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Share Your Story

A study of how images contribute to storytelling
and online communities

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Abstract

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This paper examines how images contribute to storytelling (RQ1) and how communities can be created through visual storytelling on Instagram (RQ2). By conducting a case study on the Instagram account Roam the Planet, we explore how stories are told through images, and how these stories can contribute to the creation of a community within the outdoor discourse. To answer our research questions, we study six sample images by combining visual rhetorical analysis and discourse analysis. First, we look at the images' aesthetics and content and identify central meanings and associations. Then, to gain a better understanding of the images' role in storytelling, we develop the results through a more detailed analysis. Our findings are as follows: the images convey meanings through aesthetics, content and aspects of storytelling; there are three subdiscourses that contribute to the representation of outdoor discourse on Roam the Planet; when the viewers identify themselves with the stories, the identification can be considered a type of participation in the community on Instagram. We conclude our study with a discussion of our findings in a broader cultural context.

Keywords: social media, Instagram, storytelling, digital storytelling, online community, visual communication, strategic communication, visual rhetoric, discourse analysis

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We confirm that all the work for this thesis has been carried out equally by both authors.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Problem definition	2
1.2 Objectives and research questions	3
1.3 Presentation of the case	3
1.4 Research outline	4
2. Literature review	5
3. Theoretical framework	8
3.1 Visual Communication	8
3.2 Storytelling in digital media	10
3.3 Participation & Community	12
4. Methodology	15
4.1 Research strategy	15
4.2 Visual rhetoric	15
4.2.1 Foss's schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery	16
4.3 Discourse analysis	16
4.4 Data Collection & Categorisation	17
4.5 Limitations	18
5. Results	20
5.1 Sitting in a van	20
5.1.2 Function	21
5.1.3 Evaluation	21
5.2 Floating on a mirror lake	22
5.2.1 Nature	22
5.2.2 Function	22
5.2.3 Evaluation	23
5.3 Waterfall in the autumn	23
5.3.1 Nature	23
5.3.2 Function	24
5.3.3 Evaluation	24
5.4 A cottage in the forest	25
5.4.1 Nature	25
5.4.2 Function	26
5.4.3 Evaluation	26
5.5 Mister Lynx	27
5.5.1 Nature	27
5.5.2 Function	27

5.5.3 Evaluation	28
5.6 Road to the mountains	28
5.6.1 Nature.....	28
5.6.2 Function	29
5.6.3 Evaluation	29
5.7. Summary of the rhetorical analysis.....	29
6. Analysis	30
6.1 Subdiscourse 1: A story of protecting the nature and our environment	31
6.2 Subdiscourse 2: A story of going on an adventure	32
6.3 Subdiscourse 3: A story of being free.....	33
6.4 Creating a community.....	34
6.5 A critical reflection	34
7 Discussion & Conclusion	36
7.1 Suggestions for further research	37
8. References.....	39

1. Introduction

The need for people to connect with each other is one of the main reasons for the development of online applications and diverse social networking platforms (Barnes, 2013). Today, mobile devices are extremely widespread and social media are growing in popularity, taking the place of previous means of communication and affecting human social relationships (Serafinelli, 2017; Barnes, 2013). The time spent on communication is shorter and interacting with others is easier than ever before. In addition, the demand for visual content and multimedia channels has been high over the past few years, and it only seems to grow in the future (Martin, 2017; Mu et al, 2015).

Barnes (2013) divides the development of the Internet into three different stages that are characterised by different features; text-based stage, more developed stage and the current stage. The development has gone from text to graphical interfaces to diverse features to share information and to connect with others. The current stage of the Internet includes blogs, social networks and video, which are popular means of communication. Moreover, while text is still important in online communication, visual content, such as images and videos, is now one of the most widespread means of interaction (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014; Serafinelli, 2017).

Thus, there has been a major cultural change in the production and circulation of media content (e.g. Barnes, 2013; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). Instead of media corporations, it is now individuals who are creating and sharing information on the Internet. With cameras, smart phones and other mobile devices, individuals have the possibility to create their own content, i.e. user-generated content, and upload it on the internet and different social media platforms. This can be done very easily and inexpensively, or at no cost at all, which in turn has contributed to content spreading effectively and even going viral (Barnes, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2013).

User-generated content contributes to the creation of online communities, that provide a platform for people to exchange messages and ideas and share personal experiences over time and space. Moreover, people can form friendships around the same interests, political questions or games (Barnes, 2013). With the advancements of new media and increased interactivity, key themes such as the growth of social networking sites as well as online communities, have emerged (Barnes, 2013; Baym, 2010; Serafinelli, 2017). Previously, communities have been defined as groups of people who follow the same set of behavioural rules and live near each other. However, following the widespread

use of computers, the idea of communities now refers to groups created for various topics or interests (Barnes, 2013; Baym, 2010).

Furthermore, Porto and Belmonte (2014) discuss how local user-generated digital content can become global through storytelling. This is due to that people from different geographical locations, social backgrounds, and cultural traditions share personal experiences to different audiences via Internet (Porto & Belmonte, 2014). Instagram is an example of a social media platform, where storytelling is facilitated through images, and where communities can emerge around specific interests. Since Facebook bought Instagram in April 2012, the number of Instagram users has increased significantly on a global scale. The visibility afforded by Facebook has promoted the emergence of diverse Instagram communities (Serafinelli, 2017).

Another cultural change is the increased participation in adventure and action sports in the last 20 years (Puchan, 2005). Adventure sports, extreme sports and outdoor living has become a common interest among many online communities. Stinson (2017) argues that we are now living the “Wilderness 2.0”, which means that the wilderness and outdoor recreation are explored both offline as well as online. The concept of wilderness is thus a social construction that is re-created in different cultural contexts (Stinson, 2017). The stories and communities build on the outdoor interest flourishes on Instagram, yet the cultural context of this platform is still understudied.

1.1 Problem definition

The networked nature of social media is manifested in the creation of different groups and communities that centre around common interests and values (Habibi et al., 2014). Many of these groups are built around brands, and much of the research is focused on brand communities and how organisations and companies can benefit from them in their marketing. However, there is a lack of research on how these communities are created, i.e. what social processes contribute to the development of a brand community, as well as what kind of other communities exist in social media. More importantly, number of studies has been conducted on text-based social media, but the role of visuals remains understudied (Cassinger & Thelander, 2015). According to Rose (2016), very little attention is paid either to the ways how images are perceived by specific audiences, or to the social institutions and practices through which images are made, circulated and displayed.

Instagram is a social media platform based on visual communication, where users post and share photos as well as interact with each other by commenting, tagging each other and using hashtags. These practices contribute to creating communities around common interests and brands (Serafinelli, 2017). Recently, Instagram has gained academic interest, but even here the focus lies on

existing businesses and brands, not emerging communities. Furthermore, the majority of research has marketing as a starting point and examines how images and features on Instagram can be used to develop effective marketing strategies. Studies conducted from the company or brand's perspective see visuals as tools to achieve communicative and economic goals, not as important cultural artefacts.

With our background in strategic communication, we have studied and seen the changes in the media landscape. Today, communication is more about co-creation, dialogue and sensemaking instead of distribution of carefully crafted messages (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). Additionally, individuals and networks are increasingly creating and consuming visual content (Barnes, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2013). As the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words – images are powerful tools for persuasion and meaning-making. Consequently, images include certain elements and exclude others. They are representations that communicate a specific view of the world. Thus, it is essential for communicators, professionals and amateurs alike, to adapt to the cultural changes and understand the importance of visuals while being critical to what we see (Cassinger & Thelander, 2015; Jenkins et al., 2013).

Although considerable research has been conducted on images, storytelling and social media, few studies investigate how stories are told through visuals and then circulated in social media. Furthermore, there is little information about how visual storytelling contributes to the development of discourses in society. This study aims to address these questions.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The purpose of this study is to gain profound understanding of what kind of stories are created through visual communication in social media. By conducting a case study on an Instagram account focusing on the nature and the outdoors, we explore what role images have in storytelling and how these stories contribute to the creation of a community around a shared interest within a specific discourse. To achieve the objectives of this study, we seek to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do images contribute to storytelling?

RQ2: How can communities be created through visual storytelling on Instagram?

1.3 Presentation of the case

To answer these questions, we have chosen to conduct a case study on *Roam the Planet*, which is an Instagram account focusing on outdoor and adventure lifestyle. It is described as “A community built

on a passion for adventure” on the profile (Roam the Planet, n.d.). Roam the Planet posts photographs that are taken by both amateur and professional photographers, always giving credit to the author in the description. Occasionally, live videos are posted as well. Followers and other users are encouraged to “Share your story”, i.e. share their photos of travels, experiences and discoveries with the hashtag #roamtheplanet.

1.4 Research outline

In the following chapter, *literature review*, we will discuss previous research that are relevant for our study. In *theoretical framework*, we present relevant theories that provide the background for our research questions and for the analysis of our material. The chapter *methodology* includes descriptions of the research strategy and the research design as well as a discussion of limitations of this study. In *results*, we present the results of our rhetorical analysis of the sample images. The chapter *analysis* consists of in-depth examination and interpretation of our material through a discourse analysis. In *discussion and conclusions*, we synthesise key elements of this study, connect the findings to a broader cultural context as well as provide suggestions for further research.

