel” is the most common subject everyone sees and uploads on his or her own profile, too. This gives a strong indication that people heavily associate positive feelings towards memories of their travels and it's worth sharing with the world. However, the interviewees claim it sometimes seems as if people travel all the time as they constantly post pictures of them travelling. Ellie, for example, is aware that most of such pictures are posted after the vacation. Still because some people post several photos over a long period of time it does seem to her as if everyone else besides her is constantly travelling. This makes her feel bad and annoys her a lot. The reason for said impression is probably the short amount of time she looks at each posting on her timeline feed and the high amount of pictures that are added every hour. Michael, who only posts pictures from his travels even admits that he could imagine that people misinterpret his life by this.

Similarly, if people see an apparently perfect lifestyle and perfect looks it has negative effects on them. Many interviewees noticed the pressure to look good on Instagram which not only refers to the physical looks (body and face) but also refers to the locations and surrounding they visit. Some may see it as an inspiration and seek a similar life, others develop self-doubt and either delete followers who do not add value to their life (such as Ellie) or they reduce their time on social media and with that automatically decrease the exposure of negative effects (such as Michael). In general, when the interviewees notice too many selfies, too many travel pictures and possessions it seems fake, unrealistic, staged, egocentric, showing off, boring, or they simply question the intentions behind it.

Generally, all interviewees have the same impression of Instagram: they see it as a platform for self-presentation, only showing images of the good and positive moments in life (mostly travel pictures), which are illustrated by beautifully shot and arranged photographs. In turn, this common understanding of the platform, its standards and norms applied by the users have a strong impact on one's own posting behaviour as well.

Learnings and the response to image-based communication

With the time and experience that users gain from visual social networking systems, they start to learn from each others' behaviour. These learnings become norms and standardised user patterns which in turn shape their own future behaviour. The interviewees talked about two different aspects: on the one hand, what they learn from visual content and on the other hand, how written content in relation to visuals appear to them.

In regard to the image-based communication, almost everyone noticed that Instagram's posts are presented in a beautiful format, nicely edited and perfected. They learn that Instagram is a platform where aesthetics play a huge role, which makes them strive for perfect shots for their own profile as well. Furthermore, the interviewees also mention specific motives, e.g. drone pictures of mountain peaks or nicely arranged meals from above. These are examples of popular posts which generally receive many "likes". In addition, there are specific photographic arrangements that are well-known on the platform. Lena provides the example of colour contrast: *"Objects in front of white walls, this allows you to play around with the contrast. It also looks very pretty. For example, let's say a colourful flower arrangement in front of a white wall - this just looks much more beautiful than a colourful flower arrangement in front of a bookshelf"*.

Also, people learn that it works well to show popular locations on their profile. Paul talks about the repetitive picture of an Italian lake with a boat, for which there exists even a dedicated Instagram profile. Even if it is not unique to post it, it has been proven to generate many "likes" and every interviewee state to be happy if they receive a few. For the photographers, it has become a standard to travel to said popular locations in order to perform in their job successfully. For ordinary users, however, it is also very common to post about their vacations and spectacular views and landscapes. The line between professionals and amateurs are blurred as well-known motives are photographed and posted by everyone. As for equipment, e.g. drones or high-quality photo cameras are available to everyone nowadays and people adapt their aesthetics and styles from what they see in the media which also includes social media. Consequently, it is hard to distinguish between the professional and privately taken photos.

This phenomenon of copying each other's motives and the resulting repetition of images on Instagram has become so obvious that there is a dedicated Instagram account for such cases, named "@insta_repeat" (Figure 4.2). The owner of the profile explains the idea about that profile as follows:

“I chose to stay anonymous because I didn’t think it mattered who I am. I am not trying to make overt value judgements or pretend to be the arbiter of what is good art. I am making objective observations about what I see online.” (@insta_repeat, retrieved 09/2018 on Instagram)

