Online Corporate Identities:
A multimodal analysis of the communication patterns in the social media marketing posts on #Instagram by three multinational companies

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to apply multimodal frameworks, which stem from Halliday's theory of systemic functional linguistics, and apply them to data extracted from the publicly accessible official Instagram accounts of three international companies, namely Nike, Starbucks and BMW. This is a qualitative and comparative study that examines the modal affordances of Instagram and analyses the posts on a textual level, in order to identify language patterns in the corpora, as well as from a social semiotic multimodal perspective, which encompasses the non-verbal modes such as image, layout and colour. The hypothesis is that the language of social media, Instagram in particular, has classifiable and identifiable patterns and grammars that are used to create a sense of community, which have social and practical implications for the users viewing the content and for the identity of the companies. This is supported qualitatively by identifying occurrences within the data in which particular communication styles and choices are made and by establishing what semiotic effects are recognisable in the computer-mediated communication.

Keywords: *Discourse 2.0, identity, language variation, mode, modal affordance, multiliteracy, **multimodality**, semiotics, sociolinguistics, social media*

1. Introduction

There are many terms that attempt to embody the interaction that is used in online settings such as digital rhetoric, computer-mediated discourse, and discourse 2.0 (Herring 1996, 1999; Tannen and Trester 2013; Eyman 2015). Since the 1990s, technology has developed rapidly and social media and computer-mediated interactions have become a daily practice in countless societies. Traditional forms of language and communication found in the media, academia, and social exchanges have shifted from being one-dimensional and highly text-based and are now highly *multimodal*. Multimodality is most modestly explained as the use of multiple modes to create a message. In linguistics, we can attempt to position multimodality by looking at two factions in the analysis of language and communication, namely non-verbal communication (NVC) and the code model (Langlotz 2013). Before theories of multimodality were developed, language theories were used in order to understand and interpret NVC. The code model: language as a formal system, as reflected by semiotic, syntactic and generativist theories, also significantly influenced the development of multimodality. Multimodality approaches language as a tool for social action. Rather than formal systems, the code model has its influence in terms of modal grammars. A multimodal approach is indispensible if we want to fully analyse communication today because it allows us to unrestrainedly look at situations with written and spoken language, but also with respect to image, gaze, colour,

layout, position and many other different modes and mediums that permit a broader analysis. Scollon and Scollon (2011: 170) describe multimodality as follows:

> 'Multimodality', a new term, has become a focus of academic and intellectual interest just within the past decade or so, while language has been at the centre of such interests for millennia. The task of relating multimodality and language, then, is a task of relating this new and fresh but still largely amorphous perspective on human communication to a complex, ancient, richly developed, and historical one which is differently naturalized in different cultures.

Multimodality provides a broader scope than conventional linguistic approaches and allows modal affordance, metafunctions and inter-semiotic/intermodal relationships to be examined. Further theoretical information on multimodality will be explored in Section *2. Theoretical background*. Additionally, the notion of *multiliteracy*, which is a critical component in reading multimodal communication and messages, is a concept that will be elaborated on later in this thesis. Being able to recognise and decode a modal grammar that is being employed, is fundamental in extracting the semiotic meanings of signs found in the multimodal posts. This thesis will endeavour to use sociolinguistic, multimodal, and ethnographic frameworks in order to analyse the official Instagram posts of Nike, Starbucks and BMW, and their online identities that are shaped in the process. Page et al. (2014: 5) define social media as the following:

> We use the term social media to refer to Internet-based sites and services that promote social interaction between participants. Examples of social media include (but are not limited to) discussion forums, blogs, wikis, podcasting, social network sites, content-sharing sites (like the video-sharing site, YouTube and the photo-sharing site, Flickr) and virtual worlds. Social media is often distinguished from forms of mass media, where mass media is presented as a one-to-many broadcasting mechanism (such as television, radio or print newspapers). In contrast, social media delivers content via a network of participants where the content can be published by anyone, but still distributed across potentially large-scale audiences.

Instagram is a tremendously popular social media platform. It has over 400 million active users and continues to grow, making it one of the largest networks of participants that is freely available. This is most likely also the reason why numerous organizations and multinational companies have chosen to use the social networking platform. Users are able to reach audiences that they may not be able to reach through traditional media outlets. Those responsible for creating the posts for Nike, Starbucks and BMW's Instagram accounts, are likely trained public relations or communication professionals. Networking with stakeholders, colleagues and contacts are important aspects of developing strong relationships for public

relations professionals. These relationships can be fluid and adjust depending on fluctuating needs. With the growth of online communication, practitioners have moved to the use of social media as an opportunity to extend their reach to a larger number of current and potential new contacts (Gilpin 2011: 232). Professionals and companies around the world are using Instagram to build relationships. Instagram was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and was launched on October 6th, 2010 as "a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures" (Instagram.com). Since its launch, the platform has unrelentingly grown and developed. More specific information on the functionality of the Instagram platform will be discussed in Section *3. Methodology*. The popularity of Instagram and other social media and networking sites has become a true phenomenon. As conventional linguistic analysis principally looks at language on a verbal level, as is illustrated in Section *4.1 Language-level analysis*, an additional analysis based on the other modes is needed to analyse Instagram posts. If a text-based analysis were to be done alone, the analysis of the posts would be limited to "a partial account of what's going on, it's like having sentences that aren't completed" (Kress as quoted in Bezemer 2012). Therefore, in Section *4.2 Multimodal analysis,* the corpus is also manually evaluated based on the analytical multimodal framework (*Figure 2*) that has recently been developed. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) have exemplified that several different *modes* need to be considered such as *image, layout* and *colour* in combination with text and writing to explore fuller meanings. *Modes* as defined by Bezemer and Mavers (2011: 196) are a set of resources for meaning making that are socially and culturally constructed, such as image, speech or gesture. More precisely, Bezemer and Mavers (2011: 196) note the following:

> Modes have different materialities shaped by the histories of cultural work, offer certain possibilities for representation. Given that material and cultural difference, there can never be a perfect 'translation' from one mode to another: image does not have words, just as writing does not have depiction; relations which in speech or writing are expressed in clauses and verbs are realized through 'vectors' in image; forms of arrangement 'syntax' differ in modes which are temporally or spatially instantiated.

The structural organisation of the posts, as well as possible patterns that may be identified in the process, will be explored in this thesis. Additionally, determining which mode to use, and which modes are available on a certain platform or which *modal affordance* it provides, are culturally and socially significant. Each mode can deliver a particular sign and affect the understanding for particular audiences (Kress 2009). Modal affordance is described as one of the four core-concepts that are common across multimodal research and will be discussed in more detail in Section *2.1 Multimodality*. Because a multimodal text can be understood as

having integrated meanings, it is reasonable that an integrated approach would be needed for a proper analysis. Hence, this thesis will take a qualitative and comparative perspective on multimodal aspects of the data and the linguistics variants found in each corpus, i.e. the Instagram posts taken from the different company accounts. The data has been complied as both screenshot images of the Instagram posts and a text-only corpus that contains the writing found in the user-generated *caption* section of each post. Moreover, the notion of a new online vocabulary that is used in these specific social media settings and how theories of *linguistic accommodation* and *code-switching* can be used in the defined contexts will be explored with elements such as #hashtags, emojis, and also in terms of the variation of language register that takes place. For example, a shift between corporate or professional language and a conversational tone or *Discourse 2.0*. These shifts require users to have a certain aptitude or multiliteracy when decoding the posts.

The Instagram posts by Nike, Starbucks, and BMW will be analysed in this study in order to identify patterns in the language, images and colours chosen in relation to their online corporate identities. These accounts were chosen with the intent to shed light on the different corporate domains while comparing similarities in usage of the platform as a device for social media marketing. The study will use the multimodal analysis framework by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) and computer-mediated discourse analysis framework by Herring (1996). Previous research in the field has included studies on synchronous chat room exchanges (Jepson 2005; Johnson 2006) and Facebook statuses (Lee 2001; Gouws et al. 2011) to study how individuals interact on social media. Up to now, there have not been many studies that combine developments in social media platforms, multimodality and the use of language and identity theories together, in order to explore how companies are constructing their online brand identities through multimodal communication. The purpose of this study is therefore to shed light on the latter by critically examining the posts by Nike, Starbucks, and BMW, notably by looking at language variation and social features. An examination of collective identity and ethnographic representations will be used as a basis to look at linguistic variation such as the discourse of corporate branding and style-shifting as inspired by Hymes who has stated that "A general theory of the interaction of language and social life must encompass the multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning" (Hymes 1972: 269). Page et al.'s book *Researching Language and Social Media* (2014), although intended as a student textbook, will be used as a guide for the methodology and research. Since the research field is still in its infancy, this book is the most up-to-date work currently available on the topic. I will attempt to substantiate the hypothesis, that the language of current social media, in particular

Instagram, has identifiable patterns of usage or a proposed grammar that is used to create a sense of community, which can have social and practical implications for the users and for the identity of the companies. A qualitative analysis of the discursive practices and modes used by the aforementioned international brands has been conducted. The posts have been compiled into brand-specific corpora, and the findings will be discussed in detail subsequently.

The relevance of this study stems from technological advances and recent shifts in how we look at language. These shifts, according to O'Halloran (2011), were first triggered by discourse analysts, who to interpret the vast discourse practices humans employ, required not only spoken or written language but an integration of language with other resources. This need was amplified by a rise in contemporary interactive digital technologies. Additionally, multimodal annotation tools have become more easily accessible and advances in methodological approaches for MDA have been made. This type of retrieval of information is common across disciplines and the shift for multimodal analysis is interdisciplinary. Social media is a contemporary interactive digital technology. An increasingly large percentage of society is using social media, which is reflected in the fact that the three official accounts being examined have over 60 million followers combined. Social media, in general, serves as a rich assortment of information and bountiful source of CMC and multimodal data, and, as such, it can provide relevant information for sociolinguistics and communication studies. As O'Halloran (2008) argues the following:

> The systemic functional (SF) approach to multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is concerned with the theory and practice of analyzing meaning arising from the use of multiple semiotic resources in discourses which range from written, printed and electronic texts to material lived-in reality.

Consequently, the previous research and theoretical backgrounds include a combination of sociolinguistic perspectives. An attempt to prove the hypothesis of this thesis and to define the variety of language on Instagram as having an interpersonal function is undertaken by answering the research questions provided below.

1.1 Research questions

There are four multifaceted research questions that this thesis will attempt to answer in order to uncover the language patterns and sociolinguistic identity features in the multimodal Instagram posts. Each question attempts to uncover the patterns in the posts from a particular

approach found in the analytical and theoretical frameworks. The approaches examined are verbal functions, identity, computer-mediated communication, and modal affordance.

i. In terms of verbal functions, how can we describe the level or register of language and vocabulary being used in the posts? (Informal or formal, professional, conversational, technical, neutral or mixed) What conclusions can we draw from these findings? Which orthographic features and lexical terms are distinctive? Can we identify thematic linguistic trends from this?

ii. With regard to computer-mediated communication or discourse 2.0, are there patterns in the discursive practices to the effect that there is a new genre or variety of language for social media with its own variations and lexicon? Is the language used platform- or network-specific? Are there identifiable or significant amounts of non-standard orthographic variations and specific styles being created or employed? How are hashtags and emojis incorporated into the posts?

iii. Concerning identity and community, does style-shifting allow companies to negotiate their previously established identities in affordance to a new and broader audience? How does the chosen mode of communication affect the companies' identities? Are they able to re-invent, reinforce, or alter their public image and address wider audiences? How are the company's mission statements and values presented? Where are the posts positioned in relation to others, and how does each company position themselves within the community?

iv. In the matter of multimodality, which modes are most prominent, i.e. does the text or the image seem more substantial for meaning making or are they interdependent? Does the environment or frame make the image more salient, and can the text be as meaningful without the image or outside of the context of Instagram? In other words, which mode or semiotic resources are being employed and are there specific modal affordances? For example, what does the text afford that image cannot and vice-versa?

The questions above extend beyond the verbal level and involve complementary modalities, to highlight the patterned interplay of semiotic modes, as they are used to strategically project a certain version of reality. The use of multiple semiotic modes for persuasive means and meaning making through interrelations can transform reality (Maier 2014: 246) and so each mode should be considered. Moreover, the questions are rather synchronic in nature as they are focused on the language and modes in the here and now. The focus will be on which patterns are identifiable, not in comparison to the past but as compared between accounts.

Multimodal interactional analysis has a strong social approach and looks at the dynamics of the interaction. The questions above are intended to expose identifiable patterns in support of the hypothesis. Also, they provide insight into multimodal analysis and highlight the social significance and importance of analysing social media language and communication, as well as how organizations are able to use the modes to their advantage. Men and Tsai (2015) have determined that the use of a conversational tone in corporate social media posting engages people more than traditional formal messages, as results have shown that there is a link to increased trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality. Sung and Kim (2014) discovered that when a personalized approach was used by organizations, users and associates are more willing to spend time and money to develop relationships, which translates to building the corporate brand image and public engagement. The aspect of tone will be explored in the findings of both the language-level and multimodal analyses. Pronoun usage such as *we* and *I,* as they are used quite frequently by the companies, permit a sense of identify to be created and negotiated. The terms for addressing their followers and the public audience are also examined. In addition, *address terms* and *in-group* language will be looked at. Hashtags and the incorporation of emojis into the text as sentence level features will be monitored. Online vocabulary has particular phrases and topographies such as #TBT, selfie and regrams, which to be understood may require membership in a certain community of practice (Eckert 2006). How this is accounted for and other communication strategies and patterns will be discussed in the findings.