2. Literature review

In this chapter, we present findings and observations from three different studies that were chosen for their relevant methods and findings. Serafinelli (2017) examines how online communities on Instagram can be generated. Porto and Belmonte (2014) discuss glocalisation and the importance of users' geographical locations. Zappavigna (2016) investigates how images can create meaning within an Instagram community of motherhood. These studies provide a starting point for our research.

As mentioned, little research has been conducted on storytelling from a cultural perspective. Most research that involve storytelling are focused on organisations, political discourses or how storytelling can be used in marketing communication or branding (Alexander, 2011; Dennisdotter & Axenbrant, 2008). Studies from a cultural or rhetorical perspective focusing on narratives and discourses in social media as well as the role of visuals have been marginal. Furthermore, not many researchers have studied storytelling and visual communication, focusing on how images can contribute to stories that generate shared meaning and communities online.

Serafinelli (2017) is one of few authors who has studied how meaning is generated from images on Instagram, and how the increased connectivity and widespread images can contribute to new communities and relationships. Notably, instead of conducting a common semiotic analysis of images, she analyses users' behaviour on Instagram and how images posted on this social media outlet can affect human relationships. Serafinelli (2017) describes social networks as inherently multi-dimensional, and argues that they are altering the traditional ways that social connections are perceived and managed. The contemporary sociality is characterised as a combination of online and offline life, where social media platforms function as an extension of offline networks. In fact, the arrival of Instagram in October 2010 raised the question of *how* social media are used (Serafinelli, 2017). Previously, online social networks were mainly based on already existing contacts, i.e. friends and family, and social networking was a means to maintain and reinforce these relationships. However, Instagram is a medium primarily for photography, and with the medium's inherited affordances, the users' understandings and use of the medium have changed.

According to Serafinelli (2017), images are communicative instances, and together with colours and music, for example, they are equal to language and can fulfil the same communicative functions. She states that words can explain vision and motivation while images can communicate what words are not able to describe, i.e. emotions (Serafinelli, 2017). Furthermore, images can

represent objects and their relationships, as well as existing social relationships between the image, the viewer and the producer.

Yet, images are not the only data which should be taken into consideration, since an image does not necessarily always reflect its meaning (Serafinelli, 2017). The behaviour before and after the photo exchange are also important factors of the meaning-making process, which is probably why Serafinelli (2017) focuses on the development of relationships between individuals, visual technologies, images, practices, culture and society. By using netnography, 44 computer-mediated participant interviews as well as visual analysis of the participants' photo-sharing behaviour, Serafinelli (2017) does a critical analysis on Instagram. Her findings show that the increased use of social media affects and mediates social relationships by new mobile technologies. Even though Instagram is not the ideal platform for interpersonal communication, it encourages people to meet offline or relocate onto other social media sites. Thus, it is possible to form new relationships and new communities on Instagram (Serafinelli, 2017).

Even though our focus is on the visual analysis of images and their contribution to a specific online community within outdoor living instead of users' online behaviour, Serafinelli's (2017) findings and observations are relevant for this study. Serafinelli (2017) also shows that further research is needed in this area and demonstrates that analysing the meaning and outcomes of Instagram photos can be done in several different ways, not only through visual or semiotic analysis, which seem to be the most common ways of analysing images.

Porto and Belmonte (2014) examine how people from different geographical locations, social backgrounds and cultural traditions can share personal experiences with different audiences around the world through digital storytelling. They analyse 30 digital stories, including texts and images, selected from popular storytelling websites and websites of non-governmental organisations around the world. This allows them to claim that images in digital stories play a multifunctional role, being far more than a mere support for the text. According to Porto and Belmonte (2014), pictures can serve different macro-level functions that can help turn private, personal experiences into universal issues with a counselling, encouraging intention. While the local narrators can benefit from the global or common understanding of the world, people around the world can also benefit from the individual local experience (Porto & Belmonte, 2014). This is important for understanding how people can generate meaning from images posted online and again, it raises the question whether a specific location is essential for the interpretation of images. Moreover, Instagram's technological possibilities allow a 'close-to-real-time' pace at which the posted images create a vision that the viewer could be there and that they are sharing the experience at the time it is happening (Porto & Belmonte, 2014; Serafinelli, 2017; Zappavigna, 2016).

Zappavigna (2016) explores social meaning in photographs on Instagram using the representation of motherhood. By analysing the entire Instagram feed of a single user who posts images of her experience of motherhood, as well as a collection of 500 images using the hashtag #motherhood, Zappavigna (2016) investigates how the photographs can create meaning within this community of mothers. This research, like many others, has an individualistic approach to how meaning is generated, as the research focuses on posts from one photographer, the owner of the Instagram account.

Comparing our case study with Zappavigna's research (2016), Roam the Planet's account contains photographs taken by the owner as well as re-posts of other users' photographs, both amateur and professional. Although the number of contributors on the Instagram accounts differ and the focus is on different types of communities, Zappavigna's study (2016) is relevant for us, since our objective is to explore how images can create and help maintaining a community through storytelling. In addition, the method Zappavigna (2016) uses to collect images works as an inspiration to this research, and her analysis deals with topics such as sensemaking and subjectivity, which this thesis will address as well.

3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, we present an overview of theories and concepts that provide the framework for our analysis and help us to understand our research questions – how images can contribute to storytelling and how communities can be created through visual stories on Instagram. We have divided the literature in three overarching themes: visual communication, digital storytelling, and participation and community.

3.1 Visual Communication

According to Mitchell (1994), “vision is a mode of cultural expression and human communication as fundamental and widespread as language” (p. 543). Every day, visual technologies and visual content surround us via television, social media, advertisements, photography, paintings, movies, etc. According to Rose (2016), “the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in Western societies” (p. 2). The term *visuality* refers to the ways “how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein” (Foster 1988, p. ix, cited in Rose, 2016). Visual culture, then, refers to the many ways the visual is embedded in social life (Rose, 2016). Thus, many social media, including Instagram, are part of our social life and today’s visual culture. With the emergence of Web 2.0, individuals now can create and share diverse content such as photos, videos and music (e.g. Baym, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2013). The development of new visualising technologies has further altered the ways in which we communicate. Paul Virilio (1994, cited in Rose, 2016) calls this “the vision machine” in which we all are caught.

Mitchell (2015) uses the term “pictorial turn” to describe a transformation occurring in disciplines or the cultural sphere. This usually happens in connection with the emergence of new technology of reproduction or set of images associated with social, political or aesthetic movements. Visual culture developed when changes in the media landscape facilitated the creation of more advanced social platforms, which can be described as a pictorial turn (Mitchell, 2015). Additionally, there has been a shift from the mass media’s more or less controlled visual communication into a culture of individuals wanting to share their photos and other content. Today, anyone can easily participate in the production of visual content by recording videos and taking photographs with their phones or other mobile devices and then upload them on the internet. This is part of the emergence of user-generated content (e.g. Barnes, 2013).

In *Handbook of Visual Communication*, Smith, Moriarty, Barbatsis and Kenney (2005) state that visual communication is not a new discipline. Rather, the field can be traced back to early psychology, perception studies, media and communication, and many other areas of study. In recent years, visual communication has expanded rapidly both in academic research and in society at large. However, there are nearly as many theories about visual communication and thoughts about how to study the area as there are authors (Rose, 2016; Smith et al., 2005). Scientific perspectives suggest that all visual art must be studied cognitively. On the contrary, scholars within the aesthetic theory argue that visual communication is about systems of ecological relationships as well as the processes of creating and interpreting these relationships (Dake, 2005; Smith et al., 2005). The relationships are formed between three primary elements; the visible object, the maker or producer of this object and the intended viewer or audience (Dake, 2005). Using a photograph as an example, meaning is generated from the different features and observable properties, e.g. line, shape, value and colour, combined with the editor's intention and work on the image and the viewer's perception of it.

Furthermore, Dake (2005) states that a photographic illustration is symbolic and viewers use cultural cues to construct meaning from it. Visual meaning can also be understood through interpretation, visible attributes and aesthetic qualities. The power of the meaning lies in the relationships among these three aspects of understanding. However, the viewer's attitudes and past experiences guide their perception of and the meanings created from an image. Based on the unique frame of reference, different people see different elements and react to photographs and other visual artefacts in different ways (Dake, 2005; Foss, 2005).

Similarly, within the field of Web art and Web installation, Menon (2005) states that users control the sequence of viewing when they look at art on the web and make choices that will result in personal creation of meaning. In other words, the artist or photographer is responsible for the general context of the art/photo-experience, yet the final interpretation is determined by and dependent on the viewer. The evolution of today's artistic photographs is thus unpredictable (Menon, 2005). Hence, online photographs on Instagram can produce multiple meanings and are in constant transition (e.g. Bailey 2010; Menon, 2005; Rose, 2016). These meanings are further shared with others.

Another theory or concept that examines meaning-making in visual communication and visual imagery, is visual rhetoric (Foss, 2005). The scholars within the field are interested in visual artefacts and their impact on our contemporary culture. A more detailed explanation of visual rhetoric and how it can be used in the analysis of images is presented in Chapter 4.