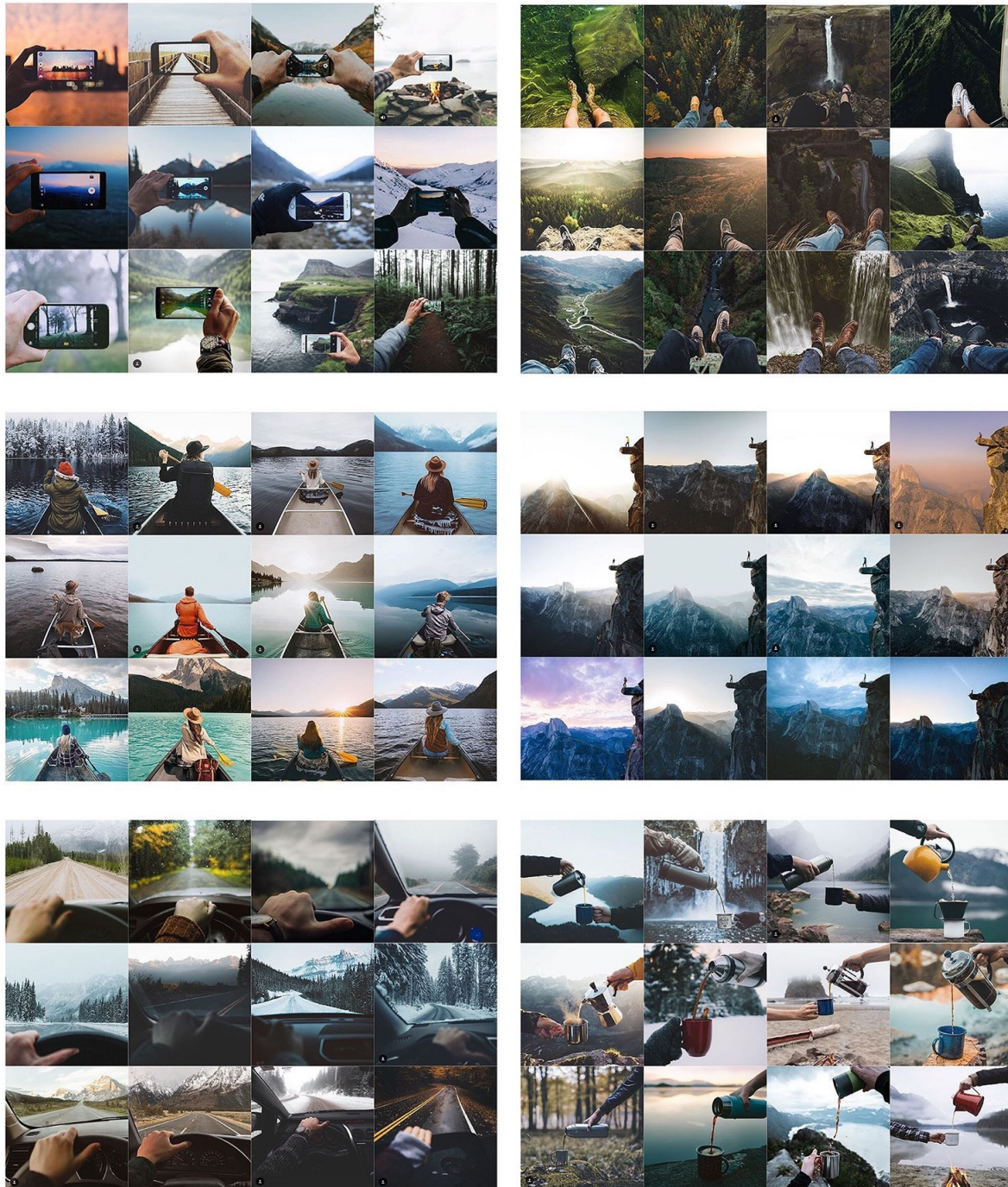


Figure 4.2: Posts on @insta_repeat’s account on Instagram
(retrieved by the author 09/2018)

The same applies for photo-editing and the use of filters. The number of apps that offer editing tools and filters on the app stores has increased by far. Editing only takes a few clicks

which can be even done on-the-go on the mobile phone. There is no need anymore for expensive editing tools for the personal computer, like photoshop. At first, many interviewees claim they do not like to edit their pictures because, by that, one changes the reality. However, as they see everyone else does it on Instagram, they all started to copy these editing styles. Yet, they stress they would only do it to highlight particular parts of the picture to make it look like they have perceived it in reality. As most of them use the same editing applications on their smartphone, the pictures get a very similar look. This especially occurs when filters are used. Due to that, the interviewees fear to be boring, and thus, try to post only unique things "no one else has". However, oftentimes these apparently unique pictures are also inspired by images people have seen in the past. This again makes them less unique.

In terms of the content they see, the interviewees point out that the repetition of motives is perceived in a negative way by the Instagram community. Too many selfies indicate that the person is conceited, too many travel pictures or possessions are seen as pretentious. Therefore, this must be avoided on one's profile. Consequently, they have to find a balance between showing what they have without being judged.

Regarding the texts, the interviewees also learn and follow several standards. They oftentimes mention during the interviews to be unimaginative about the content of a caption. However, as "everybody does it" and "everyone is used to it" they have to have a caption, too. Due to that, a lot of time is spent to find a proper caption and appropriate hashtags for their images. Some interviewees say, during their process of finding a caption they try to remember what they have seen others did. Motivational quotes or wisdom phrases are popular among many users. But as the interviewees aim to be more unique, they do not like to copy and try to find a special caption. Thus, they force themselves to add thoughtful captions even if they would not need them theoretically.

One interesting fact which a few interviewees mention was the way the text is presented visually: the captions are oftentimes separated by empty lines that only include a dot. Leo assumes that people don't want to make it obvious for others to see that they are using a great number of hashtags. Through the separating dots, users have to manually click on the "more" button to see the whole caption and hashtags. Ellie herself applies this standard. She explains that Instagram does not allow empty text lines, therefore, she has to add at least one character in each line, hence, the dots. She herself says to find it more aesthetic than a crowded caption section full of text. It could be possible that she does it for the reason that Leo mentioned: she wants to be found through the hashtags she uses but tries to reach her goal in a subtle way.