2. Theoretical Background

Previous research has been conducted on various computer-mediated discourse channels such as chartrooms, blogs, Facebook and Twitter posts from a variety of academic fields including but not limited to linguistics, psychology, sociology, education, business and media studies (Lee 2001; Stewart et al. 2001; Koller 2005; Richter and Riemer 2009; Saransomrurtai 2011; Zappavigna 2011). This study is primarily a sociolinguistic investigation, and the theoretical background of this paper is relatively varied in that, unlike traditional sociolinguistics, ample attention is placed on what traditional linguistics might label as *extra-* or *meta-linguistic* features. As Domingo, Jewitt and Kress (2014: 1) maintain, these features have become a large part of the current linguistic landscape:

> The contemporary landscape of communication is marked by a profound change in the uses, forms and functions of writing. Speech has been and remains a major means of communication in face-to-face interaction although usually accompanied by gesture,

gaze, body posture and so on. In short, speech is but one mode in a multimodal ensemble. When it comes to inscribed communication, writing has tended to dominate in the context of print. The place and role of language in inscribed communication is, however, changing in digital forms of communication. Writing and image taking on new functions and relationships. Technological developments, notably web-based audio-visual applications (e.g. Skype) and speech-based applications (e.g. transcription software) together with the more generic potential for image and movement in online digital environments have led to two particularly significant changes. First, image is more and more taking the place of writing at the centre of the communicational stage. Second, the many screens of the contemporary landscape are, increasingly, displacing the media of the printed page. One consequence of this is that it is increasingly problematic to consider writing in isolation from the multimodal ensembles in which it is embedded. Following from this, understanding the function of writing, that is, what it is being used to achieve, becomes increasingly complex, particularly when seen as part of the endeavour of multimodal composition. Beyond the design of any multimodal ensemble there is a need to distinguish between the existing 'pre'-designed constraints and potentials of a technological platform (e.g. Wordpress) and what can be done on or with it in terms of writing.

Consequently, this new landscape necessitates new research methods. As a supporter of the Kress and Van Leuven school of thought on multimodality and their conviction that most contemporary linguistic studies are in one way or another multimodal, in this thesis, I will incorporate three types of frameworks and theoretical backgrounds. The three perspectives chosen highlight previous works in the branch of sociolinguistics with a focus on language and identity, to permit an examination of the ethnographic features of the posts to be conducted. Also, frameworks on computer-mediated communication (CMC), which have been used by linguists such as Herring and Bourlai to analyse Tumblr posts in their work entitled "Multimodal communication on tumblr: i have so many feels!." The 2014 ACM conference on Web science will be used to look at the discourse 2.0 features such as hashtags and emojis. And evidently, the theoretical background of multimodality and its origins will be discussed below.

2.1 Multimodality

Multimodality has historical origins in assorted branches of linguistics including Conversation Analysis (Goodwin 2000; Mondada 2006;) Systemic Functional Linguistics (O'Halloran 2008; Herriman 2013) and Social Semiotics (Kress 2009; Jewitt 2011) (see *Figure 1*). It has been supposed that Multimodality had early roots in the 1950s with the *Natural History of the Interview (NHI)* project, but then those roots evaporated. The NHI project was an interdisciplinary project carried out at Stanford University in advanced behavioural science 1955–56. The aim was to develop a model of non-verbal communication in psychology

interviews in order to comprehend what was not being said i.e. through NVC. The researchers used structuralist linguistics to model the codes of NVC. Early studies in NVC (Goffman 1955; Kendon, Scheflen, Birdwhistell 1955; Argyle and Dean 1965) looked at eye contact and the correspondence of facial expressions between apes and humans, stemming from studies of natural history i.e. mammalian communication (Darwin). But the early studies failed because they did not have a framework to follow (Hecht and Ambady 1999: 3). It should be pointed out that structuralism lost its influence to generativism, which was not interested in NVC and therefore a departure from the holistic view of communications as generativism has a narrower research interest. Afterwards, the roots of present-day multimodality seemed to originate within qualitative sociolinguistics and Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (1967), which focuses on the functions of systems of forms. Systemic functional grammar assumes that language is a tool for social interaction and has evolved to meet our communicative needs in society though it is not a formal theory of language. It proposes that users can make different choices from the systemic functional grammar, which consists of systems networks, e.g. the 'modality network'. If we use a cereal box as an example, some may express their opinions about the box in one way e.g. more directly by saying *It is ugly*, as opposed to another who may say *I do not find the box aesthetically appealing*. As such, humans have the choice to take different stances on the ways in which they reveal their opinions for the box. This in turn carries its own meaning because the choices we make are never neutral; rather they construct the world we are talking about (Herriman 2013: 4). The practices serve the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual function. Halliday's SFG central framework extends to multimodality in linguistic meta-language (Herriman 2013: 3). The focus is not only on the sign-maker but also adequately on the object itself and a complex system of networks. For example, if we again take the cereal box and try to find out if there is a hidden grammar for all cereal boxes, we would need to determine if there is a grammar for the colour, size, shape etc. of the box and how the grammars are orientated for the box. This is not a formal grammar, as grammar means a regular conventional system of organising signs into patterns and trying to detect the system, but a set of system networks which are there to make complex choices from. For the purposes of this thesis, an effort will be made to uncover the patterns of social media marking communication on Instagram and to find out if there is a grammar or being established that can be observed through organising the signs into a conventional system. Modern Social Semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001, 2002, 2006; Jewitt 2011; Bezemer and Mavers 2011) also originates in Halliday's SFG framework, as does Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), which has a similar focus on meta-functions in

its approach to reading images. Consequently, a system of networks was created for visual semiotics and there was a shift in 2003-2005, which re-evaluated SFL to have a stronger focus on context and interactional sociolinguistics. The approach can differ depending on the situation as the situation shapes the mode. As the posts are not necessarily shaped by a grammar but rather the situation, there is a stronger focus on the sign-maker, and Kress focuses on the process of sign-making (Jewitt 2011: 29). More recently, the notion of 'Multimodality' has been used to analyse mediums that have been developed with globalization and technological advances in communication. Traditional forms of conversation analysis (CA) have also largely been incorporating modes such as gaze with advancements in technology, making it easier to develop software that can account for multiple modes. Abundant attention in discourse analysis studies has been given to the verbal system and its semantic structure, but this constraint has left other ways of making meaning such as colours, images, sounds, and flashes to be overlooked. The studies have thus been less than exhaustive and non-comprehensive, so multimodal discourse analysis was started in the 90s as a solution (Zhu 2007). Since the 90s, these changes have generated frameworks and core-concepts for the branch of multimodality and there are even departments which are now entirely focused on multimodality such as *MODE,* which "is a node of the National Centre for Research Methods [...]. It develops multimodal methodologies for social scientists, providing systematic ways to investigate all modes of communication used in digital environments" (MODE 2016). According to Langlotz (2013), there are four central approaches to multimodality, which are the following:

1. (Systemic functional) multimodal discourse analysis e.g., O'Toole, O'Halloran, Stenglin;
2. Social semiotics e.g., Kress, Van Leeuwen, Jewitt, Bezemer;
3. Multimodal interactional analysis e.g. Norris, Scollon and Scollon;
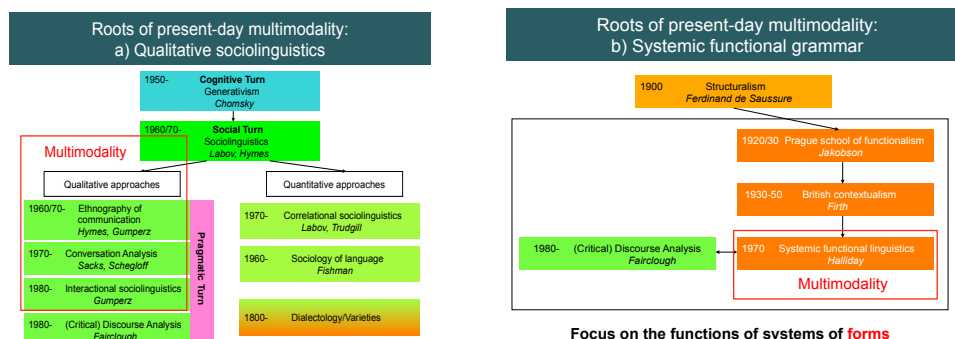4. Multimodal conversation analysis e.g., Deppermann, Mondada, Streeck, Goodwin, Heath and Luff.

Figure 1. Source: UNIL Moodle (Langlotz 2013)

This thesis uses the term *multimodality* as it would be used in the social semiotic approach as proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). Bezemer and Mavers (2011: 191) have established some principal aspects to multimodal analysis. They establish that there are four central core concepts:

> Four core concepts are common across multimodal research: mode, semiotic resource, modal affordance and inter-semiotic relations. Within social semiotics, a mode is understood as an outcome of the cultural shaping of a material through its use in the daily social interaction of people. The semiotic resources of a mode come to display regularities through the ways in which people use them and can be thought of as the connection between representational resources and what people do with them. The term modal affordance refers to the material and the cultural aspects of modes: what it is possible to express and represent easily with a mode. It is a concept connected to both the material as well as the cultural and social historical use of a mode. Modal affordance raises the question of what a mode is 'best' for what. This raises the concept of inter-semiotic relationships, and how modes are configured in particular contexts. These four concepts provide the starting point for multimodal analysis.

Modes are an essential part of multimodality, which leads to the fundamental question *what is a mode?* "Modes are cultural technologies for making meaning visible or tangible, that is evident to the senses in some way. In focusing on modes, there is a need to begin to tease out what the *affordances* of the different modes are in order to see how and why each of these modes is taken up in on-line environments" (Domingo et al. 2014: 4). There are certain affordances that each mode may accomplish better than another. For example, we can ask questions like, *What things can each mode do well? less well? or not at all?* For showing colour, image may be better than writing. These are design decisions that are afforded to those in charge of creating the posts. In the study by Domingo et al. (2014), the importance of image and text are evaluated in terms of the social situation and needs of bloggers. With Instagram, the platform's structures do not have constraints on the amount of text one is able to write, unlike other social media platforms or networks such as Twitter. There is however a certain cultural understanding or society of Instagram users that has made the image the central form of interaction. Culture and technology in the social world shape the semiotic resources available for communication and the way we interact. The social orientation of technology plays a large role in understanding which potential limits are put on writing and other modes for each platform. Which modes for meaning making are most visible on a platform, e.g. still and moving image, colour or writing, for instance can facilitate meaning making and the type interaction takes place (Domingo et al. 2014). The constraints on Instagram are thus not only limited by certain technological elements but also by social norms and modal affordance. Another central aspect in multimodal analysis is the consideration for

modal affordances. Modal affordance signifies the means of enabling certain meanings that are best expressed through the use of a particular mode and what each mode provides for making meaning. Adami (2014: 134) asserts that interactivity is afforded in digital texts:

> Digital texts afford interactivity; they not only represent certain meanings but also enable 'users' to act at given sites and achieve certain effects. Links, buttons, search fields, and so on are not only *signs* making meaning on the page, they are also *sites* of action, producing a changed textual situation; in that, they represent an analytical gap for disciplines focusing on text and sign-making, including multimodal analysis.

Similarly to Adami's study (2014), this thesis uses a social semiotic approach with a multimodal framework for the analysis of the Instagram posts. It reviews the language use along with the signs and discusses the relation between the mode of image and text used to activate Halliday's (1978) three metafunctions *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual*. The choice to use a certain mode by the companies is to assume that their audience will be able to interact with the content on Instagram. A certain level of multiliteracy is thus essential. Multiliteracy is a concept that was created with the development of multi-dimensional mediums and technological innovation. In terms of multiliteracy, we can say that a new definition of literacy has been developed because instead of text found printed on paper, the shift guided by the Internet has led to more texts being found on screens. Information is accessible in many different ways and on many different subjects. New media practices are continuing to evolve. Combining these evolving practices has shifted the generally used evaluation as being literate, and it has extended the concept to different types of literacies for various methods of communication that surpass the written word. How we understand messages as they are presented to us through different and evolving platforms and with new terms and phrases is a skill-set that will likely be continually learned and developing as the advancements in technology continue to progress and evolve, and in turn, more modal affordances are applicable. For example, the technology we use to mediate discourse is constantly transforming and the mediums available to communicate and create meanings or messages are not solely computer-mediated in the literal sense, but now also mobile phone-mediated, tablet mediated and even smart-watch constructed. There is a recognised theoretical background that has established the term Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and it will be used going forward. The theories and frameworks focused on CMC will be discussed next.

2.2 Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) and discourse analysis (CMDA) are topics that have been examined by many prominent researchers in the field of linguistics such as Tannen and Trester (2013), who developed the concept of *Discourse 2.0*. Other previous studies on the topic of CMD have been conducted by Herring (2001, 2004, 2007), e.g. her research done with Bourlai (2014) on Tumblr and on cross-cultural CMC. Herring explains (2001) the difference between CMD as and CMC in the introduction to *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis:*

> Computer-mediated discourse is the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers. The study of computer-mediated discourse (henceforth CMD) is a specialization within the broader interdisciplinary study of computer-mediated communication (CMC), distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus. Most CMC currently in use is text-based, that is, messages are typed on a computer keyboard and read as text on a computer screen, typically by a person or persons at a different location from the message sender. Text-based CMC takes a variety of forms (e.g., e-mail, discussion groups, real-time chat, virtual reality role-playing games) whose linguistic properties vary depending on the kind of messaging system used and the social and cultural context embedding particular instances of use.