Moreover, multi-author work has become popular and today's online environment, which Bailey (2010) refers to as the e-infrastructure, is built to fit our large, complex databases. In other

words, the increased amount of content is grouped and stored in new ways. On social media sites, this grouping of content can be seen through a less structured ‘cloud tagging’ design, which, for example, can be found on Flickr and Instagram (Morgan, 2009, cited in Bailey, 2010). Since hashtags create clusters of images that connect people and photographers sharing the same interests (Serafinelli, 2017), it can be considered a form of the ‘cloud tagging’ strategy. The groupings of content form ideas what many people assume is the truth (Bailey, 2010). This further contributes to the development of online communities, that will be explained later in this chapter.

Generating different truths online through grouping of material such as visual archives has become an increasingly used resource with the development of the Web 2.0 (Bailey, 2010). According to Breakell (2010), archives can consist of both verbal and visual material. It is the shape and content of the material, which makes the archive valuable and creates collective identity. The order of the material may or may not be arranged but reflects the process that created it. The significance is thus lying in the interrelationships between the components of the archive, that can imbue one another with authenticity. To exemplify, a photographic archive of images functions as an image bank of largely decontextualised images. An image alone cannot access the same significance as a group of images collected into an archive, since images grouped together can shed light on each other and reveal discrete provenance as a group. This distinction is what explains the nature of archives and the importance of professional archive practice and knowledge (Breakell, 2010).

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, today’s visual content can become global or go viral, as local images and videos produced by instantaneous electronic communication are crossing borders when communicated through the Internet. (Barnes, 2013; Mitchell, 2015; Porto & Belmonte, 2014; Serafinelli, 2017). Different social media features such as Photo Maps and Geo-tags has emerged rapidly. These features allow users to share their precise location, which is a useful tool to create social connections. Moreover, Mitchell (2015) states that this globalisation of images is paradoxical, as the very idea of local is generated by the global. He also questions our current photo scanned and searchable world, the circulation of images in the world, as well as the term ‘global’ as such.

3.2 Storytelling in digital media

The concept of digital storytelling was first developed by scholars Dana Atchley, Denise Aungst, Joe Lambert and Nina Mullen during the early to mid-90s (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009). At that time, digital storytelling was described as a workshop-based practice teaching how to use digital media to create short audio-video stories, usually about personal lives. Moreover, it was based on the idea that storytelling brings a timeless form into the digital age, universal human experiences and emotions

into narratives, as well as enables self-expression and sharing of stories of everyday life for everyone (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009). Today, digital storytelling is practised in increasingly diverse contexts around the world and can entail various forms of crowd-sourced media produced by amateurs, semiprofessionals and professionals (Jenkins, 2017). Continuing this thought, Hartley and McWilliam (2009) propose that digital storytelling in its current form is “something of a social movement” and represents one of the first genuine combinations of expert and user-led creativity (p. 4). Technological changes do have cultural and social significance, for they can improve and enhance the existing ways of meaning-making (Jenkins, 2017). However, digital storytelling is not a new, revolutionary phenomenon, rather, the technological advancements have changed the *characteristics* of narratives.

In his book *The New Digital Storytelling*, Bryan Alexander (2011) seeks to answer the question of how the digital tools and platforms enable new aspects of storytelling. He begins with defining central characteristics of storytelling that help to understand what storytelling is. According to Alexander (2011), stories carry meanings that become accessible through details and emotions, which invite the reader, viewer or listener to engage in co-creation and sharing. For Jenkins (2017), digital storytelling is about using digital tools to create stories, about participation and interactivity, and about sharing and consuming stories via digital platforms. Thus, meaning and engagement are key elements of storytelling.

We often think of a story in terms of sequence – there is a beginning, a middle and an end (Alexander, 2011). This linearity is present in most definitions of a story. Additionally, the longer, more abstract stories can be divided into anecdotes, that are shorter and more focused. The sequence is important here, as it makes it possible to extend the story beyond a single point of data and time (Alexander, 2011). Consequently, stories that are spread online have a much greater potential to survive and carry on (Dennisdotter & Axenbrant, 2008). The concept of sequence is similar to Bailey and Gardiner’s (2010) reasoning about how visual archives can create a more profound meaning compared to a single image (see previous section about visual communication). In the digital world, pieces of multimedia content, such as images, sounds and texts, constitute narratives when combined. For example, the specific collection of pictures on an Instagram account could then be regarded as story, and the individual photographs as anecdotes that contribute to the whole.

Stories in the literature often contain problems or challenges, since they create tension that make the story interesting (Alexander, 2011). Without any tension, the story loses its meaning and the audience experiences it as dull and uninspiring. In addition to tension, personal content is another element that creates engagement. Characters that go through changes, solve a problem, overcome a challenge or meet their goals are important for the emotional dimension of the story – they make

stories more appealing. Furthermore, having a character, or multiple ones, facilitates identification, as the viewers can relate to the story and draw connections to their own life more easily. Due to its power of conveying meaning and generating engagement, organisations and communities use storytelling for creating social identity and sharing knowledge. Additionally, narratives are common in public relations, marketing, journalism and photography, to name a few (Alexander, 2011; Dennisdotter & Axenbrant, 2008).

Traditionally, storytelling is associated with fiction, but all its aspects apply to nonfictional narratives as well. Both mythic and everyday life are appealing to media consumers. Mysteries are important for engagement as they elicit the audience's curiosity and make them want to know more. According to Alexander (2011), "for a story to connect with an audience, however, it must represent something recognizable from life" (p. 11). Thus, skilful storytelling is about both drawing attention by concealing some parts of the story and facilitating engagement by conveying familiar events to the audience.

Kavoori, Lashley and Creech (2017) see storytelling as the "essence of life". Jenkins (2017) somewhat agrees by stating that stories are "meaningful to those who produce and consume them, because they satisfy our sense of what it means to be a human living in a particular cultural context" (p. 1062). We tell and share stories to create and maintain conversations on topics that are important to our social network. Additionally, we use media in a way that is meaningful in these conversations (Jenkins, 2017). Thus, digital storytelling and social media are tightly integrated – the former provides creative skills to tell our unique stories in a way that captures the imagination of others, while the latter facilitates communication with family, friends and the rest of the world (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009).

Even though our communicative practices today are largely digital, it is important to remember that storytelling is one of the oldest forms of human communication. As stated by Kavoori et al. (2017), "storytelling not only persists and adapts to new mediums and modes of expression but also remains a vitally human task" (p. 1059). The key here is to understand the relationship between the digital and storytelling, without reverting to determinism. Important questions are how the existing world is changing with the development of new technologies, and how the changes blend into the existing culture (Jenkins et al., 2013; Kavoori et al., 2017).

3.3 Participation & Community

In *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) address the changes in the media landscape and cultural production. Henry Jenkins' concept of participatory culture is used as a starting point for

exploring the shift from distribution to circulation, and for finding ways to explain how and why sharing is now commonly practiced (Jenkins et al., 2013). According to the authors, spreadability is about creating media content that others can use for diverse purposes, hence inviting them to participate in shaping the material by sharing it in their social networks. Thus, the roles of the producer and the audience are blurred in the user-led environment. The technological and cultural developments have changed the ways we create and perceive stories and communities.

Similar to digital storytelling, online communities are not a new phenomenon. However, the affordances of new technologies and media platforms enable digital storytelling “to constitute *new* crowds and groups through the narrative sharing of human experience” (Kavoori et al., 2017, p. 1059, emphasis added). Baym (2010) reflects upon the definitions of “community” in the changing media landscape in her book *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Instead of joining the debate of what community exactly means and whether online communities are real or not, she focuses on the essence of communities. Baym (2010) identifies five qualities that many definitions of communities have in common: the sense of space, shared resources and support, shared practice, shared identities and interpersonal relationships. Baym (2010) describes the space as people involved in the online group sharing the same place. This can be a geographical place or, more commonly, a visual online environment, such as a shared software or hardware platform that constitutes a “cyberspace” on the Internet, for example Instagram. Shared resources and support is about providing and receiving social support or advice in a specific online community, which can be beneficial to the members both emotionally, psychologically and practically (Baym, 2010). Shared practice entails norms for the appropriate use of communication in the specific online meeting environment, and also includes habitual, unconscious and routinised behaviour shared by the group members. Online groups also share norms for what constitutes skilled communicative practice and are conscious about their self-presentation inside the community. This brings us to shared identities that contribute to the feeling of community in digital environments (Baym, 2010).

Shared identities develop from the shared space, rituals of shared practices and exchange of social support. They include a shared sense of who “we” are within the group and can involve different personalities and roles. Being part of a group and having a sense of belonging makes online communities appealing (Serafinelli, 2017). According to Baym (2010), interpersonal relationships can develop from the context provided by the online group. Further, these one-on-one relationships and friendships contribute to the sense of connectivity. Serafinelli’s (2017) study shows that social engagement emerges from the specific interest in photography and photo sharing on Instagram.

Ervin Goffman’s book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) has been a staple in social research and although it is written at a time before the Internet, the concepts are still relevant

today. Goffman describes social situations through impression management – we choose different roles, presentations and attributes strategically to control and influence others' behaviour and perception (Goffman, 1959). This is apparent in social media, particularly on Instagram, where people strive to give the best impression of themselves, reach a larger public and gain more followers. Moreover, Goffman's (1959) division in front and back regions apply to photography and other visual communication. The images posted on Instagram present a certain version of the users and their life, a version that is usually beautified with the help of filters and other digital affordances. This relates to the front region, where the performance takes place. What is not shown, i.e. what happened before and after the photo was taken and edited, constitutes the back region.