4.2.5. The self in image-based social media

All of the above-stated findings are all linked together with the concept of self-presentation. The intentions, motivations and expectations users have in the beginning may only be for passive use. However, over time, users become content producers and start to actively fill their own profile with photographs. The learnings they take by observing other accounts interacting and the values they develop by evaluating these social interactions have an influence on the way they want to be presented on Instagram. As a producer of visual content, two goals and motivations are self-expression and self-affirmation.

self-expression and self-presentation

Several interviewees stated that Instagram allows them to present themselves in a much broader way because it is easier for them to use visuals than text to express themselves. The different levels to communicate through images include colours, editing, perspectives and angles, combinations of several images, etc. In particular, videos are even more expressive through sound and moving images. Generally, the use of visuals is much broader than the one-dimensional nature of text. Many interviewees oftentimes struggle to find the appropriate words for their Instagram captions to express themselves and prefer to merely use images. Michael, for example, solely uses emojis in his captions, Simon complains to "often wonder what to write there". It seems that the interview participants have troubles finding the exact words to share their emotions and thoughts with their followers. Words are very explicit, thus many interviewees' believe that images are easier to use.

“you can better represent yourself and also more information can be integrated into a photo” (Tim)

“Oftentimes, so much more can be expressed within one picture [...] You share a photo and everybody knows immediately what has happened in your life. Integrating all of that into a (written) message is so much harder.” (Michael)

Another way of self-expression is the follower base. Most interviewees say they use Instagram for inspirational and sometimes informative reasons. In addition, they oftentimes follow accounts they can relate to or accounts of their interests. Hence, the accounts a person are a collection of the person's interests, opinions and viewpoints. However, Tim argues, that he is oftentimes misunderstood, as he follows politicians of a variety of political parties in order to receive a general overview of actual events. This made his friends question his political viewpoint because they interpreted his following as a support. Thus, it is not easy to interpret a followee-base of a user, without further explanations.

self-affirmation and the sense of belonging

Another interesting fact which was pointed out by some of the participants is the aspiration for self-affirmation; both by the followees and by the followers side.

By browsing through Instagram, users find people with similar interests which confirm their own behaviour. The accounts one follows are not merely a conglomeration of interests, it is also a reflection of personal opinions and viewpoints. Ellie “looks for her own online crowd” when she notices that other people post similar things as she does. This not only refers to the topics a post is addressing but especially also how the topic of the post is presented (e.g. how the image is shot, what part is shown, what caption is added, etc.). By following accounts with similar viewpoints and seeing their pictures on the feed, it affirms oneself and give a sense of belonging.

When it comes to developing a follower base, people strive for approval as well. Simon, for example, separates his personal interests into three different accounts: music, photography, cars. He explains that within a group of people with similar interests, he does not have to worry about misunderstandings. On the account which is dedicated to his car, he solely wants to exchange knowledge about cars, however, if he would post the same picture of his car on one of his other channels, he assumes that his friends will interpret it as showing off. This indicates that for him a homogeneous group of people serve as a safe space. As everyone has a common understanding of the intentions behind it, the perception of photographs is very similar and misinterpretations are very few. Lena also gains self-affirmation through her followers. She tells about the political party "Die Partei" which started to follow her. As the party represents part of her own political viewpoint, she takes it as a compliment and says to be proud that “Die Partei” considers to follow her.

4.2.6. Text and image in social communication (and the role of “time” and “effort”)

One main focus of this thesis is the difference between text and images, more specifically between written information and visual content in social communication. An interesting connection that emerged from the respondents is the close link between the use of images or text and the time and effort people are willing to dedicate in each case. This will be further explained in the following sections.

Generally, interviewees communicate on instant messengers on a daily basis. All participants use WhatsApp the most for reaching their friends, family, colleagues, etc. However, Instagram acts as the main visual social media platform for them to upload new pictures.

In order to understand the interviewees' view on visual and written communication, it is first important to know the communication tools that are available on Instagram.

Content creators can communicate through 1) a post (incl. images, videos, captions and comments), 2) InstaStories (incl. images, videos, sound, music, text, integrated exchange through polls, emoji slider, questions), and through 3) Instagram Direct (text, images, videos). As a consumer or viewer, it is possible to express one's opinion through comments and likes on a 1) posting or 2) on a story through Instagram Direct (text or emoji-reaction).

Use of the communication choices and behavioural patterns

Content creators see the image of a posting as their main focus. Most effort and time goes into the preparation of the image, starting with planning out the location or objects to shoot, finding the right way to shoot it (angle, equipment), selecting the most interesting one from an image pool, and finally editing them. The caption, however, is oftentimes not relevant anymore. The interviewees complain that they are too lazy to create long text or simply just don't have or want to take the time to think of a good caption. Thus, they either finish up with a single emoji, a short statement or a brief description of the image. Ellie, however, tries to start a discourse on Instagram about topics she finds important to talk about, e.g. body positivity or zero waste. Thus, she always tries to put more effort into her captions and to inform her followers about interesting facts.

Furthermore, for almost everyone from the interviews, communication on Instagram Direct only refers to InstaStories and they claim they never use this messenger to contact a friend. Only Paul sees the potential and benefit in using the integrated messenger as for him it's the perfect connection point to reach out to people he does not personally know but whose opinion and knowledge he values a lot.