Also, work stemming from the field of traditional conversation analysis attempts to bridge the gap between turn-taking and traditional two-way interaction in an effort to examine more closely the effect of new technologies and social media on conversations or discourse as one-to-many interactions (Mondada 2006). To date, there exist some early studies on chat-room talk, and on emoticon usage on mobile phones (Thurlow and Brown 2003; Jepson 2005), which did not necessarily follow contemporary frameworks as they are used today; nevertheless, they are still very relevant to this study as they have streamlined contexts that can be applied for this study. Consequently, traditional discourse analysis needed to have further specifications and changes made to its structure in order to cover the norms and allowances of computer-mediated discourse, and now what is typically referred to as Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis or CMDA (Herring 2007). Determining whether the platform of Instagram is synchronous or asynchronous is slightly two-fold because the response element in corporate Instagram usage is a rather dynamic concept. In fact, as there is a *comment* section rather than a *reply* section and the comment is many times not directed at the poster. The comment can tag another friend on the platform to make a remark about something in the photo, and in this sense could incite synchronous communication between followers, but in terms of corporate use it is safe to say that the platform is asynchronous.

However, conversations can be started in direct response to a question in the caption section, such as with Starbucks' pattern of posts labelled *#whereintheworld*. These posts follow a self-made structure and ask their followers to comment on the locations of a Starbucks store that is displayed in the photo, but there are usually no direct replies from the company. Thus there are varying types of interactivity that can be found on Instagram; and it is up to the user to determine which type of interactivity each post will consist of. Adami (2014: 134-135) explains that *interactivity* has many forms, such as analogous human-system interaction or user-message interaction all of which consist of an interaction with text and media and can be referred to as interactivity. In terms of semiotics, meaning manifests through the interface and what users can do to a text. The affordance of a medium or text in different types of media allow the user to mediate communication in a particular form, and as a result, the interactivity of social media platforms defines how users can make meaning there. Multimodal discourse analysis extends the theory of interactivity and takes the concept to the semiotic level. MDA is concerned with theory and analysis of semiotic resources and the semantic expansions which occur as semiotic choices combine in multimodal phenomena often found in CMC. The inter-semiotic (or inter-modal) relations arising from the interaction of semiotic choices, known as *intersemiosis*, is a central area of multimodal research. MDA is also concerned with the design, production and distribution of multimodal resources in social settings (e.g. Van Leeuwen 2008), and the *resemioticisation* of multimodal phenomena which takes place as social practices unfold (O'Halloran 2011). O'Halloran also presents some challenges facing the development of frameworks for MDA and processes of resemioticisation as the spaces where multimodal communication unfolds are complex. Encompassing the vast expansion of semiotic recourse that are available on social media and how this can continue to be developed is a daunting task. For the purposes of this thesis, a combination of multimodal discourse analysis and computer-media communication theories will be merged in order to best interpret the intersemiosis of the posts. Ongoing research will be needed in the field as CMC is rapidly evolving. On-line communication will undoubtedly undergo structural and societal changes overtime as new interfaces are developed. New challenges may arise in CMD as technical enhancements to popular channels come into fruition. As Herring (2001: 4) has established, "CMD is not just a trend; it is here to stay. For as long as computer-mediated communication involves language in any form, there will be a need for computer-mediated discourse analysis." One of the more recent enhancements to CMC has been the development from *emoticon* use, which was developed in the early days of e-mails and analog cellphones, to the phenomena and dominance of the artfully and commercially developed *emojis*. For

clarification purposes, it is important to define the difference between emoticons and emojis, which is not necessarily commonly understood. Many people tend to use the two terms interchangeably, although there is a clear difference between the two. An emoticon can be typed without having to adjust the font or keyboard in most western societies, for example consider the very commonly used smiley :), while an emoji must be typed from a specific emoji keyboard and is a more animated version that does not integrate into many traditional word-processing systems. Also, emojis differ from platform to platform and are not easily transferable. For example, while I was compiling the corpus for this thesis, I had to manually transfer and copy a .png version of the emojis that were posted in the Starbucks posts into my caption corpus as Microsoft Word does not support the emojis as font. Technology journalist Hern has provided an excellent description of the difference between an emoticon and an emoji in his post in *The Guardian* from February 6th, 2015 that was published after dialogue about an emoji lawsuit was widespread in the media headlines. He states the following:

> An emoticon is a typographic display of a facial representation, used to convey emotion in a text only medium. Like so: ;-) Invented multiple times over human history, its internet-era genesis is widely considered to have occurred in September 1982, when computer scientist Scott Fahlman suggested to the Carnegie Mellon University message board that :-) and :-(could be used to distinguish jokes from serious statements online. Shortly thereafter came the name, a portmanteau of the phrase "emotion icon". In contrast to the grassroots creation of the emoticon, emoji were created in the late 1990s by NTT DoCoMo, the Japanese communications firm. The name is a contraction of the words *e* and *moji*, which roughly translates to pictograph. Unlike emoticons, emoji are actual pictures, of everything from a set of painted nails () to a slightly whimsical ghost (). And where emoticons were invented to portray emotion in environments where nothing but basic text is available, emoji are actually extensions to the character set used by most operating systems today, Unicode. In essence, emoji are treated by the computer as letters from a non-western language, in much the same way as Japanese and Chinese characters are. But that also means that the software has to explicitly support them – otherwise it is forced to display a placeholder icon, or even just a blank space (which you might see between the brackets in the paragraph above if your browser doesn't support emoji). It also means that each company has to provide its own interpretations of what the emoji descriptions should actually look like – and they don't always agree. Take the implementations of the "dancer" emoji: for Twitter and Apple, it's a female flamenco dancer. But for Google, it was, until recently, a John Travolta lookalike dancing disco style. And now it's a weird blobby thing. So if you're about to tell someone "you look gorgeous, like a """, make sure they aren't reading it on a new Android phone.

Apple Google Google Twitter
(Old)   (New)
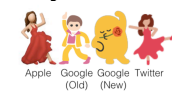
Emoji-laden posts may even be considered slightly pictographic. Since the development of emojis, there has been an ongoing discussion about the extent of usage that is becoming the

norm in CMC today. The culturally significant meme that has circled the Internet can be seen below.
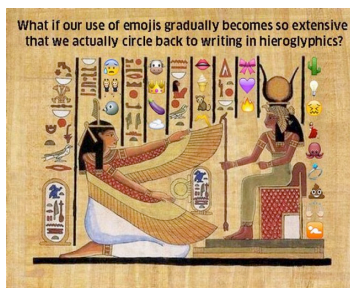
The choice to use emojis or to avoid their use is likely deliberate and premeditated as their presence or absence may be in part a function to uphold certain aspects of the companies' brand identities. A brand identity is how a company wants to be perceived by the public, which can include overall look, tone, or logo. As we use language to construct our identity and as the emoji is a language-level feature in CMC, it has many sociolinguistic implications. Language and identity theories will be discussed next.

2.3 Language and Identity

Language and Identity as a topic located in sociolinguistics is one of the most key and pertinent research fields because it allows for a better understanding of how a speaker or sign-maker is able to establish and construct their identity, and highlight how others may perceive their language-use and what this asserts about the society or community. Identity features in language are central and this focus can determine how the companies' Instagram posts reinforce their pre-established public and online corporate identities. *Identity* is a powerful concept as it influences many important aspects of life. Affiliation to certain social groups allows individuals to draw strength but can also cause friction with other groups. Stable definitions of community and identity have not been established in scholarly work as the terms have been used to refer to many diverse points such as group memberships and internal meaning systems. The meaning of the term *identity* is also unclear in popular culture although it is widely used. The linguistic perspective on virtual community expands to include different modes used to construct social bonds and communicate on Instagram. This includes language use but also colour and image as forms of semiosis (Vignoles et al. 2011: 2). For the purposes of this thesis, *identity* will be used as a broad term to encompass the widespread and fundamental meaning as the often complex answer to the question "Who are you?" The *you* can be in reference to an individual or a larger group in society. The question requires one to

self-reflect and respond introspectively. This can result in categorical answers referencing membership in a group or between groups and individual ideas about oneself. In general, identity is made up of both who you think you are, individually and collectively and also who you act as being in interpersonal and intergroup interactions for social recognition from others (Vignoles et al. 2011: 2). In this thesis, the online corporate identities of Nike, Starbucks, and BMW are examined. For international companies, the image they provide to the public can have a large effect on the success of their business and their brand identity. Maier (2014: 245) highlights how in the age of social media it is no longer possible for companies to omit actions of transparency without damaging their reputation, persona or competitive advantage. Maier (2014: 245) confirms that "the idea that business enterprises have some responsibilities to society beyond that of making profits for the shareholders has been around for centuries. However, in the contemporary context, this idea has rapidly developed in ways that might have been difficult to imagine or anticipate even a few decades ago." With reputation and profit on the line for companies, proper communication in online public settings is a key concern. The styles chosen can account for loss or gain of affiliation and collectivity. The representations and constructions of a company's beliefs and core values may be presented through social media and can have daunting outcomes. Men and Tsai (2015) distinguish a key factor for social platforms is how companies interact and communicate to build relationships online. How this is done has been analysed in studies (Men and Tsai 2015) that have found that in blogs, dialogical communication aids in successful relationship cultivation. Disclosure of information and interactivity are also effective strategies for building quality relationships with the public on social media. Authentic communication that seems to be unbiased and transparent is often respected. "Thus, communicating in an authentic, genuine, personal, and consistent way works to foster public engagement and nurture relationships" (Men and Tsai 2015). As with most forms of communication, the interlocutor has a choice of what to disclose. However, on social media and other similar platforms, there are often certain *terms of use* that set parameters of what must/can be disclosed. This may cause style-shifting or a consistently negotiated identity, as a conversational tone may be constricted by a social responsibility and as a result shifts between a rather informal conversational tone and a corporate or socially responsible tone can occur. Wiley's (1994) concept of the *semiotic self* has been expanded upon to include contemporary social networks. Identity is seen as the result of power and structural dynamics whose boundaries are constantly being negotiated. These boundaries are complex in social media as identity construction online is not embedded in time and space (Giddens 1991). This results in the blurring of personal and professional

identities in CMC environments and online interaction. The distinction of personal versus professional in social media is often unclear and so consideration of both structure and content should be done on an individual case basis (Gilpin 2011: 233). Online identities have essentially become a sub-category of the term identity. The findings based on these identity considerations will be looked at in Section *5. Discussion*.

3. Methodology

The research methodology employed for this thesis is qualitative and comparative. By selecting three companies from various fields and comparing their language use on a single platform that has the same modal affordances available to them, and by uncovering language patterns or practices that are consistent in all three accounts, we are able to find out how the communicative and meaning-making practices have been conventionalised on Instagram. The subjects that I have examined are a sub-set of the Instagram community as all three accounts are official corporate accounts, which have been marked by a blue checkmark otherwise known as a verified badge. Accounts marked with a verified badge certify to users that the account is the official and verified account of a celebrity, public-persona or organization (Instagram.com). In order to analyse these certified posts, I will use a framework, first proposed by Adami (2014), that focuses on metafunctions and is well suited for the objectives of this thesis. Using Halliday's (1978) three metafunctions as a basis for the framework, this thesis will look at how language is used to perform the functions of (1) saying something about the world or an ideational function; (2) saying something about those involved in the communication or the interpersonal function; and (3) saying something about the text or the textual function. This analysis will look at the signs and their interactive meanings. These metafunctions work together on different levels to enhance the meanings of each post. Kress and Van Leeuwen have adapted Halliday's metafunctions for the analysis of multimodal texts and have labelled them as *Representational*, *Interactive* and *Compositional* (Adami 2014: 141). Like Adami, who in her study from 2014 entitled, *What's in a Click? A Social Semiotic Framework for the Multimodal Analysis of Website Interactivity*, has adapted Halliday's three metafunctions to analyse data from blogs, this thesis will attempt to do the equivalent to the data from Instagram. Because Instagram is a platform unlike blogs in that it has specific parameters and mediums available with compulsory image use, there are certain elements that Adami has focused on that will be omitted considering the scope of this study, and others that were excluded by Adami will be incorporated. A table exploring the metafunctions proposed by Adami which separates the paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions of interactive sites

can be found in Table 1. in the appendix. Attention will be paid to the visual modes and how they are symbolic, notably based on Kress and Van Leeuven's analytical system. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) established techniques that analyse the visual modes of images and video. In doing this, their belief that visual meaning can be organised from the practical meaning to a representative meaning. Such that the narrative meanings refer to the elements of an image, appear to be represented naturally and without alteration and signs represent symbolic meaning. Modalities like image/gaze and frame/social distance provide the viewer with interactive meanings, which are the visual link to interpersonal meanings, which can help identify how participants use images to relate to each other and the viewer (Mehmet et al. 2014: 4). Because Instagram's layout is structured around the image, the visual mode is very important. The data is multimodal and has been captured and examined in terms of symbolic and interpersonal meaning. The text has been run through the Simple Concordance Program version 4.09 and the Voyant Tools site to highlight non-standard language and to develop frequency lists. The primary analysis has been conducted manually following the analytic framework proposed by MODE, which can be seen in Figure 2.