The aim of impression management is to show oneself in a positive light as well as to perform according to the norms and rules that apply to the specific situation, role or community (Goffman, 1959). Joining a specific online community can then be a part of identity construction or a way to communicate a certain type of social identity. In social media, people often present the ideal version of themselves, showing a "perfect life". Following the rules can help the individual to fit in, reach a higher status and avoid embarrassment (Goffman, 1959).

4. Methodology

In this chapter, we go through the methodological aspects of our study. We begin by presenting our orientation to the research process. Thereafter, we provide an overview of our methods of analysis; visual rhetoric and discourse analysis. We then move on to the detailed description of data collection and categorisation process. Finally, we discuss the limitations of the chosen method and this study in general.

4.1 Research strategy

This thesis is based on the presumption that the world is socially constructed, which means there is no *truth* that can be objectively examined as is the starting point in the positivist approach (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Since our aim is to gain a broad understanding of the studied phenomena, we have chosen a qualitative, inductive approach and conduct a case study of the mentioned Instagram account Roam the Planet. To answer both research questions, we analyse our material first from the visual rhetoric perspective and then conduct a discourse analysis.

4.2 Visual rhetoric

Rhetoric dates to ancient Greece and is commonly known as the art of persuasion. It was not until 1970, that images were included in the study of rhetoric (Foss, 2005). Previously, scholars within rhetoric had only focused on verbal communication. Since then, visual rhetoric has become an interdisciplinary field that encompasses the study of human symbol systems, for example dress, music and images (Foss, 2005). In our contemporary culture, images in their different forms make up most of the rhetorical environment. Focusing only on verbal discourse, then, would rule out an important part of symbols that we are surrounded and influenced by (Foss, 2005).

Visual rhetoric is concerned with the way artefacts of visual culture, e.g. paintings, sculptures, movies and photographs, communicate meaning. Furthermore, visual rhetoric explores how visual elements can be used to affect people's attitudes and beliefs. According to Foss (2005), visual rhetoric has two meanings: "a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating" and "a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which images perform communication" (p. 143). The second meaning of the term, visual rhetoric as a specific way of viewing images, constitutes the basis for our first analysis in Chapter 5. Our aim is to

examine the rhetorical responses to images, i.e. meanings that can be attributed to the images (Foss, 2005), and how these meanings create a certain story when shared.

4.2.1 Foss's schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery

Sonja Foss is a renowned scholar in the field of rhetoric and visual studies. We apply her framework for the analysis of visual objects from a rhetorical perspective. There are three aspects that can be considered when analysing images: nature, function and evaluation (Foss, 2005). *Nature* encompasses the components, qualities and characteristics of images and contains presented elements as well as suggested elements. *Function* refers to the communicative effects of visual rhetoric. *Evaluation* concerns the assessment of images, focusing on how they fulfil their function.

Even if Foss (2005) is critical towards aesthetics, she states that “to explicate function or to evaluate visual images requires an understanding of the substantive and stylistic nature of those images” (p. 146). Manovich (2016) who has conducted an extensive study on Instagram, argues that both the visual aesthetics and the content of the images need to be considered. The aesthetics concern *denotative* aspects of the images, such as composition, lighting, angle, frame etc. This relates to Foss's nature concept. The content stands for the *connotative* dimension, i.e. higher-level meanings that are communicated through symbols and metaphors in the image. This refers to function in Foss's schema.

4.3 Discourse analysis

While rhetorical analysis of visual culture examines the influence of visual artefacts and practices, it also places them in their discursive context (Smith et al., 2005; Rose, 2016). According to the visual rhetoric perspective, the audience's responses and meanings are influenced by their personal experiences and knowledge that originate from the way they live and see the world (Foss, 2005). Thus, there is an evident connection between rhetoric and discourse.

Discourse can be defined as “a group of statements that structure the way a thing is thought”, and our actions are then based on that way of thinking (Rose, 2016, p. 187). Within a particular discourse, there are conventions that determine how people should think and behave. Roam the Planet is part of the discourse of outdoor living. Moreover, being an Instagram community, it is also subject to the conventions of photographic practice.

Through discourse analysis, we can examine how certain views of the world are constructed through images, as the method “explores how those specific views or accounts are constructed as real or truthful or natural” (Rose, 2016, p. 193). By identifying characteristics of outdoor life, we can

examine what kind of story or truth is being produced. Further, we can explore how the stories contribute to the discourse and bring people together.

4.4 Data Collection & Categorisation

In our data collection, we applied Rose's (2016) approach to systematic selection of images that is often used in content analysis. First, we selected the images from Roam the Planet's Instagram feed by scrolling down two times and then choosing the nine images that were visible on the screen at that time. We repeated this 20 times, ending up with a total of 180 images. This technique allowed us to include images that have been published during different time periods and to get a representative sample of the variety of images that are being posted.

The following step was to develop categories for every image. We examined the selected 180 images, and based on their visible characteristics we identified different themes that could be used as categories. According to Rose (2016), categories should be both exhaustive, exclusive and enlightening, which means that every aspect of the images must be within one category. Furthermore, these categories should not overlap and should provide an analytically interesting and coherent analysis of the images (Rose, 2016).

As we continued connecting the images to categories, we noticed that many of the images could be in several different ones simultaneously. Rose (2016) admits that creating a list of categories according to the mentioned criteria is incredibly difficult due to the rich content of visual material. We found that our original categories were not optimal and therefore we developed another way to organise our material.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) define categorisation as "the analytic process of sorting units of data with respect to properties that they have in common" (p. 246). The themes identified before shared common characteristics. For example, waterfall, lake and ocean are themes that include the element of water. To facilitate the categorisation process, we developed six clusters that contain closely related themes (see Table 1). The selected 180 images were then divided to these six clusters based on their dominant features. Finally, having inspected the images in the clusters once more, we chose six images for further analysis. These six images were considered a representative sample, as all the clusters were well represented.

We chose to analyse six images because, on one hand, our resources were limited, which ruled out analysing additional images. On the other hand, most content on Roam the Planet's account combine multiple themes, which made it difficult to lift only one cluster at a time. However, we

believe that the chosen images portray Roam the Planet effectively as well as provide a good starting point for our detailed analysis.

Transport /Movement (28)	Actor (39)	Landscape (36)	Water (30)	Housing (23)	Sky/Weather (24)
Road	Person/People	Forest	Lake	Cottage	Rainbow
Bridge	Feet	Trees	River	Treehouse	Sunset
Boat	Animal	Mountain(s)	Waterfall	Tent	Sunrise
Car/Van		Rock formation	Ocean	Castle	Northern/Southern lights
		Cave	Wave(s)	Indoors (house/van)	Stars
		Island			Clouds
		Glacier			

Table 1. The six clusters including the number of images and the themes in respective cluster.

4.5 Limitations

Conducting a case study on a public Instagram account, such as Roam the Planet, is favourable as the material already exists and cannot be affected by our presence or adjusted to better fit our analysis. The images are also publicly available, and accessing them does not require registration. Furthermore, since the sample images were collected from a public Instagram account, not the founder nor other users have the possibility to control the analysis in certain direction.

If we had used another qualitative method, for example interviews with the photographers, the owner and the followers, we could have enriched our research with more information. However, considering the nature of our research questions, i.e. our focus on the *images*’ role in storytelling and community-creation, alternative methods were not considered as relevant. For the same reason, we have excluded the non-visual elements of communication on the Instagram account from our analysis of images. This concerns captions, hashtags and comments, as well as the connections among users and between the account and its followers. Since it is important to study the image in its context, these will still be discussed to some extent.

Rose (2016) states that most researchers select material based on their academic or personal interest and analyse socially significant processes of meaning-making, which often results in a detailed case study. Consequently, the chosen images are not statistically representative, and the results of the analysis cannot be generalised, which can be seen as significant limitations (Merriam, 1993; Rose, 2016). Further, a strong personal interest can affect the critical view when analysing the material, which in turn can affect the reliability and the validity of the study (Rose, 2016). We selected our sample pictures systematically, taking these limitations into account.

Regarding discourse analysis, it is important to try to forget previous assumptions or preconceptions of the material we are researching, and to analyse the images with a fresh set of eyes (Rose, 2016). This to be able to gain new insights and interesting leads that could easily be missed. Although, according to Phillips and Hardy (2002, cited in Rose, 2016), social sciences are also discursive, and therefore our interpretations will affect and be affected by this discursive formation. A high level of reflexivity is thus necessary; we seek to be critical to not only our material, but also our research.

As mentioned before, our aim is not to achieve generalisable results, but to gain a broad understanding of social phenomena. This is the core of qualitative studies (Merriam, 1993). Furthermore, Merriam (1993) argues it is impossible *not* to include the interpretations, interests and roles of the researcher. In fact, the researcher can be seen as the primary instrument for both sampling and analysis of information, which is then communicated directly from the researcher instead of a survey or an interview (Bryman, 2016; Merriam 1993). Our interpretations of the material can therefore improve the internal validity through our analysis, but not the external validity, because they are not generalisable (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Similarly, our research can be considered reliable to some extent, since using the same method would give similar results, however not exactly the same. A complete replication is very difficult (Bryman, 2016).