"I think it's actually very interesting to see Instagram as a messenger because at the beginning I found it [...] partially even unnecessary the way I made use of it. But now it makes perfect sense because you have many people on it whose contact information you don't have. You often have no insight into the lives of others and what they experience. On Instagram, you can see in the stories 'Woah, you're currently doing that!' And then you write a message and then you go into the chat, you add some opinions. A lot happens there, you have a conversation base, which is usually a photo or a story or something, that's always really cool." (Paul)

For him, Instagram's users are a very important source of information and he really enjoys to connect and exchange opinions with his followers. However, he experiences other people's lives through their pictures and uses them as conversation starters. The comments afterwards are always linked with pictures or videos. For all the other interviewees, the only things that are exchanged on Instagram Direct are short questions or comments on a story, and no ongoing conversation is build up.

As consumers, the interviewees admit that commenting is not a common thing they do. If they do so, it is most likely a short compliment on a friend's post or story. The only tool they regularly use to express their opinion is to give a "like". Overall, when scrolling through Instagram's feed, the interviewees state that images mostly catch their attention a lot faster and stronger. Especially on a small screen, the amount of attention is even shorter so that they can only see the image at a fast pace. Due to that, they don't really pay much attention to the captions. They also claim they would understand the intention and message of a picture at first glance so that there is no need to read through every caption. Thus, they perhaps miss the intended message behind a picture and make their own judgement upfront.

Perception of textual and visual information

From the content creator perspective, the interviewees have the feeling they are able to express a lot more within an image than with text. For them, a lot of information can be compressed and summarised in one photo. Moreover, they have the impression that images are less imposing to transfer a message. It has a different tone than text, doesn't seem too harsh or imposing and give the users more freedom in self-expression. As Tim phrases it, it is much more subtle to frame a message inside an image because an explicit phrase might sound quite pretentious. Mary states that sharing an image on an image-based network is much more subtle. Sending the same pictures over an instant messenger feels too imposing to her and she does not want to be too pushy. On Instagram, she can share all of her activities and experiences and her followers can choose whether they want to look at her uploads or if they shortly scroll through. In addition, uploading an image is much faster compared to writing a text. As mentioned before, the users try very hard to create a pretty and interesting profile that offers relevant images and information. Thus, they always try to come up with some meaningful caption. When asked if the image would suffice, they agreed and added that this would save them much time and effort. However, they said they oftentimes don't even know what to write and only do it because they see people do it and copied this behaviour. If there is no caption, there would be something missing.

From the consumer's point of view, the majority of interviewees state to like visual content a lot better than text as it is more fun and visually pleasing, less effort and less time consuming to look at, and they have the impression that they can better grasp information in a short time. They admit to only read captions of pictures the intention is not clear to them. This, however, increases the risk of misunderstanding the majority of postings. By skipping the seemingly understandable image, they might misinterpret the actual message without even knowing. Nevertheless, the text is the more personal part as lots of beautiful pictures on Instagram overwhelm people; only when the pictures stand out from all other beautiful pictures, it becomes personal again.

Other communication tools which the interviewees do not regularly look at is text integrated

into an InstaStory or if the person starts to talk in a story. They claim that they oftentimes skip those because it takes too much time or it annoys them. This might be due to the use of the app on the smartphone. People usually use their mobile device on-the-go, very often as a tool for distraction. As Instagram is an app made for mobile, anything with audio is hard to consume when people are in public. They mute their devices to avoid distracting their surrounding, thus, audio on Instagram is oftentimes not perceived. In addition, the amount of time they pay attention to their phones is very short, thus anything that takes too long to consume might be skipped out of convenience.

The lack of time is connected with the fact that interviewees are oftentimes overwhelmed by the content. With a certain amount of followees, the timeline feed is constantly filled with a great number of images. In order to actually consciously look at each of these photographs, people claim it would take too much of their time and effort.

5. Discussion

In the previous chapter, an in-depth description and analysis of each interview has been conducted. Afterwards, the most important themes and issues that were pointed out in the interviews were summarised, linked together and interpretations were suggested.

In this chapter, the theoretical concepts which have been listed in the earlier chapter will be taken into consideration and applied on the interviews' findings and generated themes. By this, it will be shown whether the general concepts on image perception and interpretation as well as the theories behind self-presentation are well applicable on the findings and consequently, if they are still valid for the current technology and social media.

From the results of the empirical data, several topics and issues derived, which have also been mentioned by the theoretical concepts:

- visual communication and the role of images in social media
- the presentation of self on image-based social media
- the mobile phone and its role in visual communication
- the impact of image-based social media networks on people's well-being
- the shift from Facebook (text- and visual content) to Instagram (image-focussed content)

5.1. The ambiguity of images in social media

The nature of images has been a well-analysed aspect by several theoretical concepts. Müller-Doohm refers to Waldenfels' term "Doppelgestalt im Bild" (1997, p.85), which means that an image not only shows itself as a picture as is but it additionally reflect further information . This is dependent on external reasons, e.g. culture, society, society, etc., and thus, might not be apparent immediately to the both creators and consumers.