Analytic framework

Writing	Image
• Sentence type, structure and organisation (Halliday 1985, Hodge & Kress 1988, Martin & Rose 2006) • Lexical choices, vocabulary and jargon (Androutsoplous 2007, Zappavigna 2011, Myers 2010) • Technology features (Dresner & Herring 2010, Thurlow 2011, Zappavigna 2011, Hargittai & Litt 2012)	• Image type, structure and organisation • Interactive elements: gaze, shot and angle (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006)
Layout	**Colour**
• Organisation of text (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) • Image-writing relation (Martinec and Salway 2005) • Hypertext and interactivity (Lemke 2002, Adami 2013)	• Hue, value and saturation • Purity • Temperature • Modulation (Kress and van Leeuwen 2002, Koller 2008, van Leeuwen 2011)

MODE multimodal methodologies
FOR RESEARCHING DIGITAL DATA AND ENVIRONMENTS

Figure 2. Source: (MODE https://mode.ioe.ac.uk)

The four modes described above, namely *writing*, *image*, *layout* and *colour,* are the modes that will be focused on in this study. As such, sentence structure, lexical choice, vocabulary and technical features are considered in the language-level or text-based analysis that follows. While image, layout and colour with attention to hue and saturation and organisation in terms of image-writing relation and interactivity are also explored in the data. Additional modes and mediums are used on Instagram. Instagram has been expanding and integrating the use of videos on their platform as they have recently announced that they will be allowing longer

video posts, which is likely in direct response to the competition being fostered by other competing platforms such as Snapchat. And although sound and moving images are pertinent social and meaning-making features, due to the scope and technical restraints of analysing sound and video, the video posts that were posted by Nike, Starbucks and BMW during the timeframe of this study will be omitted. These and other limitations will be discussed in Section *3.2 Limitations*. Essentially, the methodology of this study is qualitative and comparative and is based on the analytic framework in *Figure 2*.

3.1 Data

The posts from Nike, Starbucks, and BMW were chosen with the intention of selecting companies that are multinational but use an official international account that is intended for a worldwide audience; and who had at least 5 million followers and well-known brand identities. However, instead of choosing three car companies for example, three distinct companies with different brand identities and product bases were chosen in order to identify if the communication patterns in social media marketing were becoming more of a widespread grammar that all companies would follow irrelevant of the product. The dataset was compiled in a chronological fashion isolating all posts from the accounts within a specified timeframe, thus in a systemic longitudinal fashion. All images henceforth presented in this study without a source cited below as well as text that is not formatted in Times New Roman have been sourced and reproduced with permissions based on the Instagram guidelines from Instagram.com. The corpora are a collection of all posts from the official Instagram accounts of Nike, Starbucks, and BMW between June 1st 2015 and January 31st 2016. This has produced corpora that vary highly in the number of posts and characters. To illustrate this vast difference, some qualitative figures about the text-based corpora will be provided: Nike contains 567 total words and 315 unique word forms, Starbucks contains 3,959 total words and 1,481 unique word forms, and BMW has a total of 30,824 words and 3,650 unique word forms. The BMW corpus is thus the largest corpus by an overwhelming amount. Screen shots of all the posts have been compiled, and the captions were converted into text-only versions, which could be used to generate word lists. The posts are essentially monolingual corpora, although we could reason that they are in a way multilingual for Starbucks as they use emojis to a great extent; and emojis may be considered a language in their own right (Schnoebelen 2012; Scall 2016). The qualitative part of the study consists of looking for patterns and trends in relation to choice and systems, which is inspired by systemic functional linguistics. The points of comparison examined on a textual level are language variation, i.e. non-standard

orthography, the use of emojis or hashtags, subject and object pronouns, corporate terms, and brand identifiers. In order to better describe the non-verbal or multimodal data, the functions and features of Instagram and its limitations need to be discussed. First of all, *What is Instagram?* Instagram is one of the most popular social networking sites today. Instagram's official response to the question (Instagram.com), can be found in the *about* section of their website:

> What is Instagram? Instagram is a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo with your mobile phone, then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever. We're building Instagram to allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen. We imagine a world more connected through photos.

The description notes that one of the main confines of the platform is that posts can only be made from a mobile phone, and more specifically a mobile phone that runs on iOS or Android. But this does not limit who can view and interact with the posts, as this can be done from any web-browser. For example, the posts made by the three accounts being studied can be accessed by anyone with internet-access from web-browsers even if they do not have an Instagram account. Links to these accounts are usually made from their official websites or other SNS platforms, although you can directly access the accounts with a web address as well. This is the approach I have taken for the ease of data extraction. In terms of the analytical framework and analysing layout, as mentioned previously, another limitation or challenge is the unstable layout of Instagram posts. In terms of the organization of text and images, the position of the text can switch from being found under the image, to being found to the right of the image. This is discussed in the Sub-section *3.2 Limitations* as the layout is dependent on the device you are accessing the posts from, and thus slight variation can be found. For a better understanding of the aforementioned posting process, refer to the steps of posting on Instagram in Image 2. The series of 8 photos (*Image 2*) are screenshots taken on an iPhone 6 for a visual illustration of the steps each sign-maker is afforded in the processes of posting to Instagram. The first step is choosing to take a picture or video or upload either from your phone's library. This means that the videos and photos are not limited to the editing features of the app as it can be conducted using any photo or video editing software that the user has access to. In previous versions of the app, users were restricted to posting square photos, but more recent developments allow users to change the size of the photos and post videos. Next, you are automatically prompted with the option to crop the photo or to use a filter.
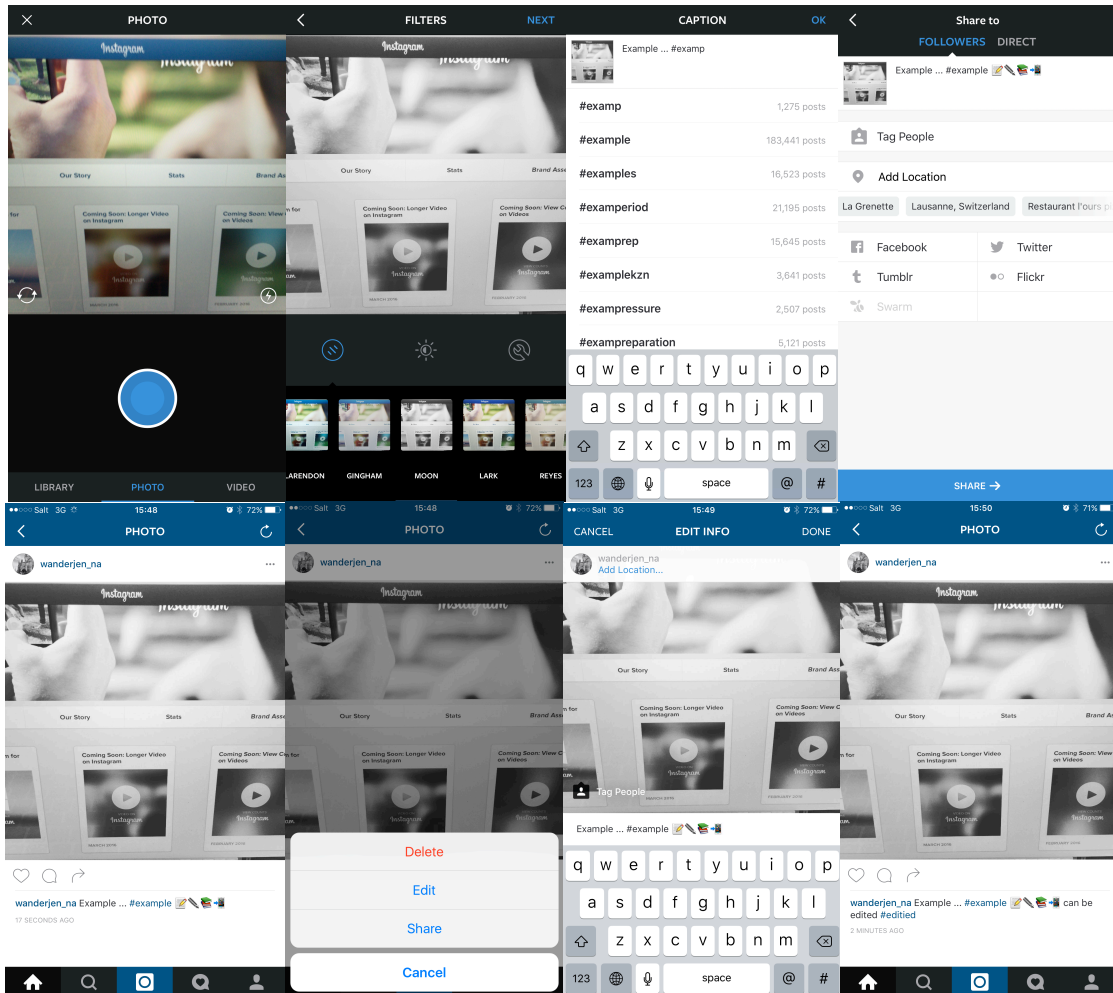
Image 2. Screenshots of the posting process from the Instagram app on iOS

Filters are one of the most famous features of Instagram. What contributed to its community notoriety and significance is the famous term #nofilter. The filters are a set of colour overlays that change the colouration of the image; you can also choose to change the brightness and contrast at this stage. Next, you are prompted to write a caption for the image. Unlike Twitter, there are no character limitations for the posts; and if you choose to include a hashtag, you are given an automatically generated list of suggestions, which includes information on how many posts have been tagged with said hashtag. On the same screen, options for location and tagging users and sharing to other SNS sites are available. The post is then complete and added to your feed. Previously, once you had posted the image to your feed, no editing was allowed, but now you can edit the caption at a later date if necessary. The functionality of Instagram has thus changed over time, and changes are likely to continue with technological advances and competition from other social media platforms.

3.2 Limitations

One of the general limitations of this thesis is the fact that technology and the applications being examined are ever-changing. In fact, during the process of data collection, Instagram made a major update, i.e. it changed the algorithm for the posts. This in turn changed the ordering system from chronologically based to pertinence. Also, as previously mentioned, the layout of Instagram changes depending on the device it is viewed from, i.e. an iPhone or Android smartphone, iPad or tablet or Mac or Windows desktop application etc. And since layout is an important feature of a multimodal approach to communication, this is a challenge in terms of analysis. Examples of this variation are provided below:
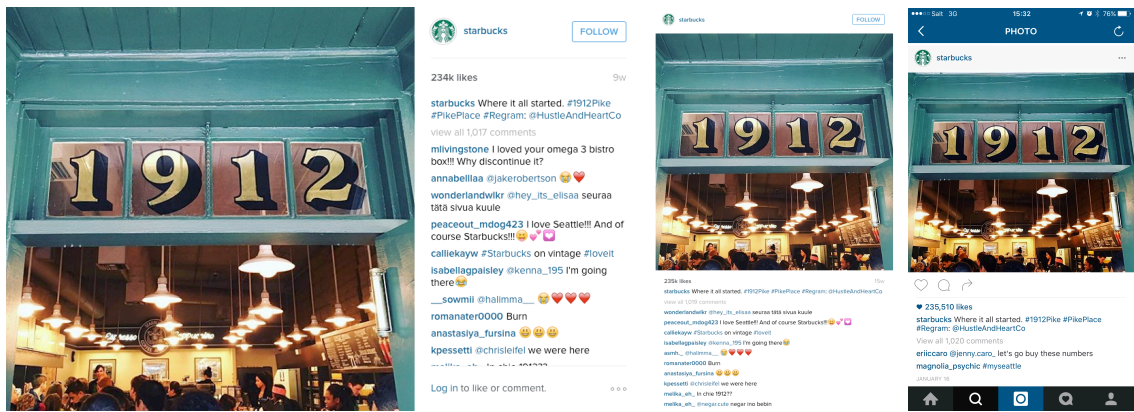
Image 3. Screenshots of the layout changes from the Safari web-browser and the iPhone app

In Image 3. starting from the left, the first screenshot was taken from the Safari web-browser, on a large display that automatically (due to the pixel size) turned the frame horizontal. If the browser is resized to be narrower, as in the second screenshot, it appears more similar to the way it would on an iPhone using iOS, which is illustrated in the third screenshot. Due to the scope of this study, one of the major limitations in terms of accounting for the mode of layout is that all different device layouts cannot be considered, for example how the image and text would be laid out on an Android device or on a Windows web browser.

Furthermore, due to technical limitations of my abilities of video and sound analysis, as well as the limited scope of this thesis, the video posts will not be analysed. Also, it would have been beneficial to understand who is responsible for the posts, in order to have background information on some meta-linguistic information that may help to determine why some of the posts may have a consistent or inconsistent pattern. After all, it would be more likely to be consistent if there was one sole person in charge of the posts, or even beneficial to simply know if there is a social media/communications or marketing department responsible for the posts, and if that department has specific company-set guidelines to follow in order to

keep the language consistent or as to follow certain brand identity practices. I did attempt to contact the communications departments of all three companies, but unfortunately, I either received no reply or I was informed that due to the overwhelming number of student and research inquiries made, they were unable to reply to each request and refer to their press information. The press information did not contain much information relevant to this study other than that of brand identity and core values. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to consider if the person who created the post was female or male, and which office base they were working out of, i.e. USA or Germany or a different location, or even age-demographic as it may have provided a background to the sociolinguist variations such as the choice of American spellings of words like *color* as opposed to the Canadian, British or other typically commonwealth spellings *colour*. These and other variations will be illustrated henceforth.

4. Findings

Applying the research methodologies described above, the findings have been separated into two categories of analysis below: language-level and multimodal. The findings presented symbolise an attempt to answer the four research questions presented in the introduction of this thesis. Although qualitative in nature, some quantitative results will be displayed in order to illustrate and compare the patterns found between the accounts. The findings will be discussed in the proceeding section, notably with the aim to explore the hypothesis of the practical and semiotic effects for the users and the identities of companies found in the styles of the Instagram posts.

4.1 Language-level analysis

The findings of the language-level analysis are based on the text in the caption section of each post. The text is one of the many modes found in the Instagram posts. The other modes discussed in this thesis will be explored in Section *4.2 Multimodal analysis*. Careful attention is paid to the text, as there is a rich variety of data to be examined on the verbal-level. Domingo, Jewitt and Kress (2014: 2) explain how writing can be understood in multimodal analyses:

> Writing is a mode: it is a set of resources, socially made, to enable us to deal with social needs and achieve social purposes. In this sense, writing can be understood as a cultural technology. Through interactions writing is constantly remade, to fit with ever changing social needs, occasions and purposes.