It is the nature of a qualitative study that the sample and the analysis will be affected by the researchers' background and interpretations. Thus, our background in communication studies as well as interest in outdoor culture have affected our interpretations of the images. Nonetheless, these findings can be used for further research in the same research field or be used as inspiration when studying other areas (Merriam, 1993; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015).

Lastly, our sources are limited to western cultures. To develop a broader understanding of the studied phenomena, sources from other countries and cultures would be preferable to use as well. While being aware of our limitations, we strongly believe that our research can provide valuable insights to the field of strategic communication as well as other related fields.

5. Results

In this chapter, we present the sample images by applying Foss's rhetorical schema. In this rhetorical analysis, we explore the nature, function and evaluation of the images one by one by looking at the denotative and connotative elements, i.e. what can be seen in and what can be associated with the image. This first step of our analysis will help us to examine the rhetorical situation of the images and explore the diverse themes identified in the clusters (see Table 1). In addition, it will function as the basis for our in-depth analysis in the following chapter.

5.1 Sitting in a van



Figure 1. A photograph of a man sitting in a van looking at a mountain. Comments on the side. (Roam the Planet, 2016).

5.1.1 Nature

We begin by looking at what Foss (2005) refers to as the nature of the image and the presented elements, such as the aesthetics and major features of the photograph. In Figure 1, there are various features that can represent different associations. The picture consists of a person sitting in a van drinking coffee and looking at a snow-covered mountain. The photograph is taken from the person's perspective and framed so that one can only see person's legs and feet.

The big snow-covered mountain in the middle of the photo and two colourful backpacks on either side of the person's feet form a triangle, which can be related to the rule of thirds – one of the most commonly used composition techniques in visual communication. There is also a camera on the floor close to the person, and a cup of coffee in his left hand. The walls of the van create a frame for

the scene, placing the mountain in focus and adding contrast between the light blue sky and the darker interior.

The suggested elements of the picture, i.e. the possible concepts, ideas, themes and allusions (Foss, 2005), are diverse in this picture. First, the mountain surrounded by the blue sky symbolises power or challenges, e.g. the power of nature or climbing a mountain. Second, by looking at the equipment, the person's clothes as well as the scenery, the picture can be easily associated with hiking and outdoor life. The position of the person holding a coffee also gives the impression of a stress-free life and freedom of having the time to relax in the raw nature, escaping the city life. The fact that the person is sitting in a van enhances the feeling of freedom and the simplicity of living in a van and camping in the outdoors.

5.1.2 Function

The underlying thoughts in the picture communicate the feeling of freedom, solitude and exploring the outdoors and the wild. The picture invites the viewers to pack their things, hop on a van and go on an adventure to see what the nature has to offer.

5.1.3 Evaluation

Looking at the form, we can see the picture is smaller than other pictures on Roam the planet's Instagram account. Further, a closer look at the main features and the caption reveals that the photograph is manipulated. This could affect the viewer's opinion about the image and attitude towards Roam the Planet negatively. Further, colours can evoke emotion as well as trigger and inspire emotions (Solli & Lenz, 2010). The bright and inviting colours can thus contribute to the positive atmosphere in the picture. The blue sky reminds the viewer of fresh clean air, which enhances the feeling of being in the middle of nature.

The picture's content, e.g. the hiking equipment, the van as well as different nature elements, addresses people who enjoy outdoor activities and can identify themselves with the person in the photograph. Showing only the person's feet and taking the photograph from the eye-level, is a way to portray subjectivity (Zappavigna, 2016), which strengthens the viewer's identification with the image by giving the impression that "you could be sitting here as well".

5.2 Floating on a mirror lake

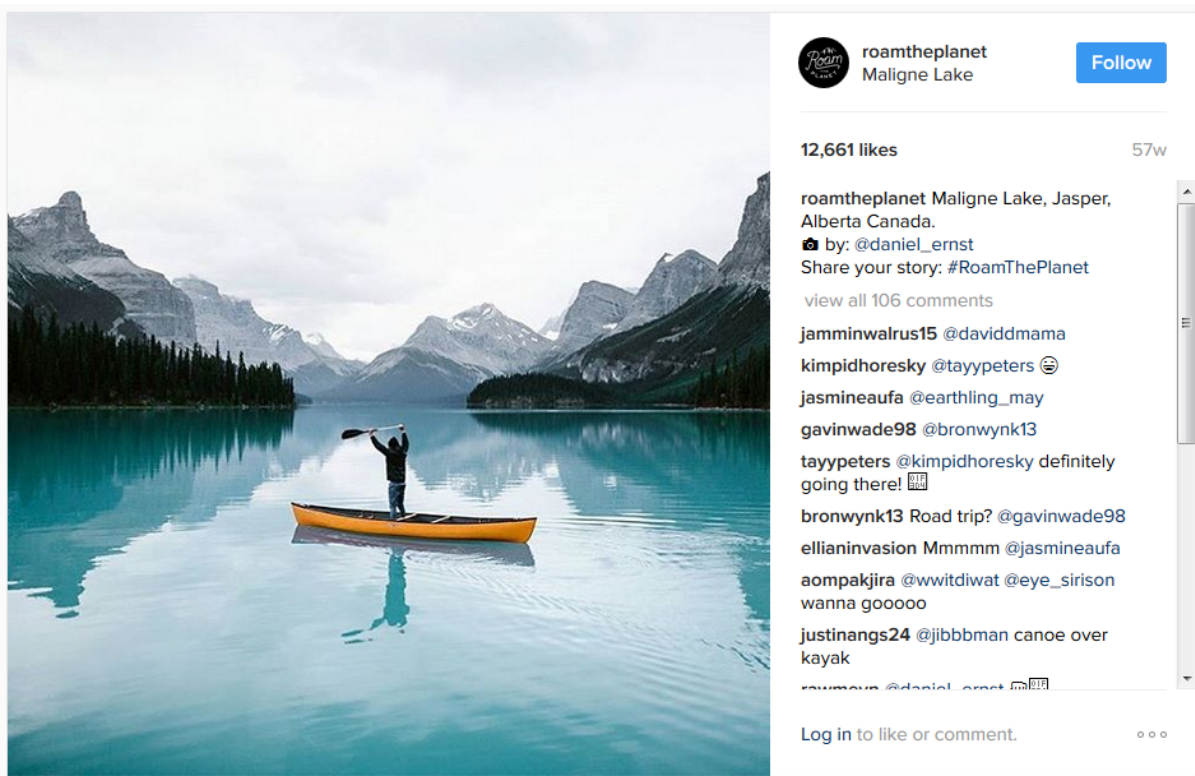


Figure 2. A photograph of a man standing on a boat on a lake. Comments on the side. (Roam the Planet, 2016).

5.2.1 Nature

Regarding the presented elements in Figure 2, there is a man standing on a boat with his arms in the air, holding a paddle. The yellow boat is floating on a mirror lake, creating a contrast with the turquoise blue. In the background, on the horizon, there are mountains and forests on either side. Together with the reflection from the water, they create a symmetric pattern and a colour contrast in the picture. Feelings of victory and triumph as well as freedom and adventure are some of the suggested elements in the picture. The man having his arms up symbolises achievement, reaching the destination of a long journey. Being supposedly the only person in the area gives the impression of exploring the unknown. In addition, the stillness of the lake gives an impression of silence and peace, while the surrounding wild nature could be perceived threatening.

5.2.2 Function

Similarly to Figure 1, the function of the image in Figure 2 is to communicate freedom and solitude. However, the excitement of adventuring and exploring the wild is more evident here, as the picture is lacking the comfort of a van. The audience is encouraged to challenge themselves and to face the unknown to achieve their goals and to fulfil their dreams.

5.2.3 Evaluation

The colours in the picture, the clear turquoise and the shades of grey, contribute to the calm and peaceful atmosphere as well as the uniqueness of the situation. Yellow is a positive colour that contributes to the feeling of happiness (Manav, 2007). At the same time, it brings a burst of energy to the subtle tones. If the boat would have another colour, for example brown or black, the mood in the photograph would be different. The grey and green are typical colours for mountains and forests and create a natural scene. Considering the content in the picture, the surrounding mountains convey the feeling of raw, challenging nature, while the specific position of the person symbolises victory.

5.3 Waterfall in the autumn



Figure 3. A photograph of a waterfall and a bridge crossing it. Comments on the side. (Roam the Planet, 2016).

5.3.1 Nature

The presented elements in Figure 3 include a waterfall in the centre of the picture, a bridge crossing the water in the middle as well as cliffs on either side of the waterfall – all surrounded by colourful trees. The waterfall divides the picture in two, and the colours are gradually changing from top to bottom. Beams of sunlight are shining from the top left corner. Closer to the bridge, there are brighter

autumn colours, such as yellow, orange and hints of red, while in the lower parts of the picture the trees and bushes are green.