In this context, some interviewees are aware that there is a risk that other people misinterpret their intentions behind a picture they post. This indicates that interviewees see two different ways their image can be interpreted. Thus, they always evaluate their posts beforehand, whether it is appropriate and neutral enough to be shared. In particular, in cases where followers share the same interests and goals as the content producer, the community of followers acted as a safe space where no one needs to fear any misunderstandings. Simon, for example, is able to post pictures of his car in the dedicated account and does not have to worry about any judgements. As this account clearly communicates its focus on cars and the

aim to share experiences and tips, it only attracts interested and like-minded people. A post about his car is automatically understood as a neutral information and would not be linked to the owner. However, if he would have posted something about his car in his personal account, where he as the person is the main subject, his followers might interpret his posts in another way. Each post has some kind of connection with the producer, hence, people try to find a reason why Simon shares a picture of his car. He assumes that some of his friends on Instagram will therefore think that he wants to show off with his vehicle. In this case, the symbols exchanged through the image are not interpreted by people with a common understanding. As Müller-Dohm states, in order to identify truthfulness within images, people's understanding has to be based on a shared living environment and a common worldview. The *Doppelgestalt* of the image is quite visible here: the same picture (the photograph of the car) posted on two different accounts with two different user bases, conveys different information that can differ strongly.

5.2. The presentation of self in image-based social media networks

As already explained above, Goffman's (1990) theory of the presentation of self in everyday life turns our daily life and social situations into a theatrical setting. Each one of us plays a certain role on stage for an audience of people we meet in our daily social life. Similar to a theatre, there is a backstage area where the actors prepare and rehearse their role(s), which they perform on the front-stage in front of an audience. Depending on the compilation of people in the audience, the actress shows another character or role on stage. This metaphor applied to a daily situation can be e.g. the role of a daughter in front of the family, the role of a manager in front of the colleagues, or the role one has within a specific circle of friends. In each of these contexts, the person either hides or brings forth different kinds of characteristics. Hogan (2010) developed Goffman's theory by applying it to the context of social media. There, new problems emerge as the actors are not only facing one but several audiences simultaneously. Every person on social media usually has one account which is connected to all kinds of acquaintances; friends from high school, friends from university, work colleagues, family members, etc. Hence, they need to decide how to present themselves in a way that fits all different groups of followers. Hogan's suggestion of the lowest common denominator is very often the solution. (Hogan, 2010, p. 383)

Taking Goffman's theory and Hogan's version and applying them to an image-based social networking site like Instagram extends the concept of front- and backstage: the tools the actresses and actors use on stage are now restricted to the visual channel (Instagram posts).

Words are limited (hashtags) and the actors rarely speak or only very brief (captions). Their appearance on stage, their gestures and poses are their main tools to express themselves. Additionally, they can make use of the stage (the surround captured in a picture), its properties (personal belongings), and stage lights (filters). Given this set of tools, the actors now have the task to express and represent themselves on stage. The audience on such social media networks, as Hogan explains, cover different kinds of social groups. Hence, the actors now need to create a collection of images with which they are able to portray their characteristics.

In addition, due to the nature of social media platforms, content consumers are also always content producers and vice versa. With Goffman's metaphor, this could mean that actresses on stage are sometimes also part of the audience of another person's stage. They experience another actor's visual performance and witnesses the reaction in the audience. In this process, they learn two things: what kind of performances are popular and how these performances are presented. If everyone learns and copies what is commonly liked, each performance will look the same. This is currently criticised by several interviewees who claim that everything on Instagram is beautiful but generally very similar looking.

Here, we need to question whether images really enable a better self-presentation or not.

Images offer advantages but also disadvantages compared to written information. On the one hand, an image can cover a lot of information at once. "An image can convey more than a thousand words" and it "can tell a story" (Simon), "you can better represent yourself" and "put much more information into one single photograph" (Tim), and "oftentimes, a lot more can be said through an image. You send a picture and the other person is updated right away. To put all this into a written message is just too much effort" (Michael). Also, it can be done in a shorter amount of time than to put it in words, as "a video or picture is taken and uploaded within an instance" (Paul).

Moreover, images are much more open to interpretation. This can be advantageous in cases when people want to convey something but do not find the right words to express it (see Tim's example of communicating his Amsterdam trip). However, a wide scope of interpretation can also convey a misleading information, depending on the viewer, as it was explained above with Simon's several Instagram channels. Also, if everyone on Instagram simply copies other images that have been proven to be accepted by the community to avoid criticism and to increase their popularity, it is questionable whether these images actually represent the person.

5.3. The mobile phone and its role in visual communication

A factor that also has a strong impact on visual communication is the transmission of information through the mobile phones. Mobile phones are usually used on-the-go, where users are surrounded by a lot of different distractions and their attention span is limited to short periods of time. In addition, the phones' screen is relatively small and people have to scroll through, in order to see the content. If we apply this to Goffman's and Hogan's stages, it means that the audience's sight towards the "front-stage" is restricted and small and the actors on stage must fit a lot more of their performance into one "stage scene". Additionally, this makes it even harder for the audience to interpret the performance accordingly, as the information they receive is compressed. With the shortened attention span, text on mobile phones are simply ignored oftentimes and visual information is much easier to grasp. As Michael states: "*Well a text simply get lost [in the feed]. I think if you want to have the attention of so many people, you need to communicate in a visual way.*" (Michael) That is the case, in particular, when users want to decrease their time on social media to save time for other daily activities, such as Michael, and therefore cut short any unnecessary task on the social media platform.