Domingo, Jewitt and Kress (2014: 2-3) have established that writing is shaped by context, and the needs and structures that are experienced when the mode of writing is used can change to fit on-going collective developments. Therefore, changes in the form of writing reflect social changes. To understand these changes, which social groups are using writing in different ways and in different settings should be examined in order to hypothesise trends in writing practices. This is linked intrinsically to the idea that society is constantly developing so it is continually important to understand different forms and uses of writing among semiotic resources. Along with looking at the cultural and social aspects of the language, some grammatical and syntactic features will be explored as well, such as focussing on the use of "proper", i.e. standardised, punctuation, spelling and syntax. Also, the register of language and identity features such as brand terminologies are observed, along with Discourse 2.0 markers, such as hashtags and Web 2.0 features. The limits of language variation on social media and in CMC have been discussed by Androutsopoulos (2011: 279) and focus on both unimodal and monolingual linguistic variationism that has been predefined by independent variables. Though parallel to traditional variationism in sociolinguistics, there is a gap between new social media language in contemporary interactive digital environments and older research on CMC as found in e-mails and instant messaging. Also from an ethnographic standpoint, I will investigate whether culturally significant terms have been used. The choice of all three accounts to use English has been briefly commented on. Additionally, particular attention has been paid to hashtags as their usage is one of the patterns that transcend all three accounts. In their study *Rhetorical Functions of Hashtag Forms Across Social Media Applications* (2014), Daer, Goodman and Hoffman discuss hashtags and define categories that can be used to classify the rhetorical and technical device. They both analyse and detail the uses and functions of hashtagging beyond its original technical function of linking. Instead, they focus on the metafunctions of the hashtag which have created new ways for post-makers to communicate. They have presented this as qualitative data that they have sourced from five popular social media applications (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest) and developed findings on the rhetorical functions they can produce in the social media context. They have identified 5 primary categories of "metacommunicative" hashtags. The 5 categories Daer et al. (2014) have designated are the following:

i. Emphasizing - used to add emphasis or call attention to something in the post or something the post describes or refers to; usually expressed without judgment as a comment or reflection. Examples: #evidenceofspring; #lateafternoon.

ii. Critiquing - used when the purpose of the post is express judgment or verdict

regarding the object of discussion (a described experience, an image, etc.). Examples: #chefdamianisawesome; #whatishethinking.

iii. Identifying - used to refer to the author of the post; functions to express some identifying characteristic, mood, or reflective descriptor. Examples: #ihatemyself; #diabeticinshape

iv. Iterating - used to express humor by referring to a well-known internet meme or happening in internet culture (or popular culture, depending). Might also be a parody. Examples: #hashtag; WhatDoesItMean (attached to image of a "double rainbow).

v. Rallying - functions to bring awareness or support to a cause; also could be used in marketing campaigns to gain publicity. Examples: #pitbullisnotacrime; #ASUfallwelcome.

These categories are highly important for this study because hashtags are consistently and predominately found in all three accounts. In what follows, I will take a closer look at the Instagram accounts of the three selected companies.
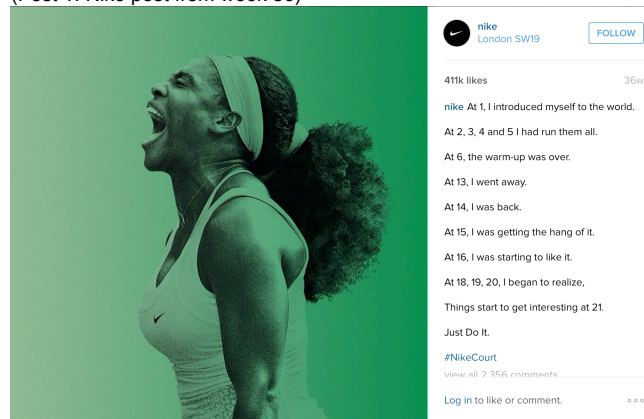
4.1.1. Nike

The Nike corpus contains the most standard language usage in comparison to the other two accounts, i.e. there is almost no variation. Basic information about the Nike text corpus that was compiled by the use of Voyant Tools and the Simple Concordance Program version 4.09 (see *3. Methodology*) and informs that the Nike corpus has 567 total words and 315 unique word forms. The most frequent words in the corpus are *finish* [5]; *nike.com* [5]; *fast* [4]; *line* [4]; *acg* [3]; *conditions* [3]; *matter* [3]; *start* [3]; *you're* [3]; *zoom* [3]. This account seems to use a unique strategy and does not appear to style-shift in terms of register, apart from the use of hashtags. There are 22 posts that were posted in the timeframe, and out of the 22 posts Nike used hashtags in 13 of the posts, which means that approximately 60% of their posts contain hashtags. The hashtags are principally used for three out of the five above-listed categories, notably *identifying*, *emphasizing* and *rallying*. Examples of these hashtags are, the branded and cultural signifier *#justdoit* (2) which identifies the company; and *#sofast* which is used to emphasise, and #werunsf (11) which is intended to rally runners as it is used in the marketing campaign for the San Francisco marathon. An interesting feature about one of the most frequent word list findings is the acronym *ACG* (1). It is a term that needs explanation by the brand and as such is a new lexical feature.

(1) *nike ACG means All Conditions Gear. And All Conditions means all conditions. In 1981, Nike's designers created a line of products for those who wanted to take on any activity, in any condition. Originally designed for outdoor adventure, today's ACG is now built for the ultimate landscape: The city. Move. Adapt. Protect. See the @NikeLab #ACG Collection at nike.com/nikelab.*

Acronyms are a typical structure for mainstream social media hashtags, such as the popular *#TBT* to refer to *Throwback Thursday,* an in-group language feature that is used by the other two accounts but that is absent in the Nike posts. The reason for mentioning the lack of the mainstream hashtag in this section of the findings is that this absence exemplifies that each company has situated themselves within the norms. Nike's consistent choice of applying hashtags at the ends of posts so that the text is still syntactically correct or to use uniquely branded hashtags in lieu of the widespread or typical *#TBT*, highlights their position in relation to the others. It is also notable that by analysing the captions of Nike's posts there is not even one occurrence of non-standard orthography apart from the hashtags; and the modal affordance of a hashtag does not allow standard orthography or syntax to be used, as spacing is not possible. Moreover, despite the lack of restraint on the number of characters for the captions, the Nike posts have the smallest average character use compared to the other two companies. There is a pattern of simplicity and thoughtful construction in their posts. Also, the text being salient in isolation of the image is possible more often in comparison to the other accounts. In terms of pronoun usage, in the Nike posts there is less frequently reference to themselves as can be seen by a lack of the use of *us* and *we* and the fact that the company directs their posts to their followers in a motivating tone using *you,* which allows them to address a widespread audience. This is in direct contrast to the findings related to the other accounts. There is an exception to these observations, and though it is isolated, it is worth mentioning. In Post (1) below, Nike uses the pronoun *I* and is an exception where the text does seem relatively dependent on the image. There is a lack of citation related to the text, and as a viewer one may assume that the *I* is the voice of Serena Williams who is depicted in the image, but one cannot know for certain.

(Post 1. Nike post from week 36)

nike
London SW19   FOLLOW

411k likes   36w

nike At 1, I introduced myself to the world.

At 2, 3, 4 and 5 I had run them all.

At 6, the warm-up was over.

At 13, I went away.

At 14, I was back.

At 15, I was getting the hang of it.

At 16, I was starting to like it.

At 18, 19, 20, I began to realize,

Things start to get interesting at 21.

Just Do It.

#NikeCourt

view all 2,356 comments

Log in to like or comment.

Still, without the image, a message of inspiration can be felt, as a progression and growth is explained in the text. There is a thematic trend across all of Nike's posts that has a fundamental tone of encouragement. The brand's motto, *Just Do It*, is resounding in the language. In terms of corporate or marketing communication strategies that can sometimes seem over-processed and lack sensitivity, the use of an encouraging tone by Nike affords a personal touch to be felt in the language. In their study *Gearing toward Excellence in Corporate Social Media Communications: Understanding the Why and How of Public Engagement,* Men and Tsai (2015) elaborate on these language features and the notion of corporate character:

> Corporate communication factors address a company's characteristics such as *corporate character*, its social media *communication strategies* (i.e., being open, interactive, transparent, authentic, and responsive), and *messaging tactics* (i.e., conversational tone). Given that social media platforms are inherently interactive, communal, and personal, they serve as an important social milieu that enables interpersonal communication with organizations Notably, social media allow companies to exert a personal touch in their communications to build unique corporate character. Defined as "corporate character".

Particular corporate character traits have been distinguished by Men and Tsai (2015) such as ruthlessness and agreeableness. The more agreeableness demonstrated was said have strong positive effects on social media for public engagement. When a company is perceived as supportive, as is the case with Nike, they have found the public is more likely to engage with the organization on social media. Companies are able to assert the inherent attributes of their brand on social media. The character of Nike is reflected at the language-level of the posts, independently from the images. Nevertheless, the images in terms of multimodality do help to create an overall mood. The company is thus able to use the captions to portray their online corporate identity as being in line with their core-values. As they use a thematic linguistic trend of encouragement and determination, which aims at inspiring their followers, and in turn create a feeling of agreeableness, which has strong, positive effects for the user engagement. Despite the significantly lower amount and frequency of posts published during the timeframe studied, Nike still maintains a significantly superior number of followers in comparison to Starbucks and BMW combined, which is currently 46.8 million as opposed the Starbucks' 8.7 million followers and BMW's 6.6 million. A selection of the inspirational captions by Nike can be found here:

(2) **nike** *Yesterday's blister is tomorrow's trophy. #justdoit @rafaelnadal*

(3) **nike** *There is no final whistle.*

(4)   **nike** *A sunset is not a stop sign.*
       @nikesverige

(5)   **nike** *"The only true disability in life is a bad attitude." - @Leepster*
       You're too tired. You're too busy. You forgot your headphones. You forgot your headband. It's too early.
       It's too late. Anyone can find excuses to stop. Find a reason to keep going.

(6)   **nike** *It doesn't matter when you start. It matters if you keep going.*
       #goskateboardingday

(7)   **nike** *Why walk on water when you can fly?*
       #askwhatif

(8)   **nike** *If it seems like anything is possible, that's because it is.*
       @nikeyoungathletes

(9)   **nike** *You can quit. Or you can quit complaining.*
       Find your fast at Nike.com/Zoom

(10)   **nike** *04:40:08.*
       280 minutes. That's the amount of time it took @nani183 to not only prove that she was a runner, but to prove
       that she was a marathon runner. Hours after the winner had crossed the finish line, the first timer found victory in
       defeat. It didn't matter how daunting the distance was. She didn't care if she finished 4th or 4,000th forward.
       She just wanted to finish. Hanin told us, "To be successful, you mustn't give up. Only giving up is failure." #NRC

(11)   **nike** *The steps to the starting line will take you further than the finish.*
       Catch up @nikerunning. #werunsf

The language used in examples 2-11, contains rhetoric features that encompass the brand's *just do it* values. The captions serve the marketing purposes of promoting the brand and are also community building. The language in the corpus is also notably gender- and nation-neutral. There are references made to both North American cities such as Toronto (12) and San Francisco as well as European cities such as London and Berlin.

(12)   **nike** *The finish, for now. The start, for later.*
       It doesn't matter if you're a record-breaking legend or a jaw-breaking medalist:
       A legacy is built beyond the finish line.
       Today, @joanbenoitsamuelson, @marlen_esparza, and 10,000 others completed the Nike Women's 15k focused
       on what's in front of them, not what's behind. #niketoronto

There is also a balance between the gender of athletes referred to in the posts, with female runners, soccer players and tennis stars mentioned equally frequently as male stars. There seems to be a societal responsibility with regard to this balance, which could also be used to reach wider audiences by fostering an inclusive and responsible online corporate identity.