Regarding the suggested elements, the picture communicates several different feelings and meanings through the vibrant colours. Green, the colour of life, stands for balance, nature and energy. Consequently, the lush trees can be associated with freshness, growth and hope (Manav, 2007). The colour yellow is often seen as a symbol for optimism, creativity and happiness while orange is associated with warmth, confidence and joy (Manav, 2007). The hints of red catch the eye and as a powerful colour, red communicates diverse emotions, ranging from love, passion and desire to anger and hate (Manav, 2007). Moreover, the waterfall can be seen as a symbol for energy and power. The bridge can have different connotations, such as progress or connection, which are enhanced by the different colours that denote the changing of seasons.

5.3.2 Function

The picture has several functions. First, seeing the colourful landscape makes the viewer appreciate the nature and creates the need to protect the environment. Second, the change of seasons and the flow of waterfall can be associated with the constant changes in life. The picture inspires the viewer to accept that change is a natural part of life. Third, the bridge encourages to overcome fears and move forward to the next chapter in life, as the viewer imagines crossing the bridge.

5.3.3 Evaluation

The colours play a key role in defining whether the picture fulfils its function. As mentioned earlier, the leafy greens have several positive associations, which create the desire to protect the nature. The colours of autumn and the changing of the seasons can trigger both positive and negative feelings, however, this photograph creates more positive associations through its aesthetic features.

Apart from the colours, the waterfall and bridge add depth to the image's rhetoric. The powerful waterfall and the distance between the ground and the bridge can be intimidating for some, but exciting for others. Together, the different elements of the photograph encourage the viewer to overcome fears and embrace chances in nature and in life.

5.4 A cottage in the forest



Figure 4. A photograph of a person and a dog by a cottage. Comments on the side. (Roam the Planet, 2016).

5.4.1 Nature

The presented elements of Figure 4 are slightly different compared to the sample images analysed so far. In the centre of the picture, there is a seemingly old, wooden, brown cottage, that is surrounded by a forest of pine trees. The trees in the picture are mostly dark green with hints of yellow and orange, which denotes that it is autumn. The top half of the photograph is covered in fog, and on the bottom edge, a person in a red jacket is standing on a rock with a light-haired dog, looking towards the cottage. Taking a closer look at the picture, one can see a solar panel on the roof of the cottage. The photo is taken from above, behind the person and the dog.

The suggested elements in Figure 4 are diverse. First, the dark colour tones, the fog and the dark green and orange trees connote cold and mystery. Second, elements such as the forest, the person's clothes and the cottage are related to outdoor-living and trekking. Third, the picture gives an impression of togetherness and friendship between the person and the dog. Fourth, the cottage being surrounded by a thick forest creates the feeling of escaping the city and living in the nature. Fifth, the solar panel on the cottage's roof refers to sustainability. Sixth, the fog and grey colour tones

create a calm and silent atmosphere. Finally, the dark colours, the fog and the lonely cottage could also be associated with fear and loneliness.

5.4.2 Function

As with the previous photographs, the viewer is invited to explore the wild nature and to go on an adventure – this time in the company of their best friend. Furthermore, the picture inspires to escape the city life and stay out in the wild using nature's own resources. The person and the dog seem to have reached their destination after a long walk, and are now looking forward to escaping the cold inside the cottage. The picture creates a longing for warm cosy evenings together with your dog in front of the fireplace, in the middle of nature.

5.4.3 Evaluation

The dark colours create a mysterious atmosphere and enhance the feeling of being outdoors. Even though the photograph is most likely meant to convey positive associations, it can be interpreted in different ways. The dim colours and the fog can be perceived as uninviting, even scary. The person and the dog might have found the cottage in the middle of nowhere by accident, and do not know who or what is inside. Thus, the feelings are opposite compared to the warmth of the fireplace. On one hand, being alone in the forest can connote the feeling of freedom and solitude. On the other hand, it could indicate being excluded from social networks or the society.

The autumn colours in the trees, the red jacket and the light brown fur of the dog give a softer impression and indicate the warm friendship between the person and the dog. Although, the red could also be perceived as a warning sign (Manav, 2007). Regarding the content, the person and the dog together is a way of symbolising friendship and loyalty – they are sharing the experience of being in the wilderness of the forest.

5.5 Mister Lynx



Figure 5. A photograph of a lynx sitting in the forest. Comments on the side. (Roam the Planet, 2016).

5.5.1 Nature

In Figure 5, the presented elements consist of a lynx sitting down in the centre of the picture, surrounded by thick green vegetation. The wild cat with a thick, dark beige fur is looking towards something past the photographer. There are a few plants between the camera lens and the lynx, and in the background, there are trees. One can see glimpses of the sky in between the tree trunks. The focus lies on the lynx as it is sharp while the surrounding plants are blurry.

Regarding the suggested elements, the photographer has captured a unique moment, being close to a wild animal. To experience that requires knowledge of nature and wildlife as well as patience. The picture reminds the viewer of living “here and now”, since such a rare moment can last only seconds.

5.5.2 Function

The function of the picture seems to be reminding of the beauty of nature and the unique moments you can experience when exploring the outdoors. The picture inspires the viewer to be present and to enjoy the moment. It seems that the photographer wants the viewers to feel that they are standing this close to this wild animal, and that the viewers too, could experience something like this if they go and explore the wild.

5.5.3 Evaluation

The different shades of green together with the thick vegetation give the impression of being in the middle of a wild forest and enhance the feeling of being outdoors. Dark shadows and the blurred effect create a mysterious atmosphere while the light green colour and sharp focus in the centre make the lynx stand out. The unique features of the lynx and its fixed stare strengthen the feeling of facing a wild animal. Even though the plants and the cat seem calm, the viewer knows that the moment might only have lasted a short while. Thus, the colours, the content and the effects of the photograph all contribute to the feeling of being in a precious, dream-like moment.

5.6 Road to the mountains

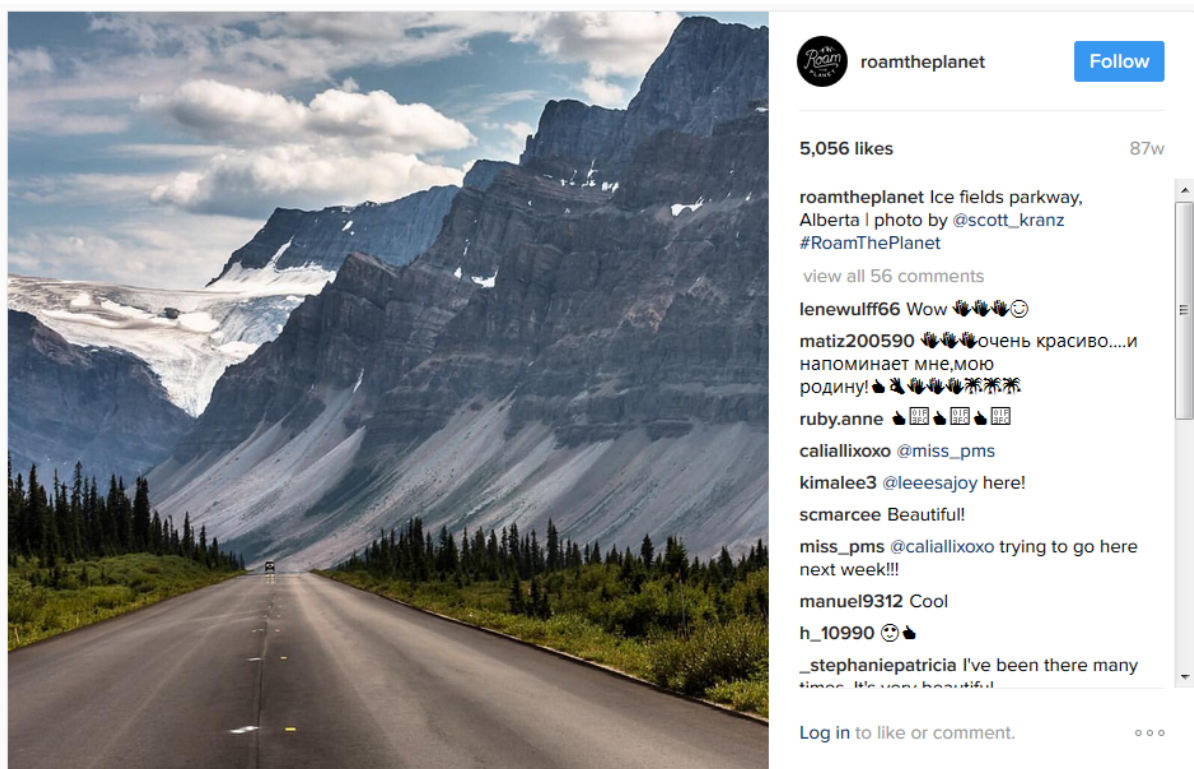


Figure 6. A photograph of a road and mountains. Comments on the side. (Roam the Planet, 2015).

5.6.1 Nature

The major features in Figure 6 are the wide road going towards the horizon where it meets a huge wall of mountains. There is a car at the end of the road, seemingly driving towards and then passing on later. There are green bushes and pine trees lining the road on either side. In the top left corner, one can see parts of a glacier as well as the blue sky with scattered clouds.

There are several suggested elements, of which power is perhaps the most evident. The picture places the small human against the powerful nature, which is illustrated through the small car and the

big mountain. Besides power, the mountains connote challenges and obstacles, particularly in relation to the even road. The glacier and the mountains can be associated with stability, consistency and history, since they have and most likely will last longer than people's lifetime. Yet, there are also signs of movement and change in the picture. The road is a symbol for movement, being on the way and traveling, and the erosion indicates changes in the nature – both natural and caused by human action.