Furthermore, mobile phone use is tightly linked to photographing. Many of the interviewees own a professional camera but barely use them due to its size and weight. Thus, they often end up using the camera that is integrated into the mobile phone. Only those who take pictures professionally, such as Michael, Flo and Paul, only post pictures on Instagram of their travel photoshoots. Nevertheless, the process of taking pictures has become a part of everyone's life and is oftentimes integrated into the lives as an activity. Julia, for example, plans to go for a photoshoot with her friend simply because she has seen a nice spot on Instagram. She even bought a new smartphone with a better camera for such use cases. For Flo, photographing has also become an experience that can be shared with a friend (who joins him in spontaneous night shoots in the mountains) or even with his mother (who drives him around to find the perfect spot and motive). Moreover, the editing process, which is now easily done on the many mobile apps, is a way to reflect on the past experiences: "*Especially when you edit photos of earlier times, all the feelings come up again.*" (Michael) Likewise, going through the "digital photo album" can bring back great memories and it's nice to reminisce on them (Julia, Lena).

The responds indicate that with the ubiquity of mobile phones and the constant use of them, photography has gradually become a natural part in everyday life for many. Photo-taking is an ever-present task nowadays, hence, some interviewees already started to consciously stop

themselves in doing them in order to “enjoy the current moment” a lot better (Alex, Ellie, Lena).

5.4. the impact of image-based social media networks on people’s well-being

In the most recent research, a lot of has been focused on the influence of social media on people’s self-perception and well-being. These effects were noticeable in the interviewee’s responds as well, which will be explained in-depth in this chapter.

A perfect presentation of life makes other people jealous

As mentioned above, Instagram’s postings are known for their high level of aesthetics and perfect arranged objects. The most relevant topic is the modern lifestyle and people share only the best moments in their daily life. This covers their homes, the food they eat and the restaurants and food locations they go to, the activities they perform and the people they spend time with, their possessions as well as their looks, and most of all, where they travel to. Every interviewee mentioned “travel” as one of the most popular topics that Instagram users post, including themselves. As Mary says, *"if someone was on vacation, they will definitely upload pictures to Instagram right away"* and she jokingly adds that people probably do that "to make others jealous". Another study on Instagram usage found a tendency that Instagram use and the act of following strangers show a slight increase in depressive symptoms and negative social comparison (Lup et al., 2015). There are users, who continue to post pictures from their travels even weeks after they already got home. Some of them are professional or hobby photographers, such as Michael, who has a pool of pictures that he collects from all of his past travels. As he only posts photographs of his travel’s landscape and nature on his profile, it might seem as if he is constantly on vacation or travelling. Ellie experienced exactly this case, where one of the people she followed uploaded several vacation pictures for weeks and it wasn’t clear if the person was still there or not. This really bothered and annoys her. Both Michael and Ellie stated even if they are aware that pictures do not need to reflect current events, it still triggers some kind of jealousy and makes them feel bad about their own life. Michael as a photographer mainly follows other landscape photographers and admits that even he sometimes experiences some kind of "FOMO", the acronym for "fear of missing out". This is a term used online which describes the feeling to miss out on something great when they see other people’s activities on social media and the pressure to join or do the same (urban dictionary, 2018) Michael

deals with this by reducing his followee count as well as his consumption on Instagram content in general.

Ellie additionally struggles with the constant input of people's appearance perfectly set in the scene on Instagram. One of her interests is the topic of body positivity and how people are able to accept their body and stop comparing themselves with others. For Ellie, it was very difficult to keep her self-confidence in times when she used to follow accounts where Yoga girls show off their skinny bodies in difficult Yoga poses. The effect of social comparison of the body-image has already been shown in Besenoff's (2006) research (see chapter 2). This influence did not add any value to her self-esteem but only made her feel bad about her body. Thus, she started to get rid of half of the accounts and ended up with only those, that did not affect her in a negative way. Mary also feels as if some people try to show off with an unrealistically perfect life and that users should be careful in believing the content they see:

"There are many show-offs on Instagram who display a beautiful life and who try to make other people jealous with this. In reality, it looks completely different, thus, one should be careful about that and should not trust everything one sees."

This has already been shown in Chou and Edge's (2012) research on Facebook's impact on the perception of other people's lives. They found out that heavy users of Facebook tend to perceive other people's lives as better and happier and thus have the impression that life is unfair. The researchers assume that users are faced with the two heuristics, the availability heuristic and the correspondence bias: people base their knowledge and perception on the posts they can remember and automatically think that the information they get is the general status of other people's lives, and "associate positive content with personality instead of situational factors" (Chou and Edge, 2012, p.118). Consequently, these two heuristics will certainly occur in Instagram as well, where only pictures of perfectly staged and happy looking people are shown in an infinite feed.