4.1.2. Starbucks

As previously mentioned, the Starbucks corpus consists of 3,959 words and 1,481 unique word forms. The most frequent words in the corpus are *regram* [48]; *coffee* [40]; *link* [38]; *bio* [26]; *cup* [21]; *icedcoffee* [20]; *starbucks* [17]; *tea* [17]; *whereintheworld* [17]; *answer* [16]; *frappuccino* [15]; *red* [15]; *fall* [14]; *purchase* [14]. Starbuck's Instagram posts are the most evidently stylised of the three accounts. The abundant use of emojis can be seen at the first glance. And unlike Nike, who has chosen to use hashtags in a patterned fashion at the end of

each post, which does not encroach upon the syntax, Starbucks ignores traditional English syntax and grammar in favour of computer-mediated affordances and practices such as incorporating hashtags and emojis directly at sentence-level. This can be observed in many of their posts. One example is the use of the strawberry emoji (Post 2) to describe a smoothie flavour:

(Post 2. Starbucks post from week 42)

The hashtag *#StrawberrySmoothie* is used for clarifying purposes in this case. The number of hashtags per post is multiple in the Starbucks corpus and often outnumbers the use of regular language. The incorporation of emojis and hashtags by Starbucks is almost equivalent to the use of traditional text (Examples 13-17). The decision to publish the posts taking advantage of these features, may be an attempt to embrace the social media culture that is more closely aligned with Starbucks' online corporate identity than that of Nike, and as such the CMC practices and multimodal choices construct an identity and community. The amount of text in the captions is often very brief and relies on other modes and semiotic resources for meaning making. Some of the examples that can bee seen as symbiotic and interdependent on meta-linguistic features are shown below:

(13) *starbucks Gimme that. #ColdBrew #Coffee #ItsHere*

(14) *starbucks #Twinsies* 👯

(15) *starbucks* 🔍🌶️😆 *#Sriracha #TurkeyBacon #BreakfastSandwich #HappyBreakfast*

(16) *starbucks What's better than* 🍂*? Yes, that's right, the answer is* 🍂🍂🍁🌺🎃🍂*@MadeWithStudio #HelloFall #FallCup*

(17) *starbucks Just a liiiittle more. #AtHome #Caramel #CaramelMacchiato #HappyPlace #Espresso #IcedCoffee*

In the posts above, there are informal spellings of *little* and *give me*, namely in examples (13) and (17), that show how Starbucks chooses an informal and/or more oral language use. Though there are exceptions where standard language use still fits in with the causal register

and allows users to see some of the richness of language on Social media, as illustrated in the post below, which has been written in the tradition of a poem:

> (18) **starbucks** An ode to marshmallow:
> Graham cracker,
> Loves to hug you.
> Melty chocolate,
> Loves you truly.
> You are,
> Forever gooey.
> #SmoresTart

An important quality on the verbal-level is tone, and the captions can change the tone of a post and provide an insight into register being used. Starbucks has clearly chosen a more playful tone and mood. In terms of the sociolinguistic functions of the text, there are some posts that contain country-specific information. The various captions reveal geographically specific exclusions:

> (19) *starbucks* Limited edition. Unlimited style. The Anna Sui for Starbucks collection. Exclusively available in Asia. 💜 *#WhereInTheWorld*

> (20) *starbucks* Reduce. Reuse. Redesigned. *@Blynnxoxo*'s winning white cup is now available for purchase in select US & Canada stores. *#WhiteCupContest #CupArt #Regram*

> (21) *starbucks* It's the return of the *#RedCups*! Show us your creativity by tagging your photo *#RedCupContest* for a chance to win. See link in bio for more info.
> *Open to Legal residents of the 50 United States (D.C.) and Canada, 18 years or older. Enter Contest by: 11/5/15 at 11:59 pm PT. For Official Rules, including prize descriptions, visit http://sbux.co/redcupcontest. Five grand prizes of $500 available to be won. Void where prohibited.*

In terms of community, as the official accounts being examined attempt to reach a worldwide audience, these sanctions can potentially create a feeling of exclusion, though Starbucks is limited by the platform's guidelines. We can also note that a professional and corporate level language register is being used in the posts for promotions and contests, and that there is a clear style-shift from the playful style that is usually used. This style-shift is imposed by the context. In fact, there are guidelines which stipulate lawful information such as residency restrictions must be disclosed on Instagram:

Image 4. Source: (instagram.com)

Starbucks does follow the promotional guidelines set by Instagram, and in doing so, each time a promotion is mentioned, there is a sort of code-switching occurring between corporate and playful registers. This may require a certain multiliteracy or can be considered in a sense as an example of the heteroglossia of social media language. Although this has created a certain sub-division amongst their community of followers, there is also an attempt to unite the community at a larger level and include followers from the less frequently mentioned nations such as Indonesia. One can find a lot of socially and culturally significant features in terms of language and community. In fact, it seems that Starbucks has attempted to show social responsibility and be transparent with regard to its contest rules. At the same time, they have positioned themselves as a globally diverse community with members from all over the world.

(22) **starbucks** *Customers around the world have turned the red cup into works of art! Tag yours #RedCupArt— we're sharing favorites at RedCupCollection.com#HolidaySpirit #Joy #Art #Regram: @florencia.selvi from Indonesia.*

This can be seen by the inclusion of "from Indonesia" (22) and in the solidarity post that is tagged as #PrayforParis. As mentioned in the five categories, there is the function of rallying taking place in Post 3.

(Post 3. Starbucks post from week 18)

As Daer et al. (2014) have discovered, tragic events can bring strangers together on social media which is juxtaposed with using hashtags for the sake of a single user's identity (e.g. #selfie). The use of hashtags to bring large groups of strangers to rally together around a single event can be seen above in Post 3. with the use of the #PrayforParis, that was preceded by a similar case after the tragedy of the Boston Marathon and the #prayforboston hashtag. Daer et al. have found that hashtags can have political implications and can be used across

multiple platforms. This highlights how a design feature like the hashtag can transform communication across different contexts. These user-generated ideas bring new functions to social media language and communication designers must now account for these changes.

4.1.3. BMW

The largest of the three, the BMW corpus contains 30,824 total words and 3,650 unique word forms. The most frequent words in the corpus are *bmw* [857]; *consumption* [654]; *fuel* [635]; *co2* [616]; *emissions* [461]; *new* [443]; *km* [337]; *combined* [333]; *passenger* [318]; *official* [315]; *bmwrepost* [296]; *vehicle* [169]. In the BMW text corpus, there is a clear *car-love*r theme reflected in the posts. A quick look at the most frequent words in the corpus illustrates this thematic branding trend. Although, while manually analysing the corpus, it became clear that the parameters set for analysing all the text in the caption sections of the posts would not be simple in the BMW corpus. This has to do with the fact that they have selected to create essentially what can be considered a sub-division (23) in the caption section, in the overwhelming majority of their posts.

(23) **bmw** ///M4 x 4 - This is our all-new #BMW #M4 GTS. What's your favourite detail?
‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
Fuel consumption and CO2 emissions for the BMW M4 GTS:

Fuel consumption in l/100 km (combined): 8.5
CO2 emissions in g/km (combined): 199

Further information about the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO2 emissions for new passenger automobiles can be found in the 'New Passenger Vehicle Fuel Consumption and CO2 Emission Guidelines', which are available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Hellmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern, Germany and on http://www.dat.de/angebote/verlagsprodukte/leitfaden-kraftstoffverbrauch.html

This self-selected division is used for the disclosure of environmental features. These features are amounts such as fuel and CO2 emissions and corporate responsibility disclosures. So, in terms of the frequent words list, the liability of disclosing this information can been seen with *consumption*, *fuel*, *co2* and *emissions* being the highest ranked words alongside *BMW*. The split between caption and social responsibility will be explored later in terms of layout. But for the purpose and length limitation of this thesis, the captions will be examined based on the text found above the manually inserted division marker (e.g. ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾)*; and the presence of the marker will serve to indicate that there is fuel and co2 emission information in the actual post, but that it will not be carefully studied. In terms of the other most frequent words, it may seem completely expected for *BMW* to be the most frequent, but in fact, in comparison to the other two accounts, this is unusual. With closer inspection this ranking seems to stem from BMW's decision to brand most terms or lexical features that the others do not. Examples of

this occurring are *#BMWrepost*, *#BMWDrivingExperience*, *#BMWstories* when other accounts would use the Instagram and social media standard #Regram, as is the case in the Starbucks posts above (examples 20 & 22). Instead of using #regram, which is a very standard style on Instagram, BMW has chosen to use a branded version that fortifies their community with the *#BMWrepost*. The choice to modify a standard lexical feature of Instagram in order to include branding features is significant in terms of identity and community construction. It creates a kind of sub-community beyond the *#CarsOfInstagram* community to the more exclusive *#BMW* community. The BMW lexicon also includes the variants *///M* and *Bimmer*, which requires an understanding of the brand and can be seen as another feature of in-group language:

(24) **bmw** *Bimmer love is true love. Your soulmate is one-of-a-kind. Meeting them and sharing the same passion for Sheer Driving Pleasure - now that's just priceless. Thanks to @danielleraecer for one of the most extraordinary, heart-warming #BMWstories @ladydrivenamerica*

A passion for driving is used to create a community that seems to share similar interests and understands that *Bimmer* is an affectionate term or nickname for a BMW vehicle. This lexical choice reveals that there is a discourse community (Swales 1990) in place and that using in-group language can strengthen this bond. There is also a feeling of inclusion that can be felt in terms of gender. As another notable item is the reference to @ladydrivenamerica and *girl power* in the text (25), which may be seen as another comprehensive measure not to exclude women from a predominately male-centric domain. Perhaps, in order to also demonstrate that the community expands beyond gender and nation or language, BMW has playfully used conversational phrases in Italian (26), French (27), and German (28).

(25) **bmw** *Girl power! @kellkiernan speeding up at #Fontana #AutoClubSpeedway in her beloved #BMW #1series Coupé. #ACS is located on a track in Fontana, California, which used to be a former steel mill in 1997. #champions #BMWstories @ladydrivenamerica*

(26) **bmw** *Buongiorno! #MilleMiglia #ThrowbackThursday #tbt @BMWClassic*

(27) **bmw** *C'est bon! @mat_buckets enjoys the sweet life in France accompanied by photographer @gfwilliams and the #BMW #6series Convertible. To find out more, copy and paste this link into your browser: http://bit.ly/1fB5CMC.*

(28) **bmw** *Prost! Hope everyone had a fantastic and a safe Oktoberfest. #BMW #M3*

_____

The conversational tone taken in the posts when addressing and thanking their followers, and also by sharing their stories which are patterned and tagged with the *#BMWstories*, creates a sense of warmth and constructs the feeling that the company values their community of followers and fellow BMW enthusiasts. As a social media marketing feature, and as an

identity construct, it is a pattern that has benefits for both the users and for the company's online corporate identity.

(29) **bmw** *Since purchasing his beloved alpine white #BMW #M3 in March of 2015, @limerock200 had the pleasure of meeting a lot of other BMW owners. After chatting and exchanging ideas for a few months, he finally met @mw_m4, @itsyasbitches & @f80awm3 in person. They drove from North Carolina & Virginia to New Jersey for a weekend of fun and friendship, celebrating their #Bimmerfest. Their four cars were finally captured together in this amazing shot. As they call it, a strong ///M bond! #BMWstories #companion*

(30) **bmw** *@f80awm3 and @ch4sem3 met through Instagram and at different BMW events/meet-ups. They've told us that New Jersey has a pretty big and tight knit ///M community where meet-ups are held at least twice a week. We take it as a huge compliment and are really happy to hear about so many great people that share the same passion for our cars. #BMWstories #companion #BMW #M3*
_____

The thematic trend of mutual love for BMW vehicles is also accompanied by the theme of luxury. Being a luxury car company is part of BMW's identity and distinct references (31, 32) and are made to this aspect of their brand identity.

(31) **bmw** DRIVING LUXURY.
Leading innovations, a new level of comfort and contemporary design unite to make driving and being driven an experience for all your senses. Introducing the all-new #BMW #7series. #drivingluxury

(32) **bmw** "Luxury must be comfortable, otherwise it is not luxury." Coco Chanel
The #BMW #4series Gran Coupé Luxury Line.

In what may be an attempt to uphold the luxurious nature of the brand, it is noteworthy again that there are no *emojis* used in the text or captions of all the BMW posts. The closest thing to an emoji found in the BMW text corpus is the text representation of music notes that occurs four times, as illustrated in the following posts:

(33) **bmw** ♫♪ IT'S THE EYE OF THE TIGER ... ♪♪ *Sing out loud in celebration of #caturday! #BMW #cat #catsofinstagram #BMWrepost @mrakeno*

(34) **bmw** ♫ *A beautiful ride, we're happy tonight, driving in a winter wonderland. ♪♪ #BMW #X5*

The use of standard emojis may have been seen to hinder this public image of luxury or hinder the tone or level of language, and affect the company's online identity, as may also be the case with Nike. Nike is much more consistent in terms of the language style they use and this correlates with their lack of emojis. Nike does not use any informal or incorrect spelling, and scarcely incorporate hashtags at sentence-level, while BMW does seem to code and style-shift between registers and orthographies.

(35) **bmw** *Knowing that true beauty lies in the details is what being a #perfectionist is all about. Thx @SamHurly for sharing your passion through #BMWstories*

(36) **bmw** *'Nuff said. The #BMW #X4 M40i.*
_____

(37) **bmw** *Rise and shine. An early mornin' #BMWrepost via @felicitas.hoamatgfui.*

(38) **bmw** *Wheel-y beautiful. @bmwcanada*

(39) **bmw** *Whoooooooo!*
       #BMWDrivingExperience

(40) **bmw** *The #BMWArtCar that lead to #LeMans victory.*
       This #BMW V12 LMR took part in the testing session, another V12 LMR won. #JennyHolzer's artwork featured
       phosphorescent letters that reflect the sky in the day and glow in the dark during the night.

The informal language lexicon sampled in the posts or terms such as *Yo*, Thx (35), and g-dropping (37), which is a variation of *–ing* that has a social and cultural significance, and using hashtags in standard syntax (40), are found throughout the BMW posts. These variations affect the overall tone of their posts and illustrate style-shifting and identity negotiation.