5.6.2 Function

The viewer is invited to take the road towards the unknown and the raw nature. The road can be seen as a connection between the viewer's real position, most likely in the city, and the nature that awaits. The picture also carries the message that life is a journey – sometimes you face mountains of challenges, sometimes it is a straight road. The photograph shows the contrast between the powerful nature and the small human, but at the same time, it functions as a reminder of how easily we can ruin our environment.

5.6.3 Evaluation

The grey colour tones of the mountains and the road dominate in the photograph. However, the green in the trees and the blue in the sky create contrast between the different elements, making the picture more inviting. Only based on the colours, the viewer might not find the image that inspiring. However, the impressive mountains and the nearly empty road create excitement for facing the unknown. In conclusion, the road and the mountains create a powerful contrast that enhances the symbolism in the photograph.

5.7. Summary of the rhetorical analysis

The rhetorical analysis according to Foss's schema allows us to examine the rhetorical situation of the sample images. The nature of the sample images, i.e. the specific qualities and themes, create emotional responses. The function of the image is the action the images aim to communicate (Foss, 2005). As seen above, the six images in our sample have similar functions: they inspire the viewer to participate in outdoor activities. The evaluation shows that the function is fulfilled through aesthetic qualities and aspects of storytelling.

We have now looked at the six images and how they generate meaning individually. In the next chapter, we will explore how the images together contribute to a certain representation of outdoor discourse.

6. Analysis

In this chapter, we answer our research questions by further developing our findings from the rhetorical analysis through discourse analysis. First, we present the three subdiscourses that are based on storytelling through the images on Roam the Planet's Instagram account. Second, we examine how the community is built around these subdiscourses. Finally, we conclude the analysis through critical reflection on our findings.

As many scholars agree, a photograph's aesthetics and content can generate different associations and interpretations for different people (e.g. Dake, 2005; Foss, 2005; Menon, 2005). For example, someone who likes animals would most likely focus their attention on the dog in Figure 4 or the lynx in Figure 5. Some might recognise the mountain in Figure 1, while others remember their last trip to Canada when recognising the lake view in Figure 2. While being aware of other possible interpretations, we have identified several themes (see Table 1) that contribute to the function of the images. Images can fulfil the same communicative function as language, yet, they are more effective in describing emotions (Foss, 2005; Rose, 2016; Serafinelli, 2017; Solli & Lenz, 2010). The symbolism in the sample images is rich; for example, mountains, forests, wildlife, lakes and different weather conditions create different moods and feelings associated with the outdoor lifestyle. These symbols work as cultural cues that help the audience create meaning from the images (Dake, 2005).

Furthermore, one image can communicate a lot, but several images together can tell even more. When images are grouped together in a digital archive, they can illustrate the underlying concepts and ideas better than a single image can (Bailey, 2010; Breakell, 2010). Each of the six sample images is thus telling its own story, but when grouped together, they contribute to storytelling, connoting a greater meaning.

In the rhetorical analysis, we have found that many of the sample images have a similar function. The functions include elements of storytelling that together generate three subdiscourses. These subdiscourses are about respecting the nature, protecting our environment and exploring the wild. Furthermore, they communicate an alternative lifestyle to the mainstream, career-centered culture in Western societies. The sub discourses contribute to the representation of the outdoor discourse communicated on Roam the Planet's Instagram account. Thus, Roam the Planet and the stories created and circulated on its account are part of the outdoor culture in general. We will now present the three subdiscourses in detail based on their storytelling qualities.

6.1 Subdiscourse 1: A story of protecting the nature and our environment

The analysis of the sample images shows that respecting and protecting the nature is important for Roam the Planet. Landscape, water as well as sky and weather are the main clusters in this story (see Table 1), and create the foundation for the processes of meaning-making. The varying landscape shows the uniqueness of the wild outdoors, enhancing the need to preserve the beautiful nature. Water is present in many of the images, and can symbolise purity, life and strength. The clear sky refers to clean air and the sun and the solar panel refer to natural, sustainable lifestyle.

By showing nature's beauty through diverse content and vibrant colours, the pictures generate positive associations, which in turn makes it is easy for the viewer to believe the story and identify with it. For example, the colour green can represent energy, balance and growth (Manav, 2007), which are desirable factors to anyone, interested in outdoor life or not. On the contrary, the darker grey colour tones, the fog and the cold can create concerns about the future.

The shifts in the sky and weather indicate the different seasons and the cycle of nature. Additionally, changes in the landscape and weather can also be associated with the changing climate, for example, the erosion of the mountain and the glacier that might be melting (see Figure 6). The changes in the nature and climate relate to the concept of sequence in stories (Alexander, 2011, see Section 3.2).

One can see there are two sides in this story. On one hand, the unique weather conditions and elements of nature generate positive feelings and hope for the future, inspiring the audience make more sustainable choices. On the other hand, they are a reminder of the environmental issues and the diminishing biodiversity, triggering feelings of sadness and hopelessness. Problems that need to be solved and challenges one must overcome create tension that make stories interesting (Alexander, 2011).

Having a character is essential when telling a story (Alexander, 2011). Here, the character is someone who feels comfortable in the unique surroundings and shows their respect for the nature. For example, the people in Figure 1 and 2 seem to be enjoying the moment. Additionally, the picture in Figure 5 shows that the photographer has been very close to the lynx, and gives the impression that one could hear the rustle from the green leaves and the breathing of the lynx. The feeling of being extremely close to nature is also apparent in Figure 3, where the viewers can imagine themselves standing on the bridge, almost hearing the waterfall only by looking at the picture. The photograph illustrates what it is like to be close to nature and reminds the viewer of why it is important to protect it.

6.2 Subdiscourse 2: A story of going on an adventure

Another message communicated through the images on Roam the Planet's Instagram account is to inspire people to explore the unknown, search for adventures and take risks. In this story, the main clusters are actor, transport and movement, and landscape (see Table 1). Actors, such as the people and the animals play an important role in drawing the viewer's attention and conveying meanings. Transport and movement, such as the car and the road in Figure 6, refer to going somewhere while the landscapes create the setting for the action. The different elements of nature, such as mountains, forests and lakes create a different kind of adventure in each of the photographs.

Seeing the beautiful, colourful scenery in the images creates emotional involvement (Solli & Lenz, 2010) and inspires the viewer to explore the wild. Bright yellow and orange promote positive feelings, such as happiness and joy of being part of an adventure culture (Manav, 2007). The deep turquoise in Figure 2 creates the desire to see the lake in real life, and a few adventurous people may actually go and explore the place where the picture was taken.

To reach the specific places where the photographs have been taken, one must walk or hike through the forest or in the mountains – or at least this is the impression from the sample images. In addition, the boat, car, van, road and bridge illustrate being on the way somewhere, in between places. The images show that one is rewarded with a beautiful view when reaching the destination as seen for example in Figure 1 and 2. Yet, what is more inspiring for an adventurer is the journey to get there, the problems that need to be solved and the challenges one must overcome. The different stages of the journey and the thrill of adventure, i.e. the sequence, mythic and tension of the story (Alexander, 2011), make the story more compelling and increases engagement.

The audience connects with a story through aspects that are recognisable from their own lives, such as familiar events (Alexander, 2011; Kavoori et al., 2017). Seeing a character draws the viewer's attention and illustrates what it means to be part of a specific culture (Jenkins, 2017). Thus, seeing people in the images can make the outdoor interested viewer to identify with the people and want to trade places with them. For example, in Figure 1, the subjective perspective reinforces the feeling of being in the same place, or the urge to travel there. Furthermore, the positions of people can express different feelings, such as achievement, curiosity and being stress-free. Seeing the man on the boat throwing his arms up in the air and taking in the beautiful scenery makes the viewer want to *be* him (see Figure 2). The story portrays people as adventure-lovers, always looking for new challenges and experiences in the wild nature. If the viewers see themselves as adventure-lovers as well, they will most likely identify with the actor in the image.

As Roam the Planet is built upon the shared interest in the outdoor life, it is expected that the sample images are rich in features that refer to adventure. To give a few examples, the mountains in

Figure 1, 2 and 6 stand for challenges and power, and the bridge over the waterfall in Figure 3 can be associated with taking risks and exploring what is on the other side. Finally, as mentioned, the mythic of the unknown in Figure 4 and 5 generate curiosity and excitement of going on an adventure.

6.3 Subdiscourse 3: A story of being free

Nature and adventure are present in this story as well, although here the focus lies on the spirit of being free from the constraints of living in the city. The central clusters contributing to the story are actor, housing and water. Relevant themes for this story can also be found in the landscape cluster (see Table 1). Similarly to the previous stories, there is a character who tells the story and provides a source for identification. Living in the nature calls for different housing alternatives, such as the cabin or the van shown in the sample images. Regarding the element of water, it symbolises different concepts, such as reflection and purification through the stillness of the mirror lake in Figure 2.

In this story, the concept of sequence can be seen through, for example, the constant flow of the waterfall in Figure 3, as it can be associated with life cycle, as well as power and freedom. Features in the landscape cluster contribute to the story of the free soul who is exploring the mountains and forests, driving across countries and encountering wildlife.