Image-based social media as a means of proof

Closely linked with the act of social comparison and its negative effects on the well-being is the pressure on people that create those feelings. Those pictures of happy moments are created by other Instagram users as well. Their motivation is either intrinsic or they have the pressure to keep up with other people's happy life and feel the need to prove that their lives are full of happy moments, too. Alex mentions parents who post pictures of their children and family, smiling and having a good time together. However, these happy moments don't apply at all times but on social media, it is conveyed as if this would be the standard. It is imaginable that other parents who see these postings again feel the pressure to show such kind of moments with their friends, too. Le Moignan et al. (2017) analysed this behaviour in their research on Instagram parents, who use the platform "as a means to evidence good

parenting" (Le Moignan et al., 2017, p.4935).

Mary, for example, recalls her past school-mate who shares every step of her life as a single mom on Instagram. This woman used the platform to prove that even as a single mom, who struggles with the divorce and such, she is able to handle everything well.

The presentation of relationships on social media has been analysed in scientific papers as well. Two studies examined the online behaviour of male and female in relationships on Facebook. The researchers found that those users who post pictures of their relationship with their partner were more happy and satisfied with it. Especially on those days they felt happiest about their relationship, they shared information about their relationship on the platform. Generally, couples showcased their relationship in similar ways, either through Facebook's relationship status or through the profile picture. Male users' relationship satisfaction was particularly dependent on the relationship status, whereas female users' rather consider the profile picture and how the relationship is presented (Saslow et al., 2012), Papp et al., 2012). Utz and Beukeboom (2011) particularly focused on the factors jealousy and relationship happiness. Their study shows that people with low self-esteem and a strong need for popularity tend to be jealous because they "try to compensate their low self-esteem by creating an idealized picture". (Utz and Beukeboom, p.511) On the contrary, people with high level of self-esteem use their social media accounts for grooming their relationship.

In the example of Leo, the girlfriend wants him to regularly post a picture of them. It seems his affection for her in private is not enough because it is not visible to others. She already posts about their relationship but as he does not, she probably fears that his affection for her is not strong enough and that this imbalance between their public affection may appear as if they wouldn't be happy. In order to actually demonstrate that their relationship is still working and that they are both happy, she asks him to post about it occasionally, too.

The need to be interesting to keep up with others

Generally, all users compare themselves to each other and everyone wants to keep up with their friends and followees. All the interviewees stated that they don't want their lives to be seen as boring, hence, they only post "exciting" things. Like stated above, the most common things about this are travel pictures, as this is a topic every person generally considers exciting, interesting and worth sharing. It seems as if the current goal in life is less focused on the possessions people own but rather the experiences they have. With travel, people not only showcase where they can afford to travel to, what they eat and what locations they stay at, which would be rather considered as wealth. Travel also means the luxury to take leisure time and time for relaxation, to be adventurous and cosmopolitan, and generally to be able to experience new things, and thus, to be interesting. Some interviewees said they to go nowhere particular for a period of time and therefore don't have anything exciting to post about. Hence, they instead post an old picture of a past happy moment and justify this post as

a nostalgic moment (see Nele). Mary even recalls throwbacks which refer to pictures of past moments that people reminisce about: "*sometimes I also post those 'take me back' things [...] when I feel wanderlust of France, there is usually a France 'throwback'*". This social media posting trend even has a dedicated day, namely Thursdays, resulting in the trending term "throwback Thursday" (Moreau, 2018). This trend already existed since 2003, however, it was not popular until it was used on Instagram. It now has become a very common thing to do. There are several hashtags used to tag such pictures: e.g. #tbt (442 million posts tagged), #tb (65.9m), #throwback (92.8m) (Instagram App, 2018). However, these throwbacks may not merely fill the current online posting gap. Instead, it appears as if people take this chance to remind the world they are still to be considered interesting because they have experienced or did something worth sharing in the past and this is not to be forgotten. This might not only be a reminder for others to see what one has done in the past but it is also a sort of self-affirmation and proof for oneself that life is not always boring and unexcited as it may seem at that moment.

Another very important role for the well-being of Instagram users is the number of "likes" they receive. Tim noticed that many of his Instagram contacts post selfies. However, there is a difference between his male and female friends on Instagram. Girls tend to take selfies alone or with friends and try to look cute. Boys rather take selfies to look manly and fit, showing their muscles after workouts. It seems there is a different way of conveying a selfie between the genders. Many of the interviewees claimed they do not post selfies. Also, none of them said that "likes" are in their mind when they post a picture on Instagram. Yet, it is one of the few tools that allow them to get feedback about their profile. The interviewees mentioned several times that they barely comment on other pictures or receive comments; if they do, it is mostly a brief compliment. However, giving a "like" is a common thing they do and receive. When the interviewees were asked about their position to "likes", all of them admitted that they do feel happy about it and that it gives them the confirmation that their post was well accepted and interesting. Generally, "likes" increase people's well-being. In this context, research found that especially selfies get the highest attention and receive the most likes on social media (Souza et al, 2015; Bakhshi et al, 2014). Thus, it is quite imaginable that people who want to keep up with others and base their popularity on the number of "likes" they get, to post images that have proven to generate many likes. Hence, they probably will post many selfies.