4.2 Multimodal analysis

MDA is a developing theory in discourse studies and extends the study of verbal language by combining it with other modes such as layout, gesture, image, and sound. At the moment, the term MDA is used lightly as it is a relatively new field of study that presents contemporary approaches and concepts. For instance, in both print and digital materials that are used daily multimodal meanings are created by integrating language and other resources in various formats. These materials can also be referred to as semiotic resources or modalities. Variations of the concept of MDA are multimodality, multimodal analysis, multimodal semiotics and multimodal studies (O'Halloran 2011). The main features of interest when examining the corpus from a multimodal perspective are image, layout, and colour. Semiotic resources found in the colour choices in combination with the symbolism of the image and its layout will be highlighted in the selected posts in this section. An overview of the profile page of each account reveals that there are significant differences in the colour schemes and hues of each company's posts. As colour is a significant mode, Kress and Van Leeuwen's findings (2002) on the semiotic nature of colour will be sampled. They have found that there are many schemes that can be employed through colour. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002: 366) have found that different colour schemes relay different feelings and eras. For example a colour scheme based in high levels of saturation and dark value, they have labeled as 'historic' which is juxtaposed with the modern or 'Mondrian' scheme based on purity and high saturation. The postmodern colour schemes often use pastels and are hybrid. Colour schemes are rooted in history and time but extend beyond their period carrying semiotic resources that can present different ideological positions through their use. Choices in the design of a message such as

colour can reveal select information about the identity of those who generate the posts, such as the social environment and individual interests they may have.
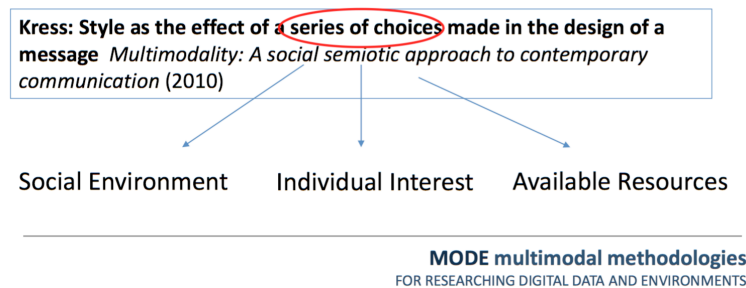
These style decisions carry semiotic information, as the features that are chosen to accompany the text are a crucial element in the identity construction process that is constantly being negotiated on social media and in language. These image representations can be a direct reference to brand identity and may help to decode the visual semiotics of the posts. For the analysis of colour, Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2002) chapter on "Colour as a semiotic mode" will be used. In this chapter, they define distinguishing features for approaching colour stating that, "colour has two kinds of value, a direct value, which is the colour's actual physical effect on the viewer, which derives from the physical properties of colours so that they 'move towards us' or 'away from us', and an associative value, as when we associate red with flames or blood, or other phenomena of high symbolic and emotive value" (2002: 354). Kress and Van Leuwen (2002: 355) have also argued that affordances from which sign-makers and interpreters make selections according to their communicative needs, otherwise known as signifiers, are dependent on a given context. These contexts may be regulated and the choices influenced by authorities. This is likely the case for social media accounts run by companies and less likely the case for accounts owned by artists or individual users. Particular attention is given to *value*, *saturation*, *purity*, *modulation*, *differentiation* and *hue* of the colours and the images' emotive and associative values. These are design choices that those responsible for the social media marketing of the companies may regulate, and as a result, these choices are often made with consideration of the brand culture and identity. The layout in terms of multimodality is also considered in relation to the social environment and resources available on Instagram. This is interesting because part of Instagram's integral claim to fame is the filter. It is important again here to consider the limitations of this study, because, if we consider the choice of style that, as Kress argues, all sign-makers go through, we are limited

in not knowing exactly if/which filter was used. Nonetheless, the posts will be approached with these integrated features in mind.

4.2.1. Nike

Similarly to Nike having the most standard language use, they also use the most consistent pattern in the images. In terms of layout, it is significant to note that each image posted by Nike during the timeframe of this study is a single image, meaning that there are no collages found in the dataset. This is in contrast to BMW who posts numerous collages that allow them to show the interior and exterior of a car in one post. Nike opts for a more traditional layout and does not exercise this modal affordance for images on Instagram and does not choose to overlay the images with any text. In terms of colour, all the Nike posts are in colour, except for Post 4. that is in black and white. This is a function of saturation.

(Post 4. Nike post from week 43)

Saturation is the scale used to measure colour from its most pure manifestations to its softest or most pale manifestations. Full de-saturation at is when an image is black and white. The most fundamental affordance of saturation of colour is the ability to express 'emotive temperatures'. This can change the feeling from being neutralised to being intensified or subdued which can help to add significant meanings in context. "High saturation may be positive, exuberant, adventurous, but also vulgar or garish. Low saturation may be subtle and tender, but also cold and repressed, or brooding and moody" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002: 356). The other most notable image in terms of colour in the Nike dataset is the green overlay that can be considered a modulation of colour, and can be seen in Post 1. in Section 4.1.1 of Serena Williams. In the analytic framework for analysing the image, the gaze of the subject in

the images should be examined. In the Nike corpus, there is only one image in which the subjects' gazes are directed towards the viewer. Rather, there are artistic angles that are chosen like Post 4. above, which centres on the hands of the famous tennis player Rafael Nadal whose face cannot be seen. This is also important in terms of layout and the relation of text and image because without the layout affording for a mode of writing and the caption section, the viewer may not know to whom the hands in the image belong. It exemplifies once again the multimodality of the Instagram platform and that there is interdependence between modes for semiotic information transfers to be upheld.

4.2.2. Starbucks

Unlike the variation found in the language-level analysis of the Starbucks posts, in terms of the images, there seems to be a pattern that is followed with relative consistency. In terms of the layout of the images, Starbucks seems to often follow a pattern of posting pictures that centre around their iconic cup. The extracts below are a small sample of the many cup-centric posts found in the Starbucks corpus.

(Posts 5-10. Starbucks posts from weeks 17, 10, 16, 14, 13)
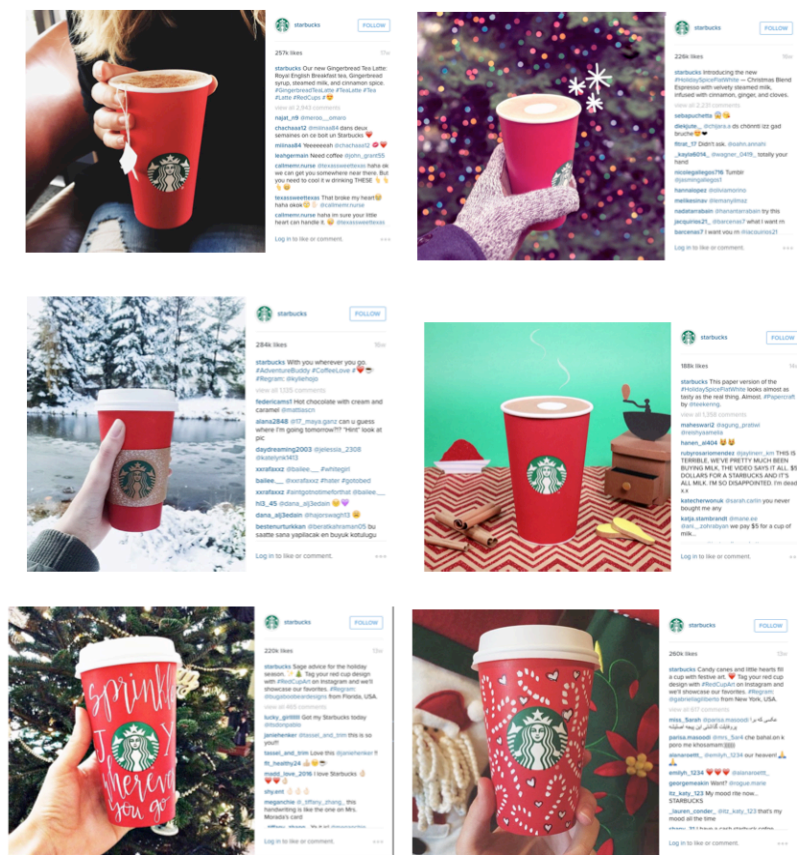
The colour red is featured during the holiday season. The red cup is symbolic and a community and in-group semiotic feature that marks a period of time where exclusive flavours of drinks can be purchased. This semiotic meaning may be lost on members who fall outside of the community. The trends or colour schemes of the images seem to be seasonal and subject-specific. There are ranges of colours used in the Starbucks corpus that are used to create different moods. The pastel colour (Posts 13, 14) choices by Starbucks are usually juxtaposed with moodier high-definition images of the store photos in the series of photos labelled *#WhereInTheWorld* and, in the images, centred on coffee which are patterned as shades of green, white, brown and black (Posts 11, 12). The use of the colour green also helps construct the corporate online identity of the brand, as it is the Starbucks' logo colour.

(Posts 11 - 14. Starbucks posts from weeks 43, 39, 40, 41)

The use of colour in the Starbucks posts helps support a certain level of uniformity throughout their account. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002: 349) have found that textual cohesion can also be promoted by 'colour coordination', rather than by the repetition of a single colour. The various colours of the Starbucks posts have roughly the same degree of brightness, and/or saturation, etc. In terms of colour, there is a lot of pink and pastels in the Starbucks images (Posts 13 and 14). What we interpret is that the audience is possibly more feminine or that a younger audience is being targeted online. In Posts 11 and 12 above, there is also the overlay of text on the images. Again, with this function being employed as with the use of emojis at a

language level, we can note that Starbucks places equal consideration on the different modes for meaning-making and that the company has created an integrated semiotic approach to their identity construction on Instagram.

4.2.3. BMW

The theme of luxury that was identified in the language-level analysis is continued in the analysis of the modes of image, layout and colour. The colour saturation and hues of the images are very consistent and inspire a feeling of warmth and luxury in the BMW posts.

(Post 15. BMW post from week 41)
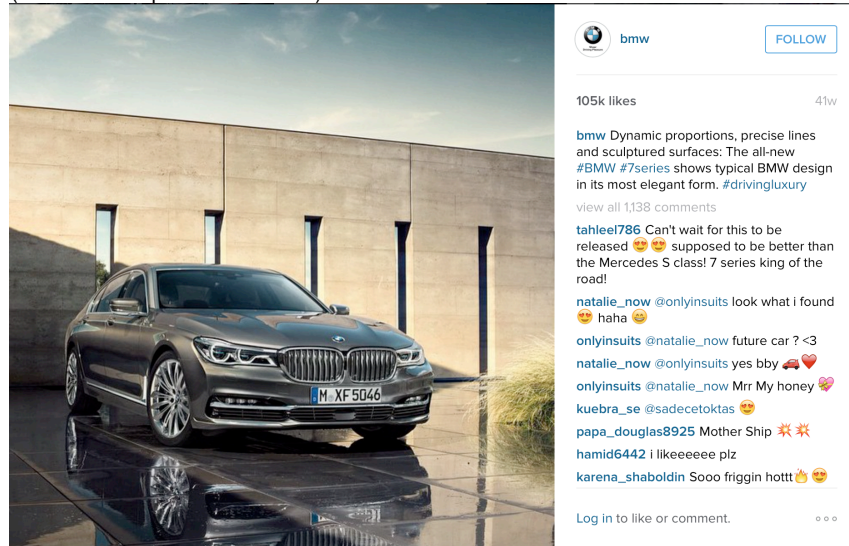
Black is one of the most referred to colours in the BMW corpus and has cultural meanings as outlined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002). For example, *red* can be used to signify danger or stopping, and *green* for nature, hope or progression. The meanings of colours are often embedded in cultures and societies. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002: 343) exemplify the culturally rooted nature colour:

> For example in most parts of Europe black is for mourning, though in northern parts of Portugal, and perhaps elsewhere in Europe as well, brides wear black gowns for their wedding day. In China and other parts of East Asia white is the colour of mourning; in most of Europe it is the colour of purity, worn by the bride at her wedding.

These contrasts show how the connection of meanings and colours are culturally shaped. This allows companies to apply their own meanings to the use of certain colours for their brand identity. BMW uses their personal cultural interpretation of the colour black to simulate style and sophistication (Post 16; 41), which are two dominant themes constructed for their online brand identities.

(Post 16. BMW post from week 13)

bmw

FOLLOW

109k likes   13w

bmw The essence of style is black.
It's both: Elegant, but mysterious.
Classy, with a sophisticated twist.

Step inside the first-ever #BMW #M2
Coupé.

Log in to like or comment.   ○ ○ ○

(41)   **bmw** *Back to black. Effortlessly stylish.*
         @e30_celio's #vintage #BMW #3series. #BMWrepost

BMW has chosen to use black to reinforce their brand, and as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002: 350) have established, *colour does what people do with it*. BMW is using colour for communicative work as it carries semiotic properties as they reference the colour black in both the text (41) and images (Post 16). On Instagram, the use of colour by sign-makers when conducting social media marketing seems to be aimed at brand reinforcement. The mode of colour, as well as layout and image can be adapted to serve multiple semiotic effects.

(Post 17. BMW post from week 20)

bmw

FOLLOW

123k likes   20w

bmw Which seat do I take?!?! – a few
#BMW #7series in a #BMWrepost via
@bmwf30driver. Plenty of #drivingluxury.
view all 1,309 comments
hassansalehi @yekisham bekharim hal
mide
mehmeetsari @ahmetselim21

Log in to like or comment.   ○ ○ ○

(Post 18. BMW post from week 15)

bmw

FOLLOW

73.9k likes   15w

bmw XOXO

#BMW #X1
view all 209 comments
amir_ali_sh 😊 ...واقعا محشره
dd7amirhossein7dd 😍😍😍😍😍😍shet

Log in to like or comment.   ○ ○ ○

Images and text work together to create meaning on multimodal sites. Thus it is not enough to analyse the images alone for an exhaustive interpretation as text often provides the context for

the images. Sarcasm is difficult to interpret through software or computerised systems and this is complicated even more when text is embedded directly onto images, which makes it part of the image's overall meaning. With this in mind text and image should be analysed in relation to one another although few studies have done this in a systematic way (Bourlai and Herring 2014: 1). There is a hint of sarcasm in the posts captioned *XOXO* and *Which seat do I take?!?!* found above in Posts 17 and 18. Without the captions to accompany the text, this meaning may have been lost. This sentiment is fittingly paralleled in a BMW post that is captioned:
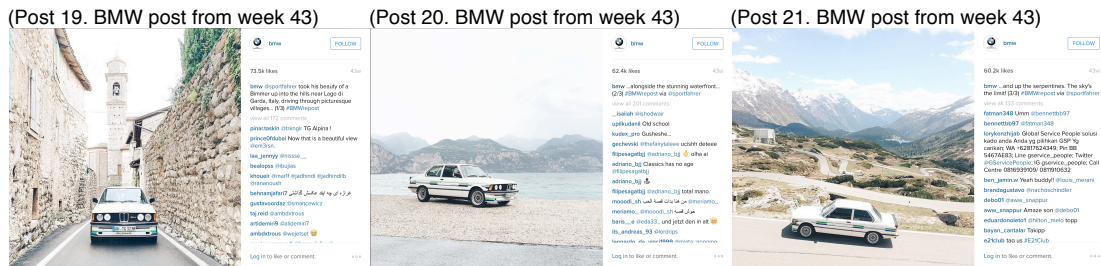
(42) **bmw** *A face-to-face encounter is worth more than a thousand words.* *#BMW #X1.*

BMW has put together a series of posts (Posts 19, 20 and 21) that would also lose some of its structure without the captions that have been labelled sequentially and that reinforce the interdependence of captions and images, which tell a story on Instagram.