The tension in the story is created through the contrast between living in the nature and living in the city. As mentioned earlier, the van and the cabin in Figures 1 and 4 represent alternative living arrangements. The alternative lifestyle can also be seen in Figure 1, where the person is enjoying his coffee with a beautiful view, sitting comfortably in his van. Furthermore, escaping the city-life is evident in Figure 4, where the person is spending time with his dog at the small cabin in the middle of the forest. Thus, the idea of freedom can be related to rejecting the mainstream culture.

The people in the sample pictures are presented as explorers who enjoy freedom and spending time in the nature alone, or with a four-legged friend as shown in Figure 4. The actors in the images make it easy for the viewer to identify with the story, creating the desire to find freedom and peace outdoors. Based on the analysis of the sample images, Roam the Planet encourages the audience to create their own path, travel and explore new places, and embrace the silence and peace of being alone in the wild.

Being close to the nature, able to go and explore the wild, as well as living free are key concepts in Roam the Planet's communication in general.

6.4 Creating a community

The images on Roam the Planet tell stories through colours and meaningful content, such as natural elements and beautiful landscapes. These features convey meanings and create emotional associations. Furthermore, central characteristics of storytelling (see Section 3.2) engage the viewer. Sequence and tension create participation by generating curiosity and making the stories more interesting. The viewer wants to see and know more, and thus returns to Roam the Planet's account. Characters complement the other aspects by providing an effective source for identification. Identifying with the stories and participating in their co-creation and sharing create a sense of belonging (e.g. Baym, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2013; Serafinelli, 2017), which in turn contributes to the creation of the Roam the Planet community.

If we examine Roam the Planet from a broader perspective, looking at not only the photographs but their context as well, we can identify Baym's (2010) five qualities of communities (see Section 3.3). The users share a sense of space as they participate in the Roam the Planet community on Instagram, sharing resources and giving support in different ways, such as likes, comments, tags and re-posts. As described on Roam the Planet's account, the community shares interest in adventure (Roam the Planet, n.d.). Moreover, the images that are re-posted on the account are mostly taken by professional or semiprofessional photographers, which means that the members of the community are also passionate about photography.

The members of Roam the Planet community can use meanings that are produced and circulated through the images and stories in their identity construction. Storytelling is thus a way to create shared identities, i.e. to define who "we" are (Baym, 2010; Jenkins, 2017). Based on the stories shared on Roam the Planet, the members of the community are adventurers, travellers, hikers, campers and outdoor enthusiasts. Finally, communities are characterised by the interpersonal relationships between the members (Baym, 2010). Communication between the members of Roam the Planet is outside the scope of this study, but we can note that it is possible that the users communicate via direct messaging, other media channels or in real life in addition to commenting and liking the images.

6.5 A critical reflection

Thus far, we have analysed how visual storytelling on Roam the Planet's Instagram account facilitate the audience's identification with the images and stories and invite them to participate in the community. It is important to reflect upon the findings of our analysis from a critical perspective.

A good story includes both fictional and nonfictional elements (Alexander, 2011). The fictional dimension in the sample images includes, for example, the added filters, arrangements as well as what is left for the viewer's imagination. The nonfictional dimension is manifested in the photographs that are taken by real people and represent real locations, elements of nature and characters, whether humans or animals. However, the word *represent* is crucial here, as a photograph is never an objective presentation of truth – it is taken from a specific perspective and shows a particular view of the world. Or, as Rose (2016) states, images “interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways; they represent it” (p. 2). Thus, the stories that are told through the images on Roam the Planet's Instagram account are only one way of presenting the outdoor discourse.

First, photographs are always framed, which means they include some elements and exclude others. As we note in previous sections of our analysis, the images on Roam the Planet's Instagram account are aesthetically pleasing and include content that create mostly positive associations. Hence, the negative aspects of being in the nature and exploring the outdoors are marginally represented or excluded. For example, sudden changes in the weather, feeling cold and wet from the rain and wind, as well as dealing with broken equipment or irritating insects are common issues in the outdoors. In fact, some people might relate the word ‘outdoors’ to such experiences only.

Second, the members of Roam the Planet act according to the conventions of what is considered “good” photography and how they think outdoor life should be like. In addition, people strive to give a positive impression of themselves and their life on Instagram (see Section 3.3). This can be related to Goffman's (1959) description of social interaction as “a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation” (p. 152). There are certain conventions and rules the members of Roam the Planet follow, such as taking certain kind of photographs, and liking and commenting to fit in and avoid embarrassment (Goffman, 1959).

Furthermore, the division to front and back regions (Goffman, 1959) can also be applied to the stories presented in this chapter. We can argue what we see here is the edited, beautified version of living the adventure lifestyle, i.e. the front region. On the contrary, the back region consists of what is left out, such as the circumstances when the pictures are taken as well as the editing process of the digital image. Therefore, even though the sample images and the stories provide clues of how people can think and behave within the outdoor discourse, they do not provide an exhaustive definition.

7 Discussion & Conclusion

In this chapter, we discuss our findings further and place them in a broader cultural context. First, we reflect upon the online and offline worlds as well as online communities in the changing media landscape. Then, we present our conclusions and give suggestions for further research.

The online-offline divide, i.e. whether there is a separate digital world, is an ongoing discussion in media studies (e.g. Jenkins, 2017; Serafinelli, 2017; Stinson, 2017). We can agree technologies are changing the way we communicate and behave, but the question that remains is, to what degree. As mentioned earlier, digital storytelling and online communities are not new phenomena, but a natural part of the development in the society. Storytelling is a practice that has existed long before the development of new technologies, and people have always gathered together and created communities. Digital storytelling and online communities have elements from both online and offline, as seen in this study.

On Instagram, aspects of the offline world can be seen in the images and features. First, location tags and maps, can give the impression that the images display the actual reality, as they allow users to upload images and tell their stories directly from their geographical location (Porto & Belmonte, 2014). Second, although it is not the focus of this study, it is worth mentioning that users can post live videos on Instagram. As the live video is both created and consumed “here and now”, it engages the viewer and strengthens the feeling of reality. Finally, the images seem to be spontaneously taken and “natural”. However, in the online world, images are often arranged and edited before uploaded online. This framing and manipulation of images makes it harder to define what is real and what is not (see previous chapter). Thus, it is important to consider the images’ context, i.e. the behaviour before and after the photo exchange (Serafinelli, 2017).

The online-offline divide can also be applied to communities. Referring to Baym’s (2010) five qualities communities have in common, it can be argued that an online community is as real as any offline community. However, it is necessary to reflect upon the level of identification with the community as well as the degree of participation. It is possible that not all who follow Roam the Planet’s Instagram account are interested in outdoor activities. Instead, they might only share the interest in photography. Hence, the users’ participation through likes and comments might be based on the aesthetic qualities of the images, and not on the identification with the values and beliefs of the outdoor community. This can be related to Serafinelli’s (2017) argument that the use of Instagram is not about social participation and engagement or gathering people together – it is simply about the

shared interest for photography. Regarding the degree of participation, it is hard to tell when one becomes a member of the community. Is it looking at the images, liking or sharing them, using the hashtag #roamtheplanet, or perhaps getting one's photograph re-posted on the account?

Finally, Roam the Planet is part of the discursive formation of outdoor culture. In the previous chapter, we show how the images and stories on Roam the Planet's account contribute to the outdoor discourse and illustrate a certain view of the world. Jenkins (2017) argues that different kinds of stories are now being told and shared, since the mass media are no longer in control of the production of media content. The stories shared on Roam the Planet centre around adventure lifestyle and explore the wild, which are current trends in our culture (see Puchan, 2005; Stinson, 2017). Thus, alternative stories and worldviews communicated within online communities can spread further and impact the discussions in the society.

Through an analysis of images on the outdoor Instagram community Roam the Planet, this study shows that visuals are important communicative artefacts that can create communities and contribute to the definition of discourses. The findings demonstrate that images tell stories through aesthetic qualities and meaningful content that engage the audience. Storytelling generates emotional responses that facilitate the viewer's identification with the stories. When other people share the same feelings and meanings, they form a sense of belonging and choose to participate. Moreover, digital technologies allow more people to participate in production and circulation of narratives, regardless of their status or geographical location. Our analysis shows indications of how images can contribute to the creation of online communities. However, to understand the entire process, further research is needed. The findings of this study show that by harnessing the emotional power of storytelling, images can bring people together, making visual storytelling an effective means to create communities around the same interest.

7.1 Suggestions for further research

This study focuses on *how* images contribute to storytelling and how communities can be built upon the stories being shared. It would be interesting to study the relationships between the members and *why* they want to join the community. Thus, we suggest an in-depth analysis of communication within the online community, for example by looking at image captions, comments, likes and shares etc. An alternative to studying content on social media would be to interview the owner of the account as well as the users and photographers who are active and whose photographs are re-posted on the account.

To complement or to contrast this study, it would be interesting to see whether an analysis of different images from the same Instagram account, Roam the Planet, would provide similar results. Furthermore, future research could focus on other interests and discourses on Instagram and see whether the storytelling practices and identification processes are similar or different.

Finally, as we mentioned in the introduction, bloggers and brand communities are already using Instagram for marketing purposes. An interesting subject for future research would be to study how companies and businesses can benefit from online communities based on shared interests.

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