5.5. The visible shift from Facebook to Instagram - from text to image

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that all interviewees tend to move their online social communication and daily updates from Facebook to Instagram. Many of them have deleted the Facebook App on their phone and only log into their account on their desktop computer. Instagram, however, as a mobile-driven app with a limited amount of features on the web version forces them to keep it on their phone. Besides the device-dependency, interviewees nowadays use Facebook merely to explore events or to get updates on news in their Facebook groups. Personal updates about life have become very few on Facebook, instead, everyone now uploads pictures of them to Instagram. Hence, in order to be informed about one's friends and interests, it has become common to do so on Instagram.

Sleeper et al.'s (2015) study similarly found that participants wanted to reduce their activity on Facebook in order to be more productive. Instagram users, on the other hand, wanted to post more and improve their use (Sleeper et al., 2015)

Although Facebook allows photo-sharing, creating albums and such, the platform is still seen as a text-intensive social media network. Maybe not as much as Twitter but interviewees feel as if they are forced to write down their updates and cannot simply leave an image without any personal comment. Instagram, in contrast, is defined as a photo-focused network. This is clearly visible by its features, which include the image-based posts, the InstaStories, Stories' highlights, and InstagramTV. In addition, the platform encourages its users to even exchange pictures and videos in its chat, Instagram Direct, which serves as the internal instant messenger. Generally, it was quite noticeable that every interviewee compared Instagram and Facebook and oftentimes explained their use and the resulting advantages on Instagram based on its difference to Facebook. Tim, for example, still favours Facebook as he seeks information and longer discussions and cannot see this on Instagram. Instead, it is rather a "little companion of Facebook", which merely displays more pictures of friends. However, he sees the advantages as a content producer who can update his friends through subtle images instead of a prominent text. However, Michael is aware of the important role that text still has on such image-focused platforms because text makes it possible to truly understand someone's perspective and intentions: *"You can look at an image without text but of course the text can suggest a new perspective to look at the image or to better understand the context of it to round off generally."*

6. Conclusion and Future Work

Images and visual media nowadays play a crucial role in people's lives. They are a means of communication for self-expression and self-presentation. Particularly in the context of image-based social communication, their impact becomes quite noticeable. Users of image-based SNS such as Instagram learn from what they observe on the platform. They additionally learn how specific images trigger certain replies which are then compared with their values and goals. Based on these learnings, as well as on their initial intentions and motivations, they decide how they select and form their visual online posts. As the roles of content producer and content consumer have become interchangeable, people tend to believe in the things they see on image-based social media platforms, as the content is primarily produced by ordinary people which they can identify with. However, these pictures are comparable with professional advertisements and are similarly impactful. Especially on Instagram, where images are perceived as overwhelmingly beautified snapshots of life and where staged scenes of ordinary activities are used to present a perfect everyday life, negative feelings can be triggered. Users of such networks are aware of that, however, they still struggle with the strong influence that images have on them. With this knowledge in mind, people try to find a balance between an authentic presentation of themselves and their goal to convey a unique, interesting, and desirable life at the same time. Due to images' wide scope of interpretation and the combination of different elements, such as motives, perspectives, lighting, colours and much more, people have the feeling to be able to better express and represent themselves. They struggle comparably with the use of words and avoid reading and formulating text if they can. The use of mobile phones even enhances the strong focus on visual content as the attention span on mobiles is quite short, making it hard to grasp written information compared to images. Additionally, people claim they aim to reduce their time on social media, yet, they still want to consume as much information as they can. Hence, images are much more popular than text as they are "quickly grasped" and their consumption saves time. However, the ambiguous nature of images can also lead to misperception and misinterpretation of visual information as the viewer's context play a major role within the interpretation process. People know that text can help understand the context and intentions behind each picture, yet, they oftentimes are simply ignored. As a consequence, it is questionable whether an image by itself simplifies the self-presentation and self-expression or if it rather leads to further miscommunication. However, people also learn that image-based social networks such as Instagram are based on certain standards and become aware of platform-specific norms. For example, the rather strongly edited pictures on Instagram have become a matter of course, which is not much questioned by long-term users anymore. Although this kind of style might still cause misconceptions, people also

seem to see it as a natural element of the platform. Compared to the beginning of their usage, experienced users do not take it as serious and start to treat image-based content in a different way. As the interviews show, there is already a combinational utilisation of visual media. Instagram posts are used to capture a special moment in life, thus, can be especially beautified; InstaStories, however, are not modified, hence, they feel more realistic and lively and are perceived to better reflect the actual activities in a person's daily life.

Therefore, it would be interesting to see in future works how videos will act as a means of communication. Instagram has already introduced several features where moving images play an important role. Several InstaStories can now be permanently kept within one's profile as "Highlights" to showcase further personal information besides one's images. Short videos can be sent directly to friends and longer videos can be uploaded to one's own Instagram TV (IGTV) channel if the InstaStories are too short to express oneself.

Also, further research can also include participants with different demographics (e.g. teenagers or families) and different cultural backgrounds as this study primarily focused on German-speaking individuals of similar cultures. Moreover, complementing research on a larger amount of data of Instagram with additional quantitative methods may provide information about the relation between consumed and produced content. By analysing specific clusters of individuals and their followers, similarities between an individual's and its followers' visual content can be examined in more detail.

Images have always been and will be a part of social communication and this study confirms that they increasingly become a crucial means for self-expression.

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