(43) **bmw** *@sportfahrer took his beauty of a Bimmer up into the hills near Lago di Garda, Italy, driving through picturesque villages... (1/3) #BMWrepost*

(44) **bmw** *...alongside the stunning waterfront... (2/3) #BMWrepost via @sportfahrer*

(45) **bmw** *...and up the serpentines. The sky's the limit! (3/3) #BMWrepost via @sportfahrer*

(Post 19. BMW post from week 43)   (Post 20. BMW post from week 43)   (Post 21. BMW post from week 43)

In terms of layout, since the update to Instagram last year that has allowed shapes other than square to be posted, it is interesting that most users continue to choose to use the traditional square format. BMW has embraced this recent affordance in some posts that opt for a different layout i.e. the rectangular post by BMW as found above in Posts 16, 17 and 18. Also, in terms of layout, BMW uses collages (Posts 22 and 23) frequently. This modal affordance of the image may be best suited to this account as it allows different features that could not conventionally be captured in a single photograph to be displayed in one image at the same time, like the interior and exterior of an automobile.

(Post 22. BMW post from week 9)   (Post 23. BMW post from week 15)

The choice and layout of the images reinforces the company's online identity. In combination with the other modes available on the Instagram platform such as text a story can be told and the interpersonal metafunction established.

5. Discussion

Using a multimodal approach allows the richness of all modes and semiotic communications to be displayed. The sub-corpora used in this study were laden with semiotic functions and different modes being used interdependently to communicate with many users who may be members of a discourse community or simply observers who have come across the posts and are multiliterate enough to read them. With multimodal communication surrounding us, as this is what we are used to seeing, i.e. someone talking with a certain gaze or facial expression, or websites with different colours and images, an analysis of a similar integrated nature encompasses a broader interpretation of the patterns and systems on social media. As Carey Jewitt has stated in the introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (2011: 1), "multimodality approaches representation, communication and interaction as something more than language". The term *multimodality* is strongly linked to the perspective on communication and discourse that interaction is more than just language, but also feelings and moods (Jewitt 2011: 2). The research conducted has provided a dynamic qualitative account of the Instagram posts as the corpora include many variations of language including the use of conventional language and Discourse 2.0 features such as hashtags and emojis, alongside the images. This creates an interesting interplay between text and image. The semiotic significance is largely tied to a community of users whose salient understanding is increased by their knowledge and understanding of computer-mediated discourse practices. The companies are able to strengthen their communities and identities through the social media marketing done on their official international Instagram accounts. The choice of colour

and use of emojis may seem to be arbitrary outside of the context, but in terms of identity, there are many semiotic effects, as can be understood from the findings. The companies are required to create posts that can be cross-culturally communicated as +75% of users on Instagram come from outside of the USA. This provides companies with the means to reach greater audiences and the ability to amplify social change on a larger scale.

Responsibility on social media is an important concept as was seen with the disclosure of fuel consumption that dominated the BMW posts on the textual-level; after all, there are social implications for the environment and the company. Currently, there is a lot of public exposure of companies' fuel ratings and environmental figures in traditional media. Nevertheless, the first priority in the social media marketing objectives of BMW seemed to be building a community that was based on mutual love for the brand. With the division between text captioning the image, fuel information, and the affordance of the layout of the posts, the social responsibility sometimes seems to take a backseat to the marketing objectives. The choice to include the socially responsible information is an interpersonal one that in a way allows environment concerns to be presented, but places them lower in the hierarchy. According to Maier (2014: 246), environmental awareness is becoming a main focus of contemporary society and for multiliterate consumers who have access and the knowledge of understanding semiotic modes and communication strategies across media platforms. These concerns can be found in a range of multimodal texts and have become diversified in communication to facilitate public understanding of ecoliteracy and can be used to promote and inform greenwashed corporate images, actions and responses. Like BMW's efforts concerning fuel emissions, Starbucks has diversified its communication and has also endorsed ecoliteracy in promoting the preservation of coffee trees, as illustrated in Post 24.

(Post 24. Starbucks post from week 25)

45
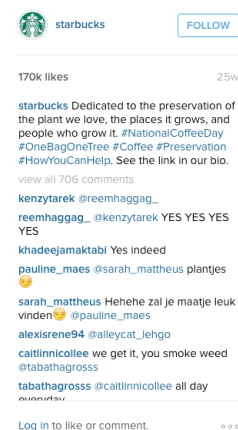
The hashtag #HowYouCanHelp in Post 24. is used to inform Starbucks' green corporate image and also promote action. This is in line with Chatzithomas et al.'s findings (2014: 84) that test the idea that there is a distinct online virtual culture which challenges traditional cultural boundaries and promotes a community that is shaped by the ability to globally communicate and share ideas. This study has found that with social media adoption, companies have implemented their own patterns and communication strategies that directly reflect their brand identity. While incorporating platform specific trends and aiming at global connectivity, these strategies still seem to feature cultural and brand differences. This kind of connectivity is difficult to conduct in any other environment. Traditional media such as television and news outlets, with the exception of the online versions (that do not have viewing restrictions), are still largely limited in their global approach as they are typically nation-, region- or society-specific. Instagram is a platform that allows for a bridge to be built that connects users, but at the same time, does not guarantee a mutual or similar understanding of the semiotic features. Different cultural and practical literacies must first be attained and shared as there is a significant amount of in-group language present in the findings. Many of the discursive choices presented in the findings reveal new lexicons and orthographies that require a certain brand-knowledge or membership in a group in order for it to be understood. With the image as a central part of the layout, plus the interdependence between caption and image or between the modes of writing and image on Instagram, what might be misunderstood in a one-dimensional verbally based interaction can be supplemented by using multiple modes. As a result, it would have been interesting to examine how the companies' use of Instagram norms and new online language would compare with an individual user, who is not trying to market anything, maybe just themselves, i.e. if there is an overlap of these patterns. It is without too much investigation that we can input forms such as #TBT, which are used by users across the scope of Instagram regardless of the account being an official company account or the account of a neighbourhood friend. This is an interesting observation in terms of language and identity as it shows that the boundaries of the discourse community are not limited to nation or social status as studies by Chatzithomas et al. (2014) and Androutsopoulos (2011) have found but based in the online culture. Also noteworthy is that a majority of the posts are gender- and geographically neutral. Likely users will read the images from their culturally specific perspective but an attempt to reach a diverse audience can been seen.

Each account clearly looks different, even though they have been constructed using the same platform, which demonstrates that they are socially formed. These stylised identities

parallel linguistic heterogeneity, and show that in the same way that playful and creative language is a key resource for interpersonal communication, visual design contributes to identity management in digital media (Androutsopoulos 2011: 295). This reflects the notion of how identities can change depending on the social environment as certain platforms provide more things to engage with as they are not in isolation but part of a social networking effort with technical standardisation and linguistic variables that are unique to these new media platforms. Moreover, similar to Chatzithomas et al.'s (2014: 85) findings in which empirical evidence from an analysis of over 500 corporations across the USA and Greece was conducted and revealed there to be cultural differences reflected in online communication, the findings of this thesis also reveal that social media communication is not culturally neutral but bound to the identities of each company. "Such findings are consistent with previous cross-cultural research on consumer-generated brand communities in social networking and internet usage patterns" (Chatzithomas et al. 2014: 85). The culturally bound nature of social media is underlying in the posts by Nike, Starbucks and BMW. This is more evident on some accounts than on others. For example, in Nike's posts, the thematic pattern of inspirational rhetoric is quite universal. Then again, in the Starbucks posts related to many of their contests, there are clear national and cultural divisions represented. But overwhelmingly present in the findings is that there are larger scale patterns being followed that blur the boundaries between users and cultures such as the use of hashtags that promote collectivity and rallying for both individual branding efforts but also across different domains. Language patterns found on social media can be a reflection of larger societal trends. Self-presentation has become an increasingly important and complex notion in social media interactions. This has caused the boundaries between personal and professional representation to be blurred. How groups and individuals negotiate and pattern these interactions, self-representations and constructed identities on digital media is thus worthy of further investigation (Gilpin 2011: 234-35). In terms of online corporate identity, and considering the findings from a multimodal approach to identify grammars or patters present on Instagram, the hypothesis of this thesis can only be partially upheld. The portion of the hypothesis centred on social and practical implications of modes is true, but an emerging grammar for social media posts does not seem to be used in the same sense by all three companies. Modal affordance of Instagram has allowed each company to use their own methods of separations and sequencing techniques, which differed between BMW and Starbucks as an opposition of square brackets vs. parenthesis and the use of emojis. The novelty of the platform may account for some of this variation. While the results in this study show variation, there are some identifiable patterns that transpire

throughout the posts, such as the use of hashtags, which link the language practices to an online community. It may be that the community of Instagram is one made up of users that accept language variation as a norm, and that the differences are a result of an integration of different modes and approaches. Research that uses multimodal approaches, that are already well-established in corporate settings, are notably still underrepresented in academic research. That being said, it is increasingly relevant to continue detailed multimodal analysis in different genres in order to reveal objectives in discourse patterns commercially and academically (Maier 2014: 256). Multimodal analysis is very applicable in many genres and could supersede corporate, social media and CMC studies, as a framework for many further fields such as medical and event evaluations. With regard to the findings in this thesis the observation by Gunther Kress in his book *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (2001) in which he determines that multimodality is the basic state of human communication and thus multimodal analysis is best, is supported. Because if the text alone had been examined to explore the meaning and online identity of the companies' posts, the same conclusions may not have been made. Writing on Instagram, and many social media platforms in only one of many modes e.g. *writing* and *image and colour* – that can be used to create a sign. Although the captions alone do contain meaningful information, many of the captions would only partially make sense without the image and vice-versa, and colour and layout enhance these messages. Using multiple modes has significant benefits as each mode can do something different and specific. Kress' findings (2009: 1) are supported in this thesis as we can establish that images can show more efficiently ideas that would take longer to read. For example, an image can express a character of a brand in less time than it would take to read the brand description. And writing can describe what cannot be shown in images, such as fuel emissions or contest rules. And modes such as colour and layout can be used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message. The intermingling of modes and affordances on social media can help brands communicate their online corporate identities to maximum effect and benefit as different modes lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work.

6. Conclusion

Ultimately, it seems that we are moving towards a more integrated approach to communication that requires a certain level of multiliteracy. With the shift from print-based to screen-based channels, we can observe many effects on language use and mediation. In social media-based communication, there is a loosely defined audience to consider when

constructing the posts. Although, with more modal affordances that have obvious benefits for forming meaning, the use of multiple modes is valuable in conveying meaning to widespread audiences. The interactivity of each platform is important to consider in light of new forms and social media applications that are emerging with popularity. Also noteworthy is that almost all of these platforms place limitations on the amount of text and characters that users are able to post; but have not done the equivalent for image or colour. This may be cause for concern that there is a shift taking place on the importance of written-text in comparison to speech, video and image. What this means for the future of education and multiliteracy is highly suggestive. Is there now interdependence between the image and text, which has created a lack of descriptive imaginative writing for communicative purposes that is being replaced by the image? These and other similar questions could be fruitful in further studies to provide a more contemporary view of communication practices that are forming online identities and the advancement of technological mediums. Another interesting future perspective could take form in the domain of sociology of the image and the shift in the standards of photography and images. The shift seems to be moving towards lower quality picture taking methods that are more focused on product-placements, filters and photo-editing, that are captured *for the 'gram* as the saying implies, are taken for the sole purpose of posting on social media. As Instagram and other social media and networking platforms continue to grow and develop, their uses are no longer solely for social interaction but are also being used by educators and professionals as a medium for one-to-many communication. And although the hypothesis of this thesis can only be partially upheld as the findings show that each company and account seems to have developed their own interpersonal grammars while following common patterns more generally, as formal grammars of CMC do not exist. In conclusion, this multimodal analysis was able to reveal the richness of language found online and some strategies that companies are able to use in order to establish their online identities and create a community on Instagram, and in turn expose select features of language in society.

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Appendix:

Table 1 :(Source: Adami: What's in a click? A social semiotic framework for the multimodal analysis of website interactivity, 2014:142)

Table 1. The three metafunctions mapped onto the two dimensions of interactive sites/signs.

Dimensions	Ideational function	Interpersonal function	Textual function	Interactive value
Syntagmatic (within the page)	What it is: – form/ meaning (representation of the world)	What it says about: – authors – users	How/where in the page: – salience – information structure	Aesthetics of interactivity
Paradigmatic (optional realization)	Which action Which effect Where	Directionality/ power Who towards whom: – author/users/ others	Before–after Given–new	Functionalities of interactivity